Monks: Daily Life: Not-Self

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 57:18

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
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Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I asked what sort of things you want to talk about. I remember two of them, but I can't remember the third. One was about monastic life, the other one was about daily life, and there was something else, wasn't there? Not me, not mine. Ah yes, that's a killer that is.

Let me start with the daily life one, which we'll sort of tackle tomorrow, but maybe just say a little this evening. But just to answer a question about monastic life: when the Buddha left home, he entered a tradition of his time which seems to have had quite a long history, maybe going back even to the civilization of the Indus Valley. The Aryans came down from the Russian steppes and either took some of their practices—yoga practices—nobody really knows. But the idea of leaving the ordinary worldly life to go off and live in the forests and practice these exercises for one reason or another was well established by the time the Buddha came along.

It would seem that his age was a bit like the hippies of the 70s. Anybody and everybody was out there. When these ascetics turned up at parks, crowds would gather to ask all sorts of questions. It seemed to have been this sort of entertainment of the age, really, on the full moon, in the bright full moon. And so he was just joining a tradition.

The tradition simply said that you lived really close to nature in that sort of climate. During the hot season, you might just live under a tree—and they still do it, you still find ascetics out there doing that. Then in the rainy season, you'd build yourself a hut from branches and leaves. And in the cold season, you'd make sure you got a bit more cloth to cover yourself with. So it was a very basic lifestyle.

The idea was that they would go begging for food on alms round. It wasn't so much that you went and asked people—you would stand in silence. Then hopefully somebody would take pity, and the exchange was of course that people thought these were spiritual people from whom they could get advice about their own lives, much like psychotherapists these days. Some of them were healers, so there was that sort of exchange between them, and many of them would teach lay people their practices.

The Buddha entered into a particular tradition as opposed to that of the Brahmins. The Brahmins were really the priests in the sense that they officiated at these rituals. They could be landowners, they were

advisors to the king, some of them very rich. The Buddha often talks about the true Brahmin, sort of pulling their legs, saying the true Brahmin doesn't do that sort of thing—he's supposed to be the spiritual leader of society.

In his district, in his part, the Brahmins really hadn't got to being the top dogs yet. Over towards what we now know as Calcutta, the Brahmins were at the top, then the kings, then the rulers. But where he lived, the Brahmins hadn't quite ascended to that level, and the king still had the greater status in society. Of course he belonged to that caste, the ruling caste, the Kshatriya caste. So when he went out to train, he basically took on those traditions.

Within those times there were people, mainly men though women did join them, who would practice these absorption states and some of these mortification things. All this he gathered, and he reinterpreted it all after his own enlightenment, his own awakening. He then reinterpreted all this in a slightly different way to make sense according to his own understandings.

So he begins—he thinks he's going to, he wants to share this stuff, so he goes out to teach. The story is that he meets this ascetic on the road, and the ascetic says to him, "You're bright, your face is shining, you're obviously well advanced. Who is your teacher?" And the Buddha says, to the effect, "I have no teacher. I'm the fully liberated one, I am fully enlightened." And the man went, "Oh yeah," and then walked off. So I think the Buddha sort of quickly realized that's not the way you get his message across, by announcing his status.

He then ends up with his own companions, his disciples. But as his fame grew, you might say, as he walked around giving his teachings, people would ask to join him as an ascetic. His response was "Ehi passiko"—come and have a try. That's known as the first ordination.

After so many people had joined him, and many of them became fully liberated as well, they established this Sangha, this community. Then there came the taking of refuges, which is known as the second ordination, where you take refuge in him as the teacher, the teaching he's giving, and the community around him. That became the lay ordination—when lay people wanted to take him as a teacher, they would take these refuges and precepts.

Then the later rules came because monks and nuns had all sorts of misdemeanors. The ordination became more complicated in the sense that questions were asked. Certain things were established: you couldn't be in the service of the king, you couldn't be a criminal, you couldn't escape into the order by being a criminal, you couldn't be ill. That last rule came about because one of the great doctors of the day offered free medical care to his order, and of course people who were sick purposefully joined the order to get free treatment. So they made this rule that you couldn't do that.

For the first few years we can imagine that they basically stayed with him to get his teachings and to practice meditation. They would go off by themselves, and just by hearsay—not having mobile

phones—they'd occasionally come across him, they'd hear that he was over there or over here, so they'd go and search him out. As it grew to a bigger size, there came the establishment of monasteries, mainly for rainy seasons. During the rainy season it was difficult to move around, but also there was this feeling that they shouldn't move around in case they accidentally trod on little creatures.

Remember, the Jains were also very powerful at that time, whose teaching was that whether you meant it or not, if you did harm—like you stepped on something by mistake—you still had bad karma coming towards you. So there were a lot of different teachings around karma and the meaning of karma.

Eventually he had these monasteries here and there, and the population grew. It tended to remain fairly close to his teachings, which was that anybody who joined the monastery had two duties: the duty to meditate and the duty to study the Dhamma, which meant mainly reciting off by heart his teachings. We have the product of that in all the scriptures now, which for 500 years were just kept by word of mouth.

He's the monk who... Well, I'll tell the story and I'm sure Mario will remember his name. He's an Arahant. He becomes an Arahant and he says to the Buddha, "What I'd like to do now is just show people where to stay when they come to the monastery."

So it was said that those people who were interested in meditation, he would put in these quarters, because they were meditating. Those who were interested in the Dhamma, the teachings and memorization, he'd put here. Those people who were interested in the Vinaya, the rule of the monks, he'd put over here. And the athletic monks, he'd put over there—being the people who messed about.

So people would come to the monastery, especially late at night when it was dark, to see this phenomenon of light coming out from the end of his finger while he showed them where to go. A bit like E.T., if you remember that film. Anyway, he's quite a character because he also has to give talks to the nuns, and the nuns complain that it's always the same talk. When it finally comes to him to pass away, he says to the Buddha, "It's time for me to go," and the Buddha says—when somebody says something like that to the Buddha, he always says, "Do as you think fit. Do what you think is right." So he rose up into the air, burst into a ball of flame, and disappeared. Can you imagine that?

So you can see there that the monastery had certain sections in it which were devoted to certain practices. Later on, the monasteries entered into cities, and becoming close to lay people meant there had to be a much more intimate interaction with them. There was much more service to do with lay people.

The monasteries that you see way out in the jungles—well, there's not many jungles left now—but way out in the countryside, they tend to be more specific in their practice. They're mainly meditation. As you come into the city, the monastery tends to become urban. So you have monasteries specifically devoted to study. And then you have small viharas—vihara just means a dwelling place of a monk. There were so many on that side of India that the state Bihar is a corruption of the word vihara. So at one point there must have been a lot of them.

As they came into the city, they had to interact with lay people on a much more religious level. So there came the establishment of little rituals—people coming to take refuge and precepts, sprinkling of water, all those things that were slightly coming over from old Brahminical traditions. Like for instance the string that's tied around your wrist—have you all heard about that? I'll offer you all that at the end. That really goes back to the Brahmin string that they hold across their bodies, connecting them to Brahman, the Brahma.

These days you have much the same pattern. You have monasteries which are very singular. If you go, for instance, to some of the monasteries like Mitirigala in Sri Lanka, or you go to Wat Pah Nanachat or the Ajahn Chah monasteries, they're all very separate huts and the monks just live by themselves and meditate. Then they turn up for lunch, that's all. Well, it's breakfast—it depends on the tradition they're in.

If you go up to northeast Thailand, you're out with your bowl as soon as the light breaks. When you come back and you have your meal—food's often brought to the monastery—by eight o'clock you're finished, and that's it. You don't eat again. And you might think, "Oh God, that's terrible." But in fact, it seems to work. What's that old adage about breakfast being like a king, lunch like a prince, dinner like a pauper? To my surprise, I found it actually worked. If you eat a lot in the morning, and you're not doing much during the day—remember, you're just meditating and walking gently up and down, you've done your exercise wandering off to get this food—then you find that that suffices. Other monasteries will give you breakfast and lunch.

I mention Mitirigala because it's a Mahasi monastery. These places tend to be exclusively for monks, and some will have monks and nuns, so they tend to be really for order members. But as you move into the city, then you get this connection. The Mahasi Sayadaw was one of those monks of the last century who brought the monastic life directly into the urban life. He was actually invited, and one of the interesting things about that was that the Mahasi Centre in Rangoon is actually owned by lay people. That's really quite against tradition—normally all the buildings and grounds that monks live in are owned by them through a trust or some mechanism, but this is actually owned by lay people. A lot of Mahasi centres are owned like that.

So here we get a slightly different thing. Before that, generally speaking, the idea was that lay people lived the good life and created good karma so that in their next life they might take on the spiritual life. And the monks and nuns, they lived the spiritual life hoping to attain full liberation. This sort of changed during the middle of last century, where the meditation techniques were taught directly to lay people with great success through the Mahasi tradition especially, but also U Ba Khin and Goenka, people like that. And the same was beginning to happen in Thailand with Ajahn Chah and others.

So the monasteries then became also meditation centres for lay people. That's what you've got. Depending on what monastery or what tradition you belong to, you could find yourself in a university. Peradeniya, for instance, in Sri Lanka—there are a lot of monks there who are basically academics. There's a sort of

mismatch between the real academic life and meditation, because if you do long meditation retreats, you forget. Memory is like a muscle.

If you don't keep exercising it, it disappears.

There was a story of an academic monk who came down to the Mahasi center and was taken by the technique, really liked it. He went back to his study monastery and began teaching the monks how to do it, and they were drawn to it. But then the senior monks thought, no, this is not good. So they kicked him out and stopped it. Because sometimes it doesn't work, you see, if you want to really remember stuff.

And then you get these meditation centers now. The one I was at, Kanda Bodha, had a throughput of a thousand people every year. But it also had a monastic sangha, both nuns and monks. And we were devoted mainly to—well, entirely to—the meditations and the teachings around meditation. Nobody there you would have seen as a scholar or anything like that.

Then you get all the viharas in cities which really are there to service lay people. Even now, if you go to London, there's a Chiswick Vihara which is the biggest Sri Lankan vihara. There's just a continual throughput of lay people coming in either to make offerings or to seek blessings for an exam, or a pending birth, or anything like that. So there's that sort of connection. And the monks there may or may not study, may or may not meditate.

Lay people in the East are very happy for anybody to take the robe and just live the good life. For them, that's praiseworthy enough. So that's it—there's not much else going on.

Those of you who know about Christian monasticism, the ones developed through St. Benedict rather than, say, St. Francis, will know that there's a routine through the day. But in his rule, in one of his writings, he always saw this as training, and that eventually the monk or nun would go off by themselves to seek solitude. That was the main idea.

Have you seen Into Great Silence? The Carthusians, in French Switzerland, on the border. That's really very inspiring, very challenging. The filmmaker asked for ten years, thirteen years before the monks gave him permission to film. Well, they thought about it for quite some time.

So basically that's the monastic life. I remember this woman asking Venerable Nyanaponika—the very man, a German monk, very revered and very renowned. He's the one who started the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy. His book, by the way, *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, is still a classic and definitely a good read.

The woman said to him—because she thought, as people often think, if you're a Buddhist then you must be a monk or a nun—she said, "Well, what if everybody becomes a monk or a nun?" He said, "Don't worry my dear, it won't happen."

And basically that's it. It's a lifestyle, and you're either drawn to it or not. There's nothing—it's not the only

way to live a spiritual life. It's an institutional way. And what makes an institution are the rules and customs. A layperson who really puts their mind to developing spiritually wouldn't need such tight rules and customs to achieve that, but would simply have to guide their lives as best they can within daily life, with the feeling that they're moving forward.

And that in a sense brings us to daily practice.

The jewel of the collection is the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse, known as the jewel of the whole collection. The Buddha is giving instruction on how to establish this mindfulness, this awareness, this right awareness. He's been to visit a group of people called the Kurus who lived near modern Delhi. So he's traveling quite a bit—between Delhi and all the way over to Varanasi, and then up towards Nepal. He's always walking, except in the rainy season when he stops. He gives them his usual talks, and then he returns to visit them and finds to his surprise they're actually doing what he said. It said that, for instance, there was no well talk—in other words, gossip. Around the well you have a bit of a gossip.

So he was taken by this, and he actually delivers this sermon, this teaching, to them. What the discourse is saying to those lay people is: if you want to attain liberation as a lay person, without going through all this ascetic business, this is the way to do it.

In that discourse, it's basically about the meditation practice we're doing and how to overcome these hindrances—everything we've talked about. But there's also a small section on daily life, which really is just mindfulness, just being with what you're doing. When you read the scriptures, it's obviously been adjusted by monks and nuns who were memorizing it, because everything is skewed towards the monastic life. But if he's giving it to lay people, then he must have also talked about cooking and washing and looking after babies—the whole business of how to bring your mindfulness into daily life.

I think the core attitude is service. Whatever you're doing, you're doing for your own benefit—the Buddha is clear about this—you're doing it for your own benefit, or you're doing it for somebody else's benefit, or you're doing it for both your benefit and somebody else's. If you're clear about that, then this is going to be your attitude. Every time you come to a decision point, and there are many during the day, you just stop for a moment and give yourself the right intention.

So we've been doing it with food—well, I hope so. You've been in front of the food and you've said, "This food is to nourish the body, full stop." The fact that it tastes nice is to be enjoyed, but that's not why I'm eating.

I'm eating purposefully for the benefit of this body.

Now, it doesn't mean to say that while you're eating, greed might not come in, and you find yourself shoveling it in. But as soon as you notice that, you might stop. You say, "Whoa," put the spoon down. Okay, stop. And you breathe out and wait for it all to settle. Then you re-establish your right relationship to the food. You can see how, if you take that into daily life, it becomes transformative.

One of the lovely small incidents in the suttas is when the Buddha turns up and there are three monks there. They're called the Anuruddhas, as a group around the chief monk Anuruddha. They're three fully liberated monks living together. And the Buddha asks them, "How is it you live so peacefully together?" Anuruddha says, "Well, what I say is, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?"

Now, that sort of works best when everybody is saying it. If you say it and somebody else isn't saying it, then you can tend to be abused. So it has to be used with a certain wisdom. But fancy just waking up in the morning and saying, "Well, today I'll put aside what I want to do and do what others want to do." Not as an absolute, but just as a general attitude.

So that anytime you meet somebody, anytime you go into a situation, even at work, there is that attitude of openness to find out, "Well, what do they want to do?" You don't have to do what they want to do, but the attitude is that of genuine inquiry: "What do you want to do?" Normally speaking, when you do that and people actually feel your sincerity—that you are actually open to what they want to do—they're usually open to what you want to do. And after some negotiation, there's usually a little bit of compromise, and you end up all being happy. So that sense of openness, that sense of service.

Now again, just like in eating, you might start off with the right intention and then this other stuff creeps in. You find yourself being anxious, you find yourself controlling. And then, as soon as you wake up from that, you re-establish your right relationship. So if you think of service as a way of relating both to individuals and to groups, that sense of openness to them—and knowing that you don't have to do what they say, you're just open to it like a suggestion—the mindfulness that we're practicing really allows us to try and maintain this wakefulness during the day.

When we did that global awareness practice, where you are aware of what's inside and what's outside, it's not tight. It's not tight around something. Now sometimes you have to be focused. If you're adding up your bills, you've definitely got to be focused. If there's something specific that you are reading or studying or looking at or involved in, then there is that sense of focus. But if you don't watch it, it's like this other stuff creeps in, and before you know it, it's getting tight, it's getting obsessive, and all that sort of thing.

One of the things you can do is always set a time. Have either a little timer so that it wakes you up every so often—it could be any interval: twenty minutes, forty minutes, one hour. That would be a moment where you stop and say, "What's going on?" There's a mindfulness bell you can download on your computer, which comes from the Thich Nhat Hanh community in Washington. You can set it to whatever time you want. So there you are on your emails and your Facebook and all that, and you hear "ding." The point isn't to say, "Oh, I'll put it away." You say, "Oh, ding," and you stop and wait for three bells, and then you carry on.

That business of stopping every so often, depending on what you're doing and where you are, is a really skillful thing to do because you catch yourself.

Other times, when you feel a bit more relaxed, when you don't have to focus so much on what you're doing, try to maintain that global awareness where you're also aware of what's happening in you. In conversation, we often lose contact with ourselves and get drawn in completely. If you keep in contact with yourself, with your reactions to what's happening, just in the background, often it can stop you saying silly things and getting caught up in somebody else's problems and such.

And then there's just a basic routine—having a morning practice. The importance of the morning practice is that it sets you in the right mode for the day. Even if you lose it, at least you've reminded yourself in the morning that you want to maintain this sense of awakenedness. What do we mean by that? We just mean that I'm aware of what I'm doing. Everything is deliberate. I'm aware of the state of my heart—whether I'm in a depressed mood or too excited, getting too carried away about things. And I'm careful.

You have to be careful with your words. Speech is so easy to fall foul of. The Buddha talks about kindly speech—always kind speech, honest speech, being honest. And most important to me anyway: at a suitable time. It's all right being kind and honest, but you want to choose your moment. These factors help us to just be a little reticent about jumping in with our talk. They just pull us back.

I'll give you one example that often happens to me, and I think happens to a lot of people. Somebody might say to you, "My garden's in a mess. Have you got any time to come and help me?" And you say, "Yes," right away. And then afterward you think, "I don't want to go there. What am I doing? I'm busy." Now you're going to have to pull back. So you phone up and say, "I'm not feeling very well," or, "Somebody's just called me." All you had to say in the first place was, "I'll tell you a bit later. I've just got to check—I think there's something else on." You just give yourself a little break. And then when you make that decision, it's coming from a good heart. If you don't want to do it, you say, "I haven't got the time," or something, or, "I just don't want to do it." You have to be careful with friends.

So it's just little things like that—being slightly aware of how we get into conversations.

Now, all these things, all these tricks—there are many books on daily life, they're a dozen a penny now—all these things at first feel slightly false, as though you're forcing yourself, as though it's... what's the word I'm looking for... as though you're pretending.

For instance, you might start off by saying, "Before I speak, there will always be a stop." When you're in the mode of listening, actually listening, there has to be a moment where you become proactive, where you've got to answer. Our problem is that while we're listening to somebody, we're already forming our answer. That's where conversations get all jumbled up. But if I say to myself, "I'll get in the habit of first of all listening," you find that when you really listen, there's always a gap before you can actually speak, because you've got to change mode—you've got to become active.

When you practice at first, it feels false, it feels forced. But that's always true of anything you do when you want to get into a new habit. You have to go through this process of it feeling practiced, forced, false. But

then, once it becomes habitual, it becomes spontaneous.

It's the same with mettā. At first you practice mettā and you might not feel like doing it, so it feels false—because we think that goodwill has to be an emotional thing. So if I'm depressed, feeling down in the dumps, and somebody comes along who is really happy, they've just got this job they always wanted, I put on this happy face: "Oh, I'm so happy for you." But inside I'm thinking, "No, I'm not. I bloody hate you." Then I think, "Oh, this is so false. I'm being so false with you."

But that's because you're identifying with this down mood. You're not identifying with the part of you that really does want to rejoice in their good fortune.

So at first it feels false, you see. There's a phrase, "fake it before you make it." I'm sure you've come across that. So you've got to pretend to do it, and then eventually it just becomes natural, becomes spontaneous.

All these things that you read about, they just take a little bit of effort. Keep reminding yourself. Don't worry about forgetting it or not doing it or getting all jumbled up. And when you get that judging mind coming in saying, "You're useless, you'll never do this," you note that as judging, so you don't get involved in it. And you just keep reaffirming your right action.

After a while you find these behaviors begin to change towards the positive. That gives you more confidence. The more confidence you have, the more ease you feel about yourself. But even after years of training yourself to respond with kindness and all that, don't be surprised if suddenly you fly off the handle and go berserk. Because those habits are always there. Sometimes we think that we don't suffer so much from that anymore, until somebody presses the button. And then we know, oh heck, we've still got more work to do.

I remember my teacher said to me—he was, generally speaking, a very peaceful, very kind man, Dr. Ilze Dammer—and he would always say to me, "Well, I'm not tested. When I go to the station and these people make fun of me and all that sort of stuff, that's when you want to see me. Then you'll know how peaceful I am."

So it's a case of just gently pushing ourselves, just a gentle push towards what we see as wholesome.

Now there was—ah yes, not-self, my goodness. Well, first of all, in the discourse which is known as the second ever discourse that he gave, all he says is—he talks about control. First of all, you have to understand what they meant by the self in those times, or the soul: something which was eternal, it had to be everlasting, it had to be in control, and it had to be happy. If you're in total control of your existence, you should be totally happy because you can make yourself totally happy.

So the first thing he asks is: have a look at what you're experiencing and just see what control you have. On the body, for instance, sure we can wave our arms about and take it here and there, but on the essential stuff—sickness, aging, and death—there's very little control. You can't grow taller, can't grow

smaller, you can't extend your arms. When you look at the body, there's very little control as such.

When you go a bit deeper, you find that actually you haven't a clue what's going on there. I think red corpuscles are now leaking out from the marrow of your bones through the bones into your bloodstream. Have you ever felt that? Have you any idea what your liver's doing now? And even if you knew, could you do anything about it? So when you actually ask questions about what it is you know and can control about your body, you find it's actually not much—it's just surface stuff.

Then he asks the same about our perceptions. When you perceive something, he's talking about the way we see things and hear things. That's completely dependent on our sense base. If you're hard of hearing, you're hard of hearing. You're not going to hear very much. If you lose your sense of smell, your taste tends to disappear. So a lot of our perceptions are, again, based upon the body and also based upon our culture. Sometimes we can't see things because we haven't got the culture for it.

One of the things that happened to me when I went to Sri Lanka was I heard this barking, and for some reason I hadn't associated this noise with any animals, and it was way up there in the trees. So I said to somebody, "What is that?" It was the monkeys! I said, "Monkeys?" And I kept looking at these trees—where the heck are they? The Sri Lankans said, "Well, there they are," and I'm looking, I cannot see them for the life of me. And then suddenly I see one monkey in the trees. Of course, once I'd seen one, I saw them all. There was a whole troop up there. But for the life of me, I couldn't see that first one.

So you can see how the way we're trained affects the way we perceive things. For instance, the Inuits have something like ten or fifteen words for snow, because they see the various types of snow, whereas for us, snow is snow, eh?

Then there's feelings. Now, the word vedanā covers both the sensations in our bodies and the sensations caused in our bodies by our emotions—feelings, sensations. And what we discover in meditation is that we don't have much control over those either. You can generate good feelings through the mettā, but in a sense they can't be sustained. They disappear, they arise and pass away. So we don't have much control over those either.

Then it comes to our saṅkhāras. These saṅkhāras are our habits. Now, this is where we could have some control through our will, but we find that we are creatures of habit and we're dragged along by our habits. So you find that our control over habits can be quite minimal too.

And then finally there's consciousness. Now, consciousness is dependent on the psychophysical organism. So if that goes, you've no control over it. The obvious time is sleep.

So you lose your awareness—or should we say your awakeness—in sleep. There's always some consciousness, always some awareness, because otherwise you wouldn't hear the alarm clock. You're sort of woken up by this little tapping on the eardrum.

So that's his first argument. He says, well, if there is this soul, if there is this eternal thing, where is it? Where is it in your experience? And he's asking us to look at our experience and see. One of the definitions of a soul is that it's in control of itself.

The next thing is he points out this impermanence, which is just another way of saying control—that you can't control it. So he asks you to look at the body and our perceptions and our feelings, all these habits, and even consciousness itself, and see that they're all arising and passing away. So they're not eternal.

When he asks us to look like that, you see, he's not saying therefore that there is nothing, that all there is is this psychophysical organism and then there's nothing at all. That would put him in the category of materialists or annihilationists of his day. So he's not saying that. On the other hand, he doesn't want to fall into the error of saying, well, there is a soul or a self, because if he does that then he's pointing to something which has some sort of eternality about it, some sort of control.

So he's very careful not to fall into the error of a concept about what a soul is, and he's very careful not to go into a complete denial of it. Therefore he then tries to point to something which is there, which sounds very much like a soul. He says, for instance, there is that which is not born, it doesn't die, it's not conditioned, it's not created. So that sounds a bit like a soul, doesn't it?

And then he says there is a sphere—there's another way of saying it. A sphere, as he uses it, we're translating the word āyatana. A sphere is a type of experience which can't be mixed with another. So there are six spheres of experience. One sphere is sight, the next sphere is hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and the inner mind. All these are called spheres. In other words, you can't see through your nose—you can try, but you can't do it. So these spheres are quite separate.

Then he says that there is a sphere where there's just no phenomena. There's no moon, there's no sun, there's no coming, there's no going, there's no here, no there—but there is this sphere of experience.

And then finally there's a lovely little discourse, a lovely little phrase which happens twice in the scriptures. The one I'm thinking of begins with somebody asking him, where do the four great elements come to an end? In other words, disappear, annihilate. Now the four great elements are earth, fire, water, and air, and they stand for certain properties. Earth is pressure, weight. Fire is heat and lack of it. Water is cohesion, elasticity and lack of it, stiffness. And air is movement or lack of it. What they're describing is not physics—they're not describing the way a physicist would describe what there is in the universe. What they're describing is how we experience matter. So when you go into your body, or when you touch something, you'll see it has one of those qualities. All four qualities will be there, but some of them will be preponderant.

The question is, where does all that come to an end? In other words, is there an end to all that? He's asking about annihilation. And the Buddha says that's the wrong question. He says the question ought to be, where do these four elements not find a footing? Where is it that you don't find the world, the

phenomenal world?

And he says there is a consciousness—and I'll come back to this word consciousness in a minute—there is a consciousness which is not touched by any of the senses, which is without boundary (you have to have phenomena to create boundary), and in all directions full of light. And just this is the end of suffering. So he's obviously talking about something within us which is not phenomenal. It doesn't belong to this world of phenomena, and it cannot be described as a self.

It cannot be described as a self because when you are that consciousness, you don't know it. It cannot be an object to itself. And you'll find this in Mahayana scriptures where they say things like the eye cannot see itself. It can't, can it? The tongue can't taste itself. Can you imagine if the tongue had a basic taste of curry? It would be a killer, wouldn't it? I mean, it's all right if you're eating curry, but what about ice cream?

So it's the very fact that senses are empty. They are empty themselves of what they receive. So this awareness that we are exercising, this satipaññā, this intuitive intelligence—we're drawing it out of its confusion with the body, confusion with emotions. When I say "confusion," I mean "together with." Every time you say "I am," you've got to ask, who? You say "I am angry"—who's angry? With thought especially, very quickly we are the thinker.

So we're drawing this quality, this intuitive awareness, out from that to become the observer. When you're the observer, the Buddha says, you're in the presence of Nibbāna. You're actually in the presence of the ultimate state. But we can't see it. It's right in front of us and we can't see it.

And what we actually feel ourselves to be is the observer. To be the feeler. And the double bind is, how do you get out of that? Because every time you want to get rid of that sense of self, another self appears to get rid of it. So you're in an eternal double bind going all the way back.

The Buddha's instructions are to keep averting away from that sense of self—that's the delusion, that's the first object we make. Averting yourself to actually what it is you're experiencing, because that sense of self is only a concept in the mind. It also has a mirror image in the heart as a sense of presence. Often that's described by people as their soul, but actually it still belongs to the world of phenomena because it's a feeling. And if you have a self-image like "the observer," that must also still belong to the world of phenomena, to the world of feeling, perception, and so on.

So it's by bypassing that, keeping our attention on what it is we're experiencing as arising and passing away—not me, not mine—that there comes the experience of who we really are. The Buddha referred to himself as the Tathāgata, which means the one who's transcended. So there is within us this Buddha nature, this intuitive awareness. You'll find it referred to in various ways. And really, to experience that in itself is our aim, because once that's known, the path leading to the end of suffering is open wide. That's what it says.

But once you know that, then you can't know it? Well, that's the interesting thing, isn't it? In your meditation, this intuitive awareness we're exercising, looking at these specific qualities of impermanence, of the role of desire, and of that seeing of not me, not mine—something distant—when it sees something, the insight, the actual insight, is immediate. There's no thought involved. You either see it or you don't see it. But then it has to tell itself what it's just seen. And that's where the mind comes in. The mind has to be used; the intellect is used to refer back to itself what is just observed.

That's why often some of you will have experienced it, but in meditation a line will come up, just out of the blue, some insight. There's one beautiful example by a teacher called Ajahn Mahā Bua, who died recently. If you get hold of his book called *Straight from the Heart*, these are really beautiful talks, although you have to get into his way of speaking. He's meditating, meditating, and there just comes this line out of the blue: "Wherever there arises a sense of a self, that is the beginning of another level of existence, of another level of becoming."

What he's saying there is that as soon as the "I" appears, a process happens. And because of the "I," because of the delusion of "I," there's always going to be some dissatisfaction involved, because this "I" is always seeking real happiness in the sensual world, and it won't deliver. With that insight, he seems as though he really moved. Now, that came from this intuitive intelligence telling itself what it's just seeing.

It happens to us in ordinary daily life, when suddenly you say something amazingly wise and you wonder where it came from. Has it happened? You suddenly find yourself giving advice to somebody and you wonder how the heck you came across that.

So it's one of the more tricky teachings, mainly made tricky because of the books written on it. Everybody, any academic worth his salt writes about not-self, and he just confuses it. Because it's not actually a philosophy, it's a methodology to make us discover what's real, that's all.

When it came to questions about the soul, there's a lovely one where this man Vacchagotta comes up, and he's completely confused. He goes to the Buddha and says, "Now come on, is there a soul or isn't there?" He's obviously had discussions with this and that. He's had discussions with the Buddha and he's finally fed up. He says, "Look, come on, I want to know, is there a soul?" And the Buddha is silent. So Vacchagotta goes away.

Ānanda, who's with the Buddha, says, "Why didn't you answer him?" The Buddha says, "Well, if I'd have said there is not a soul, he would have gone around thinking that I would have been put into the camp of the annihilationists. If I said there was a soul, I'd have been put in the camp of the eternalists. But I didn't tell him that because if I'd have said to him there was no soul, he would have gone away confused, saying to himself, 'Once I had a soul and now I don't have one.'"

So with all these questions, he kept silent. One of the regular questions was known as the quadrilemma. We have a dilemma; they had a quadrilemma. And the quadrilemma was put as: Did the Tathāgata, upon

death, continue to exist? Did he annihilate? Did he both exist and annihilate? Or did he neither exist nor annihilate? You can't get around that one. And of course, he kept silent. He wouldn't go into metaphysics, because as soon as you get into metaphysics, you get into all sorts of mess.

I don't know whether that's been as clear as the problem or it's made it even more confused. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your practice, deliver yourself from all these confusions and arrive at that wonderful place of Nibbāna, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.

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