Mindfulness: Time

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1:03:33

Well, I think the general feeling I was getting from people was that therapy was very good at getting people in touch with their stuff, but didn't quite know what to do with it when it was up. And it was through research by John Teasdale here in Cambridge, and of course Kabat-Zinn bringing it to pain management, depression, anxiety. According to John, it was something like a 90% success of mindfulness and panic – of not going back into panic.

And it's really understanding what the Buddha means by *dukkha*, by suffering. I think once we're clear on that, you can see the role of mindfulness in undermining suffering. It's there in the Second Noble Truth. The first is just basic statement that there is this *dukkha*. We'll define that in a minute. And the second one is the cause of it, which is desire. And the third one is very hopeful – there is an end to it. And the fourth, of course, is the path leading to it, the actual practice.

So what does he mean by this word *dukkha*? It translates as hard to bear. But what he's referring to are three types, as he lists them. One is the suffering caused by attachment to sensual pleasure. The next one is an attachment to becoming. And the next one is an attachment to annihilation.

So it's a case of separating out what you would call just the natural pain of being a human being. So just the physical pain. He wasn't as though he got rid of physical pain. He died very uncomfortably with some sort of gastroenteritis. And he once asked Ananda to take over his speech because his back was hurting. So whatever he means by *dukkha*, this suffering, he's not referring to physical pain as such. And he's not, in our state of non-enlightenment, talking about the primary level of mental suffering. So when we feel, in an obvious way, when we feel depressed or anxious or something like that, there isn't actually any suffering there in his terminology. There is just this mental state.

Now, to understand that, you have to go into his psychology, which he called dependent origination. It basically says that something arises dependent on something else, that's all. And therefore it doesn't have its own existence, it doesn't have its own reality base. Everything is interdependent, I'm sure you've heard that. The Buddha's gone on and on about that. This was turned into a sort of universal idea by Mahayana. But in the original teaching, the Buddha stayed very close to the human actual experience. He was very wary of turning anything into some sort of metaphysics. So when you read the Theravada scriptures, he's right there with the human being and what we experience – our personal experience within this globe of consciousness through which we experience the world.

So, this problem of desire... We begin by what is our essential mistake. So the Buddha is saying that somehow we've made some mistake somewhere, which is often translated as a delusion. And this

fundamental mistake is a mistake of relationship. The relationship is to seek happiness in a world that's not going to deliver happiness, if only by the fact that it just doesn't stay. It's always in a process of change. So as soon as you think you've entered into this heavenly place, in whatever way you might define that for yourself, it always moves on. It always comes to an end. So when you have a great party and somebody says, we must do this again, you know you're heading for disaster. Because the second time is never. It loses juice.

So the fundamental position then is one of trying to seek this happiness in a world that's transient and doesn't deliver. And the more you accumulate, the more you feel safe. So the more friends you have, the more feeling of friendship you feel safe. The more money you have in the bank, you feel safe. You're always moving back to this business of safety. And that fundamental feeling of safety is resting upon a deep understanding somewhere within our being that we're not safe, that there is death. And so we cover that up by making something of life. So we move towards life and what it can give us, and we make ourselves feel safe by all sorts of little mechanisms.

Unfortunately, once we've accumulated this stuff, it has to be defended against marauders and against the government. So you have to build up a certain aversion to get the energy to get rid of the enemy. If the enemy looms a little too large, well, you've got to run for it. So there's your three basic dispositions in life coming from this fundamental delusion or mistake about seeking happiness, real happiness, not transient happiness, real, permanent, meaningfulness, real, permanent, existential groundedness in the transient world – the business of acquisition, accumulation, aversion, and fear.

So from these three dispositions, we move into every moment. It's always there underneath. It's not that every moment demands these things, but they're always there as potential. And we move into actions of speech, thought in our head, and then it moves out into speech and then into action.

Once you've done that, you've created something within yourself. You've created a conditioning. And it's these conditionings that are driving your destiny. So these conditionings that we built up unwittingly in childhood and in early, up to teenage and places of that age, and even beyond – people who are not aware, who are not mindful – this compendium of habits is basically what we call our character, our personality. And it drives our destiny. And it's only when we hit walls that we begin to question. Normally speaking, we blame everybody else. That's much easier. Society, parents, everybody – that fault. But slowly wake up that maybe this crash has come about because of a certain way that I'm behaving.

When the Buddha was fully liberated, we say he had three knowledges. Three knowledges came to him. The first one was that he was completely, he'd come to the end of these, what he called defilements, these wrong ways of relating. There was nothing unwholesome in his heart. There was nothing unskillful in his thinking anymore. That had been completely taken away because some deep delusion had been destroyed. We'll come to that in a minute. And then he had memories of all his past lives, and he saw that it was his ethical decisions which had moved him into hell realms, into hellish places, and then finally

driven him to his liberation. And then he saw beings moving from one place to another, driven by this same cause of *kamma*. So what he's saying there is that our consciousness is in a process of relationship. So everything is to do with ethics.

We in our time, we medicalize things, or you socialize things. So you do things because your parents have done this to you and all that or you've got some sort of illness or something like that. Remember that our forebears would talk about being a bit off or got out the wrong side of bed or feeling heavy, but now we talk about depression and it becomes a sort of mental dis-ease. When you go to the east, they don't – they physicalize it, they embody it. They say that they're feeling down or they're feeling heavy, but they don't turn it into a psychological thing. So as soon as you turn it into a psychological problem, then it becomes, you have to move towards therapy. And in a sense, it takes away the personal responsibility we have for having constructed these mental states. That's the problem. So it's the personal responsibility of having constructed depression, anxiety.

Now, the understanding is that when something comes towards us, either a physical pain – somebody hits me on the nose – or some anger from somebody, that somehow they're causing this reaction. That their anger is causing my anger. That this clout on the nose is causing my grief. And because I can't get my own back, I feel very depressed.

I once went to a group that was a group for people suffering from depression. And we sat in a circle and everybody started telling everybody else how depressed they were, which was extraordinarily depressing. And then when we got round to one person who said he wasn't depressed, he was really happy, he was obviously up on a bit of a high, everybody looked very jealous and glum. And everything they said – well, I'll give you an example. The leader of the group said, a week ago or so, I tripped over the pavement and hurt myself. So I wrote to the council and asked for compensations. The council wrote back and said that it wasn't on. He wasn't going to get a penny. So he got very angry. And then he got depressed. And it was the council with this pavement that had caused this depression.

Now, in the Buddhist psychology, that's not actually what's happening. What's happening is some information is coming towards us. And the reaction that we have to it, the response, the reaction that we have to it, is actually coming from a different centre. It's not coming from this person. It's not coming from the pain on my nose. The reaction is pain on my nose, which I'm well aware of, and then inside me, coming from a different place, is this little being who's quite frightened because somebody's just hit them on the nose. And the way you respond to somebody hitting you on the nose is you get very angry, unless they're very big, and then you run for it. And that's coming from this inner center of the heart, not from the bump on the nose.

So when we get, these days, a lot of people are suffering from unemployment. Now, when you become unemployed, as I remember it, there's a loss of your wealth, there's a loss of your status, there's an immediate loss of your place right now. That's bad enough as it were because you have to reorganize

yourself. But on top of that, there's something else happens which is to become depressed about it. So that's this inner reaction to a situation. And what mindfulness is drawing us to understand is that that isn't necessary. That second part is not necessary.

So the Buddha always talks about these two darts. The first dart is just the pains and sorrows and woes of ordinary living on this planet. And the second one was completely self-manufactured as a relationship to what was happening. And that relationship is our ethical position. Either we're trying to accumulate something or we're trying to push it away or we're trying to run for it. That's a relationship. It's an ethical relationship.

Now, the Buddha himself didn't have a brilliant time all the time. Towards the end of his life, I think he got quite worried because the two great kings who had been his great supporters – one was murdered by his son, and the other one died naturally, and the two sons who became kings didn't like him at all. In fact, one plotted with Devadatta, a dastardly fellow, who was a monk, and tried to kill him. I'm going to tell you the story.

And the other prince, actually, he married into the Sakya family, his family. And because they thought he was of a lower caste, they secretly gave him a slave girl. I mean, the untouchable. And when he found this out, of course, he was raging. And he got on his elephant with all his other elephants and started going to destroy the Sakyas. The Buddha turned up and said, hey, what's going on here? And he got a bit of sense and he rode back. But after a while, he got into his heart again. He got on his elephant, and off he went again. And the Buddha said, whoa, turned up and said, hey, what's happening? So he said, okay. So he went back again. Third time on his elephant, whoa, and the Buddha turns up – come on, he says. So he turns back. The fourth time, the Buddha says, I can't do anything. That's it. He won't listen now. And, of course, he did. The Sakyas were, many of them were killed. They had to move their capital elsewhere.

So these were very worrying times for him towards the end, and he obviously was concerned about the order, the support of the order, because, as you know, these religions grow because of temporal support. I mean, in China, for instance, whenever the emperor was Buddhist, you were away. When he wasn't, you ran for the hills. That's how they developed this kung fu – self-defense. In our rule as a monk, we can defend ourselves. You're not supposed to attack. You can definitely defend yourself. So that whole way of combat in which you're trying to use the other person's energy to undermine them, to destroy them. And as they pass you by, it's a quick rabbit chop. So it's... just finish it off, coup de grace.

So, where was I? I go off on these tales and I forget where I am. So, yes, so we're still struggling with this word *dukkha* and how to deal with it and where mindfulness comes in.

So the Buddha's saying, if you put your attention in between the original pain, whether it comes physically at you, like you bump your head and catch your finger in the door or something, or whether you put it within yourself as some old conditioning arises – some depression, some sadness, some guilt, some shame – if you put your attention there, upon that object, and you observe this relationship you have with it, of

indulging it... indulging our depression, I'm so depressed, I'm depressed, all this self-hatred, I'm terrible, I'm useless, nobody loves me, it's true, I'm horrible, things like that, and you're working, you're actually developing that particular conditioning by this indulgence – a sort of false humility. So by observing that reaction, you're cutting in between the original suffering or pain that's coming up, physical or mental, and this reaction.

When this reaction falls away, you can stay with the original pain and you've discovered a sort of an equanimity with it, a non-reactive position. And when you do that, you find that this original pain, whether it's the pain in the nose, the physical thing, or something in the heart as a mental state, begins to evaporate. And if you do it long enough, you realize that actually there's some therapy going on. The heart's purifying itself. It's healing itself. You begin to realize you don't have to do anything. All you have to do is be aware of it.

But that awareness demands a certain ability to bear with, to bear with the conditions. And what we also discover is that the heart cannot purify itself except into consciousness. And it will either do it as a felt emotional state or as a physical illness, psychosomatic illness.

So this ability to cut in between the original given unfortunate state and the reaction to it is, you might say, the point of escape. That's how he would put it. There's the escape. The escape from what? The escape from further suffering and past suffering. The escape from suffering caused by the past. So when you realize the power of that mindfulness to be with suffering, then you obviously want to be there more and more.

Tell them they'd be expelled if they make any noise.

So this mindfulness that the Buddha's talking about. So there's your, that's mindfulness at its most obvious position in the Four Noble Truths – desire the cause of suffering. So remember desire here is the desire to accumulate, the desire to annihilate, to get rid of what you don't want, and the desire to run from fear. So if a person can see that in their depression, in their anxiety, in their rage, in their revenge, and all – they can see that – they see that they found an escape from suffering.

You can see how it's very helpful in all these therapies to get a person to find that position within themselves. It's talked about as the objective observer, the objective feeler, or the one who knows, the one who experiences.

So by objectifying what we experience, we find a sort of different place, something which is transcending consciousness, transcending what we would normally identify with.

So what do we mean by transcending? We mean by transcending finding a different identity point. So when we are in the body, when we are the body, we are the body self. That's who I am. Children, that's where they live in their bodies. They don't separate their emotions or thought life. They are their bodies in a very embodied way.

We really can only get to that level by accident. If you trap your finger in a door, just for that one singular sweet moment, you are the body. And then you jump out of that and start kicking the door. So to be a body self, you have to get into high states. I mean, that's why people like these dangerous sports. Because just for that one moment, they are that experience of going through rapids or flying in the air or something. And when you identify with something so totally like that, you feel completely alive. In that moment of absorption, there's no you. There's just the action.

So that's the paradox. When we're completely happy, we don't know it. And as soon as you bounce out of it, you've lost it. What you're aware of is the dregs of the happy state. This ability to absorb into something. We do it, many of us do it just at work, which we find interesting, and you're just absorbed into it. People have hobbies like gardening. Time passes. The garden's been done beautifully, but there's not been a sense of somebody doing it.

So these are our happiest moments. And as soon as you jump out of it, then there's something that knows your happiness. You've lost that happiness in a way. You've objectified it. So coming out of the body and being aware of the body as something means that my identity isn't there. I mean my identity will soon re-establish itself if something is life threatening. As soon as something threatens my life then I really become my body very quickly, but I can actually find this other position of having a body without being one. So when I'm looking at my hand, there's something looking at the hand. It's not in the hand.

So it becomes an object to me. That's a different relationship. I still own this hand. My relationship with this hand is different from my relationship to your hand. If you lost your hand, I'd be very compassionate. But if I lost my hand, I'd go berserk. That's the difference.

So the next identity is, of course, emotions. So I am happy, I am sad, and so on and so forth. That's an easy one for us to stay with. If it's a good one, we like it. If we don't, we tend to jump out of it and become aware of it. Only when you go into it completely do you find yourself becoming mentally ill or falling into an uncontrollable rage. So there's that point of identity that I am. If you say I am... In the identity, in that moment of identity, there is no I am, there is just the identity. There is just depression, just panic. In a panic situation, you just lose it, you just go for it, and then you wake up out of it.

When you become aware of an emotional state, it's an object, isn't it? So there's something in us which is no longer identifying with the emotional state, though fully aware of it.

And then there's the mental identity of thought. That's even easier. I mean, we'll go off on these thought trips anytime. And you just get lost in thought. And then you wake up, and the thought's gone. In meditation sometimes, when this ability to remain as the observer is very acute, you can see thoughts arising and passing away. They don't develop because you're not in there to develop them. You can see a thought arising and passing away, like a neon light.

So, you've got these three major identities, which you're pulling out of: the body with its sensations,

feelings, the heart with its emotions, moods, and the mind with its thoughts and images. And when you pull out of that, you've found a different identity. You're now the observer, the feeler, the knower. And that's the position of somebody who's being mindful—in this particular case with therapy, mindful of painful states, painful mental states.

Now that isn't your final position. To be the observer, the feeler and whatnot—it's not your final position. But the Buddha actually says those who are mindful like that are in the vicinity of, in the neighbourhood of *Nibbāna*.

So when we're in that state, mainly in the sitting posture, and you find yourself acutely being this observer within all this body, mind and heart—usually the body has to be very still and the heart has to be very calm, and the mind has to be silent. And then there's this very acute sense of the observer, the feeler. So when that comes to you, after that experience, ask yourself, what was it like being there? What were the constituents of the observer?

Because at that point, there's the ability to discover what we really are, which is something transcendent. So it's something which transcends all these identities. Even the identity of an observer, of a feeler. And that's what the Buddha is pointing to. So when he's teaching of not-self, it's just this way of saying everything that we experience, if you can objectify it, it can't be you.

When you are aware of yourself as a self, as an observer, as a feeler, there's something that feels itself to be a self. So it can't be that because it's an object. So you're always moving, you're always taking a step backwards. And when you actually fall off the cliff of the self, that's it. That's when we realise who we really are. That's the transcendent point. And that's what the Buddha is referring to when he calls himself the *Tathāgata*. *Tathāgata* means arrive there or gone there. And its best translation is the transcendent one, the one who's transcended the psycho-physical world.

So now, this mindfulness, when it comes to just ordinary problems of life, ordinary mental problems like anxiety and lots of stuff—what it does is, it allows the person to find that position where they are no longer making things worse by identifying with that emotional state. That's the desire, that's this business of either saying, I am depressed. As soon as you say, I am depressed, where's the escape? But as soon as you say, there's depression, there's an escape, isn't there? You can do something about it if it's there within yourself. But as soon as you say, I am, that's it. We're locked into a particular type of relationship, this identity with it.

So the ability to maintain that mindfulness stops that identity, which is indulging it, which is actually making it worse, and allows the original state to manifest. And that's what's so difficult, is to be with these very painful mental states and just be with it in this calm way and feel them, experience them fully. And what you're doing is you're saying to your heart, manifest your turbulence. And it's in that manifestation that turbulence can exhaust itself. So that over a period of time, you begin to feel this alleviation of all this turmoil within the heart.

Think 25 years. I wouldn't want to give you any false hope.

So, this business of indulgence, how do we develop our mental states? We develop them through thought. It's through making up these constant stories that we're actually developing mental states. So the first thing is to know that the mind, if it's not under our control, is really working against us. So anxiety, remember, is really being anxious, 99% of the time, anxious about things that aren't going to happen. Because the mind here, in a state of fright, in a state of uncertainty, extends the future outwards. And it always builds up this tremendous fearful storyline. The scenario of fear just extends itself. And that's completely unnecessary because if you come back into the moment, and you feel the fear, and do it anyway—you all know the book, yeah?

So you feel the fear, and you're letting it go. And then when there's an equanimity, when the fear has subsided, then of course you see the situation with much more clarity. It doesn't mean to say that you can't see that unfortunate things may happen, but at least it takes away the huge agitation around it, the exaggeration of it.

So that's the power of your mindfulness, not to get caught up in thoughts driven by unwholesome mental states. And you'll do that when we realise that, when we allow the mind to do that, it gets worse. It's actually developing the mental state.

So, on a very obvious psychological level, what mindfulness is doing is it's putting this awareness, this mindfulness, which is our intuitive intelligence. You know, we talk about mindfulness, we talk about awareness, but remember that two words always come together in the Buddhist scripture. It's *sampajañña-sati*, which means an intuitive intelligence and awareness.

To think of them as two things is really to look at the two sides of the same coin. We have it in our language when we say, if you look carefully, you'll see. So the see is the grasping of the situations. So awareness is the ability to look dispassionately, to look from a position to an objective position, and as we look, we grasp the situation, we see what's wrong. So although we say this awareness and intuitive intelligence, it's actually intuitive awareness. And that's the reason I call this centre Satipañña, because that is the Buddha mind.

To be in that state, you're actually in a state of awakening, right? You can't say awakened, but we can say definitely a state of awakening. So, when we see the power of that to stop us making things worse and to undermine old habits, that's the point. When these mental states come up, remember, these are conditioning, they're old habits. And when we're undermining, when we're allowing them to manifest, we're actually allowing that turbulence to exhaust itself. So that's the healing. So these turbulences find it harder and harder to hijack our lives. We can stay above them, walk with them, see them as our companions, but also to turn a certain kindness towards them too as if you were with somebody who was depressed or anxious. So this awareness, this mindfulness can be saturated or flavoured with loving kindness, and that gives us a great strength. It gives us a great courage to stay with the actual state no

matter how long it stays.

And it's through that process that two things are happening. One is the psychological dis-ease is being eased, and the other one is there's a slow recognition of where the escape is from all suffering—by non-indulgence, non-reactivity, non-aversion, non-fear—and it's seeing that second arrow as the Buddha would call it, second dart of aversion, fear, pushing away, and just allowing that to manifest and die away, that we are slowly receding backwards to this place of pure equanimity, of non-reactivity. So it could be, in my understanding, that somebody who comes into therapy, a mindfulness-based therapy, very easily just by observing the process of how suffering is created, find their way to complete liberation on one of the insights.

As you do that of course the other two insights, the other two characteristics of existence, become obvious to the person. As they move along first they realise that everything is impermanent because they're watching it. So it dawns upon them that there's nothing that they're experiencing which remains. Nothing that is permanent. Therefore, everything that we experience is unreliable. You can't rely on it. You can't rely on a relationship lasting. I mean, the person might think better of it and off off. Or they die. You can't rely on human beings. It's terrible. It's terrible. You can't rely on your happiness on another human being. You're into a hell realm. Because you're not in control. The whole point about being happy is that you're in control. And if you can't control something, there's always going to be fear that you'll lose control.

So this is your attachment coming from this position of I am. I am a human being. As soon as you say I am a human being, you're stuck. Because now you've got to seek perfect happiness in this form. And so you're constantly in conflict with the world because it just doesn't deliver.

And that impermanence, you know, it leads you to this beautiful statement by the Buddha. There's nothing in the world worth holding on to. And one thing you can do with these phrases when you come across them in a book that you're reading and it strikes you is to keep repeating them. This is the spiritual reading. So you come across a phase and you keep repeating it. Keep repeating it. Repeating it in all its inflections. Like there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There is nothing in the world worth holding on to.

And you keep repeating it and repeating it. And you repeat it gently until you feel a sort of digestion. And that means that it's moved from being an intellectual understanding into a disposition. It's moving into a disposition. And when that's really grasped, it comes out in your actions, in your speech. That's your eightfold path. If it stays at an intellectual level, it's sterile. Nothing's ever going to happen. You're going to sound very clever, but nothing's ever going to happen. It's got to move into the heart, as a disposition.

So, one sees this impermanence. In seeing the world as impermanent, one begins to realise what is permanent within the world. So, these qualities, these characteristics are always making us find the opposites. So, where the Buddha says this is suffering, he talks about this place, for want of a better word,

Nibbāna, where there is no suffering. Don't call it happiness just says there's no suffering because if you say happiness we immediately associate that with some sort of emotional state. So he prefers the word no suffering. And what is able to see that which arises and passes away must itself not be arising and passing away. So another quality of *Nibbāna* is that it's not transient, it's not changing. It's a state which has a permanency about it and is utterly reliable. That's what he's saying.

And then as you begin to take this position of the observer two things become more plain to you is that your control over your body, heart and mind is only apparent. So you can move your body around here and there but there's very little you can do about your bones. Like whatever skeleton you've got you stuck with it, and you can get rid of bits of it, break bits of it, but basically speaking so much of our physical nature is a given isn't it? I mean we don't even know what's happening. Do we know what I mean do we know what's happening now in our liver? Yeah, completely blank as far as I'm concerned. And as long as it doesn't hurt, I'm quite happy to leave it alone.

It's like neurobiology tells about all these chemicals and neurons. I don't experience any of that. I haven't a clue what's going on. All I know is that I have these thoughts and images coming up here and I'm aware of feelings and emotions. So my actual experience of life, it's nothing to do with chemicals and whatnot. Not to say that chemicals don't affect the experience of my life.

But that's not what I actually experience, you see. So in thought, you see, what happens if we become senile? We suffer from Alzheimer's. Who are we then, you see? So this business of pulling out of and looking at something makes us realize, and it's a frightening thing, to realize that actually you're not in control.

But it's also beginning to discover a position which is outside it. So this is the transcendent position. The transcendent position in its absoluteness cannot know itself. If it knows itself then it must have an object. If it's an object then it can't be it. Simple as that. Whatever is an object to awareness can't be the awareness. It's an object. So that's why the Buddha says even *Nibbāna* doesn't have this sense of self. And that's the process of liberation. The process of liberation is the eventual abandonment and destruction of any idea of a self. That's all there is to it.

Now when we experience these things, they are not, they don't have to be mind-blowing experiences. They're sometimes like a drip feed. And over a period of time, you wake up and realize actually that you don't see the world as you did 5, 10, 15 years ago. Because it's a slow dawning. That's why the word awakening is so much better than enlightenment, you know.

And as you begin to have that, as you begin to, as it were, find this identity, remember that it doesn't stop there. You have to re-enter the psychophysical organism. You have to become a person. And it's through the personhood that you begin to express the wisdom that you have. So, in the Buddha's own story, he retreats from life. He goes into these meditative experiences. And when he's fully, when he wakes up to what he's actually discovered, see, his first thought is, who can I share this with? Who can I teach? See? It's

a natural outflow.

So this Eightfold Path that he left, right understanding, right attitude, flows naturally into right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Right livelihood. And that's the way that you begin to understand that this process of mindfulness is actually making you re-engage in life in a much fuller way because it's not being enclosed by a barrier that we call the self. The self is always defining the world for its own self-benefit. And therefore the relationship we have with everybody or anything always has this angle of what's in it for me. See? When the what's in it for me goes, then you get that pure relationship. Not that there isn't anything in it for you. It's just that that's not the dominant thought. That's not become a barrier. It may be a boundary, but you can step over boundaries. But barriers, you can't step over. See?

So you can see how somebody who has entered into a therapy just with the purpose of overcoming panic or grief, they've had a terrible grief in their lives, and they're taught this business of separating the grief from this indulgence. So often when people die and we're left with this grief, we make the mistake of thinking that the amount of grief I have is the measure of my love. So that means that every time your grief begins to disappear, you panic. And you've got to start grieving because you're saying to yourself, I don't love this person anymore. So you have to grieve again. And so it goes on and on. It becomes a never-ending indulgence in grief. And there's a deep satisfaction that, oh, I'm so grieving that I'm so happy that I love this person so much. But the grief is actually an expression of your attachment. Real love allows the person to go on.

It's like, say, a parent who won't let the child go on. You're holding on to the child. But when the child is launched into the world, there should be happiness, you know, as well as relief. There's more happiness out. So it's like you see parents see their children and they're happy for them. They don't hold on to them. They stay here, you know.

So when a person sees that grief, it's something coming out of attachment and allows the grief to pass. Stop indulging in it. Stop confusing it with love and allowing the person who's passed away to actually pass away and to rejoice in the relationship they had and just to let go of that person, let them go. Then, of course, the grief disappears. The grief begins to just exhaust itself. So it's not as though the mindfulness is going to help you get over the grief quicker. The process of grief will be determined by the measure of your attachment. But it's still going to take three, six, nine months. They say if it goes on longer than that, it's becoming chronic. But if you, you see, it doesn't stop the suffering. What it does is it opens you up to it. But it opens you up in a way that it's going to heal the heart. See?

So you can see by seeing grief, supposing someone comes with grief, and they cut in between this business of indulging grief from a wrong understanding that it's an expression of love. So this misunderstanding dies away, and the reaction of indulging grief therefore stops. The grief now is allowed to arise and pass away, and they're beginning to see that it's impermanent. And then they're beginning to see that actually, I'm looking at it, I'm feeling it, it's not me, even if it's only a slight insight. So all the time they're

discovering this new identity of being the one who knows.

So it seems to me that even though a person might enter at the level of deep suffering, of psychological suffering, there's a great possibility that they find their way completely. As the scripture says, in no length of time, so and so, so and so, became fully liberated. And the commentaries gloss that with 25 years in the forest. Fifty years in the forest, but in no length of time. Well, cosmically speaking, that's 25 years.

Are there any questions around that?

Bhante, a lot of what you were saying related to experience of time, impermanence and passing of things and so on. I wonder if you could say a little bit more about the kind of Buddhist experience of time and the importance of the present because there's very much an idea of letting go of the past, not becoming too involved in the future. And also in a more deep sense, there's an underlying picture of what reality is. It's saying, in a sense, there is no past and future. They aren't solid, real things at all. And that's something that can be quite disturbing.

Well, the mind is very clever, isn't it, in maintaining a certain continuity for us. And in a sense, it'd be difficult to see how you could operate without some level of continuity as to who you are, where your position was in society, what your job was. You've got to be in the morning and thought, I'm not supposed to be doing today. You have to ring around and find out, oh yeah, I'm supposed to be at work. So there has to be some connection to the past. You have to have known, it puts you in a position of time in flux. And time in flux is basically a series of events, isn't it? And you're slotted into that series. And there's a presumption it's going onwards.

Remember that in the West we have this impression that time is linear, it's going somewhere, it has some sort of progress. Whereas in the East and in more ancient cultures it was more circular. It was just going round on itself. That's why in the West we often find it very difficult to think of rebirth or reincarnation because we have this idea of progress as a linear state. You begin here and you end up somewhere up there. But as I say, the more circular idea of time which you find in the East allows the mind to allows us to create the possibility that things come round again, things come round again.

So and in daily life, you have to know. I mean, if you've got a dental appointment on Monday, you have to reorganise yourself for that dental appointment. So you can't lose a reality base of what's actually happening at the level of where you are in society, what you're supposed to be doing, where you're supposed to be going, and so on. That's right. But, of course, the delusion is that this is something that has an absolute reality about it. If you walk into a door, there's something absolutely real about that. You know what I mean? It's solid, and it's there, and you've hurt yourself, see? But we know that actually it's just subatomic particles meeting subatomic particles. I mean, there's another level of reality, you can say, that there's actually not much there apart from this energy. This is what we are told. I've never experienced that myself. But this is what we're told, that there's this level of reality about the universe we're living in, which is just energy. It's just this frazzled energy.

So in the belief of continuity, in that sense, there's a belief, an underlying belief, that it's the same person. That's where the delusion is. So, even though you see that your face has changed since you were a child, even in the last five, ten years, you still say, well, it's me. That's me, you see. There's something in us which remains this insoluble, permanent sense of I-ness, of me-ness. See? Even though all our opinions have changed over a certain lifetime, there's still me that hasn't changed. Even though all my emotions are constantly changing and moving around, I don't change. See, this sense of I, see? And this sense of I creates a permanency dependent on this impermanent relationship, on this impermanent happening in our lives. So it's I that I'm going to the dentist. It's I that I'm thinking. It's I that I'm doing this. And this I, you see, substantiates the present moment. Turns it into a real thing.

Now, when you bring your attention to the present moment, into the here and now, you'll hear that, you know, you read that in the literature, you are able to stop this growth of I. So this is the other problem with this fundamental delusion of this becoming. By always in a state of becoming, it's a way that we feel we can control the future. So you're going to do this. I'm going on holiday to this sort of place. When I retire... And it makes you feel very safe because you've got it all worked out. The rest of the world doesn't know you've got it all worked out. This is the problem. It's only you know that it's got it worked out. So this sense of I, you see, begins to collapse. It begins to move. As you move into the present moment, you see, and see the present moment in its totality, you're aware of the difference of the next moment and that it's arising dependent on and yet separate from this present moment. See?

See? So there's a feeling of letting go of that grasping onto time, onto this present, onto a future which you can only imagine. It doesn't actually exist. The future cannot exist, but you imagine it. And what it does is it opens you up to the present moment in a way that allows the potential of that present moment and its expression to be much more available.

So if, for instance, your sense of control is about the sort of person you like, if you go through all your friends, you'll notice that you like them all. See, that's one of the... If you go through all your enemies, you'll notice that you don't like them. So you've split the world into all these people whom you like. Now, every time you form a friendship, you reinforce this idea of who you like. And without you knowing it, you've put blinkers on because you've defined what is likeable, and what's likeable is what's likeable to you. Now, if you're in the present moment much more, and you're open to a new person coming towards you and you haven't got this history of what I like and what I don't like and you're completely open and you're not envisaging some sort of friendship out of this, then as you meet this person you're much more open to them and your sense of who you like and what you don't like begins to expand much more at ease.

So this whole business of time in Buddhist understanding, it's a mental construct. It doesn't actually exist, and I think most people would see that fairly clearly. And we're in a vortex of actions and reactions, and what awareness is trying to do is to weave a way through that which is going to create happiness. See? Does that make sense? So we're in this state of being in time flux, but the awareness is absolutely now within the flux. It's not allowing itself to build up a future from what's happening now because it knows it

doesn't know what the future is. In not knowing the future, it then, as the next moment comes up, is completely open to it because it's not trying to manipulate it. And in not trying to manipulate something one sees the fullness of it. Yeah. When one sees the fullness of it one sees the potential of it. And in seeing the fullness of the potential of it one hopes that the decision made is going to produce something greater out of that situation.

I think I'm sure everybody here has experienced the point in their lives when you come to a full stop. And you don't know what to do. And in that emptiness of not knowing what to do, where to go, there is a certain type of openness there. And then something always arises. Especially if you have a general aspiration, you know, a generalized aspiration to be involved in something. Yeah? Or is that just me? Yeah, you see. It's being able to... It's stopping presumptions from the past launching into the future and creating what we think is something real. And when something comes against that projection that we've made, we're always in conflict. We're in conflict with it. And if it happens to conjoin with our projection will drive it to its bitter end because we don't see its consequences.

I mean, an obvious example is this financial crash. Who was the last Treasury guy in the States? The one with the glasses. Do you know who I mean? Names evade me. I suffer from nominal aphasia. Yes, Greenspan. He said, didn't he, he said it was just greed, that nobody foresaw that the whole thing would collapse because they were still stuck in this greed. That's a wonderful example of what happens. You don't think things are going to end because you keep projecting. It can't end. This is always going to be this tremendous growth of wealth. They just don't see it coming. And the Queen writes to all these economists at the London School of Economics and says, why didn't anybody see this? Because they're all greedy. It's a tunnel vision, isn't it? Very few people foresaw this collapse coming.

But it's interesting, isn't it? We have such a different way of thinking about the future than thinking about the past. So we think the future is completely open and undetermined and not there in a way. We make it. And we think the past is all fixed and definite and that it's an absolute reality. And the actual situation is a lot more fluid than that.

That's right. And I think you've hit the point there. What was that, Rand? Atlas Unbound or something, wasn't it? What was that book? It affected all these people who were in control of their lives. What was her name? Rand? Ayn Rand. That's right, Ayn Rand. And the book was called Atlas Unbound, wasn't it? Atlas Shrugged. That was it, Atlas Shrugged. You see? And it gave this generation of entrepreneurs and Silicon Valley people the feel that they could control their lives. And for the most part, the situation actually supported it. Here's the point. Sometimes the world will support your aspiration. But then we lose the understanding that actually it's happening because of contingency. Not only because I'm in control. It's happening because at this particular time certain things have come together to form a situation where I make a million. I make a billion for myself. Like Zuckerberg with his Facebook. But he might think he's done it. His idea, I've built up the empire, etc., etc. And completely loses the idea that in fact he's just one part in a whole contingency.

So that's what the self does, you see. The self takes control because underneath it, at a deeper level in our psyche, we know we're not in control. We know there is death. That's the problem. So it's an evasion of death. It's a running away from death all the time.

When we say death, we don't just mean physical death. We mean ending. Every time the day ends, that is a death. Every time you finish your lunch, just stay there for a minute and say, the meal is now dead. It has come to an end. It no longer exists. When you walk out of the house, turn around and say, that moment is dead. Keep using the word dead, and slowly it dawns upon you that actually we're dying every moment.

Well, that's true on the actual level of the physical world and all that, but the problem is the I doesn't change. The I always remains the same. It was always me. I mean, that's the problem. I never change. See, as far as I'm concerned, I'm still 35.

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