Happiness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1:00:39

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I thought I would just center on happiness. I was watching a talk, I'll probably put it in one of my e-reminders, about mindfulness. And the amount of literature on mindfulness over the past three to five years has zoomed. It's, I believe, well, it says that editors tell writers in self-help psychology areas to make sure they put mindfulness in the title and the other thing is happiness. So we've now got gross national happiness and you'll see books appearing just on happiness. There was a whole issue of Resurgence on happiness, well they termed it well-being, which is a term I prefer. So I just thought to center on what the Buddha means by happiness.

And the handout you've got is for your reflection tomorrow, not particularly now. And this word happiness, by the way, comes from an old English word, hap, which means lucky, luck. So you get things like to happen, that was later developed, and then happenstance, which normally has a good meaning to it, happenstance. So that happiness comes from an idea of luck in a way, which is strange. And we don't use it like that now. But if we try to define what we mean by happiness and just clarify that, then it'll help us really in our practice.

So the first thing is, is happiness essential pleasure per se, just by itself? Would that bring happiness as such? I don't think we normally associate sense pleasure as happiness. We associate what happens when we have sense pleasure, the mental states that arise, but we tend to see there's something separate from the word happiness, I think anyway.

And if you think about happiness as an emotion, happiness. So when are you happy? When are you feeling happy? About a couple of minutes a day, is it? So if somebody said to you, are you happy? It's a difficult one, isn't it? It's very rare that you would have such an intensity of emotion as happiness. And it might shade into excitement.

Or perhaps happiness refers to a mood, an underlying mood, but then moods also are not stable, they don't hang around all that long. So this word happiness has a few meanings and if somebody says happy do they mean your general disposition to life, are you happy? So people, I often get the question, people come and they look around this place and look at me and say are you happy? And I sometimes say, well, not right now. Because it depends what you mean by happiness. So I tend to prefer the word well-being. But even that has limitations.

But if we go through what we mean by well-being. So our blessings, when we do the *metta* sutta, our blessings are: May you be safe. That's pretty basic, isn't it? You want to be safe from physical danger, safe from financial collapse. There's a connection with the world we're living in, the society we're living in, the state of the world, which creates a sense of safety. I would have thought that's basic to happiness, basic to a sense of well-being.

So, for instance, if people get very much involved in this climate change business, there's an underlying anxiety, frustration, despair about the situation, which would feed through to all the rest of their lives, wouldn't it? And it's there within us all, that sense of danger.

And then there's health, of course. The state of your body can undermine your general state of well-being. It might be just something simple. Just having a bad flu. Would you ask somebody who's got a really bad flu, do you feel happy? Are you happy? Have you got well-being? And then there's chronic illness, of course. You've got a chronic illness. That can be undermining to a sense of well-being. And if you're told you've got so long to live, see these people that were mentioned earlier, so one person there, six months, would you still have a sense of well-being? Would you still be happy about that? So, the sense of happiness, well-being.

And then may you be safe, may you be well, may you be happy. So that also comes into our blessings. May you be happy. That's also here referring to a mental state. And the last one is ease of living. I've translated that as being content with the way things are. Content with the way things are. And live in harmony. So even if things aren't going so bad, we're at least working with it, and we're seeing potential, we're seeing an end to the problem, which can lift the heart. If we resign ourselves in that bad sense to something, then you tend to begin to despair, not feel so good. Well-being goes out the window.

But to try to just go on a different tack, what the Buddha constantly goes on about is this attachment, *tanh a*. He has a special word for it. It refers to that relationship we have to things for the purpose of seeking happiness, that's basically it. So you could say from the wisdom point of view there's a misconception, a misunderstanding which is about who we are. So that misunderstanding basically is I am a human being. I am a human being. And finding ourselves with this definition, I am this person, I am this human being.

We then, from the heart's point of view, we're trying to seek happiness. So we seek happiness as a human being in the human world. And that leads us to this connection with pleasure. Connection with, not just simple pleasures, eating, sex, drugs, and rock and roll, that sort of stuff, but art, nature, relationships, anything to do that brings that combination of pleasure and happiness that we can generate, that we can experience through this psychophysical organism.

But immediately we're in a relationship with the world on this misunderstanding that the world can somehow, if we engineer it correctly, if we move around it properly, we can somehow find happiness. So from that you have these basic relationship. The first one is whatever is making you happy you want to acquire. You want to acquire more of, you want to sustain it. And when that moves into a relationship,

whatever it is, even with objects, you're moving into an ethical situation, so ethics in its broadest sense is about relationship.

So if I acquire something then I have a relationship to it. So if it's an object, a certain dependency, our computer is just messing up so there's fear, despair, anger, the whole lot, it all comes up when the computer doesn't work. So we have this relationship both myself and Martin with this machine. Now if I have it with a machine that doesn't particularly affect the machine as such, I mean the machine doesn't know I have this relationship with it.

But with a person it's slightly different because with a person if I have an attachment it means I'm demanding of that person that they make me happy, and that tends to take away their humanity, their individual personhood, because you're only looking at them from a particular point of getting them to make you happy. So they become an object. I mean all our relationships are a mixture of that, they're a mixture of true love, a true connection with the person, but also a certain often unspoken, covert demand.

This comes out in silly things like you buy them a great big lump of special cheese for Christmas, they don't send you anything, that's very upsetting. That you're expecting your usual piece of goat's cheese. It just didn't arrive. So you've got this relationship with people, you see. Part of it is from this misconception about people making you happy. The computer makes me happy. Things make me happy. People make me happy. And then there's all the other areas of art and nature.

So you might have looked on the weather forecast and it says it is going to be good tomorrow, and so you prepare to go out and enjoy nature, and it turns out to be cloudy and horrible. That's terrible, isn't it? That's profoundly upsetting and despairing. And of course we live in a country where you can't judge what's going to happen, which is really good for spiritual practice. I mean Sri Lanka, it just gets hot, and you can expect it to remain like that.

So, this relationship of acquisitiveness, right? When we are actually enjoying it, see, remember, when we're actually enjoying something, that is *nibbana*, by which I mean perfect happiness. I mean, when you are completely lost, for instance, in a DVD or in a bit of food, when you lose that sense of self-awareness, when you become, in that total way, what it is you're experiencing, see?

Remember, every time self-awareness comes up, there's always a break. That's another consciousness. The consciousness is watching you, watching the DVD. You're watching yourself eating. Even if it's a break, you see, there's still not that absorption. While we are absorbed, in the boiled sweet, while we are absorbed in it, as far as we're concerned in that moment, it becomes timeless, doesn't it? There's no self there. So, in the scriptures, the Buddha goes through these various levels of *nibbana*, you see. But he says it's not very good because it doesn't last. You know, the boiled sweet comes to an end. Then despair arises. Unless you can find another one. See? And that's what happens, isn't it? You get this dependency, right? This addiction. Addiction.

This constant having to re-perform in order to get the same bliss and of course there's an inbuilt obsolescence to pleasure isn't there because the same one won't work so you've got to try a different flavour. So you've got this constant chasing. I think in drug circles they call it chasing the dragon. So you're constantly chasing this dragon, trying to get the same high that you had before. So there's your addiction, you see.

Then, of course, if you don't get it, if you can't get your boiled sweets, then you tend to feel frustrated, and you write your MP, things like that. You get very angry. If you've just laid out on a whole bag of special boiled sweets, gobstoppers, if you've got a whole bag of gobstoppers and you leave them on the train or the bus, boy that's very upsetting isn't it? I mean there's sorrow there, there's deep grief. So when you lose something which has given you a lot of pleasure then there's grief.

And then of course while you're carrying your bag of gobstoppers, you're always aware that they might go. So there's an underlying anxiety of loss. I was in India once and I bought a bag of peanuts. And I was walking away really enjoying these roasted peanuts. Suddenly there was a slap on the top of my head. Real shock. And it went. Just like that, just disappeared. Cheeky monkey. Came out of nowhere. It just landed on me and stole my flip.

And then, of course, there's boredom. Boredom. So I like to point out that in an obvious sense, greed is the engine of the consumer society. Everybody wants more, more, more. In fact, more is no longer an adjective, is it? It's a noun. You say to somebody, what do you want? They say, more. That's enough. Just more.

But the underlying driving force, the subconscious driving force, subliminal driving force, is boredom, isn't it? So boredom is that state of negativity, a state of, it's not a very nice place to be bored. So as soon as you're bored, you're looking for distractions, you're looking for something to do to get you out of this boredom and in so doing you again try to repeat the same old process of getting pleasure, getting happiness somewhere.

So these underlying, these post-traumatic stress that you get from indulgence, yeah, so whenever we indulge it's fine. But it's the aftermath where we realize the pain is actually causing it. So there's the compulsive nature, the addiction to it, the frustration when you don't get it, sorrow when you lose it, fear of loss, insurance policies, and boredom. To mention only five, there's probably others.

Now if you take that up from gobstoppers to people, then you can see there's a lot of suffering, isn't there? Our attachment to people, the sense of pleasure we get in it, the sense of joy and happiness. So this whole idea of happiness is a bit strange, isn't it?

Now when the Buddha was asked, used to be accused rather, of annihilation, because he prefers to talk in the negative. So when he talks about Nibbāna for instance, this is a real Nibbāna, he prefers not to use the word *sukha* which means happiness. He simply refers to it as *adukkha* which means non-suffering. So he's

pointing to something which is beyond our normal experience.

Now this acquisitiveness, remember it's formed, we formed a relationship with the world of hoping that it brings to us certain circumstances, certain ways in which we can be happy. Unfortunately because of the acquisitiveness we're now in a sense of guarding it because of fear of loss. So the other side of fear is always aggression. So aggression arises naturally, there's a potential of aggression which is commensurate to the amount of acquisitiveness.

So if for instance you are afraid of losing things, of your house being burgled, you see, then you buy two great big Rottweilers. And you train them to bite people and kill them. Because you don't want your TV and your super-duper computers stolen. You're prepared to have people's limbs ripped off their bodies to safeguard your particular property. I say this because just up the road, if you ever take a walk, you'll come across two rather nasty Alsatians.

So you're in immediate sense of guarding, guarding, keeping hold of against others who may want what you have. So aggression arises naturally out of acquisitiveness. And if the enemy is bigger than you then you've got to collect all your stuff and run for it. So there's the fright, there's the fear. The two sides of aggression, the two sides of aversion is fear and aggression, fear and anger, fear and hatred.

Now those three attitudes are the basic relationship we have to our life, to what we experience, because of this essential delusion. So greed, hatred, greed, fear, acquisitiveness, fear, hatred, anger, those are deep dispositions and they're there to maintain our happiness, to maintain our happiness. And once we begin to see the falseness of that then of course we begin to generate a different relationship to the world.

So now, the Buddha was accused, because of his negative way of expressing things, the unborn, the undying, of being an annihilationist, an annihilationist. And he was at pains to say that he wasn't. He said the only things that are annihilated through the process of liberation, process of enlightenment, is this greed, hatred and fear, and the delusion of course, the underlying delusion. So his whole practice you might say is about undermining that relationship, that wrong relationship that's from the heart's point of view. From an intellectual or from a wisdom point of view it's undermining a wrong understanding, a wrong perception. We've conceived something wrongly, see.

Now remember that we're moving towards this liberation, we're moving in our own pace and our way towards this enlightenment, this awakening. Now this awakening can't be manufactured because it doesn't come, according to the Buddha, from the world. It exists before the world began. What he means by the world beginning is being born every moment into this particular world. The world as far as we're concerned is the world we experience. That doesn't deny other worlds. It's just that the only world that we know or can know is the one we're actually experiencing.

Well this is the world right now as far as we're concerned. And he says it's in this world that there is the end of suffering. In this world. The world that we're experiencing. So it's this business of turning that

investigation inward to ourselves to find out where the mistake is being made and to see that this mistake is creating some wrong relationship.

So when he talks about *nibbana* which is the highest happiness, right, yeah, he talks about it as the highest happiness, he goes through these various stages. So he says, is the highest happiness sensual pleasures? Is it all to do with the world as we experience it? So he doesn't deny there's happiness in it. He just denies it's the highest happiness. And then he goes through all these ecstasies, these inner ecstasies, the *jhanic*, the absorption states that we can achieve. And each one he asks, he says, this is *nibbana*, but it's not the highest *nibbana*. And then finally he gets to...

a place of non-contact with the world you might say and he says this is the highest Nibbāna. So now this generates a lot of argument in Theravāda circles and sometimes between Theravāda and the other schools. I think there's enough evidence in the scriptures that Nibbāna is a real experience. It's not a darkness. It's not a sort of annihilation. The Buddha wasn't walking around 45 years not knowing what he was doing. He wasn't asleep or something. He wasn't in this nirvanic bliss. He was right here and now and communicating and everything else. And he enjoyed life. It's not as though he didn't enjoy life.

So when he talks about what is annihilated, it's only this greed, hatred and delusion. It's only this wrong understanding and the relationship that comes of it. So there's no way that in this life we can escape from unfortunate things. There's no way we can escape from just the basic stuff of falling sick and growing old and dying. There's no way we can escape from relationships that go wrong. There's no way we can escape from having to work and all that. So it's not an escape. He's not asking us to find an escape from these things.

Now you might say, well what about you monks and nuns? You escape. Nip off somewhere and live in these caves. Just come out and get your grub and then go back. Well of course the holy life can be abused. It can be abused. But basically, of course, a monastery, if it's really working well, a monastic center or a meditation center, if it's really working well, is a hospital. It's a spiritual hospital. It's where you come to have a look at your diseases, your spiritual diseases, and try and sort it out. With the intention, at least in Buddhist understanding, for the benefit of others. That's the Bodhisattva ideal.

So recognizing that the pleasures of life and the joys that life give us are not reliable from the heart's point of view, they're not reliable from the wisdom point of view, they're impermanent, it's accepting that. So when we really accept that there's nothing in the world that we can rely on for happiness and there's nothing in the world which is sustainable, then the attitude has to change, doesn't it? You've got to actually, when happiness arises, there's not that clinging to it, there's not that trying to hold on to it, but just accepting it as something which will arise and pass away.

So if we can develop that attitude to the joys and pleasures of life, then we shouldn't have this aftermath, we shouldn't be feeling sorrow when it goes. We shouldn't be feeling frustration when it's not there, fear of loss - all that should begin to lessen as we just accept each moment as it comes to us. This is it, now it's

gone. This is the way it is. If we find a little phrase which captures for us just the way it is - this is the way it is - and just drive it home that it passes, now first you can get a negativity about it. I remember once saying to my teacher what a wonderful sunset that was, and he said ah yes but it passed away. And my thoughts inside were what the bloody hell is he there for? I know it passed away. He just tried to destroy my happiness, you see.

But it's that quiet self-reminder, how things pass away, that allows us to re-establish a moment-to-moment wise relationship with the pleasures and joys of life. So that's the one side of it. The one side of it is to continuously see this relationship of attachment. Remember, you can't get rid of it. You can't say, well, from now on, I'm not going to be attached to coffee. I'm not going to be attached to cigarettes, if you smoke. You can't just say it. You've got to go through the pain of letting go. And that's mainly what stops us from doing it.

So now we've fasted or we've eaten very simply. I mean, nobody's dead. Nobody's lost enough weight to be rushed off to hospital. It's setting ourselves little tasks where we actually face the attachment we have. So now you can do it gently. When something comes up and you enjoy it, to remind yourself now it's gone and just to feel whatever's arising. You can't stop it. If you suppress those feelings, if you suppress the nostalgia, you want more of it, if you suppress the frustration of not having enough, then of course that all feeds back into the psyche and it just creates more problems.

So for instance after a meal, just to sit there for a moment and just catch what comes up. And it's seeing what comes up actually relates to how we've related to that meal. So if after your meal you sit there and you feel gratified - now be careful of that because that gratification may be to do with feeding the pleasure to a point where it is gratified. Now that gratification feels very close to contentment. That's the problem. Because at that moment you might say, I feel really contented now. But that gratification has within itself the seed of furthermore. All we've done is satisfied a desire to the point where it's now feeling okay, and then a little bit further down the line it pops up again. So to distinguish between gratification and contentment.

So how are we going to undermine this whole process of attachment? As often as we can, it's the intention with which you enter into an experience which is going to determine what you develop. So when we come to a meal, what's your intention? We haven't read it today, but tomorrow we'll read this thing, and it's just there to nourish the body. The fact that it tastes nice is to be taken as something extra. And we're not eating it in order to be happy. We're eating it in order to maintain health, the nourishment of the body. That's a very different attitude.

Now, when you put the food on your tongue, of course it tastes nice. And with that nice taste there arises a certain contentment in the heart. It doesn't always have to be - you can have a nice taste and feel terrible. So it doesn't always have to affect the mind in a very direct way like that. But let's say that for the most part, at least for the purpose of this talk, you put something pleasant on your tongue, a piece of pizza, and

the heart goes bright. So that's a given. That hasn't to be destroyed. We haven't got to take that away. That comes up naturally because that's our physical nature.

So it's the same with friendship. It may be that certain friendships, certain relationships, intimate relationships, relationships of parents to children and all that - there's a natural beautiful joy that arises from those relationships. But there's always that underlying business of this person is here to make me happy, and that's the corruption. So how do you overcome that? It's by opening up, by always reminding ourselves to open up to the other person. It's being open to the other person and seeing their desire for relationship and there's that communication. Whereas if you move towards a person with these often unnoticed desires, then it comes out in the way we speak and the way we act.

And you can always tell when attachment has slipped into a relationship because if the other person doesn't respond in the way you want them to, then that's when you feel these things. You feel the frustration with them, you feel a bit angry with them, you feel disappointed with them. Then you might feel afraid that they might not want to be your friend anymore. Terrible. So all these things, all these negative states often show us that there's something underneath the apparent friendship.

Let's take a very regular mistake I think that people make. And that's to do with the loss, the loss of friendship or at a more extreme sense, death. So you lose somebody, they die. Now, the grief we feel - the grief we feel, as opposed to sorrow, I'll come back to it in a minute - the grief we feel is actually a measure of our attachment. The pain that it leaves in the heart is the measure of them disappearing. It's that ripping out of the heart. They're gone. And we're left with memories. They're like ghosts within us. Whenever I, for instance, remember my mother, she's stuck in time. I remember this particular phase, this particular time. And every time she comes up, there's a certain generation of the relationship I had with her.

If I go back to all these people or some who have left me, they're like ghosts within me, aren't they? And I've got this continuing relationship which is frozen in time. It's not being fed again by the reality of this person. And that grief is a measure of that relationship. And of course, normally speaking, if we do it properly and we recognize that, then the grief dies away. And what's left is a sense of gratitude for that relationship. Even if the relationship was terrible, it was horrible, there's still an ending of that process of the pain that's with it, and just an acceptance and maybe some learning about what one's personal relationship was, what one was doing in order for that relationship to be so painful. But it's never just the one, is it? We like to think that. I think it's all you. I like to think it's all you. But that tends to be very delusive.

So we've got this teaching from the Buddha that everything, that our relationship to life is an ethical relationship. And this ethical relationship, if we get it right, will naturally produce all the opposite to that acquisitiveness and the hatred and the aggressiveness and all that and the fear. And the opposites will begin to appear. So now we have always these beautiful states - the love, the compassion. So again,

compassion not to be confused with grief. Compassion isn't feeling sorry for somebody. Compassion is wanting to help. And what naturally arises is a beautiful, happy state of mind because you're helping somebody, haven't you?

Sympathetic joy, to be able to really feel happy because somebody else is happy. And these are resonances, human resonances that come to us. We do it easily with nature. So you might wake up on a beautiful morning and hear the birds and you resonate with their little chirpings and it's all very lovely and beautiful. So it's not as though the Buddha is saying that we have to let go of these things and then there comes this arid desert-like state where there's no suffering but it's actually dead. No, the mind and heart actually begin to produce quite naturally these very beautiful states of mind which through certain exercises you can extend. You can actually develop them within you even more and more, and there's no limit to that. There's no perceivable limit to how much you can develop the quality of love. It's just not perceivable. That's why they call them illimitable. There's no perceivable limit to our compassion or to our sympathetic joy.

So the spiritual life or the life according to the Buddha is really this whole business of trying to get this relationship right. And the relationship itself, once you start working on the negativity of the relationship, the positive sides arise naturally. You don't have to work at it. As we begin to lessen our selfishness, generosity arises naturally. As we begin to lessen all the angers and hatreds and petty frustrations and all that, love arises naturally. As we begin to lessen all our little back-bitings and cruelties and knife-in-the-back stuff, compassion arises naturally. Cruelty to compassion, hatred to love, selfishness to generosity.

But you can take any of the painful traits in our lives - loneliness. Well, normally speaking, what's loneliness? It's a feeling of not being loved or not being loved enough, not being accepted, being separate, being isolated, being on your own, not being able to communicate. I mean, you sit there saying, and then you start saying, I'm a horrible person, which you might be, of course, but you can change.

So you've got this. Now, when you allow loneliness to express itself and you sit within that loneliness - that's what the Buddha is asking us to do. He says, you can't push these things away. You can't destroy them. You have to attend to them. So all this negativity, whatever it is, you attend to it. That's the attention. So that word attend suggests not just the looking, not just the observing, not just the investigation, but a heart's relationship to it, an attention to it in that kindly way, as a nurse or somebody nursing might have towards a patient.

And what happens is, this is what we experience in our meditation, that these things simply arise into consciousness and begin to evaporate. Begin to evaporate. So once we take away our definitions of these things as solid states, as blocks, as emotional states - see that word state - but see it more as just a turbulence, just shades of different turbulences, clouds, cumulus clouds, all those other clouds just passing through the mind like weather systems. And we're just watching it and feeling it and allowing these things

to arise and pass away. The system itself, I mean, that's the amazing thing about this teaching. The system itself purifies itself. You don't have to do anything. The heart itself purifies itself.

As soon as you get in there, there's always a danger that you're doing something just slightly off. You're developing love in order not to look at the hatred you have. And then it becomes like two different mindsets. You've got all this turbulence of hatred and on the top you're laying this ice cream of love. And it's just a case of recognizing that the negativity within us has to be released. It has to be allowed to express itself. And that is done through the *vipassanā*.

The insight is to see it's not me. That's the deep insight, that as soon as you experience an emotion as an object, as something you are experiencing, this you being the observer, the feeler, immediately you've pulled out of it, you're no longer it. The identity is broken. And therefore, in that position, if you look at it carefully, there is no suffering. Even though you might be in a deep depression or a great anxiety or there's stuff coming up, if you can pull out of it to the position of the observer - ask yourself, is the observer, the feeler, the knower, is that actually suffering?

And when you turn on the investigation, it becomes something you're investigating, as a scientist might investigate pollution. It's just mental pollution. So there's no suffering in the knower. As soon as the identity forms, as soon as you fall into that relationship of ownership, identity, suffering arises. So when we chant in the morning, this dependent origination, he lays it out very clearly. With that desire there comes the grasping. The grasping is the identity. And then as soon as that happens, some action is performed, either indulging it or pushing it away or doing something. And there's your act. These actions produce a certain conditioning and there you've got your compulsive behavior.

So now when it comes to the way the Buddha describes his own life, at that point of liberation he's discovered a completely different level of consciousness. Now this word consciousness is used these days in so many different ways that it's very difficult to really use it. The best word I ever came across to try and get this across is knowing. Even the knowing isn't quite right. It's just knowing.

So we have this facility in English, these verbal nouns, gerundum or gerund, which gives you a dualistic understanding that it is something but it's a process. It's also something which is nothing because it's always in a process. So this knowing is telling us that it has this facility, this ability to understand. And that's the Buddha, that's the Buddha within us. And once he'd achieved that, once that became completely separated from the psychophysical organism, and he re-entered into it, he was living in a completely different world.

So this completely different world, remember, is not the outer world, it's the world that he's manufacturing. And from that point onwards, suffering doesn't arise. It's not possible for it to arise because the relationship's not there for it to arise. So this suffering is something that is simply coming out of a relationship.

That doesn't mean to say he didn't have physical pain. We know he had physical pain. I mean, he said to Ānanda to take over the talk because his back was hurting. See? I feel good. My back hurts. You know, like the Buddha. This is my big connection to the Buddha, bad back.

So if we can understand that, you see, at least intellectually, then we take it into our practice. So right here, now, while we're sitting, some unpleasant thing arises. Just by getting that attitude of investigating it, of finding that position other to it, of turning it into an object to be investigated, we're not suffering. And then when it comes to the pleasant part to do exactly the same so when pleasant stuff comes up to enjoy it but not to indulge it.

Now that's really difficult for us because the distinction between indulging and enjoying they are up against each other. You know, when you don't like something because it pushes it away from you as an object you know when aversion arises. It's very difficult to know when the indulgence slips in. See?

So that's why when something pleasant comes up in your meditation, you see, just for a moment, just reflect, you see. This is beautiful. This is lovely. I'll just be with it and enjoy its characteristics. That's all. So that means that when the sitting finishes, you don't come back into your next sitting thinking that it's going to rise again because it never does anyway unless you're an adept at these absorptions. So you don't get disappointed, you don't expect it.

So when it comes again, oh, very nice. So if we can take that same understanding into daily life, you see, so something beautiful happens and it disappears. Something beautiful happens and it disappears. So you don't expect anything. So expectation is always going to put a pressure on life which is going to undermine the full potential of happiness.

So now there, there we come back to a real sort of deeper understanding as to what perception is doing, what concepts are doing. So remember, you know, just take an example of food. Remember, whenever you see food, unless you've never seen it before, you've got a concept about it. So you've got, you're looking at an apple. Now there is already an expectation of what this apple ought to taste like. It's just there. Because we've had so much experience with apples. As soon as you say apple, there comes this idea of what a good apple is.

So as soon as you taste this apple, it's always in comparison with past apples. So your direct relationship to that apple as it is, is distorted. You won't actually taste certain things because you don't want to taste them. Or you immediately have a negative attitude towards the apple. Can you imagine that? Then really negative towards an apple. Because this is not the apple you expected.

It often happens, for instance, with pears. So the pear looks absolutely beautiful, but it's not matured. And you sink your teeth into it, and it's got no taste whatsoever. It's got the slightest taste, and you can hear the mind saying, "God damn it, we should have waited. This is a waste of a pear." See, two, three days on, it would be absolutely luscious.

So it's when we understand that the concepts we have, the expectations we have are always messing around with the direct experience of things. So if we can approach an apple as if we'd never eaten an apple before, that apple would be fine unless it's obviously rotten. The apple's fine. It's just as it is.

How do we do that, you see? We do that by driving ourselves to the sense base. If we're right there with the tongue, that's what we'll taste. We'll taste the apple. But if we're there at the level of concept, we'll only allow the tongue to give us the taste that we will allow it to give us.

It's the same when you, you know, culture-wise, you know, these days we're much more multicultural. But there was a time when, you know, Chinese music just didn't make sense. It was awful. You'll still get Italians who won't eat anything else but spaghetti. They're not open to things. It's getting better, by the way. I know there's some Chinese shops, but I haven't seen many curries. But that's by the by.

So it's a case of recognizing, just realizing that to go beyond our concepts, to go beyond our history, which is always impinging on the present, you have to drive your attention to the actual experience that's happening.

So it's the same with people, isn't it? When you meet somebody, there's already this expectation of the person. You've built up an inner image, an inner concept of the person. And therefore, when this person does something which is out of the ordinary, whether it's beautiful or not, there can be a tendency to feel that they're not playing their role again. I mean, this happens most distinctly, say, in a partnership or a marriage where, I mean, this happens, for heaven's sake, where somebody gets involved in meditation. You know, and there's a whole war coming out because this isn't the person I married. You know, this isn't the person that I formed a relationship with. Because you've defined that person in the way that pleases you from the history. So when that person changes too much, you just, you know, it's like that's just unacceptable.

So it's always a case of understanding that when we're practicing *vipassanā* we're actually practicing how to live. There's no distinction to be made between the mindfulness that's in the sitting and the mindfulness in the ordinary day of life. It is to be there with what's happening in that very open, spacious way and to be aware of any judging that we're putting on a situation. Remember all these things have always got, you know, little underlying aspects. I mean it's not as though you want to stop judging; you want to know it's judging. I mean if you know somebody's as rotten as they come you don't want to lose that. It's just that you don't want it to impinge upon your direct experience of them because there's always a chance that they might change.

But if you're always going to go to them knowing in your heart of hearts that they're as rotten as they come, it stops any possibility of change between you and that person. And if you go to the person with always the idea that they are truly a wonderful person and they do something that's horrible, that's the end of the friendship because it's broken your idea of them.

So it's a case of recognizing that this whole business of the delusion, the delusion of who we actually are and why we're actually here and to see how it affects our lives in terms of just that relationship of always holding on to acquiring, maintaining, and then the opposite of pushing anything away, either aggressively or running for it, that seems to undermine these little islands of joy and peace that we manufacture, that we actually try very hard to create for ourselves.

So this little handout, if you just have a quick look at it, I've tried to give some indications for tomorrow. This isn't particularly the rest of the day. This is just for tomorrow. If you want to do some reflection, you see. So you see, you saw another year. Again, make revolutions once more. So you've got this achievable revolution.

So these are four areas, you know. And any comment on this little pamphlet would be greatly appreciated. So physical well-being. So if you look down there, you see. So eating. That means basic stuff. Eating, sleeping, exercise, health issues. So what's your relationship to all that? How can you make it even better? What mistakes are we making?

Then material well-being. So this is all to do with wages, consumer items, cost of living, ease of living, unemployment. What's your relationship to your work? Actually, I'll put that in the next one. But it's just material well-being. You see, how much of our happiness is based on wealth? You know, on being able to take a plane and go on holiday somewhere whenever we feel like. How much of it is based on that? Or a car, see? A car gives you mobility, doesn't it? You just jump in a car and go somewhere. Remember Spike Milligan? He said, "They say that money can't make you happy. But I just want to have a try."

Then there's social well-being, which is a huge area. It has to do with all our relationships and the wider family, friends, workmates. And work itself. What's our relationship to work? Even if the work is not what we want to do, even if the work isn't what we want to do, can we form a relationship with it which is at least meaningful, spiritually meaningful? Civic responsibility, see? How seriously do we take that? That means, you know, things like voting and local issues and stuff like that. It's not that we have to do these things; it's just a case of in what way do they impinge upon our well-being. Would we feel better to get more involved? Would that make us actually feel better in ourselves? Charity work. Do we do any? See? And leisure. So leisure here I'm putting things like art and walking in the country. Anything that doesn't fit into the other categories.

And then finally there's spiritual well-being. So this is again ethics. So remember the Buddha's teaching is all about ethics. Ethics in the widest sense of that meaning of relationship. You can boil all his teachings in terms of the life we live, down to ethics. Even closing a fridge door is an ethical problem. Are we closing it with complete disregard for the door? Disregard for the actual machine which is banging it to. How do we open a door? It goes down to the actual minuscule.

And then there's just lifestyle of a spiritual voice. That includes everything, your lifestyle. And then finally, your spiritual practice.

So in the morning, when I point to all these people at this present time who are suffering, you know, from sickness and wars and all that, see, the last one is who find life meaningless. That's pretty despairing, isn't it? If you feel that fundamentally your life has no meaning, that's a sort of despair, isn't it?

Now what the Buddha says is that the meaning of this life is to discover this perfect place, this perfect happiness. This is what he calls *Nibbāna*. He talks about it as an *āyatana*, as a sphere of experience, which is completely separate from the moon, the sun, from going here, there, standing still, from all the senses. It's an actual experience. He's pointing to that as something which makes sense of everything. It's not just a final place in itself; it makes sense of the whole of our lives. It's the discovery of our Buddha nature, for want of a better word.

So we should enter the new year with hope in our hearts. This is with great hope and great effort. You see, and if you want you can join in then you see this little ceremony on New Year's Day. So it's a case of putting your resolutions on a bit of paper and we shall take them up and put them in a little container which I've yet to find and we shall offer them as a burnt offering to the Buddha. And then we shall take our resolutions, sorry, all the things that, all our, yes, that's right, and then we shall transform that into action, into an attitude, you see, by chanting at the statue of Kuan Yin. It should be great fun.

So I think that's it. I've been on a bit. I can only hope my words have been of assistance. May you by your continuous effort liberate yourselves from all suffering and find true happiness and well-being and of course the final joy of *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

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