Faith and the Spiritual Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 59:29

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this weekend we're just looking at this process of taking refuge, refuge in the precepts. And for fear of repeating myself tomorrow, I thought I'd just hang around the question of what is the spiritual search? What's the quality of faith? What role does doubt play in it? That area.

There must have been some point in human history where this self-awareness arose. And with it there must have somehow dawned the question of who am I? What am I doing here? There must have been at some point—who knows when—where these fundamental questions must have slowly arisen. These three questions: who am I, how do I relate, and what do I do?

These congealed over time into what are three discernible paths. Hinduism, I think, has very clearly delineated them. But of course it's there in all the spiritual traditions. And in Buddhism, it's enshrined in the Eightfold Path. So right understanding is trying to answer the question, well, who am I? Or why am I? And the right attitude is, now that I'm here, how do I relate? What is my relationship to other people, to the universe? How should I relate? And then that moves into action. So now that I've understood why I'm here and how I should relate, what do I do?

And that's the path of karma—the path of gnosis or understanding. The path of love, that's what relating is. When you ask the question, how do I relate, you're really asking, what is love? And then finally, what do I do?

According to the Buddha, these questions arise out of suffering. So this word *dukkha* has various meanings. It's not just the awful physical suffering that we can go through or mental distress, but it's at that deeper spiritual level, a sense of alienation, an existential feeling of meaninglessness. Meaninglessness can come across hard to people and it ends up as being a real deep depressive state of living without any meaning, especially in our society which at least on the surface is just driven by a hunt for the next exciting thing to do. What's the next film? What's the next kick? What's the next buzz? It's like we're constantly searching for something to distract the mind. And you're constantly fed the understanding that pleasure and the pleasures of relationship are equated to happiness. Like this car will definitely make you happy.

We know just because of the nature of things, because of the nature of transience, the ephemeral nature

of things, the fact that things arise and pass away, change—that can't be so. There's still within us this search for happiness.

Now, none of us here may be drug addicts or completely lost in that commercialism, in that consumerism. We might not. We might know that. But even so, we still do it. We still seek happiness in a cup of tea, Costa coffee. It's like you're always looking for a place where you can find relief. That's your refuge. Every time you do that, what you're saying is that Costa Coffee is my refuge. You go in there and choose a cake.

So next time you do that and you know you're going in there really just to escape boredom or whatever—it's hard to really rationalise or to give some real purpose to coffee—but having done so, one can sit there and gaze at it and say, I am taking refuge in coffee. And let that sink in a while. You shouldn't stop drinking the coffee. It's just acknowledging that it's not going to really give what the heart truly seeks.

If you were to ask, well, what does the heart want? What does the heart want? Now, mind the head, understanding, why is this, why is that? Where does the heart want to be? If you ask yourself that question. Now, even the heart can be confused, can be doubting as to where it wants to be.

A lot of people would want to place their heart in a relationship, trusting a relationship, trying to find the right person. That's going to be the wherewithal of our lives. Taking refuge in somebody else. But that's unreliable, isn't it? People who were deeply in love end up stabbing each other. People take the vow to marry, to take care of, and all the lovely things that they say, till death do us part—it's an idealism, isn't it? There's a presumption in that ceremony that it is actually going to happen. And a few years down the line it corrupts. Even if it doesn't corrupt and people fall apart and go separate ways.

There's that confusion often between what love is and what the emotion that we call love is. I remember doing a little ceremony for people who were getting married. It was combined with a New Age-y ceremony. It was very lovely. And they asked me to say something. When I pointed out that love, real love, had nothing to do with emotions, there was a stunned silence in the room. What is it then if it's not? What we discover of course is that love is an attitude. It's a disposition. It's a way of relating whether you like somebody or not. I mean that's one of the good things about the spiritual life—that when we're practising together we're all helping each other. It's irrelevant whether we like each other or not.

Often the person whom you don't like, the person who's disturbing you, is your teacher. They're telling you where your buttons are. I once, a long time ago, did a retreat and there was this man—in the Eastern tradition all the men sit together and the women sit over there—and he was, for six days, sniffing. Have you ever sat next to somebody sniffing all the time? I wouldn't want to shock you with what I was going to do with that man's nose.

The teacher at the time, it was Ajahn Sumedho actually—some of you will know him—took a break on Thursday, and he thought he was getting too tight or something. I happened to mention this to another man and asked him if this nose was also upsetting him. To my amazement, he hadn't even heard it. He

hadn't even heard it. I said, oh, fine. At the end of the retreat, because we had another day to go, he came to me and he says, I did hear it. He said, oh, yesterday. Is that what happened with unwholesome speech? Maybe I shouldn't have said it. I don't know. But he was obviously more annoyed with me than the man's nose. He hadn't heard it.

So, asking ourselves the question, where does the heart want to be? It wants to be content, doesn't it? Isn't that the deepest place you want to be? To be content. And what does that mean, to be content? To accept the way things are, no matter what they are, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant—a acceptance. But not with resignation, resignation suggesting some despair, I can't do anything about it. But more that openness: this is the way it is. And then in seeing the situation clearly, as clearly as we can—always, because we're in a process of time, time moves, possibilities arise.

So searching for that contentment—what I'm suggesting is that that's what we're deeply searching for. It might start off with just wanting to put an end to suffering. It might be phrased that way. It's definitely how the Buddha started. He set out quite clearly—and then he says it himself—quite clearly because he was in a state of confusion, a state of suffering. So he goes off searching for the end of suffering.

As we go searching, as we go into various different types of teachings, somehow we have to make a connection with that teaching if it's going to work for us. And that's really what we mean by faith. A lot of people go through the process of listening. They listen to the teaching or read about it. This brings up a certain confidence, because that's what faith is: a certain confidence in what they're hearing.

So it's not a belief. If what we mean by belief is a total acceptance of a statement, that would be an error in terms of the Buddha, because what belief does is it stops you investigating, it stops you taking the process any further. You take refuge in a mental state of belief. I believe, so I'm all right, I'll be saved. That's also a false refuge. It might make you high. Like, I'm free now. I believe. I believe in God. I believe in the Buddha. Now I can go and have my Costa coffee. It takes away a whole area of problems. I believe. That's it. I don't worry about it.

But that stops the investigation. That stops the process of trying to find out whether it's true for me personally. What we discover, of course, is that the next step, having heard something, we then begin to think about it ourselves, so that this knowledge that we've picked up becomes our own particular way of thinking. We've thought it through ourselves, to some extent. But then we get this practice, we get this direct experience of the path.

Of course, it's in the practice that we're not only, shall we say, stabilising that faith through the practice because it actually works, but the very practice is itself the process of liberation. That faith is an ability to be open, to be willing to have a go, to keep going. All of you must have that or you simply wouldn't be here. So it's there within you.

There are people who don't need to go through that. Sometimes on seeing a person, they just feel it's their

path, it's their way. In my own case, both happened. I entered into the Buddhist path in that gingerly way of investigating this, investigating that, having a go. I mean, there wasn't the choice when I started in the 70s, middle 70s. But I remember at one point, when I was with a teacher, there was a very direct, clear connection that this was my teacher. And I went to Burma to be with him. I didn't stay that long, but it was very clear. I never had that with anybody else. I've had lots of teachers, I've had lots of people I've been with, but I just knew that this person was going to get me through, was going to really make it for me.

So that leap of faith which sometimes happens in the heart is also a proper act of faith. And in a sense it's much stronger than a faith which arises through thought, because it's coming from that deeper level within us, that deep connection.

There's that case of Anathapindika in the scriptures, who's a merchant. It was the time when merchants were really becoming a very rich caste or class. The castes weren't so rigid in those days. I think it was his brother-in-law or his brother had met the Buddha and had actually set up a little monastery for him. While he was visiting, Anathapindika mentioned about the Buddha and it would seem that just the word, the Buddha, seemed to have awoken in him this enormous connection already. He went on to become a great supporter, bought him land for a monastery and was forever supporting the Buddha. But that was just an immediate connection, even by a word, something in the air, you might say.

I've known people to do that from pictures of Indian gurus. Just seeing a picture, they've made that connection. Nobody's done it with me. Hang on, I've got to get older.

So there are these two ways in which one can make that faith. It's a confidence, isn't it? You can't move without that. You can't commit yourself without confidence. And that's not just the spiritual part, it's anything. Whether it's a job, sometimes you wonder whether you can do it, whether you should be doing it. If there isn't that confidence, you can't take the job. Or you do it feeling really fearful about it. Same with a relationship, whether you want to start a relationship with somebody or cement a relationship, either a partnership or a marriage. If you're in a state of doubt—well, I might be, I don't know whether I should, maybe I can't, and all this—you can't commit yourself. So that sense of confidence, trusting, has to be there.

In the actual spiritual path, the trust is likely to do with ourselves I think. I mean you can trust the teacher, you can trust the teaching, but eventually you've got to have a trust in yourself. Some people have a lot of problems with that, have a lot of problems with doubt one way or the other. I shall leave exactly what it is we're putting our trust in—the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha—till tomorrow. You'll all fall asleep tomorrow.

But here's a case which gives you an idea of how quickly one can take refuge in the Buddha. There's a Brahmin Janusoni and he comes to see the Buddha. It's basically a question about practice. So this Brahmin is obviously a practitioner. He says to the Buddha, you know, people who go into the jungle, into the forests, and live on their own, they go mad. Is that not your experience, that people go mad when they go off by themselves?

So there's obviously in those days, there were lots of these men, mainly. There were a few women, but it was difficult for a woman to do it because there wasn't the protection against men. So all these men were going off, doing a hippie trip. That happened in the 60s and 70s. And searching for this enlightenment, this liberation. Obviously some of them were going bonkers out there. They were losing it.

The Buddha then goes into quite a clear definition of what it is that stops you going mad. The two main things are that your virtue is good, that you're not going into that situation with huge guilts and problems and whatnot. That has to be cleared, as it were. Also, even if you have that, you're very clear that from now on you are virtuous, and that gives you a solid rock within yourself. And the other thing is a disciplined mind. Because as we know in our meditation, if the mind's not disciplined, it goes bonkers.

Having said all this, Janusoni is really taken by it. And he also answers another question which is of interest, which I've mentioned before this weekend, is that he says to Janusoni that he keeps going to the forest for his own quiet abiding and as a teaching for others, as a good example for others.

This is the classic response that you get throughout the scriptures to various persons: "Excellent good Gautama"—so they would call him by his family name, your surname basically. "Excellent good Gautama, it is as if one might set upright what has been upset or might disclose what was covered or show the way to one who has gone astray or bring an oil lamp into the darkness so that those with vision might see material shapes. Even so, in many a figure has the Dhamma been made clear by the Venerable Gautama. Thus I am going to the Venerable Gautama for refuge, the Dhamma and the Sangha. May the Blessed Gautama accept me as a lay follower, going for refuge from today forth as long as life lasts."

So he's really taken by it—as long as life lasts. He's really taken by it.

But this wasn't always the case. There's a lovely one. Well, there are two occasions, actually. But this one is a man called, who's termed Dandapan, which means sticking hand. He asks the Buddha in a rather provocative way. He said, what does this recluse assert? What do you proclaim?

So he responds to this by saying, I assert and proclaim that I do not quarrel with anybody, that the world quarrels with me. And then he goes on to explain the teaching.

But even so, Dandapani, who was a Sakyan belonging to the same tribe as the Buddha, shook his head, wagged his tongue, raised his eyebrows until his forehead puckered in three lines, and then departed leaning on his stick. So even though the Buddha must have given him a really good talk, he still went away with great doubts.

There's also a lovely story which shows us that after the Buddha was enlightened, he wasn't a natural teacher. He had to learn how to teach, just as he had to learn the path to liberation. He meets one of these Ajīvakas—these ascetics—just as he's on his way to teach his five former companions. So he's just become liberated, he's thought it through, and he's decided that he is going to try and teach it, when he meets this ascetic on the way. The ascetic says, "You've got lovely bright features, you look absolutely splendid. Who's

your teacher?"

And the Buddha goes into this amazing statement about how he has no teacher, how he is the fully enlightened one, the liberated one. And the guy says, "Oh, that's very good," and walks off. As you would, if you think about it. If you stopped somebody in the street and said, "Well, you look quite spiritually advanced," and he says, "Well, I am the new cosmic Buddha, and I live in north London." We used to get letters like that at the Vihara. I often wonder what happened to this guy. Every so often a letter would come to the Vihara saying that the next cosmic Buddha was living in northern London. I never investigated it for fear he was—I mean, that would have changed my path entirely.

And of course that didn't work. I think the Buddha got the idea he had to be slightly more subtle.

So once we've actually established this faith, once we've got this confidence, the question then is: how do we make it grow? How do we take it to the point where it becomes not just a spiritual faculty but a spiritual strength? So faith is one of the spiritual faculties—faith, effort, awareness, concentration, and wisdom. These are the five spiritual faculties. And it's only when we actually have a glimpse of *nibbāna*, when we actually experience the ultimate point, even if it's only, as the Buddha said, like a flash of lightning, that faith becomes rock solid, becomes a *bala*, becomes a strength. You can't deny an experience. You can always, up until that point, say, "Well, maybe, maybe not, who knows." But once you've actually experienced it, then you can't deny it. And that's the culmination, you might say, the fulfilment of faith.

It's interesting in the Christian story, isn't it, where Peter denies Christ three times. Even though he knew in his heart that this was the great guru, he denies him—of course, with tremendous remorse. You can't go against what you personally know, even from fear.

One of the things that supports faith is good companionship. The Buddha is quite strong about that. Ānanda, who was his companion for the last twenty years of his life, once made a statement like, "Well, now I think I understand what you're on about." And the Buddha said, "Oh no, no, Ānanda, no. You've got a long way to go yet." And on another occasion Ānanda said, "I think that friendship, good friendship, being with good people, is half the spiritual life." The Buddha says, "Oh no, Ānanda, no, no, no. It's the whole of it. This is the entire spiritual life—good friendship and companionship, good comradeship. When a meditator has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is expected that he would develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path."

I think most of you who go to groups will know that to go to an evening group once a week is a real fillip. It gives you that little bit of energy, that group energy. And coming here or going to a meditation centre—it's not just the case of coming to practise, but to actually be with people. You go away imbued, as it were, with their confidence, with their energy.

Then there are things which really support that commitment, that faith. The Buddha says to be perfect in

virtue. Well, that's a bit heavy. I think for everybody here, at least to move towards it, to move towards virtue. And we won't do that unless we make the connection between virtue and liberation. You can't be liberated, you can't be fully awakened, without having been entirely purified. The one goes with the other. And the reason is simple: all the unwholesome, unskillful things that we do are the measure of our delusion. Once the delusion goes, then obviously all that bad stuff goes too. But it works the other way. If you work against your bad stuff, the stuff that you see is unwholesome, then you must be growing in wisdom too. The one moves towards the other.

In the Eightfold Path, there's right understanding and right attitude. So we can start with right understanding, but you can also start with right attitude. For instance, you might start by saying to yourself, "I want to grow in compassion in some way." Whatever life presents, make that an opportunity for compassion through generosity, through helping, and so forth. Now as you do that, unwittingly you're making that connection of interrelatedness between people. And that of course comes up as this business of being interdependent. So it doesn't matter which way you begin the process—the one will always affect the other.

Training according to the rules of training. So here, although he's talking to monks, this is also to do with our precepts. The precepts that we take, the training rules. They're translated as precepts, but the actual word means training rule. It's an actual training.

Engaging in talk concerning effacement. Not trying to put oneself first all the time or making big of oneself.

Favouring the heart's release. And here we can say that's to do with letting go of those attachments, letting go of those compulsive behaviours. And what the *vipassanā* is doing is showing us how to do that. So we don't just do *vipassanā* when we're sitting. Any time—you could be standing at the bus stop and you could feel this great desire to go into Costa Coffee, but you let it go. You just let it go. And you're observing the feeling, you're observing how strong it is.

Being energetic in abandoning what is unprofitable. That's discerning what's unprofitable and abandoning it. You're making that determination: I'm not going to go down that path. I'm not going to do that again. And although that can feel painful, remember that as soon as you stop doing something, you're withdrawing the energy from that conditioning. You're just withdrawing the energy from that conditioning.

So if somebody has a habit of smoking, the thing to do is to stop. And then, of course, you get the pain, you get the horror of it. But first of all, you have to stop. You have to say, "No, I'm not doing it." So if you see anything that you're doing, anywhere where you feel a compulsive behaviour—which is being imprisoned, isn't it? I mean, you become a prisoner of your desire. It's dragging you around, it's hooked you by the nose: "Come this way, come that way." It's dreadful.

And developing, of course, what is profitable. So there's always the other side. When we start with the five precepts, those are things that we don't do, we try not to get involved in, even at a subtle level. But then there's always the opposite of that. And this is expressed in right attitude as moving from hatred to love, from cruelty to compassion, and from selfishness to generosity. So there's also the positive side of our actions.

And interestingly enough, understanding impermanence. The Buddha seems to have centred on that one—impermanence. And you might say, "Well, why is that? Why doesn't he centre on suffering?" You know, the psychological suffering, the process of desire, because it's there in the Four Noble Truths: the cause of suffering is desire. So why doesn't he emphasise that so much? I mean, he obviously does, but it's this impermanence. And then there's the doctrine of *anattā*—not me, not mine. Why doesn't he go for that?

And the reason is that it's through impermanence that one can see the other two more clearly. So when you see that things are impermanent, you see that holding on to something is going to cause suffering. When you see that something is impermanent, how can it be substantial? How can it be me? Every time I point to, "Well, this is what I am," it's gone, it's changed, it's something else.

We say of people who are stuck in views that they're opinionated. But a definition of a self is that it's whole, entire, doesn't move, knows where it is, stuck. It's solid. But when you look at your phenomenal being—the sensations you get from your body, your feelings in your heart, the thoughts in your mind—they're constantly in this process of change. You can't point to something and say, "Well, I am happy." One minute you say, "I am happy." Next minute, "I'm depressed." Where's this "I"? Where's this "I" to be found?

If you say, "Well, I was happy"—well, that's of course dead. If you try and extend your "I" beyond the present moment, you're losing existence. "I will be happy"—that's a waste of time. I want to be happy now. So being aware of impermanence is a gateway into the other two.

He reinforces this in the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the discourse on the highest blessings: "Not to associate with fools, but to associate with the wise, to honour those worthy of honour." And then relationship with the teacher, this *kalyāṇamittā*, the good friend.

He has a lovely passage about how we can relate to a teacher. "Here one has faith in the teacher and visits him or her. When he visits, he pays respect. When he pays respect, he gives ear. One who gives ear hears the Dhamma and, having heard the Dhamma, memorises it, examines the meaning of the teachings. When the meaning is examined, it develops the intellectual acceptance of these teachings."

So now we're going back to this: how faith grows. "When there is an acceptance of teaching, zeal springs up." That's true, isn't it? When you have faith in something, there's an energy that comes to follow it through. As soon as you have confidence in the task, this energy comes through. Zeal. "And when zeal has

sprung up, then the will is applied. And when the will is applied, there's scrutiny." So this is the meditation now. "And the striving, resolutely striving, realises ultimate truth and sees it by penetrating it with intuitive intelligence."

So there's a whole process that happens once you have that faith. And it can come either through the actual practice itself or through a relationship with a teacher. In my own case, going through various teachers—all inspiring, all of them able to point me in the right direction. And if I were to ask myself, "Would I have progressed without these people helping me?" No, it's not possible. A teacher is actually central to the practice.

Not that one becomes attached to the teacher—"my guru." That wouldn't be really where the Buddha's at, because the teacher is one who points, the one who instructs, one who clarifies for the student. I know that in certain forms of Buddhism you do get that guru thing, but it's definitely not there in the Buddha himself. If I remember rightly, he's actually dying, and there's a monk looking at him in that very loving, attached way of "my teacher, my guru," and he sends him off to the forest. The reason is that that sort of attachment is again a barrier to investigating. It's a barrier actually to being able to criticise the teacher. You become fooled. I mean, we've heard stories of people who've been fooled by gurus.

So it's not that sort of thing. It's more to do with respect, openness, an ability to listen, to follow the practice, and to keep that sense of distance so that you can discriminate as to whether the teaching is actually doing you good. That's the point.

Now, there are, of course, dangers that undermine faith, and one of them we've already talked about—the distinction between faith and belief. There's a lovely discourse called the *Kālāma Sutta*. The Kālāmas were a people who were obviously very interested in the spiritual path—this whole village had become very interested. And they complain that one guru would pass through and say, "Well, whatever those gurus say, that's a load of rubbish, and this is the truth." And then the next guru would come along and say, "No, no, no, they're a load of rubbish and they're completely confused."

When the Buddha comes, he says to them not to believe anything. I'll take this from the actual discourse because the translation is slightly better: "Don't go by oral tradition." So in those days things were handed down by rote learning. So just because it's oral tradition, the lineage of teaching—this has been a long lineage—it still might not be true. I think it was Gandhi who said truth can be in a minority of one.

"Not by hearsay"—somebody's told you. "Or by a collection of scriptures." So this must have been added later because the Buddha was illiterate, which always comes as a shock to people, but then so was everybody else. There was no writing. The only people who had writing as such were the growing merchant classes. Even today in Hinduism, the Brahmins still learn it by rote. It's still very much part of their practice.

"Not by logical reasoning." Now, that might come as a surprise to a lot of people, but where's reason taken

us? Our own Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which put reason to the fore and did away with tradition. It had to be reasonable. And of course, out of that grew our whole scientific tradition and our technology. It's been a huge exploration and a wondrous couple of hundred years, really, if you think about what's been invented. And it produced the wonderful Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration of Human Rights. There's no mention of God in that—that's just human reason: how do we live peacefully together? What are our rights?

But it also produced communism and Nazism. So reason is only reasoned on a premise. You can reason anything once you take a premise. If your premise is human beings are not equal, off you go—you can write a fantastic book about that.

"Inferential reasoning"—that's when, for instance, I have a headache. I've had headaches, so when you say you have a headache, I'm inferring that you must have the same sort of pain that I have in my head. He says, "Not even that either. Don't believe it."

Then he goes on: "Reflection"—just on your own reflection. "Just because you've reasoned it, don't believe it." It's a bit heavy, isn't it? "Or by acceptance of the view after pondering it"—the same thing. "Or by the seeming competence of the speaker." Be careful of that. Silver tongues and all that. "Or because you think the ascetic is our teacher, the guru."

But then he says it's only when you know for yourself: "These things are wholesome, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise. These things, if undertaken and practised, lead to welfare and happiness." Then you should adopt them. And the opposite: if they lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them.

So it's a case of a combination of practice and reasoning. It's not just that you reasoned it. It's also your own personal experience. Take, for instance, people who suffer from things like anxiety or depression. What the teaching will say to them is: "You are the cause of your own depression." I mean, that's a turnaround. Most people think that

You know, it's their partner that's depressing them, or the job, or the country, the prime minister — everybody's depressing them. They're totally depressed. And then suddenly this Buddhist teacher comes along and says, no, you're making yourself depressed. Nobody can make you depressed. Nobody can cause you psychological pain.

So first a person might reject that: "absolute rubbish." And then they say, well look, why don't you just sit quietly with me now and just watch how the mind is working. And then you do the meditation and you realise, oh yeah, it's me — I'm making myself depressed. So it's that sort of exploration, not just believing it, but actually making it true to yourself.

So it's all these things, really. He says it's not just by information, not just by listening to a teacher. It's a combination of both the hearing, the understanding, personal reflection, personal practice, personal

experience. And then one comes to realise, oh yeah, this is true, this is true for me.

I mean, the Buddha knew when he was liberated. He knew when he'd experienced *Nibbāna*. It's not as though he came off and wondered, "what was that?" He knew that was the end of suffering. He knew he was liberated as soon as he did it. So that's not to confuse faith with belief anyway, that's all.

The other thing is, be careful not to be too critical. Because often it's all to do with what we expect from our practice. And it's a big — it can be a real undermining of doubt. People come to the practice with expectation. And when these expectations, when these hopes are not fulfilled, then the doubt begins. "It's not doing me any good." I mean, I've come across that many a time. And you have to be careful of that because in a sense what expectation is doing is it's producing a future which has maybe completely contrary to the actual manifestation of the path within you.

So just taking an instance where other people are criticising. So here's a lovely thing. It's called the Bhaddali Sutta. And this monk is always doing daft things or wrong things. And he's always being criticised. And the Buddha said, "This bhikkhu progresses by way of faith and love. Let him not lose the measure of faith and love, as he may if we take action against him by repeatedly admonishing him. Suppose a man only had one eye, then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives would guard that eye, thinking, 'Let him not lose his one eye.' So too, this bhikkhu progresses by measure of faith and love."

So that's in a sense of people with people, but even with ourselves, be careful not to overdo self-criticism. "I can't do this meditation, my mind's going all over the place, I can't do it." Don't believe your own mind — that's ridiculous. I don't believe in anybody else's, but our own minds are liars. Dreadful things. Wouldn't bother with it really.

Also what undermines the practice is unethical behaviour. It's very interesting that because when you start doing things which you know are wrong, you start losing self-respect. It's to do with the quality of shame, but it's self-respect, self-esteem. And this, as it were, poisons everything you do because it undermines your confidence in yourself. It can have quite an undermining effect on your life to do things which you feel are wrong, you know, which are not quite right.

And this business of expectation — those of you who received my newsletter and actually read it (I don't read newsletters, I'm not one to blame anybody else) — you'll see I had a little essay in there trying to discern between expectation, aspiration and hope.

What expectation does is it puts a completion date on things, it puts an ideal ahead of you and therefore you torture life to fit in with that ideal. I remember I met somebody who said they'd gone on a meditation retreat and he'd read the books and it was about achieving liberation, *Nibbāna*. So he went on a meditation course. It's, you know, like if you go on a course to get a certificate for woodwork, at the end you get your certificate. So he joined a week's course in meditation and he'd get *Nibbāna*. Years later. It's a

bit of an awakening, you see. It's not quite like that. So that's what expectation is.

Aspiration is something different. Aspiration is something that comes from the heart. It's not so solid. It's knowing where you want to go. It's a general direction. The Buddha talks about inclining to *Nibbāna*. Inclining. If you stand still and lean forward, you have to take a step. And it's an aspiration, it's a desire, it can be a very strong desire to aspire to become a Buddha, for instance. But there's no time limit on it, there's nothing put around that — it's just the heart's desire. And that's a great freedom and it's a great motivator.

Hope is often used in the sense of good wishes — "well I hope you're well," or "I hope you do this," or "I hope I get the job." But I like to use the word hope in its, if I want a better word, theological meaning, in the way that Christians use it. Hope is that inner knowledge that comes to you through your practice that there is an end to suffering. And that puts this underlying hope in your life, this underlying joy in your life that there is actually an end to suffering. You know, there is an end to suffering. And that becomes a bedrock for our lives.

If that becomes really strong in you, it's a bedrock. Because nothing — it doesn't matter what happens. If you end up in a Chinese prison as a political prisoner or something — underneath it there runs this knowledge that even this too will pass. That there is an actual end to suffering. Without that, there's — what is there? Despair.

So just making that little distinction there. But here's the Buddha, you see, in the Kīṭāgiri Sutta. He says, "I do not say that the attainment of profound knowledge comes straight away. Nevertheless, the attainment of profound knowledge comes by gradual training, a gradual doing, a gradual course. And how does the attainment of profound knowledge come by means of gradual training, gradual doing, gradual course?

"It is thus, monks: one who has faith draws near. Drawing near, they sit nearby. Sitting nearby, they lend an ear. Lending an ear, they hear the Dhamma, and having heard the Dhamma, they remember it. They test the meaning of things born in the mind, and while testing the meaning, the things are approved of. There being approval of, desire is born." Now this is the aspiration, not desire in the sensual sense. "And when aspiration" — I think I prefer that word — "aspiration is born, they make an effort, and having made an effort, they weigh it up. Having weighed it up, they strive, and being self-resolute, they realise for themselves the highest truth itself, penetrating by the means of wisdom they see."

It's a gradual process. And I'll be talking about this just a bit more tomorrow. But also that lack of faith in the teacher, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the training. And he also says being angry and displeased with one's companions in the holy life. I mean, that's happened. I know people who become very displeased with their companions and shot off somewhere.

But I want to tell you though that this business of expectation is a real killer. When I first started we used to do these long retreats and I met this man who became a friend and it was the way the Mahasi system

teaches it — I don't teach it like that at all, but it gives you goals to go for. And this particular friend of mine really got involved in trying to achieve these goals.

And I was there — looking back now, I was there when he gave up the practice. It was a kernel moment in his life. I mean, I didn't realise how kernel it was, of course. But he dropped, like — he was one of these people that did six-month retreats and then six months of sex, drugs and rock and roll. And although he said — I mean, if somebody could meditate, this man could. But because he hadn't achieved it, he lost the faith, he lost confidence, lost confidence in himself. "Couldn't do it, not this lifetime," that sort of argument. And he dropped. And I lost contact.

Ten years later, he turns up and we meet. And that year, he told me — this is a while back when money was, you know, money — he'd just spent £8,000 on crack. So it's quite a danger to fall into the error of expectation. Expect nothing.

So I think that just about brings us to the end of our little discussion of faith. Not another nice story to end with. An admonishment. An exaltation. Don't expect anything.

So faith is a core, basic attitude within us which we can develop through our practice. And if you feel your confidence declining, if you feel your confidence going, try to see that something is happening there which is undermining, try to see what is actually undermining your confidence. Even not keeping resolutions can undermine your confidence. So often people will say, beginners come to meditation and they make this big determination that they're going to sit for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening, and it lasts till Monday. And then they can't do it. They can't do it. So it's really just being aware of how easily we can undermine ourselves.

And in states of doubt — they'll always come up until we've achieved that deep insight into things — not to be fooled by doubt. Often it's an honest doubt which the Buddha would want, a state of confusion, and just to stay in that and just to feel how uncomfortable it is. We don't like to be in a place of not knowing — very uncomfortable, a lot of fear and anxiety in there.

So this is a real teaching because you know, in some sense we don't know. There are lots of things we don't know. You don't know whether you'll be here tomorrow. You might be up there or down there. Who knows? You don't know, do you? You just don't know. You don't know what's going to happen. And it's living in that "don't know" place which is very instructive and just to stay there.

Often we can't make a decision until more information comes in, until we have more experience, until there's a clarification. Not to push the process because we don't like staying in that position of not knowing.

And when it comes to the growth of faith, like taking refuges tomorrow, to see it as a — for some of you who haven't done it — to see it just as a trial. How does it feel when I commit myself to a path for one month, one year. One year is better, right? One month goes too quick. How does it feel? At the end of that

year, what's gone? Has some indecision gone? Has some clarity come?

And remember, it's in the commitment that one can really begin to investigate. Because remember, so long as the commitment isn't there, there's always that pulling off, there's always that shying away.

So hopefully, these words of mine have been of some assistance. May you be liberated in this very lifetime, sooner rather than later.

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