Daily Rhythms; Fetters, Hindrances and Inclinations; Rebirth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1:02:00

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

Many thanks for your questions. There are only so many topics that you can talk about, probably a dozen or more. And what a question does is make you look at a particular topic from a slightly different angle. So it allows a bit of creativity rather than coming out of my usual pattern.

I'm not going to answer these in order because they work better if I jumble them around a bit. The first one is concerning the experience that we have during the day. So the question is: I've noticed over the past three or four days that the same sits each day have the same quality of energy. So first thing in the morning is good, and late afternoon, early afternoon the energy is low. And late after an evening, it's good again. Is it possible that we have a distinct rhythm of energy like a daily pattern?

Yeah, I think most people experience that. Most people have a... And I mean midday is a classic time when the body energy does go down. You're supposed to have a rest after lunch. As you know, I'm an aficionado of the siesta. I've no problems with that. So people are different. They have different metabolisms, don't they? People are good risers and some people are poor risers. People like to stay awake at night. I mean, I know one person, his rhythm is, he works till one o'clock in the morning. So when he comes here, it's a hell realm. So I have to adjust things for him because it's silly really because he spends most of his time falling asleep. Because that's when he's awake. He's awake when we're asleep and asleep when we're awake. So everybody has these different rhythms.

But the important thing is to know the difference between that which is natural to us and that which we're laying on top through bad habit. So the bad habit would be that when we feel tired we simply go to sleep. We don't question it, that's all. And as you know, we often go to sleep or get dozy often when we're fed up with things or a bit depressed or we just, I'll have a sleep now. And it's a lovely form of self-annihilation. And as you know, there's no suffering in oblivion. I mean, that's the lovely thing about oblivion. It's like there's nothing there. There's nobody there. There's no suffering or anything. It's just that we insist on waking up.

So then, you see, there's this habit. Now remember, these habits are dispositions. They are wells of

potential energy so we don't tend to think of dullness and lethargy as energy we tend to think of them as a negative thing, a loss of energy. But it's not. If you look at them closely they're dragging you down into a black hole, which is not the same as tiredness. Tiredness is a clean energy, and when you wake up from it you do feel refreshed. But it's often the case that when you oversleep or when you're sleeping to escape something, sometimes you feel worse than when you first went into sleep. So it's really distinguishing those two on a retreat. Knowing the distinction. It's not always easy.

I mean, as you know, the usual thing I say is the first three days, there's a natural tiredness that comes because of the imbalance in most people's sleep. They're either oversleeping or they're undersleeping or they're not sleeping well or something. That's normally ironed out. And I do see it on people's faces. That's one of the things that you see after three days. The face changes dramatically. Partly because, I think, of the sleep business, but also because just for a moment they've dropped the cares and woes of life. They forget about it finally, just for a day. It is remarkable.

And what you see is the modern stress. I remember when I used to go and visit up to the uplands of Sri Lanka where they were living really the old agricultural life. They lived with the seasons. They lived very, very close to the earth. It was just a hut. They had a bit of, they had maybe a small bit of furniture they'd bashed up together. And the land up there is plentiful. Up on the highlands, I mean, it's just so lush. And the rainfall is twice a year. The monsoon comes twice. And there isn't that existential fear, you know, like you get when there's an economic crisis. As far as they're concerned, they're still going to get curry. It's not a problem. It's just there.

And you see a very different atmosphere about them. Obviously much more relaxed, much more at peace, much more at ease, you see. Now, that's one of the blessings, isn't it, that we give with *mettā*. It's to live in ease, you see, not to have this constant worry and stuff that the modern society really pushes on top of us. As a monk I, when going out to the Easter course, I escaped all this. I know what it's like when you know you're going to get lunch and you have only a few clothes and you know that's enough and they'll last for years. And you have a roof over your head and it's always warm. You never get that cold that you can't put a jumper on and feel warm.

So this little escapade here, Satipan, has been a bit of an awakening. Because here all I've been assailed with constant worries and it's wonderful, the real awakening. I was living in a false Nirvana, that's what it was. And I must say this, the laying of this car park and the placing of that statue, that's it. It's taken two years to get to a point where there is really nothing more to be done. I mean, there are always one or two things, but all the big stuff's gone, and that's it, really. The only thing is hopefully in time we can place some small buildings or something for people in wheelchairs, wheelchair access, which we haven't got. You know, and a proper toilet pan for disabled people. So yes, that's that then.

So that's the only thing with your rhythm. So it's natural to feel tired at certain times of the day and just to know that that's physical and not an unwholesome mental disposition. And finally, of course, you've got to

take that into daily life. You can't make the effort here and then in daily life you just go berserk and sleep all the time. It's just like the practice has to go into your daily life. So that you're always gently lifting your energy. And energy is just like anything else. The more you exercise it, the more you have of it. It's not as though you've only got so much energy and that's the end of it.

I'm sure there's a limit, physically anyway. You can't be running up Everest. But I think we've got much more energy than we think we have, or potential for more energy than we think we have.

Does any questions arise from that? Any clarifications? Yeah. You describe sloth and torpor as an energy that you look at and investigate. But I find that if I try and be aware, I get wrapped up in it and fall asleep. Yeah. So, yeah.

Well, sloth and torpor... sloth and torpor. They're an early translation. And it tends to put a moral no-no on it. It's a moral, you know. So the, I tend to prefer dullness and lethargy and let people off a bit. I more feel guilty and shameful, which you ought to, of course. I mean, that's the truth of it. But the modern person doesn't like that.

Yes, there are various things you can do, of course, which is to put yourself in a position where it's difficult to fall asleep. And it depends on the strength of the dullness and lethargy. So, one can open one's eyes and still feel it. You see, you're feeling the sensations. That's what you're doing so if it's a dullness in the mind your attention is in this area you see just feeling the dullness and you can stand up and you can walk and you'd be surprised when you keep making that effort to be aware of these feelings, which are neutral feelings, they're not painful, they're quite restful actually. It's like the energy draws back into the watching, into the knowing, and you become bright, absolutely bright. It's like walking into a cloud. It's like that, it's like being in a fog. You're awake, you see, but you're there with these feelings.

And remember, you're not trying to get rid of them. You're not trying to do anything to them. Just like all these forms of energy, you're just allowing it to dissipate. And as it dissipates, you're losing a bit of the energy from that disposition, *saṅkhāra*, from that particular habit. So that's why you've got to take it to daily life, because if you don't, you go back, you reinforce the old habit. So every time you come to meditation retreat, you keep having to suffer the same things. There's a lot of it. We're not going to run out of it. Well, not for a while.

I think it is actually. That's one of the things you don't like people to do in a meditation hall is yawn. Gets you going. Physically it's even easier because you can take the mind up and down the body and discover what parts of the body actually don't feel it. Like you don't feel, generally you don't feel lethargy in your toes. Although you can. If you stretch your toes you get that feeling of tiredness in them, or at least I do anyway. Maybe I've just got very sensitive toes.

So yes, you can work with those in the same way, and you can just be aware of it, you can just feel it, you see, you can just feel it. You can sometimes turn your inquiry or your interest into the process or go

deeper and find out what are the constituent feelings of it, the softness, hardness, softness, the gentleness. You can go beyond the definition of dullness and lethargy and actually find out what are the sensations that make up this concept. Things like that, see, awaken your interest in it. But sometimes it's just good enough to sit with it. Just walk with it. You know, like I say, you take the big fat dog for a walk. Come on, boy. Drag it round the paddock. Just keep moving the foot.

Yeah, there was a time, there was a time those things used to, I remember distinctly, it used to last ten days with me at one point. I was on a long retreat and when it hit me I knew it would be around for ten days and I'd just be in this miasma for ten days and then it would slowly lift. So it comes and goes anyway, but over time if you're working with it as a constant effort in your daily life, you see, don't be brutal, you know, you're not fighting it, you just know you're tired and you ask yourself, am I really tired? So you get up, walk around a bit, stretch, you know.

Yeah? So that's the question about the practice. We can move to one about the fetters here.

So as I understand it, the fetters are the bindweed that generates the hindrances. These are always coming up in meditation and life. We can combat them with mindfulness, but can we get all the bindweed out? Or do we always have to be vigilant? I'm thinking of the delusion of a permanent self and the things that accompany this. As above, might cultivating positive mental states help? And if so, which and or and in what ways? Sorry it's so long.

I like long questions.

Well, the first thing is to be clear in our mind what these fetters are and what their categorization is. So the Buddha categorizes the human experience in various ways to give us different angles. Two of the ways that you can look at this psychophysical organism, the human being, is either by the *khandhas*, these five heaps, the body, perceptions, feelings, conditions, our habits and all that, and consciousness. But then he also says you can look at a human being by way of the senses. So there are six consciousnesses, six ways of knowing the world, the five physical ones and the mind itself, you see.

So here, he first of all, I want you to point out that there's also what's known as the *anusaya*. Now the *anus aya* come very close to, I think anyway, the Western idea of something subconscious, something that we're not fully aware of. And it's one of these lists I haven't learned. They're known as, here it's translated as the proclivities, which is not a very regular word, is it? Inclinations or tendencies.

Now, they won't surprise you. Sensuous greed. Grudge. I don't know about grudge. Normally hatred, yeah? Speculative opinion. In other words, I'm right, everybody else is wrong. Skeptical doubt. Conceit, craving for continued existence always wanting to become and ignorance which covers it all really.

Now although this actually is enumerated, I've read that the Buddha used it very generally, the word *anus aya* to suggest that there were these potential conditionings within the system and that they related in some way to actual behavior to the way you think and speak and act. And when they do that then you can

actually see them, so that's when he categorizes them in terms of our meditation practice into the five hindrances.

So now we know when something unwholesome comes up, we should be able to fit it into one of these five. And then when we're doing that, we're doing the fourth establishment of mindfulness, which is to see what we're experiencing by way of the Buddha's Dharma. *Dhamma-dhamma-nupāsati*, right? To really look into the Buddha's dharma and to see what we're experiencing from his point of view. This is the point, you see.

Which is difficult for us Westerners who have a different psychology and a different philosophy. What we tend to do is place that upon the Buddha's teaching and reinterpret the Buddhist teaching by way of our understanding and I think that's some of the problems that people come across. One of the early mistakes I mean it was the early Christians who came upon Buddhism and just presumed because of the descriptions of *Nibbāna* that it was extinction. It was often translated just annihilation even though the Buddha goes out of his way a hundred times to say he doesn't teach annihilation he only teaches the annihilation of greed, hatred and delusion so you get things like that you see.

So it's good sometimes to contemplate the teachings of the Buddha because it makes us see our situation in a different way and I would say that it's by doing that that you get the fullness of the practice. I mean one example might be the quality of *anicca* impermanence so normally I think we would think it's the same stuff which just changes. Like you might see a tree, the leaf of a tree, but it's always the same stuff that produces leaves. Do you know what I mean? So you get the idea that impermanence is like a cloud. It's the same thing, but it's changing.

But actually, it's more like the way leaves are in a tree. It's a completely new leaf. The leaf grows, drops off, and then you get a completely new leaf. And that's how the Buddha saw time. It collapses momentarily, you see. And mentally speaking, those collapses aren't into annihilation, but into this rather funny word, *b havanga*, which means life continuation. We would just call it unconsciousness. But it's a potential. And then you rise out of that. And the longest piece of that *bhavanga* that we have is, of course, when we fall asleep. But those are happening minutely throughout the day, they're not just when we're asleep.

So those are the things that we from the West might impose upon the Buddhists without even knowing it, we just presume we know when in fact we haven't really understood what he was talking about.

So now these five *nīvaraṇa*, as they're called, the five hindrances those come specifically within the practice of *vipassanā* because he tries to encapsulate in those five all the various unwholesome mental states that you might come across. That's all he's done and the reason why he's categorized them like that is because each of them demands a different approach a different way of dealing with them so obviously if you're dealing with a compulsive desire it's something that's really grabbed your imagination and it's really taking most of your meditation into this dream world

So you have to come off, and there, you know, it's an indulgence as opposed to something which you don't like. So for instance, if some anxiety comes up, there may be anxious thinking about it, but when you come into the body you don't want to stay there. So normally what we do then is of course rush off somewhere where we can enjoy something.

So often you find that when you're involved in a pleasant daydream and you keep coming off it, it's actually a bit of icing on top of this dung which wants to come up, you see. And that's the way we often escape from our problems, by just indulging in something pleasurable. It's understandable, isn't it? I do it myself. But it's just knowing that these various categories have different ways of dealing with them. So we just talked about dullness and lethargy. So that's the hindrances as such.

Now the fetters... So in terms of the question, you see, the bindweed, that which binds, that's another category, only this time he's talking about these big leaps in spiritual understanding that are real turnarounds in the way that we relate to the world.

So, in the first stage, what's known as *Sotapanna*, the stream-enterer, the insight there is such that the person glimpses the fact that this personality is not a self, it's not a me or a mind, it's not substantial. The other insight is that all the religious practices which are not to do with insight but more to do with raising devotion—all the little rituals that we do like the bowing and the taking the refuges and stuff like that—are all supports but in themselves don't produce any awakening.

Now, if you go back to Hindu, to the times of the Buddha, it was presumed that certain things would bring *moksha*, you know, would release you from *kamma*. And I still think probably there are some forms of Hinduism that still believe that, like standing in the Ganges gets rid of all your *kamma*, bad *kamma*, you know, get rid of you too. And a lot of the rituals that we see in other religions, you see, which people, from a Buddhist point of view, might mistakenly think that this actually brings liberation.

But you then don't want to go to the opposite side and think that all ritual is useless and a waste of time, because the whole point of ritual is to prepare oneself, is to get the right frame of mind, the right attitude, the right atmosphere within oneself. So the Buddha is not saying don't have any ritual—he's just saying don't believe that that's enough to get you liberated.

And the third one, actually it's number two, so the first one is personality belief that this body, that this personality is a real self, so there's a glimpse of that, there's a real understanding of that. And the second one is the ending of skeptical doubt, so that person doesn't have that hindrance come up in terms of the Buddha's teaching. See, it doesn't mean to say that they might not doubt in ordinary daily life, like whether they should take this job or not. It's not that. But there's no skeptical doubt as to the Buddha's teaching because they themselves have glimpsed *Nibbāna*. That's the point.

And the Buddha talks about it like a flash of lightning. And it's interesting because when some people have this experience, it's like nothing. They don't even know they've had it. It's like it's virtually no consequence

to them. They don't even know it sometimes. Even though the teacher tells them, they say, well, I don't think you're right. For others, it's a sort of huge, amazing thing that's happened to them. And the way I personally make sense of that is because, of course, in past lives if you have attained that then when you come back to this life you're simply regaining the position where you were.

It's like for instance going through the first big change in our relationship to the world at the age of seven—it just happens naturally doesn't it for most anyway. Very few people know they're going through that process of a seven-year-old. You know there are two major things that happen there. The first one is that you take on guilt, you come across the law of *kamma* at the age of seven, that when you do something harmful, harm comes to you. Before that, a child might not be clear about it, but from the age of seven on, it becomes more and more clear.

But the other thing that happens to us around the age of seven, of course, is that our imaginings cannot be real to us anymore. You know, Father Christmas cannot come down the chimney anymore. For a three-year-old, that's not a problem. It's just presumed, you see. But after seven, I'm afraid we lose the magic.

I was once with a mother and a child, she was about three. It was Christmas, wasn't it? Roundabout Christmas. And unfortunately, I thought, well, they were talking about Christmas, and the mother kept saying, but you know, it's not real. And I could see the girl was slightly confused by this. And I kept thinking, no, don't kill it. There's only three, for God's sake. Believe in Christmas. It's like... It was like she was trying to be, trying to make the child what it can't be at the age of three, you know. Never mind.

So those are the fetters that disappear. Now fetters, that's a nice word, bindweed. You know, they sort of hold you there, you can't, and you don't even know it, of course, because of the delusion. So these three, you can see they don't quite equate to the five hindrances or to the *anusaya*—they sort of double up a bit. But it's said that when a person does reach this their morality is also enhanced, you see, their virtue is enhanced. And it's said that if such a person cannot commit a crime or do something so heinous that would put them into a hell state—it wouldn't be possible for them to do that.

All these various realms remember are to be experienced, can be experienced as a human being. Buddhist cosmology simply—it's a later thing. Although the Buddha talks about it, the way it's all worked out with all these different heavens and all that, this is a later sort of intellectualisation of it. But they're basically cosmologising states that you can experience right here and now. So when you're really depressed or when you're in a panic, you're in a hell state, you know. When you feel very dull, when you've had a few drinks, say no. You're in animal state. You've lost it. You know what I mean? When you're in a very angry state, you're in the angry gods. When you're very happy, you're in heaven. You're in one of the delightful heavens. When you achieve one of these beautiful states in meditation, an absorption state maybe, then you're in one of the higher realms. You see what I mean? They're all...

So now the second one, you see, when you reach the second stage which is the stage of once-return, it's

presumed you have to come back into this form again to let go of your desire for sensual pleasure. So this is the realm of sensual pleasure. And even though you've attenuated greed for sensual pleasure and aversion, there's still something to be done. So those are the two things that are attenuated. They're just lessened. They're not so strong.

It's only in the third one, the non-returner, where this searching for happiness in sensual pleasure and aversion and all that disappear. And all that's saying is that such a person is no longer attracted to this particular form. It doesn't attract them anymore. Just as children, as we grow out of certain toys, we're not attracted to rattles anymore. I've moved on, usually. I know some people still have their teddy bears, but we can forgive that.

And then finally when you finally reach Arahat and the self disappears, that understanding of a self, then you get the craving for these two rather finer states which is caused by the *jhāna*. So the *jhāna*, the ordinary *rūpa-jhāna* and the *arūpa-jhāna*—so these are technical terms but they're basically blissful states within us.

And the whole point about the jhānas is that they are created by the mind itself through mantra, through watching the breath, through loving-kindness. And therefore you don't need anything out there to feel absolutely blissed out. And that's why when you get to that stage you can live under a tree—what the hell does it matter? You know, you don't need retail therapy anymore. You can just sit under a tree and get blissed out. And you wake up, go for a bit of lunch, find yourself a park bench and off you go again.

So even those areas are now let go of as true happiness. This is the point. The delusion that these are going to bring true happiness disappears. And with that, with the self goes conceit. Now conceit in Buddhism, the word used *mana* has a root form which means to measure. So the self is always measuring itself against other people. It's either getting envious or feeling superior, and that's the conceit.

It can be inferiority conceit—I'm worse than everybody else—superiority, and then a rather subtle one where I'm equal. So by saying you're equal to somebody you're basically forming a group which is either inferior or superior to anybody else's group. This is the subtle—it's like when you say we're Buddhists, you know, as though that's better than being anything else. So that's conceit that goes because there's no self that is judging anymore or measuring.

Restlessness goes. Now this has always interested me. I think what's really meant here actually is that all the old problems are there that are within our personality and that through the practice and over a period of time they just become less and less and less until they're just this little restlessness. They're not disturbing so much, they're not so cloying, they're not so demanding, they just lost energy. See, that's my understanding of it. Technically, it's just feeling restless, you know, fidgety or whatever. But when you look into your own restlessness, you'll always find there's something making you restless, you see. So even that goes now because the heart's completely purified, you know. There's no, for want of a better word, there's no neuroses, there's nothing in there which has a negative effect on us.

So now the heart is now full of these more positive qualities, mainly or the four illimitable—love, compassion, joy, peace. We'll come to that. And then finally of course ignorance goes. So now a person is wise, wise meaning that they know about how they've created all this suffering for themselves. They know themselves to be liberated from it and they know that they cannot fall back into that suffering. That's what this ignorance is. It's not as though when you become wise you know all about quantum physics. Unfortunately they do put things like that on the poor Buddha, but I'm sure he didn't. But he definitely knew he was liberated and he definitely knew how he had liberated himself and he definitely knew how he got into the mess. And of course that's what he then went on to teach.

So that I hope covers a bit of that. I don't know if there's any questions arising from that. It's always good to read these long questions again actually. I shall just read it. "As I understand it the fetters are the bindweed that generate the hindrances." I'm not so sure they generate the hindrances—I mean one of them does, ignorance—but it's like a different categorisation. The hindrances are the expressions of the bindweed, something like that. Yeah, why not? I'll let that pass.

"These are always coming up in meditation and life and we can combat them with mindfulness. That means in a sense that they don't overtake us. But can we get rid of all this binary?" Well, the answer is yes, you see. But unfortunately, as the question goes on, "Do we always have to be vigilant?" Absolutely. See, so his final words, *apamādo sampadeta*, you know, struggle and strive on, *apamādo*, diligently, vigilantly, it's often translated as vigilant. So, you bat an eye and you've fallen back. He's like, you've got to keep on the ball.

But remember, the attitude should be one of being relaxed with that process. If any force comes into it, if any struggle in that wrong sense comes into it, then actually you're making it worse. We're making it worse for ourselves. And it's just a good habit to keep relaxing into the present moment as often as you can, as often as it comes to mind. Just to stop, relax the body, relax the shoulders, just stop. And then you rise out of that into your next action. And that keeps an ease about life.

Spiritually speaking, you're not trying to attain any of this. You're not trying to attain these four paths and fruits. You're not trying to attain *Nibbāna*. What you're trying to attain is moment-to-moment mindfulness. Because once that's attained, the path manifests. You don't have to do anything. And that's the genius, you might say, of the Buddha's teaching. He doesn't land us with goals in the future. So that everything we're doing now is some sort of Nibbanic bliss in so many hundreds of thousands of years. He says, no, he says, just be aware now and you'll begin to taste it. Just be aware now and those hindrances that are stopping us moving forward will begin to lessen. So the whole accent is upon now, you see. And that makes it easy for us, doesn't it? It's like you don't have to worry about the future. It will take care of itself.

I want to do the next one now which is about the self actually. So if the last question was long, wait for this one.

Bhante, I just wanted to say one more thing about rebirth. We had a discussion on rebirth. If rebirth is

fuelled by thirst or desire to become, then it follows that if the human race were all to simultaneously realise the Absolute Truth of things and attain Arahatship, then from that moment no more human beings could be born. I make this point not to be ridiculous but because rebirth explained in this way seems to be saying that life and existence is the problem. Now for me life manifesting itself in all its wonderments is truly beautiful and that the problem is not existence but our wrong relationship with existence. I think to regard rebirth, if it happens, as something to hopefully one day be done away with, misses the very opportunity, the very point of our existence, which with the right view takes us into the realm of great love.

Now, this rebirth is a big problem for Western music. But you might have come across a teacher called Buddhadasa, Ajahn Buddhadasa. He's written quite a few books. He had a monastery. I say he had because he died. He's died now. He had a monastery in the south of Thailand called Suan Mokkh. And he is probably the only writer I've met who actually has hit the nail on the head and it's really very much against the normal teaching of Theravāda or the way that Theravāda normally talks about rebirth and all that.

So the normal thing is that we keep being reborn as human beings or as other beings and when we become liberated that's it. Like it's what happens nothing is spoken of it, nothing is talked of it. Mahāyāna tried to correct that by having the Buddha constantly appear out of compassion for all beings in his bliss body, basically as an angel, inverted commas, that's his bliss body. And that within the bliss body there's the Dharmakāya which is this Buddha within, the Buddha nature, call it what you wish, you see. So there's a whole philosophy and a whole understanding about that which is highly elaborated in the Mahāyāna system.

Now, if we take the Theravāda, according to Buddhadasa, the big mistake came very early on, talking about rebirth as if it was one person being reborn, maybe as a different personality, but basically that was the process that came to an end.

When he studied the scriptures in his own depth, to his own understanding, and I think this is what comes across once you begin to see where the Buddha is coming from, this whole process of rebirth is the rebirthing of self.

So this dependent origination, for instance, is often talked of as three lives. The first, your past life is your ignorance, your delusion and all your dispositions. You're born into this life with these dispositions and fundamental delusion, and your culture then helps you to produce a personality, a character which has as its base these particular conditionings. Depending on the situation, certain conditionings will come to the fore and others won't. So if, for instance, you have a lot of fear within these conditionings at birth, but you're born into a situation which is very supportive, then it's obviously going to be helpful. If you're born in a war zone, you're not going to do so well.

In this life all the middle section happens—all the business of the desire, the becoming, and so on. Then

after this becoming there's this rebirth in another realm of sickness, old age and death—birth, sickness, old age and death. In other words, that's your future life. So that's how it's taught traditionally.

Now what Buddhadāsa has pointed out, which is already there, but he really makes it very clear, is that this wheel of dependent origination is actually about present moments. It's actually happening now. So even now there is this basis of delusion within us, and there are these dispositions. Every moment we enter comes with that little bit of baggage. We react from delusion—this is not wise, not from a wisdom point—we react to it in a deluded way, and before we know it we're stuck in some desire, some aversion, and we rebirth the self. That's at the point of the *upādāna*, the grasping. Then when that process is over, it's as though there's a drop, there's a finish, and the potential lies there. Then you walk into the next moment and another self is created.

So it's not as though you have a self which is blocked and that's it, it's final. The self is constantly being reborn. And it's not always happening—it's obviously not happening when you sleep, and it's not happening when we're doing something from a wisdom base.

So if we look at the Buddha, once he'd become fully liberated, from then on all his actions are moving along a similar psychology. An idea comes: "I'll go and teach these people, my old companions." Then he reinforces the idea, it's an intention, he's empowered it, and he's walked a couple of hundred—I think it's about a hundred miles or so, can you remember how much it was? It's a long way, at least a day. So from where he was liberated to go and find these companions right up in Benares, Varanasi, was an act of will. But that whole process and going there and teaching did not produce another self. See?

So that idea of a self has gone. Now, does that mean that the Buddha doesn't have a sense of himself as it were? Like it's a schizophrenia or an uncentred personality? What's happening if he doesn't have a self?

Well, the thing is that it depends how you want to express this. The way I personally express it is that once this *satipaññā*, this intuitive intelligence, has discovered its own true nature, it forms a very different relationship to this body-mind complex, which is this personality, this character, this body. It doesn't see it as me. It's simply a vehicle, like you might get in your car. So if you get in your car and then say, "This is me," they probably take you away slowly. "Yes, come on, dear." You don't say that. You say, "I'm in"—I mean, you might say it's my car, you have a relationship to it, but you don't say it's me.

So it's the same with this *satipaññā*, this Buddha within us. It no longer says, "This is me." It's coming from some other place, and it's driven by similar—on a wholesome level it's driven by similar attitudes of love, compassion, joy—but this time it's not being corrupted. It doesn't have the kink of a self in it. In other words, "What's in it for me?" It's coming from a pure heart, a pure wisdom base.

So now that is, I think, a more acceptable way of understanding rebirth, and I think it's a way that allows us to use the concept of rebirth very much as part of our spiritual practice. So here I am being reborn as a greedy person again. You see what I mean? It's like, "Here I go again. It's me again. Hello." And it's

recognising that. I say, "You greedy person." Not damning, of course, not judging, but simply no longer enjoining it, no longer indulging in that.

So now, what happens when we die? This is the next big thing. What happens then when we die? Well, in terms of spiritual practice, it's irrelevant because all we have is this present moment. You're either practising or you're not. When you die, well, if you're not anymore, fine. There's no suffering there. You won't be bothered at all if you disappear completely. On the other hand, if you reappear, then it might—if you actually reappear then of course there's a problem again. You're stuck with this being. "Here I am again." It's like when you wake up in the morning, isn't it? "Here I am again." What are we doing? You wake up, where have I been? So all of a sudden—and I just read a quote about that in the final chapter on the question. Do you remember the quote?

Along the lines of, if there is no such thing as rebirth, but you've lived an honourable life, well, that's all very good. And you've lived a life of happiness and peace. And if there is rebirth, then your rebirth will be positive.

That's right. A win-win situation.

Yes, I know the Buddha points that out. Because obviously in his day too there were annihilationists. The people who thought that when you died that was it. There were some people who had a more convoluted system where you went through all these different realms and then disappeared, but there were definitely annihilationists in his day. And yes, he gives this win-win situation where, you know, if you live a virtuous life, at least you get these benefits, and then fine, you disappear. And if you live a virtuous life and wake up somewhere else, then you've got at least the benefits of that, of your virtuous life.

The Buddha talks about the *citta* body, the body of the mind, the mental body, which he says through meditative practices you can exit from the body like a sword from the scabbard—take it out. And I've been—I know people who have had this subtle body leave the physical body and go for a walk and come back. And it still has the same unfortunate qualities as the physical body—it still arises and passes away, but it's just of this finer material. And that would be, in the Mahāyāna system, as I understand it, that's your body of bliss when it becomes enlightened—that's your *sambhogakāya*. This is known as your *nirmāṇ akāya*, which is your apparition body or something, your creative body that's created. Now in all this there's the *dharmakāya* or the Buddha within. And of course that's of a different nature, and people experience that too outside their bodies—those people who've had near-death experiences where this consciousness has exited from this whole system and yet is obviously very conscious.

So, in terms of rebirth, it's never caused me any problems, the idea that one goes on in some way. But it's necessary to also understand that that belief is not necessary. Often when people come to Buddhism, if they've been brought up in one of the religions, the monotheistic religions—Christianity or Judaism or whatnot—it's like there's a misunderstanding that they have to believe what the Buddha says or else it's not going to work. It's like you believe that Jesus died to save us all. And you have to believe that or else

you don't get your comeuppance, you don't get your grace. But of course, Buddhism is very different from that. It is very much a hypothesis, it's a theory that the Buddha puts to us and says, "Well, this is true for me, you'll have to find out for yourself whether it's true for you." It's an investigation. And that process of investigation is the process of liberation.

So, I can take out the salient points of this question. Yeah, so then what happens, I mean, if all human beings disappeared, well, that'd be it. The Earth would be liberated from very deluded beings. That's for sure. Probably Mother Earth would feel joy and jump up and down with joy. "Yippee! She's got rid of a few species every so often." She just shakes them off, doesn't she? And then reinvigorates herself and starts again. Wonderful.

Now, this question about all beings, it's just that I know it's a hypothetical question, but it reminds me of a lovely question that was asked of Ñāṇaponika, who was this German monk. He's the one who started the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy. And she said to him, in a similar vein, "Supposing everybody became monks and nuns." That would be the end of the human race. And he said, "My dear, it won't happen. It just won't happen." So, even though I know this is a hypothetical question, if all human beings became liberated all at once, it just won't happen.

But the question goes on and says, "Life manifesting itself is all in wonderment." Now, the Buddha is definitely aware of beauty, even in the very simple way of the way he asked his order, the monks and nuns, to robe. You remember in the early days they were happy with just taking bits of cloth off the charnel grounds where they put dead bodies in shrouds and cut it into pieces, sewed it together—anything would do. But when he saw a group of his monks dressed like this, he didn't like it at all when he saw it as a way of manifesting his teaching. And that's when he asked them to cut it into various pieces and sew it in such a way that it looked like paddy fields. That's what they looked like. And to dye it, to boil it with this nut called an areca nut, which gives it a light brown colour.

And if you read the final discourse, which leads to his passing, which leads to his *parinibbāna*, he's walking along with Ānanda, his companion, his assistant, and he says, "Oh, this lovely grove, let's go and eat this in a lovely shrine." He doesn't say, "Let's just sit down here in this ditch and eat this stuff." He actually seeks out what is beautiful.

And if you think about it from—I think it's Plato, isn't it? Plato said, I think it's very true, that with truth, with truth there arises virtue. And with virtue, beauty. So now, the truth is the intellect, it's understanding. Virtue is your will, how you manifest your understanding in daily life. And beauty is the heart. It's art. It's the way that you manifest your feeling, your—this question used the word love. I mean, that's what love is, isn't it? So the Buddha doesn't deny that. He doesn't deny that's what life is. That's what I definitely understand by it.

And I shall end with a little story. I think I've answered the question. End with a little story about this young girl who turned up at the monastery at Kandalama, which is my monastery in Sri Lanka. And her

father said that every evening she would come and tell him that she was going to a particular heavenly realm because she was writing the biography of the Buddha. So she was only a little girl, nine or ten or something. So he humoured her and said, "Oh yeah, very good," and she got to bed. Anyway, one day it would seem—you can only believe what people tell you—she got fed up with her dad and rose up in front of him and disappeared.

So he rushed her off to this monastery, Kandalama, with this big question, and she came along. And her answers are on a tape. They're in Sinhalese, so I don't understand it, but the gist of it was that she was an *a rahant*, and she didn't bow to monks. And she didn't, because she was completely liberated. And she had come back to help her grandfather—this particular person—and when she went up to this particular heavenly realm all the Buddhas, the Buddha and all the disciples were there, and there were shrines where they came and gave talks. Now it's a strange thing, isn't it? I don't know whether you have to believe this or not.

So many—about three or four years later I went back to Sri Lanka and I asked about this girl, but unfortunately she had disappeared. She'd now be I suppose twenty, twenty-odd. It would be interesting to try and seek her out and find out whether she was dreaming or not. But her father said she rose up in front of him and disappeared. No, mind you, Jesus—the Ascension. So there are wonderful things in the world.

So unless there are questions arising, I trust that my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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