The Body and the Discourse on How to Establish Right Awareness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50:14

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.

What I hope to do tonight is explain the importance of the body in the Buddhist teaching and put it in the context of the different exercises that we're doing. The idea of this particular course was to give various exercises to show the extent of Buddhist practice.

Most people who come into at least this school just want the meditation, the vipassana, and that's fine. Most people these days want to collect their own little spiritual portfolio—a little bit of this, a little bit of that—and gather their own direction in the spiritual life. So these exercises may be of use to you in the long term, but at least you know of them. We've done the body exercise about how to develop a good attitude towards the body, but also how to undermine a certain wrong relationship to the body. This morning we did the metta, which is about developing the heart. We didn't do the forgiveness, which I'll do tomorrow, which is the other side of it. And of course we did vipassana, and part of that vipassana practice was also recognizing that you have to establish a sort of basic platform, which includes these qualities of not just an awakenedness and awareness but this attitude of wanting to know, this curiosity, based on equanimity.

This is a very important attitude. In fact, you could say it's the greatest virtue in the Buddha's teachings because what equanimity does is put you in a position of openness and not let you get caught up in things. When we talk about the virtues of love and compassion, equanimity stops you from slipping into the error of attachment and grief. In terms of insight, it stops you from only seeing what you want to see from your own conceptual ideas of what there is. In a sense, you have to drop all that. You have to drop history, basically.

Tonight I just wanted to center on this business of the body, but looking at it also from the Buddha's own particular teaching around suffering.

A potted history of the Buddha's own life: something happened in his twenties, mid-twenties, which we would call an identity crisis. It comes out in a little story about him going out on his hunting trips and coming across these four figures—a very sick person, a very elderly person, a corpse, and then an ascetic sitting under a tree. These are now known as the messengers from the gods that awoke him into his path.

Basically it was him coming to terms with the fact that youth was disappearing and ahead of him looked pretty miserable.

In those days, the idea of rebirth—not quite the same as reincarnation, but the idea of an ongoing process—was looked upon as horrific. Everybody was trying to get out of that. Life wasn't so easy, especially depending on which caste you were born in, although the castes at that time weren't so set; you could move. But the idea that you'd have to come back and do the same thing over and over again without any escape presented those times with their real existential suffering. How do you get out of that?

There were various teachers at that time. Some of them were just basic materialists. There wasn't such a thing as rebirth. You basically died and that was the end of that. Their idea was you got the best out of life that you could, mainly through the sensual delights of life, and then you disappeared.

There were others who had the idea, very close to our Western idea of a soul or self, of something everlasting. For instance, a contemporary teacher of the Buddha was the Jain founder, the Nigantha. They seem to have had a very concrete idea of what karma was—the consequence of your ethical actions. It was almost something material that got stuck on the soul. The idea was that you went through mortification exercises so that this stuff fell off and then the soul could rise to a different place. Their understanding was that whatever you did, whether you meant it or not, if it wasn't good, you got the karmic result. That's why you see Jain monks going around sweeping the floor in front of them. If they stand on an ant, whether they meant to or not is immaterial. They've killed that life and therefore there's a consequence.

So there was that teaching of self-mortification, of letting go of the appetite to the body, mainly around sex but also around food. The Buddha seems to have practiced this for quite some years, to the point where he said he could hold his spine through his stomach. That's a bit extreme. At some point he gave up on that. Somehow it didn't answer his question.

Having left his lay life where he was married—and as the story goes, he'd just had a child born, a little boy—he was a member of the ruling caste. His father was a local headman, you could say, and they all came under the local king in Kosala. This was also a new development at the time, a movement away from pastoral communities that lived in little groups to a more centralized form of government under a monarch. It was creating all sorts of psychological problems and wars and disputes. A new class began to arise, the merchant class. For us it's hardly turbulent, but for them it was terribly turbulent—a change in their society that created a certain dislocation, a certain feeling of alienation perhaps. So lots of men, mainly, left to live this life of the samana, the wandering ascetics.

When the Buddha leaves home, the first thing he does is go to particular teachers who are going to teach him how to create happiness. And that's through these jhanic states, the absorption states. All religions have this. Just by saying a mantra or a prayer with intent, slowly but surely the heart lifts and you enter into your own internal space, which can be ecstatic, peaceful, calm.

So when we're doing the metta this morning, just by getting to that point of repeating, "may all beings be happy, may all beings be happy," very slowly you begin to lift yourself.

The problem with that was that when he came out of that mental state, he was back to being depressed and anxious, Siddhartha Gautama. So it didn't really answer his question, even though his teachers thought him to be adept enough to actually take on the teaching. Then he tries these mortification exercises and he leaves that too because he just feels he's getting nowhere with it.

So at that point he's in a state of desperation, can we say. He's in a state of despair because he's searched for what the society has to give him and nothing's come of it. So we can only presume that he's in this position of despair. And so the story goes—I'm presuming one or two of you haven't heard these little stories.

There's a woman called Sujata who comes along, which means "well-born." She is carrying some rice pudding, or rice cakes—I prefer to think of it as rice pudding—to the local god, to make an offering. Seeing this poor wretch, she thinks, well, he probably needs it more than the god. So he partakes of this, he starts eating this rice pudding, and it sort of revives him. Well, you know the power of rice pudding.

At this point, he remembers something from childhood, and this is really a core point in his progress. He remembers watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. Now, he's as concentrated as a little child—we can think of him somewhere between six and nine, that sort of age, probably below seven. He's concentrating on his father, so his level of concentration is acute, and he's really interested. He wants to know what his dad's doing. And he realizes that there's a quality in that which is different from all the stuff he's been practicing before. Before, he's been trying to get happiness, trying to attain happiness. What this insight into this child does is turn the process around for him to ask, "Well, what's the cause of suffering in the first place?"

It's with that sort of inspiration that he goes and sits under what we call the Bodhi tree, a religious fig tree. So he goes there with a completely different intent. Now the intent isn't "How am I going to make myself happy?" but "How do I create suffering? And who creates the suffering? And why do I create the suffering?"

He determines—it's called the great determination—not to rise from the tree until he's cracked it, or he drops dead. Well, as you know, lucky for him and lucky for us too, he sort of cracks the problem. And he realizes that the problem of suffering is, first of all, at a psychological level that we call desire—it's actually a bad translation, "desire," but we'll come to that in a minute—and at a deeper level, something goes wrong: a mistaken identity as to who we are or what we are.

So one of the core words in the teaching is this word dukkha, which simply means "hard to bear," but it encaptures all what we would call suffering—from the deepest angst and horror and despair to the silliest of irritations and thirsts. It's a whole gamut of human suffering. Dukkha: hard to bear.

And he makes a distinction between that dukkha and the suffering that comes from the body, which is natural to the body. So the first type of suffering is called dukkha-dukkhata, in other words, the suffering of suffering. What he's asking us to do is to separate out the physical pain which comes from the body itself from how we make a problem of it, how we turn it into some real heavy suffering. So that's your first premise.

And when he's pushed—when he's pushed to, you know, "What does he teach?"—because he won't go anywhere near metaphysics, right? There's no God, there's no reason why we suffer in any ultimate sense, there's no reason for us being here. He doesn't enter into any of those metaphysical areas, simply because you can't prove it. He doesn't want to get into arguments. In those days, one of the big entertainments was to turn up at a park on the full moon where all these ascetics would come and have a real old ding-dong battle as to who was right and who was wrong. So he wouldn't enter into those sorts of discussions.

He constantly drew his whole teaching down to what in the Pāli language—that's the language he spoke—is just three words: dukkha, dukkha nirodha, which translates as unsatisfactoriness, suffering, and the end of it. That's all he's concerned with. Of course, it's in that investigation that you come to realize that in fact there's more to us than what actually meets the eye.

So this suffering is caused by this desire. Now, when he talks about desire—and we're going to go into it more deeply during the week—he's really talking about forming a relationship of psychological dependency, so that our happiness is dependent on something. And when it's like that, what happens is when that which you're dependent on disappears, then you know suffering. On the side of suffering itself, if we presume the body will always be healthy, when it falls ill, then there's a lot of suffering.

So a lot of our exercises, a lot of the exercises that he gives, are just a constant reminder of the way things really are—which undermines at least the strength of suffering that can happen when somebody goes, when somebody's taken by surprise, when somebody's in a state of shock.

I don't know whether you know the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross? It's a book called *Death and Dying*, and she's one of the early investigators into what happens psychologically when you die. She was a doctor and spent her time in hospices. When you're told that you've only got six weeks, you can imagine it is a bit of a shock. And that shock, you see—I mean, why is it there? Everybody knows they're going to die. Everybody knows that everything dies in the end. But somehow, when we're told that it's our turn, it's a real thump, you see. And more so when we've never considered it.

So the Buddha talks about four types of people. There are those who wake up to the reality of life when they hear even somebody hardly famous has died. Then there are those who wake up when somebody famous dies. There are those who don't wake up until somebody close to them dies. And then there's the unfortunate who don't wake up until it's their turn to die.

So you don't want to get to the point where you're in a state of terminal shock when the doctor says you've

got so long to live. Part of the Buddha's teaching is to bring us always down to this real base. Now, when you come down to this base, as you approach it like this, you think, "Well, that's really gloomy. I mean, what do I want to think about death and dying all the time?" But what it does is it takes away the fear, it takes away the anxiety. And in so doing, you live more fully in the present moment. That's what it does.

Remember that a lot of our actions are an escape from suffering. So as soon as boredom comes, you're looking for something else to do.

As soon as some pain comes, you're looking to get rid of it. There's always this flight from suffering, always a flight from what is painful, a flight from death, you see. So it's always behind you. And it's only when you bring it in front of you and accept it as it is that all that anxiety and fear and rush and bother begins to disappear, begins to fade away. And that means that all your energy now is in being in the present moment and living fully. That's the consequence of these sorts of contemplations.

So what I'd like to do is go through the importance of that in the Buddha's discourse on how to establish this mindfulness. This particular discourse was delivered to people called the Kurus, in Kurusa Dhamma, which is seemingly close to modern Delhi. The important thing about this discourse, which is considered the jewel of the collection—and there are about sixteen collections of these—is that here the Buddha encapsulates all his teachings, his practical teachings on how to become liberated from suffering.

What's important for people to understand is that this was delivered to ordinary people in a small town. Most of these discourses are delivered to monks, because that's who he's talking to most of the time. As he's traveling around and staying here and there, he's giving talks and having discussions with kings and local people. He'd obviously been to this place and returned to find that they were actually following his teachings. He says there was no idle talk, no gossip. So he really sits down and tries to give them this teaching.

It's called the direct path. The two-way path is to develop this very strong concentration, which we call samatha. That can take time—you've got to take time off work, and you've got to sit there and develop it. When it's developed, then you would turn that very clear concentration onto investigating. But in this discourse, he points out that that's not actually necessary. What is necessary is to get these qualities, these factors of enlightenment, and simply begin to investigate things as we experience them.

The first part concerns the body. Actually, excuse me—the first part is how he abides. He abides with his body upright and his awareness set in front of him. The Buddha is very clear about the importance of posture, and there are other scriptures, other discourses in which that's gone into in more detail.

The first thing is that the body itself is an expression of your attitude and your state of mind. That's pretty obvious, really. When you see people in the street looking miserable, they don't walk around as though they're in charge of the world—they're all crunched up and bent over. As soon as you straighten the body up, as soon as you lift the spine, you're drawing energy up the body. This energy that's coming up is the

same as the chi or the ki. As soon as you sit up and lift up the top of the head, there's not only the physical energy of keeping your body upright—there is this mental energy coming up. When that mental energy comes up, it will begin to shake those parts of the body that are holding turbulence, those little pockets of turbulence being held there. That's where you get this physical pain coming through the body.

So posture is really of importance, and the part of the posture that's important is the spine. It doesn't really matter what you do with your legs—you can take them off if you want! It's a case of actually lifting up to the top of the head and maintaining that posture. In your meditation, if you find yourself crunching in onto yourself, you just stop and say, "lifting, lifting," and bring yourself back up.

And he talks about putting away covetousness and grief for the world. In other words, when you sit in meditation, you're putting aside all your desires about life and what you want and all your plans, and you're putting aside all your griefs. You're trying to bring yourself into the present moment, not allowing the past or the future to cramp this present moment as it is. We do that by simply stopping the thought, and the thought stops when you give the mind something else to think. That's the purpose of these noting words. I think last night I pointed up there to the teacher, the Mahasi, and the curtain was over it. I presume you could imagine him. Anyway, that's the Mahasi—Mahasi Sayadaw.

So here a meditator goes—obviously we're talking about a different time—to a forest, the root of a tree, an empty hut. He sits down having folded his legs crosswise, sets the body erect, and establishes mindfulness before him. Ever mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out. The first point is to get in touch with the actual feeling of the breath. The meditator knows the breath is long or the breath is short. It's a getting in touch with the body, getting in touch with feeling caused by the body, sensations caused by the body.

Then once that's established: breathing in, experiencing the whole body; breathing out, experiencing the whole body. What's meant there is that by this time, as you settle in on the breath, you're staying with the whole flow of the breath. Your mind's not coming off it. Don't be disappointed if the mind keeps wandering away, because that's the practice. You wake up, you know what it's doing, you come back to the breath. This process of settling on the breath is bringing about that silence in the mind, silence in the mind, calmness of the heart. You've got to start somewhere, and the breath helps you to do that.

Sometimes you have to spend just a bit of time allowing the breath to silence the mind, allowing the breath to calm the heart. If you try to stop thinking, try to stop feeling agitated, then you're in conflict with your mind, in conflict with your heart. And that produces even more turbulence. So it's a case of being very calm, very peaceful, just allowing things to happen no matter how long it takes.

When your mind is fairly steady on the breath, you train it to be like that. You train it in order to tranquilize—it's translated as the bodily formation—to tranquilize. As you breathe out, you tranquilize the body formation. In other words, you're just getting calmer, getting calmer.

The important thing to recognize here is that the body affects the mind. We know that if you feel ill, you

feel down, you feel depressed about it. And if your body feels good, it tends to lift you up. That's why you go for a run and feel good about it. So it's a case of recognizing that the breath, which is something happening automatically, has the power of bringing the mind to silence and the heart to calmness. It all rests upon the body being still.

There's the complete silence, you might say—the stillness of the body, calmness of the heart, silence of the mind. Just because you've gathered that within the beginnings of your meditation doesn't mean it's going to stay there. So every time you get lost within your sitting, you always begin again. Just begin again.

You might find that a little disappointing, because I think we come to meditation thinking, "Well, I'm doing everything right, so the mind should stop." But when you think that—from the time you wake up in your ordinary daily life to the time you fall asleep—does the mind ever stop? In fact, have you experienced the mind not thinking, a state of no thought? When you come and sit in a meditation center thinking, "Well, now I'm just going to sit in complete silence," it just doesn't happen. So part of the training, part of the process, the work you might say, is to allow these things to happen. Remember, you're not trying to make the mind be silent. You're not trying to make the heart be calm. You're just using an object, a neutral object—the rising and falling of the breath—to bring about those qualities, just because the breath itself is calming. As the calming comes, the breath gets finer and finer, and that's a sign to you that the concentration is growing. The breath gets finer, more shallow.

It's not just that the body offers us this quality of suffering, this quality of unsatisfaction, this quality of pain. The body offers us pain so that we can investigate what our relationship is to pain—which is the real suffering. It also offers us a deeper insight into this quality of impermanence. What we all want is something that's permanent and completely reliable. So all the Buddha is saying is: well, where is it? Where is this permanency? Where is it in this phenomenal world that you're going to find something reliable? Here you have the breath, you see.

Now, if the breath were to stop, then I presume we'd panic. But we presume it's going to keep going. What we have to recognize is that every breath is a new breath. It's not the same old breath repeating itself. This is a completely new moment, and this brings us into an understanding that every moment is arising and passing away, arising and passing away. When we see that in the breath, we discover something profound.

When something arises, we often attach the word "new" to it. With that word comes this lovely feeling—something new, a new song, a new product, a new iPad. The word "new" tends to be good. You don't usually use it when something's awful. You don't say it's a "new" revolution in the Arab country.

As the breath starts, it's the coming into life, the movement up. It brings you up, then it stops—there's a moment when it stops—and then it comes down, and then it finishes. Rising, falling. Rising, falling. Birth and death. It's actually contacting you with something very obvious about life, but something that in our deepest recesses we don't fully accept. We don't fully accept that actually this "me" that I talk about is

arising and passing away.

My sense of me is virtually continuous from the time I get up. If you ask yourself, "Do I have a sense of me, of me-ness?"—it's always there, isn't it? That never disappears, does it? There's always me thinking, when I become aware of me, that is. It never disappears, and it always seems to be static, always seems to be immovable, always seems to be above what I'm actually experiencing. By seeing this impermanence, we're actually asking: well, how permanent is that sense of me?

One of the benefits of seeing impermanence and unreliability is that you become much more easy about letting things go, much more easy about just allowing things to happen. Let it go, and then the next moment arises. There's always going to be another moment, another moment.

The final thing is this business of not-self. In watching the breath, especially as something automatic, we begin to realize it doesn't need me. The body breathes. The body breathes, and that's when you begin to look into the body and find that what we actually know of it is very superficial. For instance—I'm told, I've never experienced it—the marrow of our bones is actually manufacturing red blood corpuscles. These corpuscles are passing through the bone into the blood. Has anybody actually experienced that?

When you breathe, they tell us that carbon dioxide is taken out and oxygen is taken in. Have you ever experienced that? You experience the breath, but you haven't a clue what's going on with the body. There are trillions of cells—it's amazing when you look into these biology books—trillions of cells, and they're all reproducing themselves. And I have nothing to do with it. Nothing to do with it at all. There's a whole business going on of purifying the blood through the kidneys, and it's just not under my control. I haven't a clue what my liver is doing. But I do know when it hurts. And my brain—looking at brain science, it's just fascinating what we've come to learn about the brain, and the fact that our moods can be moved around by different chemicals.

When you look into your body like that, you get the feeling that you're an alien within this frame. It's a bit like driving a car. When you're absorbed in the driving, when you are just driving, you become the car. You and the car are one. Then of course it breaks down, and suddenly the car is something else, and you realize you're not the car—you're in the car, but you're not the car. It's the same with this body. There's something in the body, but it isn't the body at all, because it doesn't have this control.

So there's the Buddha's explanation of trying to define the self: if it was really me, I would be in complete control of the body. If it was me. But because it's not me, I find I'm not in control. The more I get into that, the more frightening it can be actually—especially when I realize I don't have any control at all over the aging process and over dying. We don't know the hour of the day, unless of course I take my own life.

Watching the breath as an automatic thing, as something happening by itself, watching it appearing and disappearing, watching my relationship to it, finding it boring—that whole process of liberating ourselves from this dukkha, from this existential suffering, it can all be done just watching the breath. That's how

powerful that practice is, once you turn the investigative eye upon it.

Now, that's not the only thing he suggests. All this can be done in the four classic postures of sitting, walking, lying down, and standing. It doesn't matter where you are—you can always do this practice.

But now we've got this business of mindfulness. In the Pali language, there's only one word: sati. That's why I call this place Satipaññā, because that's the Buddha mind—intuitive awareness, or awareness and intuitive intelligence. Even though we think it's two things, being aware and having this intuitive faculty, actually they're two sides of the same coin. We get it in a phrase such as "first you look, and then you see." The awareness is the absorption, the openness; and the intelligence is the understanding.

So "in full awareness" here—it's been retranslated as if he was talking to monastics—but when flexing and extending limbs, he acts in full awareness. When wearing his robes—in other words, when putting on or taking off clothes—in full awareness. When eating, full awareness. When drinking, consuming food and tasting, full awareness. When defecating and urinating—instead of reading a magazine.

He's supposed to be aware of everything. And one of the things that Brian was pointing out was this business of gratitude. Have you ever thanked your bowels for getting rid of that stuff? That's your relationship to your bowel. Instead of saying something absolutely awfully disgusting, you have to thank them and say, "Thank you so much for getting rid of all that stuff." Same with your bladder. "Thank you so much for getting rid of that stuff." So you're actually creating a well-being towards the body by simply activating that attitude of gratefulness, thankfulness.

And he has this full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, and waking up. If you go to sleep with a firm determination to that awareness, awareness sparks awake upon the arising out of sleep. You might even catch whether you wake up on the in-breath or the out-breath. Have a go. And aware when talking and keeping silent. So awareness is just that sense of presence with whatever you're doing. Awareness can only be in the present moment, so it's always being with exactly what you're doing. Whatever your body is doing, your mind is there. And if your mind is doing, you're there with the mind. The mind is never allowed to wander and just go off on its own little trips.

Now, the other thing we did was the foulness of the body parts. This is right here in the foundations of mindfulness. The Buddha has a huge list of things we're meant to contemplate. Not only simple things like hairs on the head and hairs on the body, but skin, bone marrow, kidneys, spleen, lungs, large intestines, stomach, feces, bowel, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine. When you make a list of all these things, you can come out feeling pretty disgusting. But the whole point is to get in touch with that relationship we have to the body and to begin to transform it into its opposite, which is thankfulness, which is non-disgust. This is the way the body is.

There's a case in the scriptures where some monastics have been contemplating in the forests, doing specifically this exercise. The exercise here is to realize that our happiness is not dependent on the body.

So one contemplates these sorts of things. The problem with doing it in a non-balanced way is that you end up being disgusted with your body if you keep doing this. So you're supposed to do the opposite as well, which is this thankfulness to the body, this ability to draw mettā into the body.

When the Buddha sees this group of monastics coming out, he sees that they've done this practice very well, but what's lacking is this loving-kindness. So he gives them the practice of loving-kindness, and all of them liberate themselves. That's the story—they all liberate themselves from suffering just with this exercise combined with loving-kindness.

Then there's a deeper sort of experience about the body, which is the way the mind contacts the body at its base before it turns it into concepts and perceptions. We did a part of that when we were doing the standard meditation. When I asked you to feel the base of your foot and to really get into the soles of your feet and what you were actually feeling, you discern two types of feelings: the pressure and the heat. Those are two. The other one, of course, is movement—there's your third basic sense. And the fourth one is a sense of liquidity, or cohesiveness, a stickiness, an elasticity. Sometimes you can feel that on the breath; it's like an accordion, expanding and then contracting.

In the Buddha's psychology, that's the point of contact between the body and the mind. The mind can only perceive these four things, and it's from these four things that it creates its percepts. The eye, for instance, would be seen as a fire element—heat, light—and it's from these little pixels that the mind actually takes this in and begins to create a picture. We know, for instance, that when somebody's looking at a picture, the eye is moving around all over it, but that's not what you're aware of. What you're aware of is the whole picture. That whole picture is being manufactured inwardly, and all the eye is picking up at that sense base are these little pixels.

When you put your attention on the ear, you actually hear recognizable sounds, such as the little tweets of birds. But actually, if your meditation is clear enough, the initial perception isn't a sound at all. It's just pressure, like a drum, and all you experience are drums. It's from there, from that basic pressure—which is the earth element, as it's put in more metaphorical language—that the mind takes it in and begins to create an image, which is then recognized and then understood. That's a whole process going on.

So these four elements in Buddhist psychology are the basic perceptual base of the mind touching matter. That doesn't mean to say they exist in matter itself. It's the way the mind experiences matter.

It either experiences it as some sort of pressure or lack of pressure, some sort of heat or lack of it, some sort of movement or lack of it—stillness—and some sort of cohesion, elasticity. It's just from these basic percepts that we create this world around us.

The final thing in this section on the body are what's known as the nine charnel ground contemplations. In those days, they didn't bother to bury bodies as such. They offered the body—which after all is just meat and bones—to nature. Bodies were wrapped in white cloth and ceremoniously placed in the charnel

grounds, where vultures, foxes, wolves, lions, tigers would feed off them. And one of the contemplations was to sit and watch a body slowly corrupt away.

The Buddha had obviously done it himself, because there are eleven parts of the process described. He sees a corpse thrown aside on the charnel ground, devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, various types of worms. Then he sees a corpse thrown on the ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, and a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together by sinews. A skeleton without flesh and blood held together with sinews. Disconnected bones scattered in all directions—here a hand bone, here a foot bone. And all the while, the meditator is saying, "As this body is, so is mine. As this body is, so is mine."

That's a pretty heavy meditation, that one is. If you can find a body—these days you can't do that sort of thing. It's interesting because as a monastic, if you go to the East, Thailand mainly or Sri Lanka, you can get easy access into the autopsy rooms and just watch them do what they do to a dead body.

Now again, what's the purpose of it? The purpose is to overcome your fear and overcome your delusion as to this body being me, this body being mine. This tells you how important the contemplation of the body is in the Buddhist teaching. All these exercises that we do around the body are really to see these three characteristics—the lack of control, the changing nature, the dependency of the body on everything outside it: the air, the food. Minimal control. And just like when you take something away that you're dependent on, there's always that pain of letting go. That's the way it is.

So if your car breaks down, or if your iPod breaks down—that's worse—then you've got this pain of not having your iPod. But then, if you can't buy one, if you can't get one, there's a slow acceptance of that situation, and the pain disappears, the suffering disappears. So it's slowly just letting go of things, letting go, letting go.

When you're in meditation and you can see a lot of suffering around various things that happen in your life, as that comes up you keep saying, "Let go, let go." But you've got to be careful with that little phrase. You're not supposed to push things out. Not "let go" like "get away," giving it a little flip, because that would be an aggression. Letting go just means let it arise and pass away, let it arise and pass away.

And when all these things arise and pass away, it's not as though anything is destroyed. That's the joy of the process—everything is given back, but renewed. Everything is given back in its non-attached form. When the Buddha, for instance, went to do this practice, he would have had to let go of thinking. One of our big problems is to let go of thinking, to stop thinking. And you would think, well, when he's fully liberated, that would be it—he'd just sit there like an amorphous blob with a sign: "Leave me alone." But the very quality of discussion, the very quality of being able to argue a point is now re-established, only this time to express his own understanding.

It's the same with emotions. By letting go of these unfortunate emotions, they're transformed. Nothing is lost in that process. What was grief becomes joy. What was hatred and anger, unforgiveness, all that sort

of stuff, becomes love. You can't stop that transformation. It happens naturally. We do these exercises to push that process along, but in Zen they tell you that with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. It just arises naturally.

There used to be a fairly famous teacher in Zen in London, Myoko-ni. She was quite a fierce person, it seemed. I never met her; she died quite a while ago now. And she said doing loving-kindness meditation was a waste of time. That was very peculiarly Zen, very Japanese. Perhaps that was nitty-gritty: stop wasting your time.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated through your investigation of the body sooner rather than later.

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