Retreats, Attachment, Children and Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 28:13

Well, it takes three days really to get into the practice, sometimes four days. And then after that really it's up to you. But in a sense the minimum would be to get a good – the minimum would be seven days. But after that, the world's your oyster. Just go for it. Keep going. No stop. The classic time in the Mahāsi tradition is three months. He said, if nothing happens in ten weeks, nothing will. You need a break.

And the things that you would do, would it be similar the days to what we did here? Well, in an ordinary long retreat your meditation period will be an hour, an hour sitting, an hour walking, an hour sitting.

Because I've heard that some vipassanās where they're nearly sitting nearly all the time. Has this been different? Has this been punctuated by a lot of walking?

In some tradition, well in what, I think the tradition you're talking about is the taught by Goenka, the U Ba Khin tradition. That tradition, the actual practice combines a *samatha* element, a calming element, with the vipassanā. So it's quite easy to sit with it for long times. And it's up to the individual just to keep going.

The Mahāsi Sayadaw taught a system which was pure vipassanā. And there's one or two others like that. Pure vipassanā, like there's no joy in it unless it comes up naturally. So it tends to be a little bit harder. The purification is much more intense. So, normally speaking, you'd have two or three days horror, and then a day of peace and happiness, and then the next lot will come up. It really is quite tough. You've been through it. Always. In silence.

You would normally do, if you were doing a full Mahāsi, you would be walking and sitting 18 hours a day. Two hours for eating and rest and four hours sleep. That's the real program. You can do that at Satipanya. But that's not necessary. Six hours sleep, you can still become fully liberated with six hours sleep. But it depends on the individual. Remember that all you're doing all day is calming everything. You're not indulging emotional states so there's not that energy being used up. Although you might do some exercise just to keep the body fit, generally speaking you're very calm, very steady.

So, of course, you find you do need less sleep. You need much less sleep. Now, it doesn't mean to say that when you re-enter into daily life that you don't have to go back to a sleeping pattern because of just the pressures, just the energy you need to live in the society.

Any of the persons do any component for fasting? Well, it's inbuilt because afternoon you don't eat. Fasting itself in Buddhist understanding wouldn't be – they don't like you doing fast, not in the monastic world. They don't mind you, I mean, as far as they're concerned, the only reason for fasting would be a process of renunciation. You might do it for health reasons, of course. That's another thing altogether. But

in terms of a spiritual practice, the only reason you lay off something is to see your attachment to it. I think I mentioned it now, sitting in front of the TV. That's a killer, that. And then you see what your relationship is. So that's what you would do it for.

Renunciation is one of the great spiritual practices. But you do it in order to see your attachment, and you have to sit with that renunciation until the attachment dies away. And then, so long as it's a wholesome activity, you can go back to doing it. But you always have to be slightly aware of how you're relating to it again, in terms of compulsive behavior, any psychological need.

So what would you do with alcoholics? Would you put a bottle of wine in front of them? You don't want to tempt people too much.

In giving up your attachments, I guess I would extend to something like a parent or a child. It's always a very difficult one. The thing is, so long as there's a sense of self, by which we mean, I think I am this form, this human being, so long as there's that feeling in us, there'll always be attachment. There's no way. All we can do is be aware of how the attachment manifests, and the attachment manifests always by way of holding on to or pushing away or running away. Those are your basic manifestations.

So a parent with a child, when the child doesn't do what the parent wants the child to do, the parent gets angry. Now the anger is a manifestation of attachment, of having a desire to control the child. Now that doesn't mean to say that the child doesn't do what the parent wants it to do, because the parent should be guiding the child. But the anger is not necessary. That's the point. Insistence – you will do this, this is what you're going to do – that's necessary. The child has to be trained. But the anger is not necessary. The anger is coming from somewhere else. Frustration. All that is not necessary. It happens because the attachment is there.

If little Johnny from down the road gets a black eye, well, you're very happy, because he deserves it. But if your Johnny gets a black eye, well, all hell's let loose. You're up there knocking on people's doors. There's your attachment.

If a child falls over and hurts itself, and the parent knows that the child has not actually hurt themselves, just a scratch or something, then they're very comforting. No problem. But if they think the child's actually really hurt themselves, broken a limb, banged their heads badly, it's panic. Now, you take the child to the hospital. Supposing the staff began to panic. Ridiculous, isn't it? You take the child with a broken arm, and the nurses are panicking, the doctor's panicking, you think, oh, bloody hell, what's happening? So you don't expect professionals to panic, but you expect the mother and father to panic. So the panic is unnecessary. That's coming from that wrong relationship.

You mean the death? Ah, yes. Well, that, of course, is a real horror story for a parent. But the grief, the loss of somebody, the grief we feel is not a measure of love. It's the measure of attachment. And if you don't see that, then you get yourself into a double bind. Because every time you grief lessons, you say to yourself, I

don't love them anymore. So to re-establish your love with a person, you've got to re-establish your grief. There's no way out of that.

So the grief is like something has been ripped out of your heart and it's left you with a rawness. And this person has been part of your interior life. It's been part of your happiness, been part of your grief, but it's been part of your life. And suddenly they're ripped out, and you've just got this gaping wound. And you've got this ghost inside you who keeps reappearing, but you can't – it doesn't grow, it doesn't move anymore. Nothing happens to it. See what I mean? So there's your grief.

Now, normally speaking, in a grief process, this is what they say, it takes nine months, the first three being quite terrible. And if it goes on after nine months, then there's something chronic about it. There's something wrong in the way the person is relating to that death.

So I had an elderly woman came, and she'd been grieving the loss of her son for five years, for heaven's sake. So when I pointed this out to her, and I said, actually, what real love is, is allowing a person to go. Now, if that person lives with his time, you let them go. Just like I mentioned this morning about the mother with the child who leaves home. She's ready to let go. That was their time. And then, when you do that, of course, you begin to rejoice in the relationship you had. It comes up with joy. Well, she was back the next week saying all her grief had gone. She was amazed, because she just got locked into that double bind.

But you wouldn't feel that great if you... Ah, well, you'd have to be fully liberated to do that. You'd have to be fully liberated. When the Buddha died, when the Buddha passed, we don't say – we usually say, pass into *parinibbāna*, total *nibbāna* – the young monks who were around began to cry. And all the elders who were fully liberated said, what are you crying for? You knew he was going to rise and pass away. Which sounds very glib. But that was their relationship to him as their teacher.

You keep saying that people are liberated. Is that the aim? Is that the intention? It's to be liberated from suffering. That's the aim. Now, you have to be careful what we mean by that. We're not talking about physical pain. So long as there's a body, there's pain. But the suffering is depression, anxiety, frustration, the whole gamut of human misery. Addiction, compulsive behavior, all that. We're completely liberated from because our relationship to the world completely changes. We're not seeking happiness there anymore. Why? Because we've found this inner happiness which is not dependent on the world. That's the meaning of *Nibbāna*.

Now every time you're in that position of the observer you're very close to it, but we always define happiness by an emotional state. So when you say to yourself, when you say I'm happy, what do you actually mean? If you say to somebody I'm happy, what is it you actually are referring to? It's your emotions, isn't it? It's a feeling of happiness in you. Well, that's unreliable.

So if you stop saying I'm happy when you are feeling happy, then it's just – I mentioned Blake's little

phrase, to kiss a joy as it flies is to live in eternity's sunrise. And every time something good comes up many times, the best thing is to feel gratitude, to thank it. And then let go. That's it. Finished. That will never come again. Something similar may arise, but that will never come again. That's the nature of impermanence. Nothing ever repeats itself.

So if we get into the habit of saying, thank you very much, goodbye. Finished. Then the next thing.

Do you know if you're, like, does that, does it mean to, like, do you know the way you said people who weren't in one issue did that, but, like, become liberated, but how, like, do you, if you're not? Like, how do you actually be in the world and...

Ah, well. That's a good way of putting it. In fact, that's Jesus, isn't it? To be in the world, but not of it. I mean, that's perfect. You couldn't say it more simply, more direct than that. To be in the world, but not of it.

So, we've done the practice of meditation, which is about understanding, about clarifying the way we understand things, and about purifying the heart. Then we did the *mettā*, which is about establishing a right relationship. So now, you have to take that wisdom and goodwill into your daily life. And every time you walk into a situation, you have to stop and think, well, what is the right attitude for this situation? And just in that way, you move towards liberation.

So that's the Eightfold Path. Right understanding, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, where we talked about a basic attitude of service. That's it. And these things are feedback loops because if you, for instance, have an understanding, just an intellectual understanding of interconnectedness, you've thought about it and you've seen how everything is dependent on something else. Everything is contingent. Everything arises because of something. Everything is interdependent. Now, if it stays at that level, it's absolutely sterile.

But when you actually bring it down into an attitude, you're moving towards love. Because love is the acceptance of interdependence at the heart level. And compassion and joy. If it stays at the heart level, you might feel good about it, but it doesn't do you any good. It's got to move into action. And as you act from those attitudes, it feeds back into the understanding. Because you're actually experiencing interconnectedness. In that way you spin yourself to *Nibbāna* without getting dizzy.

So 25 years, do you say about it? Oh at least. Oh at least. Well in Buddhism 25 is a lifetime, but we don't want to get too depressed. We want to start. You start where you are and you just keep moving forward. And the thing is not to get upset when we fall over. I always point to, what's his name? Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. I can't remember the film it was in. But you remember, she's trying to teach him how to dance. And he pretends to fall over. And they have that song, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, start all over again. That's it.

Every time you fall, you just pick yourself up. So we're bound to fail. That's the point. We're bound to fail.

But we keep trying. Keep trying. And the failures get less intense.

Are we not, like, all heading there? Why do we try and not fail? The Buddha never says this but you can read into his psychology that there is a psychological imperative in all beings to move towards their enlightenment, and the reason is that all beings suffer and want to escape suffering and therefore all beings are seeking the escape to suffering. And that which seeks the escape will eventually find the way out. But the Buddha never goes as far. He doesn't like absolute statements. Because you can't prove them if you get into arguments.

Just it helps if somebody's got that already and comes back with some instructions, that's all.

You know, he taught the Kurus this method. Was he teaching more *samatha* before that? Was he teaching *samatha* practices to others?

No, he didn't teach. He was asked by both his teachers to teach *samatha*. But he didn't want to. He said he hadn't really answered this nagging question in his heart. So he didn't really begin to teach until after he became liberated. Until his awakening.

I'm sorry. I meant between becoming liberated and coming upon the Kurus because it seemed like there was, he'd been travelling around for a while.

Well, he learnt their, well, no, he learnt their methodologies but I don't think he ever taught. There's no indication he taught it. I think he was quite single-minded about trying to, it must have been a nagging thing.

Well, it was a different imagery, God's brother coming to, you had those kind... Yeah, well, the first statues were made by the Greeks, weren't made by Easterners. Remember, Alexander had conquered all that area, which is now present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, parts of India, parts of North India. They were all Greek kingdoms, Greek kings up there. And it was about 500 years on, so we're talking about the year 200, thereabouts, that the first statues were being made.

And that's why he's got the headgear. Because Greek nobles used to bring up their hair into a bun. That's why. I mean, he wouldn't have had anything like me. I don't know. I don't think it is. I think it was just a sign of nobility. Originally, a sign of nobility. And if you Google for Greek statues of the Buddha you'll see the original, and you'll see that they are extremely Greek. At approximately the same time there was also statues being made down in Gandhāra, which was the – no, no, Gandhāra was the Greek statues. There were some being made down in the south of India too.

All the postures that you see are representative of something. So that's your *samādhi* posture, that's in concentration. When he's holding something, he's holding a lotus, which is the teaching posture. When he's like that, it's the fearless posture. Towards the end of his life, his cousin, who was one of his disciples, Devadatta, tried to kill him. Even if you're a Buddha, someone's going to try and kill you. And on one

occasion, they set a mad elephant on him. And so it said that as the elephant came towards him, he held his hand and offered loving kindness. And as the story goes, the elephant stopped and bowed. Wonderful. So it's fearlessness. You'll sometimes get like that too, although they're not so common, and that's love, compassion.

Although the other one is touching the ground. That's the *Bhūmi sparśa*, touching the ground with compassion. Before this awakening came, it's known as the great doubt. So when he went to sit under the tree after all that training, this great self-doubt came up. This is one of our big hindrances. "Everybody else can do it, but not me." So the self-doubt was, "Who am I to seek the end of suffering? Nobody else has ever found it. It's impossible."

And it's put in mythology as Māra attacking him with his army of hindrances. And he touches the ground to call upon the earth goddess. He touches the ground, in a sense to ground himself. But in the mythology he touches the ground and the earth goddess rises and says that the reason why he has a right to seek the end of suffering is because of his past perfection of generosity. And what this tells us is that he realized that he wasn't doing it just for himself, but he was doing it for all beings. And on the desire for the benefit of all beings, he continued his practice. That's the touching the earth one.

Yeah, that's the *samādhi* one. What about the big heavy one? That's the Chinese. Yeah, in China it seems if you're fat, you're happy. So the more fat the Buddha is, the more happy he is. Yeah, a laughing Buddha.

"Very good. Yes, sorry, yes. I just found it was a little bit difficult for me to absorb what you said about all psychological pain is self-generated. I think that could be a new point because even if you take it's always your attitude to things, but if for example say you've been raped, it is not self-generated. I cannot buy that at all that it's self-generated. I think there are circumstances in life where there is some pain and I honestly can't see how it's self-generated."

No. You'd have to... If somebody really harms you, whether it's rape or beating you up or shooting you, and you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, basically. Yeah, yeah. There's nothing to do. That's right. The only thing a person can do to you is physically harm you, and that's not what we're referring to when we talk about suffering.

When somebody approaches you with their emotions, their anger, their hatred, all that stops here. It stops at the point of feeling their anger. What happens then is coming from another centre, so all the hurt, all the anger is self-generated. That's the understanding. It doesn't matter what damage the person has done to you at the level of physicality or at the level of the emotion that's being generated towards you from them.

Now, you can test this out yourself. The next time you're with somebody who's really angry with you, see if you can just drop into that moment of just awareness. And you'll see the anger stops here. If you let it in, you get your reaction and then you get your anger and you're hurt. That's the understanding. And it also

includes children, children who are abused. What's happening inside them is being self-generated.

Now the logic of this is: if any suffering within me is caused by you, how can I ever be liberated from suffering? It's the very fact that all suffering – and we're talking about psychological suffering – is caused by me that I can thereby be liberated from it. See? Otherwise, I'd have to wait until everybody was liberated or I'd have to get rid of you. And then I might not. So that's the logic through it. Yeah.

And because it's self-generated, it can be self-cured. See, that's the point. And people who have been damaged, whether it's rape or attacked and blood flow and all that, it's forgiveness. And then the heart's purified.

I'm quite well aware that's a very difficult one for people to accept. And in a sense, all you can do is catch it in yourself, and then you'll realize, actually, all this you can actually overcome. People can overcome all the hurt and misery that's been caused to them by others, as catalysts, you see. Yeah, no, it's difficult to accept that, especially of children, obviously, very difficult.

You know that book... oh dear, see, Marshall McLuhan, non-violent... that's it, non-violent communication. Have you come across that book? Yeah, well, he's a great, he's really fantastic. It's worth a read on how to take the violence out of communication. He's got really a very beautiful way of doing it. Now, he's not a Buddhist, but he's sussed it out. Right there, he'll tell you nobody can cause you psychological pain.

"Oh, really?"

That's right. Very good.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.