# Questions and Answers: A Dolly Mixture

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48:35

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa* (repeated three times). Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

You'll all know about my struggle with the mole, Morris. After all my travail, he finally just left. No matter what I did, he decided to leave when he wanted to leave. Recently you've seen me chase the chicken. So this is the chicken. Mark's gone along the fence with all these other fencings, but the chicken gets through. Even now, I found us all wandering around the garden.

To me this is a very good example of our defilements. No matter how much we try to get rid of them, they keep bouncing back. So I think it's a case of accepting the chicken at some point. Eventually it dies. It will pass on.

Just as a small excuse on my part, last retreat Letta was here. She's a professional gardener. She planted all these seeds, and when she saw the chickens, she said, "Well, it's going to eat all those seeds." So that's why I've been making this effort to make it feel quite unwanted. Not with any hatred in my heart, you understand. There's no aversion.

So yes, lots of questions actually. I didn't realise they'd piled up. The first one is to do with this indulgence in pleasure just leading to suffering, the process of it.

We just have to grasp the essential mistake. The essential mistake from the heart's point of view is that it's seeking happiness in the wrong place. There's nothing wrong with seeking happiness. Everybody wants to be happy, and this seeking happiness is coming from that within us which will eventually achieve the great happiness which is *Nibbāna*.

But of course that which is seeking *Nibbāna* is itself deluded, or else it wouldn't be in this mess. It's a paradox. It is deluded. It's fallen from a state of not knowing into a state of knowing. But that knowing we call delusion. The mistake is that happiness is to be found in the sensual world.

By sensual world we mean this physical body and mind, the physical body, the mind, the heart, and what it can give us with its contact with the outside world. So we enjoy beautiful views. If we didn't have eyes, if we were blind, we wouldn't be able to enjoy that. So all our enjoyment is based upon the body, including the brain. When the brain begins to malfunction – dementia or Alzheimer's – then you also lose that capacity to even think and to imagine anything.

So all our pleasures on this planet, on this earth, are dependent on the body itself. Seeking happiness is

always through the body and what it does to the heart and mind, which in Buddhist understanding is something separate. It's another form of energy, we can say. The Buddha talks about the mind-made body as opposed to this physical body.

The disconnect between the suffering of pleasure and the joy of it is because the one comes after the other, and therefore people don't often make that connection, especially with boredom. So we have this phrase "variety is the spice of life." What we do is we keep seeking for the next input that's going to make us go back to that original place where we felt happy.

So you go on holiday, it was a great place, you want to go back. You go back, it's not quite what it was, you get bored, so you come back, and then you think there's somewhere else to go. If we look at our lives as this constant movement towards what's going to really make us happy, lift us emotionally and intellectually, and the boredom that comes from it, we don't see that the boredom is actually a product of pleasure itself. Because no pleasure can give us the same buzz, we always have to either increase it or find something similar to it or give it a break. If you were eating all the time it would become really boring.

But the fact that we wait until the body signals some sort of appetite allows us to re-enter that pleasure syndrome. Of course not everything we eat has the same lift for us. So some food we eat we hardly even notice. It just passes through down into the throat. It's just eating for eating's sake. That sort of mindlessness comes because of this compulsive behaviour of seeking happiness in food. Seeking happiness in sex, seeking happiness in holidays. It doesn't matter what it is, it's just that's where you form this habit.

What we don't see is that pleasure and the joy that we get from pleasure has an inbuilt obsolescence. It's like in the 60s and 70s, they talked about making sure that machines had inbuilt obsolescence so that there'd be a turnover of manufacture. It was quite openly talked about. Now of course it's very unecological and not very green. But in those days they thought, "Well, we'll make a car to last ten years, full stop, fifteen years, and then you've got to sell it." So the machinery of manufacturing just kept churning over, whereas they knew they could build cars for fifty years or whatever.

It was that sort of mentality that mirrors our seeking happiness in the sensual world. Not recognising that boredom is a product of that indulgence is a big problem, especially in rich countries where pleasure is easily attainable. I'm not talking about rich, but just talking about the fact that you can just flick a switch and you're being entertained. What it does is there's a deeper malaise because it always associates happiness with excitement. When you get too excited you don't mind a bit of silence, a bit of quietness, a bit of loneliness, but actually it doesn't last very long. That's why silence, aloneness and solitude are things that people don't develop anymore.

A lot of people who come here who enter into this sort of sound atmosphere find it difficult. They're not used to it. So there's that underlying frenetic energy of always seeking the next buzz. "What are you going to do on Saturday? Where are you going? What are you doing next year? What are you doing when you

retire?" It's always, "What are you going to do? What are you going to do? What are you going to do?"

Do you remember that animal – Rudyard Kipling cartoon with the elephant and the jungle boy? Yeah, do you remember the crows on the branch? They had this sort of cockney thing going on, like, "What are you going to do then? Where are we going to go?" I thought it was brilliant.

Now that's the sort of more subtle disconnection that we have with that emotion of boredom, which in its excess leads to real deep depression, a sense of meaninglessness. In the end, nothing is giving you that buzz so your life becomes meaningless. It becomes really empty.

Then there's the others which I think are a bit more obvious: grief at the loss of something that you're attached to; yearning for something, an incredible yearning that can never be satisfied; a sense of lack; frustration when you don't get it; anger; and this constant underlying anxiety about losing what you've got.

So there's a heck of a lot of suffering underneath indulgence. I mean, suffering's bad enough – *dukkha*. The ordinary pain and pressure and stress of life. Just listening to a program there, teachers have a 40% higher suicide rate than any other sector. I mean that's stressful, isn't it? So that encapsulates it, and then you can just draw that out.

The thing is to take it into your own lives. When you feel bored at something, you stop and say, "Hold on. See what this boredom is telling me. How much, how dependent I am on excitement, on distraction, on variety."

Now how are you going to overcome boredom? The only thing you can do is exactly what *vipassanā* is telling you: to get in contact with it. But here's the trick – you keep doing what you're doing. Keep doing what you're doing, and as the boredom begins to fade away it transforms into interest.

You can try that out. That's one of the things I really thank my father for, because when I was a kid I used to learn how to play the piano. I remember saying to him, "This is really boring, Dad. You go dee dee dee dee," and he said to me, "Don't worry son, just keep playing it, you'll see." I kept doing it, and of course suddenly you're playing the tune. The boredom had gone then, and we were all excited to play this little tune.

So the answer to boredom is not variety. That's exactly what people think. "I'm bored, what am I going to do? What's the next thing I can do to make myself excited?" The answer to boredom is repetition. As soon as you find yourself being bored with something, you keep doing it with your attention on the boredom, but with your attention on the boredom so you know it's there. You're not trying to repress it, but your intention is to keep doing what you're doing with goodwill. Yeah, that's the answer.

Is there any comment on that? Anybody had that sort of experience? No? Good. Well, if your life's busy, if your life's busy and you're interested and involved, then yes, it doesn't particularly arise. Oh well, that's a

gift. Yeah. Well, it might be, of course. But if it...

Just to spend some time of the day, that's right, just to spend some time of the day in that abiding in the present moment. And to keep doing it in little bits every day, all day long, just to keep stopping. In between jobs, just stop. And just abide in the present moment. All the time you're drawing yourself down into this calmness. You get a taste for it. That's how you want to be. You want to be calm. Just take your time. Take the rush out. It's quite difficult to do.

"I find that quite difficult to do at work."

"Yeah."

"They want you to hurry up and do what you're doing."

Well, I suppose it's a case of not getting up their nose but pretending to hurry up, but you just carry on. You just carry on doing what you're doing.

"All right, yes. You spoke of painful, difficult mental states and to just observe the mind. This seems difficult when in daily life, at work especially, say with resentment and obsessions. Any guidance please?"

Yeah, when you're actually in the process of work or engagement then yes, it is difficult. It's more difficult than obviously just sitting here still and just observing the feeling as it comes up. But even so we have to be to open, relax, just relax your awareness around things and just notice. That's the noting. You say, "Ah there's this negative feeling, this resentment or obsessive stuff," and if you're aware of it it doesn't have power over you. That's the big understanding. If you're aware of some compulsive behaviour or some anger in that way of being quite, being aware of it, I mean there's a little distance between you and that feeling, then it doesn't have power over you. But as soon as you move towards it, of course then it begins to affect your behaviour.

Yeah, when you identify with it. So it really is a case of practising just like here we practise. In ordinary daily life as soon as this stuff comes up, see it as a way of practising. Of course we fail, of course we keep falling into the old ruts and the old habits, but you just keep working with it. Keep working with it, and eventually I think it becomes easier. It becomes easier not to fall into old habits.

There's no easy way out of it. It is just hard practice. And the resolution you make in the morning, and you keep repeating it through the day. You can take just one thing. Supposing there is a situation at work which is stressful. This may be resentment or something. So make a determination at the beginning of the day: "I'm going to watch this. I'm not going to let it grab me, so I can keep cool. I can keep a certain objectivity about what's happening." And then during the day, keep reinforcing that resolution, especially when you fall into that habit. So you come out, you notice it, resolve it. That way you can hopefully sustain a better objectivity about it.

In that objectivity, in that clarity, usually some sort of solution arises. A small amelioration of the situation

sometimes. Often it's because we don't know how to talk to people. We don't know how to approach them when they're messing us about. Or if we're in charge, we don't realise how we're messing them about. We think they're messing us about, but actually we're messing them about. There's a lot of that goes on.

There's a lovely book called *Difficult Conversations* which deals with all that. It's a really cracker of a book. One of the things that comes to mind is when something goes wrong, everybody looks for blame. "You did that, did you?" Everybody looks for a scapegoat, somebody to beat up. But if you take out the personality and just look at the job – what went wrong with the job? – and then the question is, "Well, how do we get it right?" – that takes all the grief out of it.

Because now the person who's made a mistake doesn't feel they're going to be victimised, blamed – "your fault." But actually there's a recognition that, well, maybe the person needs help. Or recognition is just human failure. I mean, human mistake. That's a real big breakthrough when you realise that blaming actually doesn't do anything at all. If anything, it makes things much worse.

One has to presume that if a person has made a mistake, that they already feel guilt, shame, upset by it, afraid of consequences. If we're on the receiving end of blame and guilt, then of course you feel it, and then you've got to accept that this person is deluded, that they're just looking for somebody to blame to get out, and you have to bear with that, and then to turn around and say, "Well, how can I do it better, or how can you help me?" And if it's just a mistake, you just say, "Well, it's human error. What can you do?" And then if they fire you, you can get the union on them.

It's a whole area of human relationship.

"Is contrition part of intuitive intelligence?"

Ah yeah, right. Well, there is only one intelligence. We only have one intelligence, and that intelligence is that which knows, that which understands. That is a quality of the Buddha. The Buddha means the one who knows – that's what it actually means, the one who knows, the Buddha. The qualities of the Buddha are *satipaññā* – that's why I call this place Satipaññā – that mindfulness, moment to moment mindfulness, being completely in the present, being open to the present, no resistance. With it there's wisdom. There's just this natural connection with things.

Now that is something which belongs to the unconditioned. The Buddha in his victory verse that we chant every morning says, "I have achieved the unconditioned *citta*, the unconditioned heart or mind – *asaṅkhat aṃ cittaṃ*. I've achieved that." When that is engaging with the world it has to go through the mind, heart or body. So it's thought, emotions, and action. That's your Eightfold Path: right understanding, right attitude, there's your heart; right action, right speech, right livelihood.

So intuition, in this sense, is the Buddha Mind. That's what it is. It's that faculty which sees and understands the way things really are, and that's one of his pet phrases: to see and understand the way things really are—*jñāna-dāśanā yathā-bhūtaṁ*—to see and understand, to understand and see, how things

have come to be. In other words, the process. That's the literal translation. You'll see it translated as "how things are," but actually the literal translation is how things have come to be, which to me makes much more sense—to understand and see how things have come to be: process.

So intuition is the intuitive intelligence in the definitions that I'm putting to it. The word "intuition" is often used for a feeling—you have an intuition about things, a gut feeling. That is this intuition that we're talking about expressing itself at a non-intellectual level. So somebody who is very mental and thinks up there may not have that particular way of understanding because they're always coming through thought, the intellect. And somebody who is at a more intuitional level in this sense of a connected feeling may not be able to express it—often they have to express it through art.

That's one of the definite divides between the masculine and the feminine, without saying men and women, but it is a big problem between men and women if both are actually at both ends of the scales. It can be a bit of a disconnect.

I don't know whether you know this, but I used to know this very old woman, Beatrice. She's died now. She used to go to Dublin and stay in her house. She was very old when I was teaching, when I'd go teaching there. And she said to me that women, as she put it, think inductively and men deductively. Now, I've probably got that wrong—it's probably the other way around. So the inductive way, if I've got that right, is to go from the particular to the general, and the other one is to go from the general to the particular.

So I said, "Oh, very interesting, Beatrice." And it was at the time of the Afghan war—we'd just gone into Afghanistan or something, and we were talking about the war. And as we were talking, I suddenly realized, and I said, "Beatrice, we're doing it, aren't we?" And she said, "Yes." So you just don't know you're doing it, but that's the way you think.

So the masculine approaches from concepts, from a generalization, the big picture, and when they come down to the specific, they have a different view from somebody who's coming from the specific rising up to a general concept. So in war, a masculine approach may be the big picture: "Well, look, Al-Qaeda is a big danger, so we've got to go in there and sort them out. And okay, we kill a few people—that's just collateral. It's just one of those things that we have to do." From the particular, the actual person getting killed, where the other type of thinking, then you say, "Well, look, this is suffering, this is killing people, so therefore we cannot go to war." And there you get your huge contradictions.

And there we were, arguing over a cup of tea, and without... And it wasn't that we were actually arguing over a point—we just weren't understanding each other's position. I mean, we were. I could see where she was coming from and she understood where I was coming from, but there was no... It was difficult for me to entirely sympathize with her situation, as it was with her to sympathize with mine. Not that I agree with collateral damage as a consequence, but I was like the big picture.

So that form of intuition—that's something else. When normal people use it, the way we're using it in terms of the Buddha mind is your original intelligence, the original mind before it—the original faculty *sat ipaññā*.

Can you speak about gratitude and how it arises and what is it? Well, it's a lovely, beautiful mental state, isn't it, to be thankful? And it just fills your heart with joy, doesn't it? Especially when somebody has done something in a very thoughtful, kind way, completely unasked. And I suppose what it is that's touching you is their love, isn't it? Their caring, their sympathetic joy to be joyous with you. And of course that increases your feeling of self-worth, of your feeling of goodness within you, isn't it? When somebody either praises you or gives you something, it's a way, really, of embracing the other, isn't it?

I mean, just think when you give something to somebody in that very clear, generous way. And then, of course, there's what they give—it's helped, it's done something for us. So the natural response of the heart is to feel thankful: gratitude. And I think that when we feel that, it's easier for us to feel generous on our part.

That's why I always start the *mettā* with people who've helped us. Now, that's how we start in the monastic order—we always thank. Here it's been translated as our benefactors, but the chant: to *dāyaka*, the supporters, who give us our four requisites: food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Those are your four basic requisites in anybody's life. It's not just a monastic requisite—you're not destitute if you can have those four, are you? If you've got enough food, enough clothing, enough shelter and medicine, you're not actually destitute. I would say that people who don't have that are destitute as opposed to being poor. That's an awful state to be in.

So yeah, that's gratitude. And to complete that little virtuous circle, you have renunciation, because when you give, you give up something that you could have used for yourself. And renunciation is the path—ultimately we've got to renounce everything, got to let go of everything.

Oh yeah, absolutely—time and wealth, isn't it? You give up your time and wealth, whatever you can. As a sort of virtuous circle, you just keep going round it. And the funny thing is, isn't it—I mean, the paradox is—that when you do give with a good heart, it increases your own joy. Because you've not only got your joy in the giving, in letting go, in seeing the joy of others, but also in seeing the joy of others—the way it's helped them.

That's why, one of the reasons why, we're not supposed to say thank you. Buddhist monks aren't supposed to say thank you, because it undermines your gift, because you may be giving it for the thank you. So sometimes when—well, one of the things that upsets people is if somebody doesn't say thank you. See? So you've put a condition on the giving. So the next time you give something to somebody who says thank you, you just watch the mind: "I'm not going to give to him."

And it's something that you can develop by just going back through your lives and just seeing what you've

been given. I mean, the amount of stuff that society gives us is absolutely incredible, which people don't—I mean, even now I go down to the doctor and I'm not paying for that. It's all been paid for out of the national purse. The dentist, go right back to my early education—and it's all paid out of the sort of general purse. Everybody whinges: "It's not good enough." And they don't contemplate that all this stuff is just given without question.

I mean, like in education, obviously the education system is trying to get you to do the best you can, but there's no penalty for not doing the best you can. There's no penalty for not arriving at some great academic stages. Same for me—I go to Sri Lanka, I'm greeted, I'm fed, I'm given shelter, medicine, robes, and nobody comes round knocking on the door and says, "Are you meditating or what? Where have you got to now? How far have you got? What *jhāna* are you on?" Then they have a big meeting and say, "Well, he's not doing anything. Kick him out."

It's funny, isn't it? The only thing that is really asked is that generally you keep the rule. Once you start breaking the rule in any serious way, then of course people do stop supporting you.

There's one question here I'll leave for another time because I need to look up a few things—it's about Māra.

Can you explain what you mean by feeling emotions in the head? Well, I think that's a more masculine thing—again, not saying men or women. It's a bit of a more masculine thing. It's to do with—it's a funny thing, but it's as though the masculine type feels emotions up here in the head, and when they go in the body there's nothing there.

Now I know this was very true for me, because after I had a certain breakthrough—I can't remember what it was now—I remember this question coming up, which is a very strange question for the feminine type. The question was: what is an emotion? I hadn't actually felt an emotion, even though it was obvious I was angry, sad, the whole lot, but I hadn't actually felt an emotion. What was it? And it was only through meditation that finally I got in contact with the body and the emotions started coming through as felt things.

I know it's very strange—it's in the head, isn't it? It's in the head. That's right. But it is, I mean, that's the—and what you do is, of course, by coming off thought, constantly through the meditation, coming into the body, eventually it does begin to come through the body. That's what happens—you begin to feel it through the body.

Can it be to do with, like, a blockage in the system, or is it something you're conditioned to do? Conditioning, yeah. I mean, I think it's because we're so head-bound. Our whole attention is within thoughts and images. We're a very head-bound society. I think other less developed societies, so to speak, are probably much closer to their heart.

Well, in fact, there's a very good example of that, isn't there? You know when the tsunami came, all the

animals left the beach—they all went off, but the humans still stood there. And in the Andaman Islands, the people there also still had that connection to nature and went off. They just felt it in the air—something wrong—and they went off. Either they felt it like the animals directly, that there was something out there coming towards them, or they felt the fear coming from the animals themselves. But one way or the other, none of them got touched by it. That's what I read.

And in our very—I don't know—intellectualized society, words, newspapers, reading is—it sort of lifted us up into this weird cloud. And I think that's one of the great gifts of meditation, and even therapies—therapies do it—is to bring you back into the body. Body-centered therapy.

And then, of course, the insight is to realize that it's thought that's actually developing this stuff. And that's when you start coming off thought—silly thought, this running-away thought. Every time—it's a constant effort—every time you see your mind wandering off somewhere, getting into an argument, talking, note it, come back. Just keep coming back, no matter what the resistance is, no matter how much you want to go there. Just keep coming back into the present, into the body.

And to be clear, that's not suppressing or repressing anything, so long as you are aware of the emotional energy that's actually causing it.

Could you say something about the *dharmas*? Can they be understood as universal laws, or—getting to different types of *dharma* confusion, is it? *Dharma* has various meanings. I don't mean the Dharma with the big D. Oh, *dharmas*—it just means elements, actually. It's translated as elements, the different *dharmas* . That chant we do in the morning, *sabbe dhammā natatti*—that's everything. Every little thing. And of course things are not real in themselves—it's just pointing to elements. I think it was translated as elements, elements of things.

Are we talking about air, water? Well, those are the four great elements, as they call them, the *mahābhūta*, the great elements. But I think it goes into all sorts of things. I'll check that out, look it up. Well, it's the elements that go into some greater whole. So you're constantly breaking things down into *dharmas*, little *d harmas*, just as time is broken down into these little moments that we call *kalaṅas*. That's the word for it. Yeah, I mean, that's why we say to note like the *kalaṅas*.

When you talk about mindfulness of the Dhammas, is it about mindfulness of these constituent elements? Yes, of everything. Right. Of everything. The bits. The bits. Yeah, the bits. Every time you deconstruct something, it turns into a *dhamma*. As I say, I'll come back to that—I'll try and make that more clear.

I'll make this the last one. Are there antidotes or wholesome approaches that can be used in conjunction with the tendencies of personality that you described on Monday night in the talk? The tendencies, yes, the *anusaya*. Are there... Yeah. Well, the antidote, not surprisingly, is to do the opposite, basically.

So the antidote to feeling stinginess is to be generous—do the opposite. But we have to be careful not to be aggressive towards the negative within us. That's the mistake we make—we make a judgement about it:

"That's bad, that's negative." It's just the conditioning. It doesn't mean to say it's not unwholesome, but it's when we say "I'm bad" and then you sort of make that identity with it—and that's harmful.

And then you do the opposite. You do the opposite. Take anything which you can see is unwholesome and just look at the opposite, and that's what you do. But you've got to be—in some things you have to be slightly careful about the opposite. I'm thinking here of lust. So the antidote to lust is to look at the disgusting nature of the body, and that definitely undermines it. But if you keep doing that, you get really disgusted and it's very depressing. So in certain antidotes you sort of do it to balance it out, and then they sort of disappear.

Food—the antidote to overeating is to just imagine what's happening to your food going through your system and what it ends up as exactly. And if you follow every mouthful down there, it definitely undermines your greediness. But eventually, if you keep doing that, you stop eating because it's so disgusting. So with any of these more visceral habits we have, just do the opposite, but you just have to be careful when it comes to...

virtues, then of course that doesn't apply because there's no limit to generosity. There's always got to be wisdom though. There's a lovely story about Saint Francis actually. Saint Francis said "give everything away, give everything away," and he himself only had these rag robes. If you ever go to Assisi, just go and see it. It really is very moving, especially for somebody in Buddhism who knows the life story of the Buddha, because his robes are there.

And it is actually a patchwork, higgledy-piggledy patchwork sackcloth. That's what he wore. He just picked up all bits of sackcloth and sewed them all together. It's quite moving. And one of his brothers came back with no clothes. He'd given his robe away. So he had to make a rule: you can give everything away but not your robe. So you've got to be slightly intelligent about these things. That's a great story, that.

So I think we'll leave that there for this evening, but there are quite a few more questions, so maybe I'll carry on tomorrow and just finish them off. And see if I can answer that other question—I'd like to just look it up. It's about *Māra* the evil one.

So I can only hope our little discussions and question answering has been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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