Dependent Origination and How All Other Important Teachings Are Included

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 49:49

I thought I'd start with a quote from a nun, Meichi Kyao. She's a Thai nun who died in 1991 and was recognized as a fully awakened being, an Arahant. Her teacher was Ajahn Mahabua.

She started off by doing a lot of concentration meditation. When she went to work with Ajahn Mahabua, she wouldn't take his instructions because he was trying to get her to do vipassana. So he kicked her out. That somewhat woke her up, and having been a little humiliated, she came back and fully realized the path. So she was on a learning curve.

This is what she says:

"Mind, body and essence are all distinct and separate realities. Absolutely everything is known. Earth, water, fire and wind, body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. Sound, sight, smells, taste, touches and emotions. Anger, greed, and delusion, all are known. I know them all as they exist in their own natural states. But no matter how much I'm exposed to them, I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart. They arise and cease, they're forever changing. But the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It stays forever unborn and undying. This is the end of all suffering."

The reason I quoted that, you'll see from the way I talk about dependent origination.

Once the Buddha was liberated, there are all sorts of stories as to what teaching came to mind, how he worked it out. The first watch of the night, he went through dependent origination one way, and the second watch he came the other way, and on the third watch he went both ways, and then he did that with the Four Noble Truths and so on.

The interesting thing is that once he had had this cataclysmic insight into human nature, it wasn't as though he knew everything. It had to be explained. He had to go through and try to make sense of what he'd actually seen. The experience of nibbana, if you want to look at it from the point of view of self—the collapse of self, which is the underlying delusion—of course begs the question: well, how did I get there? And that's where dependent origination comes in.

Dependent origination means that everything is dependent on something else for it to arise. Nothing arises of its own accord. It's sometimes called the wheel, but that's taken from the Tibetan tradition because they made a nice little picture out of it.

In the early scriptures, when the Buddha is talking, you can see that the discourse, the teaching, is not formulated. Often he just talks about six links. Sometimes it's down to even three. Later on, as he's having to go around and teach—and remember in those days there were no mobile phones, you couldn't record anything—he was going to have to say the same thing every time somebody asked him. Everywhere he went, they'd ask him the same question: how do you get liberated? So as time goes on, he formulates and comes up with these enormous lists. There actually are about three hundred and odd lists, but we're only concerned with the main ones in this particular teaching of dependent origination. If you want to know all the lists, there's a whole collection of them in what's called the Numerical Sayings, all put together according to ones, twos, threes, and it goes all the way up to eleven.

The beginning of dependent origination is this word avijja, which is often translated as ignorance. But that gives it a feeling that you should have known, that you shouldn't have been such an idiot, that you should have known what was going to happen. Actually, the word avijja very simply means not knowing—just don't know. It's from this not knowing that we land in a situation and presume, quite understandably, that this is what we are. There we are, we're born, and there's that slow awakening through our babyhood and into childhood.

And what do you experience? You only experience this body, this mind, this relationship with the world. So it's quite understandable that you come to a certain age and you say, "Well, this is me. This is me," you see.

Now, because of that, we of course have a wrong relationship immediately with the world. So what is that relationship? Well, I just want to make myself happy. That's pretty straightforward. I just want to be happy. And I find that if I collect a lot of things, I get more and more happy. I've got lots of money, lots of friends, a good job, two cars, and all that sort of stuff. I feel much more happy. Yes, that sort of accumulation. And sometimes I might be happy reading and listening to music and art and nature and all that sort of stuff. But all of it is geared upon making me happy, because that's all I want to be. I just want to be happy, for heaven's sake.

Now, of course, once you've accumulated, there's the danger that you might lose it. Hence, protectiveness. Who are you protecting against? Well, everybody else. So you have to create this idea of pushing things away. And there's your aversion. And if, of course, what you are dealing with is bigger than you, bigger than me, well, you've got to run for it. So there you have your basic tripod, you might say, of how we fundamentally react to the world because we've mistaken it to be ourselves: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear.

And from there on, of course, we do things. Sometimes we do things for other reasons, like out of love, compassion, joy—but even that is slightly tainted. You can know that when you do somebody a good turn and they don't say thank you. Well, that really hurts, doesn't it? I mean, you need to be appreciated. So there's always that little bit of conceit in there somewhere, right?

And so these three things lead us into actions—actions through thought, where we create stories, through what we say, and of course what we do. And then, because they come from an unwholesome base, we have that secondary layer of misery: guilt, shame, remorse, and so on. So you can see we've entered into a relationship with the world which is causing us to have developed habits that are unwholesome.

And that's what happens in the dependent origination. Out of this ignorance, we create the delusion—the delusion of me being this human being, a self. And because of that, I have these habits. They're known in the Pali as volitional conditionings. Basically, they're just your habits.

Now, those run underneath everything we're doing. From the moment you wake up to the moment you fall asleep, they're running there as potential. This potential of delusion and the potential of unwholesome habits. And they run over everything.

Now, because of that—so *avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārā paccayā viññāṇa*—it's because of these arising of these habits, provoked, shall we say, by stimulus from the outside, by other people, even by the habits themselves inside. Like you wake up in the morning and you feel really excited about something. So that initial arising has to manifest. And what it manifests on is this screen, just like this screen that I'm looking at now with you all sitting there. It's a screen which is sensitive to information that comes upon it. And it's always coming from the sense bases, one of which is the mind itself.

So there you have your beginning of every moment. You have that consciousness which is receiving information. Now, this is not the same as awareness. It's not the same as awareness. This is consciousness. This is what you're aware of.

Out of that consciousness, you become aware of—and this is the first deconstruction of the Buddha—the body and mind. And to make that very clear to ourselves, for those of you who know, that's actually the first insights. Those are the first insights: to know that we are a compound of physicality and mentality, and that the one is always reacting off the other.

And in our meditation, that's why I keep stressing in the morning to make that very clear to ourselves. Even during the day, to make that very clear: that if I'm going to open a door and I'm standing there, there's an intention—that's mentality—intention, intention. And then I empower the intention and the hand moves.

So the hand is, of course, physicality. When I touch the door handle, what I'm getting are sensations from the physical nature. But it's the mind that actually experiences it as either cold or warm, and so on and so forth. All you're getting from your fingertips or your hand are just physical sensations. And it's beginning to undo these things, to undo that process, which is slowly deconstructing this idea that I am an integer, that I am a one, that I am whole and entire.

Now, because of this body and mind, nāma rūpa paccayā salāyatana. So the salāyatana are your six senses, dependent on the body and mind. This is important because a consciousness is dependent on one

of these six senses. You can't have a consciousness that mixes them both. Now it feels that way—you know, like you're at home watching television, having a coffee and biscuit or something, and it seems all one. You're watching, you're hearing, you're tasting, and it's all heavenly. But actually, in Buddhist psychology, these are all very separate consciousnesses, just running one after the other. A bit like the old film, really, where you get twenty-six frames per second or something, and that gives you the illusion of continuity.

So those are your six sense bases, and the sixth, of course, is the mind. Actually, it's all mind because the contact—which is the next point—because of these six senses, we have contact. The contact is the point where the sense base touches upon the object. So the physical base of touch is straightforward. If my hands touch each other, that point of contact is my primary percept. Now, that's still coming into the mind.

At the ear, for instance, the primary percept that comes in, the primary information, is just pressure. It's just pressure. You can actually experience that, and it's only when it's taken into the mind that it creates an actual sound. It's the same with seeing. There's a book by an American teacher—I can't remember her name now—and I think it's called something like *Insight*. She was a Mahasi practitioner. Actually, she died quite young from brain cancer, for heaven's sake. But her insight was how what she was seeing just broke up into millions of pixels. And when you think about it, that's exactly what's there on the retina. All you've got are these little endings of nerves which are sensitive to light, and from that she saw how that information is taken into the mind and created into an image.

So that's the point of contact. It's very, very basic. And that's what I'm really trying to drive you towards when I say at breakfast, drive your attention into your tongue. Get right down to tasting before you give it a name, before you have any idea of what it is that you're actually tasting. That's the point of contact.

Now, at the next level, when it's finally produced a feeling of some sort, a sensation of some sort, then you have that judicious moment where you realize that something is either painful or pleasurable. Everything that we experience has to be on that line. It's either very, very pleasurable, moving towards neutral, or very, very painful. That's it. Everything we experience, you'll be able to put somewhere on that line. And that's the duality that we live in.

You can't overcome that. Whatever we perceive, whatever we feel, whatever we experience as pleasant will remain so. You can't get rid of that experience. You can't wash it out. And the same, of course, is true with something that's unpleasant—unpleasant feelings, unpleasant emotions, unpleasant thoughts that come to the mind.

So that's the point of vedanā, feeling. And it's at this point that this underlying business begins to manifest. Remember, underlying we've got this ignorance, this not-knowing, this delusion, and all these little habits that we have. And so in comes this contact. We're walking down the street and we see something—well, not these days; we don't go shopping anymore. You're on the screen and it comes up with this thing that you're looking for, a new whatever, a new mobile, and it shoots up on the screen. Immediately you get this

little movement from a habit, which is not only to do with all the stuff that you know about mobiles; it's also to do with "Oh, I'd like that." So there's your taṇhā, there's your desire.

And remember, this desire is coming out of that fundamental delusion of seeking happiness in the sensual world. And what happens, of course, is that happiness we have becomes dependent on what it is that we own. There's your problem.

Take away what it is that you own and misery arises, a sense of loss. It can be very little, of course, but it can also be quite great. And when you extend this to relationship with people, it can be awfully full of grief.

So that business of tanha is a way of relating to something whereby whatever mental state we are enjoying or not enjoying—aversion, fear, all those sorts of things—is dependent on something over which I don't actually have control. It's not a brilliant situation to get ourselves into, but that's basically about ninety percent of our lives.

I was saying this morning that there's this danger with climate change that there won't be any more tea. Well, you can imagine—absolute disaster. Takes away the will to live. That sort of dependency on tea, coffee, drinks, biscuits and all that, they're only very minor. But when you don't get it, you realize how much of your present happiness, the bit that was feeling bored and using it to escape from boredom or escape from a bit of depression, how you've lifted yourself out by attaching to something which is going to create a pleasant mental state.

So this is tanha. And of course, the Buddha points to this as the crucial point. It's the point of escape from this delusion—to catch those desires and allow them to burn out. That eventually undermines the habit. This is the interesting thing that we'll come back to with Mae Chee Kaew. It doesn't actually destroy them, but it destroys their power over us. I'll come back to that in a minute.

Once we understand that, we've got to be absolutely aware, we've got to be attentive to the arising of desires. And it's very difficult unless we're in a calm state, unless we're actually not rushing, we're not caught up in something. If we can keep bringing ourselves back to a sort of stillness every so often throughout the day, we become much more aware of these little pushes. And it's not about getting all guilty and awful if you actually give in and find yourself eating a whole packet of biscuits. It's just a case of recognizing that's what you've done. Then you make the decision that next time this comes up, you have to have some sort of strategy. For instance: I won't buy any more biscuits.

If we can become aware of the strength of these desires and how to allow them to exhaust themselves, we've actually found a way out of suffering. I'm using suffering in that big sense of everything that's uncomfortable, from the slightest discomfort to something quite horrible.

Now the next point is also where the fundamental delusion comes in, and that's the point of identity. The first thing that we're aware of is liking. Like the other day, we were walking down on the Shropshire Hills

and went into Church Stretton, and the chippy was open. I hadn't had chips for so long, you see. And when we smelled those chips, there was no way we could drag ourselves out of the shop.

First comes the smell of chips. And then with it comes this memory of the delight—with tomato sauce and brown sauce and for some people, mayonnaise. I can't understand it, frankly. But there we are. So we stopped. And before we knew it, we were in there buying chips.

What's happened there is that the information came in, there was a translation of it into something I could recognize—chips—and with it arose this feeling, this lovely feeling that I've engendered in the past over chips. And with it comes desire: more.

Now, nothing's going to happen unless I identify with it. Chips, like, want, I. That "I" has to come in. If it doesn't, I'm just left with an unrequited desire, left there with the feeling of wanting, and nothing's going to happen. The first thing is I've got to say, "I want the chips." That "I" has to come in. And as soon as I say "I," the next point happens almost automatically. It's very difficult to stop it once you've said, "I want those chips." You're in there. The next point is the empowerment, which is the will.

So another point of escape from suffering is that point of "I." It's extremely difficult to catch. You've got to be really on your toes to catch that. The next part is almost unstoppable because you've given your assent—just like the Queen, you've given your assent, and that's the end of it.

The word for that is sometimes translated as grasping, but it's the point where you identify with the desire you have. Now remember, this is all negative. We're not here looking at the positive side, driven by love, compassion, sympathetic joy. But even there, as I say, there will be some little smidgen of conceit. How wonderful I am. All that sort of stuff.

After identity, there comes the empowerment. In the dependent origination, it's called bhava. Bhava means becoming. So the self is now recreating itself.

So the self is that idea of this being me – this is my pleasure, these are my chips, and so on. There's a whole area of possession and identity around it.

I was once in India, and somebody bought me a bag of nuts on the street. It was out on the edge of town, if I remember rightly – the bus station or something. And I had this bag of peanuts. I swear there was this bang on my head, and when I looked, they had gone. It was absolutely magic. It was a monkey. It had jumped on my head and stolen my peanuts. Well, you can imagine how I felt. And the bus was off, so I lost out on these peanuts, for heaven's sake.

So that's the point of identity, and then there's the bhava, which is the empowerment. There's the will there. There's a recreation of the self as you go through the action of eating chips. The self is constantly being recreated as that process recreates itself. And of course, there's karma, there's action. So there's will, there's action, and there's the self involved at that crucial moment.

From then on, of course, the action is completed. You begin the action. As soon as the will is empowered, you go through the action and you complete the action. And that's it. Now if it's done from an unwholesome point of view, it's fed back down to these two underlying connections. The ignorance, the not knowing, has now been reinforced – this is me. And the habit of, well, in this case, eating chips, of seeking happiness in chips. So that's the whole wheel completed.

We've got little branches that come off that, which tell us something about the way the Buddha cross-sections a human being. Here we see the person in action. But when we look at the dependent origination again, you can see that there are points where the teaching expands what it is that he's explaining.

At contact, for instance – the first deconstruction is the body and mind. The next one is that contact, where we're actually down in the body, down at that physicality. We can discern that the sensations coming in are usually of four types: the sense of pressure, the earth element; the sense of lightness; the sense of fluidity, of cohesiveness, that's the element of water, the movement there; and of course the temperature, the fire element, warmth or cool.

When you're down right there at the feeling base – through your hands, your feet, your body – that is a combination of those elements creating your initial information. And the mind does the rest. The mind takes it in at the sense door of the mind where it's connecting and creates what we experience.

When it comes to other things like the ear, it's actually just pressure. That's all you're getting from the ear, just pressure from airwaves. The eye is normally expressed as heat, some form of heat or warmth. The basic animal senses of smelling and tasting are, of course, a bit more difficult to explain in that way. But there will be this basic contact.

When it comes to feeling, that again is split into pleasant feeling, unpleasant feelings, and neutral feelings. But they're also physical neutral feelings – like now, for instance, if you put your attention on your knees, you probably don't feel very much, very neutral. And then there are emotional feelings, mental feelings – both what is pleasant and unpleasant, and then just that place in the middle where there isn't that much emotional stuff going on. So that's your next point of experience, the next point of investigation: feeling.

And then the next one is of course this business of desire, this taṇhā. It's a special type of desire, remember. It's a desire based on that delusion of seeking happiness in the sensual world. That desire – it's a very difficult word to translate. It includes wanting and not wanting. The wanting is what we would call desire. The not wanting is aversion and fear. That's what it is. Aversion and fear are our suppressive measures. That's how we keep things out of consciousness. And we then place the attention on something which is delightful, so that what we often take pleasure in is actually also an escape from what we don't want to feel.

That's why pleasure has such a hold on us. That's why we get glued onto videos and such things. Anything

but to actually go into ourselves and feel these very unpleasant mental states. But of course, that is very much part of our practice. I would say it's about 99.9% of our practice—this process of purifying the heart.

So that's also important to remember: in your practice, you're not trying to be happy. That's a big mistake. You're not trying to make your life more comfortable. You're not trying to escape suffering. You're actually trying to sit in the bonfire. And this is the bonfire that we've created for ourselves.

That's what happens at the point of feeling. When we're there with these different types of feelings—whether they're pleasant and we can see ourselves drawn to them, see that desire pulling toward them—we try to develop them. And how do they develop? They develop through the mind. They develop through our imagination while sitting. In ordinary daily life, we'll actually do something that creates that happiness. But when we're sitting still, this energy has nowhere to go, so it begins to create stuff in the mind. Whether it creates stuff in the mind or manifests in ordinary daily life, remember: if it's unwholesome, we're developing it.

So the only way that these unwholesome states can be exhausted is through direct feeling of them and allowing them to manifest in consciousness. We know from psychotherapy that if you suppress material, it's working there in the background somewhere. So when you're sitting and perhaps some sadness comes up or some anger or whatever, you have to deal with that. And you have to be very careful not to let the mind wander on it. Because as soon as it wanders, it's developing it. If you want to make yourself more depressed, just keep having depressing thoughts. Just keep telling yourself how depressed you are. And then: "I'm depressed, may everybody else be depressed." It becomes a sort of wish that everybody else is in the same boat.

So a lot of our practice is to be able to sit still with that. And as you know from last night's talk, the Buddha splits these into five different categories. One of our major skills to learn in meditation is how not to be carried away and how to keep coming back to the body. If we can really drive home to ourselves that every time we indulge anything unwholesome we're actually making it worse, then I think that will help us to come off it more quickly.

That's the abyss of taṇhā. Now upādāna, which is the sense of self, begins to manifest as conceit. And that's always comparison. I'm better than somebody or I'm worse than somebody. When I'm better than somebody, I feel great. When I'm worse than somebody, I don't feel so good at all. And the other one is "I'm equal to." You might think, "Oh well, that's all right. That's humble—I'm equal to." But actually, when you look at whom you're equal to, they happen to be either superior or inferior to another group. It's just a transferred sense of conceit.

And conceit is the last thing to go. As we work back into ourselves, as we begin to purify the heart, undo a lot of the unwholesome habits, undo a lot of the misconceptions that we have, the last thing to go is that sense of self and with it the conceit. It's the last little bit that hooks us into this life, into the wrong life, into the life of saṃsāra—this constantly trying to find happiness in the world and constantly failing to be fully

satisfied one way or the other.

So that's the point of the self coming in. Now, what do we mean by this self? Self is the sense of "my" being there. One moment that we can really experience a physical self is when you hurt yourself badly. When somebody stands on your toe on the bus or the train, or you catch your finger in the door, or you bite your tongue—that's a brilliant one, biting your tongue. In that singular moment, you *are* your toe, you *are* your finger, you *are* your tongue. And then you bounce out of it and become the observer, become the knower of this pain. That's when the anger comes up. You start beating the door or the person who just stood on your toe. You've now jumped out of being the physical body into being an emotion. Then later on you think about it, you're sitting in a chair mumbling about this person who dared to stand on your toe, and it goes on and on. You become the whole thinking process, which is being excited from this emotional base.

That's what we mean by a self—as an absorption. We can be a physical self, we can be an emotional self, we can be an imaginative or intellectual self. But when we're in that state of the observer, we've pulled out of those identities.

We've become the observer, which is separate from what we are experiencing. The observer, the knower, the feeler, the experiencer. That's a different sense of self, and it's not engaged. It's standing apart from. But it's still a sense of self. The awareness still is sensing itself as a self. And that's, of course, a mirror image. It's aware of itself. Where is it aware of itself? It's aware of itself on that screen of consciousness.

When we're watching these things—unwittingly, whether we know it or not—we're actually running through the middle part of that dependent origination. We're actually teaching ourselves, without realizing it, that there's a place we can be which is untouchable. Everything's an object. It can't touch me.

And that sense of self as the awareness, as the knower, as the feeler, is of course the last thing that has to drop away. You can't make that drop away. You can't tell it to go away. The more you try and get rid of it, the more you create a self that's trying to get rid of it. So it's an ever-ending circle.

But you might find, in a very quiet moment, when the body's very still, the heart's very calm, and you are very clearly this observer, the feeler, the knower inside you—you might just have enough space, enough stillness to, as it were, glance back into that awareness. It's as though the awareness is becoming aware of itself. It's as though you're looking into the mirror and you're catching something about the awareness. And the question is: what's in there? What's it made of?

Just that little glance will help you to perceive that there's nothing there. The awareness itself is empty. Empty of what? Empty of everything it experiences. That's what the word emptiness is referring to. When the Buddha said it's *suññā*, it's empty of everything that the psychophysical organism produces.

And it has a sense base. The sense base is that field, that screen of consciousness. And this is mirrored in the senses. The senses themselves don't have the object of themselves. So, for instance, if your tongue had an innate taste of curry, it would be very difficult to experience the wonder of vanilla ice cream. It's

because the tongue is empty of taste that it can taste all the other tastes. It's the same with the eye. Because there's no light in the eye and the retina, it can experience light. And the same with hearing—unless, like me, you've got tinnitus. Then you've got interference coming from who knows where.

So there's that point of seeing things, and then there's the point of *bhava*, the point of becoming. In our meditation, we want to stay very close to what's actually being offered so that we don't fall into the habit of identifying and thereby creating something new out of what we're experiencing, whether it's pleasure or not pleasure. Because the process of vipassana is the discovery of something in us which does not belong to that whole process.

Now, if I go back to this wonderful quote—and, you know, I have to say this, and it's probably something that they would call heretical—but this for me is a clearer statement than all the statements the Buddha made. She says: "Body, mind, and essence are all distinct and separate realities."

Here we're beginning to see that the body, physicality, is one thing; mentality is another. And then she talks about this essence. Remember this is a translation from Thai, but I'm pretty sure it's fairly close. Essence. Something that has its own existence and essence.

They are separate realities—one is mundane, conventional, and one is supramundane. Absolutely everything is known. So here you have your four—come on, come on—four basic qualities: earth, water, fire, and wind. *Mahābhūta*, the four great elements. Then you have your five *khandhas*, your five heaps: the body, physical feelings, sensations. Now, they've translated the next one as memory, but in a sense that's right—it's all your concepts. Your concepts hold your experience. Concepts, percepts, but essentially it's your memory, intellectual memory. Now it also translates *saṅkhāra* as thought, but it ought to be habits. And consciousness. And then the six sense bases: sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches, and here it says emotions, but it's actually everything that the mind experiences—both the imagination, the thought patterns, and the emotions.

Now here's the thing: she also sees traces of anger, greed, and delusion—those three movements of self at the edge of creation, you might say, of thinking that here we will find real happiness. Those little traces still in the mind of wanting and not wanting. There's an actual word for them: *vāsanā*, leftover traces.

For instance, there was a case in the scriptures of someone who was a Brahmin and became fully liberated. He was talking to the other monks as if they were of a lower caste, and they complained, because in the order you're not supposed to do that—everybody has equal status. They asked the Buddha how this man could do this and still be fully liberated. The Buddha said, "Well, it's just a trace. It's just an old habit which has left a trace. But he means no harm." That's the point.

"All are known. I know them all as they exist"—in other words, as they arise—"in their own natural states, just as they are." I'm not playing around with them anymore. They're just arising and passing away. "But no matter how much I'm exposed to them, I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power

over my heart." This is, of course, heart meaning the basic quality of awareness, affectionate awareness. "They arise and cease, they're forever changing. But the presence"—see, that's another word for awareness—"the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of suffering."

You can see that the way she explains how she experiences life includes virtually all the Buddha's teachings. I think it's fantastic. It's on the window ledge as you come in to the meditation room.

So just to conclude, our understanding is to actually see where the escape is. The escape lies at the psychological level, when desire arises. That's the only point of choice that we have. Now when I say choice, it's not entirely a free choice, because if you make the wrong choice, you move into a hell realm, and if you make the right choice, you move into a heavenly realm. So it's not much of a choice really. When a desire comes up and you can see it as unwholesome, you've got to let it go. And if a desire comes up that you see as wholesome, then, if it's the right thing to do, you empower it. That's the point where you have a choice. After that, you're committed and you've created an action. You've developed a habit, and that's the end of that. And there are consequences, of course—that's what we mean by *kamma*.

The deeper level is to see impermanence, that everything is changing. This begins to undermine the sense of self, undermine the sense of solidity, undermine the sense of continuity. To see everything as arising and passing away. And then underneath that, of course, is this sense of self. That's quite difficult to get to. It comes when the awareness, even if only for a moment, can stand outside the five *khandhas* and get that objective view, that objective grasp of things. This begins to undermine the sense of self.

When we have a deep enough experience of any of these three characteristics of existence, that, in a sense, changes our relationship to the world. And that's what we call someone who is a stream entrant—somebody who now can't go back.

into a full delusive state.

And finally, just to express what that means: at the age of seven, most of us have this awakening. There's an awakening to morality. We begin to understand what's right and what's wrong. This is the Garden of Eden and that apple. And the magical world disappears. Father Christmas simply can't come down the chimney anymore.

Now, once you've made that leap, that's it. You can't go back. You can't be a three-year-old again. Not unless you die and start again, as it were.

So that's the same with these insights. The more insights we have—and it can be an accumulation of insights—there comes a point where you can't fall backwards. It's got a stamp on it.

So there we are. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion, and that you will, by your continuous unstinting effort, liberate yourselves from all

suffering—sooner rather than later.

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