NOTABLE DHAMMA TEACHERS

Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma

Dhamma talks in the Mahāsi vipassanā tradition (Satipañña)

Bhante Bodhidhamma

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CHAPTER 1

Why Meditate?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 39 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the perennial question of why we meditate, drawing on the Buddha's own spiritual journey to illuminate the true purpose of meditation practice. He explores how the Buddha moved beyond jhāna (absorption) meditations and self-mortification to discover vipassanā—the direct observation of reality as it unfolds moment by moment.*
>
> *Bhante explains how our conceptual mind creates a distorted view of reality through three fundamental misperceptions: continuity (seeing things as permanent when they are constantly changing), identification (believing we are our thoughts, emotions, and body), and the pursuit of happiness through manipulation of external conditions. He demonstrates how meditation develops Right Awareness (sammā sati) by establishing moment-to-moment presence, allowing us to observe phenomena without becoming entangled in wanting and not-wanting.*
>
> *The talk emphasizes developing an 'observation post'—a quality of consciousness that can witness thoughts, emotions, and sensations without identification. This shift from 'I am angry' to 'there is anger' creates the space necessary for insight into the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). Practical guidance is offered on how to approach meditation without expectations, focusing simply on developing meditative skills and present-moment awareness.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I thought I'd try and answer this perennial question as to why we meditate. I think one of the mistakes we make is to come to meditation with some sort of expectation. That expectation is a projection of what we want from the meditation, whatever it might be. It might be some sort of psychological relief. We want to cure our relationships so that everybody stops hating us. It might be to become enlightened, have some sort of deep spiritual experience. But if you come with that sort of expectation, it's getting in the way of this pure intelligence that we're trying to develop.

So the best attitude when you come to meditate is just for the purpose of developing your skills of meditation. That's enough. Developing the skills of meditation. And to do that, you've got to be very clear as to what the point of it is. The point is to establish this moment-to-moment mindfulness.

If we look at the history of the Buddha himself, he starts off by practising what we now call *jhāna* meditations or absorption meditations. And the purpose of that is to develop mental states within us through the process of certain techniques such as a mantra. You keep repeating something beautiful in your mind, "may all beings be happy." And it fills the heart with a certain sensation, a certain feeling, and you keep doing that until you become absorbed in it. It's like watching a good film. You just watch a good film, you get lost in it, and then when the film's ended, that's the end of that.

So it's the same with these techniques to do with absorption or developing mental states. They're just to do with manipulating the mind so that some inner environment is created and it becomes so absorbing that you lose contact with the world. You just become that. So this was great as long as he remained in it, but when he came out of it the old sufferings would arise—depression, anxiety and stuff like that. He didn't find that satisfactory, because remember that what had awoken him to seeking were these two major insights.

First of all, the fact that all life seems to end with sickness, old age and death at some point. And that he couldn't find anything in the world as a young man which was going to give him a sense of permanent contentment—any sensual pleasure, not even relationships. A sort of weariness grew with it. These two things set him out on this task of trying to discover if there was something which was more permanent.

In that age, the real fear was continuing rebirth, continuing reincarnation, no way out of it. That was the underlying fear of that particular age—that all you could do was just keep being reborn, being reborn, and depending on what you did, you might be reborn as a dog, or you might be reborn as a king, but you just kept this. There was no way out of it. So he's looking within the concept of the age to try and find something which didn't belong to any of that, whether there was such a thing. Already there were some inklings with other teachings that became known as the Upanishads, that there was something which didn't belong to the phenomenal world, beginning to be called *Atta*, the Self. And the whole concept of it being with some greater self, Brahma, was also being developed at the same time. So he tried all that and came up with this negative position that it wasn't much good.

The other process was to go into self-mortification. And the understanding there was that the problem lay in the body. So if you think about it, it's the body, isn't it, which gives us most suffering. The body itself, with its appetites and its sicknesses and all diseases. And even when you go into feelings, even when you go into emotions, they're felt in the body. So if you could somehow starve the body, or take the body to an excess where, in a sense, you lost contact with the body so that there was no suffering there. So the idea was to mortify the body. The most common way was to starve it. And those of you who've done a long fast, like a ten-day fast, know that after about three days when the body feels awful, it actually feels good, it feels all right. And the body feels light, and it seems to be okay. Except, of course, the body's eating itself. It won't last very long.

So he's practising these things and he takes it as usual to the limit. And he's got these companions. And something strikes him at some point where he realises it's a waste of time. He's not getting anywhere with it. And he's sitting by a roadside, feeling pretty glum, and a woman comes along with a bowl of rice that she's going to offer to perhaps a shrine or something. So she offers it to him, this bowl of rice pudding. And he tastes this rice pudding, he eats this rice pudding, he feels good for it. His body is lifted and his mind is lifted, he feels good. It's not that you need to eat rice pudding to become enlightened—that's not absolutely necessary.

Then he remembers this thing in childhood. This is really kernel stuff. He remembers a childhood event. He's watching his father doing a planting ceremony. And it's the state of that consciousness which he remembers as being radically different from all those things that he's practised with the absorption states, and from the stuff that he's been experiencing through the self-mortification. There's something different about it. And it inspires him, so much so that he thinks that this can only be the way. He can't see anything else but that particular state that he'd been in then as a child. So he meditates with that, with that state. And within about six hours, he makes his break, which is now called enlightenment.

So now, what is this state? Because then the whole of his life is about teaching people how to arrive at this state, this level of consciousness. If you go back to your childhood, or if you watch a child, you'll see that when a child, especially around pre-language, or pre-conceptual language anyway—that's like three to seven, that sort of age, even a bit beyond that—you'll see that when they see something, they lock on it, don't they? Become totally absorbed in it. And you see the jaw drop. And they're looking at it. And it's only after they've absorbed this object, a beetle, that they turn around and say, "What is

that?" And when dad says, "It's a beetle," that's it. They never see a beetle again. From then on, what they see is what they imagine or conceive a beetle is. They've lost that initial interest in it, that initial pure knowing, that initial investigative intelligence.

So what is that that we have as a child which then we lose through the conceptual mind? People blame it on education, but it's not education at all. It's a natural progress into language, and then we believe that language is more real than the actual experience we're having. We actually believe that language, words, are things. If I say "car," I believe that's a thing, a car. Don't I? I do. But actually, all it is is an idea in my head —"car." It has no existence. If you said to me, "Describe a car," I can describe a car to you, but it won't exist. It'll be in my head. And it'll never measure up to a real car out there, because the description will be different. It's made up in my head.

If you take me to a car and ask me what it is, then of course I'll label it and say that's a car. But because I have a picture of a car, I might never look at that car with that open-mindedness. It'll have to fit into my idea of what a car is. And that way, I don't see the car as car. What I see of the car is what fits into my idea of a car.

So now we're constantly doing that. Whenever you look at something, you'll see that your perception is actually distorting what you're looking at. And it's only when you look twice do you see things there that you hadn't seen. So we're always looking at the world through this glass, this coloured glass of a concept. And then that glass, or that distorted glass, is coloured by our emotional relationship to the world.

So whenever I see something, I always split it into all those things I like and all the things I don't like. So I live in this world where I have everything I like and everything I don't like. And as soon as I do that, I have this response to it of wanting what I like, not wanting what I don't like. And that's what Buddhism means by living in a dual world. And all those things I don't like, I don't look at properly. And those things I do like, I gobble up. So I'm always playing that game in the world.

And the game is being empowered by some deep misunderstanding or deep commitment that I can find happiness in the world if I can get it straight. If I get the right partner, the right job, the right house, I'll be happy. And so I'm constantly manipulating the world like that. Just watch yourself watching TV sometimes. You'll see. If you catch yourself, you're always shifting. As soon as the body feels slightly uncomfortable... We're never actually facing the world as it is. We're always trying to do something to shift it, to move it, to make it fit in to what I want.

So here's the Buddha, and he's found this level of consciousness. And he discovers a new relationship with the world. And then he goes out and he tries to teach it. So what's his approach in trying to make us correct our vision? Because that's where he starts from. He starts from a wrong understanding. That wrong understanding is deep within the way we're actually seeing things.

And what he points out is that there are three distortions that we make. The first is that we have some idea of continuity. Just think, for instance, how long is a space of time? How long does time last, normally? A couple of seconds? If you were to think of how long a space of time lasts... We stretch it, don't we? Because of memory and the ability to conceive. If you stop now, how long is time? A couple of seconds, isn't it? But actually it's not that at all, is it? It's absolutely specific. It's arising and passing away all the time at vast speeds.

Just think of the speed of your thought. Just think of the speed that the eye is moving at in terms of moving around, picking up photons, making up pictures in the mind. And then the mind has to think what it means and then put it into some sort of thought pattern. Then some emotion has to come up. We don't see any of that. What we catch is just this block of time. So the idea we have of things changing is not radical at all. We have a continuity.

So when I think of myself... I think of myself as being the same person as I was when I was born. If I show you a picture of myself when I was two years old, I say, "Look, there, that's me, that's me, that is me when I was two years old." That picture, this is me. And yet we know that physically, this body is nothing like the one we were born with. Every seven years, all atoms are completely changed. But we don't recognise that at all. As far as I'm concerned, this is me when I was two years old.

So we're constantly identifying with a process, thinking that the process is me. But the process is radical. There's no me that changes in it. Next time you stand in front of a mirror, you just point at your face and say, "I didn't have that face seven years ago. It was a completely different face that I had seven years ago." And if you can imagine looking in the mirror one day and you see somebody else's face, then that break of continuity would be shocking, wouldn't it? Because you identify with that whole process.

So what the Buddha is saying is, if in your meditation you can really come down to a present moment and see this quality of change, then you'll break through that illusion, you'll break through that delusion of thinking that anything is actually continuous. Now one of the benefits of seeing that is that when you really grasp the fact that everything is arising and passing away, what's the point of holding on to it? What's the point of attaching to something which doesn't actually exist, which is only a concept in the mind?

When you do that, you begin to undermine the idea that perhaps there's something here which I can grasp onto, which is going to actually make me happy. So you undermine that grasping nature about life where you're trying to manipulate the world in order to make you happy. Because all you're doing really is just shoring up trouble for ourselves. So these are the sorts of insights he makes. And the insights he makes come from a different level of consciousness. It can't be that awareness which is caught up in those things.

So when you come to meditate, all these techniques that you come across—doesn't matter what the technique is, or what school it belongs to—is to try and lift the meditator to this particular observation post, which is not caught up in this whole business of playing pleasure, wanting, not wanting, and seeing things as continuous.

So that's why you always begin by first of all trying to concentrate the mind. There has to be some stillness there. It doesn't matter how long it takes, but you have to wait until there's at least somewhat ability to just stay, generally speaking, in the present moment. And that takes an effort. It's not the effort of building a road, and it's not the effort of writing an essay or something. It's just a very calm effort of reconditioning ourselves to be present.

So when the mind wanders, and you acknowledge that the mind's wandering—it's worrying or something—by acknowledging it, you first of all become aware of what we obsess about. But then, you take your attention away from it. By taking your attention away from it, you're disempowering it. By not putting your attention on something, you disempower it. Why? Because every time you attend to something, you've intended it. And intention is what's actually creating the conditioning.

So by doing that, by noting where the mind has wandered, and you actually recognise where it is, and you turn away from it—you turn your face away from it, you turn your eyes away from it, you turn your attention away from it—when you come back to the breath, you make the intention to stay there. So that's empowering this new habit of being in the present.

Once you've got that, once you've got a steadiness of being in the present, you can now take a different position with everything which comes up within you. Instead of when depression comes up, you hear these words, "I am depressed." Like you pick up your phone and say to your friend, "I'm depressed." Or you tell somebody, "I'm angry." Instead of doing that, you're distancing yourself from it so that you're saying, "There, there's depression, there's anger, there's happiness, there's joy."

That little gap, that distance, makes all the world a difference. It takes you out of an identity with your emotions and your thoughts and your body to a position which disidentifies with it. So what is it that's disidentifying? What is it that's finding this new position where it's no longer experiencing itself as an emotion? No longer experiencing itself as a thought? No longer experiencing itself as the body? What is that?

And the more you practise that, the more you find that that's a much better resting place than to be stuck inside these emotions—hijacked by these emotions, confused by thoughts. And that position is an observation post that you've found. And it's from that post that you can begin to objectively observe what's happening inside you and begin to see these, specifically these two characteristics. Nothing that we experience inside us, never mind outside us, lasts for more than a second, lasts for more than a nanosecond.

And there's nothing inside us which, if we attach to, or if we say it's me, is not going to cause us problems. So that ability to stay separate from it is actually creating a very different relationship with life. You become in it—you're still in your body, you're still in your thoughts, you're still in your emotions—but you're no longer confused by them. You're no longer dragged by them.

So that's the purpose that we're meditating. We're meditating in order to establish a different level of consciousness. And it comes about by making that effort to be present, to be mindful in this present moment. And from that everything flows. Everything flows from that. Is that perfectly clear?

Well, that's the discovery, you see. That's the discovery. You can only know that by doing it. Its quality, its active quality, is intuitive intelligence. It's an intelligence which is prior to thought. It's before thought. It doesn't work with thought. And it's prior to emotion. It's not emotional. And it's definitely not physical. So everything you look at can't be it. You've objectified. If it's an object, it can't be the subject.

Remember that the question was, what are you trying to do in meditation? This is the first position, you see. You're trying to isolate an experience, a quality within, which eventually turns out to be not phenomenal. It doesn't arise and pass away. And when you get into that state, even though you might be surrounded by unpleasant feelings, you just pop a question in your mind. Am I suffering? Is there suffering here?

Well, first of all, you have to develop that state of being able to observe, you see. To observe an emotion as an object, not to get caught up in it. The example I give is, you know if you watch TV and you've got a light on, and you can see yourself watching TV. So now you have a choice. Do you watch yourself watching TV, or are you going to watch TV?

So this intelligence senses its presence within the mind, which is like a TV screen. And that's where you get this feeling of an observer. And when you have that feeling of an observer watching what's happening, that's exactly what's happening. There are two consciousnesses there, one after the other, very quick. Very quick. You can't actually see it unless you've got extremely good concentration, where there's this sense of presence, the observer, and what it's observing.

By continuing to put your attention on what you're observing, the observer will disappear. And it's at that point that you're doing pure *vipassanā*. And you won't know it until you come out of it. When you come out of it, you'll know that you've been in a state where the idea of a self has disappeared, and with it the sense of time. It actually comes quite often, believe it or not, but they're in such small little bits that the meditator doesn't actually catch it.

What we're trying to do is inform ourselves to find out who we really are, or what we really are. So we're not this body. If we were this body, then all we're looking to is annihilation at death. So you'd end up being an annihilationist. That's definitely not the Buddhist position. On the other hand, if you say, well, I am something, so I am this observer, then you fall into the error of eternalism. And he said he wasn't that either. So you're really stuck. So there's something beyond the concepts of something completely ending and something constantly existing. But the meditation has a practical result.

If you take, for instance, these two positions—the position of the person who's seeking happiness and the position of one who has moved into, for want of a better word, this level of consciousness, or the *vipassanā* state, shall we say. If you watch a film and your intention is to enjoy the film, I'm going to enjoy this film. You're saying that to yourself, I'm going, oh great, I'm going to enjoy this film. You turn the TV on and because you're interested in the film and because you want to enjoy it, you'll enter into the absorption of that film, won't you? You'll lose a sense of time, lose a sense of self, and you'll wake up at the end of the film and think that was a fantastic film.

Now the problem with that absorption is that it's conditioned us to seek happiness in films. That's the problem. Which means that we're always looking for a good film to see so that I can be happy. How can we watch a film where we appreciate it and yet we don't get that hangover of wanting, needing, a compulsive desire to see films?

So that's what we're learning. We're learning how to be with something in a completely absorbed way, but not coming off the platform of seeking happiness there. We're trying to come off the platform of simply wanting to know, simply wanting to experience something in order to understand it. So it's the same thing in meditation. The driving force in meditation is interest. It's a wanting to know.

Well, you've got to be careful here. It's a striving in order to know what is in the present moment. What is in the present moment. So therefore there's no conceptualisation, there's no launching into the future, and there's no grabbing into the past for some answer. It's right here and now. Therefore it can't be conceptual. Thought is always an afterthought. It's always a launching. If you're in the present moment, there can't be a self, there can't be an ego. Ego needs time. It needs time to reflect and needs to know what it wants. And then it needs to be able to manipulate in order to get what it wants.

Whereas what we're trying to do is to see things as they are now. That's the interest, to see things as they really are now. As a scientist might want to do that at the material level. He wants to see what is happening actually now. So there's no room to manipulate that now to fit in with what I want because it's happening. I can't think about it.

Time is a concept, absolutely. In that state, we don't make any judgements either. We're not saying then, this is good or this is bad. We're talking about meditation now. If the statement comes up, this is good, this is bad, then that is also observed as a sentence. There's no need to agree with it or disagree with it. Because what you're interested in is the mind as it expounds itself into your consciousness. You're investigating something. To start judging it would be already to manipulate it, to decide what you don't want to see and what you do want to see.

So one very good example is of a bird watcher. See, a bird watcher doesn't manipulate the birds. Just watch the bird. You watch the bird and at the end you write a book and make a million pounds. You just watch. Write your little notes. That's all you're doing. You're just trying to find a position in yourself where you're watching. Then you come to understand, ah, this is causing me suffering. This is causing me happiness. This is where real happiness lies. This is where suffering lies. If you get it right within us, then of course outwardly we get it right without any problem.

So you take, for instance, a very simple thing once you go out into the world. Say compassion. That's a very simple one. So you want to help people. It might be just helping somebody across the road. It might be doing something for a charity. You want to help somebody. So the ego says this is a very good thing to do. So you start helping.

Now there's a part of it which is coming out of a wisdom base, coming out of a desire to alleviate somebody's suffering. Because we've suffered, we see their suffering, so we want to help them. Normally speaking, you tend to help people who've suffered like you. If you've had a drink problem, you tend to be very good at helping people with a drink problem. It's very simple, there's a relationship to it.

So, you then go to help this person, and of course, you feel good. And the ego says, when you do that, you feel good. So then you start doing that, not particularly to want to help the person, but because you want to feel good. Then you become a do-gooder. See? So a do-gooder is somebody who does you the good they want to do to you. If you ask them to do something else, they get very upset. See? So then that's ego coming in, you see, whereas somebody who is helping for the sake of the other, the self can't be there. They're at the service of the other. So if the other says, can you do this for me? Yes, I can, as long as it's skilful, moral, and all that sort of stuff.

So the feeling of goodness, the feeling of happiness would still arise, but it doesn't become your aim. If it becomes your aim, that's self-driven. It's the same with food, isn't it? Why do you eat food? Are you eating there so that you can have a good time? So that finally you can experience half an hour of delight? Or are you eating in order to nourish the body? If you eat in order to nourish the body, you still get the delight, but you don't get the hangover, you don't get the fat. Because the body will tell you enough, and then you stop, because you don't need to eat more than that.

But if you're finding happiness in food, you can't stop. You're always stocking up the fridge, there's always a snack, there's always a biscuit. Why? Because the self has found happiness there. It's just killing the body, that's all.

So that distinction between coming from the base of wisdom and coming from the base of self begins here within us as we observe what the self is doing. And the self is always caught up in that duality. Wanting, grasping what it likes, pushing away, running away from what it doesn't like. That's the game at the bottom of the triangle. Wanting, not wanting. Wanting, not wanting. And what you've done is lifted yourself to the apex of that triangle and you're looking down on that game. You're trying to liberate yourself from that.

There's no drive towards surviving. There is life. So long as there is life, one is alive. I mean, when the Buddha came enlightened, he didn't kill himself. He didn't say, well, that's it, that's finished, and jump off a cliff. He kept living. He kept living until the natural term of his life came to an end. Why?

It's a good question. Why? I mean, you could turn the question around itself. Why should he kill himself? He was happy. He was happy with the way it is. This is the way it is. I'm neither happy nor unhappy, this is just the way it is.

But I must say there was also something else, because remember that upon the enlightenment, what was the first thought that came to his mind? Once he'd actually understood what he'd actually come to experience, what was his first thought? His first

thought was, who can I help? So with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. And that set him off on his teaching career. He didn't just sit there and say, great, I've got it, to hell with everybody else, I'll just keep asking for rice pudding.

You've been going to the Tibetans, I can see. Because I never agreed with them. Well, historically it happened the other way. Historically, the Buddha suffered, like us all, and he decided to see whether there was an end of suffering for himself. Having done that, then this thought came, who can I help? So it would be silly, from his point of view, to say that he had started off in order to help others. He started off wanting to help himself. Having done that, he then goes out and can help others.

Mahāyāna tended to be a reaction against the early Buddhism which was very much about individuals becoming enlightened so they tend to... but you can see that compassion is wisdom in action. It just flows. And then the Buddha put it in the Eightfold Path as soon as you have right understanding your attitude changes. Once your attitude changes your speech, your action, your livelihood changes just a natural outflow.

CHAPTER 2

The Mahāsī Method

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma provides a comprehensive introduction to the Mahāsī method of vipassanā meditation, explaining both the historical context and practical theory behind this influential approach to Buddhist insight practice. He traces the lineage from the Burmese master Mahāsī Sayādaw through to contemporary teachers like Joseph Goldstein, highlighting how this system revolutionized lay meditation practice.*
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> *The talk focuses extensively on the noting technique (mental labeling) used in sitting meditation—rising, falling, feeling—explaining how simple verbal labels help contain the thinking mind and establish moment-to-moment awareness (sati). Bhante describes the progressive stages of concentration development, from initial mind-wandering through to sustained attention on meditation objects. He emphasizes how this method trains practitioners to experience sensations and emotions directly in the present moment, rather than getting caught in mental commentary.*
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> *The second half addresses walking meditation and continuous practice throughout daily activities, explaining the importance of slowing down to maintain investigative awareness. This approach supports the fundamental Buddhist inquiry into the nature of suffering (dukkha) and its cessation, making every moment an opportunity for insight into the psychophysical process we usually identify as 'self.'*

Now what I want to do this evening is just explain the theory behind the practice you're doing so that you feel a bit more confident about it.

The Mahāsi Sayadaw was a monk living in the north of Burma who must have got himself a good name for teaching meditation because it was people in Rangoon, which is in the south, well, in the middle of Burma, who went looking for a teacher after the war. Generals, actually. A couple of them were. And they asked him to come down and begin teaching. And I think to everybody's surprise, it took off.

Up until he began teaching, although there'd been a small resurgence of *vipassanā* meditation in the early century, by the time he began, it really wasn't something that lay people did. I don't think it was what monks did either. Monks tended to practice a form of meditation known as *samatha*, which is basically just being peaceful, being calm, using the breath just to be calm but not for purposes of trying to understand or trying to have insight.

So it was really quite a new venture and as I say it really took off. So much so that by the mid-fifties he was actually traveling and he went to Sri Lanka, set up centers there and it was at one of those centers that I spent so many years. And then he eventually came to Britain, did a tour of Britain, used to be a centre over in Oxford. And that's where I first contacted this particular form through one of his protégés, Sayadaw Ujanaka, who's still living and has a centre in Rangoon, and later his other protégé, Upandita. And some of you may know, for instance, people like Joseph Goldstein, he's pretty famous. So he teaches this particular system.

So it's taught around the world, really, and we're pretty lucky in Britain now because they're opening a center in Manchester, the monks who come from Upandita's line. So there'll be a fundamentalist center in Manchester.

So what he did was present a system of investigation supported by techniques so that there wasn't a moment in the day when you were let off, when you could relax into a dozy, peaceful state. You had to make a real effort to develop this quality of just watching with a sharp or an attentive curiosity, a wanting to know. Remember, it's this wanting to know which is specific to the Gnostic path. Gnostic here meaning the path that leads to a spiritual awakening by way of investigation, rather than, shall we say, a path that might lead there through developing love, a more devotional path, a bhakti path.

So all these techniques that we're doing are really there just to awaken this pure intelligence within us, this intuitive intelligence that can directly experience things before words and concepts interfere, before emotions distort what we're actually looking at, prejudice.

So, first of all, in the sitting posture, there's this noting technique. So one thing this intelligence has to do is go beyond the word. So the question is, why do we use a word anyway? So obviously the technique, what it does when you present one word, is at least it stops the mind from wandering. At least it stops the mind thinking about something. So we're going right back to that slightly pre-verbal stage when, for instance, a child might see something and just shout, "Car, car." But the word car has very little meaning. It doesn't have a desire to have a car. It doesn't have all the experiences that we get going around in a car. It's just a car. It's just an object. And it's that clarity of just noting that we want to get down to. And the clarity comes because the noting word is restricting the thinking mind. So, okay, there's a concept there, but at least it's a simple concept. Just a word. Rising. Falling.

Now I say in this particular tape, I mean to change it for my next edition, that you go rising, falling, and in the break between the out-breath and the in-breath, you see the whole feeling body. And I give this image of a bird in a tree, and then you see the whole tree because the bird's not moving. You don't have to specifically look at the bird. But as soon as the bird moves, your eye catches it.

So some people find this a little bit difficult. So the other thing you can do is simply go to a touch point. So rising, falling, and then if you feel, for instance, your ankles on the floor or your knees or your hands, so you just go to that point. The reason for that is just to keep the thinking mind occupied. If you don't occupy it, it'll occupy itself and off it'll go somewhere. Acapulco. Who wants to go to Acapulco in the middle of London?

So by maintaining that word, you're actually containing the thinking mind and constantly aiming it at the object. Now some people in their meditation don't get this break after the out-breath. In which case, forget it. Just go rising, falling, rising, falling. Don't create a break if there's not one there. Usually it's because of tension. A person who doesn't have that break actually is slightly hyperventilating. This is the truth. So, it'll come as you relax. Because the breath just stops and then there's the relaxation. Then the in-breath comes. So, that's the noting as it comes to the breath.

When it comes to sensations in the body, keep it very simple. Heat, itching, pain. Don't start looking for the word like a poet might. You've lost the plot. All we're doing is just if the word doesn't come up then just use the word feeling because the attention should be riveted on just the sensation, just sensation. Why just sensation? Because sensation happens only now. You can't have a sensation yesterday. You can't have it last minute. You can't have it tomorrow. You're going to have a sensation right here and now.

So the more that we're aware of sensation as a basic premise for our meditation, the more we're driving that intelligence into this present moment. And the more it locks into the present moment, the less it can think. Because thought is always an afterthought. You see something, you feel it, and then you say something. So to get that purity of intelligence, we need more and more to just bring that attention into the present moment, relaxing into the present moment but yet remaining alert.

So, this noting word is part of the training of stopping a person living in thought, living in the mind. Now, some people find this very difficult because when they start noting, all they can be aware of is this word, rising, falling. They can't contact the breath. Just rising, it dominates the whole mind. Now, when that happens to somebody, what

it's showing to that person is that they're living up here. They're living above the chin. They don't contact the body at all. People will say things like, "Yeah, I suffer anger, but I don't feel it. It's just in my head as an angry thought, an angry dream."

We lift ourselves up into this space, into this fantasy world, this virtual reality, and we've actually left the physical feelings, the actual feelings in the body, which are motivating all this stuff. So we have to reverse that process, we have to stop living in a fantasy world. So even though the word is, for some people, flooding the whole of consciousness, that's all you can be aware of, this word, rising, falling, keep guiding your attention to the sensation, and eventually it'll drop. As it drops and the word recedes, that's a sign to the meditator that they're coming off this never-never land. It's a very powerful technique.

Now, at first, probably the whole weekend there is just this effort to come back into the present moment. The mind wanders, you know where it is, you come back. The mind wanders, you know where it is, you come back. Now that's the practice. That's part of the course. You can't speed the course up. All that shows us is how restless we are. The Buddha compares it to a monkey. The monkey mind, jumping from branch to branch.

So the first part of the practice is to use the noting technique to just bring us slowly to the object, more and more into the present moment, just being aware of sensation, feeling sensation. There comes a point, hopefully by tomorrow noon, where the mind begins to settle on the object. And it's not wandering off. It's actually staying still, at least, for a second or so. It's actually staying still on the sensation.

Now, at this point, the meditator can say to themselves, "Ah, I've got it, this is it, concentration, I'm *samadhi*, I'm stuck right now, wonderful, I've collapsed into the present moment, it's marvelous," and they stop noting. And of course, in their desperation, they find the mind immediately shoots off and goes all over the place.

So, although we've matured the noting to a point where the mind is beginning to feel more still on the object, you have to keep going with it until it matures. And there's a real feeling that it's as though you can't take the mind off the object. It's really stuck there. Now that's the second stage. That's the second stage of the noting. One continues with that, and for those of you who are mature in your meditation, you can find a point where you can drop it. But the normal thing is to keep noting because at some point the concentration and the effort will so support that sense of knowing, that sense of intelligence, that *sati*, that awareness, that the noting will simply stop. And you'll just be there with the object.

So that's the growth of *samadhi*, that's the growth of concentration, supporting moment-to-moment awareness. And that's the purpose of using a noting, of using a word, just to bring us to that.

Now, once we've got this moment-to-moment concentration on the breath, mainly we do it on the breath, but of course, whenever something draws the attention, which may be a sensation in the body, a feeling of discomfort, a pain in the knee, whatever it is, or something coming from the emotional base, some feelings of heaviness, some depression, burning from anger, whatever, then that same consciousness, now more like a laser beam, can move on to these objects, doesn't get caught up in them, doesn't allow them to slip up into this higher mentation and create fantasy. And in so doing, we directly experience an emotion as a physical mental feeling, not as a dream, not as a fantasy. In so doing, we become very intimate with it.

And we're observing its qualities. The fact that it's just a process. The fact that it isn't an object or something substantial. It's like a blowing cloud just passing through the mind. And in so doing, we're not engaging it. When an emotion comes up, pleasant or unpleasant, we immediately form a relationship with it. Either we want to indulge it, and thereby we create a greater state of that emotion. So if you want to get into revenge, before you know it, you've blown it up into a war. If you want to get into thinking about how you're going to get rich before you know it, it blows up into a book.

If you don't want to have something of course, if you don't want to feel the boredom, if you don't want to feel the depression, if you don't want to feel these things, then you push it down, you push it away, you turn your attention elsewhere, you don't want to see it. But all these actions of pushing away are simply more energy into that bad system, into that bad turbulence.

But here in our meditation we take a very radical stance. It's a stance which doesn't occur to the self or the ego. The ego can only engage in the world. It can either indulge or suppress, push away. But here we find a consciousness which does neither and yet experiences things directly. That's a paradox.

So, by finding that position of the objective observer, we're just allowing these turbulences to arise and expend themselves. We're not pushing them away and therefore creating more bad energy, and we're not developing them. So what can they do? Because they need our will, they need our empowerment to grow. So, finding that position of the objective observer just allows the psychotherapy to continue. But like I say on the tape, if you make that the object of your meditation then you're missing the point. What we really want to see is how we relate to these things.

So that's the sitting.

Now, to take that moment to moment awareness throughout the day, what the Mahāsi asked people to do was to go very slow. Now, the slower you go, the more you see. If you see a film, for instance, these nature films, a frog's tongue or something, catching a fly, and it's slowed down, so many thousands per second, then you can actually see the whole thing happen.

So what we want to do is we want to really see what this psychophysical organism is doing. This is what I've been calling me all these years. And of course, the underlying reason is to find out why we're suffering. When the Buddha set off, when the Bodhisattva, as he was then, set off on his spiritual journey, the question wasn't, "How can I get rich? Or how can I be famous? Or how can I get blissful?" It was, "What is the end of suffering? Is this it? Is human life about suffering? Full stop. Is it just carrying on and then you get sick and then you get old and you die? Or is there something else?"

So that's his search and that must be our search or else we're not actually doing his practice. We're doing something else. So our purpose is to really find out why suffering arises. What maintains it? So that investigation has to carry on all day. It has to carry on as a background theme to the whole thing that we're trying to do. Trying to understand why we're suffering, why we're not in a state of satisfaction, why we can't get satisfaction in a sensual world, even though we may occasionally be happy with it. Why we can't do it as a constant thing.

So going slow, like this walking meditation. In this walking meditation, that's extremely slow. We don't have to go that slow all the time, but we need to go slow. Just take your time. So when we break from here, don't leap up the stairs. Stop. Find yourself, take a breath, relax. And then start to climb. Lifting, placing, use the noting word just to stay with it.

When you brush your teeth, don't go mad. Take your time, stop. Note, intending to brush the teeth. Do it mindfully. You don't have to get dead slow, you'll never finish. But slow enough to actually be with what you're doing.

When you open the door to your room, just stop. Intending to open the door. Reaching. When you hold the handle, feel it. Feel it. Feel what steel, what metal feels like. You get in contact with those feelings. Pressing. Turning. You communicate with the spring. Don't attack it. Wow, bang, open the door. Crack. Can you feel it? Open the door. Close the door in the same way.

So there's a constant effort just to be with what's actually happening at its base. Don't try and get beyond it. Don't try and find out what is beyond consciousness. You're just trying to be with what's happening right here, right there and then. And you're trying to see your relationship to it.

So you might close the door and somebody up the corridor, somebody next door, might bang the door. So then you notice irritation. Anger, anger. They die away.

So take the slowness with you wherever you go. And every time you find yourself rushing, which you will do... And this is something that I shall urge you to take into your daily life. It's a very powerful technique just to stop all that agitation, all that accumulation throughout the day of all this emotional stuff. So you just stop, intend, and then do it. And when you come to the end of that action, be aware of it. That's been done, that's finished. Stop. Just bring yourself into the moment. Intention.

So, those basically are your two techniques. Going slow, taking your time, relaxing, into the present moment, staying awake of course, and just keep the noting going. All the time.

There's not supposed to be a time of the day when you stop noting. So that's the effort to keep that thinking mind steady on the object, not to let it move off it. Now this isn't a strenuous physical thing. This is not something that will exhaust you. This is something which actually contains our energy, so that by the end of the day you feel that you've really not wasted energy and that there's a lot of it around because it's not frazzled.

So the effort that we make is to be aware as much as possible. Now we know that the mind is going to slip off, but we just keep bringing it back. We keep bringing it back, bringing it back. Over and over and over again. The mind slips off, we bring it back. The mind slips off, we bring it back. That's the practice. It's really that simple.

Now you might think, "Well, this sounds quite easy." But actually, when you come to do it, you'll find that the mind has tremendous momentum to go off into its habitual patterns. And so you need quite a lot of patient persistence to keep bringing it back, bringing it back, bringing it back. But this is what develops the concentration, the awareness, the mindfulness. This is what purifies the mind.

The beautiful thing about this method is that it's so complete. Every moment of experience is included. There's nothing that's excluded. Whatever arises in consciousness becomes the object of meditation. If you're walking and you hear a sound, you note

"hearing." If you're sitting and you feel an itch, you note "itching." If you're lying down and you're thinking about tomorrow, you note "thinking." Everything is included. Nothing is rejected. Nothing is suppressed.

This is very different from methods where you try to push things away or where you concentrate on just one thing and try to exclude everything else. Here we're developing what we call choiceless awareness, where we're aware of whatever is arising naturally, spontaneously, in the flow of experience.

And because of this, it becomes a very natural way of living. You're not trying to create artificial states. You're not trying to manufacture special experiences. You're simply becoming more and more aware of what's actually happening, moment by moment. And this leads to tremendous insights into the nature of reality, into the nature of mind, into the nature of suffering and the end of suffering.

So the practice becomes a way of life rather than something you do for half an hour in the morning and then forget about for the rest of the day. It permeates everything. When you're eating, you're noting. When you're walking, you're noting. When you're talking, you're aware of talking. When you're listening, you're aware of listening. The whole day becomes meditation.

CHAPTER 3

Starting a Personal Retreat

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma offers comprehensive guidance for practitioners beginning intensive retreat practice. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he explores the three essential qualities that constitute meditative awareness: ātāpī (energy/fire), sampajañño (clear knowing), and satimā (Right Awareness). The talk emphasizes developing effortless effort and cultivating pure awareness with an open, questioning intelligence rather than pursuing specific outcomes.*
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> *The teaching covers practical techniques for establishing concentration through breath awareness, transitioning into vipassanā (clear seeing) when thoughts naturally cease in present-moment absorption. Bhante provides detailed guidance for working skillfully with the five hindrances - sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt - viewing them as objects of investigation rather than obstacles. Special attention is given to understanding our relationship with pleasure and pain, deconstructing experiences to see the three characteristics of existence: anicca (impermanence), dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), and anattā (not-self).*
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> *The discourse concludes with practical advice for maintaining continuous awareness throughout daily activities, emphasizing that all moments are equally important for developing wisdom. This foundational teaching provides both newcomers and experienced practitioners with clear direction for intensive meditation practice leading toward unbinding (nibbāna).*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Blessed, Noble, and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

Traditionally, that's a chant to the historical Buddha, or to all the Buddhas. But spiritually, we are recognising the Buddha within ourselves.

Today marks the beginning of the winter retreat and it's an opportunity for those of you who've been here to re-establish your commitment and energy and to put more effort into the practice. Not that you haven't been putting maximum effort into the practice. And for those of you who have just joined, obviously it is a special period.

Now it seems to me that we can waste a lot of time if we are confused or not clear about the aim of meditation practice. As far as I'm concerned, the only thing that we can expect of a meditation period is to feel that we've honed the skills of meditation a bit more. If we join a practice with the idea that we're going to achieve something, no matter what it is, even at a mundane level of a calm and peaceful mind, to rid ourselves of some peculiar neuroses. Even at that level, we immediately put pressure on ourselves, immediately put an ego idea of what the meditation is concerned with.

So the first thing to do is to banish completely all aims and objectives. In so doing, we're then left in an open space. And in that open space, we can perceive, perhaps, what the true intention of our meditation should be.

And this is expressed by the Buddha in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish mindfulness. All he asks us to do is to be aware. And he uses three words to give us the idea of what this awareness might be. *Ātāpī*, *sampajāno*, *satimā*.

Now *ātāpī* comes from the root word *tapos*, which means fire. Fire. And it refers to the energy that we have to put into the practice. If at any time we're not putting energy into the practice, then we're not going to establish this right awareness. However, that energy can become easily corrupted. So we have to also be very clear as to what the energy is. In Zen, they put it in this wonderful paradoxical way. It's the effortless effort. So we have to discover what the effortless effort is.

That effortless effort has to sustain *sampajañño*. *Sampajañño*'s root word is this *ñ* which comes right through our civilisation in words like 'to know'. The 'kn' goes right back to that *ñ*. It comes through the Latin to us. And the root word is to know. And the prefix *pa* is a reinforcement. And it's referring to a particular type of knowing. And that knowing is *paññā*. That knowing is intuitive insight. So we have to understand what is meant by an intuitive intelligence as opposed to every other intelligence we have.

And the third one is *satimā*, which has in it there the word *sati*, which is a state of awareness. Effort, intelligence, awareness. That's the composition of the meditative mind.

So now, what is the quality of awareness? In its simplest form, it's just to know, just to be here, a sense of presence. However, even frogs have that. All beings have a sense of presence. It might not be a self-conscious presence, but they definitely have a sense of presence. It's part of consciousness. It's a quality of consciousness to be conscious. Even in sleep, there's a sense of presence. Somebody pulls the blanket over you when you're cold. Somebody wakes up when the bell goes off. So even in deepest sleep, there's some slight awareness going on.

So if it were just awareness, it wouldn't do. That awareness has to be flavoured with this intelligence. And the flavour of that intelligence is simply a question mark. It's a curiosity. If that curiosity has a word attached to it, if that curiosity has a goal attached to it, a sentence, *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*, transiency, suffering, *Nibbāna*, if that question mark is corrupted by a question, then we immediately drop into a thinking mind, a mind which is distorted by conceptual thinking. So somehow we have to raise that intelligence, we have to abstract it, we have to disembed it out of thought.

Equally, if that state is coloured by an emotion and we presume that this intuition has something to do with a feeling, then that is also a similar mistake. Both of these things—what we normally mean by intelligence and what we normally mean by emotional intelligence—both of these types of intelligences are simply expressions of the original intelligence as it expresses itself through thought and emotion, and ultimately through the body. The body itself has an intelligence. We see it in athletes.

So the business of meditation, the business of *vipassanā*, is to first of all get to a point where we can actually practise *vipassanā*. And that *vipassanā* itself means to really see. The root word *passati* just means to see, to really see. So it's again referring to this insightfulness, this intelligence. And the effort we need is simply the effort to get to that level of consciousness, to get to that point where this purity of awareness with this lovely open question mark is allowed to exist, just to be.

So whatever technique we employ in our meditation, doesn't matter what it is, whether it's the strict Mahāsi thing about noting and walking slowly or following the breath flowing up and down the body or whatever skill, whatever technique you employ, it's always to do with getting ourselves into this completely open, spacious awareness which has this question mark, this curiosity about it.

So the first thing is, when we sit, is to use some object, mainly the breath. And the reason we use the breath is because it's neutral. So it immediately drains away from the system any emotion which might be attached to a particular object. Watching a film is exciting, but watching the breath can be positively boring. There's nothing there, it's just the breath, just the sensations.

By putting our mind just on the sensations, with no other intention than to feel sensations, experience sensations as sensations, then there arises a certain brightness in the mind. When that brightness awakens within us, find that position within yourself of an intelligent observation. And the closest image I have of that is of a child. When a child sees a bug they've never seen before, they fix on it, don't they? Their eyes just fixate on that bug. They stop still. There's an absolute silence comes upon them. And the mouth drops.

The mouth dropping and the tongue stopping is a sign that the intellectual, the thinking faculty has stopped. If you watch yourself very closely, whenever you're thinking, there's always some little vibrations on the tongue. So when the tongue is still and the jaw drops, and the eyes become still, then this intelligence begins to appear. In your meditation, the teeth should be separate because the jaw should be relaxed. The lips are closed, but the jaw is relaxed.

Getting into that position, we need an effort to get ourselves there. And that effort is simply the effort to keep bringing that mind back into this position. Now, in this particular technique of the Mahāsi, for instance, this noting word is used. It's a very skillful way. Remember, the Mahāsi was a scholar. In fact, he was what was called the questioner at the great meeting of 1956 to celebrate 2,500 years, where many of the scholars and monks came to Rangoon, where they built a special building that looked like the original cave where the first council was convened after the Buddha's death, and there they agreed upon the different scriptures. Most of it was just an agreement of what was already agreed upon. But it was an occasion where certain things were discussed. And he was the so-called questioner.

So his standing in the Buddhist community, the Theravāda Buddhist community, was second to none. He was considered to be a scholar. Now the problem with any people who live in their head is that they live in their head. So this technique that he devised was especially apt for people who get caught up in thought. Our particular culture definitely gets us caught up in thought.

So, by reducing the whole of thought to a single word—rising, falling, looking, stretching, tasting—by reducing thought to a single word, it immediately cuts out this whole proliferation of thought around an object. So using a word like that can be very skillful. So you bring yourself back, rising, falling, rising, falling.

Now, if at the first time, as we begin to meditate, there is this effort to just bring the mind back, something takes us away, if we are aggressive towards that something, if we push it away, if we see it as a nuisance to our meditation, then we're simply putting more aggression into the system. So we have to note what that is, the wandering mind, whatever the content is—worrying, thinking, dreaming, whatever it is—we just note it. It's a careful observation of that. Remember, that's a memory of a thought. A memory of a thought. And then we just guide our attention back to the breath.

This action of bringing the attention back to the breath is an act of will. Will is what conditions us. Every time we make the effort to just gently bring that attention back to the breath, it's conditioning the mind to be still. So the first part of any meditation is just bringing the mind to rest upon an object. We use mainly the breath. That's your first state.

Once you're there, once you've done that, you then have just the word and just the object. Now, as you begin to keep saying the word and keep going into the object, there comes a feeling of being fixed on the object, that you can't move off the object. Nothing can take you from it. Even when a thought comes, even when a sound comes, there'll be a recognition of hearing and then immediate return to the breath.

Now at that point, the concentration has risen to the level of what we call first *jhāna*. What we mean by an absorption state is that the mind is still on the object. The difference between this sort of concentration and a concentration that we might get in *jhāna*, the absorptions, is that what we want from *jhāna* is a beautiful state of mind. What we want from *jhāna* is to increase that beautiful state of mind and turn ourselves into glorious charismatics. However, the purpose of insight meditation is not that. It's to actually begin to see where we're causing ourselves problems.

Remember the Buddha reduced the whole of his teachings to three words in the Pali, *dukkha*, *dukkha nirodha*—suffering and the end of suffering. It's as simple as that. So what we're concerned with ultimately in our meditation is to find out where does suffering arise, who's causing suffering, is there a who that causes suffering, etc.

So, drawing our mind to this point where the word is still keeping us on the breath, we can say to ourselves, this concentration is good. So we can, at that point, congratulate ourselves and feel good about it. At that point, we then keep centring in on the breath, still able to observe anything which arises, be it a feeling in the body, an emotion, a thought, whatever it is, we still keep going and we still keep coming back to the breath.

And there comes a point where the concentration is so locked into the present moment that there's no time for words. Thought is always an afterthought. In that locking into the present moment, the thinking mind simply stops. That's *vipassanā*. That's the point where true insight will arise for us. Our whole practice is to bring ourselves to that point. The whole of our effort is just to bring ourselves to that point. That's all.

That's why the Buddha insists on this idea of awareness in the present moment. In the present moment, there's no time for the mind to think about the present moment. It's in the present moment. Being in the present moment, that intelligence now sheds

off any conceptual thinking and is able to directly experience what's actually going on. And it's in those moments that some small insight can arise concerning these three characteristics of existence. The fact of transiency. The fact that everything is not self. The fact that if I form a relationship with anything of me and mine, possession, identity, wanting, not wanting, some form of dissatisfaction will arise.

These things, according to the Buddha, arise quite naturally to that intelligence once it gets into that position. These little insights are not mind-blowing experiences, where you suddenly fling yourself up in the air and say, got it, eureka, like poor old Archimedes. These moments are just very simple, very obvious to the intelligence. You wouldn't think anything of them. But the effect slowly, over a period of time, is to shave away all that delusion and we find ourselves unbinding ourselves. All these opinions, definitions, all these needs and wants are bindings around us.

So this cutting off, this loosening of the binding is the process of the enlightenment. That's why *Nibbāna* is translated in one sense as unbinding, unshackling. That's why the Buddha says he's achieved the *asaṅkhataṃ cittaṃ*, which is the unconditioned mind, the unconditioned consciousness. It's a consciousness which is living in the world, fully in the world, but not caught up in the world.

When you're in that state of pure *vipassanā*, when you're there just watching, just able to be with it, when you come out of that state, ask yourself, what were the qualities of that state? Even though there was pain, were you suffering? Even though there was an emotional state which was painful, were you suffering? Even though there was great joy, were you excited? What was your relationship to what you were watching?

So now, once we understand where we have to get to, then we have to hone those skills to protect it. So if the first part of our period is just trying gently to bring ourselves back to this, we always have to be on guard for the armies of Māra.

Now the first attack is anything which is pleasurable. Now, when we say pleasure, is it pleasure that we want to get rid of? Definitely not. There's nothing wrong with pleasure. We all know it's very beautiful. Nobody would want to follow the spiritual practice of Buddhism if we had to ban cream cakes. It's not necessary. Our problem is not pleasure, but our relationship to pleasure. What is it we want from pleasure? Whether it be something quite basic, like porridge, or something wonderful, like love. Or something sublime, like some great spiritual joy.

What is it we want from it? We want happiness, don't we? We want happiness. We want to be happy. If we were always happy, we wouldn't meditate, would we? We'd just be perfectly happy. So our problem is that this search for happiness isn't working. We

keep investing in all this stuff, and it just keeps letting us down. In terms of an investor on the stock market, he would think we're real fools. To put any investment at all in the joys of life, knowing full well that you can't trust them at all. You can't even trust human beings.

The last thing we would want to put our trust in for our personal happiness is another human being. They're terrible. They leave you. They do awful things to you. Then they get sick and they die. They can just leave you utterly bereft. So the last thing we need to find this absolute comfort in is anything to do with a phenomenal world.

So therefore we have to come off the drug. Come off the drug of pleasure. But first of all we have to be convinced that in fact pleasure is a drug. We have to see that our addiction is taking us to more and more suffering.

Now, the one time of the day when you can make this very plain to yourself is when you're eating. Take it slowly. Sit there before the food. Contact the body. Contact the feeling of hunger. Know that somewhere mixed in that is the desire to find happiness. That's the greed. I'm going to really enjoy this. Sausage, mash and beans. Can't think of anything more delightful. There's this little voice saying, this is going to be really good.

So, once it's there, using that noting word, if it works for you, very slowly lift up the food. Now when it hits the tongue, what do we have? We have pleasure. At the physical base, we have the tongue telling us what a wonderful thing this is. Now when I say we have pleasure, this pleasure is just sensations which are being interpreted by the mind as something pleasurable. If you were one of those very unfortunate persons who didn't like sausage, mash and beans, it would not be perceived as something pleasurable. This idea of pleasurable is not within the sausage, mash and beans.

The idea of what is pleasurable and worthy of enjoyment is in the head. It's in the way we have associated with this object. Taking our consciousness deep into the tongue, what do we find? Just taste. Around it we've built this aura of enjoyment. We have to separate out the taste on the tongue from the aura of enjoyment. And in so doing, we're actually beginning to deconstruct the event. In deconstructing the event, we're also going to find that there's nobody enjoying it.

One of the constant little techniques that the Buddha uses throughout the scripture is the technique of deconstructing. He turns everything into lists. You've come across them. The five aggregates and the six sense bases. Everything has to be pulled apart. And he does that in order to take away the concept of wholeness. The concept of an entity.

So you're here. Tasting. As you perceive the taste, you see that there's an emotion around it. Now what we have to see is what is our relationship to that state. What is the relationship we have to that state? And that relationship is one of desire. That relationship is one of wanting to be happy right there. If we can catch that movement, then we're catching what the Buddha calls *taṇhā*. It's rather heavily translated as craving. But it's that desire of consciousness, desire to find happiness in sensual pleasure.

If we can stay above all that, see, that's the *vipassanā* mind. If we can stay above all that and we can slowly as we eat allow this greed to just pass away because we're not feeding the greed and we reduce ourselves simply to the food and the pleasure it brings in the heart, then we're discovering a way of being with pleasure in that non-indulgent way.

If we indulge in pleasure, any time, there will always be a hangover. We think we only get hangovers when we get drunk. But hangovers come any time you have pleasure. We've got to catch that. We've got to see that. We've got to see that pleasure, that indulgence in pleasure, doesn't deliver. We've actually got to see it. When we've indulged in pleasure, become attached to pleasure, the problem is afterwards, the frustration of not getting it when you want. The underlying fear that exists, that subexists all pleasure, that you might never get it again. These two things, the grief at the loss of pleasure.

If you take any of your sense bases, your eyes for instance, the amount of pleasure and joy we get from our eyes, you've only got to imagine one moment slowly going blind. Where does the suffering come from? Are the eyes suffering? Where's the pain? Where's the despair coming from? It's coming from that identity. It's coming from that indulgence, association. It's coming from that addiction to pleasure as a place where we're going to be happy.

So part of our process of enlightenment is to unshackle ourselves of the idea that we can find happiness in the sensual, pleasurable, even in the spiritual world of high absorptions. And yet we also mustn't make the mistake that we have to kill the pleasure. It's nothing to do with pleasure. We often hear that quote from the Bible, money is the root of evil. But the real quote from the Bible is quite correctly, it's the love of money which is the root of all evil. So it's the love of things which is causing our problems.

So putting pleasure aside, we now have to deal with all those things which are horrible. When something like aversion comes up, and in a meditation, probably boredom, something like that, you have to be very careful not to listen to these things. Boredom will always tell you to seek distraction. Try another technique. Go do some walking

meditation. I need to stretch myself. I'll walk around the property and look at the flowers. It'll always tell you to go and do something which makes you happy. But that's not the cure to boredom.

Boredom is cured through repetition. I'm sure you've all experienced during your learning days where you've got bored with something, but because you've kept at it, then the interest again arises naturally. Correct? Definitely. So it's a case of observing the boredom, feeling the boredom, experiencing the boredom as boredom, seeing how we relate to boredom, how we want to escape it, thinking that distraction will bring the end of boredom. All that has to be seen and we have to wait patiently for the boredom to dissipate.

All negative states come to rest. Interestingly enough, in the scriptures the Buddha never talks about going from hatred to love. He always talks about going from hatred to non-hatred. First of all, that turbulence has to be allowed to come to rest. Only then is it transformed into its opposite. So just as much as we were bored, don't be surprised if the same amount of energy arises as interest. It's just turning over itself.

When it comes to sloth and torpor, it seems to me that a meditator needs no more than six hours per night. And in fact should do with more like five and a half. We sleep in one and three hour, one and three quarter hour cycles. What are we doing? Are we digging roads? Does the body need vast amounts of rest? Are we stressed? Are people rushing at us all over the place? Do this, do that? Are we into production targets? Are our minds being caught up in all sorts of figures and thoughts and plans? We're completely relaxed. So therefore, a meditator should say to themselves, if I'm sleeping more than five and a half hours, this may very well be sloth. And if it reaches eight, then it's profoundly disgusting. Only dogs sleep eight hours a day.

So we have to awaken, we have to lift up that energy, that physical energy, to match the mental energy that we need in order to make these sorts of efforts. So once you've decided that enough's enough, any time tiredness comes, don't be fooled by it. You know these little voices that say just a ten minute kip will do you very good here. Lift yourself up. Refuse to be annihilated. Refuse to be dominated by a feeling of sloth and torpor. Don't call it tiredness. You've had it. Call it sloth and torpor. And lift yourself up and make yourself walk gently. Walk with it. Make it your object.

What are the feelings of sloth and torpor? Where do they arise? Do you feel sloth and torpor at the end of your fingers? Has your nose ever felt torporous? Where does it arise? Keep searching for it. Keep an objective view of it. See it as something interesting to explore. Don't be surprised if this sloth and torpor begin to evaporate and suddenly you find yourself with a very clear, pure energy. Because that's the opposite.

If you find yourself restless, jumping about, be careful not to obey these little commands that come from within us. Move, do this, do that. Where restlessness wants you to move, stay absolutely still. Refuse. Just refuse to move. If, for instance, you feel very restless before you go to sleep, one of the best tricks is to get yourself into a comfortable position and refuse to move. It may be agony for a little while, but then the energy just turns. So it's a case of accepting that these are just energy forms. We have to stop giving them names. We have to stop giving them some sort of credence. Stop giving them some sort of power over us. And we do that by just gently refusing to obey them. So when restlessness comes, be still with it. Relax around it. Refuse to move.

And finally, doubt. So doubt is insidious. And the one way to overcome doubt is just to create an area where there'll be just a putting of confidence into the practice, a putting of confidence into ourselves. And when doubt comes, when there's some sort of, I can't do it, that's one of the big ones, isn't it? I can't do it. Make that the object of your awareness. Don't let anything grab us. As soon as we find ourselves caught up in something, push it away, push it away. Observe it, experience it as an object. Don't get caught up in it.

This sceptical doubt is often based on a fear of commitment. It's often based on a feeling of low self-esteem. This is not the same as what we might call honest doubt, the doubt that the Buddha asks us to have towards his teaching. That's a sense of, is it true? And then a real desire to investigate. That's the wonder of a philosopher. And that's the mood that we have to engender within us, which is one of the factors of enlightenment.

Our meditation should be gently saturated with joy. And that gentle saturation is caused by *pīti*. Pīti translates as joy, bliss, all those sorts of words. But it's far too strong for *vipassanā*. That sort of thing is highly developed through these absorption states. But as far as vipassanā is concerned, it's interest. Interest. I'm sure you remember times when you've been very interested in something. And it's been joyous. Correct. Interest.

So this interest has to be, as it were, lifted by us out of our system. We have to bring up the interest, bring up the desire to want to know. That's the Gnostic path. That's the path of the scientist. They want to know. So this interest as it arises within us is a support to that intelligence. So we need to be able to cajole ourselves, to argue ourselves into a point that this is very interesting. And then you'll find that, of course, because the heart is joyous, everything will come up to support your meditation.

That can even be found in the most miserable depressions. And it's found by turning upon the depression as an object to observe, as an object to investigate, to feel, to experience as it is, to see how there's a part of us that wants to get caught up in it, that wants to get depressed about being depressed, wants to get really angry about it. That will

simply spiral us downwards into the warm hands of Prozac. That's not the way out, is it? So we have to be able to lift ourselves up above these moods and make them an object. Be interested in them. And the core interest is where and how does suffering arise? Where's the core of our suffering?

So having dealt now with the more obvious hindrances, we have to deal with, as it were, the more subtle ones. And those are simply to get caught up in what is beautiful, what is coming up as beautiful in the mind. Be very careful that once you get into this lovely state of *passaddhi*, tranquility, where the mind is still, lovely and peaceful. If you don't watch it, just very slowly, you wander off into the land of lotus eaters. And what you've lost is your intelligence. And you can often tell a meditator that gets into that, their head goes like that. Very gentle. Now, if you were to ask them, are they awake? Of course they're awake. They're right there, not a problem. But the intelligence has switched off. They've just sunk into that lovely state of tranquility. What a waste of time.

Instead, this is the perfect opportunity to really go into the breath. To center in on the breath. To go for the very center of the breath. And as you beeline in, focus in, right into the center of the breath, all that energy will come up to support your investigations. And you're moving deeper and deeper into concentration. Deeper and deeper into a direct viewing of things. So don't waste those moments of tranquility. Acknowledge them. Very beautiful. But really work to put your mind right into the center of the breath. Awaken that question mark. And keep going into the center.

Why into the center? Because of the focus. And when something comes to take you out of the focus of the breath, that very same focus moves to that new object. Whether it be a pain in the leg or a sound of a bird, it doesn't matter. It'll just shift like that and then come back. It'll stay with you all the time. So don't waste those times in our meditation when the peace descends upon us.

One of the misunderstandings is this business of self-awareness. When we're self-aware, when we're aware of being an observer, there's still a shuddering in the mind. What's happening is that this consciousness, looking into the mind, feeling what's in the heart, sensing what's in the body, being aware of it, being with it, is also catching its own image in the mind. You've watched TV, where you can see yourself watching TV. It's exactly that and your attention is moving from you watching TV in the TV to watching the TV. However, as the program gets more interesting the attention suddenly blocks onto the program and you don't see yourself in the screen watching yourself watching TV. So that's the trick. If that sense of observer is there you just note it, self-awareness, just keep coming back to the object and it will block it.

Alternatively, if there's a lot of peace around, if there's a lot of tranquility and the sense of self comes up like that, turn upon the self. Find out where does that image of a self arise. Where's it come from? Where's it being manufactured?

Now, the final thing is this whole business of prioritizing. In terms of meditation, we can't prioritize any part of the day, because all parts of the day are absolutely equally important in the process of growing awareness, of growing intelligence, and of growing effort. So don't say to ourselves, the sitting is more important than the walking. The walking is more important than the eating. Eating is more important than opening a door, walking up the stairs or having a pee. It's not. It all has to be equally seen as absolutely important. There mustn't be a break in that continuity. And what we're going for is a continuous state of awareness, a continuous state of presence all the way through the day. And so you have to see, first of all, those wrong opinions. And secondly, you have to see what parts of the day are weak. When do we give in? When do we stop? Those are the parts you have to empower. When you empower those parts, you empower the whole day.

So our commitment is moment to moment mindfulness, so long as there's wakefulness. So, what I suggest is that you draw a line, and just take a moment to recommit yourself to the practice. And every day you should draw that line and recommit yourself to the practice. That commitment is the *adhiṭṭhāna*. It's the determination to go on. And that determination has to be renewed every so often. And the best thing to do is to always choose a point of the day when you make this very firm commitment to the practice. And it's something that you can take with you in daily life. It's not just something that we do here. You can take it right into your daily life as one point in the day when you argue yourself, if you don't feel like it, to commit yourself to a moment-to-moment mindfulness.

So, I'd like to bring this little talk to an end by allowing you just for a moment there to draw up your will, the *dhamma chanda*, the will for the noble truth, translated later into the Mahāyāna system as the *bodhicitta*, the mind bent on enlightenment. So commit yourself, and I will draw this little talk to an end with an offering of a blessing to you from the three Buddhas.

Sābba buddhā balāpattā pacheka buddhānaṃ tatheva ca, arahantānaṃ ca tejjena, rakkhang bandhāmi sabbaso.

CHAPTER 4

Faith

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines faith (saddhā) as one of the five spiritual faculties in Buddhism, drawing on the Abhidhamma's analysis of consciousness to explore faith's three essential components: understanding, emotional involvement, and will. He carefully distinguishes between faith as trust and confidence versus belief in mere statements, using practical examples from climbing mountains to medical treatment to illustrate how genuine faith operates in daily life.*
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> *The talk explores how spiritual faith develops through hearing the Dhamma, personal reflection, and direct experience through meditation practice. Bhante discusses the famous Kālāma Sutta's teaching against blind belief, emphasizing the Buddha's instruction to test teachings through personal experience. He addresses common obstacles to faith including intellectual pride, spiritual despair, and unrealistic expectations, while explaining how faith becomes unshakeable wisdom (bala) upon reaching stream-entry (sotāpanna).*
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> *Drawing from classical commentaries, Bhante illustrates faith's purifying effect on consciousness and its essential balance with wisdom (paññā) in meditation practice. The talk concludes with practical guidance on nurturing faith through spiritual friendship (kalyāṇamittā), ethical conduct (sīla), and understanding impermanence (anicca), making this teaching valuable for both newcomers and experienced practitioners seeking to deepen their commitment to the path.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

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

So I thought I'd give a little talk around faith, which in the Buddha's understanding is fundamental. Nothing happens without faith. And I read a rather nice little essay on it by Nyanaponika, whom some of you might know — a very famous German monk who started the Buddhist Publication Society up in Kandy. Didn't write all that much himself, but what he wrote was influential. And his main book, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, still remains a classic on meditation.

The way I would like to tackle it is from these three constituents of an act of consciousness. I'm getting this from the Abhidhamma, but actually it should be pretty obvious to us. Not being too specific about one act of consciousness, but in a series of con-

sciousnesses. You always have the intellectual part, the cognitive part, the understanding. There's always some affective part, your emotional involvement. And for an action, there has to be an act of will.

And you will notice that in my explanation there, I use my hand to point to three centres. So they're your basic chakras, the one in the middle of your head signifying your understanding, the heart in the middle of your chest, and the one in your belly. And it's interesting that, just a little aside, if you look at the way Buddhism grew, it was very much a cognitive effort. The Buddha's teaching is very much about, first of all, understanding and everything flows from that. But that became too rigid, too dry perhaps, so that the next wave through Mahāyāna was raising up karuṇā, raising up the heart to the level of *paññā*, wisdom. So *karuṇā* and *paññā* became equal. And if you go over to the Far East, to Japan, their centre is very much in the hara, the will — a samurai. Just a little aside, you understand. Nothing to do with faith.

So these three things I want to just look at from the point of view of faith. And before we do that, I have to make one big distinction between faith and belief. So a belief is faith in a statement. If you say, there is no God, or there is a God, then that's a statement which, in effect, you can't prove either one way or the other. But if you believe it, then it would come under a belief rather than faith. So when we're talking about faith this evening, it's concerned with an attitude, trust, confidence. That's what we're talking about.

To give us some idea as to what we mean by that, we can take a few ordinary things that we do which demand faith. If you take, for instance, supposing now you decided to climb Everest. So there would have to be these three things, wouldn't there? You'd have to have understood what the actual path of Everest means and what it might take. It has to be that understanding. There has to be the desire to get up there, doesn't there? You might read about it and think that's very interesting but there's no desire to go up Everest. And you might have a good understanding as to what it's going to take, you might have an incredible desire, but somehow you just can't get your boots on and that's the lack of will. That's the lack of will. Lots of times like that in our lives, isn't there?

So somebody came and she was in quite an upset state because she was convinced that she had throat cancer, this particular person. And she had no trust in her doctors. So she wouldn't even go for a biopsy — not an autopsy, she wasn't dead yet — a little biopsy on the grounds that she didn't trust the doctors. And as we were discussing it and seeing what other options were open, it finally began to show that what was really

undermining her faith wasn't at all to do with the doctors or the profession, it was the fear that in fact she may have throat cancer. So that underlying fear was translated into a lack of faith. I think in this case she actually did eventually go.

But if you think of anything you have to do with doctors, you have to have a primary faith that their diagnosis is correct and that the medicine they prescribe is correct. Now in the old days you would have just had blind faith in the doctor. My parents wouldn't have ever argued with a doctor. If the doctor said this pimple on your nose is a dreadful cancer they would have believed it. It wouldn't have occurred to them to question the diagnosis. These days we're a bit more argumentative. And you want to know why and what happens. Recently I went in to the doctor with tinnitus which had just arrived out of nowhere. And she said, I'll send you for a blood test. I said, a blood test? I had to squeeze out of her why she was sending me for a blood test. I won't tell you. So this whole business of even taking medicine, even going for an operation, you've got to have that trust in the surgeon.

You take another thing that we do in our lives, a job. So if you're taking on a job, especially a job which you know will stretch you, then there has to be these three elements. There has to be, first of all, that you've understood what the job is asking you to do. There has to be that attraction to the job, there has to be a desire to do it. And then finally you've got to sign on the dotted line, or else it just doesn't happen. And that's the act, that's the commitment, the act of will. And there, sometimes what stops us is that doubt — can I do it, can I do it. So you can see that the opposite of faith is doubt. There's something that stops you from that commitment.

And if we take another one, it's forming a relationship or getting married. This takes us into the realm of a more intimate human relationship where actually your trust is in this other person. They're not going to abuse you or take advantage of you. Take all your money. There's got to be that trust. And again, there is that knowledge that comes of knowing the other person long enough, the confidence that arises with that. Then, of course, that special love that one has with that sort of relationship. And then, eventually, there's got to be that movement towards yes, yes.

So these things are just little examples which we now translate into the spiritual life. So when it comes to the spiritual life, and specifically around Buddhism, faith, the Buddha calls the spiritual faculty. Interestingly enough, he doesn't put it in with the factors of enlightenment. And the presumption is, at least I presume, is that by the time you're actually meditating, the faith must be there, at least some level of faith. Because the factors of enlightenment are put into the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish mindfulness or this awareness which leads us to the awakening. But

the five faculties are not there. They're talked about in other places. What's in that particular scripture are the seven factors of enlightenment. So when it comes to the faculty, it seems to me, faith seems to me presumed.

So all of you here now, whatever commitment you have towards the Buddha's teaching, the fact is you wouldn't be here were it not that there was some faith. And if we now go back to what faith entails, the cognitive part, the actual part of understanding, so that's pointed out as three different stages. The first one is you hear the doctrine, you hear the teaching, and that immediately arouses interest. There's also something that's stirring in the heart, that this is the truth, an attraction. There must be some sort of an attraction.

And then after you've heard it and you read about it, there are reflections about it. So that the knowledge which was given, hearsay, read, now becomes your own personal understanding by way of your own reflections. And the more that happens, the more confidence arises, the more faith arises in us about the doctrine, because now in a sense it's becoming our way of thinking, our way of understanding. So it's my way, not the Buddha's way. I'm slowly turning towards that.

But there's still that missing link between an understanding which is intellectual and the actual experience. So it's all right saying that everything arises and passes away, and I mean, there are very few people in the world who wouldn't grasp that. And when we turn inward and we just look around a little bit, we can see that thoughts arise and pass away, emotions arise and pass away, feelings arise. I mean, it's not a brain twister to actually go into that, but it's actually coming to the point where this I, this me, which feels so solid, is also arising and passing away. So turning inward and really coming to terms with what transience actually means at a deeper level through our meditation, that now becomes a knowledge which is also carrying into experience. But we would never have got there, really, without that initial confidence. See, that initial confidence.

When it comes to the heart itself, there's that feeling of trust which comes in, to trust somebody, to have confidence in, faith in somebody. And then there's a desire to devote oneself — a loyal service to the Dharma, for as much as it feeds you personally. So if you're devoted to somebody, then you're there to actually help, please, make them happy. A mother and father devoted to their children. So that act of devotion is not just a lovey-dovey thing. It's part of that movement of the heart to give of oneself. A votary offering. It's an offering. And running along with that, there's love, which translates as a lightness, a joy in faith.

And then once those two are there, there comes this point of a commitment. And the commitment is at all different levels. So it might be just the commitment to practice a bit of meditation. And eventually it's a commitment to actually follow the Buddha's path as your centre line. And a total life's devotion to it.

So, for instance, when people take refuges, refuges and precepts — that's the normal way in all forms of Buddhism. So the refuges are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. And then you take the five precepts, which is just your basic morality, not to kill anybody, steal, etc. But the first part, the taking of refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha, is an act of commitment dependent on the person. So it might be that they are committed to it just on a level of, a rather superficial level of, the Buddha's teaching is good, and it's part of my spiritual smorgasbord. I've got all this other stuff, and here's the Buddha's teaching over here, and I do a bit of that. That's fine.

As the teaching takes a more central position in your life, then the commitment comes more, to give oneself more to that teaching. But there still might be a holding back. So it takes a long time to actually commit yourself to something, especially if you are converted to it. If you're born into a religion, if you're born into a spiritual way of life, then it's just natural to you because ever since you woke up, you've been cajoled to make that sort of devotion, to make that act of devotion. But for those who have come from other forms and come into Buddhism, then it takes quite a long time before you ever get to that point of actually, if ever, that you actually commit yourself in terms of this life.

Now, you only get back what you give. So if you give a bit of commitment, then you get a little bit back. If you give a bit more, you get a bit more back. And if you give the whole thing, then eventually you get the whole thing. It's like in a relationship, if you say, well, I love you a bit, and the other person says, well, I love you a bit. And it slowly builds up until finally there's some sort of connection, which one can call a marriage in one form or another. So that's the same with our relationship to the spiritual path.

And that commitment can't be forced, you can't say, oh well, I'm fed up with messing around now, I'm going to devote myself to the Buddha Dharma Sangha. Not at all, because it's a movement within the heart. And there just comes a time in a person's life when they make these little commitments, so it grows, it grows, it grows.

Now when that happens, or as that happens, then one gets the satisfaction of acts of commitment based on faith. So here's one way of putting it. This is taken from the commentary, but it also turns up in what's known as the Questions of King Milinda, which was written quite a while after the Buddha.

And it says, "As a water purifying gem of the universal monarch" — he has seven of these by the way — "thrown into water causes solids, alluvia, water weeds and mud to subside and makes the water clear, transparent and undisturbed. So faith arising discards the hindrances, causes the corruptions to subside, purifies the mind and makes it undisturbed, the mind being purified, and the aspirant of the noble family gives gifts, observes the precepts, performs the duties of the uposatha and commences *bhāvanā*. Thus, faith should be known to have purifying as its characteristic."

So these performs the duties of the uposatha — in Buddhist countries, these full moon and the new moon and the quarters are times when lay people go to the monastery and make a special day of it, especially the full moon. And commencing *bhāvanā, bhāvanā* is meditation.

So here we have the purifying of water, transparency. Now all you've got to think about is those times when your life has been full of doubt — either should you move house, should you go for this job or that job, should you go into this relationship or that relationship. In those times of doubt, as soon as there's a commitment, as soon as there's a decision and a commitment, all the stuff around that disappears, doesn't it? All that disturbance, all the doubt, all the fear, it just clarifies, it just disappears. So that's what this is pointing to, that an act of faith is, or an act of taking refuge in Buddhist language, to take the refuge, is that point where all doubts, finally, about how one should lead one's spiritual life begin to fade away. And one is clear, one is clear. So that's its effect on us.

Talking again just a little bit about the intellect and the affective, the emotional thing — if something is only intellective, if it's only an understanding coming from the mind and it doesn't have the force of the heart behind it, then it remains brittle, it remains quite brittle and it can easily be cracked by another argument. Somebody coming along like for instance later on there's a question on rebirth — so if a person thinks well you have to believe in rebirth to be a Buddhist and I can't really believe that, then the whole thing shatters. So if faith is only at that intellectual understanding that this is ok, I understand it and all that, but without the heart behind it, it's not going to really penetrate, it's not really going to have the effect of true devotion.

If on the other hand it's only the heart, so sometimes one is drawn — a type of person might be drawn simply by seeing, seeing a statue of the Buddha. I know people, as soon as they've seen a statue of Buddha they fall in love with it. Something in their memory has clicked and there's this heart connection. And there's that leap of faith. But if that's not balanced with some sort of intellectual understanding about what they're doing, then we would call that blind faith.

And what happens then is an easy falling into belief systems. So I believe the Buddha is right, whatever the Buddha says it's got to be right. And what that does to the practitioner is it undermines their commitment to practice. I mean, if you have a belief that oh yeah the Buddha is right, then why prove it? See, the whole point of the practice that we do, the *bhāvanā*, the *vipassanā*, is that question: Is the Buddha correct? Has he got it right?

I mean, you're not saying that to yourself when you sit, I hope. But that's the underlying basis of the great doubt. This is not doubt as a skeptical thing. This is not coming from fear. It's coming from a desire to really know personally, as a personal experience, whether the Buddha's liberation is true. And whether once one gets to this point of *nibbāna*, whether there isn't in fact more. We might get there and we think, no, this isn't it. I've got to keep going. You don't know, do you?

And it's that sort of doubt which is better translated as a wonder, a philosopher's wonder, which drives our meditation. So in your meditation, if you're just sitting there watching, looking, that won't do. That's called being lazy. There has to also be that sense of curiosity. If the curiosity is not there, just that simple question mark in the mind, a way of looking, then insight can't arise.

So the Buddha is quite clear. Awareness. Without awareness, without placing that attention on something, insight can't arise. So you can't have insight without the awareness. But on the other hand, that insight won't arise unless there is that curiosity in the mind, that wanting to know.

So those two are, you have to have them in balance. And of course when you say balance, there's not some objective balance. You can't go on a weighing scale and say well I've got a bit of this and I've got a bit of that. It's to do with the individual, so that every individual has to have that balance within themselves of an intellectual understanding and a commitment in terms of their devotion, in terms of what their heart wants to do.

And that will, you know, it's just like we were saying about not getting your boots on. So there can always be this lovely intellectual understanding. Some people read so much and they can splurge it all out, and quote ad infinitum. And sometimes they've got a good feeling behind it, but they don't practice. No practice at all. Don't do any meditation.

See, now what stops them doing that? What stops them making that little effort to actually climb the mountain? And that's the lack of will, the lack of commitment. So unless there's that too, there can't be progress on the path.

And it's interesting that the Buddha puts faith opposite, or he balances faith in the five faculties, he balances it with insight. So if there's no faith, if there's not that act of devotion to the practice, then insight can't come up. So these two things are intimately linked.

And eventually when we have an insight which is an insight into the final goal, which is known as entering the stream, the *Sotāpanna*, at that point this faith becomes unshakeable. It's then known not so much as an *indriya*, which we translate as faculty, it becomes a *bala*, which means a strength. So now that faith now is unshakeable because that person has actually seen the top of the mountain. They know where it is. It's no longer clouded. It's not that they can't see it because they've actually touched it. And now that faith, which is a strength, of course, must necessarily draw them to the end of the path through the next few stages.

So until, it's understood that until we have intuited this nirvanic moment, faith will always have a little shake in it. There'll always be a little shake in it.

And that really brings us to what undermines our faith, what undermines your commitment to the practice. The first one we've already talked about, this confusion between faith and belief. So you can very easily slip into that lazy place where you say, well, I believe the Buddha, what's the point? And it undermines that practice. So you've got to keep up that sense of curiosity, that sense of wanting to know.

And the Buddha laid that out very clearly when he visited the Kalamas. It's a very famous discourse. Everybody quotes it, so I may as well quote it myself. So he ended up at the village of the Kalamas, and the Kalamas said to him, we're in a state of calamity. And he said, everybody who comes here tells us that this is what it's all about, this is the truth, and everybody else is wrong. So who are we to believe? Where are we to go?

And he says, do not believe anything simply because you've heard it, simply because it is tradition handed down for many generations, simply because it is spoken and rumoured by the many, simply because it is found written in your religious books, and simply on the authority of your teachers and elders. In other words, don't believe anything. And then he says, only when it works for you, only when you've tried it out, only when it's something which is of benefit to you, would you then commit yourself to it.

So belief is something which would be contrary to the Buddha's path as such.

The other thing is that we talked about was this balance between devotion or the heart and the understanding. And this is from the commentaries. And it says, for one strong in faith and weak in understanding has confidence uncritically and groundlessly. So that's your blind faith. That's your gullibility. That's believing something, right?

For one strong in understanding and weak in faith errs on the side of cunning and is as hard to cure as one sick of a disease caused by medicine. Interesting, isn't it? We know about the side effects of drugs. One strong in understanding and weak in faith.

So what they're saying here, what he's saying here is that you can have such a good intellectual grasp of Buddhism that you actually believe you've experienced it. And there's a total confusion between something that has been so clearly understood and something which has been directly experienced.

And I knew of a monk who actually believed that himself. He did, he had an enormous, wonderful, deep grasp of the Dharma. And he was convinced that he must be a reborn stream entrant. In other words, he'd already somewhere in his past life, he had intuited *Nibbāna*. Or else how could he have this amazing, wonderful understanding of the Buddha's teaching?

And that is such an easy confusion, related to those who have a very strong intellect. And so it then goes on to say, with the balancing of the two, a person has confidence where there are grounds for it. In other words, it's the balance that we're looking for.

The other one is more to do with self-expectation. The big one about self-doubt. Everybody can do it but not me. That sort of thing. And that can be a real barrier to progress. There's a particular monk in the scriptures who becomes despairing of his practice and commits suicide. Fortunately, when the Buddha comes along and is asked, well, what happened to this monk? Where's he gone? He says, oh, he became enlightened in the process of committing suicide.

Now, I'm not suggesting, of course, that. In this case, it was a happy outcome. But I don't think there's a deeper despair than spiritual despair. To despair of somebody, to despair of your ability to have a relationship, to despair of your ability to earn money and live a good life. All these things that throw people into suicide and jump off bridges. I'm thinking particularly of a young man in Australia who made, and remember this is a piece of news, who made an enormous amount of wealth on property. And when that thing crashed in the mid-90s, he committed suicide.

But when we're talking about spiritual despair, that digs at the deepest level of our being, doesn't it? Because that's what the spiritual life is about. It's about being. It's about who are we at fundament. And to have entered the spiritual path and to have seen the possibility of spiritual advancement and spiritual attainment and that end of suffering and then to despair that one could ever achieve that. I don't think you can get worse than that when it comes to despair anyway.

So don't despair. So that when self-doubt comes up like that, it can often be caused by an over-expectation. You know, you thought you'd be further along the path than this, than you are now. And there's pride involved in that and a loss of self-esteem.

I met a man and he said to me, when he first came to meditation, he went to a course, this was back in the 70s, he went to a course of meditation and he went to it as you would go to any old course of calligraphy or basket making or, French or something. And he went along and the idea was you got an Ibana, you got a certificate and then you left. It was a week on how to attain *Nibbāna*. He entered the course thinking he'd have a go and at the end he'd know *Nibbāna* and that was it. That's what he'd come for.

Well, of course, as the course began to end, the despair entered into the heart and it took him a while to realize that it wasn't that sort of course. And that's why you don't get certificates after meditation courses. Nobody hands you a certificate. So this expectation.

So here's the Buddha. He says, I do not say that the attainment of profound knowledge comes straight away. Nevertheless, the attainment of profound knowledge comes by a gradual training, a gradual doing, a gradual course. How does the attainment of profound knowledge come? By means of gradual training, gradual doing and gradual course. As it is, one who has faith draws near. Drawing close, they sit down nearby. Sitting nearby, they lend an ear. Lending an ear, they hear the Dharma. Having heard the Dharma, they remember it. They test the meaning of things they have borne in mind. Whilst testing the meaning, things are approved of. They're being approved of things. Desire is born. When desire is born, they make an effort. Having made the effort, they weigh it up. Having weighed it up, they strive. Being self-resolute, they realize for themselves the highest truth itself. Penetrating by means of wisdom.

See? Stages. And you also have to be careful that, so the whole point is that when we practice to abandon all expectation. This is the point. So abandon all expectation. And this will, if you don't, then you'll get into that failure success. And that's where the trouble starts.

And when you get a lack of success, it can be a sort of misunderstanding really. Remember that all spiritual traditions warn us that the spiritual path is full of deserts. Dry places, empty places. And it's surprising how many people when they enter into that place just begin to slag off and disappear and then they reappear about 20 years later.

But those periods when you think you are not advancing are more important than those periods when you think you are. That's the slog, that's the dryness, that's the desert. You've just got to keep one foot in front of the other. And I use the image before the mountain. So mountains are used often in the spiritual literature because they're so close to the experience of the spiritual life.

The idea of having this constant. The actual practice is extremely simple. To climb a mountain, all you've got to remember is you put one foot in front of the other and, generally speaking, go up. That's it, isn't it? I mean, you don't need any more instructions than that. Then, of course, there comes all sorts of techniques and ways of handling certain situations. Stamina, commitment, yeah?

And the worst thing you can do on a mountain, especially the high you get, is to sit down and have a break which is just a wee bit too long and you start getting cold. And you drink your last cup of tea. And that's it. You're on the way down then. So it's a case of that commitment, especially during those periods where you feel that nothing is happening. It doesn't matter how long nothing is happening. You just keep going. Just keep going.

And it's a testing time. You're just looking at the fact of the loss of self-esteem, the feeling that you're not going anywhere, as if there was anywhere to go, a lack of success. All comes up, and it's the ego. So the dryness, the aridity of practice, is one of the most potential parts to get rid of the ego. And usually it's a time when we give up, which is a sorrow, because it takes a bit to get up there. So don't worry about lack of success, just keep doing the job.

Then of course there are the more obvious things, doubt in the Buddha. The doubt, a doubt in the Buddha always has felt to me, in a sense, slightly unnecessary. Because as you go along, there are side posts there. You don't have to believe in *Nibbāna*. You don't have to believe at all in any of that stuff. The whole point about the Dharma is that it's immediate. You either benefit from it now or you don't. That's the point.

But when we're practicing we might not see, shall we say, an immediate benefit from it right here and now in this present moment, but when we look back on our practice over a period of years we can see that it's helped us to progress and it's part of our progression and it might even be the fundamental reason for our progression. So it's that

ability to see that the doubt that we have in the practice is undermined by not looking too far ahead. It's right here and now. So if we can look back and think a little bit, oh, this is a benefit, then we don't lose that sense of faith in what we're doing.

When it comes to the Sangha, that's really an extension of faith in the Buddha because the Sangha is simply other people who've said that they've actually attained the same thing. And the more people who say that, the more of course it gives other people confidence. Now these three things have to be, or at least two of them, have to be internal.

Even at the end, when the Buddha actually becomes enlightened, as that doubt appears, is this it or is there more, and that's when Mara attacks him with all the armies, that's how it's put in the mythology, and the Buddha touches the earth. You've seen the posture, the *Bhumisparsa* posture where he's touching the earth, and that was the point where he touched the earth as a witness as it were that he had attained the end of suffering. And the earth quaked and the earth goddess rose, wringing from her hair the water poured as libation to her by the Buddha in previous lives. That's nice, isn't it?

But when we actually take the refuge, it's not simply in that historical Buddha, it's the presumption that there's a Buddha within us, that there's something within us which is to be liberated. And that's what you're taking your faith in.

So when the Buddha is dying, Ananda wants to know who's going to take his place. Because Ananda has this overflowing faith in the Buddha. And the Buddha's answer is that he mustn't take faith in him as a person, but take faith in the Dharma, the teaching itself, the practice itself.

And in himself: be a light unto yourself, take the Dharma as your light, take the Dharma as your guide, take the Dharma as your teacher, take yourself as your guide, yourself as your teacher. So eventually this is our journey, that's all the Buddha is saying. And the usual quote is: the Buddha's only point the way.

So eventually when we take these refuges, when we make that commitment, it's always a commitment to ourselves. And there was only one period in Buddhist history that I know of where there was a collapse of faith, where there was a doubt that there were some human beings who couldn't make it. And it's a heresy, of course.

And these people who couldn't make it were labelled the *Icchantikas*. And Icchantika means forever going on in the world of *saṃsāra*. There was no ending to their rebirth because they were so stupid. But luckily that didn't take on. It remains there as one of these little side schools that believe that some beings were really thick. They couldn't make it, even if they tried.

I must tell you, in Sri Lanka it's very strange to us, but they can tell by the shape of somebody's head – or some monks can tell, and nuns I presume, can tell by the shape of somebody's head – whether they're going to make it or not. And the teacher at my own monastery, who was an excellent teacher, a direct disciple of the Mahāsi, very strict, very demanding, and often wouldn't take on students, but he wouldn't take on certain students whose head wasn't quite right. I say no more. Maybe there are ways of telling things that we're not privy to – that's all there is to it.

So I think I've just about covered all the bits that I wanted to cover. I suppose one thing I might just say is how to make faith grow. We haven't done that, really.

So first of all, there's the spiritual friendship. That's very important: to be with the right people. To be with people of like mind who are supporting you is obvious, I mean. The Buddha – Ānanda says to the Buddha, "I believe that right relationship, good relationship, is only half of the spiritual livelihood." And the Buddha says, "Oh no, it's the whole of spiritual livelihood."

When a meditator has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that they will develop and cultivate the Eightfold Noble Path.

Also to be clear about one's training. See, if you're sloppy with your virtue, then it also slips. It undermines your commitment to the path because you cannot separate insight from virtue. You can't have a Buddha who goes around robbing. Wisdom is also an act – when it expresses itself, it is virtuous.

You have to be careful of your speech especially, it says. You must be energetic in abandoning what is unprofitable. Remember that every time you attend to something, there's an act of intention. Therefore, it's conditioning. You have to be careful what programmes you watch on the telly.

And finally, the understanding of impermanence. The more we understand impermanence, the more we get what's known as *saṃvega*, that enthusiasm. I mean, we haven't got that long, have we?

And visits to the teacher or to a centre where you get teaching. And also, just as an aside, the group – the evening group, your local group. That's always a nice fillip. I always remember making that effort every week to go across town in order to join a group had an effect of raising the effort for the whole practice for the week. And if I missed it, I could feel the lack of energy during the week. So remember that the effort you put into a practice is an attitude, and the attitude stays with you.

So I think that brings me to an end of my little homily. I'll just leave you with a little final refrain taken from the *Sutta Nipāta*:

Faith, in the way that we've been describing it, is the best wealth to a person of this world. Well-practised Dharma brings the most happiness. Truth is the sweetest of all tastes, and living with wisdom is said to be of the noblest kind.

CHAPTER 5

Ritual in Spiritual Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the place of ritual and ceremony within Buddhist spiritual practice, particularly in the Theravāda tradition. Drawing from his Northern English perspective, he traces how the Buddha emerged from the highly ritualistic Hindu tradition of his time, yet established very few formal ceremonies beyond essential monastic observances like the Pātimokkha recitation.*
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> *The talk explores how devotional practices like taking refuge in the Triple Gem, bowing, and observing the five precepts serve as skillful means to cultivate faith (saddhā), submission of ego, and entry into meditative states. Bhante emphasizes that these rituals are gateways to vipassanā practice—ways of connecting with the Buddha nature already present within us. He discusses how sacred spaces, Buddha images (rūpa), and ceremonial acts create the proper mental framework for meditation and mindfulness.*
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> *Addressing both the benefits and potential pitfalls of ritual, Bhante warns that without genuine practice and meditation, ceremonies become empty forms that may lead to doubt. He concludes by examining death rituals and loving-kindness (mettā) practices, showing how these serve primarily to transform the practitioner's heart rather than mystically benefiting others, while acknowledging the psychological healing they provide during grief and loss.*

Samantacakkavālesu attharagacchantu devatā sadhammamunirajasāsanantusāgamokadam dhammasavanakālo ayaṃ bhadantānaṃ dhammasavanakālo ayaṃ bhadantānaṃ dhammasavanakālo ayaṃ bhadantānaṃ

Many thanks for the invitation. I was brought up in Manchester. I'm the real thing. Perfectly Northern. So when I was coming up, I asked Dr. Farrokh Gamage what I should talk about. He suggested I talk about rituals, the purpose of rituals, and ceremonies that we have in various types of Buddhism, but specifically in Theravāda Buddhism, and what their role is.

If we go back to the Buddha himself, he came out of a very ritualistic religion. Hinduism at that time—it's now called Hinduism because the British called it Hindu, because it was to do with the name of India. They themselves would have called it Dhamma, the truth, just a law, which became obviously a word that the Buddha himself

used, the Dhamma. And as I'm sure you know, it was led by the Brahmin caste, and it was really based around a whole system of rituals, which were to do with appeasing gods and to do with getting power.

It first of all began, as all early religion, the idea was that there were all these gods who ruled, nature gods—god of fire, god of thunder, same as in Greek mythology. And the idea was that you offered these gods something and they did something for you. This became slightly corrupted as time went on because we understood that there came a time, if you did offer something to a god, he couldn't refuse. So therefore, huge sacrifices were made, especially of—the worst one was the horse sacrifice. Thousands of horses were sacrificed so they'd benefit the kingdom. And it was understood that once you made this great sacrifice, whatever you demanded from the gods would be given.

There were all sorts of varied rituals and ceremonies. For instance, as a child he watched his father conducting the plowing ceremony which opened the season for seeding the crops and things like that. So the Buddha grew up in a society which was just replete with all sorts of ceremonies and rituals, empowering rituals. And by the time he himself became enlightened, I don't think—and I stand corrected—apart from the rituals that he established for the order, which was to do basically with coming together once every two weeks to confess to each other any transgressions of the rules, and then to go through the actual ceremony of reading, reciting the rules, apart from that and of course the ordination ceremony and one or two little ceremonies like beginning the rainy season where monks have to stay in a monastery, he instituted very little rituals or ceremonies as we would recognize them in Buddhism as we find it in various countries now. And he seems not to have been at all interested in other rituals which would have been part and parcel of any Indian life—birth rituals, marriage rituals, and death rituals. There's nothing in the scriptures to suggest that he attended such things or took part in such things. And the general understanding was that the religion of the time took care of that. And his own focus was basically on getting people to begin to move towards what he had discovered, the enlightenment, the end of suffering.

So it's against that background that we have to think of modern rituals and modern things that we've just now, all this chanting that we've done. Then towards the end of his life, he suggests that the four main places to do with his life's journey be a place where people could come and reflect on the teaching and pay homage. The main one, of course, is this huge stupa that was built in Kusinārā, and his birthplace, and where he became enlightened, Bodh Gayā. And all these places these days now, I believe, are huge tourist attractions and places of ceremony and worship by Buddhist followers from all around the world. Huge temples, especially the Japanese, I believe, have built great big beautiful temples. Hotels, of course. Casinos.

So, how is it then that various rituals began to grow up? Well, even there, with the establishment of these four places, places where people could go to reflect upon the teaching of the Buddha and pay homage, there's an understanding by the Buddha that once he's gone, people will need some sort of place, some sort of way of remembering his presence.

Now, if you think, at the time of the Buddha, he was always there. It wasn't necessary to have anything to remember him by. It wasn't necessary to have a ritual to conjure up some sort of relationship with him. He was always there. You could seek him out, find him, and ask your questions and get the direction you wanted. When that went, we can see from even Ānanda's question to him—who will you lead to guide us now, now that you're dying, you've set up the order, who will you lead as the next leader of the Saṅgha, next leader of the Buddhist community? And he says, well, leave anybody, which throws poor Ānanda off a bit, and he says, what I'm leaving you is the teaching that I've given, the *Dhamma*, and you yourself, you yourself must be your own refuge. No point in taking refuge in me. I'm not here anymore. And so he threw it back to Ānanda and he throws it back to us personally, so we ourselves must become our own refuge.

So now, if we look at our own practices, especially in the Theravāda vision, as I say, we can begin to see where certain rites and rituals might be just part and parcel of any spiritual path. Now, there will always be those people who can give up everything, go and live in the moor, somewhere up on the Peak District, and make it all the way to enlightenment, and with no need for anything, apart from just a place to sit and meditate. But they're very rare, they're very few and far between. Most of us need some sort of support.

And most of us can't get that sort of energy, that what's called *saṃvega*, that enthusiasm, that commitment to become enlightened. Most of us would prefer to do little ceremonies and do good and hope we get a better chance in the next life. So I'm postponing it. On the understanding that so long as we have to be reborn, there'll always be somewhere to be reborn. Very interesting.

So apart from those very rare instances where we get these people who can do that, I'm thinking especially of, there was a very famous teacher in Thailand, Ajahn Mun, whom you might have come across. Have you come across the writings of Mahāboowa, Ajahn Mahāboowa? So his teacher, Ajahn Mun, seems to have been one of these people. He just went for it. He just sat in the forest there in the jungles. They were jungles then. And just finally became enlightened.

So, most of us need some sort of structure, some sort of institution to work within. And if we look at the various rituals, you see that they have a specific role to play in terms of our spiritual practice. Taking refuge in the Buddha, for instance, when we bow to the Buddha.

What is the body language of bowing? In the Christian tradition, people kneel. Muslims bow. Hindus do all sorts of bows. What is that body language when you bow? What does it mean? It means that you're submitting yourself to the teaching, doesn't it? It means that whatever the Buddha says, you follow. It's a submission. It's getting rid of that ego which says, well, I want to do things my way. The Buddha's right, but I think I've got it slightly better than him. I don't need to follow him exactly. I can do it in the way that I want to do it.

I always remember when I first came to Buddhism, I started off in Zen Buddhism. And in Zen Buddhism, they don't do the full bow. They just bow from, like Japanese, they just bow from the hip. And I saw everybody doing this, and I thought, well, this is really weird. And as I did it, I felt this enormous resistance. Which is peculiar because I myself have been brought up a Catholic and you always have that sense of submission. Doing, in Christian terms, doing the will of God. But it felt very strange. And of course it was this ego. It didn't want to submit itself.

So the bowing, the actual prostration—even that word to prostrate oneself, is a physical act where we express this submission to the *Dhamma*. Now, with it there has to be this faith. Now, faith is a cardinal virtue that we have to have. Faith can be understood as an intellectual assent, it's an agreement, it's an understanding that we come to. Many people's progress is undermined by the fact that they can't come to believe entirely what the Buddha says. So there's always this little level of doubt. So long as there's doubt, there can't be commitment. There's always some pulling back. You can't give yourself 101%.

So, one first of all reads about the Buddha, or if you're lucky and born into Buddhism, then this faith is something natural in your heart. In the old days, we used to castigate, we used to look down upon blind faith because it didn't make any sense in a society which more and more believes in scientific investigation, not believing something just because somebody says it's true, the Pope or a Buddhist monk. The idea is that it has to be proved, you have to have an experiment and prove it's there. So, in our society we have this idea that blind faith is something which isn't good in itself. But if you have blind faith in what's absolutely true, then it's an asset, isn't it? You don't have to go through the problem of trying to convince yourself anymore.

So, in a sense, this is one of the attributes that somebody who's born into the Buddhist understanding has naturally. And if you're not, if you're somebody who's converted to it, or somebody who has slowly come to that understanding, then one has to go through the reading, one has to go through the understanding process, one has to understand the Buddha's teaching, and with it there comes this sense of, this is right, this is meaningful to me, this makes sense to me. And as that comes, the faith grows. Faith itself, although it has its growth in intellectual understanding, is also a heart thing, isn't it? It's a sense of commitment.

And with it, of course, there grows this other great virtue, which is hope. Hope is that heart feeling, that heart state which knows that the enlightenment will come. We live in the hope of that eventuality. Hope is not here to be confused with expectation. Expectation is hope with a date—if I begin meditating now, I'll be enlightened in a couple of weeks.

So now this faith that we have has to be expressed. We have to express it some way. All our understanding, remember, is always expressed. It's expressed by the way we speak, by the way we communicate to people, by the way we move. It's expressed through our personality. Whether we like it or not, we're all teachers. As soon as somebody knows you're a Buddhist, then immediately, or at least involved in the *Dhamma*, or a meditator, then they immediately begin to judge you according to that yardstick. And whether we like it or not, we become teachers to anybody whom we're around.

So, this business of faith allows us to move into that area of right action, right speech, right livelihood, because from that faith there comes a conviction that the Buddha's teaching is correct and that somehow I have to re-engage with the world in a slightly different way.

So these rituals that we do, the first one, the simplest one, which is bowing to the Buddha, bowing to the *Dhamma*, and then bowing to the Saṅgha, is this idea of submission, of a sort of contract, a negotiated contract that we have with the Buddha as a living memory. But it also, of course, has a much deeper spiritual understanding, because when you're bowing to the Buddha, you're really bowing to yourself. Because it's we, ourselves, that become the Buddhas. We, ourselves, have become Savaka Buddhas, Buddhas who have followed the Buddha as a way, rather than Sammāsambuddhas, Buddhas who have become enlightened by their own particular endeavour.

So there is that, bowing to the Buddha within us. And that means that we have to listen to this higher voice within us, which is, if we listen carefully enough, it's always guiding us into the skillful path, into the path which leads to our own liberation, because it's there within us. It's not something—remember, *Nibbāna* or these… the enlight-

enment itself is not something which is manufactured. It's not something that arrives at the end of a path. It's like for instance you take a train from London to Manchester and on the way Manchester grows and appears. When you get there Manchester is always there. So this Nibbānic element, for want of a better word, this buddho, the enlightenment is already there within us. It's a matter of discovering it, uncover.

It's a matter of lifting that consciousness, this *paññā*, this intuitive intelligence we have, to really discover this new relationship to the world, which the Buddha calls this liberation from suffering, liberation from delusion. The process of liberating ourselves from delusion. So that when we bow, it's also an acknowledgement that we ourselves have this Buddha within us, have the *Dhamma* within us, have the actual truth already within our hearts, it's within our minds, it's within our bodies, it's right here. We don't have to go anywhere to get it, we don't have to buy it from somewhere or import it, it's already here.

And the bowing of the Saṅgha is, in a religious sense, it's accepting that there are people who came after the Buddha who have said that, by their own experience, they also proclaim the enlightenment. And we ourselves, when we bow, we also join that Saṅgha. We may not have achieved any of the noble powers and fruits, but it's there as a potential.

So when we do this bowing, it has a purposeful way of connecting us with our spiritual wealth, with our spiritual essence, which is within us.

Now, we then take the five precepts. So the five precepts are our basic moral law, just at least getting the coarse level of our behaviour to be more refined. It's the beginning of a refinement of our personalities. And that again is, we repeat it with the intention of taking them as training rules, right? They're not commandments, they're not something which have some sort of penalty behind them apart from the law of *kamma*. The idea of punishment isn't necessary. The law of cause and effect is a good enough teacher.

Various other rituals such as, we don't do it in the West, but in the East things like bowing to the Bodhi tree, things like that, are all to do with a similar sort of faith, a similar sort of devotion, a similar sort of giving, of emptying oneself for that moment of any ego desires and saying, that I commit myself to this path.

Now, when we come to things like Buddha Rūpa, the actual manifestation of the *Dhamma* in terms of art, in terms of temples, in terms of Buddha-rūpa, they're all there to create an atmosphere, to create a certain space where we can enter. This goes way back in human psychology, the magic circle. We need to create a special space where we can go, and it immediately affects us.

You walk into a hospital and you walk into an atmosphere. You walk into a school, you walk into a police station, you know exactly what the atmosphere is there. So when you walk into a temple or any holy place, there's an atmosphere, there's something about a place, a space, a circle, which allows us to enter into a different mind space, a different way of being in the world.

And the Buddha Rūpa itself—I mean, there were no Rūpas, as I'm sure you know, for about 500 years. The first Rūpas appeared in the Indian style in Mathura and in the Greek style in Gandhāra. And that's why they had this knobbly little head, by the way. This was the Greek way of expressing nobility. They used to curl their hair and put it in a topknot. So, we've been handed that. I'm sure the Buddha never quite had that on top of his head, but later on, as you see it develop, for instance, in the later stuff, especially of the Thais, you see that this thing turns into a flame, the flame of enlightenment.

So it becomes very symbolic in that sense. Now, the root for itself is there. I mean, what is that? It's meant to be some sort of image of the enlightened mind — the composure of it, the silence of the face, the energy in the body posture. It's all meant to be a teaching thing. But it was something quite late before that. The Buddha was represented by the Bodhi tree footsteps. Various sorts of symbols were used to keep in mind for all who came along, in a devotional sense, that the Buddha, the Enlightenment, was somehow right there amongst us. We didn't have to... it was a point of reference, you might say.

Now, I'm sure you all saw that scene of the Buddha Rupa being blown up in Afghanistan. I have to say, it took me by surprise. I think it was the violence of the explosion, but I felt quite a pain in my heart. I felt, God, I think I was expecting it just to crumble, but the actual explosion was really terrible. An expression, really, of their anger, wasn't it? I mean, they're just very angry people. But in a sense, of course, we don't need any of this. See, that's the point. It's not part of our spiritual practice. This is something that we need because they're little helps, they're little something which lifts us on the path. They're not absolutely necessary.

So when it comes to these rituals, they are little entrances, little performances, little entrances to get us into a different frame of mind. Now, what is that different frame of mind for? It's to get us into meditation. And that's the purpose of it. The bowing is that expression of, you know, I'm now going to obey the Buddha's teaching. And what is the Buddha's teaching? The Buddha's teaching is to meditate. The Buddhist teaching is to practice specifically, not simply meditation, but the way we behave in ordinary daily life. But it's an entrance into a state of mind which is about turning our lives around and becoming to express the purity of heart.

So, even privately, when we're in our own homes, to, in the morning, to take the refuges, to bow, to take the refuges, and to take the precepts sets us into that frame of mind where we can then sit and begin to do some small meditation. Now, what is it that the meditation does? The meditation connects us with what we've just bowed to. That's the whole point of it. The whole point of meditation, the whole point of the *vipassanā*, is to discover that within us which is the enlightenment. As soon as we are in a state of good *vipassanā*, we're already beginning to touch upon, we're already beginning to taste the taste of *nibbāna*. The Buddha says in the Dhammapada, he says, those who are mindful are in the neighbourhood of *nibbāna*. That's how close we are when we're in a meditative state.

Now, if you don't meditate, what's going to happen? This is the problem. The problem is if you don't meditate, then what happens to all these rituals? They start to become empty forms. There's no meaningfulness to doing that unless there's a movement from the ritual into practice. The ritual is there simply to create a ground, simply to create an atmosphere within ourselves so that we can then begin to practice.

Now, although I've said meditation, because I think meditation is a core practice in the sense that if we can do even twenty minutes in the morning it sets us, it puts us in contact with that state of mind that we have to carry throughout the day. I say state of mind, but it's more truthful to say a level of consciousness, a way of being, a way of seeing things. And from there we go into ordinary daily life and we connect, we keep trying, even though we lose it throughout the day — the sense of mindfulness, the sense of being here, the sense of being attentive and careful with what we do, what we say, the way we behave, the way we communicate. Even though we lose it, the whole point is to come back, to keep remembering.

One of the earlier definitions of *sati* was remembering. Remembering what? Remembering to, in terms of Buddhism, remembering to be here. *Sati*, awareness, mindfulness. Whenever we're aware, whenever we're mindful, we're here. You can't be anywhere else if you're mindful. You're right in the present moment. So the whole point of the meditation is, in terms of ordinary daily life, is to keep on connecting us with this centre. And throughout the day, even though we lose it a million times, we keep coming back, we keep coming back, we keep coming back. Now that's the practice. That is the practice. There isn't anything more to it than just that, than just bringing ourselves back into the present moment. We're establishing mindfulness.

Now, if you don't do that, then what happens to all these rituals and all these performances? They take on a certain empty quality because they won't have, it won't lead to this meditation which ultimately has an effect on your life. Even in the Buddhist

monastic life, there are certain things that... very simple things, like putting on the same robes every day in the morning, having to cut your hair off every couple of weeks, or whenever the society of monks that you're with do so. These are all little rituals just to keep reminding the person who is in the monastic order that they've joined the monastic order. It demands a certain way of behaving, a certain way of speaking, a certain way of being in the world.

And this morning ritual that, really, I think, is necessary for most people who practice in the Dharma — this idea of just spending a small time in the morning to reconnect with the teaching and to go through that business of committing ourselves to the teaching and then to take the precepts as a basic way of behaving. All this is very meaningful so long as there's the effort to live in that state of mind, in the state of the enlightened person. If you lose that, then these rituals just become empty. And eventually, because there's no effect from the ritual, there's a great danger that the doubt seeps in. Before you know it, you basically stop practicing and stop doing the ritual.

So I don't know whether that's clarified a little bit of the situation. If there's any questions about... observations, contradictions — I always like a contradiction — criticism, editorials.

"Whilst accepting that the rituals give us a framework eventually to be in touch with meditation, *nibbāna*, could you enlighten us how the concept of *pañcakūle* evolved and what's the purpose of — I have heard that it's good to give the *pañcakūle* when you are alive?"

Can you remind me what *pañcakūle* is?

"That's the one death ritual."

The death ritual, that's right. Excuse me. You mean making offerings for the benefit of the dead?

"Yes, and that I have heard the philosophy that it's good to give it if you're when you're alive rather than somebody else offering it at your funeral."

Oh yeah, you mean as soon as you're born you do a funeral tradition? That's not bad. At least it puts you in a good frame of mind, doesn't it, for the rest of your life. I don't know.

You see, all these rituals about doing something for our ancestors and for our forebears, as far as I'm aware, there's nothing of it in the scriptures. These are something really which are there for the person who's bereaved, so they feel that they can do

something for the person and in doing so there's a certain relief in that person, that they can are offering something of their lives, of their benefit, to this person who's passed on.

Now, I think we can presume since the whole universe is interconnected and everything has an effect on everything else that maybe they do receive these blessings from us. But I think most of these exercises are much more understandable if you actually see them as practices for ourselves and practices for the healing of our own hearts when they're broken, and for the growth of our hearts.

If you take, for instance, loving-kindness. Now, we practice loving-kindness, first of all, in the classic tradition of first of all to ourselves, then to those who are near, etc., etc., and then we go out to those who we're indifferent to, and finally to enemies. Now, I think we can generally believe that, in terms of minds, that we might be connected and that it affects other people when we offer them benefit, even if they live on the other side of the world or in a different realm.

But what we're really doing is developing the heart of love within us. We're developing a different relationship to the world. And that's what we're really doing. So that, for instance, when we take that loving-kindness that we might feel quite naturally to those we love, and then we bring to mind people whom we're indifferent to, and eventually enemies, then that love doesn't become bounded by attachments.

The difference: *mettā*, love, is an internal attitude that the Buddha has within his heart which is not dependent on the object. That's what *mettā* is. For most of us, unenlightened beings, that love is dependent on whom we see. We feel more love towards this person and less to all these other persons. So, what we're trying to do is re-educate that heart, transform it, transform those negative states into an inner attitude which is no longer dependent on the world. It just comes out of that enlightened mind.

Now, that's the, shall we say, the real reason for doing it, but when we're doing it you can see it does have an effect on us in the way we behave. So for instance, so many people have told me who do the practice that for instance if at work or amongst their family there's someone with whom they've got a big contradiction, a lot of aggression and stuff, just practicing at least the level of no harm — no harmful response, no backbiting, no response to their hatred or dislike. That's presuming that they dislike you rather than you dislike them, right?

So, in a situation like that, what happens by creating this *mettā*, by creating this loving-kindness, when you see the person, and remember that human beings are extremely good at recognising people's states from way off — you can tell, even from a

person, I don't know how many yards away, whether they're your friend or not, just by the way they're walking, the look on their face and everything. So, just going into work, going into that situation where there's aggression towards us, and having established this attitude of no harm, it's already in our posture, it's already in our body language, it's already on our face, which means that the person with aggression has nothing to get hold of. Anger needs something to be angry with it, for it to grow. If anger is just anger, it just fades away if nothing responds. And so, many people who practice loving-kindness find that these situations of aggression and all that are just dissolved by it.

Now, you can be mystical if you want. You can think that this amazing loving-kindness has burst out of your heart every morning and evening towards this audible person, has changed their hearts and all this other stuff. Or you can believe that just the practice has changed you. And because it's changed you, it's changed them.

Now, in terms of this whole business of death and separation, these are really heavy times for us, aren't they? We ordinary human beings, we suffer a lot when somebody dies, somebody that we love. It's a painful, painful situation. And somehow we need a ritual. Somehow we need to express that loss. We need to reconnect with the dead person in some way and express all the things that perhaps we never expressed when they were alive and to find some way of relieving our hearts of this grief.

Now the problem with great grief of course is this confusion as to what love is, because we love in an attached way, and it's the attachment, remember, that's caused the pain, not the love. There's a hole in the heart caused by that attachment. We presume that if we stop grieving, we therefore stop loving, because the only way we've ever loved is through attachment. And therefore you can get into this awful downward spiral of going into morbid grief. Yeah, and then you have to end up on Prozac. So it's pretty useless.

So, these little rituals, a way in which we human beings can let go, can let go and say, well, whatever I did that did any harm to you, I'm trying to make up. You see what I mean? It has that sort of... Now, in terms of the Thai tradition, which I didn't know actually, in a sense, that's what the Buddha is teaching. I mean, what woke him up, what woke him up out of his indulgence in pleasure, in believing that life, the life he was living would just go on forever, which we do, don't we, when we're young — in the twenties, you never think you're going to die, do you? I know, they're good times.

And then what wakes him up, sickness, old age and death. That's what he sees, and for him it creates what we would call these days an existential crisis. He doesn't know what he's living for. I mean, there he is having a great old time, and suddenly he realises that he's going to come to an end. And such was the refinement of his mind that it

really hit him hard. And that's why he goes to the drastic steps of leaving his family in search of some end to suffering, because he was in touch with that suffering. He realised he was going to die.

So one of the great meditations that he set for us in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the discourse on meditation, on awareness, on establishing awareness, is the meditation, the cemetery meditation, where you observe the body decomposing over its nine stages. There was an American who turned up in Sri Lanka. He was in the newspaper, actually. Happened before I got there. I think he was very young in the practice, and he decided to do this practice of watching dead bodies corrode.

Now, what he did was, he got himself a cave, as far as I understand it, and he got himself a cave up in the hill somewhere, and he built himself a glass box with a funnel coming out of it. And he carried a dead body up there to watch it decompose, and it seems that he got permission to do this. He got a body of a criminal or something. That was a strange story, yeah.

So he took it up there and began to watch this body decompose and meditate on it. And the next thing, and the newspaper said, now finally, here's a real monk. Finally we found a real monk who's doing a real meditation watching dead bodies decompose. And the next part, then the newspapers went dead because he shot off to Calcutta to see Mother Teresa. I don't know, it was a breakdown probably. It's a heavy meditation, isn't it?

So... this constant remembering, this constant reminding us, reminding ourselves that in fact sickness, old age and death will come. Old age may not.

CHAPTER 6

Is Awareness Enough?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 54 min

> *In this exploration, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a fundamental question in Buddhist practice: is awareness alone sufficient for awakening? Drawing from the Buddha's own journey and the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he clarifies that Right Awareness (sammā sati) must be accompanied by intelligent investigation (dhammavicaya) and other factors of awakening.*
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> *The talk examines how ordinary awareness differs from the awareness that leads to liberation, referencing the seven factors of awakening (bojjhaṅga) and their essential balance. Bhante discusses the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana) - impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā) - as the focus of contemplative investigation. He also compares different meditation traditions, explaining how Vipassana, Zen, and koan practices all point toward the same fundamental insight.*
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> *With practical wisdom gained from years of practice, including time in Burma, Bhante offers guidance on avoiding common pitfalls: the danger of passive awareness without investigation, the risk of spiritual pushing versus appropriate effort, and the importance of developing right relationship with the practice itself.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One. I thought I'd try and put things together to make it clear as to what the role of awareness is in the process of enlightenment and what else is necessary.

If we begin with the life of the Buddha himself, remember that he had practiced quite fiercely for six years. And before that he probably dabbled a bit. In the first year or so, he attains all these very profound absorptions to the point that both teachers ask him to join them as teachers. And these are what we now call the *jhānas*. Also during that time he's obviously keeping his mind very still because one of the factors of enlightenment, one of the factors of the *jhānas* is a still mind, a concentrated mind.

Then he does mortification exercises, mainly around not eating. And he comes to the end of this process after six years and he's got nowhere. Nowhere in terms of his koan, in terms of his real life question, which is, is there an end to suffering? All that time, he had awareness.

He comes to that point, and in desperation, he's sitting by the roadside looking pretty ragged. And a woman comes along with a bowl of rice, as you know, meaning to offer it to a god. In the scriptures, they say that she mistook him for a *deva*, for an angel, for a god. But I don't think he looked like that at all. So they took pity on him and said, you'd better take some of this rice. So he had this rice, and he felt fulfilled. And he thought about what was going on and all that. And he must have been pretty miserable. His mates had left him. They said he'd gone soft because he'd eaten his rice.

And then he remembered this little time in childhood, when he is observing his father, he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. Now there's something in that observation, there was something in that particular moment, which he remembered at that time, in a time of desperation, looking back over his life, wondering whether there was an end to suffering. And he remembers this particular state of mind. If you go back, can you remember a particular state of mind at the age of 8, 9, 10, 12? So it must have been something that he really remembered, something about the quality of that observation, which he then, of course, goes and sits and determines not to move until his eyes are enlightened or he drops dead. Have you tried that?

So he sat there, and luckily for him, and for us, he became enlightened. He had this insight which liberated him, liberated him from this confusion about suffering. So that's his story.

Then, of course, the whole of his life is actually talking about this moment, of how to get to this moment of liberation. And the core discourse is the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse here, the discourse on how to establish this *sati*, which we translate as mindfulness, awareness, attention, being present. All these are about being here in a particular way.

Now, if we look at this, you'll see it's the words he uses. He says that the meditator sits and he observes these four frames of reference: the body, feelings, the mind with its emotions, and *dhamma*, which he means to look at all this from the point of view of his teachings. The three characteristics, the four noble truths, eight of these, ten of those, and so on. And he says to do it with *ātāpī sampajāno satimā*.

Ātāpī comes from the word *tapos*, which means mortification exercise. So in other words, it's real energy. So those people who translate the Zen effortless effort, meaning that you can just lie down and it'll happen, haven't read this particular discourse. So there's some energy here. We need some energy. We need some commitment. We need some real putting of our effort behind something.

The word *satimā* is just an adjective from *sati*. So, with awareness, translated. Mindfully. And the middle word is *sampajāno*. *Sampajāno* meaning with intelligence. These core words are in constant recurrence throughout the discourse.

When we get into the discourse itself, which describes in more detail how we establish these four frames of reference—the body, feelings in the body, emotional states, mental states, and the *dhamma*—we get these recurring phrases. He says to establish mindfulness on one of these four and to do it inwardly just to the point of being able to stay with it. Then the next stage is to observe the rising and falling—that's the next stage. And then finally he says to dwell upon it, to dwell upon the object of meditation, just so much that *jñāna* and *paṭissati* can arise naturally. *Jñāna* is insight. *Sati* is awareness. So there's nowhere in the scripture that *sati* and *paññā* are separated. Wherever there's *sati* there's *paññā*.

So *sati* is that awareness, general awareness. *Paññā* is intelligence. It's an intuitive intelligence.

Now, if we go back to *sati*, go back to awareness, a robber, in the midst of robbing a bank, is ultra-aware, isn't he? I'd be. Very mindful. My head would be sparking. When you're crossing a road and it's busy and you've got to watch yourself, you're aware.

So there's something about the awareness which is going to become enlightened, which is leading us to enlightenment, which is not ordinary awareness. That's why the Buddha calls it *sammāsati*, right awareness. A baby is aware. In fact, if anything, a child is living almost in a very present moment, but it's not *sammāsati*. So there must be something else to the *sati*.

Now, if we go to the factors of enlightenment, then we come across those factors which are necessary to also be there against this background of *sati*. So *sati*, you can say, is like a field of awareness. It's just a being present. But there must come something into that presence which is going to spark, which is going to actually see something.

And what we find in the seven factors is this *dhammavicaya—dhammavicaya*, which means investigation of *dhamma*. So although we have this awareness, it has to be pointed at something. It has to be aware of something. There has to be an intentionality behind it. You can't just flop, go into this wondrous, spacious state of being all things, in a state of open awareness, because nothing's going to happen. It's very nice, it's very peaceful, it's very beautiful, but it's dull, it's daft. Nothing happens.

So there has to come in this *dhammavicaya*. This *dhammavicaya*, this investigation of *dhamma*, has to be balanced with *upekkhā*, with equanimity. This suggests that this investigation must not have a question there. That's the problem. As soon as we say, let's

investigate something, a question arises. Somehow we have to develop that curiosity which is just a question mark. As soon as there's a word put to it, as soon as there's a looking for something, then it's going to be corrupted. It's going to be corrupted by that concept that you're looking for.

Balanced with that you have *pīti* and *passaddhi*. *Pīti* here translates as interest. Interest is an attitude, isn't it? It's a mental state to have interest in something. There's an eagerness included in there, a wanting to know. It's a heart state to be interested in something. Now that has to be balanced with *passaddhi*, which is tranquility. If interest is not balanced that way, then it becomes excited. And if there's no interest there, then you enter into this lovely meditative state of tranquility.

You can see meditators when they do that. They'll be like this. And if you wake them up, they say, "Oh, I'm here. What's wrong? I'm aware." Put them to sleep. It's lovely. Nothing's going to happen. They're going to end up after an hour just as daft as they were before they started.

So there has to be this intelligence, this interest, this wanting to know. And subsisting all that, subsisting and helping all that, is of course concentration, which is this one-pointedness of the mind, the ability of the mind to stay still. And the effort—and this is the *ātāpī*, this is the effort of mortification exercises—is just enough effort to maintain that. That's all.

So there's your seven factors of enlightenment. And you can see that in the scriptures. He never separates awareness from intelligence, awareness from intuition.

So when we meditate and we sit here, the first effort is to bring the mind to a stillness. But once you're in that stillness, once you've made the effort to, as it were, quiet down and to become aware of the object, there has to arise in us this wanting to know. Now, what is it we want to know? What is it that wanting has to be pointed to?

Here, the Buddha simply says to become aware of the three characteristics of existence. Because when we become aware of the three characteristics of existence, we're undermining this consciousness which believes itself to be a self. So as long as we are aware of transience, and that's his next step. So the first step was just to dwell upon the object. The second step is to become aware of its process.

But here, to my mind—I'm not so sure this is particularly commentarial, but to my mind—this watching of *anicca*, watching of transiency, includes the other two. Which is to observe how suffering arises and to observe that quality of not me, not mine. So there are your three characteristics.

So now you can see that this intuitive intelligence which is natural to us and which is the same intelligence that works out how much we have to pay for the bills and what we have to do at work. It's all the same intelligence. There's no other intelligence than the intelligence we have. What we need to do is clarify the intelligence of thought and clarify the intelligence of any distorting emotion. And we do that by making states of mind objects. We do that by bringing the mind into the present moment so that thought can't get in because thought is always after thought. When you're involved in something, there's no room for thought.

So the whole process of the meditation is to bring this, is to, as it were, close down the awareness into the present moment to an object arising and passing away so that there's no time but to see what there is. But that seeing is guided, is actually being primed to see the three factors, to see the three characteristics of existence: the fact that it's arising and passing away; the fact that it's not me, not mine, the distance; and the fact that any time I form a relationship with it, of wanting or not wanting, possession or identity, some dissatisfaction arises.

It's just watching that that liberates this consciousness from wrong relationship to the body, mind and heart it's in. And that's all we're doing—we're just changing our relationship to the world. And remember, in Buddhist terms, the world is how we experience the world. In other words, it's within this, as he says, fathom-long body. It's not outside us. It's within this bubble of our consciousness. That's what we've got to change.

Considering his own discovery of the role of awareness—when you think about it, it can't only have been awareness, it must have also been the memory of this intuition that came with it, this way of looking—and the example that I always use is of a little child who's around about pre-language or around about the beginning of language, where there's no conceptual thinking as such. They might have a word "car" or whatever, but there's nothing built up around it conceptually.

And you'll often see them see something like a bug which they've never seen before. And you see them just lock onto it. They just lock onto it. There's no time as far as they're concerned. There's just this thing crawling away. And you'll see their mouths drop. Now when the mouth drops and the tongue relaxes, there's no thought. So there they are, just in that moment. And they're just stuck there. And then some well-meaning parent will tell them to shut their mouth and kill it.

But if you leave the kid alone, then of course it comes out of it and says, "What is it?" Now once the parent says, "Oh that's a beetle," that's it, it doesn't look anymore. It knows it. And we've lost that direct contact with beetles. When was the last time you really looked at a beetle?

So that's what conceptual, that's what the concepts do. They make us presume that in seeing a thing through the vision or through the prism of a concept, we actually experience it. So somehow we've got to go beyond that, and we do that by constantly bringing this attention into the present moment. And as it locks into the present moment, there can't be room for thought. And we're right there with that childlike mind. Except this time, it actually has some intelligence, some stored wisdom behind it, which the child doesn't have. If the child had that, it'd become enlightened at the age of three. But we have to go through the horror of our lives in order to build up the wisdom of how to develop this way of looking. Remember, it's suffering which leads us to the enlightenment. So we've got to go through the pain, or else there's no gain. Everybody knows that.

In this scripture, he's very clear about that. So now we come to this confusion as to how we can be confused with the different traditions. As far as my understanding is—and you're welcome to correct me after the talk—there are two major traditions. There's the Vipassana tradition and there's the Dzogchen-Zazen tradition. And just on the outside of that, there's the Koan tradition.

What is the difference between those two approaches which can cause confusion to meditators? In the *vipassanā* process, we want to get to that *satipaññā*, we want to get to that *sampajāno satimā*. And we do it by way of using an object within the body, the breath itself. By turning inward and going into the breath, we pull out that singular object and we begin to, as it were, bury our awareness and that intuitive intelligence just into a single sensation. All the world is in a grain of sand.

In that moment, when we, as it were, open up to the field of awareness, so that we're not just concentrated into the breath, but able to observe anything which draws our attention—we're not looking for anything, so I'm sitting watching the breath and there's a bird song, and it's the bird song which is drawing my attention. I'm not looking for bird songs. And as I go to the ear, as I go to the ear base, I'm interested in the process of hearing. I'm not interested in the bird. I'll see the image of the bird in my mind. I hear and I feel my response to it. So I can see this whole connection I have with the outside world. I can see that when the bird stops, there's a longing for it to go on a little bit more. So there's my attachment. So that's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in the way that this mind is constantly wandering between wanting and not wanting. How things arise and pass away. Creating that distance, recognizing it's not me, not mine. And it's all come from this center in the breath where I've honed the seven factors of enlightenment.

Now, if you go to the Dzogchen school, or the Zazen school—the Zazen school I know personally—as soon as you sit, you're supposed to be there. Like that. Boom, boom. You made it. That's it. You're right there. Just where you were, it took these poor Vipassana ninnies weeks to get there. These Dzogchen guys, boom, that's it, they're there.

Now it can't be so, can it? There must be something going on. So that somebody who throws themselves into a Zazen position, Shikantaza. Now when you look at their training, you can see how they get there and are able to hold it. Remember that in most, like, something like Sogyal Rinpoche, as far as I know, you sit in Dzogchen for ten minutes. That's all they can expect from somebody who's doing their practice at an ordinary level. Now remember that insight in the Enlightenment doesn't take any time. You either see it or you don't. It's a flash, that's it, it's finished.

But if we look at the whole tradition, then we see how they can just sit there for ten minutes, or maybe an hour, or whatever. Hundred thousand bows. *Om mani padme hum*. Days on end. What are those practices? Visualizations, purifying the heart. It's only when you've been through all that can you throw yourself on the cushion and enter into Dzogchen.

There's the balance of the practice. Dzogchen masters and Zazen masters will tell you that the error of somebody in Dzogchen and Zazen is that they fall into the same error as Vipassanā people: to move into that state of clear awareness, absolutely still body, straight, perfect energy, no thinking, perfect peace and happiness until they wake up.

If you look at the Zazen school, you've only got to go up to Throssel Hole. It's been years since I went there. But when I used to go up there, you'd work three hours at a stretch. You'd never stop. And you worked fast. I remember once I was saying to the work chiefs, the abbot wanted soil moved from one end to the other end to build a little garden. So I was stood at one end with a spade, and there was another guy stood at the other end, and there was this Dominican priest with a wheelbarrow, belting up and down. He shoved it in and down, he chucked it out and back up. Three hours! Weeding for three hours.

The whole idea of that Zazen meditation is not something separate from what you do. It's a common mistake, especially in the Vipassanā, because we have these special practices, special occasions, but in Zen they always talk about ordinary daily life. So there you are weeding, and you're weeding. You're putting your mind in it. You know, when you wash, you've heard these Zen sayings, when you wash the pots, just wash the pots. So when you weed, you weed. And you're weeding, and you get into the rhythm of weeding, and you don't want to leave the weeding. And the bell goes, and you want to

keep weeding. And then you go back, and you're full of this energy. And you go, boom, something's going to go, and you're there. It's not that the mind doesn't wander, but at least you've got some concentration because of the hard work, you've got the energy, and so you can sit in zazen, just sitting.

Now the koan is an interesting one, because the koan actually has its roots, all these things have their roots in the fundamental schools of Theravāda and for the Mahāyāna, what became known as the Sarvāstivādin school. If you have a look at this very dry tome called the Path of Purification by Buddhaghosa, a scholar of the medieval ages, the driest book in the world, bag of bones, but probably the most brilliant piece of, most brilliant compendium of spiritual exercises you'll come across. And one of them is how to become enlightened by repeating the word death. How to become enlightened by repeating the word death.

So how are we supposed to do that? Well, the idea is that you sit, you be silent, and you use the word death to contact your feelings about death. Every time you say death, images may come, feelings may come. It's an internalised practice of what's in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, known as looking at dead bodies in cemeteries. It's the *asubha*, it's the horrible meditations. And you're supposed to go to a cemetery and a charnel ground where the bodies were just left and eaten by vultures and rotting and all that, rats around. And you're supposed to sit there and just watch bodies rotting. Come back, see them in different states and keep saying to yourself, just as this body is, so mine will be. The commentary warns you not to sit upwind. Very detailed.

So there you are sitting, repeating this word death, and it's bringing up all your emotions about it, all your feelings about death. And just like vipassanā you observe in part one. And who is it? What is it that's afraid of death? It's the self, isn't it? So once you've cut through the fear of death, what is it to be afraid of? Hence the enlightenment.

Now from that you can see how the koans came. The koans, now the regular koan in somewhere like Korea is who am I or what is it. Now, a person in the old days would have been given a koan, and they would have been caught up in this intellectual answer. The Rinzai school was meant for, was supposed to be for samurais and for the intellectuals. So, the yogi would come along, and the master would ask him the koan, and he'd wait for the answer, and the guy would give him some sort of explanation, well, I'm not this, I'm not, and he'd get a clout across the ear. And he'd keep coming, getting bonked on the head, until finally he stopped thinking. That's the point. That's the point of the koan, to stop thinking.

So the idea in the koan when we say something like, who am I? And remember, these koans come up naturally in your meditation. Just feeling a feeling and hearing a little question like, what is this? That's your koan. It is turning on that intelligence. That's what the koan is doing. It's turning on that intelligence, making that intelligence look in a certain way, but beyond thought. So the meditator, just like one would say, death, and just feel what comes up, you might say, who am I? And just rest in that moment and let the intelligence take over. Our problem is we keep getting in the way. We keep trying to manipulate that intelligence to see what we want it to see and become enlightened.

So you can see how the koan is just an extension, is just a more obvious way of exciting this *paññā*, this intuitive intelligence we have within us. So now you can see, if you come from the Zen tradition and you meet a Theravādin, and the Theravāda says, all you need is awareness, they'll say, oh, no, no, no, that won't do at all. But in the Theravāda understanding, whenever you say right awareness, the intelligence is included. It's not right awareness unless the intelligence is being activated, the intuitive intelligence. And that's where the confusion lies often when you meet these schools, because they're coming from slightly different traditions. But it's always the same. It's always the same.

And in his book, which is still considered to be a classic of meditation, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation by Nyanaponika Thera, a very famous German monk who died not so long ago, he said that there was a time when people thought that Theravāda meditation, vipassanā, and Zen were sort of two opposites, belonged to two different worlds. But in fact, when these teachers came together, and when people who had practiced both actually began to realize that in fact it's all one and the same thing. And when you think about it, how else could it be? How else could it be?

So there we have it. The Buddha's own remembrance in childhood of a particular level of consciousness. It's not a state of mind. It's not an emotional state. It's not a thought state. It's a way of seeing things. Because of his own practice, he has that concentration of mind. He has the effort. And he has the rice pudding. And he sits under the tree and he becomes enlightened. And then he realizes what the factors are that made him get there. And the main factor is this *sati*. Behind it there are all the faculties. Why does he put *sati* first? Because that's your main disposition, awareness. To begin with the awareness of the object is your disposition. And then once the awareness is there, the concentration and effort will come to rise to support it. And once the awareness and concentration is there, and it's coming more and more into the present moment, the intuitive wisdom, supported by faith, if there's any scepticism you've had it, supported by faith, uses those qualities to see clearly what's going on. And just that seeing is its own liberation.

So the liberation is consciousness liberating itself from wrong view. And the whole process of the enlightenment is simply to get out of the way. The effortless effort. That's it.

Is there any questions? Observations? Criticism? Additions? Editorials? Yes?

"There are many stories about people who follow the teachers and then are severely treated in order to get rid of this ego which you mentioned in the classic. That is one of the biggest barriers to being able to have these states come together in the right portions and go forward. How does it work, doing that, going out and scourging yourself on weekends?"

I don't think Buddhist teachers were particularly cruel. I mean, the only real stories come from the Zen tradition where they chop your hand off or something, or chop your finger off if you happen to. Who? Oh, yes, yes, yes. Well, remember that the way teachers teach their students is very much dependent upon the culture. I mean, I can't imagine a Westerner taking that sort of business. I mean, they'd probably smack the guy, smack the person back. It's not within our culture to be battered towards the enlightenment. I mean, the Buddha himself wasn't. Nobody gave him a whack or two.

As Buddhism spreads, remember, it does pick up the culture. In the West, we're in very early days, very early days, and I can well imagine within two or three generations, four generations, that the Buddhism in the West is remarkably different from the Buddhism elsewhere. Because that's what's happened everywhere else. Chinese Buddhism is remarkably different from Japanese, from Thai, from Tibetan. So it changes, but your core question is in fact how to get rid of ego and the self.

One of the things that is very difficult for us is the word obedience, is the word submission. We can't handle that. It goes against the whole post-modern idea that I do my own thing in my own way in my own time. But before the Buddha became enlightened, so it is said, he put his bowl into the river and it flowed upwards against the stream. Only dead fish go with the flow. So this was symbolic of the fact that whatever we do towards enlightenment is always going to go against the self. Always. Always.

So the self, remember, is caught up in a game. It's caught up in a game with the world of wanting and not wanting and it finds a certain pleasure there. It finds a certain comfort. It doesn't want to let go of it because it always thinks if it can get it right it will definitely be perfectly happy. So that's one of the things about bowing. People hate to bow, but in fact bowing is the physical, it's the bodily expression of that submission. That's one reason it's the physical expression of submitting yourself to the dictates of the

Dharma. So if the Dharma says you shouldn't indulge in this then you have to bow to that. If you can't bow to it, if you can't take the teaching, if you can't do it, then you just end up with a very stiff back. An arthritic back.

And this is one of the fundamental attitudes of any spiritual life. It's not just Buddhism. Humility goes all the way through. This word humility, which has now been downgraded into slavery. But humility is that ability to be obedient. Who uses the word obedient these days? You don't hear parents use it with kids. Be obedient. It's all gone out of the language. It's too painful for the ego. The word discipline. The word discipline. I mean, it actually means, if I remember rightly, study, isn't it? Disciplina. Does anybody know? Disciplina. It means learning. Learning. So in a university you have a discipline. We talk about a discipline, because to study, to advance in knowledge, there has to be this commitment, this order, this discipline. But these days, education is much more concerned with entertainment.

So, in answer to your question about the way teachers teach, it's often to humble, to humble the student. I remember when I was in Burma, and I was, you know, being the westerner, and frankly, I just got fed up of bowing to this monk. I mean, he was my teacher, but I just got fed up with him. And he was so conceited, as far as I could see. Arrogant. I wasn't going to bow to him. And I remember approaching him and just sitting there. And he went... And if I hadn't have bowed, I'd have been out. That's it. Forget it. And what he's teaching me is, look, if you're going to take my message, then you'd better have the right attitude. One of the most painful times of my life.

"Is the awareness with interest and energy, what exactly do you mean by energy?"

Energy is just the effort to maintain it. I mean as a physical thing, the only energy you need to become enlightened, if we could hold it there, the Buddha says for seven years if you're unlucky, for seven days if you're really with it, it's just the energy to keep you upright. Just the energy in the spine. So all the energy you need is the resolution, the energy to just keep observing the object.

So that's why I mentioned to those of you here for the meditation that if we are serial meditators, then every time we come to sit, you really have to remind yourself what you're going to do. And so you make that resolution. This period of time, I'm going to commit myself to establishing mindfulness. Put it in your own way. Unless you forget, and you just sit there, it becomes habitual, and the mind wanders, and sure, you've planned your holiday down to America, but what's the point? But if you sit and you make this resolution right at the beginning of your sit, then I think you'll find that when you wander, you'll come back to that same resolution. Because remember, that resolution is conditioning your mind, it's conditioning you to be present. It's an attitude, it's

an attitudinal change to be present. And I would say that every time you lose it on a dream side, you come back, you stop for a moment, you recognize what's happened, and you recommit yourself with real resolution. Resolute resolution.

"But don't you need like a free flow of energy so no tension?"

Say that again?

"A free flow of energy so... In the whole body, not just a resolution."

I don't quite know... Well, should... Yeah, oh energy, yeah, say no more. The thing is once you're in this posture and you're lifting the energy up the spine just by sitting tall, then you're actually correcting all the energy in your body. You will feel, I'm sure many of you have felt, all the chakras fire. Pain in your stomach, pain in your chest, around your neck, it's all blocked. That's it. You don't have to do any yoga posture to become enlightened. You don't need astrology.

"You seem to be saying in the talk that... Is that what you were saying?"

That's right.

"It seems that people can have quite deep insights into those three experiences, but not have a final cessation in suffering. Maybe some change in ways that can happen, so they can bring wisdom and intelligence, but there's still a sufferer and still suffering can take place."

Yeah. So... Insight or... It's... Yeah, no, it's... The insights into these things are like little... Little corrections of view. Little corrections. Until the whole thing becomes properly corrected and then you're enlightened. They're just little adjustments. And they show up in little changes in the way you behave, in the way you react to similar situations, in the way you don't react to similar situations. Little changes within you. It's a very slow process. I mean, the Buddha often warns us this is a slow process.

And then there are kernel points when we can talk about a shift in perception. And these are what we call the stream entrant, the non-returner, and the arahat. I liken it to a stick. You see, you keep bending the stick. Now you'll notice that when you first start bending a stick, it's easy, isn't it? So when you first sit, it's easy. But as you keep going, you get the resistance. You get the resistance. And you get the resistance, and that's the ego, it's pulling away. And you've just got to keep working. And sometimes you relax, and you back up again. But remember that every time you flex it, you are getting stronger. You all do these exercises, I'm sure. And then one day, crack! Two sticks. Different state. Yeah. That's how it goes.

Yes?

"My question was going to be that once the stick is broken, is there no going back?"

Definitely not. And who'd want to go back? You see, if you think of the shift of consciousness, this very great shift that we go through between six and eight, where we get real. When we're six, believing Father Christmas comes down the chimney is not a problem, because what I can imagine is true, it's fact. Eight is a bit difficult. And then this morality comes in.

It's not as though young children don't feel shame and guilt, but it becomes much more clear around the age of seven, right and wrong. The tree of the fruit of good and evil. Now you wouldn't want to go back to three years old. I don't think so. So once you've moved, once you've become a *sotāpanna*, once you've become a stream entrant or an *arahat*, you don't want to go down again.

Is enlightenment one thing from which there is no going back or is it also a temporary insight? Now actually, this is a good question because this is also very confusing from the different traditions. In Theravāda we have things like *jhānas*, these insights of *vipassanā*. In the Japanese tradition we hear about satori and kenshō and they're actually all the same thing. You'll find that when you read the literature and you go through all the traditions, you'll find they're always talking about the same thing. They're always talking about little insights concerning the three facts, concerning the three characteristics. Transience, how suffering arises, and not self. It's always that. And then you'll see that they often have a special word for what we would call stream entrance.

Now, up until that stick snaps, you can always go back. And it's very difficult. It really is. Oh, it's soul destroying to have got the stick there and to have given up. It's like climbing up the mountain and you're almost at the peak and you tumble all the way down. So it's very important not to push ourselves too much so that in a sense we exhaust ourselves. We have to take a pace which is our personal pace of enlightenment. Just our personal pace.

Some people walk round and round and round spiralling up the mountain and the occasional person can just go straight up. So we've all got our little way. And you have to be very careful that you don't push yourself too much because that would be the error of westerners. Even if you're only moving at one nanometer per ten years, that's okay, it's moving up. I'm very careful of that. Very careful.

And the other mistake, of course, is to overestimate. That's the other side, where you think you've made it. That can be very depressing when you find out that you haven't. I've had two experiences, just personal experiences, where it was just a pain, really.

And I just came to a point where I thought, God, no, I can't handle this. And I was just going to cut out and get back to a bit of happiness, for God's sake. And it was one of these little moments in your spiritual life. And I actually made a decision to give up.

And all I can say was that the next moment I was filled with an intense horror as to what that meant. Absolutely, the horror was so awful within me as to what that actually meant that I just went and sat on the cushion and waited until the intention to meditate came again. And I've also had the experience of thinking you've achieved something and actually you haven't. That's a bit depressing. It takes a couple of beers to get over that. And then you gather energy and you start off again.

The ego gets more and more subtle the more you chase it. The more you overcome ego, the more subtle it becomes. Remember, conceit stays with you to the bitter end. It's the last fetter to go, one of the last fetters. Restlessness is one of the last fetters. And restlessness here suggests every neurosis you can think of, but extraordinarily refined. But it's still there.

So the fear's still there, the anger's still there. Everything's still there, but it's just like a... But it's still there, right to the bitter end. It's a little bit more fun taking things at your own pace.

How do you know if you're being lazy or not trying hard at all, or overdoing it? Well, I think it's a case of personal experiment. I think you just have to... In terms of laziness... I like to just make, it's my own definition really, laziness is when you decide you're not going to do it. When you decide that instead you can have a cup of tea. It's actually a conscious decision. I'm fed up.

Sloth and torpor are slightly more subtle because they're mental states that arise. And often, my teacher used to call them our two very good friends because they're always saying, "Ten minutes won't do you any harm. Just have a kip. You'll feel so good." But in fact, it's not tiredness at all. It's just sloth and torpor.

So in a sense you've got to experiment. You've got to experiment and just be very aware of your body, very aware of where the limits are. When it came to sloth and torpor, for instance, and just general laziness and not wanting to do things, this was the great problem of Moggallāna, who was the second great disciple of the Buddha. And the Buddha gave him, if I remember rightly, thirteen different ways to awaken, to stay above the sloth and torpor. And only at the end of that could he say he was really tired and have a sleep.

It's like you're trying to just push the boundary, but not so much that you crack it. And you have to be prepared to make mistakes unless you know the limit. And then you make a mistake. But if you go warily, the mistake isn't crushing you. I'm just going back now to the seventies, the middle seventies, where so many people I know really got into this business of these insights, which are all delineated, and just exhausted themselves with this very wrong effort of trying to achieve something.

And one very good friend of mine, he was in Burma actually, he dropped out. I could see it. I could see it happening. And he dropped out and I met him about seven years later and that year he'd spent ten thousand pounds on crack. So you can fall a long way. So that's not to frighten you. I'm not suggesting that you're going to rush out and get crack. But it's just a matter of experimentation. It's just a matter of working within your limits.

May I say something? Sure. I work as a therapist in Canada and what I've found is that there's a tendency in Canada at least, and perhaps over here as well, for people to flog themselves and to really push quite hard. It's even quite inherent in the media telling us that we're not good enough, that we need to be better, look better, that there's something that we're not quite right. And that this can carry over into meditation, for myself as well, that watching the pushing beyond and wanting to be the perfect meditator and to be compassionate.

CHAPTER 7

Developing the Spiritual Faculties

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 45 min

> *Building on yesterday's teaching on the hindrances, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the positive counterparts: the five spiritual faculties (pañca indriya) and seven factors of awakening (satta bojjhaṅga). He begins with saddhā (faith) - not mere belief, but confidence rooted in understanding and trust that deepens through practice until it becomes unshakeable upon glimpsing Nibbāna.*
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> *The talk explores how paññā (wisdom) manifests as dhammavicaya (investigation of Dharma), supported by upekkhā (equanimity) - perfect receptivity without reaction. Bhante emphasizes the delicate balance between vīriya (effort) and samādhi (concentration), using the Buddha's analogy of tuning a lute string - neither too tight nor too loose. He discusses how pīti (interest/joy) naturally awakens concentration when we're genuinely curious, while passaddhi (calmness) provides stability.*
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> *The profound simplicity emerges: establishing sammā sati (Right Awareness) through continuous attention naturally brings all spiritual faculties into balance. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna teachings, Bhante shows how sustained looking at the breath's transient nature leads to moments where the observer-observed duality dissolves, allowing direct insight to arise. These brief glimpses of satipaññā (awareness-wisdom) gradually transform understanding and our relationship to experience, supporting the gradual path toward liberation.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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

Yesterday we did the hindrances, how to deal with those states of mind which take us away from the object. Even though they're called hindrances, they are our teachers, aren't they, because they're there to tell us what's wrong with us, and through our instructions we can deal with them in a skillful way. So we have to look upon them as welcome enemies. We have to open our hearts to our hindrances.

Now, there's the other side of the equation, which is the seven factors of enlightenment and the five spiritual faculties. And I'm going to try and dovetail them. By the end of the talk, you'll be utterly confused. But I'll try and reduce it to a very simple statement at the end. And the best thing, especially for those who don't know what I'm talk-

ing about, is to let it go in one ear and out the other. Because it's more in the sense of giving a certain confidence and a certain background knowledge which gives you faith, confidence in the process.

The ground of spiritual practice in terms of advancement is faith. I was going to say *sīla*, right conduct. Of course we always talk about *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. So *paññā* is the wisdom factor and *sīla* refers to the conduct, and the one must be mirrored in the other. But here we're talking more specifically about developing this quality of intuitive insight.

So faith is crucial, and the first thing is not to confuse that with belief. If we define belief as faith in a statement such as "I believe in a god" or "I don't believe in a god," then that's not what the Buddha is talking about when he talks about *saddhā*, faith. What he's talking about is a sense of confidence, a sense of trust.

If you think about it, anytime you act, especially those times during our lives when it's a big decision such as moving house or getting a job elsewhere or forming a relationship or going to live with somebody, marry them, all those sorts of occasions demand faith. You trust. You trust in your own decision. You trust in the way that you see things, that you understand things, and that there's something in the heart which is telling you that this is what you have to do. Otherwise you just wouldn't do it. So you can see that the relationship between trust and commitment is crucial.

If you don't trust, you just don't do it. If you go to a surgeon to have the pimple removed at the end of your nose and you don't feel right about him or her, then you don't do it. You go and find somebody else.

So that faith has two qualities. It has the quality of understanding and the quality of trust which comes more from the heart. This understanding is got merely by listening to Dharma talks, reading. That's the first sort of understanding we have. It's a given and it makes sense. The deeper understanding comes when that becomes our own way, that we've worked it out for ourselves.

You might hear somebody, for instance, explain the wheel of dependent origination, this psychology the Buddha taught, and it might initially make sense. But then when you reflect on it, it may begin to make more sense, and you can see that with that more sense there grows that sense of trust, that coming from the heart, that willingness to investigate further. And of course through the practice of *vipassanā*, what was an intellectual understanding then becomes a direct understanding, and that of course begins to cement the faith.

It is said that faith doesn't become unshakeable until we've intuited *Nibbāna*. Once a person has experienced *Nibbāna*, then there's no way that that faith can be shaken because now they know for themselves absolutely that the teaching of the Buddha is true. So it's not a matter then of losing faith anymore, and in fact the Buddha gives it a different word.

For one word it's called an *indriya*, which is a faculty, and when somebody has an insight into *Nibbāna* it becomes a *bala*, it becomes a strength, unshakable. The quality of that understanding, the process, is really just that deepening of understanding, and it has this effect of trust.

Now that trust is coming from the heart, isn't it? It's something more, slightly more intuitive. So there are those people who need to understand to the nth degree of the teaching before they dare to trust it. And there are those people who don't need much understanding. They just trust the feeling they have towards a particular teaching or towards a particular teacher, and that's enough for them. That feeling, that intuitive feeling that this is right for them. Most of us of course have to balance the two of them in some sort of proportion.

But you can understand that there are some people who just have faith. They just have faith. And you can diminish it by calling it blind faith because they can't draw up the arguments. But it can be just as deeply felt, just as deeply committed as the faith of somebody who can argue their point. And it was often a criticism that somebody had blind faith. But if your blind faith is actually in the truth, that's good, isn't it? I mean, if it actually turns out that what you've got blind faith in is the absolute truth, it saves you a lot of reading for a start. You just get on with the practice.

So this movement of the heart towards faith is there at the beginning of our practice, and it supports everything that we're doing. And there's a lovely image given—I can't remember whether it came from the scriptures, but definitely it's in the Milindapanha. The Milindapanha were questions and answers given by Nāgasena, who was understood to be fully awakened, some centuries after the Buddha when all the north part of that world was all Greek because Alexander had conquered it. So Milinda is actually the Greek king Menander who would have been around Afghanistan, and there he talks about the water-purifying gem of the world-conquering monarch.

In the scriptures you get this myth of the world-conquering monarch. Those of you who know the story of the Buddha, when he was seen by the wise man, he prophesied that this little baby would become either a world-conquering monarch or a fully self-enlightened being. And that's what made his father all upset and made sure that he brought him up to be a world-conquering monarch. That's the story. So this alter ego

runs right through the scriptures that the Buddha could have become this, and if he had, he would have been this superb leader of the world bringing tremendous good conduct and all that.

One of the gems that the person has, one of the things that they have to support that world-conquering manifestation is this water-purifying gem. So that when all the horses and the camels and the bullock carts have passed over the river with all the men carrying their shields and swords, of course the water is all disturbed, but by dropping this lovely gem into the water, the whole thing just becomes utterly purified.

And that's a lovely image for faith. Because remember, if you think about it, before you make a decision, there's confusion, isn't there? A sense of confusion. Shall I? Shall I not? There's lots of doubt about. You don't know whether you will or whether you won't. You make your lists for and against. And then suddenly you commit and the whole thing just disappears. Just like that. And the heart with all its troubles and its anxieties just gets completely purified. It just all vanishes and suddenly there's this lovely blossoming of joy in one's commitment. So it's a lovely image to have for faith.

Now, that faith underpins this *paññā*, and *paññā* is this intuitive intelligence. So it's because we have confidence in this teaching, we have confidence in the practice, that we actually can even start looking. And that looking, that observing, brings about its own insights, which then strengthens the faith. And so they tumble over each other into pure awakening.

Now that intuitive intelligence is expressed in the other form, the seven factors of enlightenment, as investigation of *dhamma*, *dhammavicaya*. And when the Buddha is talking about that, remember, if you read the discourse on it, it's basically beginning to look at things the way he saw things. So we have those three characteristics: transience, not self, and how we create unsatisfactions for ourselves. But also this business of de-constructing things, all this business around the hindrances and also all this business around the factors of enlightenment. So that's all to do with investigating the Dharma as he calls it.

That Dharma investigation is supported by equanimity. Equanimity is one of these words really. It's not the same as calmness. Equanimity I think is best described as a perfect receptivity. Now, there's nothing stopping you from receiving. There's no reaction to what's actually coming at you.

If you liken it to a judge, we expect the judge not to get caught up in the arguments of these lawyers at the head level. And we don't expect them to get caught up in the anger and emotion of the crowd, baying for blood. So it's that business of being able to be dis-

passionate, not caught up in. And of course as soon as we lift ourselves into the position of the observer, it arises naturally because to observe you have to allow whatever is to be observed to manifest. And we lose that sense of equanimity as soon as we drop into any reaction, wanting, not wanting.

So that equanimity has to be there for the investigation to be clear. And for the investigation to be clear, the intelligence must be awakened. And we won't do that unless we have faith in the process.

Now supporting that, you've got concentration which is balanced with effort, with proper energy. Concentration again is one of those things because normally when you say to somebody "get concentrated" or "be focused," you expect this real narrowing down, collapse into some sort of tightness. But concentration in this sense just means being able to keep the attention on the object. Full stop.

And the effort which is to be developed is just the effort needed to keep the attention on the object. So if that concentration becomes tight, then you start moving into restlessness. It begins to shake, and you can't keep your mind on it. And when that happens, the meditator has to recognize that. So the restlessness—and this is where the meditation gets, shall we say, a little tricky—because you may be thinking that the restlessness is coming from something arising out of the heart or something, but actually it might be because you're trying too hard, trying to become too concentrated.

So that business of effort and concentration, if you think of a camera when you focus it, the old ones before they made these little machines where you had to actually use your fingers, and if you think of that, that's the effort and then there's the focus.

Now the other side of concentration, when you have too much concentration but not enough energy, is that of course the mind now is like a laser beam, it's facing one way. And if the energy is not there to support it, then you drop into a state of unconsciousness. That's not the same as sleep, and the meditator knows when that's happened rather than sleep because the body remains upright because the energy is there alright, the concentration is there, but because the energy is not supporting it, then it's as though the mind just stops. It's a blank count, and you wake up.

Depending on the power of that concentration, it can last for various lengths of time. There's a lovely story about a Hindu guru who was an adept at these very high jhānic absorption states, and he gave an instruction to his attendant to get him some water and went to meditate and went into one of these states. Ten years later, he comes out of this state and his first words are, "Where's my water?"

What the tale is meant to symbolize is that nothing happens. It's a complete waste of time getting into these constricted blank states. And it's funny how many people actually believe that meditation is about blanking the mind, about turning it off and ending up in this dead place.

So when that happens we can congratulate ourselves because the concentration is good, but then we have to also recognize that the effort—there's something wrong with the effort. And normally when you look at it, there's been a moment there where you've lost interest, where something has lost its empowering of that looking, and the whole thing drops.

When the concentration has become too tight, then you have to look at your effort. So the effort to gain, the effort always to achieve. And when that happens, you have to really remind yourself that to be aware is the achievement. That's it. There's nothing else to achieve. And once you drum that into yourself, it does stop you wanting to go beyond the present moment, because whenever you want to achieve something it's always in the future, isn't it? When you've achieved it, you've achieved it. But while you're wanting to achieve, it's not here, it's over there. So the mind is always moving ahead of itself.

If you find yourself feeling restless, and you've got an inkling that it's not really to do—because the body feels good, and it feels light, and it's okay—but there's this restlessness, then, especially not so much at the beginning of a week retreat, but maybe within two or three days, when you really settle, then just see if some idea of getting something has not crept in.

Again the story from the scriptures is of Nanda. Nanda was the cousin of the Buddha, and he was really practicing hard and getting nowhere and getting all this restlessness and stuff, and so he began to give up. And he decided that what he would do in this lifetime was create good *kamma* and then have another go in the next one. So the Buddha, having heard this or intuiting it, appeared by his side and said, "Nanda, what are you doing, mate?"

And he gave him the simile. He said, "No, no. What you've got to do is you've got to have this effort," and he gave the image of tuning a lute—can't remember the proper word for that instrument, but it's a lute, it's a stringed instrument—and he said to get the right pitch, it mustn't be too tight and it mustn't be too loose. Just getting the right pitch.

And of course, Nanda in no length of time, having got the right pitch, became fully awakened. Usually these little stories are glossed in the commentary to say things like Nanda went off to the forest for 25 years and became fully enlightened. But actually in the scriptures it said he struggled with it and became fully awakened.

So effort is a cheeky one for us because Western culture is about achieving. It's about achieving, about getting. And one of the problems of the Vipassana school is that it does put to us certain achievements. I mean, they're there. They're called the *vipassanānāṇas*, the insights that come with Vipassana. And then there are four stages of sanctity: stream entrant, once returner, non-returner, and then finally this *arahant*.

What that does for us, or the way we can look at it so that it doesn't become some sort of achievement, is again this feeling that the path is actually well delineated. It's not a sort of—we're not on a path which is higgledy-piggledy and it may or may not. It's actually the path leading to breakthrough is very clearly marked. Very clearly marked.

Having said that, the path of the Vipassana knowledge is not the only way. And people have achieved amazing insight very quickly, usually because of some great shock. Somebody close has died or they've fallen off a bridge or something. Something happens which gives them a shock and it can really pull them out of a particular mind state and turn their lives. One of the more interesting ones is this near death experience that people have.

So, it's not the—I wouldn't say it was the only delineated path, you do get slightly different ones in the Mahāyāna—but it's definitely well delineated in this particular context.

So this business of effort and concentration—and effort, by the way, comes up in the faculties too for those of you who know these things—the other combination is calmness and what's badly translated as joy, much better translated as interest.

Now interest is a funny emotion. Philosophers wonder about it. It's a sort of wanting to know, but you can feel it coming from the heart. And just as an aside, remember—just ask yourself: did you ever have any problem with concentration when you were interested in something? So that's why, because the force of our practice is to awaken the intelligence, it seems to me much more beneficial to raise interest rather than to worry about concentration.

I'm always amazed how that manifests even in animals, this sort of wonder. I was once in a lovely place up in Penang, Malaya. There was a plantation up there and I was offered to stay up there at this house which was lived in occasionally. It was a lovely evening so I took this table out onto the forecourt, wanting to lift myself off the ground

because of bugs and stuff, snakes. I tied this mosquito net to the tree above me and brought my cushions out and everything and a cup of coffee, and I sat on this table looking out through the mosquito net to the setting sun. As it grew darker and darker I suddenly realised I was facing east. I was a little disappointed.

There were these two dogs that every evening would scamper, would chase each other. Two very good friends would chase each other madly around. On this particular evening, the one that I was sat out there waiting for the sunset, one of these dogs was late. The other one began to pine and cry a little. When the dog finally turned up, to my amazement, he ran up. When he saw this table with this figure and this... He stood there and he went... You know, while the other dog was biting him and doing all sorts of deaf things. I thought, my goodness. What an amazing sort of intelligence. Yeah, I must have looked really silly. To a dog, anyway.

Well I can't remember why I went into that—oh yes, interest. So this quality of wanting to know, you see, even here walking down the street with all these cows and bullocks, it's just amazing. They just come towards you wanting to know, you see.

So it's something that we find in all creatures. It's a case of awakening that within us, that wanting to know, that wonder. Sometimes you have to work at it a bit, just to raise your energy towards interest. Like all these things, these are all conditioned, all conditionings. So the more you condition yourself to become interested, the more interested you become. The more interested you become, the more you practice with verve and with right commitment. The more you practice with verve and right commitment, the more you see. The more you're delighted, so the more interested you become.

These things have an internal motor and I would say that interest is a real motivation. But sometimes you have to feed it, especially when those little nasty things come up like boredom, which is the direct enemy of interest. So when that comes up, remember that boredom is what is to be observed and not to be conned by, that you need distraction.

There was a monk I knew who would go to his teacher and say, "I've been watching this breath and I'm really bored." The teacher said, "Well, why don't you try watching it down here in the stomach?" So he went away and he came back and he said, "I'm watching it and I'm really bored." So he said, "Well, why don't you try a concentration exercise and look at discs?" There's an exercise of looking at these colored discs, which you use to gain concentration. So he asked him what was his favourite colour, and he said, well, it might have been blue. So he said, "Well, get yourself a disc of blue and just say blue, blue," and that was it. He came back and he says, "Really boring." So he said, "Well, try another colour," you see. This poor monk ended up being depressed. He

ended up in hospital. Yeah, he ended up in hospital. When he finally came out of it, I think he understood the mistake of getting into boredom, trying to escape boredom through distraction, you see.

You have to be very careful, and of course if you look at our society, that's the problem with all this addiction stuff. It's all an escape from the boredom that arises by seeking pleasure in something which always has an inbuilt obsolescence. You can't keep chewing the same gobstopper even if it is blackcurrant. You want a lime gobstopper. So eventually you can't stop eating gobstoppers, spend all your money on gobstoppers. Remember that to raise interest is a very empowering way to put energy into our practice.

What supports it is calmness, calmness in the heart, you see. As I say, not to confuse that with equanimity. Calmness, and anything which you find is shaking is shaking, you see. Of course one of the things that happens when you draw up interest and you do begin to see something, of course the excitement comes. That shakes the meditation for us. So as soon as that comes, that's your object. Remember that the mind and heart are very slippery. They're always shifting off focus. So you have to keep that aliveness.

Now, I opened the talk by saying that by the end of it, once I've been through five of these and seven of those, especially those who haven't come across this teaching before, they'd probably be utterly confused. But luckily, there's a very simple way of getting all these faculties to be balanced. That, you won't be surprised to hear, is the establishment of awareness.

So what the Buddha says is that when you establish right awareness on the object, all these faculties will come up to support it, just quite naturally, quite naturally, quite naturally. The quality of awareness is just looking, just looking, just observing, just being with the experience. It's its simplicity which foxes us. We always think we have to do something. We always think we have to see something. You don't. All you have to do is look. It's extraordinarily simple.

In the opening of the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, this awareness, *satipaṭṭhāna*, the establishment of this level of consciousness, he starts off by saying—he uses the word *sikkhati*. *Sikkhati* means to train. So he says, "Observe the breath," to train, in other words to get still, to be fairly, to be somewhat concentrated. That's in my morning Vipassanā guidelines. That's what one of my main teachers used to always—that was his little phrase, "somewhat concentrated." Nobody ever knew exactly what he meant, but we got the idea that you needn't be waiting until you're utterly, completely focused before you could, as it were, begin to investigate it.

Then the Buddha says—and he's talking now about the breath, and of course the breath is something neutral, so the other two things are not so obvious, this business of not me, not mine, and the business of how we create problems from it. The most obvious thing to look at is the quality of transience. So he says keep looking at it. Now he's suggesting that you actually do that as a purposive... Like the thought comes in the mind, you know, "Let me watch the transient nature of this."

At the moment when I see the breath, it feels to me like one thing, like a string, like it's one string, you see. I mean, how long is time? See, because the length of time as we experience it is as long as we can hold a frame, a frame of time. So how long is it? Have you ever measured it? I don't know. Less than a second probably, or something like that, I don't know. How long is a piece of time, you see? Now, that gives us the impression that the whole breath is one joined up experience.

What he's saying is if you keep looking, if you keep just putting your eye on it, and the more these faculties come up to actually join you and you're actually tuned into the transient nature of the breath—that's what you're looking at, is it just one string or is it all little pieces all quite separate—as you're looking at that and all these faculties of concentration, of right effort, of that investigation of the Dharma, here it's the *anicca* quality, of the balance of effort with concentration, of that equanimity balancing the investigation, and of the calmness balancing the interest. When all these things rise up, you see, he says you come to a point where there is just enough concentration and just enough intuitive intelligence or insight to arise.

Those two words, the awareness and intelligence, are never separate in that discourse. The two words that I use for this trust of ours, *satipanya*, I've actually taken that from a very famous Thai teacher called Buddhadāsa. It's two nouns, but the way it's put in the scriptures is *ātāpī sampajāno satimā*. *Ātāpī* is the effort and it's sometimes translated as fierce effort, but we're much closer to the meaning if we understand relentless effort. You don't stop. That's why I quote the Mahāsi: the continuity of awareness is the secret of success. It's the continuity, because the more you maintain it, the more these spiritual faculties come up.

You begin by placing the *sati* on the object—that's the looking—and as you look, then you see. So the looking and seeing are both the same faculty. It's just that one is passive looking, receiving, and then there's the seeing. If you think of any occasion... I had one where a friend who came to see me and we were going for a walk, his car broke down. We went off to have a look at it. The police had got there because he'd left it on the main road here in Newton Abbot and wheeled it back down. He opened the bonnet, you see. What had happened was that suddenly the engine cut, you see. Because of my long ex-

perience with mechanics, I immediately said, "Well, that's got to do with the electrics." So he opened the bonnet and I immediately pointed to this object within the engine. Having looked, you see, I saw it must be the dynamo and I pointed to this. I said, "The dynamo's gone." The AA man turned up and having a slightly longer experience in mechanics, noticed that the fan belt had gone and pointed to the dynamo which happened to be in a different place. So in this case of looking and seeing, you see... It's the case of getting that clarity so that your car doesn't end up in the scrapyard because you tried to mend it.

So these two qualities, the *sati*, the awareness, and that spark, that intuitive grasp of what's happening, arises naturally when the conditions ripen. In our meditation, when we're sat here, you see, we're just making that continuous, relentless effort of just relaxing, of coming back onto the object. That's another way, perhaps, of translating that word for calmness. *Passaddhi*. You can translate it as relaxing.

Then as it slowly gathers around, there comes the moment where we can hold the position of the observer. Now that's the point where we are seeing the transience but there's still the sense of the observer.

Now the observer means that there's a shaking in the mind. One minute we see the sensation of the breath and next minute we're aware of something watching the sensation of the breath. That awareness is a feeling of me being here. What's really happening—or what you can take as a metaphor, an image—is sometimes when you're watching TV and you can see yourself on the screen. Are you going to watch yourself watching TV or are you going to watch the TV? Now because the light is such, you can't get rid of that image of yourself watching TV. But because your interest grows so much in the program, you don't see it anymore. You just get lost in the program itself.

When we are in a state of the observer, there's always that dual state going on: seeing, seeing the seer, seeing, seeing the seer. Of course, because of the speed of the mind and its ability to hold things for us long enough and substantiate them, give them some sort of solidity, we feel it's one process, that there is an observer constantly observing this breath which is constantly arising and passing away.

But by continuously placing that attention—and that's another word for *sati*, an act of attention—on the object, all these faculties come up and, as it were, the focus narrows and narrows, and with it, time narrows. So time now begins to narrow so much until you're just there. When you're just there, there's no time for this switch and the sense of the self disappears. That's when it's possible for this intuitive intelligence to see something very clearly because now it's not shaking and there can't be—in the now there can't be any conceptual thinking.

It just can't be. Conceptual thinking takes time. You can't have a word in a speck of a second. So when those moments come up there's always some little insight. They come up in very short blips. You might not even know. It can be so short that you don't even know. But as your meditation grows, these little moments of being absolutely absorbed into the object grow slightly longer, and then when one comes out of that back to being the observer, there is that knowing that during that moment there, there was pure *satipanya*.

Now do remember that none of this—you can't make it happen, you see. That's the point and that's where the sense of achieving comes. So forget that. The Buddha is saying very clearly: just train, just keep bringing that attention back, keep waking it out of the dullness, just keep working with it gently, and there'll come that point when you'll begin to see these characteristics, one or the other.

As you begin to see that and your interest is drawn, you'll just be drawn naturally into the present moment. That's when we have just enough awareness and just enough intuitive intelligence to make these little insights. These insights are not huge wallops around the back of the head which send you spinning out of the room, you know. They're just little... they're just little, ah, oh, ah, right, see. All the time this consciousness is turning, the way it's looking is changing, just in little degrees all the time.

That then has a systemic change because as we change our understanding it changes our relationship. So that's the heart coming in. When a relationship changes it expresses itself through what we say and what we do and how we think in a more wise way. So that's the process we're going through.

So if I were to bring it all together, there are these five faculties, five spiritual faculties, and there are these seven factors of enlightenment. The ones to be concerned with are how to develop this awareness, just the looking, just the looking. How to support just the looking by raising interest. How to be very quick to know that some future aim has slipped into the practice and that's the achieving. How to be aware of that sort of restlessness that comes around because we're trying too hard. How sometimes you're right there but somehow we've slipped with the interest and we're sinking away from it.

So it's a case really of not worrying too much about all these different faculties etc. etc.

but just keep reminding oneself that one has to remain bright, vigilant.

Now this word vigilance is one of the Buddha's favourites. *Appamādo*, vigilant, diligent, being awake. And in the Vipassanā guidelines I've translated the phrase — my translation there is "those who are mindful are in the vicinity of, are in the presence of Nibbāna" — and the actual word he uses is *appamādhū*: those who are vigilant, those who are diligent in their practice are in the vicinity and the presence of Nibbāna.

So it only remains for me to wish you fruitful practice and a continuing effort. May you all be liberated even in this very lifetime.

Thank you.

CHAPTER 8

Spiritual Faculties and Factors of Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the positive mental qualities that support meditation practice: the five spiritual faculties (pañc'indriya) and seven factors of awakening (satta bojjhaṅga). He begins by distinguishing faith (saddhā) from mere belief, describing it as confidence and trust that deepens through practice until it becomes unshakeable upon realizing nibbāna.*
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> *The talk explores how these faculties work together: faith supporting wisdom (paññā), effort (vīriya) balancing concentration (samādhi), and interest balancing calmness. Bhante emphasizes that investigation of dhamma (dhammavicaya) means learning to see reality through the Buddha's framework of the three characteristics. He offers practical guidance on avoiding common meditation pitfalls like trying too hard (causing restlessness) or losing interest (causing dullness).*
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> *Drawing on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta teachings, Bhante concludes that establishing right awareness (sammā sati) naturally develops all these spiritual faculties. The practice is fundamentally simple: just looking, just observing with continuity and vigilance (appamāda). Through this sustained attention, moments of pure awareness arise where insight can naturally unfold, gradually transforming our understanding and way of being.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

Yesterday we did the hindrances, how to deal with those states of mind which take us away from the object. Even though they're called hindrances they are our teachers, aren't they? Because they're there to tell us what's wrong with us and through our instructions we can deal with them in a skillful way. So we have to look upon them as welcome enemies something like that. We have to open our hearts to our hindrances.

Now there's the other side of the equation which is the seven factors of enlightenment and the five spiritual faculties. And I'm going to try and dovetail them and by the end of the talk you'll be utterly confused. But I'll try and reduce it to a very simple statement at the end and the best thing is, especially for those who don't know what I'm talk-

ing about, is to let it go in one ear and out the other. Because it's more in the sense of giving a certain confidence and a certain background knowledge which gives you faith, confidence in the process.

And the ground of spiritual practice in terms of advancement is faith. I was going to say *sīla*, right conduct. Well of course we always talk about *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. So *paññā* is the wisdom factor and *sīla* refers to the conduct and the one must be mirrored in the other. But here we're talking more specifically about developing this quality of intuitive insight.

So faith is crucial and the first thing is not to confuse that with belief. So if we define belief as faith in a statement such as "I believe in a god" or "I don't believe in a god" then that's not what the Buddha is talking about when he talks about *saddhā*, faith. What he's talking about is a sense of confidence, a sense of trust.

And if you think about it, anytime you act, especially those times during our lives when it's a big decision, such as moving house or getting a job elsewhere or forming a relationship or going to live with somebody, marry them. All those sorts of relationships, all those sorts of occasions demand faith. That you trust. You trust in your own decision, you trust in the way that you see things, that you understand things. And that there's something in the heart which is telling you that this is what you have to do. Otherwise, you just wouldn't do it.

So you can see that the relationship between trust and commitment is crucial. If you don't trust, you just don't do it. If you go to a surgeon to have the pimple removed at the end of your nose, and you don't feel right about him or her, then you don't do it. You go and find somebody else.

So that faith has two qualities. It has the qualities of understanding and the quality of trust which comes more from the heart. So this understanding is got merely by listening to Dharma talk, reading. That's the first sort of understanding we have. It's a given and it makes sense. The deeper understanding comes when that becomes our own way, that we've worked it out for ourselves.

So you might hear somebody for instance explain the wheel of dependent origination, this psychology the Buddha taught, and it might initially make sense, but then when you reflect on it, it may begin to make more sense, and you can see that with that more sense there grows that sense of trust, that coming from the heart, that willingness to investigate further.

And of course through the practice of *vipassanā*, what was an intellectual understanding then becomes a direct understanding, and that of course begins to cement the faith, begins to cement it. And it is said that faith doesn't become unshakeable until we've intuited *Nibbāna*. So once a person has experienced *Nibbāna* then there's no way that that faith can be shaken because now they know for themselves absolutely the teaching of the Buddha is true. So it's not a matter then of losing faith anymore. In fact the Buddha gives it a different word.

For one word it's called an *indriya*, which is a faculty, and when somebody has an insight into *Nibbāna* it becomes a *bāla*, it becomes a strength, unshakable. And the quality of that understanding, the process, is really just that deepening of understanding, and it has this effect of trust.

Now that trust is coming from the heart, isn't it? It's something slightly more intuitive. So there are those people who need to understand the nth degree of the teaching before they dare to trust it. These are heavy thinkers. And there are those people who don't need much understanding, they just trust the feeling they have towards a particular teaching or towards a particular teacher. And that's enough for them, you see, that feeling of an intuitive feeling that this is right for them. Most of us of course have to balance the two of them in some sort of proportion.

But you can understand that there are some people who just have faith. They just have faith. And you can diminish it by calling it blind faith because they can't draw up the arguments. But it can be just as deeply felt, just as deeply committed as the faith of somebody who can argue their point. And it was often a criticism that somebody had blind faith. But if your blind faith is actually in the truth, that's good, isn't it? I mean, if it actually turns out that what you've got a blind faith in is the absolute truth, it saves you a lot of reading for a start. I mean, you just get on with the practice.

So this movement of the heart towards faith, you see, is there at the beginning of our practice, and it supports everything that we're doing. And there's a lovely image given. I can't remember whether it came from the scriptures, but definitely it's in the *Milindapañha*. So the *Milindapañha* were questions and answers given by Nāgasena, who was understood to be fully awakened.

Some centuries after the Buddha when all the north part of that world was all Greek because Alexander had conquered it so *Milinda* is actually the Greek king Menander who would have been around Afghanistan and there he talks about the water purifying gem of the world conquering monarch.

In the scriptures you get this myth of the world conquering monarch. Those of you who know the story of the Buddha, when he was seen by the wise man, he prophesied that this little baby would become either a world conquering monarch or a fully self-enlightened being. And that's what made his father all upset and made sure that he brought him up to be a world conquering monarch. That's the story.

So this alter ego runs right through the scriptures that the Buddha could have become this and if he had he would have been this superb leader of the world bringing tremendous good conduct and all that. So, one of the gems that the person has, one of the things that they have to support that world-conquering manifestation is this water-purifying gem. So that when all the horses and the camels and the bullock carts have passed over the river with all the men carrying their shields and swords, of course the water is all disturbed, but by dropping this lovely gem into the water, the whole thing just becomes utterly purified.

And that's a lovely image for faith. Because remember, if you think about it, before you make a decision, there's confusion, isn't there? There's a sense of confusion. Shall I? Shall I not? There's lots of doubt about. You don't know whether you will or whether you won't. You make your lists for and against. And then suddenly you commit and the whole thing just disappears. Just like that. And the heart with all its troubles and its anxieties just gets completely purified. It just all vanishes and suddenly there's this lovely blossoming of joy in one's commitment. So it's a lovely image to have that faith.

Now, that faith underpins this *paññā*, and *paññā* is this intuitive intelligence. So it's because we have confidence in this teaching, we have confidence in the practice, that we actually can even start looking. And that looking, that observing, brings about its own insights, which then strengthens the faith. And so they tumble over each other into pure awakening.

Now that intuitive intelligence is expressed in the other form, the seven factors of enlightenment, as investigation of dharma, *dhammavicaya*. And when the Buddha is talking about that, remember, if you read the discourse on it, it's basically beginning to look at things the way he saw things. So we have those three characteristics, transience, not self, and how we create unsatisfactions for ourselves. But also this business of deconstructing things, all this business around the hindrances, and also all this business around the factors of enlightenment. So that's all to do with investigating the Dharma as he taught it.

That Dharma is supported, that investigation is supported by equanimity. Equanimity is one of these funny words really. It's not the same as calmness. Equanimity I think is best described as a perfect receptivity. Now, there's nothing stopping you from receiv-

ing. There's no reaction to what's actually coming at you. So, if you liken it to a judge, we expect the judge not to get caught up in the funny little arguments of these lawyers. See, at the head level. And we don't expect them to get caught up in the anger and emotion of the crowd, baying for blood.

So it's that business of being able to be dispassionate not caught up in and of course as soon as we lift ourselves into the position of the observer it arises naturally because to observe you have to allow whatever is to be observed to manifest and we lose that sense of equanimity as soon as we dropped into any reaction, wanting, not wanting.

So that equanimity has to be there for the investigation to be clear. And for the investigation to be clear, the intelligence must be awakened, and we won't do that unless we have faith in the process.

Now supporting that you've got concentration which is balanced with effort with proper energy. Concentration again is one of those funny things because normally when you say to somebody, you know, get concentrated or be focused, you expect this real narrowing down, collapse into some sort of tightness, you know. But concentration in this sense just means being able to keep the attention on the object full stop. And the effort which is to be developed is just the effort needed to keep the attention on the object.

So if that concentration becomes tight, then you start moving into restlessness. It begins to shake, you see, and you can't keep your mind on it. And when that happens, the meditator has to recognize that, you see. So the restlessness, and this is where the meditation gets, shall we say, a little tricky, because you may be thinking that the restlessness is coming from something arising out of the heart or something, but actually it might be to do because you're trying too hard. Trying to become too concentrated.

So that business of effort and concentration, if you think of a camera, when you focus it, you know the old ones, before they made these little machines, where you had to actually use your fingers. And if you think of that, you see that's the effort, and then there's the focus, you see.

Now the other side of concentration, when you have too much concentration but not enough energy, is that of course the mind now is like a laser beam, it's facing one way. And if the energy is not there to support it, then you drop into a state of unconsciousness. That's not the same as sleep and you'll know the meditator knows when that's happened rather than sleep because the body remains upright because the energy is there alright the concentration is there but because the energy is not supporting it then it's as though the mind just stops as a blank and you wake up.

However depending on the power of that concentration it can last for various lengths of time. There's a lovely story about a Hindu guru who was an adept at these very high jhānic absorption states and he gave an instruction to his attendant to get him some water and went to meditate and he went into one of these states. Ten years later, he comes out of this state and his first words are, "Where's my water?"

And what the tale is meant to symbolize is that nothing happens. It's a complete waste of time getting into these blank states. And it's funny how many people actually believe that meditation is about blanking the mind, about turning it off and ending up in this dead place.

So when that happens we can congratulate ourselves because the concentration is good but then we have to also recognize that the effort, there's something wrong with the effort. And normally when you look at it there's been a moment there where you've lost interest where something has lost its empowering of that looking and the whole thing drops.

When the concentration has become too tight then you have to look at your effort. So the effort to gain, you see, the effort always to achieve and when that happens you have to really remind yourself that to be aware is the achievement. That's it. There's nothing else to achieve. Once you drum that into yourself it does stop you wanting to go beyond the present moment because whenever you want to achieve something it's always in the future isn't it. When you've achieved it you've achieved it but while you're wanting to achieve it's not here it's over there so the mind is always moving ahead of itself.

So if you find yourself feeling restless and you've got an inkling that it's not really to do because the body feels good and it feels light and it's okay but there's this restlessness, especially not so much at the beginning of a week retreat but maybe within two or three days when you really settle, then just see if some idea of getting something has not crept in again.

The story from the scriptures is of Ānanda. Ānanda was the cousin of the Buddha and he was really practicing hard and getting nowhere and getting all this restlessness and stuff and so he began to give up and he decided that what he would do in this lifetime was create good karma and then have another go in the next one. So the Buddha having heard this or intuiting it appeared by his side and said, "Ānanda, what are you doing mate?"

And he gave him this instruction, he said, "What you've got to do is you've got to have this effort" and he gave the image of tuning a lute. I can't remember the proper word for that instrument but it's a lute, it's a stringed instrument and he said, "To get the right pitch, it mustn't be too tight and it mustn't be too loose. Just getting the right pitch."

And of course, Ānanda in no length of time, having got the right pitch, became fully awakened. Usually these little stories are glossed in the commentary to say things like, "Ānanda went off to the forest for 25 years and became fully enlightened." But actually in the scriptures it said he struggled with it and became fully awakened.

So effort is a cheeky one for us because Western culture is about achieving. It's about achieving, about getting. And one of the problems of the Vipassana school is that it does put to us certain achievements. I mean, they're there. They're called the vipassanāñāṇas, the insights that come with Vipassana. And then there are four stages of sanctity for different stream entrants, once returner, non-returner, and then finally this arahat.

And what that does for us, or the way we can look at it so that it doesn't become some sort of achievement, is again this feeling that the path is actually well delineated. It's not a we're not on a path which is higgledy-piggledy and it may or may not. It's actually the path leading to breakthrough is very clearly marked, very clearly marked.

Having said that, the path of the vipassana knowledge is not the only way, not the only way. And people have achieved amazing insight very quickly, usually because of some great shock. Somebody close has died or they've fallen off a bridge or something. Something happens which gives them a shock and it can really pull them out of their particular mind state and turn their lives. One of the more interesting ones is this near-death experience that people have. So it's not the I wouldn't say it was the only delineated path. You do get slightly different ones in the Mahāyāna but it's definitely well delineated in this particular school.

And the whole point about the Mahasi's teaching was that it was meant to be a direct attack on this particular path. It was meant to be none of this business about trying to get blissed out or having cups of tea when you want.

It was straight on and he was very successful.

So this business of effort and concentration, you see, the other and those effort by the way and all that comes up in faculties too for those of you who know these things the other combination is calmness and it's badly translated as joy much better translated as interest.

So now interest is a funny emotion. It's the sort that philosophers wonder. It's a sort of wanting to know, but you can feel it sort of coming from the heart. And just as an aside, remember, just ask yourself, did you ever have any problem with concentration when you were interested in something?

So that's why, because the force of our practice is to awaken the intelligence it seems to me much more beneficial to raise interest rather than to worry about concentration and I'm always amazed how that manifests even in animals this sort of wonder.

I was once in a lovely place up in Penang, Malaya. And there was a plantation up there and I was offered to stay up there at this house which was lived in occasionally. And it was a lovely evening so I took this table out onto the forecourt there, wanting to sort of lift myself off the ground because of bugs and stuff, snakes. And I tied this mosquito net to the tree above me and brought me cushions and everything and a cup of coffee and I sat on this table looking out through the mosquito net to the setting sun and as it grew darker and darker I suddenly realized I was facing east. I was a little disappointed.

Now there were these two dogs that every evening would scamper, would chase each other, two very good friends, would chase each other madly around. And on this particular evening, the one that I was sat out there waiting for the sunset, one of these dogs was late. And the other one began to pine and cry a little. And when the dog finally turned up, to my amazement, he sort of ran up. And when he saw this table with this figure and this... He stood there and he went... While the other dog was biting him and doing all sorts of daft things. I thought, my goodness. What amazing sort of intelligence. Yeah, I must have looked really silly. To a dog, anyway.

So... I can't remember why I went into that. Oh yes, interest. So this quality of wanting to know, even here, just walking down the street with all these cows and bullocks, it's just amazing. They just come towards you wanting to know.

So it's something that we find in all creatures so it's a case of awakening that within us and that wanting to know that wonder sometimes you have to sort of work at it a bit just to raise your energy towards interest and like all these things these are all conditioned all conditionings so the more you condition yourself to become interested the more interested you become.

And the more interested you become the more you practice with verve and with right commitment and the more you practice with verve and right commitment the more you see and the more you're delighted so the more interested you become. So

these things have a sort of internal motor and I would say that interest is a real sort of motivation but sometimes you have to feed it especially when those little nasty things come up like boredom which is the direct enemy of interest.

So when that comes up, remember that boredom is what is to be observed and not to be conned by that you need distraction. There was a monk I knew who would go to his teacher and say, I've been watching this breath and I'm really bored. And the teacher said, well, why don't you try watching it down here in the stomach? So he went away and he came back and he said, I'm watching it, but I'm really bored. So he said, well, why don't you try a concentration exercise and look at discs? So there's an exercise of looking at these colored discs, which you use to gain concentration. So he asked him what was his favorite color, and he said, well, it might have been blue. So he said, well, get yourself a disc of blue and just say blue, blue, and that was it. And he came back and he says, really boring. So he said, well, try another colour. This poor monk ended up being depressed. He ended up in hospital. Yeah, he ended up in hospital. And when he finally came out of it, I think he understood the mistake of getting into boredom, trying to escape boredom through distraction.

You have to be very careful and of course if you look at our society that's the problem with all this addiction stuff it's all an escape from the boredom that arises by seeking pleasure in something which always has an inbuilt obsolescence and you can't keep chewing the same gobstopper even if it is blackcurrant. You want a lime gobstopper. So eventually you can't stop eating gobstoppers. Spend all your money on gobstoppers.

So remember that to raise interest, I think, is a very empowering way to put energy into our practice. What supports it is calmness, calmness in the heart and as I say not to confuse that with equanimity, calmness and anything which you find is shaking is shaking. And of course one of the things that happens when you draw up interest and you do begin to see something of course the excitement comes. And that shakes the meditation for them. So as soon as that comes, that's your object. So remember that the mind and heart are very slippery. They're always shifting off focus. So you have to keep that sort of aliveness.

Now, I opened the talk by saying that by the end of it, once I've been through five of these and seven of those, especially those who haven't come across this teaching before, they'd probably be utterly confused. But luckily, there's a very simple way of getting all these faculties to be balanced. And that, you won't be surprised to hear, is the establishment of awareness.

So what the Buddha says is that when you establish right awareness on the object, all these faculties will come up to support it, just quite naturally. And the quality of awareness is just looking, just observing, just being with the experience. It's its simplicity which foxes us. We always think we have to do something. We always think we have to see something. You don't. All you have to do is look. It's extraordinarily simple.

And in the opening of the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, this awareness, *satipaṭṭhāna*, the establishment of this level of consciousness, he starts off by saying, he uses the word sikkati, so sikkati means to train. So he says, observe the breath to train it, in other words to get still, to be fairly, to be somewhat concentrated. That's in my morning Vipassanā guidelines. And that's what one of my main teachers used to always, it was his little phrase, somewhat concentrated. Nobody ever knew exactly what he meant, but we got the idea that you needn't be waiting until you're utterly, completely focused before you could, as it were, begin to investigate.

Then the Buddha says, and this is, he's talking now about the breath, and of course the breath is something neutral, and so the other two things are not so obvious, this business of not me, not mine, and the business of how we create problems from it. The most obvious thing to look at is the quality of transience. So he says, keep looking at it. Now, he's suggesting that you actually do that as a purposive.

Like the thought comes in the mind let me watch the transient nature of this at the moment when I see the breath it feels to me like one thing like a string like it's one string. I mean, how long is time? Because the length of time as we experience it is as long as we can hold a frame, a frame of time. So how long is it? Have you ever measured it? I don't know. Less than a second probably, or something like that, I don't know. How long is a piece of time?

Now, that gives us the impression that the whole breath is one joined up experience. But what he's saying is if you keep looking if you keep just putting your eye on it and the more these faculties come up to actually join you and you're actually tuned into the transient nature of the breath that's what you're looking at is it just one string or is it all little pieces all quite separate as you're looking at that and all these faculties of concentration of right effort of that investigation of the Dharma, here it's the *anicca* quality, of the balance of effort with concentration, of that equanimity, balancing the investigation, and of the calmness, balancing the interest.

When all these things rise up, he says you come to a point where there is just enough concentration and just enough intuitive intelligence or insight to arise. And those two words, the awareness and intelligence, are never separate in that discourse. The two words that I use for this trust of ours, Satipanya, I've actually taken that from a very

famous Thai teacher called Buddhadāsa. And it's two nouns, but the way it's put in the scriptures is *ātāpī sampajāno satimā*. *Ātāpī* is the effort and it's sometimes translated as fierce effort but we're much closer to the meaning if we understand relentless effort you don't stop that's why I quote the Mahāsī the continuity of awareness is the secret of success it's the continuity because the more you maintain it the more these spiritual faculties come up.

And you begin by placing the *sati* on the object that's the looking and as you look then you see. So the looking and seeing are both the same faculty it's just that one is passive looking, receiving and then there is the seeing so if you think of any occasion I had one where a friend who came to see me and we were going for a walk his car broke down and we went off to have a look at it. The police had got there because he'd left it on the main road here in Newton Abbot and wheeled it back down and he opened the bonnet. What had happened was that suddenly the engine cut. And because of my long experience with mechanics, I immediately said, well, that's got to do with the electrics. So he opened the bonnet, and I immediately pointed to this object within the engine. Having looked, I saw it must be the dynamo, and I pointed to this. I said, the dynamo's gone. The AA man turned up and having a slightly longer experience in mechanics noticed that the fan belt had gone and pointed to the dynamo which happened to be in a different place yes so.

This case of looking and seeing. And it's the case of getting that clarity so that your car doesn't end up in the scrapyard because you tried to mend it. So these two qualities, the *sati*, the awareness, and that spark, that intuitive grasp of what's happening, arises naturally when the conditions ripen. And in our meditation, when we're sat here, we're just making that continuous, relentless effort of just relaxing, of coming back onto the object. That's another way, perhaps, of translating that word for calmness. *Passaddhi*. You can translate it as relaxing.

And then as it slowly gathers around, there comes the moment where we can hold the position of the observer. Now that's the point where we are seeing the transience, but there's still the sense of the observer. Now the observer means that there's a shaking in the mind one minute we see the sensation of the breath and next minute we're aware of something watching the sensation of the breath and that awareness is a feeling of me being here.

And what's really happening or what you can take as a metaphor or an image is sometimes when you're watching TV and you can see yourself on the screen are you going to watch yourself watching TV or are you going to watch the TV? Now because the

light is such you can't get rid of that image of yourself watching TV. But because your interest grows so much in the program, you don't see it anymore. You just get lost in the program itself.

When we are in a state of the observer, there's always that dual state going on, seeing, seeing the seer, seeing, seeing the seer. And of course, because of the speed of the mind and its ability to hold things for us long enough and substantiate them, give them some sort of solidity, we feel it's one process, that there is an observer constantly observing this breath which is constantly arising and passing away.

But by continuously placing that attention, and that's another word for *sati*, an act of attention, on the object, all these faculties come up and, as it were, the focus narrows and narrows, and with it, time narrows. So time now begins to narrow so much until you're just there and when you're just there there's no time for this switch and the sense of the self disappears and that's when it's possible for this intuitive intelligence to see something very clearly because now it's not shaking and there can't be there can't be in the now there can't be any conceptual thinking. It just can't be, conceptual thinking takes time you can't have a word in a speck of a second so when those moments come up there's always some little insight and they come up in very short blips you might not even know, it can be so short that you don't even know.

But as your meditation grows, these little moments of being absolutely absorbed into the object grow slightly longer. And then when one comes out of that, back to being the observer, and there is that knowing that during that moment there, there was pure *satipaññā*.

Now do remember that none of this you can't make it happen that's the point and that's where the sense of achieving comes so forget that so the Buddha is saying very clearly just train just keep bringing that attention back keep waking it out of that the dullness just keep working with it gently and they'll come that point when you'll begin to see these characteristics one or the other. And as you begin to see that and your interest is drawn, you'll just be drawn naturally into the present moment. And that's when we have just enough awareness and just enough intuitive intelligence to make these little insights.

And these insights are not huge wallops around the back of the head that send you spinning out of the room. They're just little, they're just little, ah, oh, ah, right. And all the time this consciousness is turning, the way it's looking is changing, just in little degrees all the time. And that then has a systemic change because as we change our un-

derstanding it changes our relationship so that's the heart coming in and when a relationship changes it expresses itself through what we say and what we do and how we think in a more wise way so that's the process we're going through.

So if I were to bring it all together, there are these five faculties, five spiritual faculties, and there are these seven factors of enlightenment. And the ones to be concerned with are how to develop this awareness, just the looking, just the looking. How to support just the looking by raising interest. How to be very quick to know that some future aim has slipped into the practice and that's the achieving how to be aware of that sort of restlessness that comes around because we're trying too hard how sometimes you're right there but somehow we've slipped with the interest and we're sinking away from it.

So it's a case really of not worrying too much about all these different faculties but just keep reminding oneself that one has to remain bright, vigilant. Now this word vigilance is one of the Buddha's favourites. *Appamādo*, vigilant, diligent, being awake. And in the Vipassanā guidelines I've translated the phrase, my translation there is those who are mindful are in the vicinity of, are in the presence of *Nibbāna*.

Now the actual word he uses is *appamāra*, those who are vigilant, those who are diligent in their practice are in the vicinity and the presence of Nibbāna.

So it only remains for me to wish you fruitful practice and a continuing effort. May you all be liberated even in this very lifetime.

Thank you.

CHAPTER 9

The Hindrances

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 30 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma provides a comprehensive examination of the five hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇa) that practitioners encounter in meditation. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he explains how these mental obstacles arise from past conditioning (saṅkhāra) created by our own acts of will and decision-making.*
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> *The talk systematically covers each hindrance: sensual desire (kāmacchanda), which manifests as fantasies about wealth, power, fame, and pleasure; ill-will and aversion (byāpāda), including anger, fear, and anxiety; sloth and torpor (thīna-middha), the downward-pulling energy of dullness and mental heaviness; restlessness and remorse (uddhacca-kukkucca), encompassing agitation, guilt, and shame; and skeptical doubt (vicikicchā), which undermines confidence in practice and teacher.*
>
> *Bhante emphasizes the key insight that we cannot directly control these conditioned patterns, but we can withdraw our willful empowerment of them. The skillful approach involves becoming the observer rather than the participant, feeling the actual bodily sensations beneath mental commentary, and allowing these energetic patterns to naturally exhaust themselves. He stresses the importance of patience—which the Buddha called the highest ascetic practice—and making a firm determination at the beginning of each sitting to maintain Right Awareness throughout the session.*

I just want to say a few things about hindrances.

First of all, we mustn't confuse hindrances with the moral law—these precepts that we take which are basically guides to how to stop creating problems for ourselves through doing harm and lies and all that. These hindrances are the products of more than just our problem with moral behavior. They arise because of our past conditioning. So they arise because of what's called *saṅkhāra*. Saṅkhāra is translated as dispositions, attitudes. And they're actually created by our own will, by our own decision making.

So, these saṅkhāras are actually made by an act of will and what we've ended up with is a whole set of dispositions which put all together comes down to our personalities, our character, personalities and character. And when we sit in meditation, what we come across, most of the time anyway, is all the bad stuff, all the unfortunate conditionings that we've given ourselves.

So the Buddha split these up into five sections, which makes it fairly easy for us to discuss and to see what we can do about it. Remember the process of meditation—part of it, in a sense most of the work is concerned with purifying the saṅkhāra, purifying the heart. In fact the opening of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish awareness, the first thing he says is for the purification of beings. That's the first reason for practicing this meditation—for the purification of beings. Only at the end of the line is it for attaining the end of suffering. So there's a recognition there that the process is one of purifying the heart of all these negativities, these turbulences.

So the first one is all to do with indulgence, all to do with our relationship to pleasure. So that normally comes out when we're sitting in all sorts of fantasies. Sex, drugs, rock and roll. Taking holidays. Making money. Becoming famous. Status. Power. And all those lovely dreams we have about power.

So those are the four worldly pursuits of getting the rich, the powerful and the famous. The rich, the powerful and the famous. And the fourth one is seeking pleasure. So our society is especially bent on that last one. That's why we have a general problem with obsession and addiction.

So now in meditation, when we sit, this conditioning, this wanting to enjoy life, this wanting to enjoy life in one of those categories—getting rich, getting powerful and all that—that desire of seeking happiness there booms up, doesn't it? Suddenly we're lost in all these dreams. All these fantasies come up, just take us away from the meditation, creating a virtual reality. While we're in there, it's great. It's only when we wake up and we realize it's not true that it hurts.

So, what can we do? Well, the first thing to really grasp is that you can't do anything. So once you recognize that, once you recognize that we are having created this conditioning, we can't do anything about it. Once you recognize that, then that releases us from all effort to try and change the mind, to try and change the heart. Which is a relief, isn't it? In one sense. If you know you can't do anything about something, then you just accept it. This is the way it is.

So, having recognized that it's a conditioning in the heart, it's like you set the car in gear and you're off. You've created a momentum. It doesn't matter what you do, you can stomp on the brake as much as you want, but the car has a momentum. It has to, as it were, exhaust that momentum.

So, in meditation, when all these dreams come up and you recognize, well, I can't do anything about this turbulence, I can't do anything about this momentum, then the option is to jump out of that system. And when you jump out of the system, you become its observer. You become its knower. In which case, this turbulence—what can it do? It has to expend its energy.

So, just as we've created this energy, just as we've created this turbulence through our acts of will to indulge, by withdrawing that will, which is the empowerment of that, by withdrawing that will, it now is just left to itself, in which case it can't grow and it has to exhaust itself.

So, in our meditation, when we find ourselves wandering away, we just note what's happened and we come back. And that's the practice. We just know what's happened, and we come back. We don't know what's happened and say, oh, that's good, I'll get into that. In this case, we'd be off again. We'd be creating the wheel. We just know—off on dreaming, some sort of fantasy, whatever it is—acknowledge it, and we come back.

If you can actually come back to a feeling of a longing, of a real strong desire, then you're really at what's motivating all these dreams. And just by staying with the feeling, as you might feel it in the heart, in the chest especially, then you just stay with that and you can actually begin to feel that it's giving up, it's giving away. And that gives you confidence that in fact, by simply not doing anything, the system will find its own equilibrium.

So if you stir up water and you take the paddle out, what happens? It goes round a bit and then it stops. So it's exactly the same with the mind. It's only an energy system and it just needs that continual empowerment. So once you opt out of empowering that, then you'll see the mind just becomes more and more quiet. It takes a long time, that's all. There's a lot of conditioning there.

Even though we sometimes wander off on these fantasies, we can say that, unwittingly, there is a small act of will there, but it's not such an empowering one. And eventually, the system will quieten down.

Now, you have to really make an effort on that, and what you find is, of course, is that you sit with good intent, but when something comes up—you want to set up a business or something, or you want to get on with this job, or you've got that shed to paint. And then you like to think about that, get it worked out, are you going to do it. And although you're saying to yourself, dreaming, dreaming, and before you know it, you're off. Because you haven't made that really strong act of determination to withstand it.

So it's got to be stronger. And it's no excuse if after the meditation you say to yourself, well, that was absolutely useless. It's only useless because you didn't make the right decision. So if we're going to judge our meditation, and we can do to a certain level, we can actually say to ourselves, well, I should have been stronger there. I should have made that decision not to indulge in that particular dream or fantasy. And then recognizing that fault, one makes the determination—right, next time I'll stay with it.

So that's all you can do with desire, and we're up against it when we eat, so we can see the power of it, the power of desire. Remember that a lot of desire has a neurotic base. Meaning that it's not just a simple desire. It's not just a desire for pleasure. There's underneath it a desire for escape from the suffering that it's hiding.

Take a very simple one like boredom. You can't handle boredom. You can't handle loneliness. So off you go. Turn the TV on, call a friend up, tell them how bored you are. Things like that. You're always shooting off. So what seems to be on the surface a search for happiness is actually an escape. And hence we get into that neurotic area where what we're doing is actually a metaphor. It's actually a metaphor for that neurosis.

So food is a very obvious place where really we're just feeding ourselves with love. We need to be loved and nobody loves us and we can't handle it. So we've got to eat and feel better. Or you feel anxious. You feel anxious about life. It's in the stomach anxiety, isn't it? So you eat and it feels good.

Which doesn't mean to say that you can't turn out to be an enormously wonderful chef. You can still be a fantastic artist in cooking, but it's covering up this. And that's one of the reasons for renunciation. That's why the Buddha constantly asks us to renounce things, to renounce those pleasures, because often when we give something up we like, then we see this underbelly of dissatisfaction.

Which is not the same as self-mortification. These words, it depends how you define them, obviously, but self-mortification is a wrong understanding that in order to become saintly, we have to suffer. You beat yourself up and hang yourself by your fingers from a tree or something. So that really hurts. And this creates an enormous piety. All it does, it hurts. It doesn't do anything at all.

So renunciation is something different. Renunciation is giving something up in order to feel the attachment, see the attachment that we have to things. So that's the first hindrance.

The next one is all to do with aversion. It's all to do with anger. Boredom is part of it. Even parts of our depression can be that too. Now, the rather good thing about aversion is, of course, it doesn't like its object. And therefore, in a rather helpful way, it creates a

distance for us immediately. So if you're sitting at home and somebody plays music next door that you don't like, then immediately you push it away. So you're right in contact with what it is that's annoying you.

Unlike indulgence, where you become it, you become the cornflakes, in this case you want to dissociate. So that's a great help for us, because at least that stops us indulging in the object. But we now indulge in this hatred, we now indulge in this anger, irritation, whatever it is.

So whenever that arises in the mind, because of a memory, etc., you have to be very careful to stay with the feeling of it. You have to allow that also to burn out. So it's always the same. It's always the same technique of coming off the mind with its imaginations and feeling the feeling. That's a tautology, to feel the feeling, but it's surprising how we don't actually feel things properly and fully in their real nature.

And the Buddha obviously had a hard time getting people to do this as well, because in the discourse on how to establish mindfulness, he also repeats it, *vedanā vedanānupassī*, to see feeling in feeling, or to see feeling as feeling. He's stretching the language to try and get people to see that they've got to go underneath the mind, underneath thought, underneath opinion and idea, and to get down to the raw feeling itself, which is felt as a feeling in the body, isn't it? Anger, it's a burning, or whatever.

The other side of that is fear, of course, and anxiety. That's also an aversion. That's running away. So again, it's the same thing. You've got to get into the body. You've got to feel it.

Now, when you get into these things, again, you find yourself in a relationship. When something is burning inside you, again, you don't like it. So there's an aversion to the aversion. So you've got to observe that too, you've got to observe the not wanting to feel anger, not wanting to feel boredom. So recognizing that, again you don't push it away, you just know that that's there, that's happening, and you just sit quietly with the feelings.

See it more as a process, something changing, become interested in it as a process. Same with anxiety. Instead of shooting off getting anxious about being anxious, being fearful of fear, and then we find ourselves off on some mental trip. Get used to feeling the feelings of fear. It doesn't take that much. Just to stay with them. Pass the mind around where you feel it. Pass the attention across it and up it. Penetrate it. Come in and out of it. See it as a process. Find a relationship with it where you can, as it were, just accept it just as it is.

Sometimes if you spice your looking, if you spice that investigation with a certain warmth, with a certain loving kindness towards the body, a certain loving kindness towards the mind, that also can be very helpful. So in the Mahāyāna they call one Buddha Avalokiteśvara, which means to look down upon with compassion. So you can do that to yourself. Give yourself a hug. Occasionally.

But the purpose is to see and to feel feelings as they really are, all these emotions around aversion and fear. Always the same technique, coming off the mind into the body, feeling feelings.

The next one is what my teacher used to call our two very good friends, sloth and torpor, because they're always telling us we need a rest. We ought to lie down a little bit, and it's all too tough for us.

So, we recognize that, having slept a wonderful sleep, we recognize that any doziness, any torpor in the mind, that heaviness in the head, or that heaviness in the body, all that is to be seen as turbulence. Now, normally we don't recognize it as that, but it's an energy form, isn't it? It's an energy form which is actually drawing us down into the pit. The pit of oblivion. It wants to squash us out. Doesn't it? You just want to lie down and disappear. Self-annihilate. It's a soft suicide. Just disappear for a while.

So these sloths and torpors, they hide a lot of worms and snakes down there, because we've learnt that one way that we can escape pain, whatever it is—we just get fed up with life or something—is just go to sleep for a while. And of course you wake up, you feel okay, you feel great, you feel better. But that sleep has been a suppressant. It's pushed all that stuff down. It's an actual force.

I'm sure that sometimes you've actually made the effort, I know I have, to actually go to sleep. Put your head in the pillow, go to sleep. Or force yourself into sleep. And that time when we don't have to get up to go to work or anything, when we don't have to get up, and you wake up and you turn over. Hours pass, hours pass. Sweet oblivion.

Well, of course, that is not the enlightenment. The nirvanic bliss is not annihilation or some total oblivion. So, recognizing that as a turbulence, our job is again to stay above it, to feel it as feelings, and by doing so, we're actually educating that energy to come upwards instead of downwards. And what you find, if you stay with it, and some of it can be very heavy, some of it can stay with you a long time—there's no rule about that. If you stay with it, you'll see it purifies, and to your surprise, you have more energy.

So many of you who've come on a longer retreat, you know that the first three days are horrible. But the energy lifts. The energy lifts as it purifies itself. And then suddenly, five hours a night—who wants any more than that?

The next one is restlessness. There's two actually. It's a catch-all in a sense. Restlessness and remorse. It's all that area to do with guilt, remorse, sorrow. Which makes you feel guilt, dread of consequences, shame, embarrassment. All those feelings which really are the product of immoral actions. But not only that, you can feel quite ashamed by just a social gaffe.

There's a lovely case of, I can't remember the name of the nobleman. It's gone out of my mind. But in the court of Queen Elizabeth I, he farted. And it was so embarrassing, he disappeared from court for three or four years. When he returned, the queen approached him and said, you are welcome to our court, we have forgot the fart. Wonderful. For three years the poor man was utterly embarrassed. But you can't call that immoral, it's just a social gaffe. Lovely story, isn't it?

So again, we have no option. You can't do anything about it. You have to suffer the consequences. And in so doing, of course, you undermine these attitudes which have caused those very states to arise in the first place.

Restlessness is the opposite of sloth, and it basically tells you to move.

You want to get up and get out, do something. Sometimes it has no reason. It doesn't tell you what it's restless about. You just feel restless. In which case, just like sloth and torpor, you've got to sit in the midst of that turbulence, go sit in the midst of the fire and just feel it.

Often it's a good thing to wander up and down the body, in which case this taking your attention up and down the body has a sort of relaxing effect. Just watching, just feeling the body going down as it were in a systematic way. Those of you who've done the U Ba Khin technique with people like the Goenka school will know that. And it can be very relaxing just to do that. But again, you're feeling it, you're observing it as a process, and you're just allowing it to be itself, and eventually the momentum just dies out of energy.

So a lot of this is to do with patience. And remember the Buddha said patience was the highest form of ascetic practice. Patience. It's the ability to suffer, isn't it? The ability to bear. And to recognize that this internal environment that we have, it's all been created by us. It's not as though our parents and whom we've met and the society hasn't helped to create it. It's been a catalyst. But it's ourselves who've made these internal decisions that have caused the mind to be like this.

Now, at first, people might think, well, that's a bit much blaming myself. I should blame all these other people. They make me suffer. But if you do that, then you're caught in this idea that you've got to change the world before you can change yourself, because they're the ones who are causing it. But when you recognize that you're the sole cause of your states, then it empowers you to do something about it.

So finally, there's this whole tricky area of doubt. And doubt's a funny thing. It's the opposite of faith. Faith is, in Buddhism, a trust, a confidence. It comes from a sort of intellectual thing, an intellectual assent. So you've read about Buddhism, you've read about meditation, you've heard about it, you've discussed it and all that, and there comes a faith, a trust in it, and then you practice, and the practice supports that, and eventually the faith grows, the confidence grows. It's not just confidence in the teaching, in the *vipassanā* and all that, it's also confidence in yourself to do it.

And sometimes you find yourself undermining yourself by saying, well, I can't do it. I can't do this and I can't do that. You have to watch that thought very carefully. Where's it leading? It's more in the sense of we should be aware of the way we talk to ourselves and say the opposite. Yeah, I can. Who in my head is telling me I can't do it? We don't have to believe the mind. For the most part, it's a liar. It's always telling us things which don't turn out to be true. So, when it says, you can't do this, who said that? You don't have to join in. You don't have to say, this is the same me. You can be the listener of your own mind. And so when it's trying to undermine you, you have to listen to it and just let go of it.

Skeptical doubt is the inability for a person to commit themselves. You can't do it, there's a fear there. And this is probably the greatest hindrance to the whole spiritual practice. Because you never get down to sit, you never get down to doing it, because you can't leap beyond the fear of committing yourself. So again, when that happens, we have to go into the feelings that are surrounding the doubt. Feelings that are surrounding it, supporting it.

That's not to be confused with what you might call honest doubt. A wonder. Because that's what the Buddha actually wants us to cultivate. He doesn't want us to take his word as fact. It's not a blind faith. He wants us to say, ah, okay, well let's see if that's true. And then to investigate. Because the process of enlightenment isn't one of belief. If you could believe in *Nibbāna* and you then experience Nibbāna, it would be simple, wouldn't it? It's one of direct experience, so to have that direct experience then you've got to have the confidence to actually undergo the training.

Sometimes we transfer that onto another person. What's the word? Projected. And we start having doubt in the teacher. Heaven forbid. Now, that doesn't mean that the teacher might not be wrong. But you can't believe it just because the mind puts a doubt onto it. You have to investigate that as well. So doubt is quite insidious actually. Be really careful with it. It slips up on you.

And sometimes you can undermine your own confidence by setting yourself standards which you can't maintain. So if you say to yourself after this retreat, then of course you'll be all enormously inspired. You say to yourself, I'm going to now meditate for two hours every morning and two hours in the evening. And with great intent and real resolution, you're determined to do that. And tomorrow morning, you feel a bit down. And you let go of it. And you say to yourself, I can't do it. See, I can't do it. In which case, you've created this huge doubt. Because you've overstretched. You've had too much expectation. And you undermine yourself. You have to be careful of that too. It's better to start low and build up than to try and start high and just flop.

So now those are the five hindrances. And when I say at the end of a sitting, you see, recollect what you're doing or review what you're doing, well, you can take one or two of those things. For instance, supposing sloth hit you during that sitting. Well, then you can ask yourself, what did I do? So there are various things we can do. But as soon as we feel that sort of heaviness come on, we can put more energy in the posture. Did we do that? And when it gets a bit too heavy, you can open your eyes, just let a bit of light in. Did we do that, or did we sort of forget about it and go into sleep? And then at some point did we have a feeling, well, no, this is getting the better of me, should I stand up?

So it's a case of also developing these skills of how to stay above these hindrances and not get caught up in them. And that's part of this reflection at the end of a sitting. And then what happens is you become wise about yourself. It's not as though the trick that you employed in the last sitting will work in the next one. The mind's slippery, yeah? You can't catch it that easy. But at least we get to know ourselves and we get to know that fundament, usually what's wrong is that we haven't actually committed ourselves. We haven't actually given a full commitment to the practice.

And that's why it's so important when you begin any sitting, even if it's only just five minutes in the morning, that just that thought comes to the mind: right. From now until the end of the sitting, I'm going to maintain a real effort to stay mindful. And that's why I like to stress this business of sometime in the early morning to make that determination to remain mindful during the day. Not to compartmentalize the day. Not to think that sitting meditation is the only practice.

CHAPTER 10

The Buddha and the Hindrances

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma provides a comprehensive overview of meditation practice, beginning with the Buddha's own spiritual journey from worldly pleasure through ascetic extremes to the Middle Way of awakening. He explores how the Buddha's childhood experience of natural awareness (satipaṭṭhāna) became the foundation for his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree.*
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> *The talk examines paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) as the Buddha's fundamental insight into how suffering arises from ignorance (avijjā) and the mistaken identification of consciousness with body and mind. This creates the illusion of a solid, permanent self that seeks security through attachment and aversion.*
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> *The core teaching focuses on practical guidance for working with the five hindrances (nīvaraṇa): sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt. Rather than suppressing these mental states, Bhante emphasizes acknowledging them and investigating the underlying emotions in the body. He explains how each hindrance tells us to act in ways that reinforce conditioning, while wise practice involves doing the opposite - staying present with the uncomfortable feelings until they naturally subside.*
>
> *The talk concludes with guidance on using periods of calm concentration to develop penetrating insight (vipassanā) into the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self through careful observation of the breath.*

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

I thought tonight to give a wide sweep to our meditation practice, to see if I can put it in some context, beginning perhaps with the Buddha's own experience, and then this crucial teaching of the wheel of dependent origination, his understanding of where our peculiar delusion lies. And then finally at the end, hopefully, a little bit about these problems we come across when we're sitting, these hindrances.

So the Buddha himself is the basic paradigm, he's the archetype of this particular path, that's what he stands for. And his early life is meant to be full of pleasure, easy-going, loving family, all that stuff, everything that people dream about these days. And

around about his early twenties, middle twenties, something happened and he got fed up with it. And what we can say is that he went through what we would now call an existential crisis. He wondered why he was alive. In his terms, why he suffered.

In the mythology surrounding that psychological event, we have this business of him being out hunting or wandering around the countryside when he comes across three different types of people. One is very sick, one's very old, and one's dead. And each time it comes as a surprise to him because previously he'd been shielded from this by his family. So we can take this as a metaphor for the fact that not until our early twenties do we really have an inkling of what death might be. It's the stirrings of a future middle-aged crisis, we can say, and the following old age crisis.

So he's now asking about these three things: sickness, old age and death. Does every human being suffer from this? Do I suffer from this? And it was this recognition that the end of life normally ends with some sickness, some what my father called the decrepitude of old age, and death. And of course it makes nonsense of trying to live a life around pleasure, riches, fame and anything else which is going to come to an end because fundamentally what we want is something which is going to last, some everlasting state.

So there was a movement during his time—it had begun before—this business of leaving home and becoming an ascetic. It tended to be anti-establishment. The establishment was the Brahminical tradition, which eventually developed into what we now know as Hinduism. And they did have their ascetics, but new teachers came along who said quite radically different things. One of them was what we would call now an absolute materialist. You just have the body, and there was the brain, and when you died, that was the end of it.

There were some people with strange ideas about karma, some predestination that you had to run the gauntlet of karma. So from being born a bug, you then had to go right through to a rat, to a cow, to a human being, and onwards until the process just naturally came to an end. And there was nothing you could do about it. So this person said, if you went up one side of the Ganges, slaughtering and pillaging and doing all sorts of rubbish, it wouldn't have any effect at all on this predestined path. And if you came down the other side and did great acts of compassion and wonderful acts of love, it would make no difference whatsoever. It was completely predestined.

So within that atmosphere the Buddha began his training and he began his training with what you might call the conservative orthodox line of Brahmanism. He went to two teachers who basically taught him very ancient techniques of meditation which were about gaining very highly ecstatic states of mind. And whenever he achieved this,

to the satisfaction of the teacher, the teacher would acclaim him as equal to them, these two teachers, and then invite him to teach. But both times, he refused the appointment and said that it hadn't completely satisfied him. He hadn't really got to the end of suffering because whenever he came out of these states, he was as bad as he was before. There wasn't any particular improvement.

So he then went on to a second type of training that was very common in those days, and that was what we now term self-mortification. So whereas the worldly life, the materialist life, presumes that you can get happiness through the ordinary gifts that we get through living, TVs and stuff like that, and perhaps there's a stoicism there that, well, you can't be perfectly happy, that attitude. The meditative school that he went to said that real happiness wasn't to do with the material world, it was mental. So you could create these beautiful mental states. So even here, in our *vipassanā* meditation, sometimes beautiful states do arise, correct? Definitely. And we can presume that this is nirvana, this is actually where we're really aiming for, if we could just maintain it.

The next school said that, in a sense, what was wrong was the body itself. Somehow you had to free yourself from the body. So self-mortification exercises were to do with subduing the body. And the most common was just to starve it, was to eat very little. Now those of you who've done something like a ten-day fast, a water fast, will know that the first three days, just like a retreat, are horrible. And then somehow the body has cleared a lot of its toxins and you can feel quite lovely within the body. Except, of course, that the body is now eating itself. So you can't go on like that for too long.

So they reduced their intake to a minimum, and he says of himself that he came to a point where he could hold his spine through his stomach. That gives you an idea of how thin he got. But this led him nowhere either.

So in desperation, he was by himself sitting on a road, probably looking fairly disconsolate when a woman passed by with, it seems, a bowl of rice pudding to offer to a particular deity in a shrine. But seeing him in such a miserable state, offered it to him. Actually, the commentaries bump it up a bit. They say that she thought he was a deity and therefore offered it to him. I can't really imagine him looking like a deity. Anyway, this rice pudding gave him a certain energy, which he'd been lacking through this self-mortification exercise, and it brought up a certain hope in him, and he must have been recollecting his own spiritual journey.

And he remembered this point in childhood, probably around about the age of eight, something like that, eight, nine, ten, when he's watching his father doing the ceremonial first ploughing of the season. And that state he recalled as being somehow different from all the mental stuff, from all the states that he'd achieved through these medita-

tions. It was a very concentrated state. In the commentaries it says it's a sort of *jhāna*. But something different had been about that state, which he recognized as having some investigative, some curiosity.

Now, the image, when I want to describe to people what this *satipaññā*, this awareness with intuitive wisdom is like, the closest I can get to in terms of an image is of a little child round about the beginning of language, where there's no great conceptual thinking, where they see something like a little bug, which they've never seen before. And they become entranced, don't they? They become totally bewitched by it. They just look at it. You can see them. They're just locked onto the object. And they're watching intently, and even so that the mouth drops, the jaw drops.

Now, one of the things about the posture is that, especially in Zen, because Zen is very good at describing posture, they always say that the lips are together but the teeth are apart. So when your teeth are apart, your jaw is relaxed. In your meditation, if you watch, whenever you're thinking, you may feel very small little movements on your tongue. Because the thoughts always are connected to the tongue, just as a natural thing, because of speech. And any tension about thinking or whatnot immediately brings in the jaw. So sometimes in your meditation, even by concentrating on your tongue and on the relaxation of the jaw, you can find that your thoughts stop. Your thoughts at least are calmed.

So that moment when a child just looks at something with that open curiosity, a child's not coming to that experience with a concept. And while it's there with the experience, it hasn't got conceptual thinking to think about it. So all it can do is just purely absorb directly what's going on. It's only then, after a certain time, will it turn around and ask what it is. What is that?

So trying to get back to that pure inquisitive without a verbal question consciousness—that's what we're trying to do. That's the aim of the practice. And what we're doing is we're trying to lift that consciousness out of its confusion. With confusion, it's blending with everything that we experience in the body as feelings, in the heart, and in thoughts.

So now the Buddha went to sit, and in a sense he was at the end of his tether, so he made this rather remarkable determination that he wouldn't move, he wouldn't shift from the seat until he was fully enlightened, or he'd die. I don't know whether you've tried that. It doesn't last very long for me anyway. It's one too many. But anyway, that was his determination and he just sat there. Luckily for him and for us of course, he made the breakthrough and he came to this understanding.

Now this understanding, it's said, that he then spent the first night going through the psychological understanding of what he'd experienced, to show how suffering arises. Then he went through the next night the other way, to show how it came to an end. And then, in the third night, he recapitulated and did them both. So this is just a way, really, again, of saying that when the Enlightenment came, when he actually realized the way things really are, it took a while for this whole thing to work out in terms of how to teach it, looking at the human being from the point of view of the enlightened person.

Now one thing that I've come across having been in the East and then coming back to the West—in the East always hearing, shall we say, the paradigm about the human being from the Buddhist point of view and therefore going through a spate of years where I'm out of touch with things like psychodynamic theory and stuff like that—coming back to the West I began to realize that the way we look at things is from a different angle.

And this has come up quite sharply since I've been down at Gaia House, where that area around Totnes and Dartington and all that is a hotbed of alternative stuff. So I've got myself a really bad name as being anti-psychotherapy and all that. But I didn't actually mean to do that. What I was trying to do was try and make very clear to people that if you want to become enlightened, if you want to actually be liberated from suffering from the Buddha's point of view, then you've really got to understand the psychology as the Buddha understood it.

So this takes us now into this wheel of dependent origination which we talked a little bit about this morning and during the day. And the fundamental stance of the Buddha, what he came to understand was that the fundamental problem was ignorance. Now this ignorance is not culpable. We're not blameworthy. It's a simple existential state. We don't know.

So, not worrying about whether we have a past life or a future life, but just taking this life. Consider, in Buddhist understanding, the mind and consciousness arise with conception. So that is what consciousness is actually experiencing. Just being in a cellular life, in a very material base. And it's only later, as the fetus grows, that it begins to get some messages about feeling, touch, hearing, things like that. When it's born, then of course we open our eyes, light comes in, we begin to hear things, we begin to understand things. And all this is, as it were, coming into a consciousness which has begun from a position of not knowing.

So that not knowing now makes a mistake which is quite understandable. It presumes itself to be what it finds itself in. I am the body, I am these feelings, I am what I think. I think therefore I am. It comes all the way up to the highest of philosophers, so you can understand that that's a very—I mean what else could consciousness do? It doesn't have another choice.

Now, having made this step, this mistake of thinking that we are this body, we are this mind, etc., which is your basic delusion, on the wheel of dependent origination, that's *saṅkhāra*. That's your dispositions, that's what it's created, a certain mode of dispositions around this essential mistake of thinking we are, for want of a better word, human beings. Now from that, of course, we form a relationship to the world whereby me is here and everything and every other is out there.

Now this me and other become a separation. So this is what Buddhism means by a duality, living in a dual world. There's me here and everybody else out there. And me, I have things, so these are mine. As soon as I've created mine, I've created yours. Having created mine and yours, I live now in a very dualistic world. And the tighter I am about me, the closer I am about me, the more afraid I am about maintaining me, this, what might have been some boundary, becomes more and more a barrier.

So this differentiation between barrier and boundary. A river, for instance, might flow through a certain countryside, and on one side it might be green, and on the other side it might be desert. And what it's doing is it's creating a certain boundary, you might say, where there's a watershed on one side and none on the other. But it's quite possible that things can move across it. But when these two places become two countries, then this river suddenly becomes a barrier, and nobody can move from one place to the other.

So what the me does, this ego—I don't particularly like using the word ego. It is used. The better word is the self, this sense of self that we have. What the self does is, of course, it demarcates very sharply. This is me, and that's not me. This is mine, and that's not mine.

So now, once the self has got itself into that position, it now presumes itself to be more secure. Remember, fear is always the root emotion of self. Fear is right there at the base. It's prior to any other emotion. Why? Because the one thing that self is afraid of is its own death. That's why it's always trying to aggrandize itself. That's why it's always trying to sustain and trying to really make everything secure, batten things down.

So this self now has a relationship to the world whereby it's going to feel more secure the bigger it is. The bigger house I've got, the bigger the pension, the bigger the car, I feel better. And the more things I've got, the more things I own. So you can see how this aggrandizement slips into immorality. Because at some point, I'm up against other people. So I'm now into thieving and not doing my tax returns. Things like that, I try to fiddle, you know, just don't make...

And how now you're into this area of aversion, of hatred, of pushing things away that you find are impinging upon your little bit of security. And how when it's too much, there's fear. This goes right through, not only just material well-being, but even our relationships. My partner, my children. Do you see what I mean? And then you get this barrier turning up. And then you get working for your own family, for your own ethnic group, for your own nationality, for your own civilization. Do you see what I mean? It grows out like that.

And of course, wherever it meets the other, that is your conflict. That is your war.

So, what the Buddha discovered was this root cause, this root cause of self. That's the point. Now, having discovered this root cause, this idea of a self, this feeling of a self, he now discovers that there are these three characteristics which symbolize the state of that self. Three fundamental, you might say, delusions. The first one is that although things, shall we say, change, actually I'm always the same.

The self always seems to be the same self. I go to sleep and I wake up in the morning and I feel the same as I fell asleep. There's a feeling running through life that, okay, everything else changes a little bit, but I, me, inside me, I never change. I'm always the one person that I always thought I was.

Now that, of course, is manifestly untrue, because when we actually look at what we mean by me, it turns out to be the personality, the character, my thinking, because these are all the things that the self says it is. But we know that we're not the same person that we were at the age of two, when we looked at bugs and discovered this wonderful *satipaññā*, this awareness wisdom, which we since forgot.

And this same self now presumes itself to be solid. So it doesn't change. If it doesn't change, it must be solid, it must be substantial. So it somehow stands outside the world that we live in. So that's the self, you see. And these are the two characteristics, the two basic characteristics, that it doesn't change and that it's solid, it's immortal.

When that is taken a step further up into our daily living, then we get this business of a relationship to what we experience. So that's when we get this business of wanting what makes me happy, what gives me pleasure, and not wanting what doesn't give me pleasure. So I'm now caught in a duality, right?

If you just watch yourself in ordinary daily life, you'll see that there's this constant judging going on. Liking, disliking, wanting, not wanting. If I like it, I want it. If I don't like it, I don't want it. So the whole of life is just partitioned into these things. If I like the person, then we can meet for coffee. If I don't like them, I don't want to see them. So this constant shifting of life according to these two different colours, the dark and the bright.

So these are your three characteristics. You can call them existential characteristics because they are fundamental to this whole idea of what is the meaning of our existence. So, again, what is the purpose of our meditation, in a sense, from the point of view of what is it we're actually trying to see? Well, we're trying to see these three things. Because in seeing these three things clearly, and seeing that they are false, that brings about the liberation of that very consciousness, which is identified with everything it did think was permanent and substantial.

So our viewpoint of whatever comes up is always coming from these three angles. So for instance, when I'm sitting here, you see, all these hindrances come up. So the first one may be something like, I've been planning to go on a holiday somewhere. So I've come on this weekend retreat and all I can think about is this holiday I'm planning. Because that's what's uppermost in my mind and that's what I'm really going to enjoy, and I've got all these ideas of what I want to do and where I want to go. So I'm sitting here and it's quite natural because I want to do this, the mind will now be incredibly inventive and give you all sorts of wonderful ideas.

So what we want to do is we want to discover what's empowering this? Why can't I just stop it? Why can't I just say, well this weekend I'll put it to the side and I won't think about this anymore. Why can't we do it? Coming to terms with the fact that we're not actually in control of the mind is a bit of an eye-opener. Whereas we thought it was me thinking, actually it's thinking, and I'm swamped by it.

There are occasions when I can use it. For instance, if I go on holiday, I have to use it for planning. I've got to phone people up. I've got to set up hotels and et cetera, et cetera. So this is a correct use, you see. But overlaying that are all these dreams about what we're going to do, how it's going to be. And that's where the wishing is coming,

that's where the wanting is coming. And once we've begun to build an atmosphere, a conditioning in the mind of seeking pleasure in a holiday, seeking happiness in a holiday, then of course it'll carry on.

So here we come to a meditation and suddenly we can't stop thinking about it. It's completely flooded us. So now, what we've come to realize is that by empowering a certain conditioning, we give it its own life. And the only thing we can do once we've set something in motion is wait for that momentum to die out.

Exactly the same in a way as you drive a car. You can stomp on the brakes as hard as you want, but it's still going to move forward. So, in our meditation here, if we try and stomp on this stuff, what is it we're stomping on? What is it we're trying to put the brakes on? Now that, you can see, is a suppressive measure. So it's no good if we're full of this desire and the mind's just full of thinking, full of thinking, full of thinking, to get hard with it and smack it on and get rigid and start watching the breath come what may. Because that's just putting the brakes on. All we're going to do is create even more turbulence, more bad energy within the system.

So all we can do is recognize that here is the conditioning I've set up. Because only me can govern the mind. Because only me can put ideas into the mind and empower those ideas. So here I am in this enormous desire, and what can I do? So every time I wake up, I just have to recognize, ah, desire, holiday, desiring, desiring. Then I come back.

Now I have two choices. I can either come back to the breath, or I can, as it were, search for the excitement in the body, that sense of wanting to enjoy myself. Now, if I go back to the breath, even though I do it gently, in a way, that's also a very gentle suppression. I've acknowledged it as it is, but I'm still not looking at the root cause.

Now, many a time, the mind is just restless. And often, you'll find that just by guiding the mind back to the breath, it'll just bring a sense of peace. But when it's very strong, then you've really got to go underneath it to find out what the emotion is that's empowering it. So dropping into the body, one feels that excitement, you see. Staying with that excitement at the feeling level means that, A, it isn't going to slip up into these higher faculties and create further dreams. And B, just by watching it here, because it can't do this, it'll just begin to slowly die out.

And the time it takes to die out is a measure of how much we've empowered it. So if it's going to take a couple of hours, it takes a couple of hours. If it's going to take a couple of weeks, it's going to take a couple of weeks. There's not much you can do about it.

Now, whenever the mind wanders off like that, even though it hasn't been a conscious decision on our part, there has been a moment of empowerment. This is known in Buddhist psychology as habitual, an habitual act of will. So there's many things in life that we just do as an habitual act of will. You just catch yourself doing something. Often, even before you know it, an idea for tea's come in your head, and before you know it, you're drinking it. So it's just been empowered naturally as a habit. That's what a habit is.

So now, recognizing that there has been an act of will in there, you see, we're even sharper, as it were, to wake up out of that fantasy and to recognize what's happened. Now, the thing about an habitual act of will is that it will just keep the wheel rolling. It won't actually make it that much worse. It's only if you were to stop here and say, well, I've come on this retreat, but really, what I really want to do is think about Machu Picchu and Antigua. So you sit here, and that's what you do. Well, of course, you're off then. You've written a book.

Now, every time you wake up out of that and you notice, ah, dreaming, dreaming, okay, and you come back, and you come back either to the breath or to the emotion, you see, now that is an act of will, a conscious act of will. That's an empowering act of will. That's beginning to develop a new attitude, a new habit of being in the present.

So there's your practice with desire, with anything which attracts us. When it comes to the second hindrance, aversion, all the little grudges and hatreds and irritations which also do very much the same thing, it's exactly the same technique. You have to observe what it is, you have to recognize, acknowledge what it is. That's irritation, you see. And then again, if it's something small, something silly, perhaps you can come back to the breath and it will just, as it were, die out because it's not being empowered.

But if it's very strong, then you may have to go into the body, as it were, and search the feeling of anger, search and feel the irritation, the grudge, the unforgivingness, whatever's there that's causing it. And you have to stay there, you see, you have to wait for it to burn out, which isn't sometimes very pleasant.

Now, when you get there, you've got to recognize the feeling of not wanting to actually experience these things. So there's your aversion. This aversion is actually what's not allowing that bad feeling, that anger to die out, because we like, we enjoy expressing anger. Correct? It's a relief, isn't it? But with the relief of anger, with the relief of kicking the dog or something, there is a development of that particular way of thinking, that particular way of feeling. So we're actually saying, it's right for me to get angry. So we have to come back on that and we have to notice this relationship we have with anger, with cruelty.

Cruelty is a delicious thing. The torturer enjoys his job. Correct? Definitely. Because he wouldn't do it, huh? So that's this whole business of aversion.

In aversion, of course, there's boredom. So boredom can be a real bane for meditators. And what you've really got to ask yourself about boredom is, where's it coming from, you see? What's the root of boredom? It's expectancy, isn't it? We expect something exciting. We expect something to happen. We expect some great, wonderful thing and nothing's happening. We get bored. I'm just watching the breath. I mean, what the hell? Really boring. See?

So again, you have to be very careful because what boredom will tell us to do is to seek distraction. So you're watching the breath here and you think, I'll watch it here. And then you watch it, yeah, boredom. I'll do a mantra. And then you're all fed up with that. I'm going to do some walking. Before you know it, you're just being swung around by this boredom.

So the last thing you do with boredom is seek distraction. You just keep going back and you feel the boredom. It's an aversion. It's a dislike. Hatred, you see. And again, you always notice your relationship to boredom. How you don't want to feel it. Don't want to feel it.

The next two can be pretty heavy too, the sloth and torpor, especially on the first day of a retreat, first couple of days actually. I must say that those of you who have only experienced one day, two day or three day retreat probably don't realise that it actually does get better. Things do lift and you do get a clarity. For the first three days, you're getting rid of all the stuff you brought with you, you see. So it can be quite difficult and also trying to lift the energy.

Even when we live a very fast, pacey life, it's actually mixed in with things like anxiety and stress and stuff. And that's not a good energy. So when you come here, when you come to a retreat like this, of course, because there's nothing to do, see what happens to all that energy? It doesn't know where to go. So it just collapses into itself. You just feel this exhaustion, this restless boredom, this restless exhaustion.

So the first three days of any course that you go on, of this nature anyway, are always brutal. So sloth and torpor, they refer to just two different states of feeling down. One is the physical tiredness. One is the mental cloud that you can get into. And sometimes they both come together. In fact, they mostly come together. Sometimes you can feel the one and not the other. You can be fairly clear in the head, but you just feel down.

Now, again, you don't do what the hindrance tells you. The hindrance says, have a kip. Ten minutes, you feel great, you see. But in fact you go to sleep and that's the end of it because what you're doing is you're piling more energy pushing down, you see, using sleep as a suppressive. Yeah, remember we were taught that early on as kids? You know, if we get a bit naughty then it's because they're tired, you know. Put them to bed and then you wake up all right and you think oh yeah, if I feel bad I go to bed.

And of course depressives, people who are depressed and especially those who have depression as illness, so much of their time is just going to sleep, just falling asleep because of this awful heaviness and they haven't got the will, they haven't got perhaps a reason to lift themselves up against it.

So the thing to do when you feel slothful or tired is to do the opposite. You put energy into the posture, you open your eyes. If you feel that that's not good enough, do some standing. Stand up. See? Just refuse to be annihilated. And that's why it is important during the day to get every walking period, get a good 10, 20 minutes of fast walking because there is a connection between the body and these sorts of feelings too.

The next one is the opposite of that, a sense of restlessness. Now for me, the way I experience it, is that the one is the other, one's going in, and one's coming out. Now restlessness, of course, tells you to get up and do things. Don't hang about. Don't just sit there and do something. So again, you do the opposite. You sit very still, you don't move, and you just try and get in touch with that feeling of wanting to move, wanting to go.

Often, of course, it begins to express itself in these fantasies. So in which case you've got to work with those desires. But sometimes it can be just almost a pure restlessness, just a feeling of fidgetiness, you see. So the more you relax around that, the more you relax the body. Remember the posture, in the posture the energy is just coming up the spine. That's all the energy you need to become enlightened. If you could sit like that and maintain your mindfulness, the Buddha says, for seven days, you'd probably make it. Either that or what we call the non-returner.

So, you know, it's worth getting the posture right, eh? So, you're lifting the energy up the spine, see, it's straight up the spine, and then with the out-breath, you can imagine it coming down into the abdomen, the *hara*. See, this is where the will is based.

So, whenever there's frazzleness, whenever the body feels restless, just lift the spine up, you see, draw the energy with the in-breath up the spine, with the out-breath down the body, and relax around it, you see, and you'll feel that restlessness. But because it's got nowhere to hold on to, you see, eventually it'll just collapse, it'll just turn.

And this is true, you know, if you feel restless before you sleep. One of the good tricks to go to sleep if you feel very restless is to take a position where you are comfortable, then refuse to move. You don't move at all. And then you'll see, it'll be a battle for a little while. The body wants to move around and do this.

And then suddenly it'll just flip and that's it. Because it's got nowhere to go, so it just burns itself out. But as soon as you turn over, as soon as you get up from the posture, you've empowered it. It feels good — the uncomfortable feeling of restlessness disappears when you move, but the restlessness as a way in which turbulent energy is expressing itself is simply being re-empowered. Do you see? So the more we can suffer this stuff, the more we can burn, the more we can allow ourselves to sit in the midst of these flames, the quicker all these hindrances begin to die out for us.

The other one which is linked in with restlessness is guilt, remorse — all that to do with what happens when we do something which is harmful. And you can see, because that makes you fidgety, doesn't it? Guilt makes you jump a bit. So again, it's very much the same thing. When guilt feelings come up, remorse feelings come up, all those feelings, it's the very same thing. One acknowledges them, one stops the dreaming, one goes into the feeling. One goes into the feeling, one suffers the consequences of one's unwholesome actions.

There's no need for punishment in Buddhism. You just have to suffer the consequences of your actions. There's no need to judge ourselves as evil or bad. There's no need to give ourselves extra punishment. You don't have to give yourself up to the police. Isn't that a relief? You can just sit there and the very pain of coming to terms with these things is the consequence and the healing.

It's very interesting because I read a little article on — if you remember, in England we had that terrible Moors murder with Brady and Myra Hindley. And he's written a book, it seems, about serial killers, and it's meant to be a very insightful book. The person who helped him write it says in the article that he asked him, did he ever think about the suffering of his victims? And his answer is very telling. He said, if I thought about the suffering of my victims, I'd go mad. So it's in him, you see. You can't hurt anybody out there without hurting yourself. Very interesting that, I thought.

And the final one is doubt. The Buddha asks us not to believe anything that he says. It's not a faith religion in that sense, because it's about knowledge, it's about understanding. And faith grows. Faith is an intellectual ascent. It's a confidence we put into the teaching of the Buddha by way of listening, which makes sense to us. So we hear the teaching, it makes sense to us, and then we go away and we think about it ourselves, and we do a bit of practice, and the confidence comes to give the practice a go.

When the practice begins to yield results, then of course you tend to get more confidence in the practice, and so it rolls on until — it is said when a person glimpses, has that glimpse of *nibbāna*, the *sotāpanna*, the stream entrant, as they're called. Once that happens, of course they know now that there is an end to suffering. Even if it's only a glimpse, the Buddha says it's like a flash of lightning, as quick as that. But at least within that person there is this real knowledge of the end of suffering, at which point faith now becomes rock hard. It can't be disturbed.

But until that point happens to us, then there will always be some doubts floating around. And doubt, of course, stops you committing yourself, and therefore you don't do the practice. And there's three areas usually of doubt. First of all, in the actual teaching itself, that it's not going to deliver. There's doubt in the teacher, of course. Don't look at me like that! But the big one, of course, is usually doubting oneself. Everybody else can do it, but I can't. And that's often a big one for a lot of meditators. They have a certain ground faith in the teaching and they see how it works. And they usually have a certain faith in whatever teachers they meet, but they're usually about themselves saying, I can't do it, you see.

So doubt is pernicious. You have to be very careful with doubt. It can really destroy your spiritual life. So whenever doubt comes up, you have to really turn on it, you see, and feel the doubt and really not do what it says, you see. Very careful about that self-judgment — very undermining. That's not only in the spiritual life, is it, it's anything, isn't it? I mean, if you start a job and you doubt you can do it, you won't be able to do it. You just undermine yourself. So whenever doubt comes up, you always have to make that leap of faith, you see — yes I can. Do you see what I mean? To hell with it, yes I can, you see. So beware of doubt if you do suffer from it a lot. Some people do, some people don't. These hindrances vary from people to people. Everybody has their own little constellation of horror which they have to work out. That's our *kamma*, you see.

So I hope that's given you some pointers when it comes to the hindrances. The last thing, of course, to say is what happens when we feel peaceful and wonderful and we feel that everything's going perfectly well? Well, don't rest on our laurels. That's the big thing. You don't say, ah, finally a bit of peace, and you sink into the peace and you're just indulging peace now. So when it goes, you get really frustrated. Why can't I be peaceful like I was yesterday?

So when there's a calmness comes, when there's a certain clarity comes, when the meditation is, as we would say, it is good, right? In fact, remember, in terms of the process of enlightenment, even should we spend a whole hour just coming off these thoughts, that's good meditation. That's the practice. But even so, there are times when

there seems a certain concentration comes, a clarity, a quietness, a stillness and all that, you see. Well then, you see, really use that to begin to penetrate the breath, you see. Because that's what you're left with. There's not much else when you're completely quiet. The only thing that's going on tends to be the very subtle movement of breath.

So you go into that and you're looking at it very closely, very intently, trying to see the exact beginning of the in-breath, the exact ending of it, the exact beginning of the out-breath, the exact ending of it. And where you're driving that consciousness is to the point where mind contacts matter. And it's right there that we can see especially these qualities of transience, impermanence, rising and falling, and the insubstantiality, this not-self. That's when it becomes very apparent.

Now, such is our state of delusion, such is our ignorance, that it just isn't good enough to see it once. You've got to really keep seeing it and seeing it and seeing it, and very slowly the penny drops. Only occasionally does a person have one of these blowout kenshōs or satoris. The normal progress, normal spiritual progress is just this wearing away — this Chinese drip. And slowly we begin to perceive, slowly begins to turn the way we see things. And in turning the way we see things, the personality begins to change, the relationships begin to change. So it's a very, for most of us, a very slow process.

CHAPTER 11

Dullness, Lethargy, Restlessness and Pain

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 58 min

> *In this practical dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma draws on the Buddha's encounter with Māra to explore how meditation hindrances serve as our spiritual trainers. He offers detailed guidance on working with sloth and torpor (thīna-middha), examining its roots in our conditioning toward seeking happiness in oblivion and avoidance of unpleasant experiences. Drawing from the story of Moggallāna's nine remedies, he provides practical techniques including posture adjustment, walking meditation, and investigative awareness.*
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> *The talk addresses restlessness (uddhacca) as refined energy that persists until the final stages of awakening, offering methods to work with both bodily agitation and obsessive thinking. Bhante emphasizes the importance of non-resistance while maintaining firm resolve not to indulge these states. He concludes with guidance on working with physical and emotional pain, distinguishing between necessary bodily signals and suppressed emotions held in the body. Throughout, he emphasizes seeing hindrances through the three characteristics (tilakkhana) and allowing their energy to transform rather than be suppressed, supporting the natural purification of the heart on the path to liberation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddasa.

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

The last time I spoke it was about the bit where the Buddha becomes enlightened and is attacked by Mara and then eventually overcomes that attack and becomes liberated. What I mean to do is just go back a little bit and really discuss this fellow Mara.

So there were nine storms: the wind, the rain, the rocks, the missiles, the embers, the ashes, the sand, the mud and the darkness. And when they approached the Buddha or the Bodhisattva, he was either untouched or they turned into garlands, flowers, sandalwood powder, banners and light. These of course refer to hindrances or what's called hindrances.

The Buddha's own image for these hindrances are like a pool of water. So the mind is like a pool of water. And if it's discoloured with all various different colours, kaleidoscopic, then you can't see into it. You can't see into it because you're enchanted by these colours. If the water's boiling, then that's an image of hatred and anger. If it's covered

over with mosses, that's the effect of dullness and lethargy. And if the wind blows across the pool and makes the waves, then that's an image of restlessness. And if it's turbid and muddy, that's the insidious pervasiveness of doubt. That's the Buddha being a little poetic.

But for us, the defilements when they arise are to be acknowledged as our trainers. They must be embraced as friends. They've come to help us to develop our perfections. And we can say that the greater the defilement, the greater the potential for perfection. The more horrible you are, the more wonderful you'll become. So there's hope even for people like Hitler and Stalin. Heavens, they might become Buddhists.

One of the things when we hit these hindrances is that we don't know our virtues until they're tested. And I'm reminded of a book I read many years ago by a man called Brian Keenan who was an Irish fellow and he was one of the many who got kidnapped in Lebanon during that time and his book An Evil Cradling is well worth reading because he really went through some horrible stuff and I heard an interview with him and the usual question was you must be very strong to undergo these things you must have had a tremendous power inside you and he insisted that it wasn't so and that other people found similar strengths. I mean, there were one or two who broke down, who broke, but generally speaking, we have this inner virtue which we don't know until we're tested.

So when these defilements come up, we have to see them as testers, trainers, teachers, friends. What I want to do rather than go through them in the usual order is just take the ones that we normally suffer from. And I want to do it for a little while and then I want to answer these questions. The question sheet that I put up didn't get filled very quickly. So most of the questions come from people who've left. So I'm hoping that I can telepathically send it to them as I speak.

So the first big one that we hit usually when we come to retreat is the old dullness and lethargy. The old sloth and torpor. And we have to understand why it is that we have so much of it. So the first reason is, of course, that we like sleeping. We indulge in it, Sunday morning, rollover, cup of tea, newspaper, roll back over, the beach, say no more. So all these times that we have longed to sleep, to rest, for no reason at all apart from that it's a sweet thing to do, builds up that conditioning of seeking happiness in oblivion. That's what we're doing.

And the fact of the matter is that in oblivion there is no suffering. Correct? There's no suffering. In oblivion there's no suffering. It's only when you wake up that you realise that it hasn't worked.

But the other reason that we tend to fall asleep, is of course that we're turning away from something, we're pushing something away. So we feel depressed, we feel down, we feel a bit anxious. And you just lay out on the couch and off you go. And here are the two great *tanha*s, the two great cravings. The craving of *bhava*, the craving of becoming, so we want to become oblivious to the world. And *vibhava-tanha*, the craving to annihilate ourselves, which takes us towards suicide. So, when we understand that these are at the root of our problem, then at least we have some basis in which to really argue with ourselves, to really confront these feelings when they come up, no matter how heavy they are.

Now, there's a story of Moggallana. Moggallana had just met the Buddha and, not surprisingly, the big thing that he suffered from was sloth and torpor. So he went to the Buddha and the Buddha gave him nine things to do. He said, first of all, when the first sign comes, he said, take no notice, just lift the spine, put more energy into the practice. If you're still coming, then consider the Dharma. Recognise the danger of the hindrance. Build up some wholesome fear, you might say. A dread of consequences. And that should lift a bit of energy.

If that doesn't work, recite the Dharma. Now, if you don't know any Dharma, then you can recite anything, just to keep you awake. This is an effort just to keep awake, remember. Then he said, if that doesn't work, rub your ears. So he must have known about acupuncture points. And if that doesn't work, he said, rub your legs. And if that doesn't work, get up and wash your face in cold water. And if that fails, he said, open your eyes. You must have opened your eyes before, but somewhere along the line you can open your eyes. And then if that doesn't work, you can create a light source in your mind. Only people who have practised *jhana*, I should think, can do that. And then finally, walk up and down.

Now, the thing here is that what he's saying is don't give up easy. He's given nine different ways in which to overcome, try to work against that desire to fall asleep. Now in terms of our practice, we can simplify that. So yes, when those first feelings come, you have to recognise them fairly quickly and just lift up the body. Sometimes they go. It's just a bit of not enough energy around and it's just moving us towards sleep.

Then if that doesn't work, just open your eyes, let a bit of light in. The other one that I've tried is hands on your head. Not on top of your head, it hurts your neck. Something like that. You ever tried that? It works. Of course, if it fails, you tend to move forward pretty quickly. It would be dangerous. But generally speaking, you catch yourself.

Then, if that doesn't work, you stand up. And if you feel you're going to fall over, then you have to walk. Now, when you walk, don't do the slow walking meditation. What you want to do is just gently walk up and down. Because what we're trying to do is refuse to fall into that temptation. Whatever the rule is, whatever the hindrance is telling us to do, we must do exactly the opposite. So if these hindrances are saying, look, fall asleep, have a little kip, a power nap, that's what you need. And you say, no way, I know you, Mara. That's the mud that he threw at the Buddha. And you stand up against it, you won't do it. You have to resist, no matter what.

And you don't fight it. If you find yourself fighting it, of course, then you're pushing a lot of turbulence back into the system. Then it becomes a struggle and you just get a headache. So it's a case of just being with it, of allowing it to be there. When you walk, when you walk up and down with it, for instance, just imagine you're just taking a big fat dog for a walk. He's dragging it with you, that's all. Come on, come on.

Now, you can go to extreme levels to overcome sloth and torpor. There's a story, and I can't remember where I picked it up from, where a monk was rather desperate about it all, and he sat against a pole and tied his head to it. Unfortunately, he fell asleep. When they came in, they thought he'd hanged himself. He's actually fallen asleep.

The other thing you can try is to sit near a wall. And when you go forward, you definitely wake up with that last little crack on the head. Unfortunately, as I found anyway, it doesn't seem to help very much. You've got very strong torpor. You do wake up, as it were, but then eventually, if it's really bad, your body does tend to collapse and you really knock the wall. And after a week of this, I got this feeling there was a bit of brain damage going on. I gave up on it.

But when I got to my *kuti*, my hut, I found that I used to sit under a net, a mosquito net. I used to find that just that, just that little touch on the head from the mosquito net was enough to just keep me up. These are only suggestions, you understand.

I was at a retreat years ago and a big tall man was standing next to me and we were meditating and this almighty crash he had actually fallen over, he had keeled over so there's a you have to use a bit of common sense somewhere when we went over to help him he refused to be helped

And there was another occasion when this was when I was a lay person. There was another occasion when I was a monk. I was in Penang and they've got a beautiful centre there. And this young monk, he was a German fellow, very tall, big fellow. And he would get up with us at two o'clock, would you believe, to do the meditation. And

he'd do walking meditation at the back of the hall. And there was this, again, this enormous crash. And he'd walked into a painting. It was lucky it wasn't a window. Very embarrassed. None of us got up, by the way. We all just noted here and here.

So, obviously, you have to use a bit of common sense with these things. But what do you do? What do you actually do when these things come? I mean, what's the practice there? So it's to investigate it, isn't it? So first of all, there's usually that reaction to it, the aversion, the not wanting it, the want to shake yourself out of it, go for a brisk walk. See, now if you do that, you're suppressing it. If you think you can kick this out of the way by walking up and down fast, then there's a possibility that actually all you're doing is pushing it away. So that pushing it away re-enters the system and then you get more sloth, more torpor.

So, when we're sitting there and this stuff comes, there may be that desire to go there, so that's the pleasure, and there may be that resistance to it, not wanting to deal with it. But frankly, of all the painful mental states that we have, you know, depression, anxiety and all that, this isn't so bad, is it? I mean, I'm alright with it. Gentle, fuzzy feelings in the head. Sometimes it gets a bit like porridge, but you just...

And what the idea is that you wander about. If you keep your attention moving, it'll keep you awake. You just wander about, feeling this, feeling that, around the middle of your head. And then maybe you can come out of your head and see if there's any dullness, any lethargy anywhere else. If there's a bright, if the mind is bright, but the body feels very lethargic, you move around, just feeling here, feeling there. Just wondering if your big toe feels lethargic. Have you ever investigated that? See?

And it's just keeping that consciousness moving, just keeping the attention moving, just gives it that little bit of energy not to be drawn into it. And what we're investigating, as always, is the quality of those sensations, those feelings. Now we can see them from the three characteristics point of view, you know, the fact that they're constantly a course of change. When you're looking at it, the observer can't be the observed, there must be some distance, so it's not me, not I. And again that reaction of wanting, not wanting, which is the *dukkha*, the suffering.

But you can also look at it more in terms of the four great elements. Try and feel its, sometimes it's, we haven't got words for these things, it's all a featheriness, it's lightness, it's dustiness. And just get into it, you know. If words don't come, if you're using the noting technique and words don't come, don't bother with it, just feel what's actually happening there, actually get into it. And that's what we're doing, that's all we're doing.

And in so doing, remember, we're always allowing this turbulence, because it's a turbulence, it's an energy, to expend itself, to just blow itself out. Now every time we fall into it, remember, even when we don't want to, even if we don't want to, even if we do it totally unwittingly, there's always that little moment of impulsion. Remember that. Whenever we fall into some dream, fantasy or whatever, there's always that little moment of impulsion. And that's the *cetana*. That's the will. And it's recreating and continues to create and continues to reinforce that conditioning. Now, it's not a powerful thing, but it's there. It's there constantly pushing that wheel round.

So when we know that, then of course we get that feeling of putting a little bit of special effort into that practice. These things can last a long time, you know. They can last for days. So you just have to bear with it. I mean, it's not as though it's like that all the time, but it can be hanging around. And it feels as though you can't investigate anything because it feels so dull. But that's because you're not making the dullness something to investigate. And if boredom comes, you note that, because that's coming out of a desire for pleasure, a desire for some happiness or distraction. You just keep going back to it, keep going back to it.

And remind ourselves that when these things come up, in that way, as physical feelings, they're actually exhausting themselves. That's how the conditioning exhausts itself. Now often when we do this with these feelings it might be that as they begin to disappear whatever has been suppressed begins to arise. It might be fear, it might be anything down there.

So the resolution then is to refuse to be annihilated. And with all these hindrances, remember, that's the purification of the heart. So that's an energy. And when it's released, it's transformed. It doesn't stop. The energy isn't dissipated or lost. Remember that in right attitude of the Eightfold Path, hatred turns to love, cruelty to compassion. So there's a transformation going on. And this energy now, purified of that tightness, is there to be used. And it'll come back into the awareness, it'll come back into all the factors of enlightenment. So it's really worth struggling with it.

You know, it's up to you as to how much you want to find out where the point of tiredness is and the point of lethargy, this dullness and lethargy starts. So, if after, say, on a retreat, if after three days you've settled in and you feel settled and you're sleeping something like seven hours, you see, push it back a bit, go back to five and a half. Remember, we sleep in these one and three quarter hour patterns. And then when you do that of course you have to go through three days of misery to get that energy up but in so doing you see something may be being released because we don't know how much of our so called sleep is actually needed and then when that's settled and you're actually

flying along on five and a half hours and you feel generally ok with it not that these feelings won't come up push it back a bit more so you can get back to four hours three and a half you see and give it another three days.

If you can do that, lift it up three days, then, you know, really, it's very difficult to go back beyond that. Even the Buddha needed two hours. And on a hot day, on the hot season, you have to have a kip in the afternoon too. So it's not as though we want to do without sleep, but we just want to find out how much sleep do we actually need.

Now, if you knock it back to three and a half hours, four hours, and after four to five days you're still falling all over the place and crashing through doors and things like that, then you come back forward again and try five and a half hours. And then you know where the line is as far as this retreat is concerned. That's not an all-time rule, that's just this moment, this retreat, this is what I can handle. And in so doing, you're actually gently pushing the system, you see. You're gently, shall we say, squeezing the pimple. You've got to give it a little squeeze and it'll pop, see. So you've got to work with it a little bit.

So that sort of gives us some idea about sloth and torpor. I do prefer the words dullness and lethargy, but I'm used to saying sloth and torpor more. If while you're listening you come up with some question or you come up with a technique which has never been known before but which works for you, do leave me a little note please because I'm collecting techniques. It's my job.

So now opposite to that is all these feelings of restlessness. So again when we look at the root cause, the root cause of restlessness is all part of our indulgence, isn't it? Rushing here, rushing there, getting this done, getting that done, wanting this, wanting that. I mean the whole society is in a sort of constant rush. So we're in that flow of getting things done in order to achieve something. So there's that pleasure that comes with doing something fast and achieving something.

One very good exercise you might try is just—because this is also a lot to do with our relationship to time and time passing and everybody has slightly different relationships to time, psychological time—one little trick you can do which definitely helped me was to get a clock with fingers and just sit there watching it, two hours. Just watching the clock go round. And just listen to what comes up. And all this stuff about wasting time. What are you doing here? You should be out there doing something. And you just sit there just watching it go round. Minute after minute. And the passage of time. The fact that we can't control it. All sorts of stuff comes up. The office can buy you a clock.

Now the other reason of course that we rush is that we are pushing things away. We don't want to look at certain things so we're running in the opposite direction. Often for instance when we feel depressed we'll force ourselves, you know the old kick in the you-know-what and get going. And unfortunately we do that only by way of not looking at something which is unpleasant. We're running away from it so it's a form of aversion. And when we do that we are oppressing. So when we slow down—and that's one of the great things about slowing down—so that you can feel that impulse to rush, rush, rush, move, move, move. And if you just stop and just stay with that, then often when that begins to dissipate an underlying feeling, an underlying mental state which it's been actually suppressing begins to arise.

And interestingly enough, this particular hindrance, restlessness, is the last hindrance to go with conceit. Now, if we think of restlessness as simply just a form of energy being restless, then I don't think that's quite right. Restlessness is anything we feel, you see, which is actually shifting the mind. So it could be any of the hindrances which is making the mind shake. So if we look at the process of our practice as a refinement of the heart, a refinement of the mind, then all these hindrances just get more and more refined until they peter out, until they go out. They go out when the self disappears. So this restlessness is going to be with us right to the bitter end. So we've got to get used to it, so we've got to stop fighting it, we've got to know how to be with it.

Now when you're sitting there, you see, and the body feels tremendously restless, so again you have to make a resolution. You do exactly the opposite. Even though there are these little *nāgas* coming in saying, move, get up, get out, do something, shift, go take a walk, you'll feel better, see, all that sort of stuff—see, you don't move. It's absolute rock still, refuse to move. And as it were, relax around it. Relax the frame of the body around these feelings as best you can. And that sort of puts a damper on it, you might say. It just stops the energy beginning to shake everything.

And if again you can just keep the mind moving, keep the mind moving around until you feel that you can hold it, as it were, then it'll keep that attention right on those feelings. And if again you investigate the body, parts of it don't feel restless at all. At the end of your nose, for instance. It's very rare at the end of your nose to feel restless. And then just to keep going around and again to see it from one of the three characteristics, the quality of transience and all that, and again to go into it and see what are the building blocks.

Now remember that every time we go towards that point of contact where we're actually just experiencing the elements, the four great elements—heat, fire, water and earth, pressure and all that—remember at that point the intellect has to stop because

you've got to be right with it there. So we're seeing things very clearly. And at that point, because we've gone beyond the idea of restlessness—same with all the others, the idea of fear, the idea of sloth and torpor—then that energy, the suppression goes.

Suppression only goes when you recognise something as pleasant and unpleasant. The suppressive forces, *tanhā*, desire, wanting, not wanting, only comes into force after we've defined something as pleasant and unpleasant. If we go beyond that, into the actual feelings and lose that definition, then there's no suppression. That means that whatever that turbulence is, that restlessness, it's completely free to exhaust itself. And remember that when I'm using words like exhaust and expend and all that, the energy is not lost. It refines itself and is thereby to be used. Well, normally it comes back into the factors of enlightenment. The calm, the spaciosity, the calmness, the equanimity, the concentration, the effort, all that begins to get ironed out and reinforced, reinforced.

So when we are working with restlessness in the body, so the big resolution is not to move. Now if you do walking meditation, again if the restlessness is severe, there's no point in doing a slow walking meditation because it's like you're trying to force a concentration on the step when the rest of the body is shaking like mad. So just walk up and down. It's like taking a frisky dog out for a walk. Just walk up and down and just stay with those feelings. And keep the attention moving and feeling it and just being with it. Take it for a walk. But do it gently. Don't start walking up and down like a mad person. Because that's just empowering it. So it's a case of just moving the body gently up and down and just letting these feelings express themselves. Again, remember that they've got a grudge against us. They need to get the grudge off their chest. Mara. Embrace them. Friends. I don't want to sound too new-agey now. Huggy-wuggy normal.

If the restlessness is in the mind, obsessive thinking, so what's happening there? What's happening, you see? The old habit whereby an emotional state is seeking some sort of metaphor to work with. So the restlessness will grab anything it can be restless with. Doesn't matter what it is. And if you find that the mind is doing that, then that's an avenue which has been conditioned to slip out into these higher faculties of thought and imagination. So if you try and kill that, if you try and destroy it, then of course again you're feeding aggression back into the system. So we just have to be patient, don't we? Very patient with it. You just note it, acknowledge it.

I'm always for really acknowledging it. Sometimes we note something and it's more like a flip away, you know, restless, a little flick. And it's an aversion, you see, and we're not catching it. But if you actually note something, even if you don't use a word, just note it—restless, restless mind, obsessive thinking—and then the second one is like an acknowledgement, like driving it home to ourselves that this is the restless mind. And

that stops that reaction of pushing it away or something, and then just noting what it is. And just come back, come back into the body. And again just feel if you can the restlessness which is empowering these thoughts.

At first you might not be able to feel it because the energy of that restlessness has that way out of exhausting its energy. But if you keep doing it, then slowly I think you'll find that you get in touch with that restlessness. And that means that you're stopping that avenue of indulgence. And the more these feelings come out through the body, the more they're exhausting themselves.

So you can take that as an absolute rule until you prove me wrong that whenever these emotions slip into the higher faculties, whether we have meant them to do so or not, they are indulging themselves and they are growing. I mean one obvious example of that is during the day at work or at home somebody says something which is a little upsetting and you just put it aside, you don't worry about it. And then when it comes to sort of morning break it slips up in the mind and while you're drinking your tea you're, "How could they say anything like that to me?" And then by lunchtime you're eating and you're, "I'm pretty well told I'm not going to do that." And then by evening you're ripping them apart, throwing them out of windows. And you have to take Prozac.

And all that's been done, not because you meant it to, because every time that there's a slippage into the fantasy world, it's developing the emotion. That's what the emotion wants to do. That's how it finds relief. If you're angry and you bang the door, there's a relief there. But unfortunately, we've reinforced the habit of being angry with doors. So with that obsessive thinking, it's just real, just constant persistence, just working with it. And every time the anger comes up, the fed-upness comes up, all that, that's also to be noted. And just, as you know, after time, it fades out.

I like these two hindrances, they often move from one to the other, don't they? You can be restless one minute and then you just fall asleep the next. And then you fall asleep and suddenly you can't stop moving. So there we see that actually all we're working with are forms of energy. The image I have is of an internal weather system. So the storms come, the whirlwinds, all that. And it's all the same thing, it just takes on a different hue, a different form.

So those are some ideas about restlessness and again if you've got any little tricks up your sleeve and things like that or you think I've missed something out just leave me a note.

The next thing that comes up, isn't it, apart from those two, is just pain, you know, physical and mental pain. When it comes to physical pain, that's just the nature of the body, isn't it? We can't stop that. Even the Buddha had pain. So what we're concerned with is taking the suffering out of pain, and we find that the suffering is simply our relationship to it. So when pain comes, at least one good thing about it is that it does concentrate us. I'm sure there's often in our meditative lives when we are feeling very restless and all that that we are crying out for pain. Just stick us on a pin or something.

And of course you have to be careful that you don't get—when it comes to physical pain—that you're clear that it's coming from the body and that the body is actually saying something. So obviously when we begin a retreat you can start getting these sore knees, screaming knees. So therefore you have to give them a bit of a stretch, give them a bit of a rest, have a bit of kindness towards your knees, things like that. But even so, it's an interesting thing for us because we are investigating that relationship we have with pain, which is aversion and fear. And the idea is not, of course, to overcome pain. We're not supposed to get macho with it, try to kill it, destroy it. But as soon as we lose that sense of the ability to investigate and to see our relationship to it, it becomes too much. Then you change posture.

Now don't forget, when we change posture, there's a whole thing to be learned there. So here we are moving from a situation where the body is in pain and the mind is in pain, the emotions are in pain, aversion and all that. As we move slowly, the more slowly you go, the more you can see the connection between the body and mind. As you move slowly, you can see the sensations of pain fading out to neutral and you can see the heart moving from being very agitated to being calm, comfortable. So it's just watching that, watching that the mind-body, like the Buddha said, milk and water, they're constantly reacting off each other. So we're learning a few things there by just working with physical pain.

And don't forget that the usual rule about physical pain is that if it carries on after a sitting or after walking, then go to see a doctor, because you never know. Generally speaking, as you know, these things disappear when you get up.

But the other sort of pain, which is, I suppose, more interesting in a way, is the pain that comes from something suppressed in the body, some emotion that's, for want of a better word, blocked or held in a certain part of the body. And again, when those feelings come up, we're employing the same quality of seeing our relationship to it always, and as that dies out to go into the pain to see what pain is made up of. Tightness, burn-

ing, whatever it is, just to get down to that level which makes it very clear that the idea of pain is a concept. It's something the mind works with. The mind conceives it and of course there is a good reason for it. We want to know when the body is in pain.

Sometimes I think that we can become—especially with physical pain I'm thinking now—you can become a little insensitive to what the body is saying to us because we become so equanimous with it. You have to be slightly careful about that. I remember in my, because you can slightly overdo it, I had this occasion once when, actually as soon as I started meditating, I started getting this sort of discomfort in my neck, back of my neck here. And it grew and grew and grew. And I was at that time working with Goenkaji, with that system, you know, a few years ago now. And I went off by myself to his beautiful center in Jaipur. And he's built a castle there, or they built a castle there. And as you go in, it's a rotunda. And as you go in, there's all these little rooms on the outside and the inside. And they're all nice little rooms, you know, when you get in there. You do feel sort of supported by the walls. And this pain was...

was really bad and I got into the habit of thinking that I was just going to squeeze it out of the system because I could feel it was in the musculature. So I began moving my head about and stretching the muscles, and eventually it got fairly wild. Over a period of 10 days, it was really what I would call the lower depths of hell. Often when I walked out and watched the little mice running here and running there.

Anyway, when I got back to the UK, whenever I sat, my head would flop forward. I'd begin like this, but it would end up like this. It was only when somebody complained—there had been a group of monks at the *bihāra* I was staying at, maybe six or seven, and there were two Westerners amongst them. A friend came up and said to me that they were a little bit ashamed that the only monks who fell asleep were the two Westerners, because I wasn't saying anything, you know. I was like this, you see. So that propelled me to go and see the chiropractor.

When he was fiddling about with my head, he told me that my skull had come off the top of my spine. And I said, "What?" He said, "It has." And then, you know, as they do, they get hold of your head, and there was this ten-thousand-world almighty crack. It was alright, back on top of my spine. So you see, you can take things too far. And I dare say that if I'd have carried on in that meditation centre, I might have beheaded myself.

So you have to be slightly careful. It's up to you really to gauge your own personality, because if you're the timid type then you can push a bit, but if you're the foolhardy type then just watch your neck.

When it comes to emotional pain, remember to be very clear in your mind that the cause of it in terms of the external cause—some fright that was given to you as a child or whatever it might be—is not the root cause of that emotional state. The root cause is the conditioning which goes back to the self. Therefore, the memory, any memory which comes up, is irrelevant.

This emotion of fear now will be chasing something to get hold of. So if the fear is there on the surface of your mind and you happen to be walking along and a spider jumps on you, then you end up with this arachnophobia for the rest of your life. So it's always searching for something by way of expressing itself. Well, actually it's an indulging of itself.

By sitting with fear, by sitting with that pain in the body, even though we don't know what it is—it's only when these mental states hit the heart centre that we can begin to recognise them as emotions. Tightness in the belly—I mean you can call it anxiety but you don't know, it's just tightness in the belly. So long as you get those feelings and the tightness in your body and the burning and all those peculiar things that come up, just stay with them, you see, and treat them as physical pain. You go into it, you get into the feelings of it and just get the feeling of allowing it to blow its energy out. In the meantime, we're investigating these three characteristics. And in so doing, we are very slowly beginning to realise all the time that we are not that. We are not that.

There's one last little story which goes with this from the Mahāsi Centre. It's written in a book where all the healings that went on there over a period of so many years are listed, and there was one particular man who turned up with terminal cancer in the stomach. As he describes it, he didn't take any medicine—he was just going to work with it and sit there and die. As it goes, as I remember it, because I've not been able to get hold of this book since, he was sitting there just watching the pain in the stomach, and there was an explosion—that's how he describes it, an explosion—and the cancer disappeared.

Now, not all cancers are caused by emotional states, but in this case, lucky for him, it was. It disappeared. So that's a very graphic example of what's actually happening when we allow these emotional states, which are in the body, to express themselves.

Very good. So this evening we've covered just these three major ones: dullness and lethargy, restlessness and pain. And the next one I'll try and cover the rest. So I just wanted to spend a bit of time on these questions. If I can't answer them all tonight, we can do so tomorrow.

"Please discuss concrete practical means of balancing concentration, energy and mindfulness. How to gauge what is needed without manipulation, that is, without desire."

When it comes to the spiritual faculties—which, of course, these are your three main ones, aren't they? Energy, awareness, concentration—the Buddha makes it very simple for us. All he says is, if you pay attention to something, the other faculties will rise up to support it. So we don't have to worry about things like concentration and effort. As soon as you make the effort to be attentive, that's enough effort you need. As soon as you're attentive, that's enough concentration you need. You don't have to worry about these things.

If you make concentration an obsessive thing, then you're missing out on the awareness because your attention is always on "Am I concentrated enough?" If you're constantly worried about your energy and "Have I got enough energy for this?" then again your attention is moving off being attentive to being worried about whether you've got enough energy or not. But the fact of the matter is, as soon as you are paying attention, you have enough energy and concentration. And the more you keep placing the mind into that attentive mode, then of course it just becomes sharper and sharper.

So abandon concentration and energy. Just let the awareness do the trick. Remember that awareness is always coupled with intelligence. It has to be an awareness with a question mark. You can't be just aware. It has to be that wanting to know. And that's what empowers the system.

"What is the relationship of the *Brahmavihāras* to the Four Noble Truths, the Factors of Enlightenment and the Five Spiritual Faculties?"

Good heavens, there's nothing more to be talked about after we've been through this lot!

What is the relationship of the *Brahmavihāras* to the Four Noble Truths? Well, it comes into Right Attitude, and it comes into Right Livelihood, because your attitudes begin to express themselves in what you do. To practice the *brahmavihāras* as *jhānic* states is all well and good in terms of developing our own mind, but unless you can take those attitudes out into the world...

Remember that the Buddha is constantly saying, "Whatever a teacher can do out of compassion for his students, I have done for you." So his developments of the *Brahmavihāras* were presumably enormous, but they had to be expressed into action. And the word he uses is *anukampā*—which means to move towards the other. So compassion, love and all these, they move you towards the other. That's the relationship.

Now, of course, you don't need them to become enlightened—this is the point. These are the merits, these are your *puñña,* this is what you get as we move along the path of liberation. For liberation we're talking about a level of consciousness. We're talking about a way of looking. So this way of looking is directed through these three characteristics of existence. When we've looked in the right way, one of the obvious insights we get is our interconnectedness. And when that interconnectedness is translated into a heart expression, when it moves into the heart as an expression, then it has to be love, compassion, sympathetic joy. If it just stays up here, well, it's not much cop.

I'm reminded of an incident with a cat. I was at a monastery and there was a cat, and this cat was playing around with a mouse. It didn't want to eat it—it had been fed. It was just playing around with it. When I walked in, there was a cat with a mouse and the mouse was dead, and I said to the monk, "What happened here?" He said, "Oh, he was just playing around with it." And I remember saying to him, "Well, didn't you stop it?" He said, "No, it calmed me."

I was at another monastery when this cat sort of shot out and got a bird, and this monk went up and gave it one hell of a wallop, took the bird out of its mouth, looked at it, realised that its lungs had been punctured and it died. He held it up very beautifully with its wings and chanted, "*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā*"—all compounded things arise and pass away.

Now you see what this first monk didn't realise or didn't understand was that his seeing the cat is part of the cat's *kamma*. The fact that he didn't react to the cat's cruelty is part of the cat's *kamma*. And that's what I mean about it being alright talking about the interconnectedness of the universe and all that, but if it doesn't express itself through a compassionate action then it's dead as a dodo.

"What does one do after leaving the anchor?"

I'm not so sure what that—I think that came up in an interview. It's not that you leave the anchor. The breath is your anchor, it's a primary object. So the whole idea about the breath is that it's always there. I mean if it's not there, worry! So when everything calms down, the mind becomes absolutely silent, the body is absolutely still, and the heart is completely in peace—it's happened once or twice, hasn't it?—then there is only the breath. So now the breath is where you centre your whole attention, and it's through the breath that these characteristics are seen. And that's why it opens up in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish awareness, because that's where you hone your skills, that's what you can always come back to, and eventually there is only the breath.

"Can you say something about the little thoughtlets which circumambulate, as it were, the primary object?"

Well, if they're only little thoughtlets, you see, just keep turning away. And as you're turning away, remember, you're drawing energy out of the system into the observing. You're actually drawing it out and putting it where it ought to be. So this is just a sort of mild restlessness, isn't it?

Remember there are those two stages: *vitakka* and *vicāra*. So the *vitakka* is when you are constantly bringing that focus back, constantly bringing it back. You know the image of the bee flying towards the flower. And then the *vicāra* is when finally the bee settles on the flower. So when you get that feeling of being settled on the breath—those are signs of that concentration coming, you see. Not that you are worrying about it. You're just worried about being attentive. And then there's that settling.

So now that's a dangerous point because you tend to think, "Oh, I'm finally there, brilliant." And you pull back a bit and off you go—the mind just bursts out because it's not really settled. You've got to keep working on that until there's a real sense of being absorbed into it, real steadiness, you know.

"How does one contemplate the three characteristics of existence without getting lost in concepts?"

So in the discourse on how to establish this mindfulness, there are these three steps that the Buddha points out. He uses the word *sikkhati*, which means to train. He says, "Train on the breath." Once you're settled, he says, "See its quality of *anicca*, the quality of transience." And then he says there comes a point when there is just enough *sati*, just enough awareness and just enough intelligence for insight to arise. At that point one isn't thinking anymore.

You don't have to think because the intelligence, this intuitive intelligence, has already been pointed that way. All we have to do by bringing up the idea in the mind of *anicca*, of transience, is you're directing your attention to a certain quality. Once it's directed to that quality and you begin to look at it, the thinking stops as you become absorbed in just looking. Remember the picture—for those of you who were here—that wonderful little baby with its eyes completely wide open and its jaw dropped. If you can get that feeling of just looking. And that's the point where thinking and all that about the hindrances disappears because you're actually directly experiencing them.

So those are the three stages. So you have to direct the mind, and there's that question mark, that curiosity, the wanting to know: "Am I really seeing this the way it is? Have I really seen the quality of transience? Have I really seen the quality of not-self?"

"Would it not be equally valid to follow the flow of breath sensations at the nose tip while doing walking meditation?"

You can do actually. It's more of a *samatha* practice just to keep your mind on the breath. Make sure that you're walking in a very open space. You tend to walk into things when you do things like that. Just be aware of where you generally are.

"It says that walking meditation balances the faculties. Which faculties in particular does walking meditation balance?"

Well, as far as I remember, the normal thing is that what walking meditation is very good for is concentration. If you're worried about concentration, do the walking meditation, because the walking meditation is gross. I mean, you can feel it. You're there with it. And you can use it to just keep your mind actually on the footstep.

Now the balancing of the faculties—presumably means the factors of enlightenment or the five spiritual faculties. Again, what balances those things is awareness, attention. That's what balances them. So walking meditation is very good for that if you can actually do it in a way that you determine to stop whenever the mind wanders. So you stop, collect yourself, intending to walk, and off you go. You don't have to turn around or anything, but you stop every time the mind wanders.

I'll just do one last one. "Can you say more about *sati* combined with *paññā* and where it's discussed in the suttas?"

Well, the main place is the discourse on how to establish awareness: *Satipaṭṭhāna*.

Very good. I think that's enough for this evening. I hope that my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 12

Eroticism, Romance, Love, Distraction and Boredom

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

> *In this dharma talk on the hindrances, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines what he calls 'deliciousness' - particularly the erotic, romantic love, and attachment. He distinguishes between the natural beauty of these experiences and our unskillful relationship to them through lust and clinging. Drawing on the Buddha's own journey from sensual indulgence to awakening, Bhante explains how these pleasant experiences can mask underlying grief, loneliness, and anxiety. He offers practical guidance for meditators on working skillfully with sexual thoughts through noting practice and the contemplation of the body's true nature. The talk explores the difference between romantic feelings and genuine love, discusses the spiritual potential within relationships following the traditional brahminical life stages, and addresses the role of celibacy on the path. Bhante also examines attachment to loved ones - family, friends, and even animals - explaining how attachment differs from true love (mettā) by making others into objects for our happiness. The session concludes with guidance on working with distraction and boredom in meditation, emphasizing that these hindrances arise when we seek happiness in temporary phenomena rather than cultivating inner stillness and wisdom.*

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

So I wanted to just continue for another session the hindrances, just to go into perhaps a little bit more detail. And this evening I wanted to investigate deliciousness. And the two areas, the three areas, that you can look at particularly is the erotic, the romantic and love.

I call it the erotic, not lust. Lust is our relationship to the erotic. The erotic and the romantic are just part and parcel of the loveliness of our lives, occasionally. And the erotic, just to think about that for a minute. So that's really to do with some sort of physical attraction towards another person. And it only happens between certain people. You don't feel normally erotic to everybody you meet. It would be exhausting. So there's that case of something very particular and... As you know, it's said that, generally speak-

ing, if you abstract, if you separate out the erotic from the romantic from love, then it becomes a bit like eating. And in itself, it's a sort of empty experience. It loses meaning when you just do it by itself.

Whenever I say this, I'm always reminded of Woody Allen's little crack, where he said... Just sex is an empty experience. But as empty experiences go.

So, as usual, when you look at anything which is delightful, it's either because we like it, quite obviously, we like to indulge in it, it brings, as it were, immediate sense of happiness. That's the point. It brings happiness. The whole point about the erotic, the romantic, and love in the general sense, not the true *mettā*, I mean love as attachment, is that it brings joy. It brings joy to the heart. It's a lovely experience.

But the other side of it is, as usual, that we may also be using it to escape something. That's the point. So that we are seeking entertainment to escape something that we don't like. So things like such a very obvious and loud sensual experience, such as sex, is something that you can get lost in and forget the worries of your life.

So there's always this duality with anything that we enjoy in terms of the self, in terms of how we relate to it. Part of it is just sheer indulgence. We like it. And it creates a lovely feeling in the heart. And the other side is that we may be running away from something.

So once we have that clear in mind, with anything that we indulge in, in those two parts, then as it were, as you watch that indulgence, as it fades away, don't be surprised that underneath it there lies maybe grief, anxiety, anything that you're pushing away. So that these pleasant things can be used to suppress just as anything else. So we talked about sleep, as a lovely way to suppress things. So here, anything which is enjoyable can be used just to push it away, just gently push it away, to ignore it, for it not to be there.

And because the sexual energy is so related to life, to the life force, any time that death appears or anything like that, there's a great desire to run that way and to reinforce the fact that there is life. Interestingly enough, I picked up a quote from William Blake. The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. You see?

So remember that in the Buddha's life, we saw how all that loveliness that he was experiencing with his dancing girls and all that sort of stuff, and presumably his drinking, and the good time, having a good time, that in the end, it's like squeezing blood from a stone. Like it loses its buzz, basically. And there comes that weariness with it. And remember we, and I'll mention again towards the end, there is a distinction to be made between weariness and boredom. Weariness is that coming to the end of seeking happi-

ness in that place. Boredom is just that you're fed up with it for a while you need a break you need a fast you need a diet and then you can get back to it again refreshed so boredom is just a as we say coming from overindulgence and then but then you still want to get back to it once the hunger for it arises.

So in our meditation, of course, it can be, if you don't watch it, these thoughts around lust can be really obsessive. And we have to be extraordinarily patient with that and just keep coming off them and back into the body and just feel the excitement, feel what's actually happening there.

And that business of really acknowledging what's going on, you see, sometimes you might think, well, we're too old for this, we shouldn't be thinking these things. But you're never too old. I think it was Pope John XXIII. I just remember a quote from him where he said the loveliness of being, I think he was 85 or something, was that the flesh had finally quietened. So you can expect to be harassed by this sort of thing until who knows when.

So it's a case of being very quick with that because remember that when a thought arises and carries on, there's some force behind it which the Buddha called *cetanā*. And that force, remember, is not the intention. Force is just a force. It's just an energy form. It's the same as when you throw a stone up into the air. As far as I know, they still don't quite know what it is. That makes the stone keep going. But we call it force.

So there is something which takes... That which is a thought in the head, just an idea, a wish, a desire, an intention. See, that's why we're also being very careful to note intentions and it suddenly flips and you're away. It's gone. You're either doing something or you're thinking something or you're saying something. And remember, at that point, it's become an action. That's a *kamma*. And therefore, you are reinforcing your conditioning.

So here, if we're not very quick with these delicious thoughts, then they just run away and you've had it. And then it takes a time, you see, then it takes time because you've re-empowered that.

A good metaphor for that are people who suffer from drink problems, alcoholics. They can be off for so long and then maybe just out of weakness or a little bit of hubris, a little bit of pride, thinking they're now above it. And it's just that one drink and off they go. Because it's re-empowering an old habit. Of course, in that case, there's a physical element, but it's the same with smoking. Even though there's a physical element too

that people can be off smoking for a long time. And then just when they feel a bit down or when they're in the wrong company, they just take that one cigarette and then they're surprised how difficult it is, how suddenly that whole engine is restarted.

So if you see these thoughts coming up, to be very quick with them and come back and just think about what that thought is doing and bring yourself back to the body.

Now, there is an exercise that you can do, which we did partly, for those of you who were here for my New Age Healing session. And there you actually take the image that you've got towards which you find erotic, you see. So it's not lust yet, it's only lust when you indulge it. So as soon as you see an image which is erotic, to actually begin to take the skin off. Look at the parts, just see that in fact, you know, we say beauty is only skin deep. And when you do that, then if you do it to parts which naturally raise a sense of disgust, you don't have to make yourself vomit, you understand. When you just raise that little bit of disgust then you'll see the mind balances itself and what we're trying to do with that exercise is to get the mind to be conditioned so that as soon as a lustful thought comes up the mind itself will change it for you you can make that a habit in the mind to do that.

And by doing that, you're undermining that process of spinning off onto these thoughts. If you end up being disgusted all the time, then you have to stop it. Because that's not the point. The point isn't to end up with disgust for the human body. It's just a little trick that we can play to make the mind flip, you see. And, I mean, I've practiced this myself, and it definitely works, I can assure you of that.

And you have to be slightly careful with it too because you can be slightly unwittingly you can be suppressing see that's another point that we have to be careful of all we're thinking about is thoughts and then we have to get down to the root feeling which is that desire to be at that place which gives us so much pleasure so you have to be quite careful with the old suppression which we know from Freud becomes twisted and ends up in all sorts of peculiar behaviour.

So the thing is that what we want to do with sexual energy, or what we want to do in terms of the spiritual life, is to withdraw the unnecessary energy that we ought to have around sex. And there's a word that, I don't know, you never hear it these days. It's got a bad name because I think it was confused with suppression. And that word is sublimation, to sublimate. In science, I looked it up, I don't know anything about science. In science, it means when a solid evaporates immediately into air, into a gas. There's a special word, sublimate.

And to sublimate means, in terms of your energy, is to divert unskillful impulses or unskillful desires into something which is skillful. So if we have an image of the way the mind works as just an energy system which coagulates, forms a tightness around a particular idea and spins around it like a whirlwind, and that's all we're talking about. We just talk about energy. And if I can draw that energy away, as it were, to something which, shall we say, is more useful or even expresses that in a sublimated form, then what I get is poetry, art, music. I don't have to go that way. I can draw that energy away and put it into some loving energy, some compassionate energy.

Now, you just have to be slightly careful with that because you've also got to acknowledge that whirlwind. So if you don't acknowledge the whirlwind, then you think you might be putting your thoughts in better places, but you're not acknowledging this turbulence. So that turbulence remains. So you have to acknowledge the turbulence, feel the turbulence, and then cajole yourself to draw the energy into something which is more skillful. And there's that transformation going on.

Now this of course became the root understanding of Tantra. That's all that Tantra is. It's just the transformation of that energy. It's just that understanding that all you're playing around with is some sort of energy force and that therefore through certain imagery and even through certain actions you can sublimate it, you can draw it out and take away that habit and what we want to do is get rid of that obsessiveness around these things.

I'm sure you all know that, if lust gets hold of us in a meditation retreat, it's got a tight hold, so you have to be very sharp on that. And remember that it can be an escape from something, a usual escape from anxiety, from loneliness, from all sorts of things.

And romance, that delicious feeling that we get when we fall in love with somebody. And the dreams and the books written, my goodness, and the films, I mean, it's just never ending. It's always the same plot, which is really annoying. It's always, but somehow, we still wring juice out of it. It doesn't matter how many romantic films people see, they love them. So it's that sheer deliciousness, isn't it, of being in love with somebody?

And again, I'm talking now about being in a meditation retreat, when the mind is wandering that day and it's fantasizing about, some enchanted evening. And you're out there on, oh my good, with old Frank Sinatra in the background. And you've got, and you have to see that immediately and go into it, you see. Now there'll be that deliciousness there because of the memory of the wanting to be at that place in that special way with another person. I mean, it is pure deliciousness. I can't think of anything more de-

licious myself. Apart from maybe the *jhānas* and that's why you have to be slightly careful so remember that again there's always these two things it's delicious, we like to indulge in but it's also an escape it may be an escape, it doesn't have to be an escape.

May be an escape so when we're sitting here and we're beginning to be assailed by these romantic feelings and romantic dreams and you come back and you allow that feeling remember remember that feeling emotions all these things are all seeking metaphor. They're all seeking metaphor. They're all seeking a way in which to express themselves.

But when you just note romance, falling in love, and you note that and you turn away into the body and you feel the delicious feelings, as they begin to dissipate, don't be surprised if underneath it what you come across is a deep loneliness. Because that's what we're running from.

So it's a case of remembering that so that when the loneliness comes up then there should be this little aha that's why I'm so obsessive about these romantic films and stuff it's because of this loneliness and of course you have to go into the loneliness you have to let the loneliness express itself.

You know, you are unlovable, nobody loves you, you're alone in this world, kill yourself. So you have to stay within those awful feelings, don't get caught up in those words. And then again, don't be surprised that as you sink into that loneliness, allow it, allow it to express itself and let it dissipate. Suddenly you're just sitting there in this really lovely state of solitude. You see, just being at one with oneself.

It's a sense of lack, isn't it? There's a writer called David Loy. He can be a bit heavy because he's a very good philosopher. He's American. Works in Japan. And if you haven't come across his books, do look him up, David Loy. And he likes this word lack for *dukkha*. Not suffering, not unsatisfactoriness, but lack. There's a lack there. And when you think about it, that's just another way of saying desire, a wanting for something.

And remember that the self is an empty thing. Not empty in the old Mahayana, the great emptiness. Emptiness ends up, there's nothing there. It's got to fill itself with something. Sex, drugs and rock and roll.

So, again, it's a case of being very clear about what's happening there, and to stop the mind. When I say stop the mind, you have to be careful not to back these things away. You're not trying to destroy the mind, you're not trying to kill it, you just note it. Now, as

soon as you note what's going on, that which has been going on, the thought, the romance, it has to stop, because you can't think two thoughts at the same time. It's as simple as that.

So if you keep saying, romance, romance, as soon as you've said that, the romance is gone. So what that means is that we've stopped with that noting, the acknowledgement, we've stopped the escape of this emotional energy from slipping up into these higher faculties to create this imaginary world, a virtual reality. That's what it is, eh? And if you get lost in that, then of course you tend to throw it out into the world.

So by coming off those very patiently, just know that you come back into the heart and you just feel, feel what's going on there. And don't be surprised if suddenly, as it dissipates, some rather nasty feeling turns on. And of course, as those nasty feelings disappear, then there's nothing impelling this search for escape, happiness in romance and all these things, and therefore the obsessiveness begins to grow.

And remember, as I keep saying, that all the energy we have, nothing is lost in this process. It is actually being slowly transformed. And all these things are transformed into love, compassion, joy, or peace. That's what we're doing.

Now, you know, whenever I talk about this, especially as a monk, everybody thinks, well, you know, he's just a monk. He's against the erotic and the romantic. He's taken about celibacy, so he's bitter. But it's not true. And if you think about the ordinary passage, I personally like the Brahminical path, because I think it's a bit, as usual, a bit male-dominated, but it is the way that you can see how the relationship between two people can lead to ultimate renunciation and then finally a true love and then finally renunciation.

So the idea is that you're a student until you're twenty-five, thereabouts. Then you get married and you live the lay life. You live an involved life. And if possible you have a family—that's not necessary in this particular, in the spiritual sense. And during that time you go through a relationship and go through these particular moments where there's a block to be, there's a contradiction to be solved, a conflict to be solved, and in so doing the relationship gets closer and closer until there's what you might call a real union.

And then around about the age of sixty-five or thereabouts, they're supposed to leave family. They're supposed to go away and live like hermits. And then at the age of seventy-five, the man—and presumably the woman, we never talked about—the man disappears completely. He goes away, tries to lose his caste name. He's supposed to become a beggar. You're not supposed to approach him as an uncle or a father or anybody. And

when you think about that, isn't that just the natural way of life? I mean, here you've got the leaves, and you can see it, the early buds, the full blossom, the slow dying, and then the disappearance.

And so here you have the idea of a full life, if possible—you've got to have a bit of luck there—where, through meeting somebody, you form this very close, intimate relationship, which is very supportive. And we all know how difficult it is to get that. And then you work through that until it becomes utterly mature. Then there comes a time when you realise that even that has to be let go of. So remember, the spiritual path, whether we like it or not, eventually, at some point, is a path of renunciation. It's like, whether you like it or not, it's got to come that way.

I heard Joseph Campbell—some of you might know, the mythologist who wrote the book called *Something of the Gods*, and a very well-known writer. And he was interviewed on this and he was talking about two relationships that people sometimes go through. The first one being the worldly relationship and then a change in midlife, and then you finally find your spiritual partner and off you go, and he reckoned that this was a regular thing. So there is within a relationship a real possibility of true spiritual friendship, true spiritual growth, and eventually the eventual path of renunciation which has to come at the end, you see.

And talking about this, it's very interesting how people get a very negative view about marriage and things like that. I'm surprised how many Buddhists think that, for instance, it's not worth having children and bringing them into this life of suffering. And once a young man came to see me while I was in London, and he said that he was having problems with his relationship, which had been absolutely fine, but now she wanted kids, and he said he couldn't see the point because life is suffering, and he gave me all this stuff about suffering and pain. I thought, why bring a child into this, you see?

So I slowly argued that this was a very special place. That in fact it was right here that all the conditions are where a being can actually make very good, very quick spiritual progress. So I explained this to him. And then I said, apart from becoming an Arahant, apart from becoming perhaps an Anāgāmi, a non-returner, I can't see in the world anything more compassionate than to bring another being into this world and to give it that basic moral and spiritual teaching for its own growth. So he thanked me very much and I never saw him again. Which goes to show that he just didn't want kids.

So I think we have to correct some of that because Buddhism has come to the West through the eyes of Christianity and it's still there as a life-negative religion. As a life-negating religion. And that's just not true. It's just not true.

And then just finally within this area is of course celibacy. And I'd like to coin a phrase from dear old Sir Winston Churchill. Some are born celibate. Some choose to be celibate. And some have celibacy thrust upon them. And we have to say that in the ordinary run of life we do find ourselves in celibate situations. Now for us on the spiritual path, those are times to get in contact with all the stuff around relationship, around this sort of relationship. And that's an opportunity.

Remember, in daily life, here you see there's no point in getting into all these fantasies because it's really just taking out energy somewhere else. But in daily life, when we enter into daily life and these energies come up, and you can see there's no point in indulging them, then this idea of sublimation, of recognising that energy and then cajoling it, as it were, into some other area of activity. If one, of course, makes the decision that one wants a relationship, then have the faith, go with it, hope for the best.

Just one last thing that I had slightly forgotten to mention is that I was very surprised once I did a talk at a marriage ceremony. Well, two things actually. A talk at a marriage ceremony, not for Buddhists. I was just a friend of this—well, he was a Buddhist, yeah, that's right. And everybody else wasn't. And I gave a talk. And in the talk, I simply mentioned the distinction between romantic feelings and real love.

And I said that romantic feelings towards your partner just come and go. Sometimes you feel them and sometimes you don't. Often you feel hate, disgust, fed up, could get rid of the person, all that sort of stuff. And I said, but love, love has nothing to do with the emotional life. I said, love is to do with a commitment coming from a deeper centre that you have devoted your life to sharing your life with somebody else. And that is the underlying motivation. And if that goes, then definitely get a divorce.

So I was surprised how many people came up to me afterwards and thanked me for that distinction. And I could only presume that in their own relationships they'd been utterly confused because they woke up in the morning and said, well, I don't love you. You turn over and you see this person and you think, oh, God, ten years, what am I doing? And you think, I can't live, I've got to get out, I've got to find somebody else. And it's just that confusion about things, you know.

And the other thing that I might say just on this little level is how I've conducted marriage ceremonies for people who've been in partnership for years. I mean, ten, fifteen years. And all of them, and they tell me of friends who actually go through a marriage ceremony, that there is a distinctive difference once it moves into a state of vowing. Because when we make a public statement about our intentions, that really roots us very deeply in something. And that's why we take public oaths. That's why, say, when

the president is elected, he makes a public oath. And that is a public commitment, and the whole of society is meant to be supportive, to support you with that. That's the idea of it.

But that extra commitment—it just, as it were, deepened the whole relationship. Which means that in the partnership, there was always something holding back. Just something holding back. Just in case, after ten, fifteen years, this is the wrong person to be with. Which would be very disappointing. After fifteen years you suddenly decide this is not the person I ought to have been with.

So just remembering all that and remembering that here in our meditation to be very quick with those thoughts because they are, they're delicious.

So the idea of when we find ourselves in a celibate situation is that this is a time to allow those things to pass away. And again, this sublimation so that we can see that times of celibacy and for monastics, the idea is to refine that energy, to take it away from there and to actually refine it, you see. That's the idea of that. And it's displaced into the spiritual path.

I think I've just got a bit of time, I think, to talk about attachment. So this is also a love with a little kink in it. And just think of all the people whom we are attached to—children, family, friends, even animals. You can love an animal as much as you can love a human being. And there's an attachment to it. And the unfortunate thing is that we don't know the depth of the attachment until the beloved disappears. You don't know how attached you are to your cat until it dies. You don't know how attached you are to your mother until she dies. I can tell you that. And this is one of those things that we don't really know.

Now, the only distinction I like to make is that we're not here talking about something evil. We're not talking about something evil. We're talking about something unskillful. When the Buddha uses the word *akusala*, see there's two words in the Pali, *papa*, which means evil, and *akusala*, which just simply means unskillful, unwholesome, not virtuous. And in terms of the path we're just trying to shift all our conditionings towards the virtuous, so it's not a case of feeling guilty about attachment, it's a case of knowing that there is some attachment there that there has to be some attachment there and say within parents, you see, that's the rebellious teenager, they just want to get away from that grip, that hold.

And of course the root reason for that is that we're seeking happiness in human beings. Now that's ridiculous. Anything in the world to depend upon for happiness is definitely not a human being. I mean, that's really awful. I mean, they leave you, then they

hate you. And then they die on you, for heaven's sake. I mean, there's no way that, when you think about it, you'd want your happiness to be dependent on a human being. I mean, rather a rock. That will stay there for a while. I mean, it should outlive you. You can keep hugging the rock. Or a tree. Love a tree. That's much better. But a human being is very, very fickle.

So once we see that, you see, and we take the attachment away, and then the confusion disappears between what attachment is and what love is. And just to be aware of that. And of course the downside of attachment is that the person becomes an object. They become something to satisfy your lack. That's what an attachment does—I want you to be like this, I want you to grow up like this, you know, to get angry.

And you can see in certain behaviours, for instance, supposing you were told or somebody was told that the doctor said to them that they had terminal cancer. And when the doctor told them that, they begin to break down and weep and cry, gnash their teeth, bang the table, how terrible it is and all that. You think, well, that's very unprofessional. I don't expect the doctor to do that, you see. And you expect them to be compassionate, kind, softly spoken, but, you know, just, as we say, with you in that quiet way.

And when you go home and you say to your partner, I've got terminal cancer, and they reply, well, what do you want to wear in the coffin? And you think, my goodness, don't you love me? I expect you to weep, gnashing of teeth and all that sort of stuff. And so you can see how behaviours change when that attachment comes. And it's a case of just recognising that.

With children, you see, you can see parents, if the child hurts itself—and it's just a scratch and the parent knows it's just a little thing, you see. But the kid's screaming, you see. The parent's very calm, very quiet, hugs the child, everything's all right, all that sort of stuff. But if the parent sees that the child has actually broken a leg or really banged his head and, oh my goodness, then the fear comes out and all that. And of course that feeds right into the child and the child becomes the object of fear. The poor kid's trying to handle all this pain and the mother or father's berserkness. But it's just part and parcel of that relationship.

So, if we find ourselves here in the meditation, you see, wanting to phone somebody, expecting somebody to phone them, wanting to get in touch with some family member, some friend, you see. If you see that, that's a product of attachment. Just let it pass, let it pass. And then there might be that feeling of guilt, of some sort of loss of love, you see. Because there's that confusion between what love is and what that attachment is.

I've got time just for one more thing I wanted to... Oh, yeah. And just to take the deliciousness to that other area of distraction. So be careful, especially on a retreat, you see. We might think to ourselves, oh, it would be nice to go for a walk now. I think I feel I need a walk. But actually, if you sit with that—actually just fed up with being inside. You're just trying to escape being inside. Or you don't want to walk up and down the same walking path anymore. You want to have a distraction, do it somewhere else.

And if you can really let that go, and as it were, draw the space around you closer, making your boundary less and less, you'll see it has a great force on your meditation and your stillness. Because every time you wander off on a walk, you're in a different place. You're exciting something. Something's arising. And it's very difficult. I'm sure you've all experienced, so we say, even doing quick walking as an exercise, how suddenly the mind will start wandering. And you've walked up and down for ten minutes and you've been everywhere and anywhere.

So all these desires for distraction, you see. So remember that if we really want to get to know the mind and to really get into its turbulences, if we really want to squeeze the pimple, as it were, then you've got to, as it were, stop the input. That's the point, you see. You've got to stop the input. You've got to stop looking, stop listening. Hearing is different from listening. And as soon as you stop the input, then there's no way these turbulences can find a way to express themselves. See?

And the mind starts going berserk, but you keep playing with it. And when that's cut off, what can they do? All these griefs, guilt, fear, the whole gamut of human suffering. It booms out as it comes out. It comes out as these awful, awful, terrible feelings. But that's the purification. That's purgatory. Just hang on in there. And just keep saying to yourself, there is an end to suffering. There is. There's got to be.

So that's why in meditation we're always encouraged to go inward, to stay with what's happening within ourselves. And just as an addenda to all that, of course, is the problem of boredom. So remember, boredom is that frustration, is that getting fed up with distraction and pleasure.

So be very careful with boredom, because boredom will tell you to seek distraction, to do something else. Remember that the whole point of the pleasure syndrome is that there's an inbuilt obsolescence. You can't keep chewing the same sweet. It gets boring. You've got to go for the raspberry flavour or the coffee flavour. You've got to move a little bit to get that same sense of pleasure or joy out of it.

So whenever boredom comes up, you see, you feel the boredom, you don't get confused by boredom on the breath, boredom on this, boredom on that, boredom with food. You stay with the boredom, you see. And the way to overcome boredom is to keep doing what you're doing, repetition. Just repetition and keeping in mind, keeping that boredom, as it were, within your attentiveness. And then don't be surprised if the boredom suddenly disappears and what arises is its opposite which is interest—only this time because you've let the boredom go some wrong purpose has been got rid of. That's the point. Boredom has come because we're seeking happiness in whatever it is we're experiencing.

I mean, our society is really bad with that because pleasure is so easy at hand and we expect to be distracted, we expect to be entertained all the time, TV, radio, the whole thing. And to enter into a place where there's nothing, then you get this boredom arising.

And going back to the Buddha's own experience, remember, after he had become enlightened for seven years, Māra stalked him with his three daughters: sexual desire, pleasure and boredom. See? So there's little boys saying, this is really boring just sitting here, why don't you get on with it?

So, with that in mind, be careful of these delicious areas.

So I think there's just some time to complete some of these questions. Now, unfortunately, I lost the list. I brought the wrong list that I was working with last week, but I shall answer a few more next week. Let me just give some indications to these.

"Can you please discuss the differences in practices and goals in the Theravāda, Zen, Dzogchen and Vajrayāna tradition?" Well the way that I think you'll find eventually, people who have practised, say, even two, three or four of these, is that the only difference is skilful means, that's all. We're just using different ways in order to achieve the same end. What is that end? It's *sati*, right awareness and *paññā*, insight. That's all it is.

And either you get it by observing the phenomena of the mind, which is more Theravāda-based, or you become aware more of the space within which this is happening, which is that consciousness. And just that begins to separate consciousness out from the contents that it sees within itself. So it doesn't matter. Even in Theravāda one becomes aware of the knowing as a different faculty from everything it knows.

So remember that all these traditions arose as they passed through cultures, and even in our culture now you can see the effect of western psychotherapy on the practice of the Dhamma and it's bound to happen and it's a good thing because that's the way we are.

"Please discuss the pros and cons of being in the breath of the nostrils as opposed to the abdomen." The general or the usual instruction is you watch the breath where you feel it most and that's the important thing because it's your primary object, it's something you want to go back to, it's something that you want to develop a certain stillness with. I don't use the word concentration. And it's something which, when everything quietens down, the still mind, the peaceful heart, and the quiet body, or the quiet mind, still body, there is only the breath, and that becomes the object which you are looking at.

So, keeping that in mind, that the primary object is supposed to be the breath, and at the point where you feel it most, I think you generally agree with me, those of you who've tried both, is that when you watch the breath of the nostrils you tend to lose the body. It's a very good technique for concentration meditations because you don't have to worry about the body, you become concentrated up here. Whereas when you stay down at the abdomen you're buried in the body, you tend to feel more in contact with the body.

The other thing is that in the Mahāsi tradition, of course, the rising and falling of the abdomen is then carried into the rising and falling of the footstep. So that this constant awareness of transience, arising and falling, beginning, ending, beginning, ending, radical ending, full stop, something arising. And so if we use the abdomen and the rising and falling of the footstep, there is just that constant pointing of the attention at the quality of *anicca*.

Of course it still works at the nostrils because the breath is coming in, stopping, going out. But it's not so obvious as this rising and falling of the abdomen and the rising and falling of the footstep. But in the end it's really up to a person and where they feel also most comfortable. The Mahāsi himself was not strict. He started off with touch points. And he just ended up with the belly and that became the focus of most teachings. It was only I think later teachers who insisted on watching the abdomen.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering even by the weekend.

CHAPTER 13

The Ten Fetters

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the ten saṃyojana (fetters) that bind beings to the cycle of suffering and rebirth. Drawing from classical Theravāda texts, he explains how these mental chains are progressively broken through the four stages of noble attainment: sotāpanna (stream-entrant), sakadāgāmi (once-returner), anāgāmi (non-returner), and arahant (fully awakened).

Using vivid Buddha-given analogies—from lightning flashes to swimming imagery—Bhante illustrates how spiritual vision develops from the first glimpse of nibbāna to complete liberation. He details which fetters fall away at each stage: the first three (personality-view, doubt, and attachment to rites and rituals) are eliminated by the stream-entrant, while sensual desire and ill-will are weakened by the once-returner and destroyed by the non-returner.

The talk emphasizes that even advanced practitioners must work with conceit, restlessness, and subtle attachments to refined mental states until final Awakening. This teaching provides both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for recognizing these binding forces in meditation and daily life, offering hope that complete unbinding (nibbāna) is indeed possible through dedicated practice.

What are the ten fetters? To understand the ten fetters you've got to have understood or know about the different paths and fruits. The way the Buddha said that people develop spiritually, there are four levels of deep insight, four levels of consciousness, meaning four levels in a change in the way we see things. According to his understanding, when we begin to see things through the three characteristics of existence, when we see things are transient, when we see things are not substantial, not self, and when we see how we cause ourselves suffering by having a wrong relationship of indulging in pleasure and running away from pain, when we see that, then there's a shift in the way that we relate to the world. And these shifts are called the *Magga Phala*, path and fruit.

The first one is called *Sotāpanna*. It means stream entrance. The second one is known as *Sakadāgāmi*, once returner. The third one is *Anāgāmi*, a non-returner. And finally there's *Arahant*, a fully enlightened being.

So the Buddha gives us some images to work with. He says that when somebody has the first insight into *Nibbāna*, the stream entrant, the one who enters into the spiritual stream and is coming out of *saṃsāra*, they've found the way out basically. When you have the first insight, it's like a flash of lightning. So the flash of lightning means that you see everything but you've only seen it for a moment. So you actually know what the truth is, what *Nibbāna* is, but it's just been that very sharp insight. The second one, the once-returner, is the one who sees things in a full starry night. The non-returner sees things as if it's a full moon. Even here the full moon can be bright, but those of you who've been to the East know that you can really see colours. It's very bright. But you don't get to see things like the noonday sun until you're fully enlightened.

There's also a teaching about what happens to a person and how long the training is after they've had these insights. So a *Sotāpanna*, a stream entrant, is said to have to come back as a human being seven times before they get out of the problem. A once returner is exactly that, comes back once. And the non-returner is someone who achieves that third level here, but doesn't have to come back to this realm of existence and works out the rest of their problems in a much better place. So those are your four levels of noble insight.

I'll give you one more image that he talks about which is rather interesting. He says that people who don't know the Dharma, who are stuck in delusion, are like people who are swimming underwater and have no clue where they're going. The trainee is someone who keeps bobbing up and just getting their head above water so they've got some idea as to where they might be going. The *Sotāpanna*, the stream entrant, is one who's treading water. That's rather interesting. Treading water. The *Sakadāgāmi* is swimming, hell-bent for the shore. The *Anāgāmi*, the non-returner, is actually standing on the shore, on the shoreline. And the *Arahant* has found his seat on the island. That's another little image that he tells us.

There's another one which comes from the general tradition of spirituality about the mountain. So if you think about it, the higher you go, the more you see. But you don't get to see the full thing until you get to the top. You never get to see what's on the other side of the mountain until you're at the top. So something happens at the state of full enlightenment which is obviously quite a quantum leap. And that's the suggestion between a full moon and the noonday sun.

So what is it that these people see to make them ennobled? They have insights into these three characteristics. So the more you see transience, the more you see impermanence, then the less attached you are, the less suffering there is. The more you see how the psychology of seeking happiness in this world, real happiness, leads only to

dissatisfaction, then, of course, you come off that drug. You come off the addiction of sensual pleasure. Stop running away from just the pain of living, sickness, old age and death. And the more you see that this body, this personality, is not me. It's not a me. It's not a person. It's just a conditioned state. It's just an energy form.

We know that, looking at those flowers, we know that matter itself is just energy. It's just a swirl of subatomic activity. They don't even talk about atoms these days, they just talk about energy forms. So even though at our level of perception they are real things, they're real colour and they've got a feel about them, when you drop down to a deeper reality about the way the material world is, then all that disappears. It's just a fuzz of just energy. So it's the same with this body. It feels real enough when you get your finger trapped in the door. And the same with the personality. It feels real enough when you're depressed or when you're happy. But it's just energy.

Now, there are two parts to becoming one of these noble people. The first part is called *Magga* and the second part is called *Phala*. *Magga* is entering into it. So the insight is what makes you enter into that level of consciousness. But the fruit of it is the falling away of fetters. Falling away of the fetters.

And *saṃyojana*, which is the word that fetter is describing, we get the word yoke from it, yoga, yoja, that which binds, that which holds. And sam is just a strengthener. So it's something that really binds you. And there are ten of these. And as you go up the different paths, the fetters drop away. And the definition of *Nibbāna* is unbinding. Unbinding. It's a process of unbinding.

So what are the fetters? The first one is *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*. It's the belief in the body or the personality as me and mine. So there's something about an experience of *anicca dukkha anattā*, transience, suffering or dissatisfaction and not-self, which allows that person to see that they are not this body, they are not this personality, they're not emotions, they're not thoughts. So they've experienced something beyond that, beyond something phenomenal. So that goes, but don't think that it's thereby entirely destroyed. What's happened is that the belief in it has gone.

I liken it to the leaving of mother. Some psychologists say up until about the fourth month there's no differentiation between the baby and mother. It's all one thing. In fact, there's a baby in the world, but specifically a baby and mother, and then suddenly, or at some point, mother becomes other. It's like it looms out of this me as something other than me. And that's your first what's known as object relations. So that's the first leave-taking. Now how long it takes to get rid of mother? My God. So you see our binding to

our mother is very deep. So letting go of this body, letting go of this mind, letting go of these emotions is a very long process of leave-taking. But what the *Sotāpanna* has seen, at least, is that they are not that. That's a very important little insight.

We get hints of that when, in our meditation, we experience an emotion as something objective within us. When you become the observer and you feel you're looking at an emotion, experiencing an emotion as if it's not me, not mine. So that's the *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, that's destroying or taking away the fundamental belief that this personality, this body is me. That's the first thing that goes.

The next one is *vicikicchā*, doubt. So obviously, if someone has experienced the ultimate truth, *Nibbāna*, then obviously all doubt in the Buddha's teaching goes, because now they know for themselves by their own personal experience. And having done so, they also know the way. So I liken it to somebody wandering around in a swamp and suddenly through the trees, through the swamp and all that, they see the top of the mountain. So now they've still got a load of swamp to go through, but at least they know where they're going and there's no doubt that there is a mountain and there's no doubt that there's a way out of this problem. So doubt in the Buddha's teaching disappears.

The third one is rather interesting. *Sīlabbataparāmāsa*. It's the recognition of wrong rites and rituals. It's understanding that the path to become enlightened has virtually nothing to do with rites and rituals. No matter how many times you bow to the Buddha, light candles, repeat your Om Mani Padme Hums. Nothing to do with it. If we could just hold the line of pure meditation, that's enough.

There's an interesting scripture where some young monks go to the elders and they say, how did you become enlightened? And the split even then is between those monks and nuns who like to live completely by themselves in the forest and those who were much more into towns and the study and all that, remembering, in those days, rote learning. So those, it was Kassapa, the very great ascetic, who said that you have to keep the rule very fiercely. You must keep the rule about renunciation. You must live out in the forest and you must meditate. And Sāriputta, who was considered to be the general of the Dharma, second only to the Buddha in understanding, said you must understand, you must learn what the Buddha's teaching is and you must meditate.

So this troop of young monks went off to the Buddha and they said to him, we've asked so and so this, we've asked so and so that, and we get these answers, what do you think? And he says, well, all teachers will bring you the way they came. They'll bring you the way they came. So they said, Lord, what is your teaching? And his reply was, meditate, meditate, meditate.

So if we can bear the horror of sitting and walking and continuing to meditate all the time, then that would be the most direct way. However, that doesn't mean to say we can't have rituals. It doesn't mean to say you can't have other practices. But there's an understanding in the stream entrant that they are not material, directly material to the path of enlightenment. So they're skillful means. It's a skillful thing to repeat a phrase, say a loving kindness phrase, may all beings be happy, than it is to let the mind wander off to Machu Picchu or Gold Coast. At least it's a skillful means. So that's what drops.

Now in the Buddha's day, remember, there were all sorts of very strange things. Remember, we're talking about medieval and pre-medieval times. And a lot of people, even these days, believe that ritual has some efficacy about it in itself which brings about some form of enlightenment. For instance, there were times in those times people thought that if you stood in the Ganges, just stood there, the purifying water of the Ganges would take all your bad *kamma* away. There was understanding that somehow you had to go through enormous suffering to get rid of suffering, mortification. Like if you, on a very hot day, you'd build a fire and sit next to the fire. And somehow that had this purifying effect. The purifying nature of fire. So you can see it's around superstition and around wrong beliefs.

So that's the third thing that goes. In other words, for the *Sotāpanna*, the stream entrant, their practice is very direct. They know where they're going. They don't get pulled off here and there with all sorts of stuff, I Ching, astrology, I don't know.

So then the next movement is to the once returner. And what these people break is, or they undermine the two next things, which are *kāmarāga*, translates as indulgence in pleasure, and *vyāpāda*, hatred, aversion. So those two things go.

Now, if you think about it, from an ego point of view, from this ego level, from this self level, which believes that this is what it is, you've got to make the most of this now. There's only two ways to behave. Wherever happiness seems to come to you, whether it's pleasure, straightforward pleasure, bangers and mash and beans, or whether it's something, a relationship or music or even spiritual delight, from the self point of view, if that's what happiness is going to be, there's going to be a clinging to it, a wanting it, a holding on to it, a wanting to develop it. And if anything is in any way oppressive or seems to undermine happiness, any form of dissatisfaction, then there's going to be an effort to push it away. So that's the only way a real self can behave. You don't have an option when you're down at the level of me and mine.

But now, when somebody has so broken the idea of me and mine, they're not playing that game anymore. That game is undermined. It doesn't mean to say that they won't indulge and they won't get angry and all that, but it's like the heaviness has gone. And it's

only at the third stage that these two are completely undermined. And that's why there's a non-returner. They don't come back because there's nothing here attracting them anymore.

However, there's still attachment. And the attachment now is to the more finer mental states and more finer realms. And these are to do with the absorptions that we practice. Or you can practice. So these are the *rūpa* and the *arūpa*.

So what do we mean by that? We mean that when somebody practices absorption meditations, ecstatic meditations, what they come to understand, what they realize is that they can create beautiful mental states independent of the world. So when we practice loving kindness, for instance, and we just put that phrase in our hearts, may all beings be happy, may all beings be happy, and we begin to feel the joy, that's just created by us, within us. So this releases you from dependence on sausage and mash and beans. You don't need the world out there. You can just engender this loveliness within yourself.

And the progress of that gets very fine until you come to a very fine place of absolute equanimity where there's not even an object. And those who experience these things always say that this is the highest happiness, not something else. All the way up that chain, all the way up those degrees of ecstasy to pure equanimity. Those people who have experienced these things always say, well, this is the highest happiness, not the other one. Everything begins to feel more and more gross. So that attachment doesn't go. Those two attachments don't go until you're fully enlightened.

The other thing that doesn't go is conceit. So the I, the me stays right to the bitter end. So don't think at any moment that you will not suffer from conceit and arrogance. It will stay with you to the bitter end.

The other thing is restlessness, which is interesting. Restlessness. And although it doesn't say so, in my own personal understanding, it must also include sloth. Because they're just two energy forms, one going out, one coming in. So, so long as there's an impurity in the heart, there's going to be that shaking, that restlessness. So our struggle with sloth, torpor and restlessness must also be carried on to the bitter end.

And finally, of course, what is completely undercut is ignorance. That's the last fetter. Ignorance here means don't know. So the *Arahant* now knows that. What does that person know? They know they are not the body, mind and heart. There's no confusion about that anymore. No confusion.

So the fetters are those things that drop away as we enter into the different paths and fruits. Which are the fruits. That's the fruit. That's the benefit. That's the return for all this hard work we have to put in. So therefore we must work hard. The fruit is there for the taking.

CHAPTER 14

Vedanā: Feeling

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines vedanā (feeling) as a crucial element in Buddhist psychology and meditation practice. He distinguishes between the four mahābhūta (great elements) of earth, water, fire, and air that constitute basic physical sensations, and the saṅkhāra (mental formations) that arise as emotional and mental reactions. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he explains how the Buddha taught practitioners to observe feelings internally and externally, seeing their arising and passing nature.*
>
> *The talk explores how vedanā fits into the twelve-link chain of paṭiccasamuppāda (dependent origination), showing the progression from contact (phassa) through feeling to craving (taṇhā) and grasping (upādāna). Bhante emphasizes how staying present with bare feeling—rather than getting caught in psychological analysis—allows both natural psychotherapeutic healing and consciousness liberation to occur simultaneously. He addresses common confusion between Western psychological approaches and Buddhist understanding, advocating for the Buddha's direct experiential method that leads to the momentary concentration (khaṇika samādhi) necessary for vipassanā insight to arise.*

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

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

This is going to try and talk about *vedanā*, feeling. I'm going to try and make a distinction between what are known as the *mahābhūta*, the four elements, and the *saṅkhāra*, which we would translate as mental, emotional states. I'm going to see where it fits into the schema of the wheel of dependent origination, and then try and understand the way the Buddha actually wanted us to experience these through the discourse on how to establish mindfulness and become enlightened very quickly.

One thing that I think we all suffer from is a confusion, perhaps that's too strong a word, between the way that the West understands psychology and the way the Buddha understood it. Just in my own little life story, there was a time when I read a lot about this stuff, Western psychology, and I came to the conclusion that I had truly sorted myself out. Only to find in a couple of years myself in this pit. And when I got into this pit, the only thing that came to mind was to do Zen meditation. I don't have a clue why. I mean it was in the air and I'd read a book and all that.

So I wrote to the Buddhist Society and said I need to go to Japan to do meditation. And they wrote back with a letter with 21 points as to why I shouldn't go. So I gave that up, and I ended up in a very exotic town of Birmingham and started practicing Zen according to the tradition of Throstle Hole Abbey, which some of you may know up in Northumberland. And I was still doing a little bit of my own therapy. I think I beat the hell out of this mattress. And I found that that got me so far. I've got rid of this whole surface stuff. But then the more I got into meditation, the more I found a way of dealing with it.

And I was lucky in this sense that by the time I came to meditation, I'd actually given up hope, both on the Christian path and psychotherapy and all that. So when I entered Zen, and they just told me to sit and watch, just sit and observe, I took it at face value. I don't remember asking any questions as to why. And Zen, of course, doesn't offer you many answers for it. Just presumes you'll discover why.

But it was only when I came to Theravāda Buddhism with its psychological basis, the way that it goes to great lengths to describe how and why we end up in certain places, that things began to fall into place for me intellectually. I began to understand what had been happening to me, especially through Zen and later through this meditation.

And again, when I went to practice with these Eastern teachers, you weren't given any reasons. You were just told to watch the breath and whatever comes up. And if you asked a question, they looked at you mystified, wondering why the hell you wanted to know anyway. It's a strange thing to have to go through. And normally the reply was just something like, watch the breath.

Slowly, through the experience of meditation, of course, these things do become clear. And what became very clear to me as I began to progress was that unless you actually see what you're doing through the eyes of the Buddha, you can waste a lot of time. Waste a lot of time trying to psychoanalyse yourself or psychotherapeutise yourself. It's a wrong view. And we get caught up in it. It's very easy because it's just part of our culture.

But when you actually position yourself right and you get this way of looking at it, the way the Buddha asked us to, then you'll see there's a clarity comes about as to what the practice is doing, both at the psychotherapeutic level and at that deeper level of spirituality.

So the first thing I would like to explain is the way the Buddha explained how we experience things, how we come to know something. In terms of the first contact that we have with the outside world, he actually called it contact, translates the word *phassa* for those of you who know. And this contact produces in the body a very simple sensation, extraordinarily simple sensation.

At the eardrum, it's simply the tapping of the airwave on the eardrum. There's no sound to it at all. That's how basic it is. And the eye, what is it? What is it that we actually see? We know through our psychology tests that we hardly see anything. Everything that we think we see is manufactured by the mind. And in a most mysterious way, the mind takes in the information, makes it up, throws it back on the retina to give us the impression that we're actually seeing it.

In terms of the tongue, what is it that the tongue actually experiences? But very small changes in chemical touchings and pressures and heat. Very, very, very, very basic.

Now, on that, the mind takes it in and begins to perceive it as a specific feeling. And that's what the Buddha means by *vedanā*. And when that perception is made, there's always a judgment made about it. And the judgment is very simple. Pleasant, unpleasant. Full stop, that's it. So you get this sensation come in, the mind takes it in, perceives it, and decides pleasant or unpleasant.

There are some pleasant, unpleasant feelings that are so fine that the Buddha then also talks about neutral feelings. But even when you get close to them, you'll find that they shade off either into pleasant or unpleasant. So there's your first distinction when it comes to feelings. Feelings are something manufactured by the mind out of data. This is coming from the outside world. It's coming from the outside world to us.

In the same way, when the mind moves in the body, the first thing that we feel are sensations. The heaviness of depression, the wobbliness of fear. We can be aware of the sensation, we can be aware of the emotion, but at base it's causing similar sensations on the physical structure. These are also relayed to the mind and in Buddhist understanding are determined, judged as pleasant or unpleasant.

Now that's *vedanā*. And the *vedanā* is a conditioned thing. We can't do anything about it. It's just part of our conditioning. We're conditioned to experience pleasant or unpleasant things with that little bit in the middle which is neutral.

Now, at that base where it's first of all experienced, the Buddha calls that this contact. And he says that at that very deep level, that very first level of physical contact, either with mind, where the mind and the body meet. So when that light comes into the

eye, there's that sense base. And at that point you get a meeting of the physical sensation with consciousness and at that level he says that there are only four distinctive feelings and they're put in a metaphorical way as fire, earth, water and air but they represent heat, hot and cold, pressure, that's the earth element, hardness, softness, movement and cohesion, elasticity.

So when you're watching the breath this is of course more obvious if you're watching it down here, sometimes you can sense just the movement, pure movement as it were, and then you can be aware of a elasticity. When you put your foot on the ground and press into it, what you're primarily feeling is that earth pressure. Heat, of course, is pretty obvious.

Now, from these four basic things, and every sensation, according to the Buddha, has some percentage of each of these. It's not as though the one appears purely by itself. Each sensation has some combination, and out of that, the mind has a perception of a feeling. Of course, this stuff's coming in at pretty fast speed, and the mind gathers it into a percept, a perception. And from that, it makes this judgment about being pleasant and unpleasant.

Now, the next thing that happens is our reaction to those things. So here we have the wheel of dependent origination. We have the contact of the feeling that arises and then we have the reaction. The reaction, the *taṇhā*, is rather unfortunately translated as craving. But it's a desire for not wanting what is painful and a desire for wanting what is beautiful, what is pleasant. That is a movement, again, in our psychology, in our mind, of going towards the object in a particular way. Either to get stuck in it and really enjoy it, or to try and push it away aggressively. And if that doesn't work, you run for it. It's a form of aversion.

Now, once that has come up, you see, the next position is a form of identity. The I comes in. According to the Buddha, there's no I, there's no sense of me in all that process until that very point. When the I want comes up, I don't want. And as soon as there's that association, as soon as there's that identity, very difficult to catch the moment, this wanting and not wanting is empowered. And that's the act of will.

Will is the power that takes something out of potential into the actual. So, for instance, in your walking meditation, you can stand there for a year and a day saying intending to walk. And then something magical happens. The foot moves. See if you can catch it. See if you can find out what's the difference between intending a footstep and the footsteps moving. And what we catch in that moment is the differentiation between this grasping by the I, the *upādāna*, to the actual empowerment of it through will, which is the *bhava*.

Now, *bhava* translates as becoming. That's your *kamma*. Now, the importance of this line is to see exactly where our power actually resides. Because if we can see that, we can let go of old conditioning and restart new, more skillful one.

Now, that whole business afterwards, the desire, the craving and all that, is a mental reaction to a given and constitutes the beginning of our emotional life. These are what's known as the *saṅkhāra*, the conditionings. That's the mental life. And this is all our mentation and all our emotions.

So even in the five heaps that the Buddha calls, that he deconstructs the human being into, the five *khandhas*, first of all there's the body. Then there's feelings. Then there's perception. This whole mentation business. Then there's the *saṅkhāra*, the conditioning. And finally, the act of consciousness that knows it. So he's constantly deconstructing an event. And the purpose of it is to take this sense of I out of it.

So here we have three distinctions that we feel in our meditation. We feel at base some basic sensation. Even now as you're sitting there, like just the pressure of sitting on the floor there, you see, at that base there, you're getting in contact. If you center in just on those feelings, you're getting in contact with the earth element. And because it's neither painful nor unpleasant, the mind can ignore it. So we're hardly aware of those things. That's our reaction to what we don't really feel.

If the posture then moves into a bit of pain, suddenly, you see, there's pain. Then you get this reaction, got to move, got to do this, got to do that. So what we have is this base of sensation. Then we have a feeling come up, which is a perception of that as pleasant and unpleasant so now it's as it were clouded with a, or should we say surrounded with a mental quality of being pleasant, unpleasant, and this immediately begins for the mind to start shaking and it shakes in the sense of do I want it or don't I want it and that's where we're catching it now.

Normally speaking, in our own little deluded ways, we just run the gamut. And without knowing it, we're just recreating the old sensations, the old pleasures, the old ways of acting. But in our meditation, what we ought to be doing is putting our mind right there at the feeling and seeing that movement of wanting to indulge, wanting not to indulge. And what we're catching there is how we create suffering for ourselves.

So if we have those three things quite distinct in our minds, then when we begin to meditate, we can actually go through this stage of actually perceiving the way things really are. It's an intellectual thing at first. It's an actual, although we feel these things, although we experience these things, there is a thought process going around it.

Now do remember that that thought process is this very consciousness which is to be enlightened, mirroring back to itself what it's come to experience. So it's not to be pushed out of the way, but to just be acknowledged. So, for instance, in the Mahāsi technique that I teach, you see, that is actually brought to the fore, where a word actually encapsulates, tries to encapsulate in some way, the experience that's being had. So it's an acknowledgement of it. And acknowledge means to know you know.

So, by deconstructing an event, by seeing that there's the primary sensations, there I'm beginning to experience it as pleasant, unpleasant, and here's my relationship to it. Wanting, not wanting. Now, when it comes to the discourse on how to establish mindfulness, you can see that the Buddha, he actually wants us to do this.

The first thing he says is, meditators. How does a meditator abide contemplating feelings as feelings? Now, here, the word he uses is *vedanā vedanānupassī*. It translates literally as a location to see feelings in feelings, which doesn't particularly make sense in English. But it's just saying that when you feel a feeling, just feel the feeling. Don't think about it. Actually, feel the feeling. It means that you've got to go into the feeling and feel the feeling. I'm sure you all know what I mean.

And he says, and here, when a pleasant feeling arises, the meditator understands, I feel a pleasant feeling. When an unpleasant feeling arises, the meditator understands, I feel an unpleasant feeling. And when a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling arises, the meditator understands, I feel a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling. It's extraordinarily simple. And you say, oh, that is an unpleasant feeling. You actually have to make it conscious, you see.

Now, although he's actually putting it in a phrase, I feel an unpleasant feeling, it's simply pointing to a direct experience of it. Because the word he uses here for to know is *pajānāti*. And *pajānāti* is the same word as *paññā*, it's the same word as *buddho*. It's intuitive intelligence, a direct perception.

So then he goes on to say, when a pleasant worldly feeling arises, the meditator understands it. And then he goes through this bit of unpleasant and pleasant. And when a pleasant unworldly feeling. So now he's asking us to distinguish those feelings that arise out of the old ways that we are and the new feelings that are arising out of our meditation.

So when, for instance, some of the seven factors of enlightenment arise, such as interest in what we're doing, which is the *pīti*, such as the sense of tranquillity, the *passaddhi*, the sense of equanimity, we should recognise that this isn't just an ordinary worldly feeling. These are spiritual feelings. These are feelings which are supporting

our meditation, which means that they can be, as it were, not, shall we say, too consciously developed, but definitely not pushed away because they're part of the process of enlightenment.

After all, the end product is to be happy. Don't forget that. I mean, we want to try and get happy. And when we find that we're getting happy because we're having wonderful thoughts about cream cakes and sex drugs and rock and roll, then we have to notice how now this happiness is based on. And we don't indulge those things. We don't get into those things.

So he's asking us to make that distinction. Not only pleasant and unpleasant and neutral, but the fact that some feelings of meditation, even negative ones like boredom. You have to notice this boredom is because I'm doing something wrong in my meditation. It's coming out of expectancy. It's coming because I expect something wonderful to happen and it's not happening. I'm getting really bored. So by making that distinction you are helping yourself to hone the skills of meditation. If you don't make these distinctions then it's just you're wandering. You're just wandering in a wood.

So having made that statement he then goes on to say how to do it. First of all he says in this way the meditator abides contemplating feelings as feelings. He abides contemplating feelings internally. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings externally. And then both internally and externally.

Now, the way the commenters explain this is that if you have a feeling in you, suppose you've got a headache, when you see somebody else and they say to you, you've got a headache, or they feel you've got a headache, you see, it's a form of inference that you're inferring. You're making some connection. In his own experience, remember.

The Buddha is said to have seen at the point of enlightenment all his past lives. And he saw through the train of his past lives how he came to be a self-enlightened Buddha. He showed the progression. And what he discovered was that there were such things as skillful and unskillful behaviour, moral and immoral behaviour, and that these were the kernel problems of anybody trying to become enlightened. But the next thing he saw was other beings arising and passing away from this world to that according to their skillful and unskillful behaviour. So what was a personal law became a cosmic law.

So it's the same for us. Whatever we discover in ourselves we also have to relate it to the fact that everybody else is having the same experience. This allows us to grow in empathy, to grow in compassion. See, at fundament we're just variations on a theme, that's all.

Then he says he abides contemplating feelings in their arising factors, he abides contemplating feelings in their vanishing factors, and he abides contemplating feelings in their arising and vanishing factors. He always does this, splits them up into bits.

Now he's asking us to change our view of things and to actually see that all these things that we are observing and feeling are actually arising and passing away. So he's asking us to change our perspective. When you change your perspective for seeing things arising and passing away, what you're abstracting out of the equation is any sense of solidity. Because we believe in continuity, things solidify for us.

We all of us, even though we intellectually know we're changing, all of us have a feeling of there's something in us which is steady which hasn't moved which is always there. But suppose one morning you got up and you looked in the mirror and it was somebody else's face. You'd be shocked. It's only because we get up in the morning and we see a similar face to the one we went to bed with that we think it's the same one. It's only when you see your photographs since you were two years old that you realize something has changed.

But from the moment, as we pass through the life that we experience, we don't get this feeling of great change. We don't get our feelings of going through life in this stroboscopic way, because that's the Buddha's teaching. Everything is arising radically and passing away radically. It's coming out of potential, out of non-manifest into the manifest. It's not as though you're taking a piece of clay, screwing it up into making a cup out of it and then screwing it up and making a saucer and it's the same piece of clay. Everything collapses only to arise again.

Now that's what he's asking us to do. But even at this level there is, as it were, still some sort of understanding going on, some sort of mentation, some sort of thought pattern going on. So the first is rather gross. You're feeling feelings as they are inside yourself in a very general way, contacting them, getting used to being just at the feeling basis. This is not emotion. The emotion might be buried in the feeling, but you're not looking at it as emotion. Just looking at it as feeling, a physical sensation. And every so often when you walk around you see somebody, there may be some sort of connection. You don't have to go berserk on that.

And then he asks you to go more inward and to leave feelings as objects, as something that somehow has solidity, and to begin to see them in their characteristic of feelings of little things arising and passing away. So that sometimes, for instance, you wake up and you feel depressed, and it feels just like a lump on your chest. Now normally

speaking that's what it is, it's just a lump on the chest. But if you actually go into it, you'll see it's not a lump at all, it's all little bits and pieces. So you're breaking it up. You're breaking up the concept, remember.

We guide our lives through these concepts. If we undermine our concepts, we undermine our view of life. So at this level, he's asking us to go slightly deeper and to see their arising and changing nature.

Finally, he says: "Mindfulness, that there is feeling, is simply established in the meditator to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness." Now, although he says there is a feeling, there is feeling, at this point there's no words. So the concentration on feeling is taking you to a point where mentation is supposed to stop. And there arises just that mindfulness necessary for bare knowledge to arise.

It's not until we get to that level that we can expect a deep enough grasp of the way things are which is actually going to move us at the base of consciousness and change us. And these moments in the Vipassanā tradition are known as *khaṇika samādhi*, momentary concentration. They don't last. It's nothing to do with time, it's a seeing. And often a meditator doesn't really know they've seen because they're so momentary, they're so immediate.

In your meditation, if you keep working, those moments where there's no eye watching, where the observer collapses, where the distinction or the separation between the observer and the observed seems to disappear, and one becomes the object - we've all experienced that. That's the moment when there's true *vipassanā*. And that's the state where he wants you to get to, the Buddha. And at that level, there is a possibility of - well, you have to see it. Even though it may not be such a conscious thing, even though that wisdom within us is not able to fully grasp the implications of it, but there is a seeing of it.

So if we just go through that again, what we have is just the sensations of the physical base, caused either by an outside stimulus - light, heat, whatever - or caused by an emotion arising in the body to create pressure, heat, whatever. We experience that then as something we like or we don't like, and that's your *vedanā*. If you stay there, you can see the reaction that you have to that given experience - wanting and not wanting. And if you stay at that level, you're also able to discern that if you leave it alone, this wanting and not wanting disappears. You have to observe the wanting and not wanting.

As you observe the wanting and not wanting and that reaction begins to decrease, the *vedanā* then becomes more obvious to you. And it's then that you begin to see it in its arising and passing quality. It's then that you can really absorb into it, as it were, and begin to see this quality of *anicca*, of arising and passing away, of not-self, at a level which is actually going to change the way we see things, permanently.

Now, these *saṅkhāra* that we talked about, which translate as mental states, which are emotional states - given what we would call emotions and moods, the ideation which comes up, all these images, all these thoughts - are manufactured from this base. Nothing moves without some motive from the heart. Even the driest of philosophers, the logicians, must have interest in it. Must have a wonder. There must be a wanting to work it out, a wanting to know.

Now, this base here, because of our own Western thing about being stuck in the head, we've separated thought from feeling. We don't have a word anymore. We used to have. The word was soul. Soul - there were three words. There was body, soul, and spirit. And if you look at the ancient, the more early Christian texts, which took this, of course, from the Greeks, you'll see that the body was what the Buddha means by the body. The soul is what the Buddha means by the *citta*, the mind, both thought and feeling. And spirit meant that other thing, what we euphemistically call the *nibbānic* element, that which is to be enlightened.

Unfortunately in our language now we split these two things, so we've now got thought and emotion, and it's very difficult for us to see the connection. So if we now see what an emotion is, and we can actually go into an emotion, and we just in the same way as we do *vedanā*, and what we're feeling is a very much more subtle state than a physical feeling. Now how does the psychotherapy then work? How does the psychotherapy of *vipassanā* work?

This turbulence which is in the mind - anger, depression, excitement, whatever - this turbulence is in the mind, it's in the body. The Buddha says the mind is in the body like milk in water. It's an intimate connection. That's why in our modern biology they can prod the brain and get you to do these different things. And why in a materialistic science the distinction isn't made. It can't be made. In a sense they don't need to make it to understand how the brain works and how certain things will work. But I don't think ever they would ever be able to work out what an image is or a thought. Maybe, I don't know.

But in Buddhist understanding, that's a finer energy. It's not the same as the physical energy. To talk of it as utterly distinct, I don't think would be true. It's more of a continuum. So those of you who practice qigong and things like that will know that there's

a qi, an energy there, which is, I'm not so sure it's recordable, but it's definitely there. And it's the same thing that people use for healing and stuff like that. Levitation. It's a mental energy. I haven't seen anybody levitate, mind. I'm going to put an advert in the paper. Somebody turn up who can levitate.

So this turbulence, where can it go? Where can that turbulence go? It's only got one place to go. It's got to go into the body. And there are turbulences that we know have been so suppressed into the body, so repressed into the body, that we're not even aware of them. And it's only through, often through, certain psychotherapeutic techniques and meditation that we actually begin to lift these up back into consciousness. But when they're lifted up back into consciousness, what are they coming through? They're coming through the body.

So when we're at the feeling base, which is caused by an emotion, if we stay at the feeling base, we're actually allowing this turbulence an avenue to express its turbulence and to finally expend its energy. That's how the psychotherapy works. And the reason why it's expending its energy is because the meditator is no longer empowering it through indulgence or suppressing it.

So most of our meditation - ninety-nine, I'm talking personally, point nine percent - is burning at the stake. This stuff has to be suffered. It's got nowhere else to go. If it doesn't come up into consciousness, it's stuck in the body. If it's stuck in the body, it's going to cause illness. There's no option. You have to suffer to become enlightened. You have to go to hell before you can get to heaven. Very unfortunate.

So when you understand that, you see a search for origins is pathetic. It's absolutely irrelevant that my mother hit me across the head with a banana when I was three years old. Pathetic. It has nothing to do with anything. What I have now is a turbulence called anger or hatred or whatever. This is it. This is what I'm going to work with. This connection in the past is immaterial. It's now just like a weather system. It's a storm. All I've got to do is sit there and bear it.

Patience, a willingness to suffer it. But if I then do a psychotherapy on it, that I'm just sitting here bearing it and it will die out, I'm not going to get the gift of the meditation. It's only when I turn my perspective around to see it as something arising and passing away that I'm beginning to lift that consciousness out of this embeddedness with what it experiences.

Lifting that consciousness out of its identity with, possession of, an emotion. "I'm unhappy." By looking at unhappiness, depression, anxiety as other, as an object, where's the I?

So there's two things always going on if we're meditating correctly. The psychotherapy is happening quite normally, quite naturally. And consciousness is liberating itself. The definition of *nibbāna* is unshackled. It's an unshackling. There are ten fetters, they're unshackled. It's consciousness itself which is shackled. As soon as you make it an object and allow it to burn in consciousness, you're unshackling yourself from it because you're no longer identifying with it.

So in the wheel of dependent origination, which is the psychological paradigm as to how we create suffering for ourselves, the Buddha points us to get right there with *vedanā* and to see what arises in our relationship to that feeling. By keeping our mind right there, we'll liberate consciousness from its attachments. And we will allow the turbulence to expend its energy and we'll be cured of it.

It's very interesting. Nowhere, as far as I can see, on that wheel of dependent origination, does he ask us to look at an emotion as a given. In other words, if I get up in the morning and I feel depressed - I never decide to get up and feel depressed, by the way - when I feel depressed, if I say "I am depressed," I'm already a goner. If I say "this is depression," I'm into psychotherapy. I'm trying to find out why I'm depressed. If I'm into feeling, all I feel is just a heaviness, a dullness, a stodginess of mind, an inability to do this and that. That's fine. What's the problem?

You know that book that's a bit of a bestseller, "Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway." Well, that's it. Feel the depression and do it anyway. Feel the hatred and do it anyway. In order to do that, you have to have distanced yourself from these feelings. You have to have distanced yourself from it as an emotion. And it's very easy to do that if you just drop down a level and see it just as feeling.

Feeling. I think that's it. May you be enlightened this very lifetime.

I'd like to start before I answer the question by trying to clarify some of the stuff I said the other night about *vedanā*, especially this business of psychotherapy. A few spears hit me as I left the room. What I was on about was coming to Vipassanā with a psychodynamic model. It wasn't a criticism at all of psychotherapy as such.

Things like just simple therapy like behavioural therapy is extremely good at getting rid of phobias, isn't it, things like that. It's just that if you come to the meditation with a particular model in your mind, then you may very well succeed in getting what that model tells you you might get, but you may not succeed in becoming enlightened. That's all.

So if you come with the meditation with the Freudian idea that there's a subconscious, that there's a super ego and an id, then you'll be looking for that and thinking that it's somewhere around and you may find it. You might not become enlightened. That's the problem. That's the first thing.

And secondly, that of course, the whole genius you might say of the Buddha's teaching is that he left a psychological blueprint. He actually left a psychological paradigm so that when you work with that psychology, then you not only get the benefit of therapy - because you couldn't possibly have a neurotic Buddha - you also get the enlightenment.

Now, when you get to be enlightened, then you can say, well, is this it, or is there more than this? He's not putting it to us, remember, as a belief factor, something that we have to experiment with and try out for ourselves. The doctrine is *ehipassiko*, come and try it. Come and try it, come and see.

So my criticism is of people coming to do Vipassanā meditation with the wrong model in their minds. And that's what I get when I do interviews. That's what I find. I find the person hasn't got the Buddhist model in their mind. So it creates a certain confusion. It doesn't create the results. The main confusion is concerned with this business of the relationship we have to our emotional life, our thought life. And that's really what you've got to catch to stop this round of reconditioning ourselves.

CHAPTER 15

Fear

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses one of the most universal human experiences: fear. He explains how meditation practice allows us to encounter fear before we label and categorize it, revealing it as simply bodily sensations and mental-physical turbulence rather than a solid entity to flee from.*
>
> *The talk emphasizes the crucial difference between fear itself and our fear of fear—showing how the latter creates suffering through avoidance and suppression. Bhante guides practitioners through the process of developing bravery by learning to sit steadily with uncomfortable emotions, neither pushing them away nor getting caught in psychological analysis about their origins.*
>
> *Drawing on the Buddha's teachings about being "in the body and mind, but not of it," this instruction reveals how to cultivate the witness consciousness that can observe difficult states without being hijacked by them. The discussion extends beyond formal meditation to practical applications in daily life, addressing how to maintain Right Awareness when fear arises in action.*
>
> *This teaching offers invaluable guidance for anyone working with anxiety, panic, or other challenging emotional states, showing how these experiences can become doorways to deeper understanding of the mind's true nature.*

Fear.

What the meditation is trying to do is trying to get you in contact with fear before you call it fear. What's fear before you recognize it as fear? What is it? It's a bit nauseating. It's an uncomfortable feeling in the body. As soon as the mind recognises it as fear, it categorises it, blocks it. And as soon as it's done that, it'll react. It'll start being afraid of fear. And that's how we suppress stuff. We just push it away with fear. Don't want to see it. So you can't get right down there, you've got to go through those two barriers.

So when fear arises, this is in your meditation now, when fear arises, you first of all have to hold steady and just feel that panic. See, the panic's the fear of the fear, which is making you run. You just hang on in there, you wait for it to die down. And then what you're building up is bravery, isn't it? Bravery is being able to stand in the midst of fear, not move. So you stand there. And then as your reaction goes away, you're still shaking

from the fear. So then you get interested in it, not as an emotion. Because that immediately brings up all sorts of concepts and ideas. You can even get into a wild goose chase of trying to find out why you're afraid. Get into a personal therapy.

When you get into a personal therapy, just remind yourself that it's the deluded trying to find out how they're deluded. And the definition of delusion is, you don't know where the delusion is, so you wouldn't be deluded. So, when fear comes up and you try and chase some historical moment when all this fear was gathered, then actually all you're doing is not facing the fear. You're trying to get behind it or before it. And even if you did remember the occasion, would it help? So okay, it was when your mother hit you with a banana across the ear when you were three years old. So what? You're still stuck with the fear. You're still stuck with the aftermath.

So one has to get into the feel of it. So then you point your attention to the quality of its feeling, its sensations, the sensations it's calling. And as you go into it, you taste it. You get a feel for fear. And you just sit in the midst of that.

And when you sit in the midst of fear, what's happening? It's just a mental, physical turbulence, isn't it? It's like a bit of bad weather running through the organism, isn't it? You're just sat there just with this nausea or something. It's pitting your stomach or you might have it in your chest. You're just sitting there, that's it. You babysit. Just sit with it.

And as you're sitting with it, you might notice that it's a process. You might notice that there's no such thing as, this is fear. It's just a set of arising and passing away of sensations. They're just little sensations. And you might get that feeling that actually, to be in the midst of that isn't suffering. It's only suffering when you start reacting to it. It's only suffering when the fear of fear arises.

And then when you get comfortable with the fear, it's okay, you want more of it. You just sat there with it and said, well, come on, let's show your face. It's like a snake, show your face. So we just let it come up, let it come up.

Now, when you let things come up like that, because you're not identifying with it, I am afraid, because you're not pushing it away, feeding the system with fear, with more fear, because you're not turning away in aversion, because you're not trying to seek its origin, because you're not trying to do anything with it, you're therefore not empowering it at all. In which case, like any energy form, it has entropy. It will die away. It dies away.

And then you recognize that actually all you have to do with fear is sit with it. Hug it. I don't want to sound too New Agey there, but just sit with it. And then it passes. It passes. And that's where your confidence comes. And then you translate that to all your

negative states. Depression, stress, whatever it is. And you realize you don't have to do anything at all. You just have to sit in the midst of the flames. That's all. And it arises and passes away. And that's it. End of fear. Guaranteed forty years, if you're lucky, because there's a lot down there.

It's not as though you're going to get rid of it. So any ideas of getting rid of fear is also a subtle aversion. You mustn't have any opinion about it. What you're really trying to discover is just how to be with it in a non-reactive way. In so doing, you find, as it were, a place within yourself which is aloof. It's up above. Even though you're in it, you're not of it. So that's what the Buddha's teaching. That's the position we have to take. In the body and mind, in the heart, but not of it.

So that sense of being aloof, of being an observer, an experiencer, a witness. You can get there by just an act of will, by saying, you know, this is an object. You can point to it and say fear. As soon as you point to something, it's an object. So it can't be you, it can't be me. You're already creating a distance just by recognizing it's there. That's not the end point to be an observer. The end point is pure observing. Even that sense of some body observing disappears. But that just arises naturally. You don't have to work at that.

So that's fear. I wouldn't worry about it. There's nothing around that in terms of how you meditate with it, how you actually sit with it. The good thing about strong emotions is that you've, generally speaking, got no problems with concentration.

You have to be aware of your reactions to it too. That's all. Come off all head stuff. As soon as you start thinking, imaging something, cut. Come down to the body. Because that's how an emotion develops itself, through thought. It's through the technique of imaginative thinking that emotions develop themselves. You all know that from when somebody says some little thing that upsets you in the morning and then quite unwittingly you keep thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it. By the evening you're chucking them out of the window and doing all sorts of nasty things and all day you've made them insult you. And they only did it once. And it's just because that little irritation has grown and grown through the force of our imagination.

So imagination, any thought around fear, you just recognize it as fear and then you come back into the body. So doing you stop it. So now that feeling of fear has only one place to come out, which is through the body as a feeling. So if you think of the mind as an energy system like the weather, this is just a bit of a storm coming up, let it come and let it pass away.

So now, in daily life, of course, it's a different position. When you're meditating, you're at the interface, you might say, between consciousness and thoughts, consciousness and emotions, consciousness and sensations in the body. When you're meditating like that, ask yourself, where's the personality? It's only when you get up and speak and do that suddenly a personality appears, a personal writing. When you're looking inside yourself, what do you see? A thought? An emotion? So this becoming of a personality is a different position. You're in now the flow of your actions and your speech.

So now, when fear comes up, or anxiety comes up in action, then, as it were, we've still got to try to maintain just that sense of knowing it's there. Knowing it's there. And because of that knowing it's there, you've lifted yourself out of it. Even though this is saying, run, run, run, run, you keep walking. Because you've not fallen into the delusion of the fear. So even though the fear is tearing at you and they're saying, run, run, run, run, you keep walking, you keep walking. Because you're above it.

And if you feel it's the same thing, when the panic comes, you say, just stop, hang on in there. You can't handle it, run. It's alright. And then when it passes, just reflect on that. Hmm, that's interesting. And so in other words, you've got to take your meditation, this insight, into daily life. And don't worry if you so-called don't succeed, because all that's shown is the strength of our conditioning. So that takes a little humility. This is the way it is at the moment. But you work gently against it.

Even if you have a very strong fear, like obsessional stuff. One person who worked with me had problems with contamination. Couldn't go near certain areas that had been contaminated with certain substances. And I was just trying really to, through the meditation, to get her to have enough confidence that she could stay within that fear, and then to try to get the person to walk into that contaminated area.

So, in this case it didn't work that way. If you take that as an example, we all have fear, we all have anxieties and this and that, so it's a case of knowing that it can't kill you, it's only an emotion that comes out. And then just building up through your own self, through your own reflection to move towards that area which is dangerous. Hang on in there. Stay there, just keep moving towards it.

Now ultimately, what's the ultimate point? The ultimate point is the loss of fear of fear. And when you've lost your fear of fear, what's going to frighten you? It's at that point that fear drops away. And that's why, through your meditation, you should see that there's a possibility of the end of fear, the complete ending of fear.

Yes, of course that's difficult. I mean, you can take an absolutist stance and say that all fear is false projection, but obviously there is a level where it becomes inappropriate, shall we say. It's not fixed to the actual situation. As the case that I've just pointed out, this particular person, if some substance or other, if she thought that some substance or other was in this room, she couldn't go into it. And it was irrational. She was irrational. It wasn't as though she was crazy. But she couldn't go into that room.

So often you can perceive that your fear is irrational. For instance, if you have, on holiday, you have a fear of jumping off the high board at the swimming pool. Fear is irrational, isn't it? So, if you have that fear, you go up there and do it. You keep doing it until the fear, until you've actually, until you've no fear of it. But in so doing it with meditation, you're actually learning how to be with fear and not to let it hijack you.

Now, there comes that shady area where you don't know whether it's fear or not, whether it's appropriate fear or not. In which case, what can you do? You have to test it. You can only investigate a situation and find out whether in fact your fear was correct or not. How else? You don't know. That's the problem with delusion. You just don't know. You have to keep testing things.

Absolutely. I mean, there should be, shall we say, that background fear, for want of a better word, whenever we're crossing a busy road, isn't it? It's just that the fear then becomes a guardian, where you never actually feel the fear, but the fear is running as it were in the background because you know if you make a mistake you're going to get run over.

This is much the same as shame, dread, guilt. When we do something which is unskillful, unwholesome, then these emotions arise, these states of mind arise. But what the Buddha calls them, guardians of society. Not in the sense that they are wholesome because we've done something wrong, but when we've done something wrong and we've felt the inner reaction of shame, dread and guilt, then as it were, it's just like that background program.

So the Buddha says, you can get sensitive enough so that as soon as an unskillful, unwholesome idea arises in the mind, it recoils, it recoils like a feather from the flame. And that's that inner conditioning about, well if I do this, this is what's going to happen. And I dare say that there are inbuilt fear mechanisms just in the mind itself, which is self-protective.

But that's not the same as what we're talking about, in a sense, because that just arises and passes away when it's pure. Oops, don't go there. That's it, it's gone. It's like the heart telling you, you know, there's danger there. That's totally different from the normal fears and anxieties that we feel ordinarily.

Oh, well, that's what I meant about as soon as you label it, you categorize it and then all your history comes in and before you know it, you're stuck with an ogre, where in fact it was just a little tickling in the stomach. A little tickle in the solar plexus. That's the problem with history.

I mean, my own personal opinion is that the fully liberated person wouldn't feel fear at all, apart from that fear of just knowing something is dangerous, as a background understanding, you might say. Just on the grounds that there's no association at all anymore, there's no identity or wrong understanding of what this body, mind and heart is. Once it's not you, it's not a big problem, is it?

You can intellectualize, you can rationalize and say, well, I know my body's not me, it's going to die, etc., etc. But then when the doctor tells you you've got six weeks to go, you freak out. So there's a difference between an intellectual grasp of something, an understanding of something, and actually moving to that level of consciousness which no longer identifies with the body.

But I dare say it's root stuff. I mean, the place where these emotions are kept, the amygdala or something, I think that's what they call it, comes from reptilian life, doesn't it? I mean, it's part of that whole evolution of basic life. The reason that our emotions, it seems, are civilized is because they're all channeled through the front part of the brain, which is new to human beings, it seems. But when they escape, that's when you get the road rage, computer rage, things like that.

I had the experience last week of leaving the barn for a week and travelling around and staying in different houses, and I found it very difficult to keep my meditation practice going and the mindfulness. I'm wondering if you had any pointers towards maintaining practice on the road.

Yeah, well, that's the big difficulty, isn't it? First of all, you just have to recognise that a place like this, a meditation centre, has special conditions. People try not to disturb you for a start. Generally speaking, people try to respect your silence and respect what you're doing, which isn't so in the outside world. So you'll never get the same quality in ordinary daily life as what you do in the centre until there's been a real purge of the heart. So I think it's unrealistic to think that you're just going to walk out of a meditation centre or the barn like this and take it with you.

So it's a case of recognising that you have to put in some coping mechanisms. It's very much a case of keeping up the practice morning and evening. The morning is a time when you remind yourself what level of consciousness you want to be at during the day. And the evening - I don't mean just flop into bed, just fall asleep - in the evening, say after work or before you eat, sit and just let whatever you've accumulated during the day arise and pass away. Then, of course, you have a very pleasant meal and a more pleasant evening.

The other thing is just simple things like if you find yourself rushing, stop. One thing at a time. Breathe. When you're talking to somebody, remind yourself to listen. If you've got the answer ready before they finish, you're not listening. You can't listen and answer at the same time. The brain can't do that. So you're presuming what they're going to say and you've already given them an answer. So it's just relaxing into what's happening. And of course what you find is that when you do that, the other person does it.

Yesterday it was rather funny really. I'd gone to a cafe with somebody to have a coffee and then we were walking back because we were trying to open another bank account for this trust. As we were walking there, the pace sort of lifted and halfway through, Anne - some of you know Anne Ashton - she said to me, "God, you're walking fast." And I said, "I thought you were walking fast." And we were just firing off each other without knowing it. By the end of it, I was running to this damn bank. So it's a case of just recognising that - perhaps the coffee was too strong, maybe that's what did it.

If we're sharp enough, if we can maintain that sharpness of mindfulness and recognise that mindfulness or awareness doesn't have to be trapped into one single object, it can be quite wide. Even now, as you're listening to me, and that's where the point of your attention is, you can still be slightly aware of the bird chirping out there and just the colours in the room. It's like that wide awareness. And to get that, you have to be very relaxed. As soon as you get tight, the whole thing contracts. And so it's that effort just to keep relaxing - feel your shoulders, just let the breath go for a little while. Then you just have to keep doing it and keep doing it and keep doing it, and just very slowly you try to take life easy.

And then little reflections like, does it help to rush? Does it help to get irritated? What does it do? What's the point of it? It doesn't mean that we don't get irritated and we don't rush. It's just that we're trying to slowly work against these old habits which are deeply ingrained and are reinforced by society. This is the problem. If you were to stay here for a year or so, then it would begin to undermine a certain conditioning. But the effort has to be made because the one feeds into the other. If you meditate for a

week or something and then go out and have sex, drugs and rock and roll, then you've had it. You come back and you've still got these headaches and backaches and it's as though you've got to take it into daily life.

And don't expect great change - very slow. It comes over a long period of time. I remember once when I came back from the East meditating, and a very old friend of mine came up who's a long-time meditator and his first question was, "Is there a quicker way?" That was the only thing he was actually concerned with. Is there a quicker way than this? I'm afraid that - well, if you find one, come and tell me about it.

Stopping is a very strong technique. If you leave a room, for instance, and you've picked up a bit of irritation there, if you just open the door, close the door mindfully, and then just stand for a moment and just recognise what's happening. And then just wait for it to die out a little. Then you find it doesn't snowball. You don't take it with you into the next room and off it goes. So you ratchet things up all the time.

Any other questions?

Just a question about right effort, that balance between too much effort and not enough, the technique to find the best way to concentrate but not put too much pressure on it. But, you know, staying in an easy... Yeah, just in particular meditation.

Ah. Well, I've always thought that's pretty easy, actually, to get over that one. Because we are Westerners, we have to achieve. Okay? So make your achievement just being aware. That is the achievement, to be aware. That's it. You don't have to worry about insights. Just be aware of what's happening. Put the whole of your effort in just knowing what's actually happening now. As soon as you put any expectation to it, as soon as you put an idea to it, then of course you are bringing some sort of extra to that present moment-to-moment awareness. So you're not looking for anything, you're just looking at what's coming up. And to do that, you have to relax. So your posture should be held up at the spine and everything else relaxed. You relax on the object.

And to keep the attention there, don't worry about concentration. Raise the interest. Just ask yourself, when did you ever lose concentration if you were interested in something? It comes naturally. If the interest isn't there, if there's boredom, then you have to say, "Well, now that's interesting." Any object which comes, you have to raise that question mark. And it's a childlike curiosity. And it's questioning, do I really know? Do I really know?

So I sit there and I think, well, as we were discussing, fear. Do I really, really know what fear is before I name it? Do I really, really know what an emotion is before I conceptualise it? Because that's the process in the mind. First there's a sensation or a feel-

ing, then there's some sort of labelling or perceptual process, and then the history comes in, and that's it. Even in very simple things like, you might see one of these flowers. So you might name it, you know, a rose or something. But do you know it? Do you know that particular rose? Or have you just looked at it and it's just fitted into a pattern of a rose so then you've seen it. But have you gone up and really looked at the colour, looked at the veins in the petals, seen the shape of the petals, have you actually smelt it? But we're happy just to say that's a rose and then we think we know it.

So it's raising that curiosity as to what is actually happening now and recognising that that is the achievement. That's it. That's all the Buddha's teaching. *Satipaṭṭhāna* - awareness and intuitive intelligence. It's just the establishment of that. And it comes when you have right attitude. You just want to know what's happening now. So you just rest your eye on it. So you can practise this on ordinary things. So the next time you're out in the garden there and see a flower, just rest your eye on it. You don't look for anything, just rest your eye on it and see what the perceptual faculty is doing. Observe how the mind observes the flower. Just be aware of where the eyes are going. And that's it.

And when you catch yourself with wrong effort - and you know that because you get tight. I mean the other side of course is that you lose energy and you fall asleep. That's not so painful. But the other side when you get tight and you start feeling nasty about yourself and all that, then just go into the feelings of it, the sensations of it. There's something crept in there about achieving it, that's all. So, as you know, the mind's very subtle. You think you're doing it right, and then you find out afterwards you weren't doing it right. But that's alright. Just to find out that you weren't doing it right is a step forward. And sometimes you find out you didn't do it right, and now you think, "Well, from now on I will do it right." And a little bit later you realise you've done it wrong again. So, that's alright. That's how slippery the mind is.

Does that help?

Any other questions? Anything else? Is it time for tea then?

CHAPTER 16

Forgiveness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h02

Drawing inspiration from the story of Aṅgulimāla, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents a profound exploration of forgiveness through the lens of Buddhist psychology. Using the Buddha's teaching on paṭicca-samuppāda (Dependent Origination), he demonstrates how we create our own suffering through our reactions to harm, rather than being victims of others' actions. The talk begins with guided contemplations to understand our psychological responses to being hurt and causing harm, then examines how avijjā (ignorance/nescience) is the root mistake that leads to all suffering.

Bhante explains that since we cannot truly cause others to suffer psychologically—only be catalysts for their own conditioned reactions—we are fundamentally innocent, having acted from delusion rather than inherent evil. This insight makes genuine forgiveness possible. The talk addresses challenging topics including childhood trauma, existential guilt from Western religious conditioning, and the apparent injustice of those who 'get away with' harmful actions.

Practical guidance is offered for releasing victim suffering and victimizer guilt through vipassanā meditation, including a 'four steps to determination' method for transforming unwanted mental habits. The teaching emphasizes that true forgiveness is neither forgetting nor excusing, but a complete letting go of hurt and revenge through understanding the deeper psychology of how suffering actually arises.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

This talk came about because a friend of mine, who's a musician, wanted to write music around the theme of Aṅgulimāla, as some of you may know. The story of Aṅgulimāla is a murdering thief, but he meets the Buddha and undertakes the training and before he dies becomes fully enlightened. So there's hope for us all. He wanted me to write something which he could attach his music to, and having done that I wanted to add something to it to explain the psychology as to how somebody so steeped in evil might arrive at enlightenment even within this very lifetime.

So the first part I'll ask you to do some imaginative work and then we'll do some explanation. Then at the end you can try and have a go at practicing forgiving all those people whom you've murdered and forgiving yourself, rather, and forgiving all those people who've done you harm.

Just try this one for size, shall we say. You can close your eyes and just, what I want you to try and do, and just catch the process of your psychology. Just imagine now, if you can think of an actual occasion in your life, that might be even better, but just think of an occasion now where somebody says something which hurts you. It might be just a flippant thing, like "you're an idiot" or something. So if you can imagine that, and just let the insult come. Now, just catch your reaction.

So I wonder what the reaction might have been. Irritation? Anger? Indignation? And what might it lead you to once you've left that person? What might it lead you to? A slander? A knife in the back?

So now just try something else on a similar line. Instead of somebody saying something awful to you, they actually do something to you. Perhaps they push you, or they stick their finger into you, or at worst they bop you on the nose. Can you imagine that? Can you see what your reaction might be? I would suggest it's much the same unless they're much bigger than you then you'd probably get a bit fearful.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is did that person cause us suffering? Do you think they were the direct cause of your suffering?

So now turn that one around now and just take somebody whom you're going to insult. It might be the same person of course. So as you just make that scene in your mind, you see, offer them your insult and just see how you feel about that. I would suggest that maybe you feel a little satisfied by it. A job well done. Pleased. Supposing they pushed in front of you in a queue or something. You got rather angry about it and you pushed them out. You used a bit of physical force there. Can you imagine yourself doing that? So I would suggest it's much the same as above, only a little stronger.

Now take that person and let them come back to you and say that they're really upset and you've seen that you've been the cause of their being upset. Now how do you feel about that? A little remorseful, a bit guilty, shame.

Let's take an occasion which is much worse. Supposing you've unfortunately had one or two drinks and you knock somebody over on the road. Now what's your first reaction there? Just play it through your mind. Shock, fear, dread of consequences when other people find out, shame when you realize what you've done to the person, remorse.

That's the end of our little escapade of trying to imagine things, just to get you in touch with all those emotions, all those states of mind that revolve around those actions where we're hurting somebody or somebody's hurting us.

So now, if we just take the process of that psychology, what we have is the Wheel of Dependent Origination. And what the Buddha is teaching us there is that whatever, just taking the first instance, whatever somebody does to us, has to stop at the point of reception, at the point where we perceive something. So if somebody called me "you fathead," that's not very nice, is it? They call me fathead, you see, so what actually happens is that I've just heard these words, fathead.

If somebody, then having heard those words, I take them into myself. I take them into myself and I define them as unpleasant. They are, aren't they? So they're unpleasant. So this person hasn't actually made me think they're unpleasant. I'm just defining them as unpleasant within myself. If I didn't speak English I'd probably smile.

So there's something I've done there whereby I've defined this as unpleasant. Now I've taught myself that when something unpleasant arises I have to get rid of it. I want to push it away. So that's my reaction to something unpleasant and again it's done by me within me because of my past conditioning.

So we can see if we look at our psychology very carefully, the person who's called us fathead hasn't actually caused me to suffer. It's the way I've responded to it. If the person who's just called me fathead is reckoned by everybody just to be a bit loopy, then I wouldn't have that reaction. I'd probably just say, "Oh, well, they're a bit daft" or something. So everything, all the hurt that I get when somebody insults me or somebody says something cruel to me is my own inner reaction. I can't blame them for making me suffer.

If somebody now pulls my nose, or tugs my ears, or gives me a shove, where does that stop? It stops at the physical body, doesn't it? It stops at a sensation on the body. But then, inwardly, I see what the person's done, I feel what the person's done to me, and again, I define it as unpleasant. Again, I respond to it with irritation, with anger, with hurt. But that's all happening in me as a response to what this person has done.

I can't say that this person has made me suffer. They've given me, shall we say, severe sensations on the nose, which I've defined as pain, but pain isn't suffering. Pain as such is just sensation, no matter how severe it is. What makes us suffer, what makes it hard to stay with, is our reaction to it, our inability to be patient with it. So it's the internal reaction we have to these things which is actually causing us to suffer.

So those are your links on this wheel of dependent origination which remember is the Buddha's paradigm as to how we cause suffering for ourselves. How we cause suffering for ourselves.

So now you can widen that out and you begin to recognize that nobody in the world can cause you psychological pain. Which is hard to accept because until now we've been very happy blaming everybody else. Parents, society, Tony Blair, all these people have made me suffer, you see. But now when I look into my psychology, I can't say that anymore.

If we now turn it the other way, I now say to somebody, "you fathead." Now, the same process is happening within them. I can't say that I've caused them to suffer, but I have to recognize what's happening in me. What's happening in me is that I am developing a conditioning of hate, a conditioning of cruelty.

Now I might get immediate satisfaction by watching somebody cringe when I call them "you fathead," but inside me I have this turbulence, this desire to be cruel, this desire to get my own back, the hatred within me. And the effect of that is that, not surprisingly, people start staying away. They don't hang about. They don't want to talk to me. So my cruelty, my hatred, goes into the world and the world moves away from me. And it causes me to be lonely, and if I don't see that, I then blame others for not being friendly, for not being open-hearted to me, and I begin to hate them the more.

I'm in a whirlwind, taking me downwards into a perpetual state of hatred and grumbling and whinging, which can keep you awake. Worse still, if I actually hit somebody or push somebody, then that's a more violent act. And therefore the inner violence is even worse.

So here we have a situation where I think I'm hurting somebody, but in fact I'm only hurting myself. So you might ask, well, what stops you from hurting somebody anyway, you see? Well, when we've contacted the hurt that I feel when somebody insults me or somebody harms me, then even though I recognize that I'm the cause of it, it's out of compassion for the other that you don't, that you are not the catalyst whereby they cause themselves to suffer. So you begin to take responsibility not to enter into situations, not to confront people in such a way that you know you're just pressing their buttons.

So, the whole psychology around doing harm is always centred on us. We ourselves create an inner turbulence when we do harm, and when somebody does harm to us, it's we that create within us our own suffering.

Now, although that may seem at first to land us in a load of suffering is the very fact that we create our own suffering that will allow us to escape it in the end. That's the purpose of meditation. That's the purpose of *vipassanā*. So you can see these mechanisms that are causing us to suffer. And then you realize that you must stop behaving like that, which means that in your daily life you have to maintain that sense of sharp mindfulness, knowing your own habits.

Even if you respond in an old way, you don't indulge it. Even though somebody says to you, "you fathead," you see, it stays right there at the point of hurt. You're prepared to let the hurt hurt because you know that is your own personal response to such a thing. But you don't allow yourself to begin to fantasize to get your own back.

So if somebody insults you once, as you know, by the end of the day, they've insulted you a thousand times. And the punishment for their insult has got worse. At first, you just shouted at them in your mind. But by the time you go to bed, you're hanging them. You're chucking them out of the window. So remember, it's through the process of thinking and fantasizing that we are developing these states of mind. This is how we develop our states of mind, through fantasy, through this process of thinking. And it's not a great distance between thinking about doing something and actually doing it.

So what the vipassanā or the insight meditation is teaching us to do is to stay right there with the hurt, to let the hurt die away. Now, when the hurt dies away, first of all, we're stopping it developing, but more important, we're actually undercutting that old conditioning of being hurt when somebody calls us a name or does something which insults us, but actually going underneath it so that there will come a time when somebody might say something which in the past you would have felt to be hurtful but actually it just stops at the sense door. You just hear the word. There isn't that reaction.

So you can see that taking full responsibility for our inner suffering using the vipassanā to allow things to burn out and to heal is actually the process of psychotherapy, healing the heart, purifying the heart, that would be impossible to do if you think the other person is making you suffer, in which case you'd have to change everybody in the world because a lot of people go around calling other people fatheads.

So even though it's difficult sometimes for us to recognize that nobody can hurt us, actually, that's our salvation. That's the healing. That's the liberation from suffering once we've actually realized that.

With that, there's the other side where we hurt people. So it's recognizing that even though we can't cause somebody to suffer, by actually wanting to hurt people, we're creating a turbulence within our mind, which is suffering, and we're creating a habit

which eventually begins to push people away from us. So once we recognize that the serpent bites back, the serpent is biting its own tail, then you realize that that behaviour has to stop. So again the purpose of the vipassanā is to sit with it in silence to allow it to burn away, but then we have to maintain that sense of sharp mindfulness in daily life so that we don't fall into those old habits.

And what we discover is that very slowly, over a period of time, you know, 20 odd years, those habits of trying to do harm to everybody just fade away. And the opposite takes its place. Nature abhors a vacuum. We're talking here about transformation. So where there was cruelty, now there's compassion. Where there's hate, now there's love. There's openness. There's open-heartedness. Warm-heartedness.

Just as a little aside, just talking about these things that we suffer. So for instance, we have within us a mechanism that decides whether something is good or bad, skillful or unskillful. We call it our conscience. Now, just because our conscience which is the judge remember judging us, just because our conscience says something is wrong or something is bad doesn't mean to say we have to accept it because sometimes this judge is a tyrant, sometimes the conscience is too tight and it creates a life of dread, creates a life of unnecessary shame. On the other hand this conscience can sometimes be very loose so that we don't feel appropriate shame, appropriate dread when we do things.

So we haven't got to trust our conscience. There has to be some reflection about it and talking to other people whom you trust so that there's a balance in the mind knowing what is good, what is bad, at a basic moral level, but remember that at a more refined level, it's what's skillful and unskillful. And when the Buddha talks about what is skillful and unskillful, he's always talking about that which leads to the liberation and that which leads to suffering.

Those two emotions that we feel, dread and shame, shame is that feeling of loss of self-esteem, we haven't lived up to our own standards, that's why we blush, and dread is the fear of consequences, the fear of consequences. Now when we do something harmful and we feel shame and dread in a sense that is not to be seen as a punishment. That's how people would look upon it. It's not to be seen as a punishment, but as warnings.

When we accept the factors of shame and dread, and they become part and parcel of our psychology, they prevent us from doing things. Because as soon as you think, "well, I'll do that," there comes just that little bite of shame, just that little bite of dread, and it stops you. And it's when shame and dread are behaving like this that the Buddha calls them guardians of society.

You can see from the way, for instance, a lot of the youth behave, that the line they draw about shame and dread is pretty low. They can do certain things which they're not ashamed of, nor do they dread any consequence. So you can see that once these reactions are lowered, you're going to get behaviour which is unsociable. When there's no shame and dread there, then we're talking about psychopaths, we're talking about sociopaths. It's an actual psychological disease.

Remorse, on the other side, is suddenly feeling that compunction, that desire to be rid of all the guilt and the shame and to want to be reconciled with the person whom you've hurt or indeed who's hurt you. So remorse is a natural feeling which comes after we accept that we've done wrong. And in our meditation, we have to sit with that. If you try and block it out, you'll just harden your heart. You must respond to that desire to be reconciled. To go to the person, if necessary. But in some way, that remorse has to be answered.

And it's going through that cycle of guilt, shame, feeling bad about oneself, fearful of consequences, feeling remorse, and bringing that remorse to an end by reconciliation, that there's not only a process of healing at that particular event, but also undermining that whole conditioning. So eventually we don't get ourselves into those corners.

Now what helps us is that our conditioning is always fairly much the same. This is what we mean by *kamma*. We're always doing the same thing. We're always making the same mistake. If you look back on your life or whatever, you'll always see that there's a trait within us which is always popping up, given the occasion it comes up. And it's catching that right before it comes up and letting it go, not responding to it, that undermines that whole trait. And why do we do it?

Because we've recognised it leads nowhere but to suffering, to our discomfort.

So now we have to go a little deeper because... In a sense, that tells us how we cause ourselves to suffer, and it tells us how to get rid of it. But the next point on the wheel of dependent origination to investigate is that whole point at the beginning of it, which is *avijjā*.

Now, *avijjā* is translated as ignorance. That's how it's normally translated. But in English, ignorance has a feeling of stupidity about it. But that's not really the meaning. The meaning, I came across this word, nescience, which fits it more beautifully. And nescience just means don't know. I just don't know.

Now, in the Buddha's understanding, when consciousness arises, it arises from a base of don't know. And it moves into this body and mind, body mind and heart, and it simply presumes this is what it is. Therefore you form eventually a concept of yourself:

I am who I am, I'm here, I'm my personality, my character, I'm my body, I'm my emotions etc. etc. See? That little mistake is actually the fundamental cause for all the bit that we've just discussed.

Now if we go back on that and we recognise that right at the very beginning there's been a mistake, it was a mistake, that if it weren't for that mistake we would never have done any harm, then you begin to understand that at fundament we're innocent. It's only because of a mistake, not because of something culpable, not because of something blameworthy. We just made a mistake.

Now, I'll give you an example of that just from one of my experiences when I was in Sri Lanka. They had these very nasty little flies called Ohopatua. Have I said that properly? Ohopatua. They're just little gnats, they fly in the air, and they have a nasty habit of biting you and leaving you with a very itchy pimple for about three days. And sometimes they even can creep through a mosquito net.

So here I am with these little pimples and scratching them, and I'm wondering what to do, and I suddenly realise that a spider has built a web in the kuthi, in the room, in the hut. So I say to myself, that's it, I've got to get spiders in and that'll get rid of them. So I have little signs up saying, this way please.

Well, within a few days, there were hundreds of them. They were everywhere, all around the room. And I thought, well, this is really crazy. And it was getting to a point where I was so bitten and miserable that I decided, you know, I've just got to leave. I've got to go up country somewhere. Just get out of these flies.

Happily, just at that time, a friend of mine, a Canadian monk came and I told him, looking really grim that this was it. And I showed him my pimples and I said, look at this. And he looked around and he said, these spiders webs, don't you get rid of spiders, the webs out of your room? I said, no. He said, well, they breed on those.

So here's a wonderful occasion where innocent ignorance leads me into suffering. Now, at fundament, that's all the Buddha's saying. All he's saying is that we've made a mistake. We're never meant to do any harm. And so at fundament, we are innocent. If we weren't, if it was actually part of our essential nature not to be innocent, then how could we ever become enlightened?

Just one or two reflections on existential guilt. This really refers to people who have been brought up in Christianity or a religion which has a god. Because according to those religions, we are born evil. In Buddhism, evil and all that is a secondary thing, which means that Western people can suffer from what you might call an existential

guilt. In other words, they feel themselves to be essentially evil. In so doing, you can see the necessity of having someone to intercede, somebody who can save, can take away that essential evil, and thereby find some reconciliation with God.

Now, if you're a Westerner and you're brought up on that, then that will probably be somewhere in your psyche. So that also has to be suffered and allowed to pass away. And sometimes that goes very deep. And when you couple it with the idea of eternal damnation, then that's bad news.

So what we have to do is go underneath that and really accept those sorts of feelings. And they can be extraordinarily nasty, like fear and dread and all that sort of stuff. But you have to stay there, you have to feel it, you have to investigate it and recognise your reaction to it, which is of course that we don't want to feel that. And eventually as that evaporates, that essential innocence arises.

Now, there is a movement in Christianity where they don't talk about original sin. That's what they're referring to. Most of you will know the myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But you'll also find that there are movements in Christianity that, instead of talking about that, talk about the original blessing. In other words, the fact was that Adam and Eve were born in innocent happiness. So in that sense they come closer to a Buddhist understanding.

So there is an end to guilt, there is an end to shame, and there is therefore an end to forgiveness.

Just two things that always come up whenever I discuss this. First of all, why is it that some people get away with it? I mean, they seem to die... take Stalin, for instance. He died fairly happily in bed, having murdered 40 million people. And it seems to have got everything he wanted, although he must have been in a dreadful state of mind in a way, because he only worked at night and... I think on one trip he had five trains going, all giving the impression that he was on one of them, constantly in dread of being assassinated. But take that to one side and just say, well, some people seem to get away with it.

Well, here, of course, we have to, in a sense, open towards the acceptance of the idea of rebirth, the idea that perhaps this isn't the only life we've ever lived, and it's not the only life we're going to live, and that there is some sort of justice in the process of the world in which individual consciousnesses work their way up towards the enlightenment through a process of being born and being reborn.

However, if a person finds that difficult to accept, it's not actually necessary in order to get the benefits of the psychology that we've just been explaining, because the benefits of that are immediate. Through the practice of insight meditation, to seeing that we

cause ourselves suffering, and to see that we cause ourselves suffering when we cause others, when we press other people's buttons, is immediate. We immediately stop behaving in certain ways and we feel happier for it.

But in a cosmic sense, this was one of the insights of the Buddha. It was part of his enlightenment, when he saw that people were dying and going elsewhere, and that a great deal of the reason for their going where they were going was because of their bodily behaviour, which creates these dispositions within us.

And finally, there's a real difficult one, which is very hard for people to accept, who haven't come across this psychology before. And that's, of course, the suffering of innocence, especially the suffering of a child. But it is the same. It is the same psychology. What is horrific to us about a child's situation is of course its absolute vulnerability and its inability through language or conceptual reasoning to find any distance or objectivity to the suffering that it's undergoing.

But still, the child ends up with a trauma and in a sense the rest of its life is working out that psychological trauma within itself. And it's very rare, I think, for a person not to have a childhood trauma somewhere. These childhood traumas are not simply caused, are not only caused by people who actually mean to do them harm. The very process of birth is a trauma, for heaven's sake.

So, the suffering in the child follows the same psychology, and that's why eventually, as adults, we can empty ourselves of this suffering. Now, for the person who harms a child, well, now that's something else, because they have to now bear the awful responsibility for that child's suffering. They might not be the direct cause of that suffering, but they were the catalyst that caused it.

And just to give you two wonderful examples that bring that home to us, the Moors murderer, Brady, was asked if he ever thought about the child victims that he tortured and murdered up here just in Lancashire. And he said, if I did that, it would drive me mad.

Now, some of you may have come across a book called The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat. Have you ever come across that one? It's a really good book. It's written by a psychologist called Oliver Sacks. And he's interested in brain damage and the way people are. The particular title refers to a man who couldn't distinguish objects. And as he was leaving the office after a talk, he simply grabbed his wife's head, thinking it was his hat. His wife I don't think is all that pleased.

In that same book there's a very interesting tale which definitely says something to Buddhists. There's a man who murders his daughter in such a vicious way that the facts of the case are not brought out in public in the court. They're just too horrific. This man could not remember a thing. So eventually they had to convict him as insane and they sent him to a secure prison for the mentally insane. This is in America. So they couldn't convict him as a straight criminal.

While he was there he acted seemingly quite normal and within a few years the staff had such confidence in him that they let him go out on bicycle rides. On one of these bicycle rides, a car hit him and he fell over and banged his head on the road. This had the effect of awakening, when he woke up from the concussion, of awakening in him what he'd actually done. And so the story goes, it took six months for the staff to restrain and stop him from committing suicide.

So eventually the harm that we do catches up on us and to harm innocence would leave us with an enormous sense of guilt and remorse.

So now we come to... well I'll just give you a final reflection on that concerning harm. There's a very famous simile of the saw which the Buddha gives. And he says, oh monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely, limb by limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to hatred towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. That's heavy, isn't it?

So now what I'd like to do is... I ask you to do another contemplation exercise. And the first one is, how do we free ourselves from a victim's suffering? So from the suffering that we feel when we've been victimised or when we've been a victim. And the second one is, how do we liberate ourselves from the suffering of being a victimiser? So I just want to go through these steps and you can close your eyes and just go through them. And then you'll get an idea of how it might work for you.

So the first one is how to let go of the suffering we feel when we've been hurt. So the first thing to recognise is that to forgive is not to forget. You have to be very careful. If you try and forget the hurt that's been given to you, then all you're doing is suppressing it and it's just working underground and it works as grudges and it just sabotages our lives. When we forgive somebody, we're not excusing them either. And sometimes we feel that if we forgive somebody, somehow in a secret way we're condoning what they're doing. So that's not forgiveness either. Forgiveness is just a change of attitude, a letting go of that hurt, letting go of revenge, and establishing within us that sense of compassion and forgiveness towards the person.

So the first thing, if you now take somebody who's hurt you, it can be somebody real, but not the big one. The first thing you have to, I think, recognise is that there's no need for us to punish them. They themselves will suffer the consequences of their own actions. That's the karmic law. So there's no need for us to seek revenge. And a Chinese proverb warns us, those who seek revenge should dig two graves.

The second thing is to remind ourselves that that person originally has made a mistake. It's by way of delusion that they've come to behave in this unskillful way. That fundamentally they are actually innocent and they didn't mean to do any harm. Sometimes it's good to have a dialogue with the person in your mind having done that, having as it were corrected our relationship to that person, we can then turn inward.

And just get in contact with the hurt we feel. You can run through the occasion. You can bring up the occasion when you were hurt. Now here you've got to be very careful not to be taken away by fantasy. So you've got to keep that attention as much as you can right at the physical base. The feelings around hurt. The anger that may still come up. The desire for revenge. Try and stay as close as you can to the body, to sensation, to feeling.

Now as those feelings begin to decrease, the next step would be to contemplate the other person's better nature. When all the hurt and the desire for revenge begins to decrease you can then begin to reform your relationship to that person. Try and see their better nature. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Send them good wishes from the heart. And if that's too difficult well at least an attitude of no harm. That's the base isn't it? No harm.

So that, as it were, sets our right relationship with the person, right attitude. Now, in the future, we can resolve not to approach that person concerning this occasion unless we're absolutely equanimous, which means we have to wait for the right time. And then when we decide that we are going to approach them, to almost talk as if you're a mediator. You'll be very careful not to put blame, not to lay it on them, but just to be clear about the feelings we felt. We have to take responsibility for our part in the incident. Takes two to tango. And the next thing is not to expect an apology. That's a presumption on our part. If they do so, well, of course, it's very healing. But it's not important to us that they should express an apology. The healing comes by this inner process.

Now sometimes of course we can't do anything because the person's moved on or they may have died. So we have to work with this process of reconciliation inward. Until all the emotional pain around the memory is just slowly drained away. Don't solidify

around it, don't get hard around it, just see it as a process. You can often just sit with an emotion and just say gently, not me, not mine. It's there, I'm looking at it. I'm experiencing it, so I can't be it.

So that's one way that you might try in the future to deal with suffering which comes because somebody has victimised you.

If we now go to the other side and consider some of the suffering that we've been a catalyst to in other people, where we've been the victimiser, then it might be a good start to just reflect on the fact that we are fundamentally deluded, that we've acted primordially out of a mistake, and that we are fundamentally innocent and therefore utter forgiveness of ourselves by ourselves is possible.

Then we have to convince ourselves that of course we do have a responsibility. We did play a role in causing that person harm, we were a catalyst. A catalyst in chemistry is something which causes a change, causes a change between two chemicals, but itself doesn't change. So the word I might have said to somebody doesn't change, or it just hits the same space, but it creates within the other a whole sequence of psychological events that causes them suffering. We have to take responsibility for that.

Sometimes we know how to press somebody's buttons too. We enjoy doing it. But when we do this we have to be careful not to take on false guilt. We're taking on false guilt if we take on their personal suffering.

So now we make resolutions not to do that again. So I was very careful about resolutions because you know the old phrase that the path to hell is paved with good resolutions. So it has to be realistic. These behaviour patterns are deeply ingrained. They've come to us over a long time. So we shouldn't be surprised if we keep making the mistake over and over again. So we have to accept that this process is going to be repeated and repeated and repeated. And what we're hoping is that given a length of time, the behaviour lessens, eventually dies away. But we still have to make these resolutions, these determinations.

And that determination has to be one of being really awake, really mindful. The alarm bell should go off whenever we enter a situation where we know we normally do something stupid, something silly, something unskillful.

Then there's the usual business of sitting with the remorse, the shame, the guilt which is in our hearts. So that's part of the process of *vipassanā* insight meditation. We can do that. And we can watch them as a process. We can see that if we push guilt away, push shame away, or push remorse away, that causes us more suffering. So there we're catching this process of how we cause ourselves to suffer.

We can so distance ourselves from those emotions within us that they become very objective. There's shame. There's the feelings of shame. There's the feelings of guilt. And just watch them as a process. Don't get involved by way of identity or possessing them. They're not me, not mine. These are the things that insight meditation teaches us.

Two of our most powerful reasons for hurting people is jealousy and hatred. All forms of hatred. So jealousy isn't just a simple covetousness. It's not just wanting what the other person wants, what the other person has. It's wanting what the other person has and hating them for having it.

So the antidote to that is having sat with that for a while to begin to rejoice in the other person's good fortune. This is what we mean by sympathetic joy. And that's a contemplation. When somebody wins the lottery, you rejoice for them. You're happy that a bit of the pound you spent went to their fortune. When your friend who went with you for the same job gets the job, you rejoice for them. This sort of thing undermines jealousy.

Hatred is undermined by seeing the other person in a different light. As we said before, to actually bring to mind their good qualities, so there's a balance of attitude towards them. And then finally, if it's possible, to meet with the person and express our remorse, express our sorrow. In the Visuddhimagga it also suggests that we offer them a gift when it's appropriate.

Now supposing at work you'd had a bit of an upset with somebody and you'd gone through this exercise. When you go to work and you're walking through that door of a corridor and they see you at the end of it, our ability to tell where people are at is very refined. We know from a person's body language, we know from what's on their face, even at quite a distance, whether they're friend or foe. And this person may be feeling themselves still hardened by what they did, or they may feel remorse themselves, or they may feel a desire to be reconciled rather. Just by having that attitude, it'll show on our face, it'll show on the way that we walk. So that they know there's a desire in us to be reconciled. So these things are really very important preparatory exercises, so that when we actually meet up with people whom we've hurt, they're open to our apology.

Now the fact is that, generally speaking, unless they've been fortunate enough to come to the Buddha's teaching about pain, they will definitely blame you for the suffering they're suffering. That's what they do. That's what people do. Now, that doesn't mean to say you have to take on their suffering, but there's no point in going into a great dissertation about how they're causing themselves suffering and that your insult didn't actually cause them to suffer. That won't do at all. All they think you're doing is trying to escape your responsibility.

So we apologise. That's not a problem. We apologise, but in our hearts we apologise for our part in the process. That's enough. You don't have to explain anything.

What happens now if the person refuses to forgive, harbours vengefulness, resentment? What can we do about that? We don't have an option, really, do we? We have to accept that this person now sees themselves as an enemy. So that will also create a reaction within us, maybe fear, maybe also a desire to set up battle formations. But because of this psychology they can't actually do us any harm. Outside they might, they might slander us, they might undermine us in all sorts of ways, but inwardly they're not doing us, they're not causing any suffering. So often when you get a person like that, it's often best just to stay out of their way. Because even the sight of you raises hackles. And hopefully there comes a time when you can be reconciled.

It also takes a bit of philosophy to recognise, well, when you do something into the world, you never know what the consequences are going to be, because it enters into a situation over which we don't have control. You may one day say something flippant to somebody, and they take it, they laugh it off, and nothing ever comes of it, because they're a forgiving type. You may say the very same thing with the same sort of slight sarcastic joke and somebody takes it as a personal hatred and off they go on a vendetta. From your point of view it's the same input into the world but you hadn't a clue it was going to come back to you. So when something comes back to you which seems to be completely inappropriate to what you did, then that's a lesson to understand.

Finally, I'd like to leave you with a little exercise, which at the moment I've called four steps to determination. So when you see in yourself a trait which you don't like, then you have to make a determination, you have to go through something of this nature to undermine that particular trait.

So supposing you do have a certain sarcastic twist to the way you say things. So the first thing is that you have to convince yourself that you can undo that particular conditioning. So you have to say to yourself, I can. You have to keep saying that until you convince yourself that you're able to do it, just by letting it go, just by not indulging it, the habit will die out.

Then you have to reinforce that can-do with a sense of ought, a sense of responsibility, taking one's responsibility for one's own self. Now, these words like ought, must, have to, tend to be looked down upon, especially in psychotherapeutic circles, because they cause further blame, they cause a further guilt when you don't fulfil what you said you would do. But that's only when it's imposed upon us. If we ourselves take responsibility, then they become ours, so it's easy to do it.

So I ought to do it for my own benefit and others is an act of compassion on my part. It's a compassion towards myself and a compassion to others. I'm motivated to do what is good for myself and other people. So that ought is not something which is going to cause any trouble.

Then you've got to convince yourself that you want to do it. And you may find that a bit of a sticking point. So you've got to cajole yourself. You do want to do it. You have to convince yourself to give up a habit which you don't want.

And then finally when you feel there is that desire to give it up, a real committed desire, then you have to empower it. You have to say, I will. I will. And then you make the decision that whenever that particular trait comes up, I will resist it. I will resist it.

So these four stages of convincing ourselves that we can do it, that it's our responsibility for the benefit of ourselves and others, that we actually do want to do it, and that we will do it, you'll find I think fairly powerful in helping you to get rid of unwanted traits in our personalities.

The opposite is also true. It works for positive. So if you want to become more generous, you have to convince yourself that you can be, that you ought to be for your own benefit and others, that you want to be—you can be stuck there—and then you will. So any given occasion you'll express your generosity.

I think that brings us to the end of my little effort to explain how it is that we can come to the end of forgiveness. So we've done two major things to understand. First of all, the psychological process as to how suffering arises in us because of our reactions to things that hurt us and because of behaving from an attitude which is unskillful, cruelty, hatred and all that.

CHAPTER 17

The Illimitables

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the four illimitables (brahmavihāras) - loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā) - as essential heart practices that complement insight meditation. He explains how these qualities are 'illimitable' both horizontally (extending to countless beings) and vertically (deepening without limit).*
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> *Drawing from Buddhist psychology, Bhante explores the relationship between latent tendencies (anusaya) and manifest defilements (kilesa), explaining how negative emotions arise from deep conditioning rather than external objects. He discusses the 'near and far enemies' of each brahmavihāra: hatred vs attachment as enemies of love, cruelty vs grief/pity as enemies of compassion, jealousy vs attachment as enemies of joy, and judgment vs seeking calmness as enemies of equanimity.*
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> *This teaching emphasizes the transformation of energy rather than suppression - how hatred can become love, cruelty becomes compassion, and loneliness becomes peaceful solitude. Bhante addresses practical challenges like dealing with attachment in relationships, the difference between guilt and healthy shame, and the importance of right intention in generous action. Essential listening for understanding how heart practices purify the mind and complement vipassanā insight.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambhasambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambhasambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambhasambuddhassa

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

So you can see how that exercise we've just done, loving kindness, *mettā*, it's normally put under this word mettā, but goodwill, developing goodwill, I prefer that to loving kindness. It sounds a bit mawkish to me. And you can see how it complements the vipassanā, I hope.

So, there's one side of our practice which is to do with purifying, the purgatory. And that includes also this insight, these insights into how we're creating suffering for ourselves. And that goes deep, remember. And on the other side, there's developing the heart, developing the heart of goodwill.

And these are expressed as the illimitables, the four illimitables: love, compassion, joy, peace. And they're illimitable in what you might say is a horizontal and a vertical sense. Horizontally, they're meant to be innumerable beings. So there's no limit to the amount of beings that you can offer your goodwill to. Illimitable. We don't say infinite. And vertically, there's no end to the depth that you can develop that attitude. It's indefinite. You can keep on developing love until you become this enormous film star charismatic. People hang on to your every word and want to be hugged.

And it's the same force that you'll see this afternoon that can be used to heal because it's also a very strong relationship to the body. Just remember that the mental force and the physical force, mental and physical energy in Buddhism is just a continuum. It's not as though they're completely separate. The one saturates the other. The mind saturates the body.

And when it comes to the first one, love, the commentaries always talk about a near and a far enemy. An obvious one and a subtle one, that's what it means. So the obvious enemy of love is hate. That's pretty straightforward. You can't hate and love at the same time. Not exactly at the same time. You can hate somebody and love them in a sequence. You can't do it exactly at the same time. And hate of course closes the heart, it shuts it off. And remember, hatred and fear are flip sides.

So it's said, I don't know how true this is, but the paranoid is afraid because they project their hatred into the other person's eyes. That's what we do often, isn't it? You might see a friend walking down the other side of the road and they don't acknowledge you. So you go away thinking I've said something wrong or they hate me now. But actually they just didn't notice you.

So we undermine that hate by again allowing it to arise. Remember you can't kill a conditioning. You've really got to really accept that. You can't kill, you can't annihilate a conditioning. If there's hatred in the heart there's only one way it's going to be cured and that is to allow it to express itself and you have to be very careful not to fall into the fantasies.

There's a little development there. You've all had the experience of being slightly annoyed with somebody in the morning. They've said something at work or something. And quite unmindfully you've allowed this to generate a little story. And it gets worse and worse and by the evening you've strangled them and written poison letters and all that sort of stuff. And that's what the mind does. It'll generate, it'll proliferate. So stopping that, recognizing that, and just staying with the pain, staying with the hurt, you see, you're allowing it to die out. So that's what you've got to really grasp if we want to come to the end of hatred.

And remember that all these negative things are not, how can we say, they're not dependent on an object. A disposition is not dependent on an object. The object is the button which when pressed allows this disposition to manifest. So the Buddha talks about two things, he talks about *anusaya* and *kilesa*. Anusaya is latent tendencies, latent tendencies.

The fact is we don't know how much hatred we've got in the system. We don't know how much fear there is. That's just a fact, it's buried within the psyche somewhere, it's buried in the body. And suddenly when something happens, this hatred comes out, this fear comes out. And often it's entirely inappropriate to the situation, isn't it? You know, road rage, for instance. It might be that just on this occasion somebody cut you up. And suddenly you're full of this rage. You see, if they'd have done it and your business was good and you had a happy relationship, you'd just swear at a bit. But because you're in a bad mood, this rage comes out and you go out and stab them. It happens, doesn't it? It's terrible.

Computer rage. How many of you have smashed up your computer? Totally inappropriate response. And sometimes we can get this inappropriate response, especially with objects or people whom, of course, we feel can't come back at us. You know? The child. The dog. They can't bite you back, so there's a sort of permission to let go of it.

So what we have is this disposition and I liken it to a balloon and it's being held there, you see, with just this membrane being held there. Something happens and it's just that little pinprick and all of it tries to get out through that little hole. So this disposition, all the anger we have and the anxiety and all that, it's all there as a programming. It's a good way to really see it. It's just there as a latent programming. And you don't know how big it is until something allows it to manifest. And then it becomes this obvious thing, and that's what the Buddha refers to as a kilesa. I can't remember how they translate that now. Can you? Kilesa? Neurosis, that'll do.

So that's part of our practice is to know what to do when something negative arises. That's part of our practice. And the real insight in this is to know that you can't do anything about this stuff except to allow it to burn out. And that's it.

So in the scriptures the Buddha always talks about going from hatred to non-hatred, cruelty to non-cruelty, see this neutral state. Then there's the transformation. It's all the same energy, remember? So that which we hated, through the practice, through a generous practice, through these sorts of meditations like mettā, become transformed. So the amount of hate we had eventually turns out to be the amount of love we have. And

then of course we can develop love. So nothing is wasted in the universe. Nothing is wasted in the heart anyway. Everything eventually through this sort of practice becomes transformed. And you end up with the Buddha heart, the Buddha mind.

Now the subtle enemy of love, of course, is attachment. And that's a difficult one. Because we have all sorts of attachments. Romantic attachments, erotic attachments, attachments to parents, attachments to their children, attachments to friends, attachments to cars. God, there's all sorts of attachments. And that attachment turns the person whom you love into an object. That's what you're doing. Because what an attachment does is it is seeking from that person that which I need to be happy. That's what an attachment does.

So when we have an attachment to something, I only want from that person what makes me happy. As soon as they do something which doesn't come into that little circle of what I like and want, then I get that rejection, I get the hatred, I get the pushing away. So that isn't love.

Now, you have to be very careful here. Not to think that therefore this is somehow immoral. You can't say that a parent's attachment to their child is immoral. But it's not skillful. That's all. It's just not skillful. So we see it in things like when a child gets hurt, you see. If a child is hurt and the parent sees that it's just a scratch or something, then of course they have this, you know, comfort, hugging, all that sort of stuff, it'll be alright, etc., etc. But if the parent sees that the child is really hurt, then there comes this enormous fear. And that doesn't help the situation, does it? So that's a real subtle one, that. You have to really work with it. And again, you can't kill the attachment. You can't get rid of it. You can't pretend it isn't there and develop this open-heartedness. It's just the gentle working with it.

Now, in the discourse on that loving-kindness that I chant, the Buddha likens love to a mother. And he says that, are these four illimitables to a mother? So, with the youngest child, I think it's in this sequence, can't be exact. With the youngest child, she's a friend. A friendly relationship. With the child who's sick, she's compassionate, looks after the child. With the child who's successful, she's full of sympathetic joy. And with the child that leaves home, she's equanimous. Being able to let somebody go.

So that's the sign of a detached love. Because what you're saying to the person is, you're utterly free to be as you are. You're utterly free to be as you are. I don't need you. So we think that part of our love contract is need. But that need is neurotic. That need is coming because we're not looking into ourselves for the fullness.

So that's why the Buddha says, you know, the spiritual person, seek solitude. Be as lonely as a rhinoceros. I don't know anything about rhinoceros, but whatever the habits of a rhinoceros are, they're definitely to be alone. And that distinction between being alone, being solitudinous, and loneliness. See, you know the difference, eh? See, when you're lonely, there's that hole. You want somebody to fill it. So you go and get this person and fill it. There's your attachment. You call it love.

But actually, when that loneliness comes, we should seek that solitude. We should stay by ourselves. And instead of calling up that friend, turning on the TV, making a cup of tea, we should do the vipassanā. We should stay with that sense of loneliness. As that begins to dissipate, what comes in its stead? We have love to hatred, cruelty to compassion. Loneliness to what? To solitude. Solitude is being at peace, at one with oneself.

Occasionally you feel it. But these things have to be developed. And you have to not be confused by those things that are negative in us. They'll always give you a good excuse, you know. You might not, for instance, recognize the loneliness. You say to yourself, ah, Mary, yeah, I'll give her a ring. I'm sure she'd like to hear from me. You displace it onto this poor person. And in fact, you haven't recognized, you haven't locked into your own sense of loneliness.

So all you can do is, and this is the whole point of vipassanā, is to lift that awareness, that intelligence, so that during the day one is with the mind, one is with the heart, one doesn't get caught up in it. That's the whole point of developing the vipassanā mind. During the day you see, ah, lonely, you see. Then you see that desire to seek this, seek that. You just stay still, wait for it to pass. And eventually, you develop a love which is non-attached.

What does that mean? Does it mean that sometimes there's a detached love? It sounds cold, it sounds horrible, detached love, you know. But all it means is a love which is not dependent on the object. So it doesn't matter who stands before me, they get the same treatment. They get the same generosity, open-heartedness, etc. Now I'm not talking personally, understand me. But that's what we're trying to develop, we're trying to develop that open hearted love not dependent on the object.

When it comes to compassion, you can see the same thing. The obvious enemy of compassion, of course, is cruelty. It's completely the opposite. Compassion is a desire, this is how it's stated, is a desire to alleviate somebody's suffering. It's as simple as that. You want to help somebody who's in some sort of pain or suffering. Cruelty is the opposite. You want to enjoy it. The worst hell in Buddhism is reserved to those who are cruel, because it's obviously the complete opposite of the Buddhist teaching. I mean,

here it is going around telling everybody how to alleviate suffering, and there are people going around purposely trying to make people suffer. In Buddhist understanding, there's nothing worse.

So again, when we feel that cruelty, you know, that very subtle desire to put somebody down, slander them, stand on their toe when they're not looking, things like that, give them a push onto the... When you feel that, you know, when you don't like somebody and you hear that they've got a serious illness and you can hear yourself saying, good... There are all these little cruelties stuck inside us, you see. So he mustn't feel guilty about that.

See, that's something else. We're not supposed to feel guilty about conditioning. Conditionings that we end up with are being manufactured out of ignorance, out of delusion. So now we're coming out of that. We're coming to a point of wisdom where we recognize, that wasn't very nice. One doesn't blame oneself. One just recognizes, that's a conditioning I don't want to develop. It's as simple as that. I just don't want to develop that conditioning anymore.

So we know that conditioning will come up again and will fall again. But our attitude now is we don't want to develop it anymore. So we get more skillful. We don't feed it anymore. And eventually it dies away. Or at least it doesn't hijack us. That's what we don't want.

Guilt and shame in Buddhism, the Buddha calls them the two guardians of society. But he's not referring here to the guilt we feel when we do something wrong, the dread of consequences. And he's not referring to the shame we feel when there's a gaffe, a social gaffe or something, or we hurt somebody. He's not talking about the consequence of unskillful action. He's talking about that little memory, that little warning that comes up when we are tempted to fiddle the taxes, which is highly topical, when we're tempted, as soon as the temptation comes, you see, the fear of consequence arises, just as a memory, the shame, you see, and immediately they guard us from doing that.

If that's not internalized, well, that's a psychopath, isn't it? A psychopath has no sense, a sociopath, they've no sense of right and wrong. You see these kids, you know, no sense of right and wrong. No sense of shame. There was that incredible thing I heard on the radio or television, I can't remember, where that little black boy was killed in London. Damilola Taylor, that's right. And they interviewed all the young people, the police interviewed. And one of the young kids, we're talking 10, 12 years old, so the policeman's asking this question, and he nuts him, broke his nose. It's amazing, isn't it? It wasn't within my generation to do that. There's just absolutely no fear of consequence. It can't be touched. And it just produces anarchy, doesn't it? It produces terrible stuff.

So those two things, fear of consequence, I'm not talking about now the guilt which arises from a feeling of being evil. That's something else. That's a sort of existential guilt, you might say. That goes deeper in a definition of self. I am evil. So when that comes up, just note it and let it pass. No, I'm just talking about those feelings of dread, you know, like you didn't... You shouldn't have done that, something's going to happen at work, that sort of thing. And they become your guardians, see? So that's a sort of sensitivity.

So cruelty is the opposite of compassion. The subtle enemy is grief. Grief. It's interesting, isn't it? Grief. Subtle enemy is grief. So often people grieve for somebody, pity, pity their state. So what's that? What's happening there when you do that? Where's that coming from? I mean, the desire, if somebody's sick or somebody, whatever, and you want to help them, the desire should be a joyful desire, a desire to help, a desire to help them in their situation, lend them some money, whatever.

But if you slip into pity, pity them, what's happening there, you see? Can you agree with some of these thoughts? I mean, you haven't said anything. Well, the question is, is it necessary? I mean, we do it. We do it, but does it help? Does it help to pity somebody? I mean, how do we feel when somebody pities us? It's coming from a conceit, isn't it? It's coming from some place, almost, I always feel it's coming from some place of displaced fear, actually, and anxiety might happen to me.

And it gets in the way, of course, because then you overdo. You overdo. You get into that do-gooder thing. Because you're compensating. Oh, let me help you. Let me help you. Go away. And the other subtle one of compassionate action is compassion. When we do something out of compassion, when we help somebody, we do get a pleasant feeling.

But when we make that pleasant feeling the purpose for doing, then of course we end up as a real do-gooder then. So I always think, supposing now you went along to your friend and said, you heard they were sick. So you said, you go along and help them. I'll come over and help you. So you go over there with this idea of cooking them chicken soup or something. When you get there, they say, can you clean the toilet? I didn't come here to do that. See what I mean? Whenever we're acting out of compassion and very subtly we're doing it in order to feel happy, we don't want to do what another person wants us to do. We want to do what I want to do for you. That's really oppressive.

So again, you can't kill that conditioning. You've really got to accept that that's the way it is, that's the conditioning arising. And then, having acknowledged that, you may be doing it in order to feel happy. You see, you just acknowledge it, it's there within the

heart. But there's also the true compassionate desire to alleviate somebody's suffering. So you make that your conscious desire. And the conscious desire that you empower is your new conditioning. So the more you empower a positive thought to help somebody in whatever way they want to be helped, see, that is developing the upper part of the egg, that's developing the compassion. It doesn't mean to say that there won't be all that disgust coming up, fancy asking me to clean the toilet, all that sort of stuff. So that still comes up, but it's a sort of afterthought, it's a leftover. One hasn't empowered that.

So it's the same with generosity. When we give something, a present or a donation or whatever, you see, as you give, there may be some feeling of goodness about it for the benefit of others. So you might be doing it for that reason. You might be doing it for guilt, I've got too much money. Not too many of those, but... But what you do is, before you give, before you actually commit the action, you have to suffuse your heart and mind with the right intention. So I'm giving this for the benefit of others. And when it's there, there's a real purposeful giving. That's when you give. As soon as you act, that's your karma, that's your action, that's your conditioning.

So there's an intention, there's an action, and those actions produce a conditioning, which grow depending on how you keep on supporting that intention. So there you are, and you've given, and you've said, I give for the benefit of others. Really suffuse that and you give it, you see. And you hear this little voice. You are so wonderful. Now you see, that's old conditioning. That's coming up from the old thing about wanting to be somebody's pet, wanting to be somebody's friend. So you just recognize that. That's the old conditioning. You haven't empowered that. And eventually that would die away.

Or you might get the other side. Too much, get some back. So you just let it go, pass away. If you feel guilty about that, you know the guilt, because it's inappropriate. He didn't mean, that wasn't what was empowered, that's just an old conditioning coming through. So again, you can see the purpose of mindfulness. You don't just give. So you have to stop for a minute and really get your heart right. You don't just go out and do good. You really get your heart right.

When somebody says, can you help me? You don't say yes. A lot of us suffer from that, don't we? I mean, I do. Can you do yes? And then you think, I don't want to do that. If you just stop a minute, you see. There's all these little tricks of language. Well, I might be busy. I'll have to look that up in my diary. And then so long as you've got the good reason for doing it, then you do it. If you don't want to do it, you shouldn't feel guilty about that. If you feel guilty about that, then one should note that, one should see, ah, guilt. Feel it, allow it to pass away.

So you can see that this, what we're doing here as a sitting practice, is specifically important every day, every moment of our lives, to keep that awareness going, so that when you're talking to somebody, there is that more spacious awareness, that you're aware of what they're saying, but you're also aware of your reaction here. Not to always be going outward. Sort of balanced awareness. Even now as you're listening to me you can be aware.

Joy. The enemy of joy is jealousy. Envy. It really cuts through, doesn't it? You can't feel joyful for somebody if you're jealous of them. So when jealousy comes up, and it's one of those things that we never, we don't like to acknowledge about ourselves at all, the fact that we're envious or jealous, because what it's suggesting is that somebody's better than us. Nobody wants to believe that. And I just make an arbitrary distinction between envy and jealousy all over it. Maybe it's not quite like that. But envy is wanting what they have and jealousy is wanting what they have and hating them for having it. Which is an added twist.

So again, all you can do is accept that that's there and let it burn, pass away. And of course the joy that comes up is then that much more joyful. You can feel great joy, can't you, for people whom you love. That's not a problem. Parent for their children, it comes naturally. Sympathetic joy, reciprocal joy. And the subtle thing is again that sort of attachment. Wanting to be joyful in order to feel always joyful. So you're not joyful for somebody, you're only joyful for them because it makes you joyful. So again, you're turning that person into an object and you want them to do things that are joyful for you. So again, you make people do things that make you happy.

I mean, that's also a parental thing sometimes, isn't it? The parent wants the child to be in a way that they foresee would be good for the child, which would make them feel happy about their child. Getting a degree and stuff like that. Pushing them. And it's done under the guise of it's good for you. But often it's this business of, I want to feel happy about you. But that's not a sympathetic joy. Not reciprocal joy. And that's something you can develop. You can develop joy every time you hear of somebody who has won the lottery and stuff like that. To say to yourself, how wonderful. May they be happy. The person who got the job that you wanted, may they be happy.

And then finally there's equanimity. So now equanimity is a funny one. It's a funny word, equanimity. It's balance of mind. A balance of mind. So you expect a judge to be equanimous. No matter what the emotional state is in the court, you expect them to be above it. You expect them not to get caught up in that. Not to be judgmental. So obviously there's your main enemy, to be judgmental, to lose that balance of mind, to take sides. You lose it.

And the subtle enemy is just again seeking to be calm for calm's sake. See, as soon as you make these virtues their purpose, it immediately corrupts it. If you want to be generous to get the joy of generosity, then it corrupts your generosity, because often you're asked to be generous with exactly that which you don't want to give. Some people are very generous with their time, others with their money, some with neither. It's just a fact. So some people might be very generous with their time, but if you ask them for a penny for a cup of tea, they don't want to see you. And that's them, that's them, drawing a circle around their idea of generosity.

So as soon as you start practicing a virtue for the virtue's sake, then you'll find yourself in this, you'll find yourself drawing a line, you'll find yourself being unable to develop it illimitably. Illimitably. So that, these are the four principles. Illimitables. And you can see that their development is equally important to developing this *vipassanā*, this insight.

Any questions about that? Anything that's come up about that? Clarifications? Observations? Criticism?

"What did you say earlier? Doing it for itself."

Yeah, always making it its own object. To be joyful in order to be joyful.

"It took me a second when you were referring back, when you were saying about guys in the basement. It took me two seconds to say, who's putting up on you? In this case, it was the kid. But in relation to the last one, equanimity, which you were saying there, and you've made an earlier reference to kids, or these young people. It sort of came across to me that it was a sort of general criticism of people who would be in a certain condition and would only know how to react one way."

Oh, no, that's presumed. They've not been taught. They're in a sort of vicious circle. Family and social circumstance, definitely. But they, you see, these children, if they move into the spiritual life, they can't blame. They can't put blame on that social circumstance and parents and all that. So this is the point. If you keep doing that, then you're unable to come out of the vicious circle within yourself, because you presume that this conditioning has been caused by others, whereas what we've discovered is that it's actually produced by ourselves.

Now, you've got to make a distinction between responsibility and culpability. You're not to be blamed because we've ended up with cruelty in our hearts, but we are responsible for it. That's a subtle difference. In other words, unwittingly, at an early age, because of circumstances, I have created within myself a lot of cruelty. Now, I can't be

blamed for that because at that time I was unaware, deluded. Now I end up, through the meditation, all through ordinary life, realizing how much cruelty is in my system. So it's my responsibility now to get rid of it. See?

That's a relief, isn't it, when we think like that? We're not looking to blame anybody or to put the finger on somebody. All we've done is that we've ended up with this personality, with this conditioning. And now that we've woken up to it, the job is to clear it out. And here's a system that can help. If we start blaming or looking for somebody to blame, then that creates another negativity in the heart, doesn't it? Revenge and all that. Yes, sure.

"So it is in the nature of the being then that we have a constant battle, even if we go to a certain level of cruelty and compassion and try and keep on moving forward. Is it a part of being human?"

Well, you see, at some point in existence, as consciousness grows, we simply make this mistake of thinking that this is what we are. That's the big problem. So therefore, you get into this contradiction with the world. The contradiction is, this is me, and I want to be happy, so I'll accumulate around me things that make me happy. And that moves to greed, it moves to crime, etc., etc., yeah? Anything that touches me, which makes me feel unhappy, then I want to push away. So it moves to hatred, cruelty, all that sort of stuff. So I'm caught in that contradiction all the time. I'm always in a state of contradiction.

And the only way I can overcome that is by seeing that contradiction and stop playing that game. So the image I have is of a triangle. So the bottom part of the triangle is this aversion, accumulation, aversion, greed. And we're constantly running up and down this base of a triangle, completely caught up in it. When we lift ourselves up out of that in meditation, we're at the apex of a triangle. We can see this gain.

So that's why I say in that exercise on forgiving somebody, you bring up the memory and you can see how you want to get your own back. You don't want to forgive them. You can see that. And that's the game of the base of the triangle. When you stand up at the top and you just watch this game, because you're not in it, you're not empowering it. So it has to die away. And that's the role of will in Buddhism. The will is what empowers the gain. So as soon as you withdraw your attention from it, withdraw your awareness from that level, that's a level of self. And you come to the level of observing that, then of course you've withdrawn the energy from it. So it goes on and on, but eventually it dies away.

But that's a very important distinction to make between responsibility and blame, and blaming somebody. And remember that in Buddhist understanding, nobody eventually escapes their problems. So if somebody's being cruel, they themselves will suffer the consequence of that. So the idea of punishment is untenable in Buddhism. That doesn't mean to say you can't put somebody away if they're a danger or put them somewhere they can be re-educated or something. But you can't have the attitude of punishing them. It's a form of revenge. Which doesn't mean to say that in Buddhist countries people don't punish each other. But it's untenable. Because it's just understood. As soon as somebody does harm, they will suffer the consequence of that. And that's what we're doing. Every time you sit, I mean, all that restlessness and all that stuff, what is it? Where's that coming from? Some of it's coming from deluded decisions at a time when we weren't aware. But some of them are coming from active wrongdoing.

"When is it appropriate to intervene in a situation which is really not in your business, even though it's obviously obvious?"

Yeah, there was... This comes up. I had with a friend of mine out in Thailand and he had this idea of detachment. He was developing detachment. So when he saw a cat playing around with a mouse, he didn't do anything. He was completely detached. Whereas I've seen also in monasteries where a cat has got hold of a bird, the monk has run out and given the cat a kick. And then just held the bird up. It was actually quite beautiful. The bird had been killed. Its lungs had been punctured. And he just held it up with its wings. All compounded things arise and pass away.

I should think those sort of decisions really, it's up to a person's own sensitivity to that, whether they're open to advice. Sometimes you give advice or you want to help, but actually you're making things worse because they don't want to know. But our attitude should be, of course, yes, to undermine suffering wherever we see it. I mean, this is what's come up with all this business of these wars on terrorists and stuff, the massacre in Rwanda, for instance. If we'd have been a more advanced international society, we probably wouldn't have let that happen. Just got in there and pulled them apart.

"Yeah, sometimes it's wise not to say anything?"

Time, place and suitability. Right speech, the Buddha says. When you want to say something, make sure it's suitable. Make sure it's the right time and the right place.

CHAPTER 18

The Perfections Turned Inward

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the ten pāramī (perfections) that the Bodhisattva cultivated over countless lifetimes, but with a unique twist - applying them inwardly as practices of self-compassion and skillful self-care during meditation retreat.*
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> *Drawing from the Jātaka tales, Bhante explores how dāna (generosity) and mettā (loving-kindness) can transform our relationship with food, meditation, and daily activities. He addresses the crucial distinction between enjoying life's pleasures without indulgence versus falling into self-mortification - a balance essential for both monastic and lay practitioners.*
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> *The talk weaves together practical guidance on working with difficult mind states like restlessness and sloth-torpor, emphasizing truthfulness (sacca) in recognizing our motivations while avoiding harsh self-criticism. Through stories from monastic life, including cautionary tales about rigid rule-following, Bhante illustrates how the pāramī of right conduct (sīla) serves not as moral perfectionism but as skillful non-harming of oneself.*
>
> *Concluding with upekkhā (equanimity) as complete receptivity and muditā (joy) as celebration of our spiritual efforts, this teaching offers a compassionate framework for deepening practice through the very qualities the Buddha himself cultivated on the path to Awakening.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambhasambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambhasambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambhasambuddhassa

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

Last week we talked about what's known as the distant epoch. This is the story of Gautama Buddha and it's in the collection of the Jātakas, and we talked about what he was doing before he was born as a bodhisattva. I was going to go on to the process of his life and what he did during his life, but then it occurred to me that this was a good time to look at the *pāramī*, because herein our Bodhisattva spent four asaṅkheyya, measureless times, and hundred thousand eons, making his resolutions under twenty-four Buddhas, commencing with Dīpaṅkara. No Buddha other than this perfectly enlightened one appeared after the Blessed One, Kassapa. And in this manner, the Buddha received his assurance under the 24 Buddhas, beginning with Dīpaṅkara.

So, what was he doing during that hell of a long time? My goodness, what was he playing at? That took him so long. So it was the development of these *pāramī*. And they're usually described as perfections, which is a little bit over the top, really. It's more virtues or those qualities that you need to get to the other shore, because that's what *pāramī* means, the other shore.

But he needs a little bit more than that, and I just want to read this out of interest to you. He actually needs, for it is said, the resolution which consists of a combination of eight conditions. You can't just become a Buddha because you've got the perfections right. Birth as a human being, the advantage of sex—we'll come to that in a minute. No throwing stones yet, please. The good fortune. The meeting with a teacher. Ordination. Endowment of inherent capabilities to higher knowledge. The dedication of one's life and resolute will.

So there's one or two things there. The idea that you have to be a human being to be a buddha. You can't do it in the other realms. So I think we know why. You know the hell realms are too painful and the heavenly realms are just too joyful. The wonderful thing about the human realm, it has this lovely mixture of joy and woe. And of course we have the intelligence to work our way out of it.

The advantage of sex, if you remember last time we were talking about conceptions of time and the idea of circular time. So obviously if you believe in circular time, time constantly repeating itself, then once you've got a Buddha who is a male, all the rest of them have to be males. That's what you call a *diṭṭhi*, that's what you call holding on to a belief, you see. And the Buddha rails about this. If he knew what was being said about him now, I'm sure he'd turn over in his grave if he was still there. The whole idea of extending something present into the past to make a law of it is one of those things that we constantly do. Precedence. In our law-making we call it precedence. So that's how you end up with the idea that only men can become Buddhas.

The meeting with a teacher or a nation, endowment of inherent capabilities to higher knowledge. Hopefully we've all got that, but there's something perhaps special about somebody who's made that dedication to become fully self-enlightened. And a dedication of one's life and resolute will. Don't forget that. This endowment of inherent capabilities to the higher knowledge. So remember, we've all got that, but we talk about the self-enlightened Buddha.

So for a Westerner, this does conjure up the idea of the self-made man, the self-made woman. And of course, when you look into the history of anybody who is self-made in terms of their success in society, you find that they've been helped along by their workers, by the system, by their birth, by good fortune, and so on and so forth. So the idea of

somebody being self-made is one of these lovely Western myths. And we deposit that on the Buddha, thinking that he did it all by himself. So, of course, he didn't. He started off by going to teachers, tried various methods, as you know, and eventually, in that despair, suddenly found a way out of the problem. But we'll come to that perhaps at another time.

So what I want to just talk around, really, just allow ourselves to contemplate a little, are these, but I want to do it specifically for a retreat situation. The first two I'll stick together are *dāna*, generosity, and *mettā*.

So, you know, we say that charity begins at home. So where's home, you see? It's here, isn't it? It's how I treat myself. If I can discover and develop a way of treating myself, which is virtuous and which does me good, then let's presume that I'm going to treat others in the same way.

So we have this, there's a teaching called the *āhāra* or nutriments. And they go like this. Food for the body, that's pretty straightforward. Sense impression for feeling. Volition for *saṅkhāra*, for mental formations or becoming, *kamma*. And consciousness for the body-mind. That one specifically has to do with the process of rebirth, so we didn't bother ourselves here so much. But it's this concept of nourishing, nourishing ourselves.

So when we go for food, you see, that's a real opportunity to develop this nourishment. *Dāna*, this generosity, this nourishment towards ourselves. So you have to, as it were, get in contact with the body and you have to recognise that the feelings of hunger partly are coming from the body itself needing nourishment and partly from greed which also needs nourishment. So we have to be able to recognise that that's there whether we like it or not and it's a case of approaching the food with that consciousness of the body with that awareness of the feelings in the body and then reminding ourselves that we can always go for seconds we take what we feel we need and we place it in front of us you see and again to remind ourselves that this is nourishment for the body that it's just going to cause us the sufferings of greed if we indulge so we begin to eat.

Now, at this point, you see, especially with this teaching around *dukkha* and suffering and all that, and the dangers of pleasure, we often fall into the wrong thinking that pleasurable feelings are somehow evil. You have to be very careful with pleasant feelings. They're Māra in disguise, and they're going to drag you down to an eternal hell. In which case, you fall into the error of self-mortification, because now you don't let your-

self enjoy anything. Because if you enjoy something, well, surely that's the same as greed. So, this distinction between enjoying what is given to us and indulging it is obviously very subtle. And we fall into the error of one or the other.

In the monastic life, which I've come to know a little bit about, the horror sometimes comes out in people's practice, the horror of any sort of sense pleasure. Monks will ride on buses and trains and keep their eyes constantly on their knees, daring not to look out in case they're distracted by whatever passes by.

And there was one lovely example I remember of a monk who, if you saw him, you would definitely feel that he was an ascetic of tremendous stature he had that gaunt look about him of somebody who had been through hell and survived and he was a couple of years older than me in the order so he would sit to my left you see and the food came by and it happened to be a very lovely meal it was somebody's birthday so it was one of these times when we got fruit salad with ice cream so this was there this was served to us.

We began eating it, the road monks, and I noticed that he was actually staring at this object on the table. And I could feel the energy of his stare, you see. Because right there in front of him was Māra, you see. And as we ate it and we got close to finishing our dessert, he very mindfully went towards it, picked it up very gently, raised it to his lips, and disappeared within a couple of seconds, just in case it touched the tongue, just in case there arose anywhere some sort of pleasurable feeling.

Now you can imagine that this sort of life is pretty dire if you can't enjoy what life gives us. We're very familiar with the genres and the idea that we can sail into *jhānas* and that the Buddha said that this was wonderful but there is a point in the scriptures where the Buddha coming back from alms round actually says to Ānanda why don't we find a beautiful shrine where we can eat this a park remember shrines in those days were really like parks and he names a couple of shrines the Cāpāla shrine is the one I remember.

The question arises, why should he be bothered about eating his food in a beautiful shrine? Why not on a dung heap? Or in a desert place, or just where he is? So there's something about beauty, there's something about the loveliness of life, which is not to be confused with indulgence and wrong relationship, which causes us problems.

Now, it seems to me that food is just one of these lovely places where we can develop this right attitude because we have to eat. And most of us do it two, three times a day and probably a lot more often as well with the cups of teas and coffees and what have

you. So every time we approach something to nourish the body, there's an opportunity to make this distinction between enjoying what is lovely, what is beautiful, and indulging in it.

Now it seems to me that if we can crack this problem of enjoying something without indulgence, of experiencing essential pleasure, in a lovely way, without indulgence, then we have perhaps a way of translating that into every part of our lives. So there's of course all the joys of relationship. How can you enjoy the joys of relationship without becoming attached? There's got to be a way of doing it, surely. How can you enjoy all the aesthetic beauty of life and not depend upon it for personal happiness. That's what indulgence does, doesn't it? You depend upon. Your happiness depends upon something being there. And when it comes even to the spiritual joys, you see, one of the warnings that they always tell you about *jhāna* practice is that you get stuck with it. You become indulgent and you can't let it go. And it just becomes another path to hell.

So it seems to me that this *dāna*, this generosity that we can practice towards ourselves, this loving kindness, this caring towards ourselves, if we start just with the basic, the basic body, what does the body need and how can I give it to the body in a way which is lovely, which is beautiful.

When it comes to meditation, you know, keeping the mind calm, keeping the mind still. Remember that you have to nourish that. You have to nourish that by giving it those things to absorb into, as it were. So just the softness of the breath. So instead of looking at it as some sort of painful exercise that one has to do, to watch the breath in order to make insight feel the actual gentle feelings of the breath feel that lovely quality of the breath and just those calm gentle feelings around it and just begin to sense that as something which is worthy of appreciation the body does have lovely feelings.

Going always with this idea of giving oneself something is, of course, the opposite, which is to renounce. You've got to renounce something. And that's where you get these two particular *pāramīs*. They come together, the idea of generosity, the idea of giving, and the idea of renunciation. So in ordinary daily life, when we give something to somebody with no hope of return, it means we have to give something up, which we would have normally used for our own personal enjoyment. If you make a donation, shall we say, to these terrible things that happen in nature, and you make a donation to help people, then you've obviously given something up, which you might have had before. You might have gone on holiday somewhere, but you've decided to give that up for the benefit of others.

So the idea of renunciation and generosity and care always balance each other. They come together. So when we nourish the mind, when we want to nourish our calmness within us, remember that it also means that we have to renounce sense pleasure. Now it's up to you how far you want to take that. Reading can excite the mind. Writing can excite the mind. Phone calls and definitely getting onto the web. So all these things have to be renounced for the benefit of spiritual development.

You can even get more refined and, of course, not look around, not look around at nature, which is around us here, and just keep the eyes, as it were, still. So this feels like a sort of sensory deprivation. But the purpose, of course, is to completely calm the mind. And the more we stop that sense impression, you see, the more the mind will calm. It's just a fact. These sense impressions, remember, are what feelings are made out of. So as soon as a sense impression comes in, we immediately perceive it as either being pleasant or unpleasant. And as soon as that happens, you get your reaction, wanting, not wanting. So to keep the mind very calm, you see, and to restrict your sense perception at all the doors, hearing, whatever, is going to help us to just calm the mind. It's sort of feeding the calmness, nourishing the calmness. And calmness, remember, *passaddhi*, is one of the seven facts of enlightenment. So it's all linked. Everything's linked.

This lovely word, attention. It has this double meaning, doesn't it? To attend to somebody, to look after them, to tend to something. And by paying attention to the object, by giving it a feeling of care towards what you're looking at, giving a flavor of loving kindness to your practice, looking down upon something with compassion. So we have this Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, from the Mahāyāna tradition, to look down upon, to look down upon with compassion.

So when these great pains arise in the body, which, remember, are only trying to express themselves, one looks down upon them with great compassion. As it were, one embraces them, opens up to them, but rather than always this very sharp investigation, which is fine, I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, but sometimes just to, as it were, flavour the investigation with just that little bit of kindness. And what that tends to do is it just softens a bit. It just softens the process, that's all. Of course, the danger there is that you try and zap what it is that's hurting you with enormous compassion and try and do a bit of New Age healing. And of course, that can be a disaster, especially if it fails.

So it's a case of also recognising that the attention that we pay, the attention can be an attending, an attending to. And if we think of the body with its pains coming either from the physical base, from the posture, say from the knees and things like that, or from the turbulences that are caught up, these mental turbulences that are caught up in

the body that come out as neck ache, back ache, stomach ache, the whole load of aches. And to, as it were, look down upon them with that sort of gentleness, you know. So this is a generosity, this is a kindness, isn't it? This is a kindness towards ourselves.

There's also to nourish that sense of enthusiasm. It doesn't come, I mean, sometimes it just arises of itself, but enthusiasm sounds vaguer, a sense of urgency. You have to feed it, you have to. Sometimes when you find yourself not putting in the practice, it's sometimes because we haven't lifted that enthusiasm. If you think of people in the business world or the political world, how they're constantly telling themselves to get on with it. These sports people that shout at themselves to make the game, you say, well, I'm not suggesting that you do that. But one has to, as it were, bring up what were the reasons that we came to meditation for in the first place. You have to keep reminding yourself. You have to cajole yourself sometimes to build up that dedication.

So this is all to do with not being hard upon ourselves, but just to develop this sense of generosity towards ourselves. It's the same with concentration, you see. When you don't have concentration, then you can get very down and you start blaming yourself and you think, oh dear, this is terrible and all this. And it's a case of just resting and just asking yourself, well, why isn't it coming, you see? So then if you put too much energy into it, of course, then it corrupts it even further.

So it has to be a gentle energy, a cajoling. Have some sort of image, like training a puppy dog to sit. If you give it a kick, it just runs away. So you've got to pat it down and give it something to suck. And very slowly, it'll sit down for you. So that sense of being kind to oneself, being generous to oneself. In all the forms of our practice, we can find a little way of bringing that generosity towards it.

Of course, there is always going to be the danger of indulgence, but sometimes give yourself the benefit of the doubt. You are actually being caring and not indulging. I think the trick is to really look at your attitude. Why am I doing it? And be very clear about that.

And that brings us really to this whole business of honesty. Honesty is, I mean, nobody would say, you know, I'm telling lies or anything. It's not a case of that. It's a case more of exaggeration or not really facing up to why you're doing something. So you feel a bit sleepy and, you know, a little power nap, take a bit of time out, all this sort of stuff. You know, I'm being kind to myself. But actually, when you really quiz yourself, and you recognize that you've actually had a very good night's sleep, and really there's no reason at all to fall asleep at this present time, then one has to be kind to oneself by

not going to sleep. Or else one simply begins to develop that idea of little naps all over the place. And if you've ever tried that, it does undermine your meditation. It begins to actually sap your energy. So you have to be slightly careful about that.

And that truthfulness, you know, even small things like, what we want to do is to build up the power of our meditation. We want to maintain a constant effort, a constant effort. And I personally like to think in three hour blocks, I can handle that. If it gets longer than that, I get headaches and stuff like that. So a three-hour block. So if I've been sitting, say, for one hour, and then I get up, well, there's that little idea comes, you know, have a cup of tea. And off I go, and half an hour goes having this cup of tea which I never needed anyway, and of course it ruins that little special effort. It ruins the building up of that energy that we need to really make some good insight.

So when you get these feelings to have a little drink or take a little break or go for a little walk, you have to be really truthful. You have to sit there and say, now come on, you know. And then you go to the walking place and do your walking meditation. Very slowly, you see, by renouncing those, they're all nicely interwoven, these things. By renouncing those desires, one is being kind to oneself and one is building up this other *pāramī*, this other virtue of determination, *adhiṭṭhāna*. Goodwill, strong will.

One of those things is when you feel restless and you think, oh well, I'll go for a walk. The mind is not still. And off you go, you go into the forest or something. And really, you're just escaping. We're just wandering off to get away from restlessness for a little bit. And of course, if you do feel restless and we walk fast up and down, it does give us a sense of relief. But it's not dealing with the mental factor of restlessness at all. And often we can use that to suppress. So you have to be careful.

So it's the same with sloth and torpor. I prefer the words dullness and lethargy, frankly. Dullness and lethargy. You can make the mistake of thinking, right, well I'll go for a run and really shake this off. And of course what you're doing is you're suppressing those feelings which are an energy force, which is drawing us down. There's energy, remember, which bursts us out like stars, and there's energy which draws us down like black holes. So it's all within us, and if we think that we're going to overcome feelings of sloth, dullness and lethargy by giving ourselves a kick and running about, that's just another way of actually suppressing it and building over it this energy. But actually we're not dealing with this energy which is experienced as a dullness in the mind or a heaviness in the body.

So how do we do that? Well again you have to let go of the idea of trying to do something about it. And as it were, be gentle to these things. Be generous to these things. Be open to these things. And allow them to express themselves. So you have to find a way

of allowing dullness and lethargy to express itself. And usually the best way is to walk up and down gently. But you keep your mind, you keep your attention on those feelings. And in that way, these mental states are given the space and the time just to exhaust themselves.

Often, when we do that we can feel that transformation. So remember that there's nothing lost in this process. Everything is simply transformed. So we might just suddenly feel, having worked with these feelings of dullness and lethargy, a sudden very gentle energy. Sometimes it flips because it's just the other side of the coin of restlessness. So it's a case of being careful to really be truthful with ourselves, not to kid ourselves.

Of course, the opposite is, or the danger, of course, is you get into self-criticism, self-judgment, this business of I'm no good, everybody else can do it but not me, I'm special that way. And it's a case of recognising that you have to make a separation between the action and the person. The person is a figment of the imagination. We can say that this action was unskillful. Lying down in the afternoon was unskillful. I didn't wake up till seven o'clock and it broke my sleep pattern. We can say that was unskillful. But if I then say to myself, well, you're an absolutely useless person. This is obvious. What the hell are you doing here? Then I get into this awful negativity about myself, which is a fiction anyway. So it's a case of recognizing that the act can be unskillful, but the person need not be criticized.

If those things come up, of course, you can't deny them there. You can't, just like in feelings of heaviness and these dullness, you can't say, oh, the self's not there, go away. No, you have to pay attention to that and let it go. You have to pay attention to it, but you don't indulge it by identifying with it. You recognize it now, that's the self. And remember that to keep off thought, to come into the body, to stay with the body, because there we're actually experiencing the mind in its rawness as emotion, what we call emotion, feeling, *vedanā*.

So every time the mind wanders, remember, it's indulging itself, whether we like it or not. Whether we made a decision to do so or not, there's still an impulsion there. So that's why even though we don't mean to get angry, because we let the mind wander, we get more angry and more angry and more angry. You end up with Prozac.

So it's a case of recognizing that, coming back, coming to the feelings of guilt, feelings of shame, and just staying there with them. Just allowing them to rise and pass away. Because you'll never satisfy self-criticism. I mean, if you hear that voice saying, you really are the most unselfish of people. I don't know how anybody could love you. And then you say, well, I'll make up, I'll give something to somebody. And I'll practice gener-

osity. And so you do this wonderful gift and give it to somebody. And then the little voice says, yes, that was a very wonderful thing. You did a really wonderful thing. But you are still horrible. See, you can't get out of that definition of being horrible by doing something about it because it's there as a conditioning. So all we can do is allow that statement to come, note it as self-criticism, and go into the feel of it, go into the feel of it, and give it time to dissipate, give it time to dissipate.

So, when it comes to coming back to this renunciation, just one or two things that you might like to try. The idea of renunciation, of course, is not to create suffering for ourselves, you know, as if we didn't have enough. The idea of renunciation is to see where the attachment is. So one stops doing something to feel that attachment towards what you would normally indulge in. So, you know, just try missing a meal as an experiment, seeing what happens. And just stay with the feelings of fear. The body may disappear if I don't eat. Things like that. And just stay with it and just feel the fear of it. That's what you're trying to do. You're trying to feel the fear. Remember that underlying all attachment is this anxiety, this fear.

One of the things is to find out what we feel about time. That can be interesting. Just to find a clock which has a finger going round, and just watch it. Watch it for an hour, two hours, and just see what happens in your mind. It can be quite something to listen to yourself, just watching time passing. Because all this business about trying to achieve something, trying to do something, and I'm wasting my time, that all comes up in great gollops. So just watching the clock go round, or watching a watch, just tick, tick, tick, going round.

When it comes to this intuitive intelligence, so I'll only say a little bit about that because I'll go into that more deeply later, this intelligence we have, the Buddha nature within us, this something in us wants to know, where's that come from? And it's a case of developing that as an intuition, knowing the difference between thought. See, thought is not intuition. Intuition has to use thought to express itself. Intuition doesn't know what it knows until it says it to itself. That's why in your meditation sometimes you might hear these little phrases come up. Oh, everything's arising and passing away or something like that. And that's this intuition talking to itself. And it's one of these peculiarities that it doesn't know what it knows until it tells itself. And the only way it can tell itself is through words. Or one way it can tell itself is through words.

Intuition is not feeling. Don't confuse what people would normally talk about as I have a feeling or intuition with feeling. Feelings can also be just as delusive as thoughts can be. But again, this intuitive intelligence expresses itself through feeling. So just take a very simple thing. Intuitively, in terms of the intellect, expressing through the intel-

lect, we may understand this idea of interconnection, interdependency. But when it expresses itself through the heart, how does that express itself? Through love, isn't it? Compassion. So compassion, love, sympathetic joy, these are all expressions of interdependency from the heart's point of view.

And, of course, it's not the body, but it expresses itself through the body. You've only got to see sports people and see how they react to things to see how the intuitive, just that intuitive intelligence expressing itself. Same with people who perform, you know, actors and musicians. So the body, heart, mind, all that are avenues in which this intuition expresses itself.

So somehow, we have to abstract it. We have to find a way of lifting it out of that embeddedness, that confusion with the psychophysical organism. And that really is what our meditation is about. That's why we turn everything into an object. That's why we look at it. That's why we look at something. As soon as you look at it, you can't be it. If you got into a car and said, well, this is me, they'd take you away. But here we are in this body and we say, this is me. So it's the same sort of idea of detachment. That's what the detachment is. Lifting this awareness, this intuitive intelligence, this *paññā*, out of its embeddedness to look at what's going on inside us.

And to do that, I always find anyway, personally, that the best motivation is curiosity. What Zen calls the great doubt, or wanting to know, to excite that interest in our psychology and our bodies, and to see these three characteristics, see how it works. So this is the sort of thing the Bodhisattva was doing, for eons, for lifetimes. Trying to get it right.

The other thing is, the other quality is *sīla*, right conduct. Normally speaking, of course, when we talk about sīla or right conduct, it's usually referred to as just what we say and what we do. But also, you know, for our purposes, we can extend it into the mind because every time we think it's an action, it's an act of *kamma*. It is a form of sīla, you might say. And, you know, you can look at just not to harm oneself, you know. Through our thinking. Not to harm oneself by overeating. Not to harm the body. Oversleeping.

All these wonderful researches into sleep. And people who sleep five hours are better off than people who sleep nine hours. It's better for you. There's a sort of good period between five and seven hours which is good for sleep. Anything over that is doing harm to the body. They did these exercises with rats, these poor animals, in which they half-starved one set and overfed the other. Not surprisingly, the ones who were half-starved lived the longest. The ones who overfed died of overweight.

One of the things that often troubles us in our meditation is erotic, romantic desires. It's a very strong pull within us. So be careful of that. Because as I say, once the mind trips, you're off. You've created enormously wonderful good films. If you'd only written them down, you'd have probably made a fortune by now. So it's a case of as soon as you see the mind beginning to indulge, be very quick.

And I can set you a little exercise if you haven't heard of it or done it before, but to look to the disgusting nature of the body. I have to be careful here because you don't want to end up being equally disgusted as you were lusted. But the idea is that as the figure towards which you feel either erotic or romantic feelings come towards, you either see the body in its more unpleasant parts and positions and see the process of aging in that person, and this undermines it. And the idea is that we train the mind to actually turn the image for us so it'll do it naturally. Once you've done it a few times it'll just do it naturally for you, and as the lust arises and presents its image it'll change in your mind just like that. It'll do it, you see.

This is only while, for most of you, you're undertaking the *brahmacāriya*, you understand. I wouldn't want to suggest that there isn't a place for the erotic and the romantic in our lives. I remember it somewhere in my life. Somewhere in the past. And that, of course, is a renunciation. That's part of renunciation. Renouncing that sense pleasure. And we have to speak to ourselves properly, you know. We have to understand why we're doing it, or else you get into a battle with yourself. And if you do things unwillingly, it creates a wrong attitude within us.

So it's the same with drugs and drink, even at the level of just relying on tea, you know. That's also, you can look at that as, you know, conduct.

Of course with all this you have to just be careful of not getting too tight a conscience. One of the great mistakes of the monastic life is presuming that if you keep the rule absolutely perfect then you're bound to move forward. Or worse, if you're practicing very hard and you don't move forward it means that you're not really keeping the rule properly. And

I shall end this little discourse with a tale of a particular monk just to show you the error of our ways. And of course it easily translates into lay life where you get the feeling that everything you're doing is wrong and that just because you're doing something wrong you can't move forward. You're always slipping into old habits, old negative habits.

So there was a particular monk I knew who was an excellent meditator. Very fierce, up at four o'clock in the morning, all that sort of stuff. And seemingly after some period, not getting anywhere, began to lose confidence. So he presumed that it must be the Vinaya. So he began to study the Vinaya and he found, to his horror, that all monks weren't keeping the Vinaya at all. On two counts specifically. The upper robe was far too big. According to the original measurements, it was at least half the size. It was a little cape that you threw over yourself when you went into the village. And the bowl was definitely not the depth of, I think it's called a cubit.

So, at a particular ceremony, the Kaṭhina, which is the time when you have a feast after the rainy season retreat, where people come to make offerings for the Saṅgha, he turned up with a very natty little cape tied around his neck. And then began doing little alms round with a proper sized bowl, which was actually a biscuit tin. And the general feeling was that he'd gone mad.

Now, as far as he was concerned, he was following the Vinaya strictly. Unfortunately, he then began to decide that, in fact, Buddha never taught Vipassanā. He only taught Samatha. And he went to Thailand, and he got shifted from one monastery to the next. That's what happens. You just get shifted. They just tell you to leave. And he eventually ended up in Australia, where I think he finally disrobed. And it's a sort of bit of a sadness, really, because he was very keen and very devoted to the practice. And then just this wrong thought around *sīla*, around conduct, and making that distinction between moral law and rules and regulations.

So remember that even when two people, well, even by yourself, but especially when two people live in the same place, you have a veneer. You have your own little rules and regulations, like you leave your shoes in a certain place and you don't leave them anywhere else and you have to close the door and you don't pull the chain of the toilet at certain times during the night and things like that. So all these little rules and regulations begin to build up whenever two people live together. And of course, even when you live on your own, you end up having little rules and regulations which you're not aware of until somebody comes and lives with you. And then you realise that you don't want them to wash the pots like that. You do it like this. And it causes enormous anger and all sorts of silly stuff.

So, again, this business of right conduct. We can look at our actions from the point of view of not doing harm to ourselves. That's the main point.

There are two other things that I want to say. The *upekkhā* principle. It is a total receptivity. Upekkhā, you'll hear it used in various ways. One of them is neutral feelings. But here, we're really talking about an attitude of complete openness, complete re-

ceptivity. It's a bit like a judge in a way. We expect a judge not to get caught up in the arguments of these clever lawyers and not to get caught up in the emotion of the crowd. So, as it were, it's an attitude of being completely open to whatever your heart and mind have to offer you. A real openness. Hold nothing back, you see. Of course, when you find yourself getting tight, then investigate that. What is it? Fear? Aversion? You see?

And finally, *muditā*, joy. I really do feel that at the end of the day, we ought to rejoice. I mean, for heaven's sake, we've been sat here for I don't know how many hours, walking around and restraining ourselves, and at the end of the day, all we can think about is what a horrible day we had. So it's good at the end of the day to reflect on the fact that we've been training, and we've been moving forward. And even though it might feel sometimes a spiritual life as one well-known Hindu saint in Sri Lanka used to say, the spiritual life sometimes feels it's one step forward, two steps back. The fact is that every evening I really feel that it's a good practice to rejoice about one's spiritual life and to feel happiness around it, that we are actually doing what is good for us and good for others.

So that quality of muditā, that quality of rejoicing in oneself, because it's often translated as just sympathetic joy, that you can only be joyful when somebody else is joyful, you see. But we can be joyful in ourselves. And I have found that the more I practise these virtues towards myself, the more it's easier for me to practise towards the others. So that goes back to our *mettā* practice, which always begins classically with offering ourselves mettā before we offer it to others. We tend to find that difficult because of our negativities towards ourselves, so we have to come round it another way. But even so, we can see that if we can think of these virtues as something we can develop towards ourselves, then I think they become more immediately important to us.

So that's what the Buddha was doing for all these countless ages and lifetime after lifetime. The Bodhisattva in his vow to become fully self-enlightened.

CHAPTER 19

Survey of Theravāda Buddhism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h00

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma maps out the entire Theravāda journey to Awakening using the classical framework of seven purifications (satta-visuddhi) from the Rathavinīta Sutta (MN 24). Drawing from Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, he explores each stage: purification of virtue (sīla-visuddhi), mind (citta-visuddhi), view (diṭṭhi-visuddhi), overcoming doubt (kaṅkhā-vitaraṇa-visuddhi), knowledge of path and not-path (maggāmagga-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi), knowledge of the way (paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi), and knowledge and vision (ñāṇadassana-visuddhi). The talk covers ethical conduct from the five precepts to monastic discipline, the role of jhāna versus pure vipassanā practice (explaining both dvayāna and ekayāna paths), and the detailed progression through vipassanā insights including the three characteristics (tilakkhāṇa), dissolution knowledge (bhaṅga-ñāṇa), the dukkha-ñāṇas, and the four stages of Awakening from stream-entry (sotāpanna) to arahantship. This systematic overview provides practitioners with a clear understanding of where meditation experiences fit within the traditional framework, while emphasizing that these insights arise naturally through practice rather than through striving.

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

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

So now, what I'm going to try and do is give you the full panoramic view of the Theravāda process of enlightenment, the actual practice. Not so much the theory, the theories behind it, but exactly what the practice is.

Interestingly enough, it's not based directly on the Buddha's teaching. It so happened that a certain monk called Punnamantaniputta. His name would be Punna, the son of Mantani, like Sāriputta, called after your mother. And he's been heard of as being very good, he's understood the Dharma. So Sāriputta goes off to see him. And they don't know each other, or rather Sāriputta knows him, he doesn't know Sāriputta. And Sāriputta puts him to these questions and asks him, what's his understanding of the Dharma?

And I'll read this simile first. As to that friend, in other words, how does one attain nirvāna? I shall give you a simile, for some wise men understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile. Suppose that King Pasenadi of Kosala, while living in

Sāvatthi, had some urgent business to settle in Sāketa, and that between Sāvatthi and Sāketa seven relay chariots were kept ready for him. Then King Pasenadi of Kosala, leaving Sāvatthi through the inner palace door, would mount the first chariot, and by means of the first relay chariot he would arrive at the second relay chariot. Then he would dismount from the first chariot and mount the second chariot. And by means of the second chariot he would arrive at the third chariot. By means of the third chariot he would arrive at the fourth. Very exciting stuff. Finally, of course, he does actually get to the seventh chariot. And by means of the seventh chariot, he would arrive at the inner palace door of Sāketa. Then, when he had come into the inner palace door, his friends and acquaintances, his kinsmen and relatives would ask him, "Sire, did you come from Sāvatthi to the inner palace door in Sāketa by means of this relay chariot?" How then should King Pasenadi of Kosala answer in order to answer correctly?

And it's told us again. So now, when he talks about these chariots, he talks about this. Purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind. Purification of mind is for the sake of reaching purification of view. Purification of view is for the sake of reaching purification by overcoming doubt. Purification by overcoming doubt is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path. Purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is for the sake of reaching purification of knowledge and vision of the way. Purification by knowledge and vision of the way is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision. Purification by knowledge and vision is for the sake of reaching final *nirvāna* without clinging. It is for the sake of final *nirvāna* without clinging that the Holy One has lived under the Blessed One. Need I explain?

So, this particular system of explaining the Dhamma, the Buddha acknowledged it as being very good, was used most successfully by Buddhaghosa. Well, first of all, it's Upatissa, which was 3rd century AD, or Common Era. And his book is called The Path of Freedom. It got lost and it only existed in the Chinese. And as far as I know, it helped to revive Buddhism in Tibet through Asita, who found the book. It was only recently translated from the Chinese back into English. But who took that system and made it into what must be one of the great world classics of spiritual manual is Buddhaghosa. That's his book. The Path of Purification. Very dense, full of all sorts of little exercises. It's basically a manual on how to practice and all sorts of things. And it's considered to be a handbook on Theravāda Buddhism. So whoever knows this book basically understood Theravāda Buddhism. It's a pleasant weekend read.

So, if we look at, first of all, the purification of virtue, this word *sīla*, it's translated as morality, conduct, precepts. But the Buddha calls the actual precepts, for want of a better word, the *sikkhāpada*. So it's the path, *pada*, of training. This is the path of training. And having established his four sanghas - laymen, laywomen, nuns, monks - he gave a basic *sīla*, a basic conduct concerning what not to do.

So you all know them. It's the five precepts. And then if you want to strengthen it, you do the eight precepts, which these days is talked about as going for an *uposatha*. So you've got a lay junior monastic. Then you take the ten precepts, and at that point you would become an order member. And then you take this whole load of precepts, 227 of them, when you enter the order.

All these precepts, as far as I know, are all negatives, what you don't do. And it's always starting from the position that our behavior, which is unskillful and unwholesome, is a measure of our delusion. So if we can stop that behavior, if we can actually put an end to that behavior, then it draws us into the middle, away from it, when it begins to take off as a virtue.

So if you look at something like the first precept, not to kill, not to kill human beings, that's the most gross thing, but then you can refine that to not to harm any living being. But of course, when you move to that position of not harming any living being, there's a movement towards compassion, isn't there? It's the opposite, towards amity, love and all that, it shades one into the other.

If you think about the next one, which is not to take what is not freely given, so obviously a gross would be to rob a bank. In its more finer thing, it's actually not to take anything which has not been given to you at all, so even a pen from work. You can't take it because it's not been actually given to you for any other purpose than to be at work. It's a refinement. The opposite, of course, what you move into is generosity, giving away. And then of course you find that by being generous, you lose your desire for things. Remember that stealing or taking something that's forbidden is just feeding that ego which feels this lack. So by giving something, you actually undo the process of that lack within you by an act of generosity.

If you take that whole business around sexual behavior, I mean, at its grossest, it's all sorts of horrible stuff, rape and all that. Then as you get more and more refined, you get to the point of, for instance, just sex for sex's sake, which Woody Allen pointed out was an empty experience, but as empty experiences go, it was not bad. If it moves into a loving relationship, then of course it moves into something much more meaningful. But

the end refinement of that, very difficult for people to come to accept, is of course celibacy, because it's drawing out the energy or the desire to find happiness in sexual pleasure.

If you take wrong speech, so obviously on one side it's just real whoppers, greatly lies. And as you then stop exaggerating, to stop even an effort to exaggerate, to go beyond as far as you can see what the facts are, and then of course it becomes generous speech, truthful speech, kindly speech, because you're not trying to gain anything from it.

When it comes to the alcohol and all that stuff, at its grossest, of course, getting blind drunk or on drugs. But as you become more and more refined, then you obviously feel that alcohol does have this effect on your consciousness. And interestingly enough, in one of the recensions, one of the classifications of the morality, only the first four are rated. The last one's put in because it's under that influence that we actually do harm. But of course, you can take drugs and drinks and stuff like that which can actually harm the body. So it's a refinement of that, of caring for the body. So then one moves into being very careful what you feed the body, what you put into the body.

So, on the one level, you have all these precepts, all worked out at these different levels, which are guiding us not to fall into error. And then you have, for instance, all the *pāramī*, the perfections, which are telling us what to develop on the other side. So the whole of our personality or psychology is being moved through the practice of these practices of *sīla*, of conduct. We're moving from something which is quite gross and an expression of our delusion towards something which is an expression of the Enlightenment.

So finally, you get to the *Vinaya*, the rule of the monks. So what's the Buddha actually trying to do there? Because it's all what you can't do. There's nothing in the *Vinaya* which says what you can do, it just says what you can't do. But interestingly enough, there's parts of the *Vinaya* which are to do with gross things, like not to steal, not to kill. But when you come to the end, it becomes very refined. Like, for instance, you're not supposed to chapu-chapu and suru-suru. Chapu-chapu means to chop your food, and suru-suru means to slurp your drink. We've got all these little rules, and we're not supposed to talk. If I talk to my neighbour here, I should be in a voice which the other neighbour doesn't hear. So there's an effort to point out that as we become more and more refined, everything becomes more and more refined.

The problem of course for the modern age is that many of these rules and regulations were to do with that particular society and time. But when it comes to the refinement, then it does actually pass through time.

So now the big problem for people who are into developing that purity, the purity of *sīla*, the purity of conduct, is that they can get themselves into a double bind because the double bind is I cannot attain the enlightenment until the *sīla* is perfected. But I can't have perfect *sīla* until I'm enlightened. It only comes with the Enlightenment. So you'll often get people in the monastic orders especially who get themselves in this ridiculous double bind and they just end up worrying all the time. Going to hell.

So the point of the matter is that these are just guidelines. They're given to us as guidelines as to what not to do and what to do. So even if you look at the discourses concerning people in family life, how the husband should treat the wife, the wife, the husband, and all that. Even though it's dated, you can see that there was a contractual way of dealing with family members, which was to produce peace, harmony, and goodwill.

So that's the basis. Now when we go through these, it's not a case of that they come, first you do this, then you do that. It's a continual motion. So being aware of our ethical behavior, of our moral behavior, is the basic rule for spiritual advancement. Every time we behave unskillfully, it's a measure of our delusion. So you can't, a lot of people might like to say, well, I want to meditate, I want to get on with it, but I don't want to keep these rules. They get in the way. But in fact, you can't do that, because these rules that you break are measuring back to you your state of delusion.

The next section is the purification of the mind. Now this actually refers to the development of the *jhāna*, absorptions. So having now worked with trying to get rid of unskillful actions of speech and body, that's what *sīla* is. It doesn't matter what's going on in your head. It's just that you don't throw it outward into the world in terms of something that you say or something that you do. You then work inwardly through concentration exercises.

And concentration exercises can take you into these lovely jhānic states. And what the meditator knows by that is that in order to get these beautiful states, ecstatic states, they don't actually need the world out there. You can produce them within yourself just by repetition of a word or the use of an image or the use of an emotion like love, *mettā*. And you can go through these little stages of bliss and reach these lovely states of inner happiness and they're not dependent on what you've eaten or who's been talking to you.

And the danger, of course, is to find yourself in a little hut stuck somewhere up in a mountain and being absolutely blissed out. But remember that the problem with *samatha*, the problem with that meditation, is that it always sits upon those parts of us in our hearts which have not been dealt with.

Now that can be extended. That can be extended to the *abhiññā*, the powers. So you end up with things like the divine eye, the divine ear, which means that you can see through walls and hear things which other people can't hear. You can read people's minds and all those things. And that's the development of the mind which goes beyond the frame, the physical frame.

You can see how in the development of *sīla*, conduct, it can shade off from what is unwholesome to wholesomeness and you move into compassion so you can see the extension of *sīla*, the extension of the *pāramī*, the extension of perfection is the bodhisattva ideal which is what the Mahāyāna did with it. When it comes to the *jhāna* and the powers you can see the Tantra took that line and began to develop it and took the position that to be a fully fledged Buddha you had to be able to do this.

So now, having developed these different powers of *jhāna*, which is not necessary, remember that there are two paths, the *dveyāna*, in Theravāda they use the word *yāna*, somebody remind me, *yāna*, what does it mean? Vehicle, thank you. The *dveyāna* and the *ekayana*. So the *dveyāna* is to practice your concentration and your *vipassanā*. One developing against the other. One of the great masters of that, if you read his books, is Ajahn Mahā Bua. He has it in his manual on how to practice. He practices the *jhāna*. He goes for a rest in *jhāna*. When he's ready, he goes back to *vipassanā*. When he's had enough of that, he goes back to *jhāna*, refreshes himself. And in this way, you can sit for hours.

But the *ekayāna*, the direct path, if you're a fundamentalist, the only path, according to Ñānaponika, Bhikkhu Bodhi, those of you who know, corrected him and put the direct path here. *Ekayāna* means the one-way path, which is through just *vipassanā*. And that's really the path of the Mahāsi. The Mahāsi system is just that one path, which is not at all concerned with trying to get blissed out or anything of that nature, but to develop *vipassanā* to the bitter end.

So that's your second purification. Now, at this point, we're ready to move, as it were, into the purifications of view, which is going to change our relationship to the world and bring about the liberating peace. And the first thing is the purification of view, meaning here wrong view about the personality, about the body, and you begin to separate the body from the mind.

So the first thing that in your meditation you begin to do is recognize that this is the body and this is the mind. So for instance, the rising and falling of the abdomen is the body. That which knows it, notes it, is the mind. They're two different things. You begin

to separate these things out. When you're eating, you note that the sensation on your tongue is the body. The heart with its response of joy is the mind. This is beginning to undo this wholeness, this whole, the idea that things are whole.

If you look at the canon, the Buddha's constantly trying to deconstruct what we think to be entire. He does it by way of the five *khandhas*, the five heaps. He does it by way of the six *āyatanas*, the six spheres, referring to the six senses. He does it by way of the *dhātus*. So he's constantly saying to us, look, if you look, you'll see everything's compounded. But that looking has to be within ourselves through this careful investigation, this careful watching of what's happening inside us. So that's actually a *vipassanā* knowledge. And that has to be more and more clarified as we meditate. And that changes our relationship.

The purification of view, which is this careful investigation of body and mind, clearly understanding how we're constituted. The purification of overcoming doubt, which is to do with understanding karma and conditionality, how everything arises dependent on everything else. The purification by knowledge and vision of what is and what is not the path, which is recognizing the arising and passing away of phenomena and seeing the three characteristics clearly.

The purification by knowledge and vision of the course of practice, which includes those *vipassanā* kilesas, those defilements of insight that can be so seductive, and then the difficult passage through the dissolution knowledge and the dukkha ñāṇas. And finally, the purification by knowledge and vision, which is the actual attainment of the path and fruition, the shift in consciousness that marks stream entry and the subsequent stages.

These stages aren't just theoretical constructs. They describe a very real psychological and spiritual journey that countless meditators have traveled. The beauty of this map is that it gives us confidence. When we hit the difficult patches, when our meditation seems to be going nowhere or when we're struggling with restlessness or sloth and torpor, we can understand where we are in the process.

I remember when I first encountered these teachings, I was struck by how practical they are. They're not philosophical speculation but a careful documentation of what actually happens when we undertake this journey of investigation into our own experience. The path isn't always pleasant, but it is reliable. If we follow the instructions, if we maintain our effort and our curiosity about what's really happening in this moment, the insights will come.

What's particularly important to understand is that this isn't a path we travel alone. We're part of a community, a *saṅgha*, that has been walking this same route for over two and a half thousand years. When we sit in meditation, we're joining this great lineage of practitioners who have made this same journey of discovery.

The ultimate goal, of course, is the complete liberation that comes with full enlightenment, with becoming an *arahant*. But even the first taste of that liberation, stream entry, fundamentally changes our relationship to existence. We've seen that there's something beyond this constant struggle to find happiness in the conditioned world.

This is why the Buddha called his teaching the *Dhamma*. It's not just another philosophy or belief system. It's the natural law, the way things actually work. And when we align ourselves with this natural law through our practice, liberation becomes not just possible but inevitable.

And then we begin the insight knowledges. The separation of body from mind, their connection, and then you go through the real *vipassanā jhānas*, which is to see the three characteristics, to see dissolution, and then to go through the suffering of what is actually the suffering of death, the loss of self. The depression and all that sort of stuff, the running away. Suddenly there's an insight which directs you towards the goal, the equanimity, and then the reaching of the goal, the release of that consciousness from its fetters, which has been causing it trouble, and an establishment of a certain level of consciousness, which is a way of relating to the world, not to be confused with a state of mind, which is an emotion or a thought. It's the way we relate to the world, the way we are in the world, which is what is changing through the practice of Vipassanā.

So, if you really want to know about that, in much more detail, I've written some books down for you. I think the ones that I'd like you to add is *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika. It's still, I think, the classic. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: The Handbook on Mental Training Based on the Buddha's Way of Mindfulness* by Nyanaponika. And another minor classic, absolutely wonderful little book, *Insight Meditation* by Joseph Goldstein. These are just little essays, and it is based on the Mahāsi technique, but it's a lovely little book. And it's something you can use on a personal retreat and just read the occasional chapter. It's a lovely little book.

The one for the stages of insight are the ones I've given you there on that piece of paper by Nyanarama, the seven stages. Also Mahāsi has written one called *Progress and Insight*. I've written that down for you. He's got his *Practical Vipassana Exercises*. *The Seven Contemplations of Insight* are just a greater explication of the three characteristics. This is definitely a classic: *In This Very Life* by Upandita. And that's where he explains these vipassanā jhānas which confuse so many people. That'll keep you going.

Really, and the last is a caveat, is a warning. This is, I think, to my knowledge, I think I've done it twice before actually, this is the only time that I've actually taught this stuff. And the reason is very simple. It's so easy to get a conceptual idea of what the path is, and then you start striving for it. And you really, really have to tell yourself that this is completely beyond your control. Completely. You cannot make any of these insights happen. And if you try, then that's the ego getting in the way. You see? That's the ego getting in the way. So my advice to you is to read them and just, as it were, know they're there because they're part of faith. I mean, this is a well-worn path. People experience it. It's there to be had. And then just to forget them.

It's about the faith. Well, it's to point out, you see, people don't realise how delineated the path is. They think it's some hazy thing. But it's very clearly delineated. And by the way, this isn't the only way you can become enlightened. This is the Theravāda way through the practice of Vipassanā. It's very, you know... It's possible. Forget time. I've known people to struggle for five years. I've known people to do it in six weeks. I've known people still at it. So forget time. It doesn't work like that. It doesn't work at all. But knowing this and within that system, then you just keep working and things arise. In this life or the next or the next. So I think that's my little bit. Really, it's just questions.

Well, I think that what he was establishing through the monastic path was a way, was an institution for that commitment. If you really wanted to become enlightened, if you really did, you'd drop everything right now. Well in any path you want to choose, if you really want it you'll go for it.

Can't you become enlightened without one of those paths?

I don't know of any process of enlightenment which doesn't have a path to it, because it's a progress. It's not as though you're not enlightened and suddenly you're enlightened. It's a development, there's a progress to it.

I think it's a very valid question. Say somebody just living on their own in the middle of nature. This is just an example. It could be anything. Living on their own in the middle of nature. Just living their life. I mean, without a program like you've set out, could they not in their own way achieve some degree of whatever it might be?

I don't know. I wouldn't do it. I don't sense that wisdom is held back by the world. I mean, I don't know. Just being honest, I felt. It can be a little dull. I didn't do it when I was young. But just the thought came up to me, Krishnamurti. And I mean, his approach and his teaching seems to be very much about not following a path.

Well, two things there. You're presuming he was enlightened. That's number one. And number two, even though he said meditation was useless and shouldn't follow a path, if you read his writings, it's full of a path. If there's a book on elements, element publication, by somebody who's written a book on Krishnamurti's teaching, it's definitely a path. I think there's a lot of contradictions there, but I think that's probably part of growing up into a way to investigate all of this in the West. I think that's part of it, but he seemed to offer, or suggested, whether he was enlightened or not.

I think that some Buddhist teachers... Yeah, I think... He just seemed to offer alternative ways.

Well, you'd have to be... Yeah, that's it, you see. You'd have to make up your mind which path you're on. If you're a Krishnamurti, then get over there and do it. If you're on the Buddha's path, stay with the Buddha. It doesn't work. It doesn't work shifting... I know that you feel this. I know that you feel what you just said. I do. I don't feel it, is it? It's a fact.

You say, I don't know. I mean, practice perhaps. I can really see the argument for committing to the practice at some point.

Well, it's up to you. It's up to you, you see. I mean, to me, the great image of the spiritual path is climbing a mountain. If you want to go across the mountain to join another path, fine. But then you're going to have to learn new techniques because it's a different path. If you stay on the one path and you're quite certain it's going to the top, then you stay with it. I think that's what I meant.

Do you have to... Do you have to follow a path? Can you just find the path? Does everybody have to ask?

Well, you know, a technique is simply a trick to get that consciousness into a particular position so it can watch. That's all a technique is. So if your technique is to hit yourself on the head with a mallet every so often to come back into the present moment, fine, that'll do. It doesn't matter. There are as many techniques as there are teachers. The Mahāsi technique really caught hold of the imagination, A, because of the clarity of his teaching. It's always clarity that draws people. Secondly, because at the time there was a real dearth of Vipassanā meditation. It was quite new. The other person who came along was U Ba Khin, with the thing you did this afternoon with Christina. And there was a void there of vipassanā teaching. And he had such a clarity about it. But more than that, he's one of these people who could get people to work. I mean, you hear this tape, four hours sleep. This isn't easy.

That's the thing you've got to get across to yourself. It's not easy. You can't lie in the bath in the middle of nature and listen to the birds and become enlightened. At least, very difficult. Why? Because this consciousness is forever seeking happiness in the phenomenal world. That's the fundamental delusion about dukkha. It's always seeking comfort in the phenomenal world. Therefore, the path necessarily is uncomfortable. If you go to a monastery and feel comfortable, nothing's happening. Nothing's happening. If you're meditating and you've spent a week and all you can say is, it was absolutely beautiful, I was blissed out, I was fine. When you come off a big pastoral retreat, the question is, what have I come to know? What have I come to know? What have I understood? What have I come to know?

I don't want you to look so glum, Anneliese. I'm not. I've still got great questions for myself.

So, Billy Darwin, I have a question here that we wrote down. We were talking earlier and we wanted to know what understanding of awareness, do you believe that awareness and consciousness are the same?

Is that a question to me? Awareness and consciousness? Yeah, it's tradition, because Christina was saying that everyone, lots of slightly different traditions, view this very differently.

I think most of the confusion is around words. And most of the confusion arises about what Nibbāna actually is. And if you look at the different schools, it splits into two. Even in Theravāda you'll get the same split, like the people in northern Thailand, under Ajahn Mun, who Ajahn Chah was a disciple. We'll talk about the Buddha. They'll talk about a level of consciousness. And you can point directly to the scripture and quote the Buddha. There is a non-manifestive consciousness, a consciousness without object. Without boundary and in all directions full of light. So you get those schools that tell you that the enlightenment is an actual living, live consciousness, which when it descends into the world of phenomena, in other words, being human beings, has a very different relationship to that world to the person who is not enlightened.

Then you get the other school who think it's *Nirodha Samāpatti*. Now Nirodha Samāpatti is *Saññā Vedanā Nirodha Samāpatti*. It's a state of, for want of a better word, unconsciousness, where all the ending of feeling and perception has gone. And it can only be got through the jhāna. And it's only meant to be available to those people who are non-returners and the fully enlightened. And you'll get a whole load of people that tell you that Nibbāna is that state of nirodha.

And it's difficult because the Buddha says: When you have sensual pleasure, people think this is the highest happiness. But then they experience first jhāna, and they know that this sensual pleasure was quite low. First jhāna is the highest happiness. And then this way he takes you all the way up to the jhānas, and then he says, and when you come to the fourth jhāna, you flip into this nirodha samāpatti. This is the highest happiness. So you're going to always have that argumentation in Buddhist schools as to what the actual end is, because for some reason the Buddha wasn't particularly clear on this one. He didn't make a complete statement, we can say.

And to my mind, and the way it works for me is very simple. What you see in the universe, is it not, is a constant clicking off and on, isn't it? Sleep and awakeness, winter and summer. Even moments are arising and passing away, arising and passing away. So for me, that consciousness can, as it were, step out of, into itself, in which case it does not experience itself as being in the phenomenal world. And it can also experience itself within the phenomenal world, awake. This on-off, on-off, rising-falling seems to be the fundamental movement within the whole of the universe, both at the phenomenal level and the spiritual level. So the battle is always between death and birth, and death and birth. And this suffering arises because this consciousness has simply identified with the phenomenal world of feeling, sensation, etc.

So it depends on which school you want to belong to, where you want to go. But for me, in a sense, that's all endgame. When we bring the practice right down to the present moment, then it's quite simple, quite straightforward.

What about awareness? You spoke about consciousness and different ideas about consciousness.

This is just a question of definition. It's a question of words. You see even the Buddha uses vijñāna as one of the khandhās and then he goes and uses it to express this consciousness which isn't a khandhā, it isn't one of the five aggregates. He talks about *citta* and it's translated as the mind and we normally translate it as the heart mind, what the old word soul used to refer to, or I should say what the soul used to refer to. And citta and yet in his victory verse he says he's achieved the citta, the unconditioned citta, the unconditioned mind that can't be... can't be emotions and thoughts. And one of the kernel questions that somebody asked Sāriputta is: How is it Nibbāna is blissful if there's no emotions? He says there's very absence of emotions which is the bliss of Nibbāna.

Now if that seems horrible to you, that's a measure back to us of how we rate our happiness according to our emotions. So I trust you're all confused.

CHAPTER 20

Impermanence and Not-self

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42 min

> *In this reflective evening talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses questions arising from retreat practice and offers a thorough exploration of two of the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (anicca) and not-self (anattā). He begins by discussing the process of emotional and mental purification, noting how feminine and masculine approaches to emotions require different meditation strategies—those closely identified with emotions benefit from experiencing them as bodily sensations, while those who have intellectualized their emotions may need to fully feel them for the first time.*
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> *The teaching deepens into the Buddha's analysis of not-self through the five khandhas (aggregates): body, perception, feeling, mental formations (saṅkhārā), and consciousness. Bhante demonstrates how each aggregate, when carefully examined, reveals no fixed self—the body's boundaries are porous, emotions constantly shift, and consciousness depends entirely on its objects. He challenges conventional notions of free will, showing how all choices are conditioned while explaining that wisdom allows us to recognize these conditionings and move toward skillful action.*
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> *The talk culminates in contemplation of sickness, old age, and death—the three messengers that prompted the Buddha's renunciation. Bhante explains how these contemplations free us from intoxication with health, youth, and life itself, not through morbidity but through releasing compulsive attachment. He emphasizes that fear is the ego's final defense, and learning to face fear without becoming afraid of it is key to liberation. The session concludes with a reading from Samuel Beckett, inviting practitioners to contemplate the cessation of all experience.*

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

This evening I'd like to spend our usual time on things that have come up during the day and certain questions.

The first concerns this business of the process of purification. What I mean by this is partly emotional purification and partly mental purification. The purity of the heart is the transformation of all that negative side of our experience—depression, anxiety, the whole gamut of human misery—into its opposites. Where there's depression, there's joy; where there's boredom, there's interest. That's the process. It's going from darkness to light.

The emotional purification is done by bearing it. First, by bearing the product of what we've created, and then by making sure we don't unwittingly develop it through fantasy, through our actions, through speech and body. In other words, it associates very closely to what we would normally mean by psychotherapy. The added dimension, of course, is that the spiritual dimension goes down to the core root of why we're suffering. That's where it becomes a spiritual practice. We're not really concerned as such with emotions. We're not concerned as such with wandering thoughts. We're trying to get underneath it.

Just while I'm on emotions, there's the divide between the feminine and the masculine. The feminine person—and note that I don't say female—tends to be much closer to their emotions. They're the sort of person who says, "I feel, I feel." On the other end, the masculine tends to be in the head, and they normally start sentences with, "I think."

When a person who is very close to their emotions comes to meditation, because they know their emotions, because they've always identified with them, because they've always had this relationship of possessing them, it's very difficult for them to create that distance I keep talking about—to look at it. The habit is to go into it and feel, experience those emotions. For those sorts of people, if you go underneath the idea of an emotion, if you go to the body and feel it as sensation—heat, nausea, heaviness—instead of seeing it as an emotion, you see it just as physical feelings. They regain their objectivity. This is not a suppressive measure; it's just a different view of what it is. In the Buddha's understanding, it's all feeling. It all comes under one word: vedanā—physical and mental feelings. Just by being there with those feelings at the level of physical sensation, we're still allowing that energy to dissipate. That's the curing. That's the healing of that process.

On the masculine side—and this is a big generalization—often if people have lived in their heads, they've thought their emotions. They haven't actually felt their emotions. When they come to meditation and feel their emotions, it's a big shock. And the shock means that they maintain that distance because they've never felt this stuff before. For them, they can remain more easily with emotions as emotions.

So place yourself somewhere on that line. There are some emotions which we allow ourselves to feel and justify—anger, for instance. And there are other emotions that we don't justify. Jealousy, guilt, remorse—sometimes that's all hidden away. Even though I've spoken very generally, everyone has a bit of masculine and feminine in them.

Remember that we're not trying to destroy the reasoning mind. We're not trying to destroy thought. We're trying to be able to stop it. The enlightened person, if they don't want to think, doesn't think; the thoughts don't arise. I remember Krishnamurti saying

that when he went for a walk in a forest, thought never arose. He was just there, walking through the forest. It's not a destruction of thought. And remember that thought is always driven by some mental state, by some emotion, by some motivation. I'm talking about ordinary thinking.

As we purify the mind, this intelligence, this satipañña, this knowing, understands something. Yet it cannot come to know what it knows until it tells itself through thought. That's the paradox.

When the Buddha was enlightened, it's not as though he came out and just laid out a big book saying, "Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path," and off he went. It wasn't like that at all. He came out knowing that he'd experienced something, and he began to teach. He taught individuals, and the teaching came out. If you look at the early parts of the scriptures, they're very spontaneous. They're not particularly rigidified or made into lists. Then in the middle section, you suddenly start getting these lists appearing—they're there for memory—and the whole teaching becomes much more of a logical framework.

For one very simple thing, he talks about the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. We've discussed the seven factors of enlightenment, but the whole teaching is the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. The whole of the Buddhist teaching is enclosed in the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. Now, there were thirty-seven musical chords at the time.

So it's a number which everybody, shall we say, had in the back of their minds as an important number, a mystical number. And it so happens that his teaching comes out to be 37. He fiddles a bit, because the five spiritual faculties he also says are five strengths—unshakable strengths when one has actually intuited nibbāna. So there's a bit of a double take to get his 37, which is all right.

Talking about that, when I mention enlightenment—these are big words. If they don't grab you, forget it. Our work is groundwork, our work is dog work. We're at the coalface here. Enlightenment is just a word pointing to some sort of end game, some sort of process where we're moving towards it. When we say we're moving towards it, we're not creating it. If you take a train from Newton Abbot to London, it's not as though London is being created by the time you get there—it's already there. So this enlightenment—the Mahāyāna are very good on this—we're already enlightened. That's not a problem. We just don't know it. That's the problem. And to get to know it, we have to go through this whole process of purifying the heart, because the impurities in the heart, the distortions in the mind, are the measure of our delusions. So we're coming back to delusions, coming back to misunderstandings, to mistakes we've made.

So don't worry about words like enlightenment, nibbāna. Just let them go in one ear and out the other.

These days we expect things to be very quick. If I wake up with an earache, by nine o'clock I'm at the doctor's and he puts something in it, I take a tablet, and the thing's gone. The car breaks down, I phone up a service and it'll be mended within half a day. So when we come to this sort of work, we think, "Well, I've been here for a few days now. I've done this for weeks. I've done this for years. And not much seems to have happened." Then you start getting a bit depressed about it.

But what I would say to you is that when you look back over a period of time—especially if you look back something like five, six, seven years—you can definitely see a change within yourself. There is a change going on, but it's very subtle. And why does it take so much time? It's because of the strength of these conditionings. Those of you who drink tea, just stop drinking tea. It's hell. When I stop drinking tea, you'll know I'm enlightened.

So the teachers that you come across—we're practically as unenlightened as you. All we've done is a bit more training. We've had maybe some good insights, some reading, and spent a bit more time than most people. That's it. We're on the same path.

When an idea comes up in your head in meditation which seems to you absolutely sublime—like suddenly you think, "I'm going to create a charity to help the lepers in India"—you think, "That's very, very good. I'll think about that." See? Now that's not meditation. Even beautiful, wonderful, sublime desires and ideas are, as far as we're concerned in this retreat, for this period of time, just mental aberrations to be noted and let go of. If you really are interested in setting something up for lepers in India, write a little note and come back to it at the end of the week. There is nothing wrong with that lovely idea. There are lots of lepers in India, aren't there?

Sometimes the body shakes or jerks in meditation. This is just energy caught up in the body, trying to release itself. It can be quite dramatic—I remember somebody shaking his head like this, you know, like he kept saying "yes, yes, yes." But sometimes it's a sort of swaying, and it feels good. Of course it feels good, because it's letting off this energy. So what you do is you stop it. You mentally bring the energy up the spine, down to the stomach, up the spine—that's where the energy is supposed to move, isn't it? Tai Chi and all that. And you lift yourself up. As soon as you stop, then you may begin to feel the actual underlying disturbance which is causing this swaying. That's what you have to deal with. When it passes, no more swaying.

The breath.

Around this time, people do start becoming much more calm, especially over the next two days, but even today. There are moments during meditation when a peacefulness comes, a great calm descends, the body becomes very still, the mind is not thinking, it's pretty empty, and the heart seems to be just calm. And when you look, there's only the breath to watch. There's only the breath.

At this point, a meditator might say, "Now what?" Because they're expecting some explosion or something to happen. Well, the thing is that now there is this lovely moment to really plunge into the breath and to go towards the center of the breath. What we're doing is beginning to focus in on a specific area. The smaller the area—it's like when somebody studies for a higher degree, they always go to a really abstruse little bit. You know, like why flies land on mushrooms, and there's a whole thesis on that.

As we go into the middle of the breath, we're really sharpening the focus. We're really sharpening the concentration. The intelligence is still there. There's still that question mark in the mind, that sense of curiosity, of wanting to know. It's a relaxation. If your forehead starts furrowing because you're doing this business, then that's wrong. Remember, this is a relaxation. This is driven by interest—not a desire to concentrate, but driven by interest.

And as you get closer and closer, because of that focus, time is collapsing. I mean, how long is time? What does it feel like? It's a couple of seconds, isn't it? It's about so long. But in reality, it's not like that at all. It's moment to moment. It's minute, the way that things are arising and passing away. As we go into there, the whole of time is collapsing. And it's right here that we begin to see things like this sense of transiency much more clearly. When we come out, when something does come up, and we have that sharpness of concentration as a quality of that looking, then of course we can see it more clearly. So don't waste those times, no matter how short they are—even if they're only a minute or so. Don't waste them.

I think that covers the things that came up for today. What I want to do is complete the three characteristics and go through them, seeing where it takes us. These other two are anicca and anatta—transience, impermanence, and this idea of not-self.

Whereas dukkha—suffering, dissatisfaction, unsatisfactoriness—belongs to the realm of sentient beings, belongs to our realm specifically. It's us who suffer. But when it comes to transience and not-self, that's something which reaches out to the whole phenomenal world. Everything is in a state of arising and passing away. It is one eternal law that everything changes. It's the one steady law in the universe. Everything is changing. And the other thing is that everything is not-self.

I want to start with this harder concept of not-self, go through one or two ideas with you, and then move to the easier one, this idea of transience, and see where it takes us.

The first thing about not-self is that it's not a philosophical statement. The Buddha is not saying there is no self. It's a teaching tool. It's a way of looking at what we're experiencing and beginning to see that there's no ghost within the machine, that there's nothing metaphysical about what we experience.

Everything arises because it's in relationship with everything. Everything arises dependent on something. So nothing has its own essential nature. Nothing has its own being.

Now when I walk around, I feel very individual. I think it's me. Me, I'm walking around. I have this feeling of being me. But when I look at this me, if I look at the body, I don't know where the me begins and the me ends. When does air become me? Does it become me when it's in the mouth or when it's in the blood? When does the food I'm eating become me? There's a sort of boundary, isn't there? When I say these are my thoughts, how much of what I'm thinking is coming in from the radio, from people I talk to, from all of that? What do I mean by my thoughts over this membrane? When I talk about emotions, sure, they're developed by me, but they're also to do with my relationship to people. They evoke things. So there's this passage of communication between us, between nature, wherever I go. This idea of me, this sort of sharp wall around me, begins to undo.

Now this process of undoing, this process of deconstruction, which I've been pointing you to especially when you're doing the eating meditation, is the main technique that the Buddha uses to get across his idea of not-self.

Just to look at one of them, he talks about the five khandhas, the five aggregates. He says, when you take a human being apart, what do you find? You find the body, don't you, and that's made up of all sorts of stuff—chemicals and so on. It's not one thing. So where does this body being me come from? "This is my body." See, I also have a possessive idea. "My body is me." Now do I lose me if I lose a foot? Suppose I lose a leg—I've now moved from being a biped to a monoped. Is it still me? Have I lost a bit of me when I do that? At what point do I lose me? Do I lose my arms? Lose my legs? Chop my head off? Do I lose me? Is that me gone? This definition of me is strange, isn't it?

Then he says there's this whole process of perceiving, where the mind actually creates pictures—basic pictures that we work on, basic ideas and concepts. They can be very grounded things, like just the colour, for instance, or they can be quite florid, beautiful pictures and ideas that I create in my mind. And it's all bits and pieces. Where do

they exist? Have I got them in little drawers around my head? It's the same with a computer, isn't it? Where's the program? Where is it? You press a button and this thing comes up—Word, Outlook Express. Where was it? So this idea of things being there in their totality, actually in some sort of subconscious, some sort of sub-realm, and they appear when they want to—it's not like that, is it?

Then he says we've got all these feelings. So perception is one thing, but feelings are something else. Which feeling are you? Today I felt happy—is that me? Now I'm feeling depressed—no, that's me. Which emotion are you going to draw on and say, "Well, this is me"? Then as soon as it's you, you've got to hold on to it and say, "I am depressed. I'm really depressed. Even when I'm happy, I'm depressed." There's no way out. You get blocked into this, and it's because you've defined yourself—this is me, miserable.

I've confused things there. Feelings should really just be the feelings in the body—likeable, unlikeable feelings. The feelings I've just talked about, depression and all that, really belong to the next section, which are the sankaras, those things that we've developed by an act of will. Remember that the body is conditioned.

I can do certain things with it, but there's a blueprint there. It just follows the genome, you know? I can't do much about that. Perceptions are dependent on my brain and mind. I can't do much about that either. Feelings are dependent too—if somebody kicks me in the shin, then it hurts and that's it. I can't do anything about that. It's just something that arises.

But this whole business of emotions is something that I create through my will. And that's what we're all beginning to understand by watching this process within us—these emotions arising and passing away, and how we want to indulge them.

So which feelings are we? Are yesterday's feelings the same as today's feelings? Who am I now? Because yesterday I had these feelings, but now I've got different feelings. So who am I? Because the idea of a "me" is something static, isn't it? Something solid, something I can really point to and say, "Well, this is me." And the goalposts keep changing.

And then finally there's consciousness. Consciousness is always dependent on the object. If there's no object to be conscious of, who are you? Who are you in sleep? Where do you go in sleep? In the middle of your sleep, do you say, "I'm still here"? It's gone, isn't it? There's no me. It's not that there's not awareness there, but there's definitely not a sense of me.

If, for instance, the doctor said to you, "Listen, you've got this very strange and terrible disease. If you fall asleep, you will die"—are you going to fall asleep? You see? The reason why we fall asleep is because we presume I'm going to appear again in the morning. I wake up and there I am. Me again.

So we have to really look at this and begin to experience things and realize that this concept of me being this body, me being this personality, me being this character—I can't sustain that, at least not at an intellectual level. I can't sustain it.

So what the meditation does is take us in. And by seeing this distancing—that's why we distance, that's the first position—by distancing, we're looking at an object. If it's an object, it can't be the subject. I can't be what I'm looking at, because there's a distance there, isn't there? So when we make that distance very obvious to ourselves, in ourselves, we're creating that objectivity, that not-self.

And that's what the Buddha says. When you look in and you feel something, just say: not me, not mine, not a self. The body's not a self. It's not me and it's not mine and it's not a self. Emotions—they're not me, they're not mine, and they're not a self. Feelings in the body are not me, they're not mine, and they're not a self. The consciousness that arises knowing things is not me, not mine, not a self.

So these little reflections, you see, they slowly burst through the bubble, they burst through the hard idea of me. And of course it's frightening, isn't it? Because as we'll explore towards the end, the point of me, where me really comes to an end—the point of death—is very frightening for us. Who am I when I die?

So that's part of the idea that the Buddha uses to deconstruct. You see the idea of deconstructing something, to see that there's no self, there's no me, no I, no self.

The other thing he points to is control. This whole idea of free will has badgered Western philosophy ever since—free will. So I walk into a supermarket, and there's something like a hundred biscuits there. And I think, "Fantastic. I have free will to choose any biscuit I want." And I go along the shelf and I come across Crunch It.

I pick it up and it says, "Crunch It really puts you in a good mood." And I think, "Crunch It? I've never heard of that." So I put it back. Then I walk along and see McVitie's chocolate biscuits. "Oh, that's what I want! Chocolate biscuits." I have exercised my free will. Totally conditioned, isn't it?

"I have free speech. I will say exactly what I want, anytime." But it's conditioned, isn't it? I only say something if somebody asks me, if somebody invites my opinion. Everything I say is dependent on my history, my ideas, my connections.

"I have free will. Perfectly free will. I can vote for whomever I want." "I never vote for liberals." "Conservatives? No, I'm fed up with the lot." "I'm not going to vote." I have exercised my free will—driven by prejudice, driven by hatred and greed. But I've exercised my free will, you see?

So first of all, we have to get rid of that pathetic idea that somehow the will is some sort of floating entity that can choose whatever it wants, to do my own thing in my own time and in my own way. We can dispense with that completely.

And then when we come down to it, we realize that in fact we obviously have choices. And what we choose is conditioned. So now, if we want to get to some freedom —not freedom *to do*, but freedom *from*, freedom from conditioning—we need to know what are the conditionings that make us make certain choices. And do these choices lead to my personal comfort, my happiness, my well-being? Do they lead to the well-being, comfort, and happiness of others?

Now, if I can see the conditioning, and if I can see the choice, and if I can see the result of the choice, and I can then step back and reflect, "Is this skillful or not?"—then I have some sort of choice to say no. But that no is coming from another conditioning, one arising out of the wisdom factor. "I'm not going to do anything which leads me to unhappiness. I'm not going to do anything which leads others to unhappiness."

So everything is conditioned, and yet through wisdom we have this slow movement, this transformation of all our habits from one place to another—from wicked to wonderful—just by exercising this reflection, driven by the idea of goodness, beauty, love, and all that sort of stuff.

Even when we do that and we've come to know it, there's no free will about it. There's nothing free about it. You're compelled. As soon as you realize that something's doing you harm, you don't do it anymore. As soon as you realize something's doing you good, you start doing that.

So there's something within us which is driven. It is driven. It's not within the bounds of our ego. It's not within the bounds of our choice. It is being driven toward enlightenment. The whole world is so manufactured to drive us, herd us, toward enlightenment. We don't have a choice. Even when you're in hell, it doesn't last that long. And when you come out, you realize, "God, I've been in hell. I don't want to go there again. I'm not going down that road again."

So the whole process is one of learning, because of this intelligence.

It's this intelligence that wants to get out of suffering. It's this intelligence that wants to get out of dissatisfaction. And yet there is something which is unconditioned.

So we chant in the morning, this little chant from the Buddha: *aneka jāti saṃsāraṃ*. And he says, "I've been through loads of rebirths, loads and loads, and I've constantly been pulled by the nose by this self, by this ego." But now, he says, "I've seen you. I've broken your ridge pole, I've pulled down your house, and you're definitely not going to build another ego and self for me." And he says, "I have destroyed all my impurities, everything is gone." He says, "I have achieved the unconditioned consciousness."

That unconditioned consciousness of the Buddha, while he's here, still has to live in the world. So his body tells him he's hungry. He goes out and gets some food and he eats. And when somebody comes to him and says, "Now what's all this stuff about?" he has to respond. He's using the language of the time, which is totally conditioned.

So that's why he says that the feeling of moving towards the enlightenment is a freedom *from*, not a freedom *to* do something—a freedom from compulsion. When we talk about control, that's coming from ego. That's ego trying to control things, power and all that. When we understand rightly, then we understand that we're in relationship, and that it's always a contract. We're always moving around. You decide that you're going to go for a picnic and the weather's pouring—that's okay. You take an umbrella. You work with it.

So now I want to get onto *anicca*, which is, in a sense, a more easy concept, because we can all see everything's arising and passing away. But how much do we see it? We see it out there, and we want it, we love it. Who wouldn't want winter and summer? They're a lovely balance. You don't get that in the East, for instance—it's always the same.

But it's when change hits us... Old age. Death. They're changing us. That's when we don't want to look at it. That's when we avert our eyes and we don't really recognize that this change is something happening within us, internal. And because we don't recognize that, because we don't stay with moments, we create this idea of continuity which feeds into the idea of self. It's always me.

But just look at the body you were born with—that little screaming hulk. How much of it is left now? It doesn't exist anymore, does it? That baby is dead. That body is dead. It died within seven years, according to our science. Every cell, every atom in that body was replaced. That whole body has very slowly, unwittingly, just dissipated, just disappeared.

When you look in the mirror next time, you can say to that face, "You weren't here seven years ago." That's what transiency is. Things are changing.

And yet, because we have this idea, because I can show you through photographs that it was me—that little screaming hulk that doesn't look anything like me now—was me. Crazy, eh? How can you be a "was-me"? You've got to be me now. You can't be me then. But I launch myself into the future. So I'm going to appear without any doubt tomorrow. I know exactly what I'm doing tomorrow.

I'm coming here to meditate in the morning. That's me.

So this idea of transiency also has to be undone. And it's undone by seeing—just seeing that process, just seeing it, by being aware of it.

When we see it inwardly and it brings up fear, that's what we've got to look at, because this fear is coming from the ego. Fear is the last barrier of the self. That's how it protects itself. There's no worse emotion than fear. You may think there is, but fear is the last thing that the self has to protect itself.

So when fear comes up, that's really something to move towards. And what you find, of course, is where there's fear, there's the fear of fear. And you bounce off it. When you're afraid of fear, you get into panic. That's what panic is. And you lose it. You just run away.

So when fear of fear comes up, you look at the fear, you stay with that, you try and stay steady between the two, as it were. Very difficult, but you stay steady. And slowly you keep averting your attention to the fear, the original fear. As you get close to it, you begin to lose your fear of it. Just because of feeling. It's just another state, just another mental state, another emotion, another feeling. That's all it is. Not me, not mine, not self.

And when we finally lose fear of fear—what the hell's going to frighten us?

So the problem isn't the object, the problem isn't the wild beast attacking you. The problem is the fear. As soon as you let go of fear, as soon as you can feel fear and not become afraid by fear, then nothing will frighten you. And that's a sign to the person that they've undone this idea of ego, of self.

The Buddha is often referred to as the fearless one. There is no fear. What is an enlightened person going to be afraid of? Who can hurt you anyway? What can people do to you? What can the world do to you? They can only do to your body. They can't hurt you emotionally. Nobody can cause you psychological pain.

Even when somebody comes to me and says, "You're a very stupid, bald-headed monk." It stopped here. That's all. It stopped here. But if I take it in, I've created this hatred, this aversion, because I've heard these words. And then I create a relationship with this person, tell them what I think of them. So nobody can cause us psychological pain.

The worst the world can do to us is cause us physical pain. But if we're not the body, if it's not me, not mine—you've sat there now in meditation and you've been able to get some distance between that physical pain and you can see that there's an equanimity with it, you can stay with it. If there's a total detachment from it, if there's no connection whatsoever with pain, how can it hurt?

So I want now to draw us to a conclusion. And I want to bring us to an exercise which I'll be doing at the beginning of every last session. It's simply to bring to mind sickness, old age, and death. These are the three things that drew the Buddha to his enlightenment.

When he saw a sick person, a very old person, and a corpse, each time he asked, "What is this?" He had been sheltered from such things. And each time they told him, "He's a human being." Then came the big question: "Does this happen to me?" And that shook him. That sent him into a kind of tizzy. He had what we might call a nervous breakdown and ran off to become a monk. So now you know why people become monks.

These meditations are meant to undo our delusions. The Buddha says that when we meditate on the fact that this body can become sick, we undermine this intoxication we have with health—this worry, these household gyms, this concern about vitamins and diets and all that sort of thing. It's all this obsession with health. He undoes the obsession. It doesn't mean you don't care for yourself. It's just undoing the obsession with health.

He says when we contemplate old age, it gets rid of our obsession with youth—with wanting to be young, to be forever flowering. We can't bear to decay. Ugly. Terrible. And when we contemplate death, we undermine this very intoxication, this enchantment, this utter dependency we have on life itself. So we're undermining that.

And what does that bring? It brings freedom. A freedom from obsession with health. A freedom from having to look beautiful and young. A freedom from having to live, having to exist—that compulsiveness. It's always getting rid of compulsiveness.

And just to put us in the mood, I'd like to read this little poem from my favourite author, Samuel Beckett, whose work is a total meditation on last moments, on consciousness. It's up to you—sometimes I close my eyes when I listen to poetry and sort of look at it.

Just think if all this, one day, all this, one fine day—just think if one day, one fine day, all this stopped. Just think.

I hope my words have been of some use to you. May you be enlightened even within these seven days.

CHAPTER 21

Ethical Behaviour and the Awakening are One

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a common confusion in Buddhist practice: the false separation between paññā (insight/understanding) and sīla (ethical conduct). Drawing from the Buddha's own description as vijjācaraṇasampanno (accomplished in both understanding and conduct), he explains how wisdom and virtue are like two rivers flowing into the same sea.

The talk examines the distinction between 'Nibbānic Buddhism' and 'Karmic Buddhism,' exploring how insight naturally gives rise to compassionate action, as seen in the Buddha's spontaneous desire to teach after his Awakening. Through the Noble Eightfold Path's structure of sīla, samādhi, and paññā, Bhante demonstrates how right understanding transforms into right speech, action, and livelihood, while ethical behavior supports deeper insight.

Key concepts include kusala (skillful/virtuous action), puñña (merit), and their relationship to spiritual progress. The dramatic story of Aṅgulimāla illustrates how even the most terrible past actions cannot prevent liberation when genuine transformation occurs. This teaching offers practical guidance for reflecting on our daily choices through the lens of virtue and wisdom, showing how every moment presents an opportunity for spiritual growth through mindful ethical action.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhasa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhasa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhasa

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

I was going to talk about this confusion sometimes that people have between *paññā*, insight, the awakening, and *sīla*, conduct. I think it's still in some circles when you say morality, it gets people very angry. They don't want to know about morality as such, or the ethical life.

In the chant in the morning, we say of the Buddha that he's *vijjācaraṇasampanno*, that he's accomplished both in his understanding and in his conduct. And he himself says that understanding and conduct are like the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers that join and flow into the sea. He doesn't make a distinction between understanding and how it expresses itself.

Some of you will know that the Eightfold Path is normally split into three sections: *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā* — right conduct, right meditation, and right understanding. And that *samādhi* normally refers to the absorptions, but in the Buddha's teachings those are not actually necessary. So the whole teaching can be reduced in terms of the process of purification and awakening to those two words: *paññā* and *sīla*. *Paññā* is this business of trying to understand how things really are, and *sīla* is right conduct, ethical behaviour. Those two sum up the Buddha's teachings.

But then you'll come across writers who split them. And when you go to the East and you see how people behave, you can understand how they might come to these conclusions from their fieldwork, from their anthropological fieldwork. One writer talks about Nibbanic Buddhism and Karmic Buddhism.

Often when you speak to Eastern Buddhists, or born Buddhists anyway, they won't have a doubt that the end point is to become liberated — *Nibbāna* — and that's the point. But their whole life is really centred around *sīla*, which is right conduct. And when you follow that train of thought through, they're not concerned so much with getting rid of this self, but more in the sense of making it a good self, a happy self, insofar as the self can be happy. And so their whole lives are about doing right things, and this is where the word *kusala* comes in, in order to gain merit, and that's *puñña*.

These two words, *kusala* and *puñña*, are key words in the Buddha's teachings. And the general idea is that you stop doing harm, you do as much good as you can, and you get reborn in the heavenly realm. And in the heavenly realm, it's a little easier to seek *Nibbāna*.

Even amongst monks and nuns, you'll find that that is the prevalent attitude. And you'll find the monks in Sri Lanka — I'm not so sure about Burma and Thailand and other places, but being influenced by Hinduism — the hierarchy will tell you that this is the Kala Yoga. And it's impossible for anybody to become enlightened during this particular time, so forget it. The best thing you can do is to do good and get reborn into a better place. It's a bit disheartening, really. But they're happy with that. In a sense, it's a let-out. I mean, if you say to yourself, I can't become enlightened, phew, I may as well enjoy myself. That's the case. So you've got to be careful with that sort of mentality.

But both in the actual way the Buddha behaves, his actual behaviour, and in the general teachings, and even in the psychology, what we chant in the morning, you can begin to see that you can't split the one from the other. The one arises out of the other.

There's this point in the Buddha's life once he's become enlightened, once he's become liberated and he has this deep understanding into the way things are and he spends some time recollecting over it. Mythically it's said three nights he goes through this wheel of dependent origination, forward, backward, both forward and backward. But obviously he sat there and that insight had to permeate his understanding, and he came up with this. And then at that point there is this idea arise in his head: who can he teach? So that has arisen spontaneously in his mind.

Now when he looks around and he sees through his powers that his old teachers have died, and he gets the doubt. And the doubt is that anybody can receive this teaching. It's too subtle. He doesn't believe for a moment there. He doesn't think that people are ready for this.

Now you'll find in some writers that they call this the great hesitation, and they argue that therefore the Buddha's accomplishment is twofold. His accomplishment was both the enlightenment, his liberation, and secondly his teaching, and that he need not necessarily have taught. He could have said, no, I won't, I'll sit here in this bliss until I pop off. And that's where you get some idea that perhaps there's a choice, that you can become liberated and yet not do anything. That it doesn't manifest outwardly into the world.

Supporting that is that myth of the Paccekabuddhist, the private Buddha — the person who's become fully liberated but what it really says about that is that they can't teach. That's the normal thing, not that they don't want to; they just can't. They don't have the skills or the capacity. And if you think of just ordinary life, sometimes you get people who are very clever in their subject but they just can't get it across. So that's another skill.

So in the sense that the Buddha had a special skill whereby he could actually get this stuff across to people is one thing. But the hesitation was only around — this is just my own understanding — the hesitation was only around whether people were actually ready to receive it. The hesitation wasn't in whether to teach or not. Which is a distinction, isn't it?

So the desire to teach, the desire to actually share what he had with others, arose spontaneously after he had understood what it was that he had gained. In the Zen tradition, you'll hear it said that with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. So it's not possible to continue in the path and for our behaviour not to change.

To take it at a ridiculous level, you couldn't have a neurotic Buddha. That would be awful, wouldn't it? Worrying about his fingernails while he's teaching. Worrying whether he'll be liked. Worrying whether he'll get any food today. It doesn't sit, does it? And it would be awful if he were immoral. He's teaching all this stuff and going around robbing banks. So there's something that jars when you consider what the behaviour of somebody who is spiritually advanced might be if it doesn't connect with understanding.

There's got to be that immediate connection between a person's understanding and purity. I mean, the whole point is that there's a purification of the heart going on. So here we are, we're meditating, we're doing this vipassanā, and we can see that, A, there's this insight going on, there's this understanding about ourselves and how we're creating suffering for ourselves, but there's also this purification going on — that in fact, we are getting less and less depressed, less and less angry, or at least not for such a long period. And there's a certain progression. If you're not progressing, then you have to look at your practice and find out why. Because that's the point. The point is to progress, both in understanding and in our happiness, our contentedness.

So that business of the slow gaining of understanding into the way we are, manifesting as good action, is right there in the Noble Eightfold Path. It flows right down. So right understanding changes your attitude to life. So for the Buddha, once the understanding had come, the compassion arose. And he himself is constantly saying, *anukampā*, he says, out of empathy, out of sympathy, I teach you. Whatever a teacher can do for his students, I've done for you. And then that manifests: right speech, right action, right livelihood.

Now, we also know that it can go back the other way. Depending on your livelihood, you yourself can be changed, can't you? I mean, just imagine now if we all joined the SAS. The Special Army Services. It would be different, wouldn't it? I mean, you'd be out there with your machine gun waiting to kill somebody, or at least protecting yourself. So your whole mentality would change, wouldn't it?

Or if you, like a policeman — a policeman's always suspicious. A policeman walks in here, he'd be suspicious. I have my brother-in-law in special service. He protects politicians. He's always suspicious. He's got to be. He's trained to be suspicious. He wanted to be suspicious. A teacher never asks a question they don't know the answer. They always make sure they know the answer.

What we do affects us, doesn't it, directly? Our personality, the way we speak, our friendships, our acquaintances, what politics we follow, what particular religion we follow, all that has an effect on us and produces a certain way of behaving, but it also comes with an understanding. And that understanding is either going to take us into further happiness or further unhappiness.

So it runs both ways through our understanding, which is at three levels: actually hearing something which has an effect on us that we haven't heard before, through our own mental processes, our own reflection, and then through this direct insight, through direct experience. So our understanding changes. But it can also change by what we do. So there's an intimate relationship between our conduct and our understanding. It would be false to separate that.

So when you understand that, in lay life, because most of the time you have to be doing something — your job, whatever it is — you can really see quite clearly that this is the path, the path of action. What we're actually doing at any present time, at any present moment, is a path leading us either towards or away from this liberation. And therefore, anytime we do something, there is the importance of that moment of reflection about whether it's *kusala* or *akusala*.

Now this word *kusala*, it has two meanings in English. One is that it's skillful. Unfortunately, if you say, well, I'm only doing this because it's skillful, I'm only being good, I'm only being generous and compassionate because it's skillful, then, as it were, the action is taken off the action itself for some future purpose. So I'm being skillful now, so I can be liberated later. And immediately you cut in between these two processes, *paññā* and *sīla*. So it becomes a utilitarian thing. I'm only being good so that I can become enlightened. I'm only helping you so that I can become... See what I mean? There's a split there.

So now you'll often see in the books that that word is translated as skillful. But that's the danger. And it means that *sīla* itself is not an end in itself. But in fact, the end in this life is perfect conduct, *vijjācaraṇasampanno*, perfected, accomplished in his understanding and his behaviour.

So, although we might say skillful in the sense that it's wholesome and it's right and all that, you also have to use the word virtuous. It is virtuous as opposed to being non-virtuous or vicious. And the question is, is virtue an end in itself? Is it? Is the virtuous life an end in itself?

Now, you wouldn't be virtuous if you look at it the other way. You wouldn't be virtuous unless you knew why you're being virtuous. There has to be an insight into it. It needn't be an intellectual insight. It needn't be something that you can scribble on a piece of paper. When we feel a certain compassion towards somebody, when we want to help somebody, when that feeling comes out, the underlying understanding there is our interrelatedness.

So although we can talk about interrelatedness from this high intellectual level, about how things all fit together, about how things are related to each other, everything is conditioned by everything else and all that, the actual experience of it in terms of our relationship to other beings, and to plants and the earth and all that, is this heart relationship of compassion, love, sympathetic joy. And that's a heart understanding.

If you split the two, then you move towards a dry intellectual understanding. And you miss out on the heart level. On the other hand, if you stick with the heart level without some understanding, then it can so easily slip into mawkish behaviour. So that's where we were saying last time about the slippage of compassion into pity or grief.

Now when we have this word *kusala*, this word virtuous or skillful, there's always this follow-on of *puñña*, which translates as merit. And it begins to sound a bit like some Christian doctrines, like grace. And you'll often hear in Buddhist circles — born Buddhists, cultural Buddhists, I don't know what you call them — it's like a bank account. You've got all this merit, and you can draw on it at any time, and you can share it with people. And that's meritorious, so you get more merit because you've shared your merit. It's a bank account that manufactures itself, which is wonderful, isn't it?

But when you actually read the psychology of the Buddha, this *puñña* has nothing to do with the outside. Of course the outside might change. For instance, if I make a decision to move away from a certain job or a certain set of friendships which I can see are not virtuous, they're not quite supporting the life I want to lead. That movement away may be painful because I have certain friendships. But in doing so, I am moving into another area. The decision takes me into another area of experience which does support me. So we can say that the friendships that I meet here and the job that I'm doing now is my *puñña*. That's my merit for shifting across. But, in a sense, that misses the point. That's all well and good.

But the real *puñña*, the real merit, is within the heart itself. So that's why, when we become fully liberated, in a couple of days, you'll see that there's no more *puñña*. There is no more merit to be had. Because the liberated person is completely full. They're completely contented and completely happy, so they cannot increase their *puñña*. And this is what it says in the scriptures. You can't increase that. That's it, they've made it.

Yet they still behave out of this compassionate action. And that's when it becomes selfless, because whether we like it or not, when we do good, we are increasing our own goodness within ourselves. So while we're not liberated, we do get the benefit of this *puñña*. But once a person becomes liberated, then there's no more *puñña*.

I'm reminded of, I think it was Sister Teresa of Lisieux. I think it was Teresa of Lisieux, Saint Teresa of Lisieux. And she was asked, if everybody goes to heaven, some people have obviously been better than others. And everybody's in heaven. So how can you all be happy? Because some will have more happiness than others. Probably a bit of jealousy. And her answer was, well, everybody gets a glass and it's completely full, but each glass is of a different size. Everybody gets a glass and it's completely full, but everybody has a different size, depending on their craftsmanship.

If you look at the different arahats, if you look at the different people of the Buddha's time like Sāriputta and Moggallāna, then you can see that. You can see that quite clearly that they have different areas which for them produce, what can we say, a different type of contentment.

So Sāriputta is known as the general of the Dharma, so his whole interest was in understanding and it's understood that he's only second to the Buddha, perhaps even equal in his understanding to the Buddha. The Buddha definitely praises him as being quite exceptional in his insight. And because of that, because of that whole interest in understanding, he doesn't develop the powers.

Moggallāna, who's the other chief disciple, isn't so interested in that angle of things but develops the powers. And when Moggallāna asks Sāriputta, why don't you develop the powers? Sāriputta's answer is, I'm not interested. Not interested. So there's something about Sāriputta's state, where he is totally content with the way he is, and he doesn't see any point in levitation, or moving from here to there, or doing amazing things. But from Moggallāna's point of view, that was part of his *puñña*, that was part of his happiness.

So there are these three concepts, there are these three or four different concepts that we have to be fairly clear on just to make sure that we are guiding ourselves properly. *Paññā* and *sīla*, our understanding and our conduct, are completely interrelated. And that if we constantly reflect upon our conduct as virtuous, then our understanding will grow naturally.

and if we understand that our understanding must be translated into right conduct, then we should progress.

Secondly, that this whole *kamma*, the whole teaching around *kamma* which is action —that's what it is, it's an action although it also means the consequence of action—has to be guided by our principles, our virtuous principles, which is this *kusala*. So the idea of reflecting about why we're doing something, even the most mundane things, like you might decide that you might want to watch a bit of TV.

So when you turn it on, you have to ask yourself, do I want to watch this programme or not? What am I putting into my heart when I watch this programme? What am I doing to my head when I'm watching this programme? And as soon as you see that it's not quite doing you good, then we have to have that strength of will to turn it off.

One exercise that I've set people is to sit in front of your favourite programme, EastEnders, and get a cup of tea, make yourself comfortable. And when the time comes, you don't turn the TV on. You just sit there watching that screen. And just feel that compulsiveness to actually know what's going on. And your mind's making up little stories, trying to work out, just in case you might have missed the plot. And you keep doing that until you don't want to watch it anymore. You do it every day, or whatever it takes. And then when you're totally equanimous with sitting in front of that screen knowing that EastEnders is on now, then you can turn it back on. When you turn it back on, then you can ask yourself, should I be watching this or not? Should I be watching this programme or not?

What about listening to the radio? All of it. TV, it doesn't matter. Whatever entertainment. Friendships. Even going for a walk. Everything has to be questioned. Is this the right thing to be doing now? Is this the virtuous thing to be doing now? Remember, skillful, virtuous. You've got to balance that.

How could you explain that to a friend? Like, I feel maybe it's not a virtuous relationship and I don't want to see your friend. Well, you can be stark. You can say that if you want. You know, I find my relationship with you utterly unskillful and unvirtuous, and I have no wish to see you again. That's it. Well, you can be assured that that would be the end of that relationship. I mean, that's what you call a sword of wisdom. But I'm sure

there are more kindly ways of getting the message across that you don't particularly want to see them again. Just showing a lack of interest. Making little white lies. It depends. Well, it's up to you. But at some point, if you decide that a friendship is not virtuous, then you have to get rid of it. Full stop.

Angulimāla is one of these stories like the good thief on the cross. And what the story does is to show that no matter how awful you've been, yet you can become totally liberated. Now, again, you have to make a distinction between this *puñña*, this merit, and... The merit that Angulimāla finished up with when he met the Buddha was—I'm just guessing—an angry, hateful, fearful, vengeful, grudgeful mind. That's in his mind. So when he meets the Buddha and something happens there, some magic happens where he suddenly sees how badly he's behaved and the consequences of it. And remember in those days, the whole idea of *kamma* would have been fully accepted and rebirth and all that and going to the hells. And suddenly when he realises what he's done, he has to come back on that.

So the first thing he does is he joins the order. So immediately, from what we've been talking about, he cuts away from one type of behaviour into another, like a knife. He just moves out of all that business of murder, whatever it was, into the *brahmachariya* life. That's a direct cut. Now, it's said that he was unarmed, round people threw stones at him and bricks and whatnot. Because he was in robes, because of people's respect for people in robes, it seems nobody really went for him, tried to lynch him or anything like that. But he still had that outside effect of children running away from him and people throwing things, spitting at him, things like that. So that's his *kamma*. But that's only the outside reflection back to him, or that's other people's reaction to him.

The process of liberation is now him within himself dealing with all that horror of remorse, guilt, which will be with him because of his past actions. So if you take the Moors murderer, Ian Brady—his biographer, I've not read the book, I don't even know if the book's out actually, I just read a little bit in the newspaper about it—his biographer asked him, does he ever think about the children he tortured? For those of you who don't know, he and a woman called Myra Hindley tortured little children, actually put it on cassette, so they were actually heard in court. It was in the 60s. And he was asked by this biographer, does he ever think about the suffering he caused those children? And his answer was, "If I did that, it would drive me mad."

So even in the most dastardly of human beings, the most awful of human beings, there's always that seed of compassion, that seed of recognition of our total humanity. So here he is. Now, is he going to be able to turn on that? Is he going to be able to turn around and see it?

Some of you might have read that book, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat." Have you come across that? It's a great old book. Oliver Sacks. Definitely worth a read. It's about people with mental illnesses because parts of the brain go. But there's one story in there which is very apt for somebody who is into the Buddha Dharma. There's a man who murders his daughter atrociously, so much so that the facts are never actually publicised, even in court. It's horrific, absolutely horrific. But the man can't remember. He has no memory whatsoever, so they can't convict him. What they can do is put him in a mental home. And in the mental home he acts perfectly normally and within a certain amount of time the staff have enough confidence to let him go out for bike rides. And on one of these bike rides a car hits him and he lands on his head. And this little bump on his head awakens that memory. And according to the book, it took over six months for the staff to stop this man wanting to commit suicide. They had to actually tie him down. You'd have to read it for the details.

So when Angulimāla, no matter how horrific his murders and all that has been, there is that being able to turn upon oneself and to sit within himself, your sense of misery, sense of remorse. Now, you see, what we have to understand is that once we've acted, once we've done an act, you can't go back on it. If you steal something, that's it, it is done. You can do something to assuage or to undermine the consequences by slipping the money back that you stole. But the action is done, and therefore the consequence will be there.

That consequence outwardly, the effect of that consequence outwardly will be totally dependent on circumstance completely beyond your control. It might never be known, and you die very rich. On the other hand, it might be known, and you end up in jail. And all that has been completely out of your ability to control. But this inner guilt, this inner feelings of remorse and all that will be there to be handled. And you'll never escape from that because that's the world you're actually living in. The world we're living in is this mental world that I'm creating. So there's no escape from that.

It doesn't say how long it took for Angulimāla to become liberated but it was years. So once he was given the same instructions that we've been given, he would have had to sit with the horror inside him about all the stuff that he's created, and just like we sit with our depressions and our guilts and our remorse, so he would have had to do that. And at some point that would have all passed away, that would have all gone.

Now that for us is one of these stories that allows us to have tremendous hope. Because if somebody who has been truly evil can become liberated within a lifetime, then there's a good chance for us, isn't there? Before next new year, perhaps? I mean, it's a story of hope. It's a story that nobody is incapable of becoming liberated. That's what it

means. And in Buddhist history, there was only one time when there was a heresy where a particular school began to teach that there were some people who were so thick that they just wouldn't be able to make it. And they were called the Icchantikas, the ones who go on forever. There was no escape from *saṃsāra* for these people. And that's the only time. And of course, that is definitely not mainstream Buddhism.

So that's the underlying hope within the Buddha's teaching. And Angulimāla stands as an example of that. No matter how extreme and horrible we've been, yet the liberation from all suffering is ours to achieve.

So just to sum up there, there's just those things to reflect upon every so often: that relationship between our understanding and our conduct, and the other way around, our conduct and our understanding, that at an ethical level, which is where we're actually creating our mental states which are going to cause us happiness or unhappiness. Is it virtuous? And remember it's not just tied to the basic precepts about not to kill and steal and all that. That's basically fundamental. It now becomes much more subtle about the relationship we ought to have to our own emotions.

So we were talking yesterday about attachment. You can't say attachment's evil. But it's not skillful, it's not virtuous. It's not skillful for the person who is the object of your attachment, because remember, attachment is always coming from the self, and necessarily turns the other person into an object, an object to service your needs. So you dehumanise somebody, actually, as soon as you attach to them, whether you like it or not, which may not be your intention, but that's what happens.

So that business of *kusala*, and to understand that, there's always this *puñña*, this merit, this merit to be gained. So the spiritual life is constantly rewarding us for what we're doing. There's a reward. There's always this consequence for correct understanding and ethical behaviour. It doesn't always seem like that, does it?

You know, like your dad says to your mother, you know, how can you be a Buddhist and not a log? You know what I mean? The world doesn't seem to get any better, but the practice seems to, the insight seems to get better. Then you go through the barrier, if you like.

When I first began to meditate, I was doing Zen meditation in Birmingham. When I first began to meditate, I had this dream. And the dream was, I was running like mad. Running, running, running, running. And there was a shower of javelins coming after me. And then I stopped, and every javelin just went into my back.

So when we start practising, that's exactly how it feels. Because you're always running ahead of your suffering. You're always trying to escape your immediate suffering. A bit of discomfort, so you shift your seat. A bit bored, so you phone up a friend. You're always moving off the discomfort. And as soon as you begin practising, you can't do that anymore. And all that conditioning, all that horrible stuff just hits you from behind of all places. So it definitely feels it's getting worse.

And it's the same when, for instance, when you join the Order. You join anything, actually, even if you join a new group or a new work. There's that lovely honeymoon bit which lasts a few months. And then there's the struggle because you have to enculturate yourself. You have to change into what the institution wants you to change into, behave in a certain way. So the first three years, for some forever, is a miserable process. That torturing, you have to behave in this way. And sometimes some people don't, some people decide it's not what they want. They don't want to be manoeuvred that way.

So the understanding is, in those wonderful terms, it has to get much worse before it gets better. And that's where your faith has to be. You have to hang on in there just to see.

CHAPTER 22

Wheel of Dependent Origination

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

> *In this exploration, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the wheel of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda) not as metaphysical speculation, but as a practical psychological paradigm essential for meditation practitioners. Drawing from the Buddha's core teaching of 'suffering and the end of suffering,' he maps out the twelve-link chain from ignorance (avijjā) through to birth, aging, and death, emphasizing how this process operates moment by moment in our present experience.*
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> *The teaching illuminates the crucial junction between feeling (vedanā) and craving (taṇhā) as the pivotal point where liberation becomes possible. Through careful observation in meditation, practitioners can witness how pleasant and unpleasant feelings naturally arise from contact, and learn to maintain awareness without automatically moving into wanting or not-wanting. This understanding transforms our relationship with both pleasure and pain, allowing us to 'take the suffering out of pain and the indulgence out of pleasure.'*
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> *Bhante Bodhidhamma concludes by exploring how an awakened being operates through kriyā (functional action) rather than karmic conditioning, acting purely for others' benefit without identification or attachment. This practical teaching offers clear guidance for applying the profound wisdom of paṭicca samuppāda directly in daily meditation practice and life.*

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

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

So, I thought I'd try and make a fairly comprehensive statement about this wheel of dependent origination, just so that I've got a cassette to show people when they get confused about it. Saves me saying the same thing over and over again.

First of all, just to put it into the perspective of the Buddha's life. Remember that he left home and we can presume it wasn't for frivolous reasons. He wasn't doing a hippie trip or something. He was motivated by what we would call these days an existential angst. It's put mythologically as him coming across these *devadūtas*, these messengers from the gods, as it's put. A sick person, an elderly person, and a corpse. And what it signifies is that in his middle or early twenties, he woke up to the fact that life comes to an end, there's sickness, old age, and death. This threw him.

So eventually when he leaves, and he goes and practices with various teachers, and then finally, as it were, goes on his own to achieve the enlightenment, he can reduce the whole of his teaching to suffering and the end of suffering. That's what he says he teaches. He reduces it to those three words: suffering and the end of suffering. It's three words in the Pali. And what he discovers of course is the way out. And luckily for us he has this ability to get it across.

And what he gives us is a psychological paradigm. And I think it's very important for meditators to know this. Because if we don't, we come to the meditation with our own psychological paradigm, which is got from our own tradition of psychology, psychotherapy. Not that that's all wrong. It isn't at all. But when the Buddha's talking about psychology, he's talking about suffering and the end of suffering. It's specific. It's nothing to do with how we learn, how we develop. It's not developmental psychology. It's nothing to do with psychotherapy as such. It's to do with finding out how suffering arises and how it passes away.

So if we have a clear idea of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the wheel of dependent origination, then that intelligence which is going to liberate us can see more clearly. This is the paradox that that intelligence which liberates us needs to be instructed on how to do it. It doesn't come naturally it seems.

Now, just to put what I say in perspective, his regular companion, Ānanda, who was with him for twenty-odd years eventually, was obviously present for all his talks that he gave, or at least most of them, and he would obviously take the opportunity to discuss this with the Buddha when he's with him. I mean, he's there in the room, he's attending to the man. So he comes one day to this conclusion, and he says to the Buddha, "I think I've understood this business now. I think I understand this wheel of dependent origination that you're teaching." And the Buddha says, "Oh no, don't say that, Ānanda. This stuff is deep. This stuff is profound. It's subtle."

So whatever I say must be taken in the context of that announcement of the Buddha towards Ānanda.

The first thing to understand about the Buddha's teaching is that he's not into metaphysics. He's not into where does the universe begin and where does it end. Is it eternal or not eternal? Is the soul lasting or not lasting? Is there a God or is there not a God? So he's not talking about origins in that sense. So when he points to the first link of the wheel of dependent origination, when he's pointing to the base of it, when he talks about ignorance, not knowing, he's not talking about some distant time where con-

sciousness arose out of some primordial mass into this state of not knowing. He's simply saying that at this present moment, right now, consciousness is in a state of don't know. It doesn't know.

That not knowing is not culpable. It's not as though we deserve to be not knowing. It's not as though we should feel guilty because we don't know. It's simply a state of not knowing. Just as when a car breaks down, we don't know. If you're not mechanically minded and you open the bonnet, you still don't know. Just don't know. You don't say to yourself—well, some people do, of course—"I'm a fool, I should know about this," etcetera, etcetera. You just don't know.

And, of course, it's a position that we as human beings find very difficult. We do want to know. We feel secure when we know. So you wake up and you've got a pain at the end of your nose and you're sure it's cancer. And you go to the doctor because you want to know. "So what is it?" "It's just a pimple," he says. "Oh..." Fantastic relief. If he said it's the most dangerous cancer, it'll blow your brains apart in two weeks, and of course you'll fall apart. But at least we know. It's better for us to know we're going to be blown apart than not to know. It's an easier state to be in. We can handle that. We know that. But not to know is very difficult.

So, bringing ourselves, as it were, into this lifetime, not worrying about past lives and future lives and getting into what might seem to others to be metaphysics. What does the fetus know? What does it wake up to? As its sensual basis begins to develop, it begins to hear heartbeats of the mother, begins to feel the place it's in. And there's no doubt a time when it's absolutely gloriously in this lovely bath of warmth, being fed, growing, etcetera. And then, slowly, it becomes uncomfortable. Then the dreadful passage, a smack on the arse, and they're there. The eyes open, and suddenly, we're here. See? From a state of not knowing, we're suddenly somewhere. From a state of some sort of cloudy feelings, which are nice, we go through this terrible pain. And suddenly we're here. And we've got no language. We can't reflect on it. We just hear. Very present. But we're present in a total state of ignorance as to what's happening to us.

So it's no wonder that very slowly we just come to see or we come to accept or we come to understand that this is what we are. I am my body. I am my eyes and my ears. I am my feelings and my thoughts. It's got to be a natural mistake because that's all consciousness knows. But it's a mistake. And because of that essential mistake, a load of suffering comes our way. In fact, all our suffering comes our way. And that mistake, of course, is the belief, is the conception, is the understanding that we are what we appear

to be. Human beings. Psychophysical organisms. Rather like that phrase. A psychophysical organism. A breathing, feeling, sensing, emoting, thinking, psychophysical organism. And so that's what we think we are.

So that's our first disposition, *saṅkhāra*. So from *avijjā—vijjā* means knowing, *avijjā* means not knowing—we produce our first *saṅkhāra*, our first disposition, which is me, self. Embodied, an incarnate entity.

So with that fundamental disposition we find ourselves in the next link, the body and the mind. Now, in Buddhist understanding, these are two different forms of energy. Both suffering from transience, both not-self, and both, if we attach to them wrongly, will create suffering, will create dissatisfaction, won't bring permanent happiness. But the body and mind in the Buddha's understanding are two different things, though intimately entwined as milk in water. But through good meditation, even in this lifetime, they can be separated as a sword can be taken from its scabbard. It's one of the powers that we can get if we want it. And then you don't have to pay anything at all to go to Mallorca and all these beautiful places. You just wander off.

So, having entered into this conglomerate of the body and mind, it obviously has ways of communicating to the world and for the world to communicate to it, and that's your five senses, six senses. The five ordinary senses that we know, and the sixth is that part of us, the brain, and the mind which is in the brain, which is there to receive and to process stimulus. This has got a special word for it in Pāli: *mano*.

Now having established these qualities, having established a fundamental disposition, all these things are arising at once. We make contact with the world. So contact comes to us also from the world. So we hear a sound. The sound, as we know, is just pressure on the eardrum. It comes into the brain. And that first contact is known as *phassa*, is contact.

At that point of contact, there is only what is stimulating the base, the sensual base, here the eardrum, the eardrum itself, the sensual base, and this consciousness. Nothing else is there. So at primary level there is just that percept of that fundamental stimulus which is coming in at the eardrum. It just is a pounding. It's just the earth element. It has no sound about it at all. Once that is there it is, as it were, brought into the mind which is the sense base and there it's processed and we begin to hear something. And that's really all part of this contact.

But when that happens, there arises in us a response. And the response is to perceive it, to experience it as either pleasurable or non-pleasurable. This is when we move on to the next stage, which is *vedanā*, feeling. So from contact, which is felt as a neutral experience, we move into experiencing it as something which is pleasant and unpleasant.

Now, this consciousness which has come into life is experiencing things as pleasant and unpleasant. Is it no wonder that it just wants to center on what is pleasant? And when it centers on what is pleasant, it finds happiness. So there you have your next link, *taṇhā*, which is translated, unfortunately, as craving. But *taṇhā* means this reaction, this reaction of wanting, not wanting.

So from the stimulus, from the actual given percept of *phassa*, contact, we have a judgmental mind coming in at a feeling level, a feeling level saying likable, unlikable. There's an immediate reaction by that consciousness of saying this is it. If it's likable, there's wantable. If it's unlikable, it is definitely not wantable. There's a whole area in between of neutral feelings, but if in your meditation you really go into the neutral feeling you'll see that there's always a shade of liking and not liking.

These feelings are divided by the Buddha at its simplest into five. The physical pleasant and unpleasant feelings, such as when you're sitting there, you get pain in the knees, that's a physical unpleasant feeling. If you're sitting there and you're feeling very comfortable in the body, that's a pleasant physical feeling. There's pleasant and unpleasant mental feelings, which is basically our emotional life. So if you're sitting here and you feel joyful, then you're experiencing pleasant *vedanā*, pleasant feelings. If you're depressed or angry or whatever, then you're feeling unpleasant stuff. And there's that whole business of the neutral feelings, for instance, around the breath, which are very neutral.

So, having established that *vedanā*, that feeling base, we have this reaction of wanting and not wanting. When that wanting and not wanting comes up, only then, only then does the I appear. I want, I don't want. The I, the idea of a self, of me wanting something, in terms of the psychological process, comes in quite late at the end. That means that at that point, this consciousness has identified, has become what it is now wanting. So up until that point, that identity isn't there.

We know that. You know that in your meditation. When you've sat there in your meditation and, shall we say, a depression or an angry feeling has arisen or something, or a joyful or wonderful feeling, and you are observing it as an object, then that I, meaning I am depressed, I am joyful, can't arise. It only arises when you become it. It

only arises, for instance, when the sun comes out and you throw yourself on the lawn and suddenly you become sunshine. You're there with the sun. From a point of view of indulgence, I am this pleasant feeling.

Because we're not enlightened, we're constantly moving in and out of that. Because we're meditators, we can find that position of not being that position. And when we fall out of that grace, we fall into the self, and we establish this relationship in the world, whereby we're seeking happiness there. That's what we're doing all the time. We're trying to seek comfort, we're trying to seek security, we're trying to seek happiness in the sensual world. So there's your *upādāna*.

When the Buddha describes the five *khandhas*, the five heaps that some of you will know, which is another division of the human experience—meaning the body, all our perceptions, all our feelings, all our emotional and mental productions, and our discriminative consciousness—he calls them the *upādāna khandha*, he calls them the grasping *khandha*. In other words, this is only a problem when we say this is what I am, when we identify with it.

So there's your *upādāna*. Now at this point, the I has come in to identify. The next point is *bhāva*. *Bhāva* means becoming. So now, the wanting, I want, now becomes get it. There's an impulsion of will into that want, and it becomes an action. An action of thought, an action of speech, or an action of the body. At which point, *kamma* is created. That's an action. That's becoming.

So from liking not liking, wanting not wanting, I want I don't want, I do I don't do. Remember that even not doing something is also an action. It's a decision not to do something.

So now we've taken a whole series of progressive acts which has produced a *bhāva*, it's produced a becoming, it's produced an act of *kamma*, which basically is just an action. Now, the importance of an action is, of course, is that because the mind is something we can condition, as soon as we put an action into the mind, an empowerment, we have conditioned it. The more actions we put of a similar nature, it becomes a habit. The more habits we engender is the definition of our personality. And once we have that personality, which is no more than a compendium of habits, our destiny is assured.

So, having made this *bhāva*, this act, we now go into the process of being born, decay and death. Again, keeping the wheel of dependent origination right into the present moment, that simply means that the action is begun, the action is gone through, and the action is completed. And that's the end of the process. In terms of the mind, there's been a conditioning. There's been a conditioning set into the mind.

So, a child, for instance, hears, just hears the little dingy bell of the ice cream man. Now what comes to the ear is just this little knocking. It's taken in, you see, and suddenly there's a perception of bell, there's a perception of the understanding of the bell, there's a perception of ice cream, there's a memory of ice cream, and joy arises. See? The joy arises. So this is *vedanā*. We've had the contact, this is *vedanā*. As soon as the joy arises, wanting arises: I want, jumping up and down, I want an ice cream. See? And nothing will satisfy that child now, unless he gets that ice cream, goes through the motions of eating it, swallowing it, and completing it, and feeling for a moment that lovely satisfaction, which only ice cream can give us.

But, foolishly, he has now established a habit. A habit of seeking happiness in ice cream. Hence, whenever that ice cream van comes, out he'll go demanding his ice cream. Later on, of course, ice cream becomes beef stroganoff. Spaghetti a la Bolognese. Beautiful wines. And of course, the more we indulge in food, the more we must seek our happiness there. And if one day there's no food in the larder, there's no tea in the morning, there's no toast, misery, frustration, horror. That's the other side of the wheel. That's another conditioning coming up, you see.

But anyway, that in summary is how the wheel works. And it works in terms of this process, you see. Parts of it are given. A state of ignorance is with us all the time until we're fully enlightened. We have a set of dispositions. They're your *saṅkhāra*. With that disposition you enter into every moment. And a disposition will manifest according to the stimulus. In this case, ice cream. So a certain disposition will arise entirely due to the sound of that ice cream bell, ice cream tune. That can only be done because we have a body and a mind. It can only be done because we have these six senses. It can only be done because consciousness with the sense base and this stimulus from outside is making contact. It can only be done because that contact, this consciousness—not the mind, excuse me, this consciousness—sees the happiness.

It therefore now forms a relationship with this feeling of happiness, which has only as its catalyst the ice cream. And therefore it wants it, it associates with it, it identifies with it, it demands it, and before you know it, it commits the act, and the ice cream is bought, eaten, and digested. That's the process.

Once we've understood that process, we can also see that there is one specific link which is going to undermine that whole process. And it's right there between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. Right up until we get to vedanā feeling, it is utterly and totally conditioned by the past, by our dispositions that we have already developed. There is nothing you

can do about that. Whenever the ice-cream van goes, we will reach to vedanā just like that, which is the pleasant and lovely feelings that arise when we hear an ice-cream van. There's nothing you can do about that. That is set by past conditioning.

The next process of wanting it is also set by past conditioning, the desire for it, the craving for it, but by putting our mind right there at that juncture, we stop the next process, which is to identify with that craving, I want, and thereby we stop the empowerment of that craving, and we undermine that conditioning of seeking happiness in ice cream.

Now, in order to do that, we have to be able to distinguish that moment. And that is the core thing of our meditation if we want to approach the enlightenment through the understanding of *dukkha*, through the understanding of suffering, which is one of the three characteristics. When we see that, when we are in a position to see that, then we can see that the one is a reaction of the other, the one is dependent on the other. Dependent, *paṭicca*, *paṭiccasamutpāda*, right? That which arises dependent on.

We can see that the feelings arising from the sound of ice cream is depending on that, there arises the craving for it. By just keeping that aloofness, and this is what solitude means in its spiritual sense, maintaining that inner aloofness to see the connection between these two things. And sometimes we're aware of the pleasant feeling, sometimes we're aware of the craving.

Sitting there before your morning porridge, not moving, just watching that movement in the mind of the pleasant feeling that has arisen at the very sight of porridge and the craving for it which arises with that pleasantness. Just to sit there and to wait till this craving passes away. And there's just the pleasantness. And then to eat for the purpose of feeding the body, not to feed the greed. Feeding the need, not the greed. In doing that, we are undermining all that process of seeking happiness in porridge. Which is ridiculous, isn't it? To seek happiness in porridge. And in so doing we undermine that disposition of seeking happiness in the sensual world. And in so doing this consciousness is finding a new relationship to the world not based on seeking happiness in it, not based on craving.

To be able to experience pleasure without indulgence is an important experience in the meditator's life, because then they know it's possible that you can live life without expecting anything from it, without wanting anything from it. It's a liberation. The taste of Nibbāna is freedom.

In the same way, when it comes to pain and suffering, whenever that pain arises, there arises that not wanting, I don't want. Yeah, get the Prozac. Swallow the Prozac, finish your pain, fine. But the pain is still there somewhere. In the same way, we see the original pain, whatever it is, emotional or physical, and we see our reaction of wanting to push it away or, if it's too great, wanting to run away. Just trying to hold that connection, just trying to see it, being aware of one and the other, sometimes being aware of both, seeing the connection, allowing that pain, allowing that reaction to slowly die away and just staying with pain.

To stay with pain as pain is to discover that there's no suffering in it. The suffering only comes because of our reaction to it. So, we can say that the whole process of our meditation is to take the suffering out of pain and the indulgence out of pleasure. Just to do this will make us arrive at *nibbāna*, the end of suffering. And it is the process of seeing how suffering arises and how it passes away.

When we're calm, then we can also see the other two characteristics. Easier to see them when we drop down at the point of contact, where there isn't even the idea of it being pleasant and unpleasant. And that's to see this transiency, this constant transformation, this flow of events, each single and discrete. No sensation is ever the same as the last one, even though it may feel to be the same. It isn't the same because a sensation arises and passes away every single moment.

To be aware of sensations, be it if they come from the body or the mind, is to always be in the present moment. That's why we always center on the breath. That's why we always center on the body. Because when we're there with a sensation or a feeling, we know we're in the present moment.

That sense of *anattā*, not self, remember, is not a philosophical proposition by the Buddha. It's not a metaphysical proposition. There is a not-self. There is a no-self. He's never said that. He said, there is not self. Everything in this world is *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*. It's transient, it will cause some sort of dissatisfaction if we associate with it or identify with it, and it is not self, not me, not mine.

So as soon as we get into that meditative posture and we can see, feel, experience a sensation, painful or unpainful, an emotion, painful or pleasant, and we can see it as an object, we are experiencing not-self. To stay at that point where we see vedanā and taṇhā, the given feeling and our response to it of craving, is the position of not-self.

So, understanding this, you see, it makes our meditation very clear. As soon as we sit, we must make the effort to come to a point of concentration, at least some stillness in the mind. And that sometimes takes a little while and sometimes takes a long while. It doesn't matter. Just bring a stillness. And then we access this level of consciousness which is just this observing, just this observation.

Then we need to have that essential faith. And an essential faith in our own Buddha nature. You know they say the Buddhas can only point. We ourselves have to become enlightened. So it's an act of faith that is within us. A higher faculty which will work this stuff out. Which will make the insight and which will liberate itself. And it will do it the quicker we get out of the way. And the quicker we get out of the way, means that when we look at something, we have to draw that consciousness, that attention, into the present moment. To bring it into the present moment and just to allow the mind, to allow that consciousness to observe. That's all.

So I hope that's clarified things. It's not made things worse. How then, just to finish off the talk, how then would the Buddha mind work? Now, this has to be in terms of a little conjecture on my part, because it's never said explicitly. But in the later works of the Abhidhamma, there has to be an explanation as to how an enlightened being works. How do they actually experience life?

First of all, the *avijjā*, the ignorance, is now *vijjā*. There's no confusion in the enlightened person's mind as to the way things really are. So we can say that the enlightened person is now not coming out of a state of ignorance, but coming out of a state of knowing. This knowing, remember, is not a matter of facts and knowledges, it's a disposition. It's a way of being in the world which is not going to cause that being any more suffering. That's what we mean when we talk about somebody being enlightened. The *Arahant*, somebody who's enlightened, need not know how many hairs there are on his head, or her head. It's not necessary, you see.

What is the *paññā*? What is the enlightenment? What is the wisdom? It is a relationship with life, which is different from being deluded. So now that person is coming from a state of wisdom, still has the body, a body which can be painful and pleasant. No problem, you see? But when that body is giving sensations, coming all the way up now, straight up to contact, there is no delusion coming from that particular disposition. So reality, as it were, is not distorted into a delusive idea of the way I want it to be. And the way I want it to be is to get the world to make me feel happy. That's your essential position as an unenlightened person.

Coming into the world without any demands upon it, you can see that an enlightened person is very sensual. Because there's no filtering. As that comes, pleasant and unpleasant feelings arise. There's still some sort of reaction to it. But that reaction is no longer suffering. There's no reaction to that pleasant and unpleasant feelings in terms of all those things that we associate with suffering, depression, anger, anxiety and all that. All that, from taṇhā onwards, which are the saṅkhārās, which are the dispositions, they're the same thing as what we start off with, have now been totally transformed from the vicious to the virtuous.

And the enlightened person lives always in some mode of the four illimitables, either friendliness, love, compassion, joy or peace. The Buddha himself says it. When you get to Nibbāna, you are contented and with it happy. Being in that state now, how then does the Buddha act, you see?

Well, they had to coin a new word to express an enlightened person's action. And the word they came up with was *kriyā*. In the Buddha's understanding there are two types of actions, *kusala* and *akusala*, meaning skillful and unskillful. What he means by that is those actions taking us to enlightenment and those actions taking us the other way. When the Buddha is already enlightened then this business of kusala and akusala no longer apply because he's already there. Therefore his actions now become, and it's translated as functional which is rather dry.

But basically, his heart is now motivated to help other people to become enlightened. So all those actions arising out of a base of wisdom are now for the benefit of others. But there's no attachment to them. There's no, I am doing this. See, the grasping is gone. And yet the action is still there. The doer has disappeared, there's only the doing.

That's why when this very old man corners him and says, look, give me your teaching now, and the Buddha says, sorry, I'm on my alms round, can you come back later? He says, look, I'm an old fellow, I could die any moment. He says, well, okay, I'll give you the teaching in short. In the hearing, there's only the hearing. In the seeing, there's only the seeing. In the cognizing, there's only the cognizing. So this old man became enlightened in a click of the eye. It didn't work for me.

So that's how an enlightened person works in the world. She no longer identifies with what she's doing. It's just an act coming out of a pure relationship with the world and with people that she finds herself in. And I would suggest that there are times that even we act like that, even though we might not have cleared the base of ignorance, there are times when through our constant effort to do what is skillful, constant excite-

ment of that motivation of loving kindness, of compassion, just occasionally, we do something which is done out of an absolute purity of heart. For the benefit of the other, not for oneself.

I think that's it.

CHAPTER 23

Free Will

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 40 min

> *In this exploration, Bhante Bodhidhamma tackles the Western philosophical problem of free will from a Buddhist perspective, revealing how our fixation on choice and control actually deepens suffering. Drawing from the Brahmajāla Sutta (DN 1), he explains how speculative views about freedom are "merely the feeling of those who do not know and see, the worry and uncertainty of those immersed in craving."*
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> *The talk examines three Western approaches—fatalism, libertarianism, and determinism—showing how each misses the Buddha's central insight. Using the honey bowl discourse and dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), Bhante demonstrates how our experiences arise through contact, feeling, and perception, creating the illusion of a separate self that demands control.*
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> *Rather than debating free will, the Buddha's path focuses on clarity and investigation. True freedom comes not through choice but through understanding the conditioned nature of experience and following the Noble Eightfold Path. The talk concludes with the liberating recognition that awakening isn't a choice we make but a discovery we uncover through devoted practice and surrender to the Dhamma.*

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

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

I thought I'd tackle the problem of free will. How does that come up in the Buddha's teaching?

This idea of free will has been with us for a heck of a long time. Even going back, were we at the mercy of the gods or could we instruct the gods to do things for us? So in terms of polytheism, that's how it began - this idea that there was some controlling deity or deities, and the idea was to get them on your side, sympathetic magic, things like that.

Then somehow it corrupted into the idea that if you actually did the ritual perfectly, you could then control. And that was when the Buddha appeared. So the Brahmins there, who controlled the whole business of sacrifice, they knew the specific words,

nobody else could learn them, and they knew the specific action, exactly what to do, and this would bring about the desired results. So there's some sort of free will thrown in there with some sense of control. That's what we want, isn't it? Control.

I think in the West we've cornered ourselves into a very sharp individualism. We don't really see ourselves too much as social beings, as social will. We tend to see ourselves as very little individual pods who demand to do what we want to do. So the idea of free will, especially from the Enlightenment, is something that's core stuff for us. And it comes out, as you'll see when I talk later, in capitalism, the idea of freedom, freedom of choice, all that.

The other thing is that with the Enlightenment - that's ours, 18th century, which I totally believe in, the idea of rational - so free will is to do with something about thinking about it and about coming to some sort of philosophical conclusion that we have or we don't have free will.

But there's a very interesting discourse here, or at least there's a part that really interests me, from the Brahmajāla Sutta, the opening discourse, actually the longer discourse of the longer discourses. And he lists quite a huge amount - I think 64 different speculative views. Some of them you'll have heard of: whether the cosmos was infinite or finite, whether the enlightened person was born or died or what not. And everybody has a view on these things. And this is what he says: he says all such views are merely the feeling of those who do not know and see, the worry and uncertainty of those immersed in craving.

And what catches my attention is "merely the feeling." We tend to be up here, and if we can work something out logically, it separates out from feeling. Therefore you believe in free will, whether you actually feel it or not, or rather you discard feeling, you push it away, on the understanding that there is free will. Even if I don't feel free, so long as I say to myself I am free, I go around thinking that I am free. I don't know if that makes sense. Hopefully, as we go on, it will get more obvious.

If we take another discourse, which the Buddha actually called his honey bowl discourse - it's a delicious sweet you can still buy in India. And he gave a cryptic teaching there, and all these monks who were listening to him didn't ask him anything about it. They went off to this other monk called Mahākaccāna, who was very good at expounding the short teachings of the Buddha. So they ask him, and he says to them, "Why don't you ask him?" And they go, "Right then." They say, "Well, whatever." So he gives them the longer teaching, and then they go back to the Buddha and say, "This is what Mahākaccāna said." It's funny, isn't it? And the Buddha says, "Well, if you'd have asked me, I would have said the same thing." A roundabout way of getting there.

Anyway, the core of it is this. What we counter-know is dependent on contact. That's the part of the Wheel of Dependent Origination, contact. So if it's something that's visual, there's got to be contact at the visual base, the retina. But remember there's also the sixth sense in Buddhism, which is emotion, thought. So something must arise into the mind to make contact - your stimulus. So that's, for instance, when you wake up in the morning. The first thing that comes up, you don't beckon it, it just arises. So much of our day is just stuff arising, either coming from an outside stimulus or from something inside us.

And then he says that upon this, feelings arise, feelings and perceptions. Now, in Buddhist psychology, feeling and perception arises at the same time. And all a feeling is, is a distinguishing in the mind between what is experienced as pleasant or unpleasant. And that's your perception. So whatever feeling arises, as it arises, it's always experienced as neutral. But as soon as you flip into a perception of it, it immediately cuts the world up into likeable, unlikeable.

So, for instance, in your meditation, you might find some emotion arising, which you describe or which you label as, or at least your attitude towards it is unlikeable. It's a bit of depression or something. Now, if you take your attention away from the emotional value of it to the sensation value of it in the body, and you get down to just thick feelings or those feelings that come up with depression, whatever - heat, whatever it is - then you'll see as you move towards that base, the idea of like and dislike begin to fade out a bit, until you can get to a point where there's just sensation. And at that point, you're at the point where the stimulus comes in. So you've gone back on it.

When you do something like that, you begin to realise that it's our definition of things. It's our definition of things which is the core problem, because it comes from our view, our view of something. So, for instance, if we're conditioned to be racist, as soon as we see somebody of another race, unpleasant feelings arise. It'll just happen naturally. If you're not conditioned that way, it doesn't arise. So these feelings that we get are also based on our views and opinions. And they arise with feeling. So the heart-mind work in unison. It's we in the West that have split these two up. If you go East, for instance, to Thailand, when they say - I can't remember what their word is for mind, something like *citta* or something - you'll see they're not actually pointing to the head, they're pointing to the heart.

Then he says, as soon as we perceive something, we'll start thinking about it, and then you get that proliferation.

So now, at the root of this feeling perception is the me. That self-awareness. When you're in meditation and you get that very strong feeling of being an observer, you've distanced, shall we say, so much away from your body, your feelings, your sensations, that you get this feeling of the watcher. Turn on that. Where's that coming from? If you're aware of the watcher, you can't be the watcher. As soon as you make something an object, you can't be it. So, if you're observing and there's that feeling of watching, of a watcher, just shift your attention and try and catch where that feeling's arising from.

So now, as it's most deluded, this me thinks it's this body and mind. And what's its purpose? What does the self want? It just wants to be happy, doesn't it? I want to be happy, full stop. So, in order to be happy, it has that feeling, that need to control. If something painful comes up in the body, it wants to get rid of it, so you take a tablet. If emotions come up that it doesn't like, it just suppresses it. And underneath all that, remember, it's always afraid of the body falling sick, the body dying, the body growing old.

So this business of always wanting to live in a pleasant atmosphere, in a happy atmosphere, is, shall we say, the motivation behind the self. But it's coming from that root misunderstanding that we are this body and this mind and this heart, and the happiness of this body, heart and mind is also dependent on the world. So good food makes me happy. So I want to control my food. I want to be able to cook beautiful things for myself.

So this, of course, the Buddha points out in the second sermon that he gives to these five companions who deserted him because he'd gone a bit soft eating rice pudding. And he points out, he says, "Well, if the self were the body, it'd be able to say, 'be like this, be like that,' be able to control it." He's not talking here about simple movements of lifting something. He's talking about what we really want, which is not to grow old, a bit more beautiful, a bit more handsome, and definitely not to die.

So that we have, that wanting to control is, I think, what we mean by free will, the desire for free will. That's actually what I think we mean at the root of it. Because, if we're to receive what we desire, then we need to control the source of pleasure. Full stop. Simple as that.

Now it's because we fail to do that, in the West anyway, we have these three ideas. They split into fatalism, libertarianism and determinism. So you can read all these philosophers and they'll slot into one of these one way or the other.

So fatalism is just that understanding that actually you don't have any free will at all. In fact the self is utterly impotent. So acts of free will don't have any effect. We don't really have any control over our lives. Anything that happens to us was previously ordained, it's going to happen. So now if on Thursday I'm driving into Newton Abbot, it doesn't matter if I go fast or slow, whether I take this turn or that turn, if I'm going to have a crash, I'm going to have a crash. Full stop. It's bound to happen. You get this view from people who believe in the stars, don't they? And then you get that psychology of self-fulfilling prophecy. So if the stars say, "You're bound to fall in love," then they'll find anyone - a chicken, a horse, whatever - they'll fall in love. It's got to happen.

And when you think about it, the really important things of our lives, well, it's difficult to say we've got any control at all. For instance, we didn't choose to be born. We definitely don't know the hour and day of our death. We didn't have a choice in cultural conditioning. What about things like economic, social, cultural? We just ended up with that. And then there's the elements - mercy of the elements. We don't even choose to fall in love, now that I've mentioned it, actually. And I suppose there's a bit to do, I suppose, with the personality as well. If you're a fatalist, that hopeless resignation. If you're that sort of person, you tend to be one, I think. Or the other side, sanguine optimist or something. I suppose at best it might build up a stoic patience, a fortitude, a stiff upper lip. On with the British.

So this whole idea that we don't have choice, everything's predestined. I mean, it comes up in the spiritual literature too. So in terms of the Buddha's day, there was a Makkhali Gosāla. And all he said was, if you went down one side of the Ganges, doing great acts of compassion and huge donations and he came up the other side murdering and pillaging, it would make a blind bit of difference because the whole road of *kamma* was set. Every soul that was born would have to go through the whole process of karmic refinement and in his case it did actually lead to some sort of heavenly state. But of course it undermines any morality because it doesn't matter what you do in the end because the universe is so manufactured through *saṃsāra* that it'll push you to that definite end - a sort of absolute fatalism.

In Christianity you've got Saint Augustine of course - he started the one about predestination. If God knew everything, he knew whether you were saved or not. And at worst that was Calvinism and Scottish Presbyterianism - you're predestined. From that there came the Protestant work ethic, of course. So that even though you couldn't tell whether somebody was going to go to heaven or hell by their earthly deeds, you can understand that one presumed that if you were successful in business, basically you had to go to heaven. So then you get that work ethic, and people who are rich get to heaven, and people who don't, well, they don't go to heaven. They go to hell.

Islam is also fatalistic. It's all written on the tablet, this original tablet. Your life's written on this tablet. And there was a lovely case I heard of where a friend of mine was working on an oil rig out in the Middle East. And two people fell off the rig, two Westerners. And the current was taking them away, and they were shouting for help. And there were two soldiers just standing there watching them. And the manager came rushing down and threw out the lifeboard, pulled it back in. And he said to these soldiers, "Why didn't you do that? Why didn't you help him?" He said, "The will of Allah." Heavy, isn't it?

And in our existentialism, we've got Albert Camus. He's the one who wrote the myth of Sisyphus. Now, Sisyphus ended up in hell, if I remember rightly, because of avarice. And his job, if you remember, was to roll a boulder up a hill, and then, of course, it would go down the other side, so he had to go back down and roll it back up. And for Camus, that was the metaphor of life. Every morning, you roll this thing to the top, and overnight it fell back down again. And when he came to make a judgment about what was the point of having a consciousness which suffered? What was the point of that? It's absolutely absurd. Take God away, take any ultimate freedom away, take the idea of salvation or *Nibbāna* or liberation away. What's the point of being conscious when it's such a misery? So his idea was that a human being, really to maintain his dignity, he only had one choice, which was to commit suicide. Luckily he was saved, the consequence of his own philosophy. Died in a car accident. One wonders whether he'd have carried that one through, actually.

So that's all there's been to fatalism, and definitely the Buddha wasn't into that. Predestination, everything's set.

The opposite of that, of course, is libertarianism. And that, I think, is definitely the fruit of our enlightenment, 18th century enlightenment. Here, of course, it gets corrupted when a person says they want to do their own thing in their own way in their own time - a teenage rebellion. But the idea is that we do feel empowered to make choices. And when you look back, of course, you do see that you have made certain choices. I mean, you could think that those choices are conditioned, but from a libertarian point of view, there's this bit of rationality come in. So that things just don't happen, you can stop, you can think about whether this is good or this is bad. And those decisions, a libertarian would say, are not random, and they're not predetermined. So there's a sense of freedom, a sense of being able to guide one's life. And you can choose - the idea of choice - and thereby we affect our decision-making.

So that view went on to support things like individual rights, freedom of speech, freedom of voting, and indeed the capitalist market, because it's the individual now who has to make choices for themselves, and they build up their own wealth. I mean, that's at its most painful, you might say. On the other hand, it does make an individual entirely responsible for their actions. So if a person ends up a robber, you can't suggest mitigating circumstance. Poverty, it's their choice. It will be a robber, so we'll hang them. Get on your bike when there's unemployment. You blame the worker for lack of skills because they've not got jobs and stuff like that. It leads, doesn't it, to a dog-eat-dog society, if you take it to an extreme.

But the idea of that at a spiritual level, unfortunately from a Buddhist point of view...

Unfortunately, it does give the idea of something inside us, this little person, that is a sort of rational self, detached from the world, able to see things from this vast, indifferent plane, and make decisions about it. Now, from the Buddha's point of view, that's the source of our misery, actually.

So if you walk into a supermarket with the idea of buying biscuits, and you're walking down the aisle, you come across a brand you hadn't seen before, Goblet or something. You pick it up and it says, "Goblet makes you happy." You look at multi-flavoured biscuits. Then you think, well, in my mind I'm going to buy my favourite figs. So there you're stuck between a so-called choice. Well, you can always say, well, all that's heavily conditioned, but there's some sort of rationality there. Do I want this? Do I want that? Feeling.

See, that's the problem with libertarianism, it lifts choice, it lifts freedom into this idea that it's up in the head somewhere. But actually you can see, even on a simple thing like choosing a biscuit, or making a vote, making a vote which we call a freedom of vote, but actually it's your feeling, isn't it? When you see certain politicians, you feel sick. When you see others, you feel happy.

So this business of capitalist freedom of choice, you can definitely argue that it's just juggling with conditioning. And it's based on this immediate fix. See, it's very interesting because before the war, if you look at the adverts before the war for products, they were very centred on the product and very pragmatic. And people only bought what they needed. That was the idea. You only bought what you needed. So if you were selling a clock in an earlier advert, you would simply point out that it has an alarm. It's got red lighting so you can see it in the night. And you'd buy it if you needed it.

If you do it these days, because this was Freud coming through, you've got to put a naked woman next to it. And the desire that comes up is immediately latched onto the clock so you buy it. It keeps you awake.

So that business of a sort of separate rational self, that won't work in the Buddha's teaching. Because that's also embedded.

And the third position is this determinism. So now, here there's the idea that the personal self, that the self does have a choice and it does affect things. So it's unlike fatalism. But unlike libertarianism, even the choices you make are determined. So whatever's going to happen is going to happen. Now, if you think about that, if everything is just cause and effect, cause and effect, as a sort of sequel from the past, it's very difficult to imagine anything but a repetitive universe. Where does the newness come in? Where does something stop this chain of cause and effect? How is it that we have actually a very creative universe? So it can't be just as simple as a direct historical cause and effect.

The Jains seem to have held that in the Buddhist scriptures. Now, you've got to be careful here because this is Buddhist propaganda. There's a man called Upali, for instance, who was a great supporter of the Buddha, a very rich person. And he told the Jain leader, Nigantha, some teaching about what the Buddha had given. And the Nigantha sent him, delegated him to go to the Buddha to prove him wrong. So, of course, Upali gets up to the Buddha there and starts his discussion. And by the end of it, he becomes a follower of the Buddha.

So he wants to become a follower. He says, you know, and I shall leave the Nigantha. This is where the Buddha's magnanimity, one of the little examples of his magnanimity, is, well, don't. Don't stop supporting your other teacher. You can support me, but don't stop supporting him. Anyway, Upali returns back to the Nigantha and tells him that he's now been converted. And the Nigantha, it seems, is so angry that he spews blood and dies. So it's that sort of tale which makes you think, well, when they're talking about Jains, maybe it's a bit of propaganda. I think he died in the Jain way, starving himself to death.

And what the Buddha points out about the Jain theory, which was some idea of predestination, you had to stop. You had to stop doing. So you stopped killing, and eventually you stopped eating. The idea was just to draw *kamma* to an end. So the Jain saint actually dies of starvation. You build up your courage for it, I suppose. What the Buddha points out is that even that decision is part of kamma. That actually won't end the sequence of cause and effect. It's like when we don't do something has an effect.

Even if you take this gathering now, we've all come from different paths to create this particular situation. And in this situation, hopefully something creative is happening. Only because we've all come here from different places. So there is something about the way the universe works which is about different lines of cause and effect meeting at a certain point to create something new.

So we see that these three perspectives, fatalism, determinism, libertarianism, I think we might argue that if you look back in time, you might just get the feeling that everything has been predetermined. Your life's actually been fairly set, and you didn't have much of a choice, and you've ended up where you are because... But when you're actually stuck in a present dilemma, when you're actually stuck between this and that, it definitely feels like you've got a choice. So again, it's to do with feeling. It's to do with the way we're looking at something as to which side of this business you tend to fall on.

Anyway, you might be relieved to know that from the Buddha's point of view, we're simply asking the wrong question. So you can now forget the first part of this particular essay. Because this whole business of free will just arises out of this profound delusion beneath us, this nebulous idea of me, me in control. So as the self discovers the world, there's pleasant, unpleasant experiences, so it wants to create something out of it, this dualistic world. So all things are over there as rivals or this side as accomplices. It's just driven by greed, aversion, indulging, accumulating, rejecting, annihilating. And it's this way that the self gains this idea of power. It's just a little game it's playing.

So obviously the right question is, how do we put an end to suffering? Remember that the Buddha always reduced his teaching to a very simple statement, suffering and the end of suffering, full stop. So the question is, how do we end suffering? And how do you get down to really cut the root?

The first thing is to understand this business about conditionality. And as we've already said, it's a concurrence of past events meeting present situations, which allows us this feeling of creativity, something new all the time.

Secondly, the aim is not concerned with freedom of choice at all. The aim to end suffering is not to do with choice at all. It's to do with clarity. It's to do with seeing where the path is. It's to do with investigation and exploration of our lives and the way things are and how it is that we keep falling into suffering.

If you, like for instance, if we set out for a walk in the country, you've already decided where you want to go. It's not random. You've decided where you want to go. So in one sense, you want to be happy. You want to find this happiness. And you've got your map. You've got your compass. When you come to a fork in the road, you don't

choose, well, shall I go down this one or shall I go down that one? You already know where you're going to go. And all you've got to do is consult the map and make the right decision.

So in the Buddha's path, the path is already delineated. So this choice, this feeling of choice that we have, turns out to be nothing but a doubt. It's not actually... See, the self lifts it up to the idea of, well, shall I do this or shall I do that? But actually, if you know all the facts, you wouldn't have a choice. The path would be just directly in front of you. Spiritually speaking, especially.

So, there's two types of doubt when I say doubt. There's what you might call honest doubt and sceptical doubt. So, honest doubt is just coming from that business of not knowing. And it comes from, shall we say, a sense of a grounded humility. Like, I don't know. I really don't know. Accepting that. And it's a very difficult place to be, isn't it? We like to know. That not knowing can cause us extreme anxiety. Like you don't know whether you're going to have the job next week. You don't know whether the cheque's going to come. It creates anxiety.

But if we can sit patiently, if we can sit calmly within that not knowing and accept that state and then just keep looking, keep observing, then the path manifests. It either manifests because somebody's pointed it out to us or because our own experience manifests. One of the points in the process of these vipassanā ñāṇa, the vipassanā understandings, is the business of what is the path and what is not the path.

And it's a very simple thing, most of you have probably been there, is that in your meditation you'll suddenly start maybe getting these beautiful states. They're very peaceful, very spaced out, very lovely and joyful. And of course there's the self immediately wants to get in there and say, well this is it, finally I made it. I remember one man told me he had this, quite deluded really, he had this amazing experience while sitting on the toilet. Now that's not relevant. You can have these amazing experiences anywhere. Remember that Luther had his great breakthrough while he was sitting on the toilet. It's faith only.

But he absolutely insisted. He said it was Nibbāna. And just what he was describing was just amazing. A blissful state, really. So, knowing that whatever nibbāna is, it is not felt. Whatever nibbāna is, it is not an emotional state. Whatever nibbāna is, it cannot be described. Immediately, it takes you off that indulgence. That's a correction. That's a correction to that not knowing, that doubt which comes up from, shall we say, this desire to seek the end of suffering. That's a wisdom thing. That's coming from something deeper than the self.

When you get the doubt which is really a sceptical doubt, a doubt which is a mental illness in the same way that sloth and torpor and all these hindrances are, then of course there's something else going on there, and that's usually a fear of commitment, usually a fear of giving yourself to something because you don't know what's going to happen, but that fear stops you committing and therefore stops you meditating.

One of the people who used to organise the meditation group, his father, when he was a young child, put him on a table and opened up his arms and said, "Jump, son." And he jumped and he moved away. Splat on the ground, he said. And he says, "That'll teach you. Don't trust anybody." You can imagine, yeah? So when he came to the Buddha's teaching, it was quite amazing that he should actually put his heart and soul into it.

So, just to be aware of that, that the path isn't about, shall I do this or shall I do that? And that's one reason for a schedule. You set your schedule down, a schedule that you know you can follow, and you just do that religiously. You don't let this little self come in and say, "Well, shall I do it? Can't do it? Maybe a little kip. I'll go for a walk. Don't feel like it." And all the time you're just feeding the self.

When it comes to joining the order, you say, look, I don't get up in the morning and say, shall I wear blue? It doesn't occur. Even the idea of what shall I eat? What am I going to eat? So it's taking out all that edge around where the self can manifest. It doesn't mean to say it doesn't manifest in very peculiar and staged ways, but at least you try and draw a circle around what you can do, what you can't do. And then you liberate. That's the benefit. You then liberate this wisdom factor, this paññā, this intuitive intelligence to investigate.

If this intuitive intelligence gets locked into what the self wants to do, then it's just taken all over the place. Fine, you feel nice when you get out for a walk, but has it helped you overcome suffering? Not at all. All it's done is it's given you a greater addiction to walking the countryside. Just deepening your attachment to the country. Which I've learnt since coming down to Devon, by the way. Terrible.

We could almost say, if you really think about it, when have you been most happy? Isn't it when you've been doing exactly what you wanted to do? The actual doing of it. It's never occurred, has it? When you've been doing exactly what you wanted to do, it's never occurred, shall I do this or shall I not do that? And it's the same with interest. If you notice, whenever you're interested in something, do you ever have any problems with concentration? No. So a lot of our practice is giving up that choice, is raising the interest to discover the path. And all that stuff just follows naturally, the clarity and all that, and the energy and the concentration.

Now when it comes to will itself, there is will, there is will in terms of power. The Buddha equates that to action. So he states it quite clearly. Will I call action. So those of you who know the Wheel of Dependent Origination, there comes that point, so we say it starts off with that contact we talked about. It starts off with a perception feeling of being pleasant, unpleasant. It would then have that reaction of wanting, not wanting. That's your *taṇhā*.

Only then does this self come in. Which is very interesting because in language we say, "I want that." But actually it's, "that want I." That's how it happens in terms of psychology. As soon as that "I" comes in, you can't stop it, you've empowered it. As soon as that "I" says, "I want," then you get that empowerment, that's the will coming in, and you have that next link, *bhava*, which is becoming. That's when you become, that's your act. Act of thought, word or deed.

So that's why in your meditation, when it comes to things like pleasant, unpleasant, you just want to keep the mind very close to that business of wanting, not wanting, liking, not liking, wanting, not wanting. And that's the way out to liberation by understanding *dukkha*, by understanding suffering and unsatisfactoriness.

So this power that we have is quite mysterious. It's totally neutral. It's not good or bad. It depends how you use it. It depends on your attitude. And you can't separate it from the action. You can try. When you do walking meditation, just stand there. Keep saying, "intending to walk. Intending to walk." And even though you're saying it and intending it, nothing's going to happen. And then suddenly the foot lifts. So what is it that has taken something out of a potential into an actual? That's what the Buddha's calling will. And you can't separate it from your foot. You can't say, well, that's it over here, and this is my foot over here. It's one and the same thing. It's within the structure of this whole becoming business.

But the power of that will is your conditioning. So remember, an action forms an intention, moves you to an action. And if that action is wholesome or unwholesome, then you're going to get the product of that conditioning. So if it's an unwholesome action, it moves you towards an unwholesome conditioning. This is inwardly. Remember, all kamma in terms of liberation is inward. It's not something to do with the outside world at all, actually.

And anything you do which is wholesome, it will produce that wholesome conditioning within you. And in Buddhist understanding, that's what's driving us to a particular destiny. And that's why, of course, in the Noble Eightfold Path, right view heads it. As soon as you understand, as soon as there's a seeing, as soon as there's a perception of the way things are, this immediately informs your attitude.

Of course, when it gets down into the attitude, you may find the opposite attitude to be too strong. So you might go down and you very clearly perceive that the body does not need tea. But that's not going to stop you doing it because of this huge conditioning to drink tea. But at least there's the perception that at this present time the body doesn't actually need tea, and it's hanging on to that and waiting for that to drop into the heart as an attitude. And then it balances up with the desire to have tea, and eventually because you're not feeding the desire to have tea anymore, that drops away, and the right attitude of seeing food and water and all that as nourishment for the body—not as a place for seeking happiness—begins to get the upper hand and lead you to the enlightenment. That's the one I'm struggling with!

So that's called *dhammachanda*, the will for Dhamma. And that translates into Mahāyāna as the *bodhicitta*, the heart seeking enlightenment. So eventually, that's the force. That's the force behind your drive to liberation.

And just finally, to end off with this lovely refrain: when anybody gets liberated, you always get this little refrain at the end of it. "Birth is destroyed"—now, this is the birth of self, remember. "The holy life has been lived. What had to be done has been done. There is no more coming into any state of self-existence." Can you feel the relief in that? What had to be done has been done.

So it's a case really of being clear that the path to enlightenment isn't a choice. It's not a choice. It's a discovery. What leads us to it is the general dissatisfaction about our lives. And once you perceive which way to go, then it's a case of building up that courage, that determination, resolution to follow it. And then, of course, you get the benefit of it.

That's the answer. That's what we have to do. So, what's the message? Abandon free will. Devote yourself. Surrender to the path.

May these words have been of awesome help to you in your path to liberation. Thank you very much.

CHAPTER 24

Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 37 min

> *In this exploration of kamma, Bhante Bodhidhamma begins with the fundamental Buddhist principle of idappaccayatā (dependent origination) - 'because this, that' - explaining how the present arises from both past conditions and current circumstances. He distinguishes the popular understanding of karma from the Buddha's precise teaching, clarifying that kamma refers specifically to intentional action, while vipāka denotes its results.*
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> *The talk examines the five universal laws governing existence: utu (physics/chemistry), bīja (genetics), citta (mind/psychology), kamma (intentional action), and dhamma (spiritual laws). Through this framework, Bhante explains why not everything that happens to us constitutes personal kamma - natural disasters, genetic conditions, and cultural circumstances arise from other causes.*
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> *Drawing from the wheel of paṭicca samuppāda, he traces how contact (phassa) leads to feeling (vedanā), then to craving (taṇhā) and grasping (upādāna), ultimately creating bhava (becoming) through our empowered intentions. The teaching emphasizes that while we cannot control external consequences of our actions, we have complete responsibility for our inner responses and the mental conditioning we create. This understanding offers profound hope: that individual liberation from dukkha remains possible regardless of external circumstances.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

To start at the beginning to understand the Buddha's way of looking at what happens in the universe, he talks about the fundamental law which is known as the *paccayatā*, the law of this and that, *idappaccayatā*, the law of this and that. You can't get simpler than that.

So the law states: because this happened in the past, this is happening now. Because this hasn't happened in the past, this doesn't happen now. Because this is happening in the present, that is also happening in the present. And because that isn't happening in the present, that does not also happen in the present. Need I explain?

So the first one is concerned with kamma in terms of cause and effect, temporal cause and effect, passing through time. So you made a decision to visit a dentist and there you are. Cause and effect, passing through time.

However, if it were just that, if it were just that the present moment were conditioned by the past, then you're into predestination, aren't you? You're into a set pattern. It would be hard to see how you could get creativity. Perhaps the universe would just keep repeating itself. If things only happen because things arise in the now unconnected with the past, then you're looking at a chaos, aren't you?

If we can put those two concepts together, then we have the Buddha's understanding of what's happening in the universe. And in a sense, it approximates, as far as I understand, the modern theory of chaos. So, having read that book, and therefore, of course, presenting myself as an expert, it says in one example that the butterfly wing, the flap of a butterfly wing in Australia, ends up as a hurricane bursting its way through the United States. So, in the past we can see the butterfly wing, but conditions around it produce the turbulence, conditions around that produce further turbulence, and before you know it, you have a hurricane or a tornado.

So the law states that something is coming into the present and meeting other things coming from different pasts in the present, and hence you have a new creative situation. And the opposite is true. If something doesn't arise, something else happens. So the sun comes up and it's a lovely summer and the harvest is great. And the workers are out there and the money's earned and everybody's happy. The sunshine fails to come, the harvest doesn't happen, people don't eat, and there's famine.

All of us are here in this room having made decisions in the past, completely separate from each other. And here we are. Oh, happy gathering. So that's the law of *idappaccayatā*. That's what the Buddha saw as basically happening at that level.

When it comes to something that happens to human beings – so that's a physical law, you see, the law of physics, you might say – when it comes to something that happens to human beings, it's fairly easy to accept the law of kamma so long as we can see some justice. So they work hard and you get the money and you own a nice house. That's good kamma. You have a good life, but then unfortunately you get a bad illness. That's bad kamma. But that's the way it is.

When something outlandish happens, then it's difficult. So the murder of two little innocent girls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. An earthquake in Turkey, or the one in Japan. Thousands of people just crushed. Or indeed, the people in the Twin Towers. So when we come across a real disaster which doesn't make sense, then this idea of human justice comes in. Something has to be just.

Now justice belongs to a system of punishment and reward. So in the 18th century it was perfectly just to hang somebody for stealing a sheep. Now you can commit mass murder and you go to jail. I'm not suggesting that that's not what should happen. It's just that, obviously, when we come to justice, reward and punishment, it's entirely dependent on what human beings think is justice. Remember the old Gilbert and Sullivan? The Mikado, isn't it? Let the punishment fit the crime. For his innocent merriment, that was the emperor, wasn't it?

So that isn't the law of kamma. The law of kamma is really stating that in fact all this business about reward and punishment is something that we produce for ourselves. It's our personal kamma. If we decide to punish somebody, then we're laying on that person extra suffering. Because whatever we do, there's got to be some consequence. That's the better word for kamma. Consequence. You do something and there's a consequence. There's an effect.

However, we are not in charge of the process that happens to an action once we've performed it. That's the problem. That butterfly never meant to do any harm. But it was put in jail for years for causing that hurricane. There was a case here in Totnes, I was told, of a charity group that collected clothes. Clothes for the poor in Africa. A very compassionate, loving idea. So they collected all these clothes and they all went to Africa. And they put all the tailors out of work. So that wonderful compassionate act ended up with massive suffering for a lot of people. Just because you do something out of the goodness of your heart doesn't mean that everybody's going to be happy with it. So the world is a very complicated place.

Now, if we say that kamma is much more to do with action and its product – and I'm using here kamma as we use it in the vernacular, in the ordinary sense of something that's resulted, that's not its actual proper use. Its proper use is just action. The result is, the proper word for that is *vipāka*. But just using it as we normally use it, bad kamma, good kamma – we can see that everything that happens to us is not our personal responsibility.

So the law of kamma is only one of five laws that the Buddha taught. Now, strictly speaking, I'm not absolutely sure that this was something he taught directly, because I can't remember, or whether it's something which was extrapolated from the text by

later commentaries. But these five laws are, shall we say, a compendium of laws which hopefully explain why things happen to us as individuals, to us as we experience ourselves as individual human beings.

So the first one is known as the law of heat, *utu*, and it actually refers to what these days we would call physics, chemistry. Now, there are things that happen in that world which have nothing to do with us. An earthquake. You can't say that you were crushed in an earthquake because in a past life you stood on a thousand ants. The connection between all those ants that you very cruelly stood on in that past life and the movement of the earth with its tectonic plates is difficult to see. Did all those ants go down there and push those plates? It gets ridiculous. You can't measure what happens to you from the outside world as being your personal kamma. In fact, it seems a little arrogant.

The second law is *bīja*, and it translates as seed, and it equates to our genetics. So now we know the physical structure we have is the product of history. I mean, if you're born with a congenital disease, what can you do? It's come up to you from past generations. If, as we had that awful disaster in the 60s, I think it was, when thalidomide was produced as a help for women in pregnancy, and children were born without limbs. It's not a personal kamma. So when it comes to anything to do with genetics, this body has to be accepted as a product of past generations.

Now, there is a little side comment to make there. Because remembering Buddha says the mind and the body are intimately connected. Milk in water, the Buddha says. And we can see that when we produce in ourselves unwholesome states, it has an effect on the body. Very simply, we know that anger hurts the heart, we know that anxiety gives you bad indigestion. On that level, it's pretty obvious. But there's also suggestions that it can also change the very genetic structure, so that the gene patterns change, or fault, so that you come up with a fault line in a genetic pattern. And this carries on. This carries on as a history.

But it could also be other things. It could be all the radioactive pollution that we've got. All these poor animals up in the Arctic, these polar bears being born with all sorts of peculiarities because of this distortion in the genetic code through this pollution up there. So we can't say that they deserve that. So that's *bīja*, that's the business about genetics. So the body we end up in, well, that's just it, you've got to do your best. Not part of our personal kamma.

The third one is *citta*, which means mind. Now, strictly speaking in the commentaries, it refers to the way the mind works, what we would call psychology. But I don't think you can abstract that from the effects of society on the mind. So, through mind, you have to include culture. You have to include the language you speak, which orders

your thoughts, gives you certain patterns of thinking which connects you with your civilization and on a very personal level connects you with the culture of your own family.

So your mind is that whole business of what we've constructed within ourselves, made within ourselves, our emotional and thought life, that we've made within ourselves, but obviously in communion, in communication with the situation that we've found ourselves. Now we're not in charge of that situation, are we? If you happen to be born destitute in a family which is in the middle of Africa or India, it's a very different life, isn't it, from somebody who's born, say, in the West, generally speaking. Not to say there are not poor people here. But you've no control over that. That's what we're working with. That's the stuff that we've got to work with. So that's the mind, *citta*, in its general form.

Now the next one is kamma, and I'll leave that for a moment.

The last one is *dhamma*, and that's all the laws, the spiritual laws. So the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, all that. So they belong to another section in Buddhist understanding, which are laws which, if you follow, have certain effects.

So there's your five laws and one of them is kamma.

Now kamma is specifically to do with our intentions. As the Buddha says, it's quite clear. *Cetanāhaṃ cetanāṃ kamma vadāmi bhikkhave*. I call your will kamma. Now, the Buddha here is using kamma to mean action. Action. And the will is what empowers something to produce an action. And there are three actions. Actions of thought, actions of speech, and actions of body. And what you do is you are empowering, you are empowering an intention.

So this kamma, in terms of why we suffer, is contained in the wheel of dependent origination. In that wheel, what you have is the contact with the world. For those of you who know it, the *phassa*. That's the contact we have with the world. From that, we have an internal response, which we call feeling. Pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. And that's our reaction, response to the world as it comes to us. Whether it be a television set, somebody speaking to us, a meditation room, it doesn't matter. It arises in the heart a certain response, a certain feeling.

And we react to that coming from a self of either indulging what is pleasant or pushing away what is unpleasant. We're always caught up in that game. The self really doesn't have an option apart from just simply ignoring something. It's always caught up in the game. You've only got to watch yourself. The mind is always moving from, oh that's nice, oh no, I don't want that. It's always shifting.

As soon as you've decided on something that you want, as soon as you've decided that you like something or dislike something, then you have that reaction of wanting, not wanting. And that's your *taṇhā*. That's your desire. And as soon as that desire has arisen, there's an identification with the desire. I want. In our language, the I comes first. I want. But in Buddhist psychology, it's the other way around. Want I. There's a grasping onto it. That's why it's called *upādāna*. It's grasping onto it.

And as soon as you've done that, that desire is empowered. *Bhava*. And *bhava* translates as becoming. Becoming. So becoming and kamma and will are all the same thing.

Now, when you do that, two things are happening. First of all, there's an action which goes out into the world over which now we can see we have very little control. Whether I set up a good action of sending old clothes to Africa or a bad action of mugging some sweet old person on the street, after that, it's that butterfly wing. I don't know where it's going to go. I might get away with it. I might get away with this mugging. And it so happens the person has one million pounds in their pocket. It's pretty good. On the other hand, I might be taken to court by all these tailors in Africa and sued for ruining their jobs. Next time you send clothes, send us a wage. See?

So you don't know. Now, how much responsibility can we take for that? Because you've put it into the pot. Other people are going to grasp it. The environment is going to grasp it. Surely the only responsibility we can take is for our initial intention. As soon as other people join in, as soon as the environment takes hold of it, that's it. So we can't blame ourselves or find ourselves feeling guilty for things over which we've no control. But we can over our particular intention, the initial intention we had.

So, having made this decision, there's an action which goes out in the world over which we've got very little control and which will come back to us in some way. Come back to us in some way. So it may be, for instance, that I'm here preparing this wonderful charity and all these people are really getting cheesed off about it. And I go out there thinking what a wonderful thing it is that I've done. And I land and somebody shoots me in the head. Somebody doesn't like me. Am I responsible for that?

Now what is happening on the outside, something else is happening on the inside. So that action, that act of will is now producing a circumstance within my own mind.

So as soon as I intend something, I'm setting up a specific conditioning within my mind, within my heart. So if I intend something compassionate, I am producing a conditioning in myself to produce a compassionate heart. If I set up one intention which I empower, even in my thought, remember, it doesn't have to be speech or action, just in my thought, and I empower a cruel thought, I set up a conditioning for cruelty.

Now, you can see that we have two things here, two things happening. We have the outside world, over which I have little control, and the inside world over which I have total control. There's a real split. It's myself who's produced all these emotions, all this restlessness and depression and guilt. But I've also produced joy, compassion, peace. My inner environment is my own little domain.

I didn't know this as a kid, else I wouldn't have done a lot of things that I did do. But unfortunately, I'm stuck with what I've got. That's my ignorance, that's myself. That's me looking at the world as a place where I can be perfectly happy. Trying to manipulate the world so that I can be happy in it. But I'm also constantly creating this environment within myself.

So we can see that when something happens to us from the outside we may be only connected to it by way of being there. I mean, all those people in the towers, they were just there. Some of them were just there. But somehow they were connected because of what they did, because of their job and all that. They were connected with all this business that's going on at this political level. But some of them were there just as tourists.

So now what is their kamma? In the sense of what is it that they've suffered as a consequence of something in the past? Or what is it that they're suffering as personal kamma? You see, if we say it was the crushing towers then we've got a lot of explaining to do. If we say it was their fear or their lack of fear, then that's them, isn't it?

So, in that situation, as in all situations of great stress, be it a war, be it an earthquake, or be it something as terrible as that, there's always this individual who is in that situation, in their own little world.

We see it as an objective thing. We see the wall, we see the towers collapse. But what the person there is experiencing is only what they're experiencing. And that's their suffering or non-suffering. And that's their *kamma*.

So there will have been somebody in that tower who will not have felt afraid and who will have felt a need for compassion to help people who were in dire straits. There will have been those who would have been killed outright. There wouldn't have been perhaps any feeling at all. There would have been those who died in abject fear, in terror. But that's them, that's their particular mental state produced by their own internal kamma.

What we're trying to do in our meditation is to purify the heart completely and to take away that initial mistake that we've made. It's a mistake of believing that this is what we are—this body, mind and heart psychophysical organism. I like that phrase: psychophysical organism. It's breaking through the delusion that that's what we are. And if that's not what we are, how can it ever cause us suffering?

So if we look at something like innocence, like these two little girls... Well, we know that there are many children these days who are in dire straits. And I'm just bringing back to memory now that the Moors murder, where they even taped the screams of the kids that they were torturing. They were on tape, for heaven's sake. So that for us, of course, is very difficult for us to bear. Because of the innocence of it. Even if it's somebody who isn't so innocent, it's difficult to bear. But when it's a child, it's extra specially difficult to bear.

So what then would be the understanding of kamma for those children? Well, for some reason, conditions outside them—this man, who knows how he came to be in that state of mind to commit that act—suddenly chooses them. Lots of children. Why choose them? Was it opportunism? Was it the fact that it just happened that they were there and therefore he was suddenly taken by this obsession? Who knows. Was it planned? Had he planned it before? Had he had some sort of special relationship with them? Who knows. It may come out in court.

But for those children, that whole time now has produced in them, one can only presume, this huge conditioning of absolute terror—real hell, a real hell state. One can only presume that, at worst.

So now what happens is, in Buddhist understanding, is that this is something they will have to sort out in future lifetimes. So this fear—remember, has not been caused, and this is what you really have to grasp—this has not been caused by that man. Nobody can cause us psychological pain. That fear has been produced by their fundamental delusion, the same delusion that we have: that I am this body, I am what I appear to be.

Now, what happens in Buddhist understanding is that through the process of rebirth there is a working out of that, and everything that was unwholesome in that mind is eventually turned into its opposite. So the amount of fear that we have in us will produce the equal amount of courage once it's turned. The cruelty that we have in us will produce an equal amount of compassion. Because all it is, is an energy force. All the hate we have will turn into love.

But more than that, because as this transformation takes place, we can then continue to develop those qualities of joy, peace, love and compassion infinitely. Well, better word, indefinitely. Infinitely takes us into metaphysics. Indefinitely. Indefinitely in two ways: horizontally in the sense that since there are a limitable number of beings we can extend those qualities indefinitely that way, and vertically in the sense that there is no end to the depth of love, compassion, joy and peace we can feel.

So even though these two children have had to suffer, have had to go through an experience which has produced in them because of their delusion an awful and dreadful state of mind, in the fullness of time they will work it out and they will gain the benefit of that working out. So nothing is wasted. Nothing we suffer is for nothingness. It always will produce something beautiful in the end.

Now, the universe, as far as our consciousnesses are concerned, is so manufactured that we don't have a choice but to become enlightened. You don't have a choice. Only once in Buddhist history was there ever the dastardly theory that there were some people who would always be in *saṃsāra*—onward going. They were called the Ichikantas, those who would go on forever, because it was understood that there were some people who were just too thick. This awful doctrine remained only in a very small sect in Mahāyāna for a very short time and was banished.

And the reason is that the self is continuously trying to find happiness in this world. It only has two ways: It either must try to build up a very pleasurable situation, or it must run away from what is unpleasurable. So, the image is the base of a triangle. It's always running towards pleasure, or it's always running away from hatred, away from painfulness. It's always running up and down this base.

And that's what you're observing when you meditate. You're observing, this is *dukkha*. This is what the Buddha is talking about when he says suffering, unsatisfactoriness. Every time we hit the wall of pleasure, when the pleasure doesn't arise, when the pleasure we depended upon disappears, suffering arises. Every time aversion arises, every time something horrible arises, we run away from it, but it chases us. You can't get away from your internal pain. You might think you're doing it. You can take drugs if you want, but it's still there.

So, this game, the Buddha says, at some point, this suffering awakens a person. And it awakens the person to find the end of suffering. And this is his own life, right? There he is, having a good time, and he comes across a very sick person, a very old person, and a corpse. You know the story. And each time he says, what is this? Because he's never seen anything like this before. And when they tell him he's a human being, his next question is crucial: Does it happen to me?

When that broke into his consciousness that he could grow old, sick, and die, he had what we would call a nervous breakdown—an existential identity crisis. And it shot him out in search of the end of suffering. And he found it.

Now, that's exactly what is happening to us. So I think that's it, really. I think I've done my bit.

Beginning with the fundamental law of *idappaccayatā*: because that happened, this happens. Now, because that didn't happen, this doesn't happen. Now, because this is here, that arises. Because this is not here, that doesn't arise. There's your fundamental plan.

So it allows an enormous creativity, especially when the human will comes into it. And remember, human will creates. Look what we've done to this planet. This is human will. It's human will that's doing this. On top of that, you've got all the laws of the universe around us. You've got also the laws of culture and the laws of civilisation. All these things we're in the middle of.

And in the middle of that there's this little puddle with its own little internal dynamic. And that's us, that's our little minds and our understandings. And although we have contact, there's a separation. We all live in a little personal bubble. My world—although none of us would disagree that this room is here, we've all of us had a different experience of it. Even if it's very similar, it's different. So we live in this little bubble and this little bubble is what we're creating. And if it's awful stuff, then we've got to do something about it, and we can. And if it's good stuff, then we increase it.

And all the time we're trying to discover how it is that this bubble is boiling and not cool. Why is it that we can't be in a very peaceful state, a joyous, compassionate, loving, peaceful state?

And remember that this individual, because of that wrong relationship to the world, whenever something happens in the world out there, will produce pleasant and unpleasant feelings. These pleasant and unpleasant feelings will produce a reaction. And the reaction is what causes all our fear, depression, anxiety, etc. It's not caused by the outside world, and that's the essential hope of the Buddha's message.

That an individual can completely cure themselves of all dissatisfaction and suffering in the midst of a horrible world or beautiful world. And you can do it in a very lifetime. In fact, you can do it in seven days if you come and join my course. That's what the Buddha says: seven days if you really work at it.

So, that's it really. Are there any immediate questions that arise out of that?

CHAPTER 25

Rebirth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

In this exploration, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the complex topic of rebirth in Buddhist understanding, addressing the fundamental questions that arise for Western practitioners. He begins by explaining the death process (chutti) and how one's state of mind at death influences the next birth, drawing parallels with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of terminal illness - shock, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance.

The talk provides a detailed examination of the six realms of existence (hell beings, animals, hungry ghosts, humans, asuras, and devas) and their psychological correspondences in our present experience. Bhante distinguishes between Hindu reincarnation (continuity of an eternal soul) and Buddhist rebirth (dependent arising without a permanent self), using the metaphor of billiard balls touching versus beads on a string.

Addressing scientific perspectives, he discusses research by Ian Stevenson on past-life memories, cryptomnesia, and genetic memory, while acknowledging both evidence for and skepticism about rebirth phenomena. The talk concludes with the essential point from the Kālāma Sutta: whether rebirth exists or not, the Dhamma works here and now (sandiṭṭhiko), and liberation depends on present-moment understanding of dependent origination rather than beliefs about future lives.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.

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

I want to try and collect my thoughts around all the problems around rebirth. What I've done is put it in question form, which are the normal questions that people ask. After each question, I'll make sure that everybody's got the idea.

The first one that is interesting is what happens at death in Buddhist understanding. Actually the process—what produces your next rebirth? I'm now presuming that there is such a thing. What's going to affect your next rebirth?

It's said that when you die, some image as to where you're going to go appears in the mind. It's a product of your actions during your life. Sometimes they say it can be a strong image, an actual memory which takes you into your next life. So if you, for in-

stance, just as you died there came this image of you squashing a fly against the window, this may take you into the deepest hells. On the other hand, catching a fly gently with the hands and showing it the window may produce a very happy realm.

We'll come to this in a minute when we come to the different sorts of realms that you can end up in. But one thing that's interesting for us as Westerners is what has been studied about the process of terminal illness. There are five states that people go through, it seems. It's been well documented. The first book written on it was called Death and Dying by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross.

Some of them you'll recognise. So when you're told, for instance, that you only have so long to live, the first thing—it's a bit of a shock, isn't it? So that's your first reaction: the shock, the horror of it. The measure of that is the measure of ourselves, the measure of our ego, the measure of how much we're attached to life.

Once the shock is over, we tend to get happier—we tend to go into a sort of magical stage, a sort of "if I do the right thing, it'll pass away." They call it bargaining. So if I eat a thousand carrots, the cancer will definitely disappear. If I pray very, very hard, God will take this disease away from me.

Then, of course, you visit the doctor and he says, "No, it's getting worse. You are going to die." The next thing is, of course, you rage. Why me? I saw this lovely cartoon once—there's a woman in bed, and there's a few friends around her, and she's saying, "Why me? Why not one of you?" Why are you saying that on your deathbed? "Why me? Why not one of you?"

After the anger passes, there's this coming up against the reality of it. So there's no way around it now. So it's very depressing. Life's going to come to an end. If the person gets through that, then they come to that state of equanimity, acceptance.

Now just look at those. Shock, abject fear, anxiety. A sort of weird mind state where you're trying to bargain your way out of the problem using magic—running all over the world, taking this herb, that herb. Anger because it's just not working, nobody's helping you, there's no way out of the situation—frustration. Deep depression, deep sadness. Equanimity, peace.

Fear, elation—what would you call that? Excitement, anger, depression, peace. Now, if there is a rebirth, you can see if you die in any of those states, that's the one that's going to carry you. That's why in every religion they make this big effort when somebody's dying to get around them the images of their religion, which is going to make them peaceful, joyful—people giving them permission to go so the sadness disappears,

singing hymns, all that sort of stuff, being with them in the last moments, just to give them that aura around them of equanimity, of peace, so that they themselves can die gently, can let go.

I think all that the Buddhist literature would say is that the image which comes to mind as you leave the body will be determined by that state you're in, that's all. And it determines where you go. If you want a full explanation of that, you can always look up the Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma on page 124, and that will give you the details.

So that's the process—it's called the death *cuti*, the death moment when you leave the body. It is going to be determined by the state of mind you're in. In Buddhist understanding, it may not particularly be that business around the illness. It could just be some big past regret that comes up. Things like that.

The next question, of course, is what happens when you die? Here, unfortunately, the Buddhist tradition gives us an option. It depends what tradition you're in as to what's going to happen to you, it seems. The Theravāda understanding, and so I'm told, Zen and those Chinese forms of Buddhism simply say that you're reborn immediately into another space, another realm, another place.

But the Tibetans have this idea of a *bardo*, where you stay for up to forty-nine days. In that state, you seem to be bombarded, or you seem to come in contact with some forms of light, figures who emanate light, who all represent the six realms. And we'll come to that in a minute—the six realms. The big one being the light of the enlightenment, of the *dharmakāya*, the body of the true law. Normally speaking, the person can't handle it, and they go for these softer lights for a different rebirth. Eventually they take rebirth wherever this soft light is. So the human realm, as I remember, it was yellow. I'm not absolutely sure. You have to look it up. Then one goes towards that light and manifests as it were through that light.

A more interesting explanation of *bardo*, in terms of our life here and now, is they talk about the in-between point between one thought and the next. Just catching that moment is meant to be symbolic of *bardo*. So it's that moment of that emptiness, when the mind stops, you might say. So that's what happens at death in these two major traditions.

The next one is, of course, what are the realms of existence and how do they match what humans can experience? So, in other words, how they relate to us. Well, the six realms are hell, the animal realm, the hungry ghosts, the human realm, the angry gods, and the devas, the gods.

The hell realm, the worst of the hell realms, is reserved especially for those who've been cruel and horrible. But it really refers to, in terms of our experience, those states of mind that we ourselves would consider pretty hellish. Really delusional states, schizophrenia, deep profound depression. The big thing about a hell state, when we experience it—and all of us have experienced it in some way or other—is when we're in a bad state and just for a moment, or maybe even more than a moment, we don't think there's a way out. That's hell. I mean, if you're so depressed, if you're caught in a job and you just don't see a way out—you know what I mean? That's really, I think, the quality of hell.

The animal realm is the realm of the dull mind. So you get drunk or something like that. The problem with these two realms is that they're not very good places for enlightenment because they're too heavy. So the hell realm is obviously too painful, too deluded. And the animal realm, you don't have the intelligence. It's not possible.

The hungry ghost realm really refers to obsession, addiction, and these days we know all about them. That's really what it refers to—an addictive nature. So next time you serve yourself soup, especially when a huge desire to devour it arises, you have to warn yourself, "Oops, if I die now, I'll be a hungry ghost. I won't be able to leave this pot forever." No, no, nothing's forever.

The human realm is characterised by what we know as—in Buddhist terms, remember, everything we say is always about the liberation, always about the enlightenment—it's characterised by joy and woe, joy and woe, suffering and joy. We have this intelligence. We can make our way out, make our way out of it. That's the process, of course. *Vipassanā* is a technique we use, or in other traditions, Dzogchen, Zazen, is a technique we use to access that intelligence which is going to lead us out of this suffering. So that's specific to the human realm, you might say.

The angry gods are always fighting, always at each other. So it's obviously a place where we're angry, frustrated, whatever. Finally the devas is for the rich, the powerful and the famous. So you're just too happy, you just can't be bothered with practice. I mean, why bother when you're lying on the beach in Acapulco?

They don't particularly relate directly to these five points of a terminal illness, but it shows you that there's some relationship between that. This isn't the fullness of it. If you look at a book called The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy—a hell of a title—by Anagārika Govinda, there, of course, the later scholastics went and divided all these realms into myriad realms depending on the particular state you were in, especially the particular absorption you were in, the particular *jhānic* state. All these different stages, these different paths, have a particular place to go to.

I don't know whether these things exist or not. Who knows? I've got this awful feeling that they're all here. They're all here around us. Just like the human realm is a jumble of hellish people, ghostly—these hungry ghosts, they're all around us here now. I can feel them, you might say.

So there we have this whole thing about the way you die, the way you're reborn. Everything that we talk about the afterlife is actually a mirror in Buddhist understanding of what you can experience in the human life. So you can say it's just a creative imagination. You can take the position of believing it—we'll come to that in a minute. Or you can take it that in fact it is a holographic universe. Everything is virtually the same. Everything contains everything else. This would go back to the idea of the Indra's net, where each jewel at the joining of each of these little ropes of a net mirrors the whole universe. So why should any other realm be really outside what we can experience here in this realm?

The next question is, what is the difference between rebirth and reincarnation? This whole thing is worked out in the Indian culture. You don't get much of this at all, as far as I know, in the Chinese culture. Of course, they believe in ancestors and stuff like that and rebirth. But in the old Confucian culture, the old ancient Chinese culture, there was obviously some idea of onward going like Christians have, but it was never worked out in any great detail, I don't think.

But the main difference between reincarnation and rebirth, between the Hindu system, shall we say, and the Buddhist system—there's a nice image. The Hindu system would suggest a string of beads. So all the beads are different, but there's this string that goes through it, a continuity, a sort of self that continues, which is steady throughout the whole of these little apparitions. Whereas the Buddhist idea would be more a line of billiard balls that touch each other. So they're all quite distinct. All arising dependent on conditions. Not entirely the same, not entirely different. But always arising, always arising, one after the other. So it's a radical transience.

The Hindu idea might give you the impression of a lump of clay which you mould into a saucer, screw it up again, mould it into a cup—the same sort of substance that's moving around. Whereas the Buddhist idea is that there is nothing that actually moves. It is more like—well, the great example of course is the body. The body itself—according to our modern science, completely changes every atom. Every atom is supposed to be changed within seven years. So next time you look in a mirror, just remind yourself: this face wasn't here seven years ago. So get back to reality. So that's the difference.

The next thing is, what are the proofs for rebirth, for reincarnation? There's a man called Stevenson who's spent his whole life going around, interviewing people, finding out about their recalls and rebirths and all that sort of stuff. Some of it is, in a sense, pretty convincing. Usually the most sharp ones come from children. Children suddenly around about the age of three to four or five suddenly remember things. There are stark examples where they've actually demanded to go and see their mother who lives in this next village. When they take them off, they describe everybody, and they even tell how they died, and stuff like that. It's pretty heady stuff.

The other one is of course adult past life experiences where a person remembers something happened in a past life and they can sometimes prove it, sometimes prove that it actually happened. The other small thing is birthmarks caused by death. Often how you died is mirrored in the next body you get. So you get moles—and the next time you look at your moles, just say, "These must have been stabbed here in my previous life." And birthmarks. So there are things like that which are supposed to relate. Again, proven by people with past life, who then said that they were shot, and there's a mole, there's a sort of birthmark, an ugly birthmark or something, where the bullet went in, things like that.

The mark of a true past life experience, according to Stevenson and according to my understanding, is that the person remembers this past experience, re-experiences it as that person. So they're not this person. They're not actually this personality. It's as though for a moment you've become somebody else. That can happen to us in a rebirth situation in this life where a childhood memory comes up as a trauma and you remember it as that child. So that's the difference. So if somebody says, "I suddenly remember being Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo," then you can ask them, "Were you really Napoleon? Or just a memory, is it?"

There are, of course, these other reasons as to why somebody might have past life recall. The first one, and this relates to Napoleon, is called cryptomnesia. I don't know how they make these words up. Cryptomnesia. The biggest example of that that most books use is concerning a woman called Virginia Tighe. She certainly had these very vivid, clear memories of being Bridie Murphy in the south of Ireland in her past life. Described it absolutely perfectly. From everybody's understanding—this is under hypnosis, so it wasn't something conscious, you might say—it seemed to be a real proof that past life exists. Because they went there and it was there. Everything was as she said it was.

Then through an intrepid investigator they came across a certain Bridie Murphy who actually lived opposite Virginia Tighe and told her all these stories. They'd obviously sunk into the subconscious, had taken on emotional meanings and came up as a whole story of vivid images. So that unfortunately was the end of this amazing proof that there was a past life. Now that's given the whole thing a bad name, because now, well, it's just cryptomnesia. I don't know what crypto means. What does it mean? I forgot to look it up. Hidden. So it's a hidden amnesia, a hidden forgetfulness, an unknown forgetfulness. Thank you.

The other explanation, of course, from a materialist point of view, something like Dawkins or whatever, is genetic memory. So our genes not only carry just the physical nature of our bodies, but also they bring with it, like Dawkins calls them, memes. Genes and memes. So the idea is that just as you get pieces of information in your genes which make up your body, you get pieces of information which are cultural. He doesn't refer to that in the genetic structure as far as I know. It's more in the sense that that's what we do to each other. We keep giving each other these little blocks of information which we then pass on and it builds up and builds up into a culture.

So this idea that it's within our genes is something that people might argue.

The other one is just the power of retrocognition. The opposite of retrocognition is clairvoyance, where you can see what's going to happen. Sometimes clairvoyant people really do see what's going to happen. Sometimes they don't, but sometimes they really do. So this retrocognition may be real, maybe it did happen, but it's more like a mystical ability to see into the past.

So there are your arguments against it. It depends where you are on the scale of things, as to which one attracts you.

The bad thing about the whole rebirth, reincarnation theory, we can call it theory, is that of course for the self it becomes a comforting thought. So I won't die after all. I'll keep going. Even though I might have to go through this little gate and it's painful, I will arise. And to actually turn around and just face for a moment that in fact there is no re-arising of this person, which is true. This person will not re-arise. It's a bit of a, whoa!

So to actually turn around and face the annihilation of this personality is a bit of a challenge. And it's sometimes easier to believe, well yes, the personality changes, but when I die, the changing will go on and I'll recognize me as I am, as I've always done.

And of course the other awful thing about the whole rebirth understanding is that people delay the process of their liberation, thinking, well now I'll just collect a bit of good karma, build up a good bank account, and I'll die in this lovely place, and off I go.

So it's like you're delaying it, delaying it. And the whole idea of building up a bank account is based, of course, on a big ego. The very fact that you're doing good things for that ego reason undermines the whole process. In other words, you're not facing the process of liberation.

For born Buddhists, for traditional Buddhists, I would say the vast majority of lay people delay it. It's the way the vast majority of monks and nuns think. They're all building up good karma for the next life. So these are drawbacks of the belief in rebirth.

The other thing that comes across when you talk about rebirth is how do you square it up with evolutionary theory? If you look at the Buddhist scriptures they live in this ancient time of cyclic time. And this goes back to earlier times when, if you think about it, every year was virtually the same. And you did the same thing. And the society was static. For as long as you can remember and for as far as you can see, people will be doing the same thing over and over again. There was no idea of progress at all.

Progress as such didn't really come into the Western mind until fairly recently, although it was started off by this cleric somewhere around the 12th century, if I remember rightly, who, having now been 12 centuries since the birth of Christ and he hadn't returned, began to say that the time before Christ's birth was the time of the Father. The time we're going through now is the time of Christ. And we're leading up to the time of the Spirit, when all will be resurrected. So this idea of actually going somewhere, of an aim, of an end to life, suddenly appears before us as an evolutionary process. This of course was reinforced by Darwin and all that we know these days. Although they say you can pick holes in the theory, I don't know enough about it to give you that. The fact is it's pretty convincing stuff that there's a process of evolution going on.

Whereas if you read the scriptures, what you get is the name of the past 28 Buddhas. And every Buddha has a Pali name, they have two main disciples, they go through this and it's this repetition, repetition. If you lived in those times and all you thought, considering you were, say, a farmer, working with your ox on a field day after day, no TV, no holidays, except in winter when it's dry season. You go through this, and then you have to go through these horrible old days because there's no medicine, and there may be some palliatives for pain, and people have died, their teeth are falling out. And leprosy, oh God. And the whole thing is there. When you're going to die, I don't want to come back here.

So this idea of being reborn was really quite the big thing in the Buddha's time. Everybody wanted the end of rebirth. They wanted not to be brought back as a human being, to be born into a god, not to fall down from the gods to be a human being. And it was pretty obsessive. And it actually ends up in the three great insights of the Buddha's enlightenment. That's where it's put. It's called the *Te Vidya*, the three knowledges.

The first knowledge is that he sees that the process of his rebirth has been very much according to his moral life. So whereas before the Buddha, the idea was more a chaotic reason, you just got reborn. The only way you could get out of this rebirth was through ritual, through appeasing the gods. There wasn't a close relationship with rebirth and your moral life, your ethical life. So this was an insight into the fact that it's our morality. Morality here means what is skillful. It's not just to do with killing and whatnot. It's to do with all that stuff around you, what we might call these days little neurotic patterns and stuff like that. It's the purification of the heart.

And then through his vision, he saw that this was true of all beings. So what was a personal law became a cosmic law. And the third understanding was that he'd actually completely purified his heart. Now, to be an *arahat*, to be a fully enlightened being, it's the third one you have to do. You don't have to have these other insights. So there's a small suggestion that these crept in, you might say, as part of the whole teaching around *kamma*. Part of the whole teaching around how we create kamma, the process of kamma, how it's guided by what is skillful and unskillful.

In terms of these days, does rebirth make sense? Well, I suppose if you think of it as an evolutionary process, that you're actually moving towards a liberated consciousness, a liberated *chitta*, you might say, then it is some sort of an evolutionary process. It still seems to work. It's the evolution of consciousness, you might say.

The other thing that comes across is the question about seeming inequality. I mean, people seem to die who've been absolute villains and they seem to die in bed and fairly happy. And others who've been wonderful and good end up on the gibbet and get themselves hanged. I mean, how does that work? Well, there are all sorts of ways of trying to explain that. But one thing you have to understand about *kamma* is that our moral life is only to do with our internal, our interior life.

Of course it affects others. I mean, if I'm into stealing, that's going to affect people. If I'm into good works, it's going to affect people. But morality, my ethical life, has a direct effect upon my inner life and eventually should clear it up, should move it towards a purification. But things that happen to me on the outside, of course, are coming from other sources. I mean, it might be that I steal something and I get caught and put in jail. So that's a fairly straightforward sequence of events that I can understand. It may be

that I do some little good for somebody and they turn out to be a billionaire and they give me a million pounds. So I can see how wonderful that is if you find anybody like that, by the way.

But unfortunately, suddenly you win the lottery. Suddenly you find yourself caught up in a terrorist ordeal. All these people at the moment getting kidnapped in Iraq. So obviously we live in a fairly chaotic universe in the sense that we don't know what's going to happen to us. Because there are various forces. There is the force of nature. There's the force of other people's decision-making and actions towards us. So you have to take all that into account when you think about, well, why did that happen to that person? Why did they die in this way? Why didn't they die this way? Because we're not in control of the situation we're in.

But one little example that I like to give around that is that in one of the great earthquakes, I think it was in Mexico, they found this mother and her child after something like 10 days trapped just between two blocks. And the mother had, over the period of 10 days, constantly cut her fingers in order to feed the child her blood. So presumably they were fairly comfortable down there for the time being. But it's like, that's quite something. She didn't freak out.

And finally, I suppose, a big question. Is the concept of rebirth necessary to become enlightened or to get the best out of the Buddha Dhamma? And I think you'll find amongst Western people, Western scholars and Western Buddhists, and there's one, if you look up the Journal of Buddhist Ethics on the web, you'll get some very good essays about it. The general opinion is, of course, that you don't need to believe it at all.

The Dharma itself either works now or it doesn't work at all. One sees the benefit now, here and now, *sandiṭṭhiko,* here and now, or what's the point of it? Worries about whether there is a future life or not really don't pertain to the direct practice. So the wheel of dependent origination, which is this whole process of mentation, which brings about the purification, or which upon seeing of it, the seeing of it, seeing how we cause ourselves suffering, is the process of liberation, is happening right here and now. So the escape is here and now from that. So it's not actually necessary for the Dharma to work.

And just to leave you with one little understanding that the Buddha gives in the *Kālāma Sutta,* which is a discourse where he really talks about freedom of thought and things like that. He says well, if you live with the idea that there will be a rebirth and that your good actions here and now will produce a better life, if there is rebirth, all well and good. If there isn't rebirth, all well and good. In other words, the reason for our practice has nothing to do with whether there's rebirth or not.

So, in terms of your practice now, here, at Satipanya, this whole talk has been a waste of time. Because it's irrelevant. But it's a pleasant three-quarters of an hour.

Good. I think that's about it.

CHAPTER 26

Premodern, Modern, Postmodernism and Buddhism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h22

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines three historical approaches to truth and spiritual development: premodern society's reliance on revelation and faith, modernism's emphasis on reason and investigation, and postmodernism's focus on individual interpretation. Drawing from the Visuddhimagga's three character types - the person of faith (saddhā), the intelligent type, and the speculative type - he explores how each corresponds to different societal approaches to awakening.*
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> *The talk investigates whether enlightenment is possible within each worldview, examining figures like Cūḷapanthaka (the faithful practitioner) and Tuccha Poṭṭhila (the intellectually gifted but inexperienced teacher). Bhante discusses the challenges Western practitioners face, often caught between rational inquiry and the need for trust in the Buddha's teaching. He explores the tension between the Buddha's encouragement to investigate everything personally (as in the Kālāma Sutta) while also emphasizing refuge in the Dhamma.*
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> *The discussion concludes by suggesting that balanced spiritual practice requires integrating all three approaches: confidence in the Buddha's revelation, rational investigation of the teachings, and personal experiential verification through meditation practice. This reflects the Buddha's own teaching method, which combined faith-based trust, Socratic questioning, and direct insight through vipassanā meditation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

This is one of the few times that I'm going to give a talk about which I know very little. So I'm hoping for lots of comments and that you'll reserve your tomatoes and eggs for the end.

I read a very interesting essay by a man called James Kurth who wrote this for the Foreign Policy Research Institute in New York. He called it "Religion and Globalization." He suddenly pointed out to me the distinctions between a premodern, modern, and postmodern society, or should we say ethos. I just began trying to think of it in terms of a Buddhist perspective and to try and link it, just in terms of spiritual practice.

This isn't, I don't mean to confuse this with a comparison between different societies, that one is better than the other. I'm not talking about its history or its art or anything of that nature. All I'm doing is looking at certain ways in which these three societies see the process of enlightenment and see if a Buddhist, or somebody following the Buddha Dhamma, the Buddha's teaching, could actually become enlightened in any of these societies. That's the task. Get my PhD on this, huh? I'm in the right city.

So starting at the beginning with premodern society, that refers to really what we know as the medieval ages. A premodern society depends upon revelation for its spiritual founts. It's a given. In terms of both Islam and Christianity you have a given revelation which is then believed in, and because of the structure of a dogma it demands that you can only have very few people interpreting it. If you have too many interpretations then you start getting what later happens, a reformation. So you have to control the power and it fitted in well with the whole idea of Christianity at that time of establishing on earth a society, a static society which would be ready for the second coming.

It was actually during the 12th century thereabouts that the idea that the second coming wasn't going to happen or was going to happen in a different way began to arise. So what the medievalists tried to do was set up a society in which people knew exactly where they were and you had both the temporal and the spiritual and it was very hierarchical. You know, the serfs just rising up through the lords, king, and finally the emperor. And in the spiritual realm, the ordinary punters are down below, and then the priests, bishops, and then finally the pope.

It was never really a question of questioning the revelation itself. It was always the idea of supporting it, even when it didn't make complete sense. So Tertullian, who was a great theologian, said that we believe because it is absurd. What he meant wasn't our sense of being ridiculous, but that it was beyond rationality. It was something you had to believe, full stop. And the spiritual path was totally dependent upon a practice which took that for granted.

So it demanded what we would call a certain faith, a certain unquestioning faith. That as your basis you then either practice good works or prayer and you would make sanctity. So I think the archetypal saint may be somebody like Saint Francis. Just a total belief, no questioning of the actual revelation as such, but a total giving of oneself to the practice. And even today you might say that somebody like Mother Teresa of Calcutta fits into that mold. When you hear her talk, there's no question that the revelation might not be true or anything of that nature.

So what does that produce in terms of a teacher-student relationship? It's one of hierarchy, isn't it? The teacher is in authority as well as being an authority. He has authority over and the student is one who listens and follows the teacher. There's no question about it. You don't question the teacher, the teacher knows. It's that relationship.

And there are character types in Buddhism based upon the three basic roots of greed, hatred and delusion: greedy types, hateful types and deluded types and the opposite of that. This is later commentary, this isn't so much in the original scriptures: the person of faith, the person of intelligence and the speculative type. And they're positive.

Now, the one who is of faith shares with the person who craves the idea of wanting. But, of course, the wanting here is more skillful, more wholesome. They really want the Dhamma. This is the description of one. This is taken from the *Visuddhimagga*, which is later medieval commentary.

"In one of faithful temperament, there is frequent occurrence of such states as free generosity, desire to see noble ones, desire to hear good dharma, great gladness, ingenuousness, honesty, and trust in things that inspire trust."

So it's the person who just is ready to submit or to give themselves to the teaching without question based on that faith. My experience with Eastern teachers is that that's really your relationship to them. If I were to ask, say, one of my teachers, a sayadaw or somebody, a question as to why are we watching the breath at the nose, he'd be miffed. What do you want an explanation for? Just do it.

And one of the great criticisms of Eastern teachers towards Westerners was that they didn't have faith. And what they meant was this unquestioning reliance upon a teacher. Now, you can imagine, if you're born into a culture, and you're imbued with that culture, and there you have a teacher in front of you, a monk or layperson, whoever, and when they speak, they're part of that tradition, so there's no idea of actually questioning them as such.

The danger, of course, is gullibility. You get led. So many Westerners who fall into the trap of the guru find themselves being led all over the place. Of course, they tell you in Buddhism, in the actual guru tradition of Tibet, that in Tibet people take years to decide whether this person is going to be their guru or not. How true that is, I don't know. But there is a type of westerner who really wants that relationship. Even though we've been through our wonderful enlightenment and arrived at this amazing rationality, there's still a surprising number, surprising to me that is, who actually just wants somebody to tell them what to do. Just do this, do that, and I'll be happy.

Now, to support this in the Buddha's time, of somebody who had just this utter faith, was a man called Cūḷapanthaka. Now, Cūḷapanthaka had a brother called Mahāpanthaka, which means big panthaka. He was Cūḷa, he was lesser, he was a lesser panthaka. And his brother had joined the order, and then asked his younger brother to join him. So his younger brother joined, and after four months, he hadn't learnt a single verse of the Buddha's teachings. So his brother said, you'd better get out. You're wasted time.

When the Buddha heard this, he went to see him, and urged him not to do that. And then he gave him this exercise, some of you will know it. Gave him a piece of cloth, and he told him to wipe his face with the cloth, and keep saying "getting dirty," being aware of the change in the cloth as he's wiping it and looking at it. Remember it's a hot country like we are now and he's wiping his face and he suddenly sees the quality of transience of change and he sees it to such a depth that he becomes enlightened. I tried it. He must have been ready. We can presume he did lots of training in his past life.

But there he was, a person of not particularly bright and just open, just open to the Buddha's suggestion without any question. And there comes that insight. So what I'm saying is that in a society where the truth is being expounded, you may be on a winner just having faith. I mean, if it is the truth, and you have faith and you do the practice, it saves a lot of bother, doesn't it? You don't have to read books, you don't have to argue, you don't have to ask questions, you just do it.

So that's premodern in the sense of that ethos, which we have, of course, still here. I mean, the Catholic Church is very much like that. And as I say, Buddhism in the East, for Easterners, is very much like that. The younger generation who are brought up in the horror of rationalizing do question, very disconcerting.

Now, the rejection of that, of course, was modernism. And the core of the modernist movement was the Enlightenment. I suppose the glory of the modernist movement was the ending of slavery, the demand for equality amongst people, and the turning towards people, towards society as a measure of truth rather than revelation. And therefore reason, being able to reason with people and come to a reasonable outcome was the mark of a modernist approach.

Perhaps one of the glories of it is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in which I'm pretty sure God is not mentioned. Revelation is not mentioned. It's a document which human beings have agreed upon totally through their rational understanding. You know, the French Revolution: equality, fraternity, liberty. Equality, liberty, free-

dom from, freedom, as we have now, freedom to vote for any political party, freedom of speech. All these freedoms that we enjoy were a huge reaction to the very strict, autocratic, premodern society. A huge revolution, really.

And the downside, of course, was that rationality then became its own servant. It couldn't look beyond the rational. And as we know, anything which is rational is always based on a premise. So if the premise, no matter how wonderful the rationality, no matter how much the argument is, the premise is wrong, then in a sense you're moving towards a peculiar situation. So communism, Nazism, although Nazism had a romantic streak about it. So you can see how eventually people became disillusioned.

The other, of course, great gift of modernism was investigation, just that opening of the universe to investigation, our science and eventually our technology. So all these were the products of that modern mind. I don't think the premodern mind could have done it because they weren't interested. What they were interested in was just stabilizing society.

The idea of progress. As far as I've read, I picked up this little bit of information about a monk called Joachim de Fiore, a Calabrian, who came up with the idea, and this was how this idea of progress crept into the West, the idea that we were going somewhere, that we weren't actually static. He talked about the three ages. The age of the Father, which was the Old Testament. The age of the Son, which is the present age. And we're moving towards the age of the Spirit. Everybody will be saved. Here on Earth.

Now, in that society, in terms of your spiritual development, that ethos, the teacher takes a different role and the student has a different role. Because here we have much more of a Socratic approach, where everything that is given to the student, the student is understood to question. It must become their knowledge.

Now, I don't know, I've tried to find somebody whom you might look upon who achieved some sort of enlightenment in the West who might have been brought up with that. Maybe, I don't know, does anybody? You see, because the whole of human effort came off the spiritual. I mean, the whole medieval ages was moving up to the spiritual all the time. All the music, all the art, all the philosophy and theology was all around Christianity was all facing up that way. With modernism, our whole effort flattened out. It wasn't so much interested in the spiritual, but more in this investigation. Not that philosophers like Spinoza and people like that didn't have a spiritual element to it. Would anyone like to mention somebody they think belongs to a modernist ethos who might have achieved? What about Darwin? Well, no, I'm thinking of sainthood. Some-

body who's achieved a spiritual, you would recognize a spiritual. The founder of the Quakers maybe. He started off from a personal revelation. So I'm stuck there. I shall wait for your response afterwards.

Now this relates to the second character type, which is translated as intelligent, but you'll see from the actual quote that it's not quite the intelligence that we expect.

"In one of intelligent temperament, there is frequent occurrence of such states as readiness to be spoken to, possession of good friends, knowledge of the right amount of eating, mindfulness and full awareness, devotion to wakefulness. A sense of urgency about things that should inspire a sense of urgency. And wisely directed endeavour."

So here you get the impression that this person is constantly reflecting wisely upon their lives. They're actually engaged. They're not there with a teacher who says, do this, do that. They're turning upon themselves as, in a sense, the source of their own wisdom. Not without the help of the teacher, because they go and visit people. Possession of good friends. Readiness to be spoken to. There's no actual teacher mentioned as such. I suppose readiness to be spoken to. I suppose that's it.

So such a person has that inner reasoning to be able to understand their own position and has a confidence in it. In the scriptures, the Buddha is often in that position where he actually takes on a Socratic role where he asks, what do you think, what do you think? He said, does everything arise and pass away? Yes, Bhante. If it arises and passes away, is that satisfactory? No, Bhante. It's all pretty simple stuff from our point of view, but it's there as a dialogue. He's not saying everything passes away. And it's that part of the scripture that seems to come across to Westerners. So we tend to think of Buddhism as very highly rational in that sense.

There is an example of somebody and he was called by the Buddha Tuccha Pothila. And Tuccha means empty. Now Pothila was a teacher and somebody who was recognized and understood the Buddha's teaching. He could really talk about it. But he hadn't experienced anything. So the Buddha called him empty. Empty Pothila. And he got rather worried that the people whom he taught were all becoming enlightened and he wasn't.

So, swallowing the bitter pill of humility, he went off to his students and they saw him coming and immediately saw this intellectual conceit. They thought, well, there's no way I can get through this. So they passed him on down the line saying, well, I'm not really the right one. And he ended up with a young novice boy, a little monk. And again swallowing his pride he went and followed this little fellow who took him to an anthill and he said to him:

If there are six holes in this anthill, and there's a lizard or a snake in there, if an anthill's vacated, in the East, lizards, sometimes snakes, live in anthills, how would you get the snake out?

He said, well, you stop up five holes.

And the little boy said to him, that's what you must do. You must stop up the five senses and observe the mind, observe the heart.

Well, as the story always goes, in no length of time Tuccha Pothila became one of the arahats.

One of the paradoxes, no, one of the actual straight contradictions that you'll find people get into in Buddhism is this especially on the monastic side because what makes the monastic order is the rule, it's an institution. So it's the rules of the institution that make you a monastic.

And I've come across this quite a few times in the East, mainly Westerners. Easterners don't seem to have a problem with it. It's the case of this. In order to be enlightened, you have to be pure of heart. But you can't be pure of heart totally unless you're fully enlightened. So people get themselves into this corner and if they've been meditating for some time, then they think that it must be because they're not keeping the rule strictly. In other words, they're not pure in the rule. So they get tighter and tighter and tighter around the rule. And we had one case in Sri Lanka. An Australian fellow. And he went back to the original text.

And he realized that the robes that we're wearing now, these robes, were not the robes that the Buddha had started with all those many years ago. The top robe was just like a shawl you put over your shoulders when you went into a city, sort of like a modesty thing. Generally speaking, you just used the lower robe. So he went to see a very famous teacher. Some of you will know him: Ananda Maitreya of Balangoda. Some of you know him. He died at 150.

And he was a Bodhisattva. During one of his meditations at the monastery I was at in Khandaboda, as you progress there comes a point where some deep memory may arise, and he remembered being in the Buddha's time and making the vow to become a Buddha. So he was known as the Bodhisattva. He said he could remember the faces of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two main disciples of the Buddha, but he couldn't remember the Buddha's face unfortunately. When you make that sort of determination in Theravāda Buddhism, I don't know about Mahāyāna, it means you can't progress.

You've got to keep building up your virtues until you're right on the point of enlightenment. And then, when you take your next re-roll, you have to do it all in that one go, in that one lifetime.

So this particular monk went to see him, and Ananda Maitreya agreed that, in fact, the lower robe was that. And the bowl was wrong. If you've seen monks' bowls, they're pretty big, you know. And, in fact, they're supposed to be just... I had a little embarrassing moment over that. I was in India and I was at Goenkaji's centre in Dhamma Giri, near Bombay. And we were lining up for food, and with me there was a Jain monk. And he had a bowl, it was very small, like that. And I made a rather foolish comment and said, "Bhante, that's a very small bowl." And he looked at me and he said, "This is the size of my stomach." And I was there. So I made this sort of limp excuse about it also being the place I put my robes in because it's my luggage case. Yes, he didn't look all that convinced.

And he turned up, this particular monk, at the Kaṭhina ceremony, which is the ceremony at the end of the Rains retreat that monks do where they have to stay in one monastery. At the end all the lay people come offering gifts for what the monastery and the monks might need. And he turned up with this twee little cape tied up around his neck, looked like a bullfighter, and a biscuit tin sweet bowl. And the general opinion was that he'd gone mad. And he eventually drove himself out of the order. So you know, rationality.

But it would seem from the story of Cūḷa Panṭhaka that if a person is completely locked into a way of being in the world which is so totally rational, so totally conceptual, that somehow the person has the intelligence to become enlightened. That's not the problem. The problem is to evacuate that situation of intelligence.

And one of the things that, for instance, Dzogchen... We had Sogyal Rinpoche come down to Gaia House to give a retreat. One of the things that he was trying to do was just to relax people, make them feel so happy, make them feel so... that with a couple of exercises, this original mind would just pop out from that embeddedness in rationality. And the person might just realize their true self, you see. We do it the hard way in Theravāda.

Sweat. So that's the modern society, based on reason. Whether... I mean, most of us are brought up with that mindset. So that's our problem when we start training in the spiritual life: to find a way of coming out of conceptual thinking.

So, for instance, in the methodology that I personally teach, which is the Mahāsi, my own particular practice too, we try to trick the mind by refusing to allow it to think about something, save in the simplest of concepts. So we engage that intellect through a noting technique: rising, falling. So when there's only one word there, at least there can't be a thinking about the object. At least there's only one, shall we say, concept between that intelligence and the direct perception of what it's trying to experience.

And then as the concentration grows, you see, and the ability of that mind to stay absolutely within the present moment, there isn't the time for thought, because thought's always an afterthought, always a comment. And by force of that practice and concentration, suddenly, that intellect will just stop. And then you have that brightness of pure awareness. And hopefully, in no length of time, we join the Arahats.

So now, we come to postmodernism. Now, I haven't a clue. I've read little bits about it. As far as I understand it, postmodernism is a rejection of modernism. And actually, historically speaking, the first rejection of modernism was romanticism. It was people like, I suppose, Rousseau and Wordsworth and all our poets who sort of went back to feeling and sensual experience, took that as the basis of truth. Not thought: "I think therefore I am." "I feel, I sense, therefore I am."

And the problem with romanticism is, of course, that it couldn't accept the present. It looked back into the past for its inspiration. The noble savage idea, Garden of Eden, you see. And in present day, you know, there's certain feminists who look back to a matriarchal age as being... as being better, would have been better than a patriarchal age, a sort of reaching into the past, a sort of nostalgia. I read somewhere that the masculine... Then there was some sort of deep ecology, that's in inverted commas, going back to hunters and gatherers, you know. But the idea of running around with a sort of dog pelt around one's privates chasing rabbits didn't particularly appeal.

So what happened there was there was no particular practice to go back to. It sort of expressed itself more in terms of art. I don't know whether it produced any... I can't think of anybody it produced whom you might look to as a spiritual figure as such, although it was spiritually directed.

As that faded out, the reaction to romanticism, but also in a sense a reaction to pure reason, was the idealists: people like Hegel and Fichte. And the bits I've read of these philosophers, they definitely had a very highly tuned idea of the growth of consciousness. It seems to relate in many ways to Buddhism. But I think the downfall for those people seems to have been they didn't have a practice. The philosopher Fichte said to his students to face a wall and become aware of the observer, and then to become

aware of that. That doesn't sound so bad, actually. But that was it. It was all very heady. It was all wonderful ideas and very inspirational, but there was no practice to it. So it seems as though people got fed up with that.

So then, of course, modernism really took hold. And that's where we ended up with the Second World War and all that sort of stuff. So after the Second World War and communism and all that, then we have this other modern strain of rejection of modernism, which we call postmodern. It comes to be called postmodern anyway.

And I don't know whether you'd agree with me, but the crucial position for a postmodernist is interpretation. So before, it was revelation: it was out there, it was it, it was given. Then it was we, as rational beings, conversing to come to understand the truth together. Since both of those have failed, I'm now reverting to me. So I am now the fount of my own truth, and you are for you. And if we don't agree, that's fine, you see. What's true for you is true for you. Doesn't have to be true for me. And so we move towards a sort of absolute relativism. So there's no objective truth at all. It's just what's true for you. So Noddy is as important as Shakespeare. The books on Noddy, because it depends where you are, you see.

There's no objective reality. I read an article which said that the 9-11 collapse of the Twin Towers put an end to postmodernism because there was no doubt there, from a societal point of view, that that was something which was objective and it did happen. It was through this postmodernist thinking that people could undermine the idea that there was ever a holocaust. Because it's your take on reality. It's your narrative. That's the word, isn't it? It's your narrative. And a society builds up its own narrative for its own purposes. And once you catch that, in fact there's no objective truth to it, then of course it collapses as science, as truth.

In society, it's very strange. When I went to Gaia House, it was a very strange place for me because I'd always been brought up in modernist societies, and the order is almost pre-modern really, in many aspects in terms of its authority structure. But when I got to Gaia, I found that there were these centres of authority who were making decisions without others knowing. It was a sort of... It was all very strange. Things happened, you know. Just recently, for instance, a huge armchair arrived in the lounge, and the managing director, the executive manager, didn't know about it. It just... this big thing arrived, and she looked around. I was in the room with her. So what happens is that since I am now the centre of authority, we're all centres of authority. And when a society has no centre, you can do what you do because it's right for you, and I can do what I do because it's right for me, and you've no right to stop me at all. It's a sort of movement towards anarchism in its absolute true sense.

And a friend of mine told me about a lovely postmodern situation that they found themselves in. They'd been invited to a meal with two friends, and they went there to the house, he and his partner, to this couple's house. And while they were having a meal... sorry, after the meal, they were sitting in the lounge, just enjoying the postprandial discussions and all that sort of stuff, when the lodger, a woman, came down, started doing yoga right there in the nude. And they said to her, you know, "Is this appropriate?" "Well, you do what you do, and I'll do what I like." And it's that me generation, you know.

I've noticed that at Gaia, anybody in their 30s is very different from somebody in their 50s, which is, of course, where I am. In their 50s, you'll still get people talking about responsibility. In their 30s, they're talking about rights. My rights. It's weird. And, of course, the clash is wonderful.

I went on a walk with the managers at Gaia, who tend to be postmodern in this sense. Because, and it's understandable in one sense, because they come from anywhere to offer a year of their lives to the Dharma and end up with people whom they would normally not choose to live with. And so you have a group of people who have to live communally, but the structure there doesn't really allow a community because people are moving in and out so often. Every six months it's like being at a railway station.

So living in that sort of community, you tend to get people who are very fierce about their position and try to come to a consensuality. And the problem with consensuality is that if everybody has a right, then everybody has a right to veto. So even though seven people say they'll do it, if somebody says no, you've had it. You can't move. So they came to an agreement that nobody has an actual veto. They can have a majority rule, I think.

And we went out for a walk. I went out for a walk with a few of them, and we were going to go to this riverside which somebody said was absolutely beautiful, and we'd have a picnic there. And on the way, over a dell down in the bottom, we came across a very delightful little stream. And one of the party said, "I want to stay here," you see. And everybody else said, "Well, we were going over there." "No." This is where the group begins to control the individual. That's what they felt: controlled individual, you see. So we went, "Well, fine. You stay here." So then we had to share the food, and she ended up with the orange juice. And we had to do without the orange juice. Because we all had it in one bottle. Wonderful.

So now we have a big problem, you see. Oh yes, sorry, that's right. I've got a lovely description of art, which gives you an idea: "A rejection of a consistent, coherent aesthetic in favour of a playful, eclectic style which draws on many sources." So in other

words, the artist feels free to use whatever, however they want. And often, as I'm sure some of you have experienced, especially in modern art, very modern art, the artist is really looking to symbols which often make sense to them, but they don't have that objective position where people can relate to it in this way.

So it's Eliot who said art was objective correlative. So I have an experience, I want to relate it to you, and I choose an object through which we can make that communication. Now if I choose an object which is meaningless to you but full of meaning to me, then the communication stops. Although the artist could argue, "Well, you should make the effort, you know, to come towards me, to try and understand this symbology," you see.

So now we have the problem of the role of the teacher. Well, you can see that there can't be a teacher. Because if a teacher says to you, "Listen, I think you ought to do..." you know, like they're saying, "Well, your meditation's not so good, and it's because, you know, you're not working on this particular..." See, the student will reply, "Well, that's true for you. But that's not the way I see things." How do you get anywhere with that sort of relationship?

So, and the student, of course, feels an authority unto themselves, only taking little bits from what they want from different traditions. Building up their own little eclectic style. Yeah? You've all come across those, eh? So you have a bit of yoga and a bit of taijiquan and a bit of *vipassanā*, a bit of Dzogchen. Get it all in, you see. And you decide what you're going to do. And unless you're very, very spiritually inclined, unless there's a clarity in your mind, then you end up with quite a lot of confusion in your spiritual practice.

Now in these character types, there's what's called the confused or the speculative type. And this is the description: "In one of speculative temperament, there is a frequent occurrence of such states as talkativeness, sociability, boredom with devotion to the profitable, failure to finish undertakings, scheming by night and flaming by day, and mental running hither and thither." The scheming by night is planning and scheming. Flaming by day is running around doing. Does that sound... so that's the speculative type, and perhaps also open to skepticism because of that. Open to skepticism, which is that inability to commit yourself entirely to a particular way or path because you know, you've only got your own reason, your own particular experience to go on. You're not prepared to put faith either in a person or in a tradition, either to revelation or to somebody else's guidance. So there's a huge danger there.

And yet, we have in Buddhism this idea of a *Paccekabuddha*. Now, a *Paccekabuddha* is translated as a private Buddha. What it's saying is that some people become enlightened but can't teach. There's a hint that people become enlightened there in other forms, in other traditions. But it's this kernel thing that they can't teach. That's very postmodern, isn't it? Because this person has made their way through their own paths, and in a sense, because it's not part of a tradition, because they've ended up, in a sense, in their own private way... how far they can't teach, I don't know, but it says they can't teach.

Now, one of the amazing things about the spiritual scene today, these days, is the arrival of these independently enlightened beings. Rajneesh, Krishnamurti. Recently the flavour of the month is Eckhart Tolle, Stephen... who am I thinking of... What Is Enlightenment magazine, Andrew Cohen, Ken Wilber. Interesting, isn't it? These people, of course, do have a teaching. Da Free John.

So these people do have, and if you read their stuff, they've obviously had some experience, but not within a particular tradition, or at least they might have touched upon a tradition, but they've had something which is peculiar to them. And then somehow, in their sense, of course, they do have a following. But I dare say there are some people who are enlightened, but simply can't get it across or maybe don't even want it, just happy being enlightened.

So now having discussed these three types of societies, these types of ethos—call it what you wish—premodern, modern and postmodern, I want to try and see what the Buddha's teaching is in terms of the practice. There are two occasions where he's talking to Ānanda. The first one is when he's dying during his last few days. And Ānanda's getting a bit worried as to who will lead the order. So he asks the Buddha who will he appoint to lead the order. And his two main disciples have died. Sāriputta died shortly before his own death and Moggallāna was murdered by thieves on some path or other, so his two main disciples who he perhaps might have handed on his leadership to had died. But his response is, "I'm not going to leave anybody. You should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge with no one else as your refuge." That's very postmodern, isn't it? But then in the same breath he says, "You should live with the *Dhamma* as an island, with the *Dhamma* as your refuge, with no other refuge." Now that's revelation—that's his revelation to the world, he revealed that to the world. That's very premodern, isn't it?

And then there's another occasion where Ānanda is walking with him—he seems to be doing this all the time. Ānanda always says to him, "I think I've understood this," and the Buddha says no he doesn't. It's humorous really. And there's one occasion when he

says to the Buddha, "In my opinion, half the spiritual life is good friendship, is good community." And the Buddha says, "Oh no, the whole of the spiritual life is good companionship, good community." In other words, to be with people who can, as it were, balance your own views. Which would suggest a very modern approach. And when you couple that with the way he would teach, this Socratic way, then you can see he's also got the modernist perspective in there.

So I don't quite know where that leaves us, really. It's really just open to people to have some thoughts around that.

There's also here I've written the *Kālāma Sutta*, which is almost a declaration of free thought, where he turns up at a village, at the Kālāmas, and they complain. They say, "Look, this guru comes along and he says this, and then the next guru comes and says, well, he's a load of rubbish, this is what the truth is. What are we supposed to believe?" And he goes through a whole list of things: don't believe something just because it's tradition, because it makes sense rationally, because somebody with great authority has said so and so on and so forth, but only when you've experienced it as being true for yourself.

Now the last thought that I had was whenever society or whenever we make one of these three things the end all and be all of our spiritual practice—whether it be the written statement or revelation, whether it be reason, or whether it be my own personal experience—it always subordinates the other two to that one. So if you're going to believe in what the Buddha said, then reason is subdued, it goes out the window almost, and your own self goes out. If you say that you've got to be reasonable, then in a sense there comes an undermining of faith in the revelation. And if you put yourself first, then you've almost undermined everything in a sense, because you yourself become the centre of authority. So if a person is deluding themselves into a statement, a belief, it's very difficult for them to get out of that little box they've put themselves into.

So it's only when we have something which reaches beyond the revelation, the rationality and self, where I think we might be able to get this balance of these three. So there's the Buddha's word, which is a touchstone. Then there's our reasoning. And then there's our own personal experience. And that personal experience can only come through actual practice, not through thought, through a basic personal practice. And this is the way the Buddha actually puts the growth of wisdom. First of all you gain wisdom by what you've heard. Then as you take that wisdom in and you think about it, it becomes your understanding, your own thought understanding, but it's still at the

thought level. And it's only then when you turn to the practice and you directly experience the truth that the Buddha is talking about, that it becomes *vipassanā*, insight knowledge.

So I suppose it's a case of not leaning too heavily on these three things, either the Buddha word or rationality or oneself as a central authority.

Now's the time for tomatoes and eggs. I spoke for one hour. That's terrible. Anybody got any thoughts around that? I suppose really what led me to think about this was, you know, what happens after postmodernism? Where do you go after that? I suppose you have to wait and see.

"Well, that's what happens, isn't it? It's too scary, so they become fundamentalists."

Yeah, that is scary. Do your own thing in your own way in your own time.

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's what attracts a lot of people. I think that's what attracts a lot of people in the West. It's surprising how many people don't want to call themselves Buddhists. They don't want the label. And what it suggests to me is they don't want to be part of that tradition as well. They don't want to be labelled. They're happy to be called socialists. When it comes to spirituality, it's like putting on—they feel like a straitjacket or something. Something happens to them. It's as though they give up their autonomy or something.

"Who doesn't like to call themselves a Buddhist but does Buddhist practice? Perhaps you can explain. So why don't you call yourself a Buddhist?"

"I think because for me it's like then I'd have to accept all these things and I'd have to believe them all."

That's very interesting because the whole of the Buddha's position was that you don't believe a word he says. And that's his basis, that everything is up for grabs. You've got to prove it true to yourself. Actually, the early Buddhists never called themselves Buddhists. That's a Christian West thing that we think, like we used to call them Mohammedans. We called them Mohammedanism. The early Buddhists called themselves Saddammikas, followers of the true law. They didn't—I mean the Buddha himself said, "Who sees the *Dhamma* sees me, who sees me sees the *Dhamma*." He was constantly pulling himself out as a personality and laying down the law as he saw it, the truth as he saw it. But it's interesting that you should feel that because sometimes that's how Buddhism comes across, especially in its outer form.

"Sometimes I think there is a bit of a contradiction between you've got to test everything for yourself and you only believe it if you've experienced it. And on the other hand, well, these are the teachings and really just to keep on experiencing until you too agree that the teachings are right. So what's the point in testing?"

No, it's a very good point because I went through a stage when I thought, "Hold on, I'm being brainwashed." Because every teacher was saying, "Impermanence, impermanence," and I'm thinking, "Whoa, yeah, impermanence," and I think, "Well, hold on." Yeah, I suppose it's a case of trusting eventually in the experience of your own meditation. And that will bring you to a direct experience which you don't feel has been conditioned by thought. That's the important thing. If the person has an experience which they think has been conditioned by thought, then that has to be brainwashing. But if the experience is of such a nature that it only reflects, it only realises in a really true way the thought which happens only to be a reflection of the truth, then the tables are turned. Then one realises actually it was a direction—it was somebody pointing and not pushing.

"What do you refer to as practice? What do you think a mark of a practice is?"

Getting out of that—well it's the methodology whereby you prove, this is in Buddhism, it's the methodology whereby you prove that the concept or theory is right. So the scientific method, you know, H2O and all that. How do you prove that? What's the methodology? What's the practice? The practice is the experiment. So in a sense we are the experiment. There is an enlightenment, so who's going to experience that? How are you going to get there? Do you know what I mean? That would be the practice. Well, that's all you can pass on because in a very postmodern sense, the enlightenment is very personal, which is you. And if somebody says they're enlightened, you can't disprove it. I thought I might try and get more followers, you know. It's amazing what people can believe.

For myself, I don't know, I haven't reflected on that entirely. It's more in the sense of Buddhism coming from an alien culture into this one and it's being picked up by certain historical waves coming through individuals. So Buddhism as a guru-based thing through, say, the Tibetan traditions has a lot of, you know, Buddhism coming through as a very rational approach and investigative through Theravāda. And it attracts—I mean, when I walk into a community of Tibetan Buddhists, it's a totally different feel to a Theravāda community. There's a different feel about it. The people look different as well. It's funny. I can always know—I'm pretty sure that I can always know when somebody's in Zen. It's just the way they hold themselves. They've got this thing about them.

"Do you know why we do something unbalanced? Like if I lived in Tibet, I'd have no choice. I'd have to go—we're in the West, holding to our personality types."

Yeah. In the East, in the Theravāda tradition, you get a whole range of personality types. But when I see Western Theravāda, it's a lot narrower. I think that's true. We've become stereotypical in a particular vein. I think Theravāda Buddhism, because it's only that one Buddhism in a country, tends to have to open up to all these different personalities. So you've got people who just meditate. I mean, like the Mahāsi, you know, he cuts through all that ritual stuff and everything, wouldn't allow any of it. And yet on the other side, the devotional type, there are places they can go to to make these offerings and light candles and all that. Yes, you're right.

But in another society like China, where different strains of Buddhism went, I don't know what it's like there in terms of the different forms. The same as Japan, of course. Sōtō, Rinzai, Shingon. Shingon is the Tantra. Maybe in a place like Japan, there are these different forms which attract a certain type, but they all live, as it were, within this idea of Buddhism. It's an umbrella idea, I don't know.

"My experience is a bit different. Although Theravāda's form, I've always said to myself, I've always been quite surprised at the different personalities. The teachings are different. Each personality teaches a different way, in a way. My experience is that there's quite a range of types of people in one tradition."

Well, I think to a point, but if you look at Europe-wide, Theravādins attract Germans, Anglo-Saxons and Jews. It's very rare to find French, Spanish, Italians. Don't get them. I think I've known one Italian monk who didn't last. A couple of French.

"Where did they go?"

I don't know. I don't know what happened to him. He disappeared in a puff of spaghetti. Yeah, it's a mindset. It's very interesting. The French are huge into Tibetan Buddhism and the Spaniards and Italians too. It's really—it's interesting, you know, because of that Catholicism, perhaps open to it, whereas our more Protestant North... I mean, I'll give you a lovely example.

The vihāra that I used to go to in Birmingham, just up the street, it was a Tibetan vihāra. And I would occasionally go up there just to chat to the monk who was there. I was ordained then myself. And I turned to the kitchen—he was a younger man than myself and he was talking about the Dalai Lama and his visit and he was talking to me. He obviously knew I was Theravādin and he was talking to me and it was just straight, you know, "He came and he gave this very good talk about this." And then just at that

moment a Tibetan nun came in, English Tibetan nun. And he got up to greet her and for a moment forgot I was there, as it were. "And the Dalai Lama came and he passed me. I put up my hand and he touched my hand like that." And then he saw me. Classic.

"You said that whatever tradition, you need to be aware of these various, you know, the fallacies that go on."

That's a good point, yes. The way this is put in the commentaries is that you are that type. I mean you can balance it a bit but in the sense you do have to see yourself as clearly as you can and where your fault line is, and then when you recognise that to work gently against it, you know.

"It was a bit, wasn't it?"

I agree with that. It was a bit. Well, this is Buddhaghosa, you know. Some of you might know him. A great commentarian. Well, it was a bit negative. I have to agree. Where am I? "In one of speculative temperament, there's frequent occurrence of such states as talkativeness, sociability, boredom with devotion to the profitable, failure to finish undertaking, smoking by night, flaming by day and mental running hither and thither."

Yeah, not much hope there, is there? The opposite is just this utter delusion. Yeah, I don't know.

"So what happens then between a teacher and a student in the West? How does it differ? Oh, between a Westerner and a Western teacher?"

Oh, it varies, it varies. I mean, generally speaking, of course, just as this is only my personal experience, but I think it's true for everybody. If somebody, you know, is a law unto themselves, you know, they think, they either don't come at all, or if they do come, it's to prove you're wrong. It's because they've had something niggling in their head and they want to come along and test it and say, "Well, you know."

Most people, well, you've got various levels. I mean, the beginner will always be reliant on the teacher, much more so. But as a person becomes more confident and all that, of course, they don't come. And that's the whole idea, of course. The whole idea is to make a meditator autonomous, isn't it? So they have that inner confidence, they know what they're doing, you know? They don't have to come. I mean, it's a bad teacher who always makes the student feel that they're dependent on them. I think that's terrible. I mean, I always make the open desire at the end that they become enlightened in this very lifetime. But not before me. I consider that unjust.

"I've got more to run still, and one of the things that I've got from postmodernism is not this 'me generation' thing that I agree with what you say about how that comes up, so philosophically it can deconstruct all sorts of things including core aspects of identity, and it's the first time in the West that we've got anything that chimes with *anattā* at all."

And sometimes it's the opposite.

It's actually a generation that sort of can deconstruct the self and can be in touch with experience.

Yeah, no, thanks for pointing that out. Definitely one of the processes that the Buddha's constantly doing is deconstructing the human being. I mean, that's his main avenue of investigation, where he splits you up into the five *khandhas* and the six sense spaces and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, absolutely. That process, definitely.

It's a very radical thinking, and perhaps I was a bit too negative on it. It's a very radical thinking because I heard a program in which there were some very clear distinctions to prove that democracy was definitely not the best form of government, which we're completely sold on because of our modernism. Such examples, the fact that Hitler was voted in, and Berlusconi. And Tony Blair, somebody would say.

So it's like there's a trust in a sort of common reason and goodwill, but obviously there are situations when even that... I think it was Gandhi, wasn't it? Truth can be in a minority of one. I think he said that.

And I think also the little bit that I understand about deconstruction and looking at the text and this idea that there are subtexts going on of which we are not aware, that whole, it's a sort of Freudianism really, isn't it, coming in, the whole idea that when you read a book or anything, a poem or anything, there's stuff going on underneath which you're not actually aware of. And that's giving your interpretation.

So, in terms of spiritual practice, the Buddha talks about these *anusaya*, these latent tendencies, which are sort of almost like these turbulences deep in the mind. We don't know they're there. It's like Jung might have called it the shadow, the part of us we're not aware. Often other people are, of course. And it's just coming through, puts nuances into our speech, gives it a twist. It gives us a shape of the body that we're not aware of, things like that.

They talk about seeing things as they really are, often interlinked with the opening of the heart. And particularly in the Tibetan traditions, they talk about balancing wisdom and compassion, and in the Theravāda traditions, *mettā* and so forth. How is the heart

addressed in Buddhism, which is not romanticized? In the West, we have this head-heart split. But there's very much, though, this knowing things as really are. It isn't a kind of transcendence of a mere intellectual experience.

No, no. No, that phrase, seeing things as they really are, one understanding of that is to see these three characteristics. I mean, that's where the Buddha's always pointing his effort. This idea that everything's transient, there's nothing that can exist of itself, there's no such thing as an entity as such, and that if you have a wrong relationship with the sensual world, that some form of dissatisfaction arises.

Wrong relationship of identity and possession. Once the intelligence, this intuitive intelligence, has grasped that, then the way it expresses itself through the phenomena of the body and personality changes. So whereas before one might have thought that it was good to help others, but the subtext, as it were, in the postmodern sense is, I feel very happy when I do this. And you're not aware of it. So then you only help people because it makes you feel happy. And then you only do things for people that make you feel happy. So when somebody says, can you clean the toilet? You don't want to do it. It's not a real compassion. It's a compassion with this underlying label.

When one sees the dependency upon compassion to make oneself happy and what that's actually doing in the sense of corrupting compassion and making the other one feel uncomfortable in some ways, not good for me, not good for the other, and all that, when one sees that and it becomes open and there's a clarification of that thought, a purification of the heart, then you get that pure compassion coming through. Isn't that right? Something like that?

Yeah, and that's why he rates this as right understanding, right attitude, why it comes down the Eightfold Path. See? And then, right attitude, and then right speech, right action, right livelihood. See, it flows downward from right understanding. I mean, it's not as though you can split those two, split those three. I mean, obviously, if you're doing something, then it's right livelihood. You're saying something or it's right like that and by being aware one understands, so the understanding comes out of the action, as it were. The right heart. So it's those three things feed on each other really, but the kernel of the practice is this awakening of that awareness, that ability to catch these little thoughts that come up that tell us what we're really thinking, which are often embarrassing or we don't want to see. Making that very plain to us. And then we see, ah, that's the underlying, that's the subtext, that's the bit of deconstruction I've got to do there. And that's when you bow to Derrida.

Yeah, definitely. Yeah, yeah. I think Oxford refused to give him a PhD, didn't they? An honorary PhD, didn't they? Remember that? Cambridge, Cambridge! There we are. Dreadful, dreadful. Very recondite, that one.

Are we somewhat caught up in Western thinking, Western dichotomising? Because I think these three types of ethos that you've been talking about, I suppose what you're saying in a way is that these should be all accepted, they all have some value. It's very difficult for us to listen to that without choosing one or the other rather than seeing that they're perhaps all part of the whole thing.

Well, I suppose if I were to... Well, I suppose it's an individual thing. It's balancing those three things within yourself. It's recognizing that there has been a revelation in terms of Buddhism. The Buddha discovered, didn't invent, remember, he discovered these particular things and he revealed them. So it is a revelation. Secondly, so that in a sense is an opening of our hearts to it, an opening of that possibility that revelation is actually true. That would be a pre-modern thing. Putting your trust in it. And that's what, remember, this word *saddhā* means, as one of the five spiritual faculties, putting one's trust in, having a confidence in that.

And then there's this business of really making it, just making it sure that it makes sense to you inwardly. So there's your rationality. It's not a case of just accepting it without question. And then finally, it has to become our personal take on reality through the practice.

So, yeah, I would say it's this recognition, making sure that we're not unbalanced, that we're looking just simply to ourselves, that it has to be fully rational before we'll believe something. Not thinking that everything has to fit into some rational form. Because the Buddha warns us, he says, this stuff is beyond reason. It's subtle, it's beyond reason. You can't reason *Nibbāna*. Because it's beyond words. He says, words only go so far, then they stop.

On the other hand, he's constantly urging us to investigate and to argue with him in a sort of dialogue. And some of the scriptures, remember, people come to him and they don't agree. They go away tutting, as it says, clicking their tongues. Rubbish. He's not unhappy thereby. That's what he says. But when somebody actually receives the Dharma and becomes a follower, he's full of joy.

CHAPTER 27

The Buddha as Exemplar and Archetype

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

> *In this reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the Buddha's life as an archetypal journey through twelve stages of spiritual development. Beginning with the initial resolution made before Buddha Dīpaṅkara, he traces the path through countless lifetimes of purification, the dramatic Great Renunciation, encounters with traditional meditation teachers, the Middle Way discovery, and the climactic Awakening under the Bodhi tree.*
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> *The talk illuminates how each phase of the Buddha's journey reflects universal spiritual challenges we all face: the choice between worldly success and spiritual liberation, the gradual nature of purification, the necessity of crossing our own 'Rubicon' through commitment, and the ongoing work of teaching and embodying the Dhamma. Bhante particularly emphasizes the psychological crisis that led to renunciation - the confrontation with sickness, old age, and death - and how this existential awakening motivates genuine spiritual seeking.*
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> *Drawing from various suttas and traditional accounts, this teaching offers practical guidance for understanding our own spiritual development through the Buddha's exemplar, showing how determination, gradual training, and the balance between effort and wisdom lead to the end of suffering.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa

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

So this is just trying to look at the Buddha's life from the point of view as an exemplar. And I've chopped it up into 12 different things so that you can see the sort of passage that he went through, his own particular journey. I hate that cliché, but I'll have to use it for the time being.

So it's said that way in the distant mists of time when he was born in a particular era of a particular Buddha called Dīpaṅkara, that he met this Buddha and put a cloak down to stop him stepping into a puddle. And he was so amazed by this Buddha that he made there and then a determination to become self-enlightened, a fully self-enlightened Buddha just like this man Dīpaṅkara. Now it's not - I don't think it's of any use to try and discuss whether in fact Dīpaṅkara ever existed or not, because remember Eastern

mythology is very circular, and the way that you substantiate a leader is by saying that it's all happened before. So all these eastern traditions have leaders which have come before - the Niganthas is number so and so in a whole line of Niganthas which produced the Jain tradition.

But for us what's important is this act of resolution, an act of resolution to really make the process of purification, the process of enlightenment, the full aim of our lives. And that total determination, you see. Total determination. And in his case, self-enlightened. But although we have this teaching, that doesn't mean to say that we don't become self-enlightened, because ultimately it's we that have to do the work. All we can say is that the distinction between us and the Buddha was that he gave us some clues as to which way to go. But the fact is that the whole process is completely internally dependent on us.

So that's the first thing that you can contemplate is the importance of making that decision, of making a resolution in your own time and your own way. Now, just to make it once in a lifetime isn't enough, you see, because it has to be constantly reinforced, constantly reinforced. If you think of any other situation in people's lives, for instance, just a partnership or a marriage, they might go through a small ceremony and they think that's it. And of course, seven, fifteen years down the line, they're walking away from each other. And the problem has been is that they haven't recommitted themselves, recommitted themselves and gone through the pain of a relationship. Other people are hell, remember.

So it's a case of understanding that this resolution, this complete commitment of the heart to the path, you see, is the kernel position you have to take, that resolution. So that's the first thing to contemplate.

The second one, of course, is that after he made this great resolution, he was then born, it is said, for countless lifetimes trying to get it right, trying to get the perfections right, trying to purify his heart. Now again, from our point of view, it's not necessary to believe that he lived thousands of lifetimes, but the myth is telling us that this path is very long, very gradual, and very difficult.

Now, I don't want to depress you, but that's what it's telling us, that it's okay to make this decision, but actually, we've entered into a path which is going to demand everything from us, everything, eventually. In the spiritual life, remember, you don't get anything back until you've given up something. And you never know what you're going to get. It's not like you've got an old car which is broken down and you think, well, I'll

get rid of it, I'll go and get a new one. And you know which one you're going to get when you drop yours. In the spiritual life, you don't really know at all what you're going to get until you make that leap of faith and give something up.

So that's the next thing, is to really consider that. And the Buddha, of course, reinforces that in his own teachings. He's constantly telling people this is gradual. It's gradual. There's no sudden enlightenment. Now, I know there are certain schools of Buddhism that talk about the sudden enlightenment, but it's not sudden in that sense at all. If you talk to, for instance, Zen monks about their sudden enlightenment, you find they've been meditating for 25 years before this sudden enlightenment came from them. So it's not nothing - in other words, you don't get anything for nothing. You have to go through the training.

And this training is twofold - it's both the purification of the heart and the growth of the heart. Heart here meaning our whole disposition, our whole disposition. So as you know, as soon as you sit, you can see these hindrances, you can see these impurities arising. And they're there just within deep conditioning within us. Even if you only believe in appearing in this world just this once with birth, you know, we've picked up all this stuff, all this conditioning. And as soon as you come to sit, then of course the stuff begins to arise. And the whole process of meditation is the purification of that part of us.

But the other side, remember, is the growth of all these perfections. One of them, of course, is resolution, the determination to do what you say you're going to do. And that's one of the things that you can impress upon yourself just these three days. Once you've set yourself the rhythm of the retreat that you want, then you maintain it. That's your discipline, that's your courage, and that's your resolution, you see. If you fail, of course, you haven't got to get into beating yourself up and saying you're useless and all that. Sometimes you have to have an act of humility to recognize that you've reached too far. So it's always good to make sure that you're not pushing yourself too much, but on the other hand, you are pushing yourself a bit. As one of my early teachers, Roshi Kennett, used to say, that you have to push yourself gently. Some of you know, I think, Roshi Kennett, or used to know her. She started Throssel Hole.

So that's the next thing, is to recognize that the path is one of effort, and it takes that commitment, and that it's one of purification. You have to work at it. You have to really work at it.

So finally, the Buddha's ready for the big thing. He's ready for the full self-enlightenment show. And he's waiting in the Tusita heaven. Just waiting for the opportunity to arise. And there it comes, you see. North India, born to a prince, a local governor. In ac-

tuality, he was what you might call a local lord who was under the local king of Kosala. But, you know, as it comes to the scriptures, he's this big king in North India. I suppose we would call him that, upper middle class king manager.

And he decides - there's a decision there to be born. And here's your classic Freudian trauma - his mother dies. Mother dies probably because of his birth, and that's somewhere in his heart, isn't it? And he loses his mother and he's passed on - I think it's a week after he's born he's passed on to his mother's sister. And he must have felt that. So already, you might say, this little child has not only gone through the pangs of rebirth, but the pangs of losing his mother. So already, as it were, he's come into life with real suffering already in that heart. The touch of suffering is already there. I might be a bit too Freudian there, but you understand what I'm saying.

And he's obviously precocious. Now that shouldn't amaze us. I mean if you think of somebody like Mozart - I think he wrote his first symphony when he was three or something. So when you realise that there are little beings who arise who are absolutely unbelievable, it was obvious that this little boy was something special. And the tale always goes, and you get it in other myths, that of course they meet the wise man. And the wise man recognizes that here is an extraordinary human being and what he says about this little human being is that either he'll become a world conqueror, a total world conqueror, or a fully self-enlightened person.

Now, that's the same for us. Now, it's not that we're all going to become world conquerors, but the choice is there. Is our lives going to be devoted to being great in the world or to being great spiritually? And that isn't just a decision we make at the beginning of our lives or somewhere. It's constant. Every time we say to ourselves, well, I'm going to have this cup of tea because I want to really enjoy it, we've chosen the world. If you have a cup of tea in order to investigate the process and with the intention to feed the body, not feed our emotional life with it, then we've chosen the spiritual path. So that division is with us all the time. That's not a problem. And in this particular story, it's put at this very heightened level. You see, here we have a little being who could have conquered the whole world or he could have become self-enlightened.

So that's the next thing to contemplate, this idea that all the time the choice is there before us, that choice between choosing the world or choosing spiritual life, choosing our enlightenment.

So, of course, when his father heard this, he was in a state of horror, you see, because this was, at that time, his only son. And as far as I know, it remained his only son. I think I'm correct, yeah. So, obviously, he wanted his only son to be heir. So then we have this part of the myth that tells us that his father went to this great extent to make

sure that his son never suffered, make sure he had all the food he wanted and as he grew older all the sex, drugs, and rock and roll. And as he approaches and he gets through teenage and what not then he comes to a point of going through all that loveliness of getting married and all that but there must be something, should we say, disturbing him at that point, you see. And it comes again through a particular myth.

Before we go into that, do remember that the whole of our society is drawn, is manufactured, the whole of our economic, political life is there to draw us into the world. The whole of capitalism, everything that we have, is to make us emboldened in the world, is to make us see our life in the world. So he's born into the world and the world wants him. But again, there's this little pain.

And it comes out in the story of his meeting with the *devadūta*, the messengers from the gods. That's how it's put. So he's out there hunting and doing his thing, killing beasts and all that. And he comes across, in sequence, somebody who's very sick on the road - there if you've been to India you know exactly what that means - somebody who's very old and crooked and really old, a corpse, and finally this ascetic sitting under a tree.

Each time he asks, you know, what is this? Because he's been shielded from this. This is what the myth tells us. He hasn't actually looked at this stuff. And after they've described it to him, there's the kernel question, you see. Does this happen to me? So here's a young man, full of energy, full of all that virility and all that, and he suddenly sees sickness, old age, and death. And of course there's this ascetic sitting under a tree which in the story symbolises hope, the escape from sickness, old age, and death.

But for him it's obviously become a psychological crisis. I think what we would call today an identity crisis. He's into a proper identity crisis, an existential identity crisis. And when does it hit him? You see, it hits him somewhere in his middle twenties. Now if you think of your lives - I don't know about you, how old are you Gabriel? It's coming.

So if you think of your life and you look back into your middle twenties, you'll see that there's a change of mentality because there's a sudden realisation that youth is over. And that's when people get serious. They get married, they take their job seriously, some even take out pensions. And it all happens in that period as you move towards the first ugly inklings of middle age.

So there he is, you see, at that point. And he decides that he's got to go and really work this out. He's in a psychological crisis. He needs to work it out. And the only way he can think of doing it is to join the ascetics because they are the only people at that time who are offering anything beyond the worldly life. He probably spent hours talking to the Brahmins, talking about their philosophy and understandings, because later

on, of course, he knows it deeply. He knows all the arguments, and he must have picked it up during that youthful time. He studied the Vedas. So he's abandoned that scholastic thing. He wants to abandon the good life.

And there are two things. Well, the other thing that makes him abandon life is that they've obviously had a big party. And in the morning when he wakes up, he's got all these bodies around him. And there's puke and saliva. It's all horrible. And he sees the other side of pleasure, which is, of course, the hangover. And he sees that pleasure is not going to bring that happiness, it's not going to bring an end to the suffering that he feels, this existential suffering of sickness, old age, and ultimately death.

So it hits hard, doesn't it? Those of you who've had a scrape with death know what he might have been going through. Those of you who've had people who've died around you know that it can hit you hard, you see. In fact, the Buddha says there are four types of people. Those who wake up, in other words, who really see that their life has to have the spiritual dimension, upon the hearing of death - just the word will wake them up. Some don't wake up until they realise that somebody has died, comes on the TV or something. Some people don't wake up until somebody very close to them dies, and some unfortunates don't wake up until, of course, it's their turn to die. So you don't want to leave it that late.

So there he is, and two things have shaken him, right? Sickness, old age, and death, and the vanity, the emptiness of pleasure, of worldly pleasure, the emptiness of it. Even sex, for instance, which might bring a lot of pleasure, is ultimately empty. Or just sex, shall we say. And I always remember Woody Allen saying that the experience of sex is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go...

So, it's that realisation. And for us, you see, we wouldn't be here now, actually. We wouldn't at all be in this room, any of us, if we hadn't had some inkling around those areas. But, again, it's not something that becomes a huge crisis for everybody. It's something that can be very gradual, a gradual pulling away because of the little bits of suffering that come from it, little bits of realisation. And of course, our own bodies are our own teachers. That's why I said this morning at the meal time, we're so dependent on the body for our teaching, because it's the body which gets ill, it's the body which grows old, and it's the body which dies. And it's when we realise that we are embodied, we are actually in this body, this body is the way we know the world, it's the way we experience the world, that we suddenly realise, or we begin to realise, that in fact we take care of it, not smash it around too much.

So those are contemplations, those are daily, hourly, moment to moment contemplations. As it arises one contemplates that, one reflects upon these things. And what it's urging us to do is to abandon, is to let go, is not to attach to these things.

Remember, when we talk about abandonment, letting go, it's not a destruction. We're not talking about not eating. We talk about eating in a particular way. So take, for instance, sleep. We're not talking about abandoning sleep, because it's a lovely time and we all want to spend some time in oblivion every day. It's recognizing that sleep has a purpose, it's there to rest the body. But if we seek happiness in oblivion, then of course the bed constantly beckons us. Every time we feel a bit tired, we launch ourselves onto the bed, you see.

As you go to bed, you look upon it as a stinking pit, so you don't see it as a place where you're going to get pleasure. It's just there to rest the body, just like food is there to nourish the body. These are contemplations to be taken up.

So he's now on the point of leaving. So here's what's known as the Great Renunciation. And it's not as though people haven't done this before. Both men and women have had to leave everything to go to war, for instance. People are often drawn out of their style of life for one reason or another. Some people are shaken and they leave everything. Some people are kicked out anyway. People are made redundant and stuff. Some are born to leave, some have to leave and whatever.

So there comes this point where he abandons, he renounces the worldly life. And it's put in the story that he even saw the birth of his son. So there's that huge attachment to this little child. And yet even so, he gets on his favourite horse, his special horse Kantaka, with his servant Channa, and off he goes.

These days that can be harshly judged as his abandoning his family and all that. But you must remember in those days they're very extended families, and I can't imagine that he did it without long consultation and argument and all that sort of stuff and cajoling. And then finally, I'm sure he said to them, as I said to my mother, I'm only doing it for three years. When I said that, she disappeared with this cloud of absolute... I said to her I'm going to join the order and she just collapsed into this awful weeping, and I put my arm around and said, "Mum," I said, "I'm only going for three years," and she stopped. It was just because she saw it as an abandonment.

So one presumes that he did have the goodwill of the family behind him. And there comes this point where he reaches a river. So here it is, you see, crossing the Rubicon. There's a point where we make that crossing, where we've built up the faith, we've built up the understanding, and finally we make that leap of faith.

Now, in terms of the Buddha, okay, it was a big dramatic moment. It's part of the myth. But for us, it's every day. Every day you have to make that leap of faith. Every day you've got to cross that Rubicon. And it's crossing from what? It's crossing from the worldly life to the spiritual life.

And he cuts off all his hair, which was the idea of those days, throws all his rich clothes away, dons rag robes, and even leaves his horse Kantaka, who dies out of grief. It was terrible. But Channa can't leave him. I think he follows him in the end. He follows him, doesn't he, Channa? Eventually. Later on.

So there we have it. Finally, you might say, he's cut from the worldly life. So that's another point of contemplation for us. In our own lives, the idea that we have to really make that commitment some way.

And that's the whole point really of taking, in the Buddhist tradition, taking refuges and precepts, of actually joining a specific tradition within Buddhism. It's in all religions. And that's why it's always ceremonious. That's why it's always done in community. It's just like a marriage ceremony. People I know who've been in partnership for a long time. I mean, I did a little marriage ceremony for a very old friend of mine. Partnership for 15 years. But then a marriage ceremony was something else. It deepens the commitment to the person. It's a funny thing, but anybody who's been in a long relationship who goes to a marriage ceremony, and I'm not talking about a religious thing, it's a communal declaration. Much the way, say, the Quakers do it. And it has an effect. It has an effect of deepening that commitment to the other person as person, as an individual.

So you'll find that in all traditions there is that ceremony of commitment by the person. And when I myself became a Buddhist, I did it up at Throstle Nest Hall, and it's five days. So it's not just a matter of saying a few words. It was a five-day long... There were five different ceremonies. And it was all about this business of renouncing, of burning one's karma. I can't remember the full gist of it now, but by the end of it, you definitely felt you'd joined something. And there was that feeling of settlement. There was that feeling of coming home.

That's one of the big feelings in the spiritual life, that finally you've found your tradition, you've found your teacher. And it might, I mean, as you know, I didn't stay in the same tradition, I started with Zen. It's not as though it's blocked in time, that you can't move, but there's that feeling of grounding yourself finally in a spiritual practice. So that's this crossing of the Rubicon, that's this crossing of the river, and letting go.

So then he joins the great meditation traditions of the time and he goes through two teachers, and what these teachers teach him is how to establish ecstasy within himself. And that means that you don't actually need the world. Just through the practices of *samatha* meditation, concentration meditation, the practices of mantra, the practices of what we call looking at kasiṇas, images, which you then internalise, one begins to recognise that you can actually attain enormous ecstasy within your own heart without any help from the outside world at all.

So you don't need sex, drugs, rock and roll, you don't need cinema, you don't need anything. You can actually sit there and develop this enormous state within yourself because that's the capability of the mind and heart within itself. And once you've established it on an object and you've internalised it, you don't even need that object. So one of the main places is using the breath. So you just need the body as it were. So all you need is, in India anyway, all you need is a bit of shelter, a tree, a bit of clothes, somebody to give you a bit of rice every day, and you sit in ecstasy. And that's it. So you can imagine why it was attractive. This is one of the attractions of the monastic life for those who can practise it. It's not within everybody's gift.

So what does that teach us? That teaches us that there is another way of actually producing happiness. But every time he came out of these states, he found himself back in dear old Gautama, back in dear old Siddhartha, just lumped with all this suffering. It wasn't an answer to sickness, old age and death. It wasn't an answer to his existential crisis. It was just another way of displacing his life into a cloud of beauty. A pink cloud. It was lovely when he was there, but when he came out, it was pretty awful.

And of course you can get addicted to that like any drug. So as soon as he began to realise this, of course he recognised that that wasn't the path. And each time it is said he was so brilliant at his meditation that the teacher would ask him to be a teacher with him. And each time he said, well, I can't, I don't, I'm not fully satisfied. There must be something else.

So that's the first thing, that when in your meditation beautiful states arise, fine, we're not trying to get rid of them, we're not trying to destroy beauty or happiness, but that's not the end of the path, that's not what it's about. So it arises, fantastic, and then you notice it passing away. And when you see yourself grasping for it as it's passing away, when you come back to the meditation hall with the intention of re-establishing that state, then know that you've fallen into a relationship of attachment, which could cause suffering, which could cause dissatisfaction.

So then abandoning that, he then went into self-mortification. Now the psychology of self-mortification rests on the idea that all suffering is bodily based. Now if you think about that, most of it is. Where do you experience suffering if it's not in the body? The hunger, wanting to eat, wanting to see something. Just the physical pain of the body. So self-mortification or those exercises, especially the one that he chose, which was to starve oneself, really reduces the body to, shall we say, almost a skeletal state where, as it were, suffering is lessened in the body.

Now, for those of you, if you've done a 10-day fast... anybody done a 10-day fast? Right. So I don't know whether you experienced it, but normally the first three days are horrible because there's this huge, all these horrible things are pouring out of the body. But then you keep drinking water and then there suddenly comes this place where it's absolutely beautiful. And it remains like that. It's just absolutely beautiful. The body doesn't feel hungry. Of course, it's eating itself, but it doesn't feel hungry. And your passions are down. You don't feel passionate about anything. Everything is lovely subdued, beautifully subdued. And, of course, you can go on like that until you get close to death, and I think it begins to hurt.

So the idea is just to eat enough just to keep that idea of the body of not exciting the body because it's all based, excitement has its base in the senses. So all that happened there of course was that he obviously reached these points of suffering and there came this point where we could say he despaired.

Now, that will come to us, the sense of despair about our practice. And it comes to us because of expectation. It comes to us because we think we should be somewhere else than where we are. So there will come these little moments in our spiritual life where we think, nothing's happening, I'm not getting anywhere, and all this sort of stuff. And they're little jabs of despair. So you have to be careful of those.

He himself abandoned that self-mortification business and with it his five disciples left him because he said he'd gone soft. So anyway he wanders off by himself and he's sitting on the roadside and a woman comes along with a bowl of rice pudding, which is a very sacred food in Buddhism. So she comes along with this bowl of rice pudding and she sees this monk by the roadside and the myth tells us that she thought that it was a god and she offered this food to a god. But I think we can realistically say that what she saw was somebody who was on death's door and looking pretty sad, and she probably was carrying it to some sort of family as a gift and when she had a little chat with him she said, look, you better have this rice pudding.

So he eats this rice pudding and of course it lifts, it lifts his body, it lifts his spirits, and he can't let go of the idea that there must be an end to suffering. It's there within him, the kernel of the idea is within him. And he must have been reviewing his life and he must have been reviewing everything he's been through and perhaps he's wandered over the three years that he promised his family and he's thinking he might go back, and as he's reviewing he remembers this point in childhood.

And he must have been about six, seven, maybe eight, and he's watching his father during the ploughing ceremony, just watching his father. And for some reason, he remembers the quality of that watching, something which obviously he hadn't been aware of, either through the jhānic meditations, the absorption meditations, or through all these practices which are to do with self-mortification.

And if you think about it, that's quite reasonable because all those practices are about gaining something, about getting something. You're doing something for something else. I'm doing the *jhāna* in order to get over sickness, old age and death. I'm self-mortificating in order to get over. So it's always drawing that person out of the present moment.

But here he remembers this point where he's watching his father and he's just in the present moment. Now, if you think of children, especially around the age of three, four, two, three, four, you see it comes naturally. They see a bug and you see they just absorb into it. Now they don't have the language to think about it. And they just absorb into it just out of a total interest. They're completely there.

And one of the signs that a child is in that state, and we ourselves in that state, is the jaw drops. And you get parents like my old man used to tell me to shut my mouth. "Shut your mouth, son." You see kids, don't you see? And what it is is that when there's no jaw, when there's no tongue, there's no thought. If you're in your meditation you might catch that when a thought comes, there's a vibration on the tongue because it's just so intimately connected.

So it's just like a child, just absorbed into that. And then you see, after the absorption, after that business of taking in the image, then there's a stop and the child turns around and says, "What is it?" So mum says, "It's a slug." So from that point on, there's a title, there's a name, it's a slug. So that child will never look at a slug again. What they will see is the image that they had of a slug imposed upon the slug that they now see. And that's the whole distortion that conceptual thinking does for us.

To get back through all that language and all that conception, back to the original mind, back to that original way of seeing things, is the process of enlightenment. Because once we're back there we're back to that amazing intelligence that we have which is now informed. That's the paradox: it's been informed through language. We couldn't have got here without language. We couldn't have got here without the teaching. But now the intelligence is informed, it clarifies itself of all those conceptual thinking and it sees anew.

So here's the Buddha. He remembers that moment and he's so inspired by it. And also remember he's despaired. He knows now this is it because he doesn't see anything else. He's been through all the traditions. He's done everything. The world can't offer him anything else. So he approaches the tree which we now call the Bodhi tree, and interestingly enough the leaves are shaped like a heart, are they not? And he sits under this big leafy Bodhi tree by the side of the river and he makes this great determination.

So we've had the great renunciation, so now we have the great determination. And the determination is, "Right I've done everything, this is it. I'm going to sit here and crack this problem or I will die." Or I will die. That's the commitment.

And it was interesting because when one of my teachers came to the Bihar in Birmingham and I'd been, I was already ordained for about four or five years or something. And he came along and I'd been practising a little bit in India, I remember, but I was living at the Bihar anyway. And I'd been to Burma before and I'd got very ill with amoebic dysentery and amoebic hepatitis and all sorts of things. And he wanted me to join him, and he sent one of the monks to tell me. He said, "Anita wants you to come and join him."

So I said, "Well, frankly," I said, "the last time I was in Burma, I nearly died. I said, I don't particularly have a, I really don't want to go east again." So he went back, and he came back with a message. "If you're not prepared to die, forget it." So obviously he was mirroring back to me the memory of the Buddha.

So there's the Buddha. He's now made this great determination. So for us, it's little bits, making that determination. So every time you sit, one of the big mistakes we make is because it's become habitual, we just take a seat. We just sit here. And of course, nothing much happens.

The mind wanders, we just get caught up in it, and we might feel a bit more relaxed. So every time you sit, you have to re-establish that commitment. And that's your determination. It's not a great determination, we don't have to worry too much about

death. It's a great determination here, now. The great determination to commit ourselves 101% to this moment of meditation. And that's when you get the fruit. That's when you get the fruits of your practice.

As the story goes, of course, he did become enlightened. It took him six hours. There's your standard. If you can sit six hours, you'll probably make it. So he became enlightened at that point.

Now, he then spends the first night, the first three nights, trying to understand what he's seen. When we chant in the morning, I chant the Wheel of Dependent Origination. So that's the psychology, that's what he understood. It tells us about why we suffer, the psychology of suffering. And I do it three times in the thing to commemorate that moment, because he went forward on it, then he saw how it came back on itself, and then he did it again, forward and back, to make sure that he had fully understood the process. So that's what that chanting is about. It commemorates that moment. And that victory verse is what he was supposed to have told Ananda was what he spontaneously spoke when he became enlightened.

So now, having done that, having now made this moment of realization, realizing what the whole thing was, what is the next thought? What is the next thought that comes to mind? Who can I teach? You see, with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. There was no break within that. It's not, ah, I've done it, fine, great, get back into bed. It was like it didn't end there. There was this immediate movement out of the heart. Who can I teach?

And of course, there's that little doubt. And again, it's put mythically as the great Brahma Sahampati comes down and says to him, look, there are some with only a little dust in their eyes. There are people who will understand this stuff. So it's with that reflection that when he looks at the world, he thinks, who is going to understand this stuff? And then when he reflects, well, what about my old teachers? And then he realizes they're dead, they've gone. So there's a sadness.

I saw this lovely statue in Burma the last time I was there. I'd never seen this before. And he sat in posture like this, but one heart is pointed to his heart like this. And I said to them, what's the meaning of that? I'd never seen that mudra. It's called a mudra posture. He says it's the sadness he felt when he realized his teachers had died.

So, having done that, he then thinks about this five disciples, remember, who've called him a scab and a deserter, and turned away from him and gone off. And he wanders off, and he walks, I think it's well over a hundred miles. So it's not as though he goes next door and says, hey, listen, I'm enlightened now, so I'll give you the mes-

sage. He walks, he goes in search. The teacher goes out in search. Often it's put in the tradition that the pupil searches for the teacher, that when the teacher's ready, the pupil arises and the pupil's ready to teach and all that. Well, of course, we in our search have to search for our teacher. But the teacher also has to be ready, has to go out and search. Although I must say, the Indian tradition tends to be for somebody who feels they're ready to sit under a tree and just wait. And if somebody does come along, that's the test at it. They must be drawn into the teaching. But anyway, he makes this great effort to go out and teach. So that's our compassion.

So now you see, every one of us who've meditated, as soon as you say to somebody you've meditated, they expect you to be somehow different. They say, well, what's the effect? What's it done for you? And as soon as you open your mouth, you're teaching them. So if you go to people and say, well, I go to the Buddhist meditation, yeah, it's fantastic, and you're slowly getting drunk, then people are going to say, well, that's very interesting. So as soon as you take up a spiritual path, you take responsibility. And if you are, I mean again, don't get into big false guilt syndromes, but as soon as you don't behave according to a certain standard that the practice demands of you, then of course you're undermining the process of other people's spirituality because they become cynical. So you take on, whether you like it or not, you take on a certain responsibility.

So having taken on that responsibility, he searches for his disciples. And of course, he meets them. And as it's said, as soon as they saw him coming, they realized something had changed about him. They weren't going to make a seat for him or anything. But as soon as they saw him coming, they thought, well, no, there's something strange. And that's when he gives the first talk about his teaching. And the whole teaching life begins after that. And he goes on, as you know, to establish an institution, to establish people around him, and eventually had enormous effect on human civilization.

But interestingly enough, that's not the full end of the story. Because in the scriptures, it says that *Mara*, the evil one, actually throws doubt and he attacks, Mara attacks with all his armies. And this actually happened just after the Enlightenment. And the question is, who are you to say that you are enlightened? Who are you to say that you've finished the path? How do you know that? So even when he made this huge realization, there was still the doubt, is this really the end of it? Is this really the end of suffering?

Now that doubt, it will always be with us. That doubt will always be with us and you have to be very careful not to get caught up in doubt. So it's not as though the Buddhist teaching is about believing what he said. We know that. It's not a belief system. It's a teaching. It's a practical teaching. We put it into practice and it makes sense. But the

doubt, especially in ourselves, that often comes, everybody else can do it but not me. That's very careful when doubt comes up to make sure you don't get caught up in that thought and that you actually just stay with that position of not knowing. And that's very difficult for us because the self loves to be in control. It loves to know. We all want to know what we're going to do at the end of this course. We've all got it worked out what's going to happen when we leave this place. If you didn't, there'd be this anxiety. What am I going to do? So it's that case of really staying with that sense of doubt, it's an ugly feeling, and not to get caught up in it.

So he touched the earth as a witness to his enlightenment. So you'll often find that statue with his hand touching the earth. And basically, I suppose it's a call to people to say, well, you try and prove me wrong. Because in my understanding, in my experience, there is now no more suffering in me. I don't experience suffering at any level. That's not physical suffering for those of you. The body always has pain. It's the heart. There's no more of all this depression, anxiety, all the gamut of human misery. That's all gone.

But, interestingly enough, for seven years Mara hunts him. So it's an interesting thing in the scripture that we have this figure of Mara. Now you can either see it, of course, as some sort of devil, but you can see it as traces within the Buddha's mind, still there, little traces. So there's been this huge enlightenment, but there's still little traces. And Mara sends his three daughters. Lust, sensual pleasure, and boredom. So he obviously had a big problem with lust. If you compare that with Jesus Christ, interesting, because Christ seems to have been powered, doesn't he? Took him up to the mountain. So those are the three, those are your worldly pursuits: fame, friendship, riches, power, and of course seeking pleasure in the sensual world. So the Buddha obviously had had a good life, hadn't he? All that pleasure stuff. And his three daughters kept tempting him.

Now interestingly enough, why was boredom there? You see, because boredom is part of that pleasure syndrome. The more pleasure you have, the more it becomes obsolescent. You've always got to go for a bigger kick. And therefore, what moves you is the boredom of where you are. So boredom is the great motivator towards addiction. So whenever you're bored, bored in your meditation, you never feed the boredom by distraction. You feed the boredom by, you undermine boredom by repetition. So when you're sitting there watching the breath and there's just this huge thing, this is so boring, so you feel the boredom, you know it's there, but you just keep watching the breath. And then eventually it fades away, because you're not feeding it. You know it's there. Remember, you've got to feel these things. You've got to actually experience them. You mustn't push them away.

So there comes a point, of course, when, and it's said seven years, which is one of these mythical cycles, isn't it? Seven years. His daughters haven't been successful. They go to Mara, their dad, and say, look... oh no, Mara sees that he hasn't been successful. He just can't get through to the Buddha to tempt him into all these things again. And so he says to his daughter, look, let's forget it. It's not working. And his daughter says, well, let's have just one more go, Dad. But eventually he slinks off. And what does the daughter say? Why are you going? Why is it that you are abandoning this quest? And Mara says, the Buddha sees me. And it's seeing, it's seeing what all the world has to offer as vanity, as emptiness, that undermines its power over us. So that by that time, it would seem that all, whatever was there by ancient conditioning was completely drained out over those seven years.

And then finally, what can we expect? What can we expect from this training? Well, there's this lovely tale in the scriptures where somebody says to the Buddha, look, this training you're going on about is bloody difficult. And he said, well, it is. It's hard. You've got to commit yourself and all that. And he said, okay, so what? He said, what do you get to *Nibbāna*? Nibbāna says, so what? What do you get when you get to Nibbāna? He says, when you achieve Nibbāna, you are happy and with it contented. And he's talking about himself. You are joyful and with it contented.

And when it comes to his own time to die, there's a lovely scripture where basically he just waits for the body to die. And he's just lying there on his side, and the people have come around him. Even at the end, he's ready to take somebody into the order, isn't he? Right at the end, right before he dies, he's ready to accept somebody in the order. And there he is, he's dying, and most of us are freaked out, eh? Most of us don't want anybody around. But here's this lovely peace and just this letting go of the body. Letting go of the body.

And of course, great sadness from that, from the younger monks. They all start crying, and the nuns and all that. And the elders say, what do you expect? Everything arises and passes away. And that was one of the Buddha's pet sayings. Everything arises and passes away. There's nothing in this world worth holding on to. Nothing in this world worth holding on to.

So, I hope that's been of some use to you in terms of how to reflect upon your own spiritual life. And that's it.

CHAPTER 28

Buddhist View of Christ's Teaching

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 29 min

In this deeply personal talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma draws on his unique spiritual journey—from devotional Italian-Irish Catholic boyhood through seminary training, existentialist wandering, Zen practice, and finally Theravāda ordination—to explore how Buddhist understanding illuminates the teachings of Jesus Christ. Rather than presenting a definitive Buddhist interpretation, he shares his own process of reconciling the contemplative Christianity of his youth with the insights gained through vipassanā meditation.

The talk examines several challenging Gospel passages: the rich young man told to sell everything, Christ's hard words about 'hating' father and mother, and the mystical statements about unity with the Father. Bhante Bodhidhamma interprets these through the Buddhist understanding of detachment (upadāna and its abandonment), explaining that true letting go is not callous rejection but rather discovering that place within awareness which cannot be touched by phenomena—the foundation for genuine, unconditional love. He draws parallels between samatha practices that lift the heart into ecstatic states and his early Catholic devotional experience, while noting how vipassanā provides the crucial investigative element.

Particularly illuminating is his discussion of Christ's words 'I and the Father are one' and the Eucharistic mystery. Through conversation with a Sri Lankan friend who moved from Catholicism to Hinduism, Bhante Bodhidhamma came to understand these teachings metaphorically—pointing not to the phenomenal Jesus but to the Buddha-nature or Christ-consciousness present in all beings. This awareness, always present even in sleep, becomes accessible through meditation practice. The talk concludes with reflections on how mettā (loving-kindness) meditation cultivates love independent of its object—the very detached love that Jesus commanded.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Jim has asked me to offer a little biography and to share the Buddhist perspective on some of Jesus Christ's teachings. So let me begin by establishing that I'm not coming to this from a completely blank space.

I was brought up as a Roman Catholic. My mother was Italian and my father was English. They met when he came up from Africa in the RAF and was billeted on her home. He fell immediately in love, though I think she took a bit more time. On his side, going back to his maternal grandfather, the family came from Milan, and his wife was Irish. So here I am, an Italian Irish Catholic. You can't get more Catholic than that.

My experience of Catholicism is very different from some experiences I've heard from people of my generation, mainly because of my mother. The whole center of my Christian practice was the love of Jesus. I knew full well that if I missed church on Sunday and unfortunately died before I could get to confession, I would definitely spend an eternity in hell. But that was never particularly stressed. It was always the love of Jesus. So I was very devotional as a young boy. I must have been a rare young boy indeed—I actually enjoyed going to Mass.

This manifested later, around the age of eleven and twelve, in a sudden vocation to become a missionary priest. I joined a junior seminary run by the Society of the Divine Word near Birmingham, and I spent four years there. When I think of the regime and the training I had, I can't imagine any modern child even coming near it. We were up at six o'clock in the morning, out in the cold doing exercises, back in for Mass, then breakfast, then an hour of clean-up before starting school. After school there was another religious gathering, and then we had one hour off for games. That was it. The rest of the day was spent in silence.

Interestingly enough, I look back upon the first two years as the halcyon days of my life. I was extraordinarily happy, in a continuous state of ecstasy. Then unfortunately, puberty entered and everything changed. If I could have stayed as a thirteen-year-old, I'd have been happy for the rest of my life.

The practice at seminary was really much to do with what we would call samatha—the development of the beautiful mind. It's done through imagery, through repetitive prayer, where you can lift the heart into a lovely ecstasy. Think of how very empowered business people lift themselves up to tremendous energy, and from the moment they wake up to the moment they fall asleep, they're right there on that plane of existence. They never drop; they just keep going, always up, always striving. That's what happens when you train yourself to lift your heart into a beautiful ecstasy. It will remain with you all day. Even if people say something rude to you, it doesn't affect you—it just comes off like water on a duck's back. Nothing can touch you because the heart itself is lifted into this lovely state.

Once that had passed, I left and went on to sixth form and then to college. Then something quite peculiar happened, something that has always slightly amazed me. I was lying in bed on a Sunday morning, and I said to myself, "I wonder what will happen if I don't go to church." Remember, this is hellfire we're talking about. And nothing happened. By the end of Sunday, nothing had happened, so I never went again. Just like that. Having been consistent with all my practice, I simply lay in bed, wondered what would happen if I didn't go to church, and when nothing happened, I never went again. People talk about guilt, especially in Catholicism—Holy Mother Church and how could you leave—but there was no guilt, no sorrow, nothing. It just cut like that.

I spent the next ten years looking like a hippie, but actually I was an existentialist. I didn't know what it meant, but it felt good to be an existentialist. I thought, well, I wasn't a nothing—I was an existentialist. It felt so much better than being a socialist, and it launched me into hours of discussion and conversation.

Then, as life has it, tribulations came, and having hit a very low point, I sought some help. At the time, Zen Buddhism was in the air. This was back in the middle to late 1970s. I wrote to the Buddhist Society, and eventually, through one thing and another, I ended up going to a Zen Buddhist meeting held not very far from where I was living in Birmingham. I remember Vajra, whom I look upon as my spiritual mother, inviting me in. Her instructions were very simple. In Zen you sit facing the wall, because of Bodhidharma—that's what I'm called, actually. I'm named out of this particular tradition, but I'll come to that in a bit.

And sit facing the wall, she said, "Just sit here and just watch whatever arises, whatever comes up."

That was it. Those were the instructions. None of this about watching the breath, like all I've done for you now. None of that. Just sit here and watch whatever comes up.

And by the end of that forty minutes, I just knew that this was going to get me out of my problems. I just had that intuitive feeling that this was the path that was going to free me from my emotional state. And over a period of time, that's exactly what happened.

I stayed with Zen Buddhism—there's a monastery up in Northumberland—for three years, and then I became involved with the Theravāda type of Buddhism, which you find in Southeast Asia: Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, those sorts of places. And it was in that tradition that I met my teacher of this particular practice that I've taught you, who

was a disciple of the Mahasi Sayadaw, a very famous teacher from Burma. Shortly after that, after a bit of a struggle, I decided to spend three years in the order to develop meditation.

And it's been twenty years. I've just not been able to get out. It's just one of those things. I only joined up for three, and here I am.

The reason for telling you these little things is because one of my struggles—you can say, small 's'—was to accommodate what I had learned in Christianity into my Buddhism. It wasn't a case of saying that was all in the past, all rubbish, and I didn't want anything to do with it. Within my heart there's always been this very intimate connection with Jesus Christ, because I developed it for the first fifteen years of my life, for heaven's sake. So it wasn't a case of trying to deny that—that would have been ridiculous.

I had to, as it were, come to terms and find an explanation for the teachings of Christ through this new prism that I'd found in Buddhism, which had worked for me. And of course, I reminded myself that in the early days, Christianity had worked for me too. The form that I had been given had actually provided the basis for all the spirituality that came afterwards. That basis was, first of all, a moral understanding of life—a clear moral understanding—and secondly, an understanding that there was an interior life. These days, so many people have no idea of what religious emotions are. No idea whatsoever. They confuse it with rock music and stuff like that.

On that basis, when I came to Buddhism and found what Buddhism was doing—investigating this whole phenomenon which I call myself, this psychophysical organism—I had to meld them together and bring them away from what was a feeling of contradiction to a feeling of complementarity.

I've chosen here three or four quotations just to give you an idea of what that has meant for me personally. This isn't *the* Buddhist interpretation of the works of Jesus, you understand. This is a particular person's perspective on his words.

The first one I'd like to point to is the very rich young man who comes to him and says, "I have followed the law perfectly. What must I do now to enter the kingdom of heaven?" And Jesus' reply is: "Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."

This business of "go sell everything"—in other words, give everything up.

He then goes on, in another place (these are two different gospels; the first is in Mark, the second in Luke), where he says something which is very hard for us to take: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate their father and mother, their wife and children, their brothers and sisters, yet even their own life, they cannot be my disciple." That's pretty heavy, isn't it?

And if you remember, there's one point where he says to his mother, "I have no mother." Now, the fact of the matter is that he had a mother. So what was he saying? What did he mean? What does he mean by saying those who hate their father and mother? What does he mean by giving up everything?

One of the core teachings of the Buddha is the teaching around detachment and what detachment actually means. In the meditation here, I asked you to catch how you were relating to what was arising—how everything which you were perceiving as pleasant, you were moving towards and trying to develop. Even if you didn't catch it in your meditation, just consider how you gravitate towards a cup of tea. And what it feels like when there is no tea. Can you imagine waking up in the morning and finding there's no tea in the house? That's pure misery.

So that attachment, that gravitation, that holding on to things—what are we actually doing when we do that? What are we doing when we say, "I have to have my tea"? Clinging on to relationships: my wife, my children, my family. What are we doing?

In Buddhist understanding, we're seeking happiness right there. That's what we're doing.

We are investing in something phenomenal, something which is arising and passing away, and demanding that it make us happy. The problem is that when you attach like that, when you demand something like that, anything in this phenomenal world is going to let you down. Because the first thing I asked you to notice was that everything is arising and passing away.

So the Buddha's statement on "go sell everything you have" would be this: there is nothing in this world worth holding on to. That's what would be the Buddha's commentary, should we say, on Jesus's "go sell everything."

Now, in his lifetime, if you remember the story, the Buddha comes to what I would call an existential crisis. He gets to the age of twenty-five, the middle twenties, when most people come to recognise that youth is over and they'd better start taking life a bit more seriously. They get married, get a job, and the pension comes a bit later.

In that seriousness, the Buddha's own experience is put in mythological form. He's guarded from the certain realities of life, and he's out hunting on three occasions. On each occasion, respectively, he sees somebody who's very sick, like a leper, somebody who is very old and crotchety and hardly able to move, and a corpse. Each time his question is, "What is this?" And he's told, "This is a human being. This is what happens to people." Then he asks the crucial question: "Does this happen to me?"

Here we have the existential crisis. It was with this that he left his wife, his child just born. Some people think that's very selfish, but a man's got to do what a man's got to do. He leaves his child, cuts his hair off, goes to the river with his assistant Channa. He goes with his horse, his lovely horse that he loves and the horse loves him, Kantaka. He goes to the river—remember the Rubicon, over the river, it's all mythological—cuts his hair off, throws all his robes and finery away, puts on rag robes and crosses the river. And his horse is so upset he dies of grief. Then the Buddha spends his years in training.

So here you see: "one who comes to me and does not hate their mother, hate their father, wife." If you define the word hate as some sort of negativity towards these people, then obviously I think you've misunderstood the teachings of Christ. I've read somewhere that this is a very strong Jewish way of saying to be detached—not to find happiness in that other person.

Now, this whole process of letting go—if you get into Buddhist circles, you come across these little pat phrases like "letting go," "let it go," "let it pass," "don't own it." When you are in yourself in the way that you were instructed a minute ago, you were detached. That's what the Buddhist understanding is.

Most times, when you feel depressed, what do you say to yourself? You say, "I am depressed." So how are you going to get out of that? "I am depressed." That's it. All you can do now is get depressed about being depressed. Then you get angry about being depressed, and you get very afraid of being depressed, and it goes down into a spiral, and you end up on Prozac.

If you were to sit inside yourself as I instructed—there—and you notice that there is depression, not "I am depressed," then of course you don't have the reaction of being depressed about being depressed. You've discovered a place within yourself which cannot be touched by depression.

When you have pain, should we say—the sitting posture there, you might have had some pain or discomfort, or you've got a headache sometimes. Instead of saying "I have a headache," owning the headache, immediately forming a relationship of attachment,

you sit there quietly and feel the sensations of your headache. There's the headache, there. And that which is experiencing the headache comes to understand that it itself does not have a headache.

These are very deep insights, because there is something in us which is experiencing directly everything that we call ourselves to be as a human being—our sensations, our actions, our feelings and emotions, our thought, our images—and yet which isn't that. So what is it?

If that within us is not the body, if that within us is not the heart with its emotional states, if it's not thought, then it hates—it is detached from the very psychophysical phenomena that we call a human being.

Now that detachment is often confused with being some sort of callous, unregarding, unlovable way of being. But when you discover that position of yourself, of being with your body, heart, and mind, you begin to realise that you can now use it, as it were, or have a relationship with it which is kind, which is generous, which is compassionate. And yet, somehow, because you're detached, you're no longer upset by what it's actually doing.

If this body is something that this within us dwells in—we would call it something like the Buddha nature—when the body gets sick, there's a compassionate movement towards the body. Why fear it? Why should you fear the sickness of the body when it's not you? And when an emotion comes, why should you be so concerned about it when it's not you?

Somehow this detaching is a process of liberating ourselves. That's exactly what the Buddha means by detaching, and that's exactly what we mean by nibbāna. Nibbāna translates as unshackling. What is it that's being unshackled?

What is it that's being liberated? It's that within us which knows, which experiences. And once we can develop this sort of attitude towards ourselves, we develop the same attitude towards others.

So at the end of this particular period, I'll do a loving-kindness meditation. The loving-kindness meditation, or the meditation of goodwill, is taking what we feel about somebody we like. It's easy to love somebody you like. So you take somebody whom you like, whom you have a warm relationship with anyway, and then you keep displacing that image with people whom you hardly know, extending it to all beings, so that this love we are developing is not dependent on the object standing before us.

If I was doing this practice properly, whoever is before me—whether somebody I know intimately, somebody belonging to my own family, somebody I've never met in my life before, somebody who stinks, or somebody who hates me—I still have that same attitude towards them. That attitude of love, compassion, sympathetic joy is what we mean by detached joy. Because it's not attached to the object. It's an attitude we have within our own hearts, developed within our own hearts, not dependent on the object.

Now, to get to that level, you've got to go and sell everything and hate your mother and father. Do you really have to do that? If you take these words literally, you're really going to have to sell everything. And if you take the word hate literally, you're really going to have to hate. But it's not that at all.

What Jesus, from a Buddhist point of view, is pointing to here is forming a completely different relationship to those things you own, and a completely different relationship to those people you relate to. The underlying movement in the philosophy behind it all is that whatever happiness is, you're not going to find it in the sensual world. And you're not going to find it in somebody else. Other people can't make you happy. When you grasp that, you'll stop demanding that they do so. And it feels very liberating for those people around you, I can tell you.

Now I want to get a little more mystical. But first, the third quote: "My commandment is this, to love each other as I have loved you." This is in stark contrast to "hate your mother, hate your father." You're not going to understand this love business unless you understand clearly this other statement about hating your mother and father. Those two statements go together.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate their father, their mother, their wife, their children, their brothers and sisters, yet even their own life, they cannot be my disciple." But "my commandment to you is this, to love one another as I love you." If you can get beyond that paradox, then you've understood the true message of the spiritual life. And you'll find that in every religion through its mystics.

Now I want to get more mystical. There's this commandment, but Jesus also says, "I and the Father are one. I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you."

This was the real struggle I had. Remember that in Catholicism, the host at mass is changed into the veritable body of Jesus Christ. So the bread is the body, even though it's under the species of bread. It tastes like bread, but actually it is the body. And the wine is actually the blood, even though it tastes like wine. This is the separation of substance from attributes. And it really just didn't make sense to me.

If I wanted to give you a critique of that from one of the greatest philosophers of the human race, Nagarjuna—who in a sense brought metaphysical philosophy to an end—he simply states: if the substance of a thing is different from the attributes, how do you know it exists? Because the only way you know something exists is from its attributes—whether it's hard or soft, whether you can see it's yellow or blue. And then he says: if the substance and the attributes are the same, why make a difference? This problem around substance and attributes is a philosophical problem.

Jesus says—and correct me if I'm wrong here—unless you eat my body and drink my blood, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Something like that. "Eat my body"—and of course people were disgusted and they all walked away. Then just before his passion, he instigates this ritual, which is to my mind the loveliest of rituals you'll come across in any religion: the sharing of bread and wine. He says of the bread, "This is my body, take of this," and of the wine, "the blood I shed for the new covenant."

So he's equated flesh and blood with the bread and the wine. And he's always referring to himself.

Now, I struggled with this for a long time, and it was only because I visited a friend of mine who was an elderly Sri Lankan man—and I must tell you, in truth, I went there for toast. But while I was eating my toast, I was able to have long conversations with him about this business. And for him it was not a problem, because he was brought up Catholic and then became a Hindu. He accepted all the teachings that Catholicism had given him, but in that mystical way, in the way of metaphor.

And it was funny how long it took for the penny to drop. It was a way of looking, a way of thinking, that every time Jesus Christ talked about himself, he was actually talking about the phenomena that we call Jesus—meaning the body, heart, and mind that you've just been examining in your own experience. That was where my confusion lay, coming to me through my Catholic upbringing.

It was only when I realized that when he talked about flesh and blood, when he talked about bread and wine, he wasn't talking about that at all. What he was talking about was the Christ within him. "I and the Father are one. I am in the Father, you are in me, I am in you." You can't get more profound than saying "I am in you and you are in me."

So now, what is the bread and what is the wine within that nature he's pointing to—that which is in me, in you, that through which "I and the Father are one"?

When you meditate, when you begin to do this form of meditation I've taught you, you will begin to abstract, to disembed from the mass that you call yourself, this peculiar quality of intuitive intelligence. And it begins with awareness. It begins now. It's not as though awareness is not always with you. It's not as though consciousness is not always with you. It's always there. It's even there when you're asleep. Somebody turns you over. Somebody pulls a blanket over you when you feel cold. And somebody wakes up. Somebody hears the alarm clock, and then there you are.

Normally we associate awareness with just "here I am." You go to sleep, and where are you?

CHAPTER 29

Just War

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the tension between pacifist and just war approaches from a Buddhist perspective, beginning with how we handle unwholesome mental states in meditation. He distinguishes between three approaches: pacifism (allowing negative energies to arise and pass away), skillful force (energy applied without aggression), and violence (force mixed with anger and revenge).*
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> *Drawing from canonical incidents including the Buddha's encounters with King Viḍūḍabha's army and Devadatta's assassination attempts, Bhante explores how the Buddha consistently responded to violence with compassion rather than retaliation. He examines the psychological foundations of both approaches, noting that belief in a permanent self naturally leads to defensive responses, while insight into anattā (not-self) opens possibilities for absorbing violence through patient endurance (khanti).*
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> *The talk addresses contemporary examples from Afghanistan to South Africa, questioning whether Buddhists can ever justify the use of force. Bhante suggests that while pacifism represents the higher ideal—exemplified by figures like Gandhi and the Dalai Lama—measured force without revenge may sometimes be skillful when applied with compassion for all beings. This nuanced exploration challenges practitioners to consider how their understanding of not-self might transform their responses to conflict in both personal and social contexts.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa.

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

What I want to give you some ideas about or discuss, and I wouldn't say this is completely worked out, is these two attitudes that we have in society when something goes wrong: we have a pacifist approach and the just war. We have, at least in Western religions, very strong arguments for just war. I think Thomas Aquinas, the medieval philosopher, who had a great effect on the West, talks about the just war and gives all sorts of conditions for what makes it just. One of them is defensive rather than offensive. Things like that.

Now, from a Buddhist point of view, remember that we always start with ourselves. We always start here. And it's recognising how we treat ourselves that we can then project that onto a given situation, political or otherwise.

Let's think on. Supposing now I'm sitting and feelings of anger, feelings of revenge arise. What do I do? I suffer them, don't I? I accept them as unwholesome and I sit there and I suffer them. Feelings and attitudes of greed, of getting, power, riches, fame. So what do I do? I just sit there and suffer them. Allow them to come up and die away. So we can see that in our meditation we have a pacifist approach.

On the other hand, when I'm lazy, when the body says lie down, when the mind says have a kip, I do something, I get up, I move. I follow a certain discipline, I have to get up and follow the schedule. I determine very strongly to put the mind on the present moment. This is all force, this is all determination, a force for the good.

So we have a dual approach even in our spiritual life. Sometimes we have to suffer it and sometimes we have to put energy into our practice, depending on the situation. Now if that energy we put into the practice is laced with some sort of achieving, some sort of aggression, then that force turns into violence, becomes a violent force.

So here I think we have three definitions. Pacifism is the approach to something whereby we allow that energy to die away. Force is the energy necessary to put right what is wrong. And violence is the same energy laced with anger, aggression.

So that's how we behave inwardly as meditators. We know that when we're pushing something away which we don't like, that's an aggression. We have to bear with it, we have to suffer with it. And what we realise is that in this pacifist approach to ourselves, inside ourselves, we have to bear with it. So there's a sacrificial element to it. There's a sense of being the happy victim.

Now it's easy for us to do that inside because we recognise that we've created all this stuff. So we have to have a certain patience towards it. And patience means a willingness to suffer. *Khanti*. It's a willingness to suffer. And the Buddha actually calls it the highest form of ascetic practice. The highest form of ascetic practice. So it's a suffering practice which we go through, a bearing which we go through in order to get rid of suffering.

So if we now extend that psychology outwards and we look at the scriptures, there are one or two incidences where the Buddha is confronted with violence. The first one relates to an incident which happened in his Sakya clan where the local king, which has

a sort of difficult name, Viruddhaka, asked for a bride. And the Sakyans, being of a high caste, decided that the king was definitely not worthy of one of them. So they shipped him a slave girl. And the marriage went ahead and everything was lovely and beautiful.

And then one day Viruddhaka decided to visit his in-laws. And turned up. And so the story goes. Somebody heard somebody slag off his queen, one of the Sakyans, as an ordinary slave girl. And one of his retinue heard this, told it to the king, and the king, of course, was livid.

So getting back home, he couldn't contain his anger and he decided that the only way to re-establish his dignity was to wipe out the Sakyans. So he gathered his army with the elephants and horses and off he went. The news came to the Buddha and he went off and he stood in front of the army, in front of the king. What he said we don't know, but it was a good enough argument for the king to turn back.

However, the king must have stewed on it a bit and decided that, no, he was perfectly right, he was going to slaughter the Sakyans. So off he got on his horse again, or his elephant, and made his way. Again, the Buddha appeared. The argument must have again won the day and the king turned back. He got back there and it stewed even more. So this time he got on his elephant again and he thought, well, you know. Now when this came to the Buddha's attention, he said he couldn't do anything. He said the *kamma* was too strong. So Viruddhaka ended up killing a lot of his people.

There's the only incident of what you might call force in the scripture that I've come across is an occasion when they're reading, the monks are all together reading the Patimokkha. So this is something that monks go through every two weeks. It's actually, yes, every two weeks, the full and the new moon. And all monks are supposed to gather. They're supposed to confess to each other any transgression. And then they enter into the meeting. The meeting opens and basically the rules are read. That's all, the rules are read. So it's an act of confession, purification, and a reminder of what the holy life's about. Then usually there's a talk, sometimes a bit of chanting, and that's about it. So that happens every two weeks.

So the Buddha's sitting there and he's got lots of monks in front of him and he's got his major disciples by him. We know that Moggallana was there. Moggallana was the second chief disciple, known mainly for his powers, not so much for his insight. That was Sariputta. So they sat there waiting, waiting, and finally Moggallana had the gumption to ask why don't we start, Lord? And he said, well, there's somebody here who shouldn't be here. Somebody is impure.

So Moggallana, taking his part, announced that monk who's impure, let him leave the assembly now. And nobody moved. So for a second time, let that monk who is impure remove himself from this end. Nobody, nobody move. And finally the third time, unlike the Buddha, Moggallana got up from his seat, got hold of this fellow by the arm and looked him out. An act of force to put right what is wrong.

Apart from those acts, similar occasions, there's another one that comes to mind where the two tribes next to each other, the true ethnic groups I suppose you'd call them now, the Sakyans and the Koliyas were arguing over river rights and they were getting to a point where they were going to do battle. And the Buddha turned up and asked them whether the water in the river was equal to the blood in their veins. And somehow it brought them to their senses and they came to some sort of compromise.

And that's really the sort of major incidents where violence impinges on the Buddha. In terms of a personal violence of course there's Devadatta who actually tries to kill him. Coming into old age, Devadatta decided that he was losing it a bit, and it was time for another leader, and he would do very well, thank you very much. And he thought that the order had gone soft. Going back to the early days, when he had joined maybe twenty, thirty years ago, before monasteries were built, before the order allowed in men and women of not such a high calibre, it was very strict. You mainly lived out in the forest, you lived under a tree, you only ate one meal a day, you only had three robes. All these rules began to be softened. The Buddha recognised that people couldn't, not everybody could live at that strictness, and also there was no need for that sort of heavy ascetic practice. So many rules were softened.

For instance, in terms of food, now the monks at one point were allowed to go around and take food wherever they wanted. But in the early days the monks would have been very ascetic, very proper. But because there was no rule about when to get food, the monks would appear at any time in front of the gate. And instead of the Buddha being hard on that and saying no, you only have this and that's the end of it, he came to that middle point. He said, you can only go out in the morning for your food. You can have whatever you want, but you must finish it by midday.

Now monks complained about that because it would seem that in those times, just as now, the better food is cooked in the afternoon. So they were getting the morning gruel, really, with a bit of leftovers from yesterday, whatever. So there was this way of softening things.

For instance, he himself would have spent all his training life out in some sort of forest, in some sort of glade or something. Very shortly after his enlightenment he was offered a monastery by one of his chief supporters. And that meant of course a place,

and it was near a city. And it meant that as he grew more famous, even kings came to visit him. So this movement out of the forest towards the city, towards the good life, was something that he had to handle.

So Devadatta saw this all as a great softening, as a dropping of standards. So he wanted to go back to the original thing. He even wanted them just to become vegetarians. So he plotted with one of the kings, well, the king's son, Ajatasattu, who was the son of one of the Buddha's main disciples, Bimbisara. And he starved his old man to death. He stuck him in a cell and starved him to death. And so he was going to rule the kingdom and Devadatta was going to rule the order.

And what Devadatta did was he set this mad elephant onto the Buddha. And the Buddha through his power, you've probably seen the posture of the Buddha, the *abhaya* posture, the fearless posture. And he's like this, expressing his fearlessness to the elephant, but also offering loving kindness. So it's the power of his love that eventually the elephant collapses before him and adores him. Then there's the occasion where he rolls a big boulder down the hill and it goes over the Buddha's foot. So he got pretty close. He got pretty close. He must have, damn, just missed.

The whole story comes to an end when the Buddha sends his two disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, to go and see Devadatta. When they arrived, Devadatta, as all these monks that have decided to follow him, he's taken a large chunk of the sangha. And on the chief disciples' approach, he presumed that they had come to join him. He was overjoyed. He says, oh, great, come on in. And he said, please, give them a talk. And he himself went for a rest.

While he was resting, Sariputta and Moggallana argued to the monks that they ought to get back to the Buddha. So they all upped and left. And of course when Devadatta awoke he was very much disturbed. According to the myth he was swallowed up into the earth, into the worst of hells for eons to come. But obviously I think he carried on, and in fact the flavour of that reformation comes right through today with the forest tradition which is very ascetic.

There's a Danish monk I know, for instance, living up in the north near Kandy, up in the hills of Sri Lanka, who lives in a three-sided hut in a forest. That means that snakes, anything can come in and out. And he just lives on his bed there. So these are sort of incidents in the Buddha's life where he takes personal attack, but there's no revenge, there's no response to it except in these sort of kindly ways.

Now, it seems to me that what we're really talking about are two levels of consciousness. And if what we understand by a level of consciousness is a way of understanding the world, a way of seeing the world, then I think we can distinguish between these two approaches: pacifism and the just war.

To give you a very sharp example of a shift in consciousness is the age between six and eight. So for a six-year-old, Father Christmas coming down the chimney is no problem. For an eight-year-old, it's a big problem. And what's happened is, of course, is that the child comes to a reality testing of its fantasies, of its energetic life, begins to understand that what it imagines is not always true. So there's a movement towards reality.

Secondly, of course, this whole business of morality comes in with the attendant guilt and all that. It's not that a young child doesn't feel that. It was a rather interesting occasion with a friend's child who was about four, and for some reason he had taken something which he shouldn't have taken and it had been on his mind and he actually became ill. And when he finally got it out and told his parents that he'd taken this thing, the illness disappeared. So I think that's a very premature feeling of guilt, personally. I don't see three-year-olds too worried about taking things they don't know. So normally we associate that with seven.

And of course in our culture that's mythologised in the Garden of Eden, isn't it? Where Adam and Eve approach the tree of good and evil, the knowledge of good and evil. And although in our tradition Eve of course is the evil thing and the destroyer of heaven, of mankind, from a point of view of the movement of consciousness Eve is given the primary task of shifting it. So she's actually lifted human consciousness out of its six, five-year-old state. From a Buddhist point of view she's a heroine, not a devil.

So if we have that sort of thing in mind, then you can see there's a shift from a person who believes in a self to a person who doesn't have a self. Now if I have a self, I have these attitudes. I am greedy. I'm averse to anything which poses a problem to me, and I'll run from anything which is too great.

So in terms of greediness, for instance, should we say, take a fairly recent example, Saddam's little sojourning into Kuwait. That's obviously him trying to extend this idea of the pan-Arabic nation. And it's a grandism, isn't it? Because he's going to be the head of it. I mean, it's not as though he goes there and gives the Kuwaiti prince the charge of all Arab nations. He's going to be there. So that's obviously a war of aggression, a war of aggrandisement. That, I think, is fairly easy to show that that is just not justifiable. That's not a problem for the self.

However, from the Kuwaitis' point of view, they're being attacked. They're being attacked. Now the self must protect itself. So there is long argument in both our own law and in laws of any religion and state whereby you can defend yourself, because you're defending your life and you have to defend your life because you've got a self to defend.

So now the problem is how are you going to defend yourself? If you defend yourself with violence, then that will lead to all sorts of consequences of revenge and all that sort of stuff, isn't it? And you find that wars continue because of this vengefulness, because of this vengefulness.

Even in our own recent history, after the First World War, there was huge, enormous reparations demanded of Germany, which just threw them into abject poverty. And it was out of that that somebody like Hitler could arise, and then you've got another war on your hand. After the Second World War, happily, people understood, and nothing was demanded. In fact, the Marshall Plan rebuilt Germany, and a whole new idea of Europe came in after those two world wars.

So we can see this ability to defend ourselves, for a self to defend itself, without the violence, without the sense of revenge. So here we have now this business of America in Afghanistan. It's difficult to think that there isn't a sense of revenge in Bush and those soldiers. There probably is, but luckily it's been very much contained by the fact that they have to keep

who has the power to stop them? Simple as that.

So what stopped them, obviously, was the Muslim nations who didn't want an all-out destruction of Afghanistan. And, of course, the balancing act of especially Europeans who also don't want that sort of catastrophe.

So, in a sense, the war in Afghanistan was described as a just war in terms of there you have this man, Bin Laden, who really has gone beyond the pale. See, what do you do with somebody who says that the ends justify the means? It's totally amoral. It's not immoral, there's just no morality involved. Anything works so long as I get to the ends I want. That was beautifully portrayed in that film, *Apocalypse Now*, where the American general—the American army have decided to get rid of this American general. The reason is because they think he's gone mad, but what he wants to do is treat the Viet Cong like the Viet Cong are treating the Americans—no holds barred—and he wants to drop the bomb and win the war.

So you come against this business of the ends justify the means. When you're up against an enemy such as a sworn enemy such as Bin Laden, then really what option have you got apart from to use force from a self point of view?

From this self point of view, if we now take the argument down a slot back into our ordinary civil life, we expect the police to use force. We don't expect them to use violence. Whenever the police are involved in a violent situation where they're being attacked and all that, we expect them to be restrained. We don't expect policemen to take their revenge on others. That's why I think it was probably very shocking that these Italian police went and shot these people. They shot him. I mean, they weren't even armed. It was absolutely outrageous. I don't know what's happening about that. There's supposed to be some sort of investigation about it. But that, from I think most people's point of view, is just completely over the top.

So we always have this problem, like there was a case, I think, maybe in Liverpool or something, where this man with a great machete or something was going around and he was about down the street or something, and the police shot him. So now the question is, did they have to shoot him? Why didn't they shoot him in the leg, for instance, or why did they kill him? These questions are always going to come up as to the edge between justifiable force to put right what is wrong and force which shifts into violence with something added—he's useless anyway, we'll get rid of him, shoot him in the head. You don't know what the policeman's thinking when he does it.

In our own family, in our own family situation, right up until I think in Britain anyway right up until the early sixties, the family was sacrosanct. You couldn't go into it. If the wife was being beaten up, if the kids were being maltreated, and if occasionally the husband was being beaten up, you couldn't go in. It was a locked unit. It had nothing to do with—

I had an incident like that. I got off the bus where I was living in Birmingham. And right across the road, I could see this woman being kicked by this man in the head. I saw it. And so I went over, and I stood in between them. He was going to have another go. So I just said to him, "I think you've done a lot of damage here." And it sort of came to his senses. And off he went. As it turned out, it was a husband. Okay. In the middle of the street there.

So I helped this woman up and I said, "Look, what do you want to do? How bad are you?" And she didn't seem to be that bad. I mean, she'd been kicked, but it didn't seem as though she was necessary to hospitalise her, at least that's what I thought. So I said, "What do you want to do?" And it occurred to me that perhaps this ought to be reported to the police. So we walked up onto the main road and I must have looked as I was trying to help her walk, because I think she was a bit unsteady. And a car stopped very kindly and took us a lift to a local police station.

Well, we got off and I was amazed, really. I went in there and I said she'd like to report, grievous bodily harm. She's just been really battered, kicked to the ground and all sorts by her husband and we want to— And the policeman basically looked blank at us. They're like, what can I do? And I suddenly realised, yeah, well, there was no procedure for it. There didn't seem to be any particular interest in it at all.

However, the law is changed. As we know, even if a neighbour, and some of them use it for evil reasons, nefarious reasons—if a neighbour reports that they heard a child scream in the next house, you've got the social services, the police, you've got everybody darting in there to see if you can sort it out.

So this suggests that society at base understands that where there's violence one can use force to put an end to it—justifiable force. We're coming now to an international situation where the world community feels that in a given violent situation you can go in there and use force. The Balkans is an obvious place. Macedonia recently where there was more ethnic trouble—the EU got involved. And very recently, it's only actual war criminals being brought before justice and things like that. So you can see that the idea of using force to put an end to an evil is justifiable now both at an ordinary national level and international level.

Now that's jihad. That's what jihad is supposed to be. It's a just war. That's what Saint Thomas Aquinas would have argued for. The problem is that there's no such argument in Buddhism. No such argument in Buddhism. There's no argument in Buddhism to do something towards gratuitous violence.

And this meant for instance when the Turkish armies came into India—the Muslim Turkish armies—and they saw this statue of a Buddha and all that which was horrific to them, they simply wiped out monasteries and monks. They killed them all. Now the Hindus were also under that sort of attack. They were also persecuted, but they had a philosophy to help them fight back, to help them use—well I presume sometimes it was violent force—but definitely they had a philosophy. And it's in the *Bhagavad Gita* and it's in the story of Arjuna who has to fight his own family, the evil ones, and Krishna is by his side. And Arjuna says he can't do it. He can't kill his own people. And Krishna's argument is that he has a duty for the good. Now, whether his own people or not, his duty is to put right what is wrong. And Arjuna goes on, of course, to defeat these enemies. And therein is established, at least in a mythological sense, the idea of a just war.

So, from the point of view of the self—understanding that the vast majority, the vast, vast majority of human beings at this present time in our development believe very strongly in a self—there is justifiable moral law to say that they can defend their lives, they can defend their own people, they can defend their country. We would all agree

with that. I don't think it would be hard for Buddhism even to argue against that, even though as far as I know, there's no incident of such a thing in the discourses. One of the things about the discourses is that, of course, they tend to be centred very much on the Dharma, and you get very little about the society around. You don't get much sort of history like this.

Now if there's no self to defend, we're moving into a very strange area for us. So we have this saying by the Buddha—I think it's in the *Dhammapada*—where he said: "Should someone approach you with a sword and cut you up to pieces, if hatred arises in your heart towards that person, you are no disciple of mine." That's pretty tough, isn't it?

So what is the psychology of pacifism? True pacifism, not armchair pacifism. Not pacifists who wouldn't want to go to war, they won't kill anybody, but somehow there's—maybe even though it's put in this wonderful justifiable language—there's a hint of cowardice underneath.

I met a very interesting man when I was out in the East. He was an American who had fled, well, he'd gone into Canada, escaping the draft from Vietnam. And, of course, he had very rational reasons for doing so, as many of them did. But there was in him this niggling doubt as to whether, in fact, he'd not done it because he basically didn't want to fight, he was afraid. You get killed, don't you, in war? And what he did to—funnily enough, what he did to prove that it wasn't a case of lack of courage was he walked through the Cambodian jungle from one end to the other, this big jungle for about two or three weeks. I can't remember now, but it was something that nobody in their right mind would do. And he just went like that. He told me he went in a straight line, didn't shift. He just kept going and going and going and going, meeting with all sorts of things. And after that, he felt he'd exercised out of himself this idea that he'd not joined the war because of cowardice—that he had actually done it in good faith. He'd done it in good faith. Maybe there was cowardice there, but he'd done it in good faith and that if he had been forced to go then he would have gone.

So the pacifist stand—what's that based on? So we have to project as it were onto human beings as a society the way we treat ourselves. When anger arises within us we bear it and we know it'll die out. Now can we project that psychology on all human beings when they come to us with anger? Can we take it and be a funnel for that anger to be drawn out of the system?

Now one of the great archetypes in human history of that of course is Jesus Christ because that's what he does. He is the sacrificial victim. He's the one who having stated the truth, having been a truth which the authorities saw as subversion and therefore it

became a political problem, decided to get rid of him in a very unjust trial, and he says nothing. He doesn't fight it. He just takes that violence into him and in so doing manifests a way of being with anger, undoing anger.

That sort of philosophy runs through people like Gandhi—civil disobedience, yes, but being able to take the blows. If you remember in the film, the soldiers kept whopping them. He must have been an enormously charismatic person to get people to do that when you think about it. I mean can you imagine the Americans have taken the blow of the Twin Towers and appealed to the world community to undermine that evil without them using force? To take the actual blow as it were.

People like Aung San Suu Kyi. The worst part of the troubles, the real part where the government were just shooting, even children in the street, they were just shooting them here and there. She stood right in front of the army, right in front of the guns and said, "If you want to shoot me, shoot me," just took them on. Of course, what helps these people is their charisma, their aura, their reputation. She was the daughter of the first leader of Burma after independence. So she has that aura. Gandhi has the aura. If an ordinary person had done it, you'd get shot.

Although we have that incident, don't we, in China, Tiananmen Square. But before Tiananmen Square, when the tanks came in and that man stood in front of a tank and they just all stopped. And he offered, I think he offered him a flower, didn't he? Sort of a latter day version of the flower power. But eventually, of course, that didn't work either.

So, Martin Luther King, finding a way through all that racism and stuff in a peaceful way, but in the end, he himself takes the blow, but he stands now as a martyr, he stands as a figure, an archetype of how these relations can be brought to a more peaceful end.

Nelson Mandela and I think that South Africa has given to the world a wonderful example of a non-violent solution through these—what do they call them—reconciliation courts? They weren't trials, were they? Where people were allowed just to give the truth and then if they just spoke the truth so that people knew—because a line had been drawn in history—there was no need for revenge, there was no need to... And that of course is a wonderful thing if you can do that.

So we have this higher consciousness which doesn't see human beings—sorry, doesn't see cells. It doesn't see human beings. What it sees is forces. It sees violent force, turbulent force just as we see in ourselves, and it sees loving force. It's not caught up in I am me, I have to defend me, you are you. It's just this interrelationship and out of compassion one as it were offers oneself as the sacrifice to absorb that violence. That's the pacifist.

So how would a pacifist have done something about Afghanistan? It seems to me that one thing pacifists could have done, really could have done, through the internet, through telephone calls, would have been, for all of them, as many as possible—I don't know, a million, two million—with all these wonderful Nobel Prize winners for peace, to have congregated on the borders of Afghanistan and walked in completely unarmed. Now they may very well have been shot. A lot of them might have died. But eventually if so many of them flooded the country with argument slowly they would have got the sympathy of people. And eventually, they might have brought about a revolution, not just simply in terms of government, but in terms of heart, in terms of what are these Afghanis doing to each other? I mean, we blame these Taliban people, but they've been slaughtering each other for years now.

Maybe. I don't know. It's just one idea. There's no infrastructure whatsoever for Afghanistan. Yes, how do you get all these people in there? There's not even anything for the people who live there. Well, that's it, but you'd work out—you'd work away, if you really thought that might be a solution. It's just an idea, I mean, I've not thought of it in terms of logistics or anything, but definitely, if you want to affect a situation which is violent, then you've got to go in with peaceful motives. Like in Northern Ireland, she was young then, Devlin, wasn't it? Bernadette Devlin. Frontline stuff.

So if we understand that, I think that we can take certain positions. I think we can say that from a Buddhist point of view, a pacifist approach definitely is the more skilful and will bring much longer lasting results to a society.

I think using force, so long as the force is measured and to the point and so long as afterwards reparations are made, as they're trying to do now with Afghanistan, I think that also may have very much a similar outcome. And I think that's justifiable, personally. I think that a Buddhist need not feel guilty for supporting force in a given situation, so long as those conditions are there. Because it's not gone with violence, it's not gone with revenge, it's just gone to put something right which is wrong.

And we have again an example even in Christ's own life where he turns the tables in the temple and gets the moneylenders to leave. Now, it's unfortunate that a lot of Christians actually see that as anger and they talk about justifiable anger. And that amazes me because it's not making a distinction between anger, aggression and assertion. Sometimes you've got to say, well, that's wrong, and out you go.

I can imagine him doing that without any anger, just with a forceful voice, headmasterish. "Leave this room immediately." All that sort of thing. I don't see why that had to have aggression in it at all. But of course, the moneylenders would have seen it as aggression, and the authorities would have seen it as aggression.

"Are you saying that in terms of society viewing itself as a collection of selves, then there is an argument for a just war? But are you saying that if you take the higher consciousness viewpoint that there is no self, then there isn't a just war?"

Well, I think that you can then argue for a pacifist approach. Or rather, you can see how pacifism works. But even at that level, I would argue that force can be used.

To give you one final example, the Dalai Lama. Now this is what I've heard, I don't actually know whether he said this or not, but he was asked in those heady days when we thought we were going to blow each other to bits, would he kill the person who was about to press the button? And he said he would for the benefit of all beings. It's a utilitarian argument, it's for the benefit of the many. But he said he would take the *kamma*, he would take the consequences of that killing.

Now my argument would be, if he did it out of compassion, if that was his main intention, he did it out of compassion, where would the bad kamma be?

I shall leave you with that conundrum. I hope it's been of some benefit to sort one or two problems out.

CHAPTER 30

The Gratification, the Danger and the Escape

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the Buddha's own teaching framework that he claimed was essential to his awakening: understanding gratification (assāda), danger (ādīnava), and escape (nissaraṇa) in relation to the world. Drawing from key suttas, Bhante explains how we naturally seek gratification through sensual pleasures and emotional fulfillment, yet this very seeking creates psychological suffering through attachment, fear of loss, and the inevitable disappointment when pleasures fade.*
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> *The talk traces how our identity formation from childhood creates a pattern of seeking comfort and avoiding discomfort, leading to the complex web of greed, hatred, and delusion. Bhante emphasizes that the Buddha didn't deny the reality of worldly pleasures, but recognized their impermanent nature and the suffering that arises from our attachment to them. The 'danger' lies not in the experiences themselves, but in our relationship to them.*
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> *Most importantly, the discourse illuminates the 'escape' (nissaraṇa) - not as annihilation or withdrawal from the world, but as a fundamental shift in consciousness that transcends attachment while remaining fully engaged with life. Through mindfulness practice, we learn to observe our intentions and reactions, finding moments of choice that lead to genuine freedom. This teaching offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for developing the factors of awakening in daily meditation practice.*

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa - Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I wanted to bring all the teachings together for you using a schema that the Buddha himself seems to have liked very much. In fact, he said until he'd understood the world this way he hadn't attained the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment. So these three moments are important. They're translated as gratification, danger and escape.

I'll read the discourse. It's only a little thing. "O monks, I set out seeking the gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is in the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the gratification in the world extends. I set out seeking the danger in the world. Whatever danger there is in the world, that I found. I

have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the danger in the world extends. I set out seeking an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is from the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom how far the escape from the world extends."

And then to complement that in another discourse, he says: "If monks, there were no gratification in the world, beings would not become enamoured with the world. But it is because there is gratification in the world, beings become enamoured with it. If there were no danger in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with the world. But because there is danger in the world, beings become disenchanted with it. And if there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from it. But as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from it."

So this little schema - gratification, danger and escape. None of this will come to you as a surprise. It's what you've been listening to all the time you've been here. This word "gratification" - I looked it up because I think it's a good translation. I tended to use the word "satisfaction," but Bhikkhu Bodhi uses this word gratification. I think it's actually a better word in some ways than satisfaction. I looked it up in the dictionary and it gave two examples: "She was gratified to see the shock in Jim's face" and one that shouldn't surprise us - "a thirst for sexual gratification." So this word gratification I think has a slightly stronger meaning than satisfaction. It suggests that compulsive behaviour or a demanding nature about the desire that we have, and so I think it's probably a slightly better word for us than satisfaction.

Now if we go back to the Buddha's own particular life story, there is that time, there's a little incident which comes up when he's having a good time - sex, drugs and rock and roll - and he's just had a party, and he wakes up in the middle of the night and he sees all these men and women, all dishevelled and saliva dripping from their mouths. He goes into great detail of how disgusting it was, and it's that when he wakes up from the gratification that he's had from the party before. So there's something about the search for gratification in the sensual world. Now why is it that we seek happiness there?

See, there's no denial on the Buddha's part that there is gratification in the world. I mean, there is gratification in ice cream and Costa coffee and all those things that we enjoy. So there is gratification. It's not that he denies that. It would be foolish of him to do so. And what is it that draws us to that then? Why is it that we seek it there?

So if we go back a little bit into the sequence of our psychology, remember that we're born into this frame, we're born into this body. And right from the beginning, we're seeking milk because it's nice to taste and it comforts us. We seek the touch of our mothers. So there's an immediate connection right there - even in the womb they say

with the voice of your mother and things like that - where that unborn and the born child finds pleasure. And this pleasure isn't just physical, is it? It's actually an emotional well-being, a well-being of being protected and of being close to some other being.

So it's right there at the beginning of our experience, I think. Now, it shouldn't be strange for us to realize or to accept that right there, even though it's not an intellectual thing, there's an immediate, there's a total identity with that experience. There's an identity with it. I mean, obviously the child's not saying, "This is me." It's just the way they experience life. It's a total identity with what they are experiencing. And I think that goes on. I would say an ordinary person would say that they are what they experience in that total identity way.

What we tend to do, isn't it, is to try and develop comfort around us. We want to be comfortable. Even in our sitting posture, if it gets a bit uncomfortable, there's that urge to move. If you watch yourself watching TV sometimes, there's a shuffle here and there. As soon as it becomes slightly uncomfortable, we move the body. Even at that very basic physical level, we're always trying to be comfortable.

And when it comes to the more delightful things - what we eat and our friendships and all that - then of course there's an added factor of a real delight. There's loveliness in life, there's beauty in life, there's all the things that we enjoy. All these things the Buddha wouldn't have denied - there is gratification, there is gratification. So if you go through the whole gamut of your experiences in life where you've been happy - from just ordinary basic things like eating to lovely times in relationships and being out in the country and listening to beautiful music, and in the meditation sometimes these beautiful states of mind arise - all that is given. They're going to come hopefully till we die. It's not that we're going to disappear because we meditate, I hope not. So there's always that part of life which gives us comfort, pleasure, joy - all those things.

And even in our meditation, we're trying to develop these factors of enlightenment to the point where they are just the way we are. So there is that calmness and there is that equanimity and openness. And what that means, of course, is there's no fear. It's fear what stops us being open, isn't it? And there's just an attention, a quiet attention to things. And then there's the four great *Brahmavihāras* - the dwelling place of the Brahmās, the great gods, perhaps better understood as the illimitables: love, compassion, joy and peace. So that's the Buddha mind or the Buddha heart, shall we say, is always in that state.

I think sometimes we get the impression through the coolness of *vipassanā* meditation that you end up being soulless or emotionless, a little bit like a dried prune I suppose, but very wise. Well, it isn't like that, is it? The Buddha says he feels joyful, he feels

happy, he feels compassionate. So his experience of life at the emotional level is always in these lovely beautiful states, always in these beautiful states. But somehow he's not fooled by it. He's not - in this sense he's not gratified. He's not gratified.

So what is it that makes this gratification in the joys and pleasures of life gratifying, unsatisfactory, not in the end gratifying? So basically very simple, isn't it? The fact they arise and pass away. Just when you think you've got everything sorted, it chucks a spanner and that's the end of it. You try and build up a life which is meaningful and fulfilling - good job and relationship and all that - and then your partner dies or they leave or the job suddenly disappears. So you can't - there's nowhere you can rest.

I love the sayings of Jesus on that: "The birds have their nests and the foxes their holes, but the son of man has nowhere to put his head." And I think that's it, isn't it? There's nowhere, there's nowhere in this world that a human being is going to be comfortable in that total way.

And then when we come to investigate the psychology around pleasure, then we see all these downsides - the frustration, because of the attachment that you've built to it, because of the dependency on what's giving you happiness, there comes that frustration when you can't get it. And there's the fear of losing it, all the insurance that we have to buy just in case we do lose it we can buy another one. And then there's the grief of course when you do lose it. So there's a whole messy psychology in the aftermath of having indulged in something that's very pleasurable or joyful.

And that connection, that identity, you see, is the root cause, isn't it? It's because I'm saying "I am" - I am or I have. There's that peculiar connection with things that we have, which is very subtle, but it manifests mainly in these negative emotions and that indulgence. So it's catching that, it's understanding that, that we begin to see the danger. See, there's the danger of it. In fact, these things hurt.

And then, having seen that danger, one seeks for the escape. So that's the Buddha. So he saw the danger of the emptiness, the vacuity of sensual pleasure. It wasn't going anywhere. That's when he leaves and he's prepared even to leave his wife and his kid, his child that was just born. So I mean those sorts of decisions wouldn't have been taken lightly, would they? I mean people are called away from their families for various reasons - for war - and in this case the Buddha felt, or the Bodhisattva he would have been then, just compelled to go and try and work out what was at the core of his deep-seated unhappiness.

And I think when you get to that level, you're really at an existential level of suffering. And what I mean by that is questions of why am I alive and why am I conscious? And in the Buddha's more immediate experiential question, why am I suffering? Why am I suffering? Couldn't work it out. When we do in the evening when we go through these recollections on sickness, old age and death, which refer back to the mythical way that they explain that the Buddha slowly came to awoke really to these factors of life - seeing somebody who was sick, old and dying while he was out in his chariot, remember - he also sees an ascetic, he also sees this ascetic sitting under a tree, and that awakens in him: is there an escape? Is there a possibility of an escape?

Now just going back a little bit on the psychology of this, remember that because of this deep identity that we have with this life form, with being a human being, there isn't just that side of greed, there isn't just that side of lust and seeking happiness in the sensual world, and indulgence - you can put it all as indulgence or acquisitiveness. As soon as we've done that, remember, as soon as we hold on to something, we put a fence around it, we put a barrier around it, and that defines what our pleasures are. So anything beyond that boundary becomes unpleasant. It becomes something that we don't want or we don't need. So our attitude to something which is unpleasant but which is neither here nor there is to ignore it. That's what we mean by neutral feelings. We don't get particularly angry about it, we just don't notice it.

But as soon as these things outside this fence, outside this boundary, begin to look a bit dangerous to us, look as though it's undermining what we own and what we identify with, then you start getting these negative things - aversion, the pushing away and the anger and the hatred and the spite and all that. And that all comes under this - there's been some aversion. And in our meditation, it's boredom. That's an averse state. Boredom. And included in that, remember, is that when these things that seem to be undermining us, seem to be overpowering us, then we start getting this other side of anxiety and fear. And it all comes down to this basic position of seeking gratification in the world.

And then once we've established in childhood this way of behaving, then you can see how it moves into another layer of psychology when we hit the whole problem of good and evil. So when we do good and we attach to it, then of course you get into the business, the downside of really using compassion, using love, using sympathetic joy in order to make yourself happy. So when the other person, for instance, doesn't appreciate what you've done, then you feel hurt, you feel broken, you feel angry. Things like that - "what I've done for you" and all that.

And on the other side you've got the evil - evil in the sense of doing what is harmful. It can be something rather unskillful, which is neither here nor there. But we're capable of doing great evil, really doing something which is tremendously harmful both to ourselves and to other beings. And then you get into all that other psychology of guilt and shame and remorse and all that. And you can see how all this builds up and up and up until you get this massive human suffering stuck in this fathom-long body, as the Buddha would call his fathom-long body.

And it all begins from this mistake, this unfortunate mistake we make at the beginning of seeking gratification in the world, in the sensual world. So all those things are all linked, they're all there. And of course when you suppress them, when you push them away, when you don't want to look at these turbulences, these negative turbulences within us, well that's when they manifest as feelings of depression. See, depression and tiredness and lethargy and all that. All those are - I push them away. I don't want to see them. Keep them away.

So when you're meditating, of course, all this starts to come up, doesn't it? It's like, I think I say on one of the tapes, like lifting a lid off a dustbin. See, suddenly it all comes up. So suddenly the depression comes up now, and you've got to see it as a consequence of past conditioning. See? You've got to see that actually, we've manufactured this. This hasn't come because your mother hit you around the ear with a banana when you were three years old or something as you might have done, but it's how you reacted to this banana which is causing all this problem.

Now that doesn't mean to say that childhood is fraught with both ecstatic joy and disaster. It needn't be that any parent has actually physically or purposefully done you harm. You can just fall off a bed and it would be a catastrophe which remains as a trauma inside you. But even so, that is how the child has reacted, and there's that continuation of all those things that we learn in childhood throughout life, you see, until we get really bad and then we look and we try and find an answer. We come to meditation.

So when we are meditating, you see, we're opening the gates. We're opening ourselves up to all the stuff that's been suppressed and all that. But also from this understanding, we're beginning to see the danger of this wrong relationship we have to the world.

And it's seeing that danger, you see, which is painful. It's hard to sit with it. It's hard to bear with some of the stuff that comes up. But there's no other way. There doesn't seem to be any other way of curing our psychology except in this conscious way. Drugs don't help - they just suppress, they just suppress the physical frame, don't they? And

then you feel good but when the drug passes, oh it's even worse. See, there doesn't seem to be - I don't know of any spiritual practice whereby you don't have to go through this purging, this purgatory, the process of purification. It's just a matter of fact.

But if you understand it as a growth in consciousness, as a growth in wisdom, then you see there's no other way. Because how else would you know that the gratification is wrong? How else would you know that there is danger? How else would you seek the end of suffering?

So if you see your life as more to do with an evolution of wisdom or an evolution of consciousness—perhaps the word wisdom is far better actually—an evolution of wisdom, and not to confuse wisdom with knowledge. Wisdom is a relationship. It's how you relate to the world you're in. That's your wisdom.

And if you see that that's what you're doing through your meditation is to discover a wiser way of being with the world, then in a sense you're prepared to go through the purgatory. And also I think when you actually go through the purgatory, when you actually see that it is a process of healing, you're more and more open to actually going through it. And that's important.

It's important that you actually see that there is gratification and that somehow something goes wrong with that. And this is what we mean by indulgence, whether it's indulgence in something which is pleasant or indulgence in something which is outwardly unpleasant, like anger. But it is pleasing to let go of your anger and bang the door and bump somebody on the nose. That's gratification—to finally get your own back. But it's not particularly skillful, it's not really wise.

So it's actually beginning to see that, that we begin to see the path out, and that's the next business of it, the *nissarana*, the escape. If there were no escape in the world, then, boy, we'd be miserable, wouldn't we? And people who get themselves into these dead ends, these dead ends of the meaninglessness of life, or a religious person—I've met a few people who think they're damned. What do you do? They're damned. Now, in Buddhist terms, that's to really believe that there's no escape from *samsara*.

That whether you like it or not, you'll be reborn and reborn and reborn—first as a shrew in a meditation room and then you get chucked out with a bit of cheese out in a paddock and then you're reborn as a human being picking up a shrew and chucking it out and there's this constant *samsara*, this onward going. And in the Buddha's day that was the horror. It wasn't ecological disaster, it was this thing about having to be reborn and reborn and reborn again.

And there's a lovely conversation in one of the scriptures—I can't remember the details now—where two of the Buddha's cousins, if I remember rightly, decide, discussing whether to actually take up, whether to follow Gautama and take up the robe and bowl. And the argument goes something like, "Look, what is life? You've got to go out there, you've got to plow the ground, you've got to harvest the seed, you've got to eat it, and then you do it again next year, and it's really boring." And one of them gets really into this and says, "Yeah, you're right." And he goes off with the other fellow and says, "No, it's for you. I'm still enjoying this." So he doesn't leave. He's still getting something out of the life form. But it was this fellow who was pointing out to this man who finally leaves how terrible life is in this boring, repetitious way, which I think would have been perhaps more obvious to people in those days, in some ways anyway, because there wasn't this huge entertainment industry.

It reminds me of an old pre-war comedian—and he's gonna jump, he's on a London Bridge and he's gonna jump in and the policeman sees him and he calls him over and they start having this big discussion about life as to why suicide, and the policeman's arguing that life's worth it and the comedian is arguing how useless it is, and the conversation goes on and on and they finally jump both of them jump off the bridge. That's brilliant. "Yeah, you're right!"

This finding of the escape—so that's the Buddha's great thing, isn't it? And he says that what he's discovered, he's not invented it. He says this is an ancient path. He's just rediscovered it. It's not as though he's the first human being that's ever done it. He doesn't claim to be that. In fact, in the mythology of Buddhism, there are Buddhas previous to him. Going back—I don't know how many times—there are 28 previous Buddhas named in previous huge eons of world systems. It was just the way that you begin to think when you think of time being cyclic. I think I mentioned it this morning, that the years just roll over, just keep going, and the whole universe is expanding and then it'll collapse, and then it expands again and collapse. So there's that idea that this has been going on ever since. He says that he doesn't see the beginning of *kamma*. He doesn't see that there is a beginning. It's always been like this. And presumably in that sense he doesn't see the end of that process, but as an individual he found an escape.

Now this escape is—be careful here—because this escape, as hopefully you've all come to realize in your meditation, is not the destruction of the world. There's a very interesting discourse in which somebody asks him, "Where do the four *Mahabhutas* come to an end?" Now the four *Mahabhutas*, the four elements, the four great elements, they are earth, fire, water and air, and they constitute the physical universe. So what the person is asking is, where does all this come to an end? And he says, "It's the wrong question." He says, "Where do they not find a footing?" It's very interesting. Where do

they not find a footing? In other words, is there an experience, is there something experiential where you will not find these, but it doesn't deny their existence or destroy them or annihilate them?

And then he goes on to say there is a consciousness which is not touched by the five or six senses. So there is a consciousness which is not coloured by the six senses. So there's no hearing and there's no seeing and there's nothing there, there's no thought, there's nothing. And yet it is without boundary, and the reason it's without boundary is because there's no phenomena. You've got to have something to create a boundary. If there's nothing in this universe, then it's empty space, there's no boundary in it. It's what we have, it's the things we have that create boundaries for us. And he says there is this consciousness which is without boundary, and in all directions full of light.

So he's pointing there to an experience which is a total escape from the world. Now remember that when we say an escape, he's still there. It's not as though he's disappeared in a puff of smoke and there's just this mystical voice arising from nowhere. So this escape is not the destruction of anything.

So again, when they ask him, does he believe in any form of annihilation? He says, "No." He says, "Everything arises depending on something else and there's no annihilation." He says, "The only things that are annihilated are greed, hatred and delusion." And greed, hatred and delusion are this way of expressing this wrong relationship we have to the world, which in a psychological sense is this seeking gratification. And that's what he means by this desire. When we chant in the morning this *tanha*, that's what he's referring to.

But remember that there's a completely different psychology and that's the psychology of the Buddha. That's the psychology of the enlightened beings, which doesn't have that downer, it doesn't have that gratification, it doesn't have all the downers of gratification—the grief, the fear, the anger, the frustration, all that sort of stuff. It doesn't have that. It doesn't have any anger, it doesn't have any fear. The fearless one—that's one of the epithets of the Buddha. He's fearless. What's he afraid of? There's no connection to the world whereby suffering could arise.

How does suffering arise? It arises through the connection of attachment, identity, possession. If that's all gone, what then is our relationship to the world? What might it be?

So that escape is suggestive of all the teachings of the Buddha concerning the practice which leads us to this point of liberation. It's an escape. It's like escaping from prison. It's like you're finally released.

So now this is where our practice comes in, because it's a fundamental practice and what we're learning is not only to see that gratification is wrong because it has these dangers, but we're seeing this escape. And that's all we're doing—we're just seeing where the escape is. And the more the escape becomes clearer to us, then the more we'll practice, because it's like when you see the finishing line you really want to go for it.

So even in our practice when we're confused or when we don't think we're getting anywhere or we don't think we're progressing—that's a regular one for meditators—because you still keep doing these pratfalls and you think well I'm still as I was before. So if you have those sorts of feelings, those sorts of ideas about yourself, remember that all those come from this gratification. You're now seeking gratification as it were in the spiritual life, meaning you're seeking a certain type of comfort there. And that comfort usually comes from the sense of achieving.

But if you abandon those ideas of trying to achieve anything and draw that word simply into moment-to-moment mindfulness, then you're always achieving, as long as you're mindful. You're always here. And that mindfulness, that sharp mindfulness, is a guard because as we begin to realize, the problem begins or starts with these intentions. So when we see these intentions and we're awake, we're bright with it, we're not caught up in it, we're not suddenly dashing off and doing something, then that gives us that moment of choice. And then we begin to see, oh, here's the escape, here's the escape.

And when we access that point within us, which is the observer—so that's not the fullest escape because there's still a sense of me there, but we can see that that's an escape from all the pain that the body might offer us, because from there we can feel the pain, we can see the reaction to pain, we can allow the reaction of fear and aversion all that to die away and we can find this equanimity, this peacefulness with pain, just this patient forbearance. And that's an escape. It's an escape from all the fear and the anxiety that we have around the body.

It's the same with these emotions. When you distance them, when you can feel them there, rather than being them, it's an escape, isn't it? You've transcended them. You're in a different position. You're not identifying with them. You're not possessing them. You're saying, "Oh, look, there, there's anger. See, there's grief. There's depression." And it's seeing that clearly that we begin to say, "Oh, here's the escape. Here's the escape."

That doesn't mean to say at all that it's easy—it's very difficult in fact, to stay with these mental states as they arise. But the more we see that this is the escape, the more we'd be happy to stay there. The more we see it actually as a place where there's healing going on.

And then finally—this all takes a long time—so there's always going to be that little bit of self left right to the bitter end. It's not going to let go. So there's always going to be these pratfalls on the way. There's always going to be moments when we feel we've slipped back and we're not moving forward and all that. But we have to keep reminding ourselves that this is an onward going. This is a long-term commitment. In the Buddhist sense we're talking lifetimes, not just talking this life. So it's a whole process that we're going through.

So there we have it—these three ways of looking at our practice: to be aware of where we're seeking comfort, where we're seeking gratification, to see that greed, that lust, the avarice—we've got lovely, great big words for all that, all centering around the four great lusts: power, riches, fame, to be famous, powerful and rich. Everybody wants to do that. That's pretty simple. And what do you want to be? I want to be famous, powerful and rich. And sensual pleasure. They're your four main areas, aren't they?

And it's just to see how the mind is constantly moving that way. It's always trying to achieve that particular state. And that renunciation is the point where we allow that desire to just fade away, to just begin to release itself. And as I've pointed out in the morning, to let any desire fade away and then just to stay with it long enough to see what the mind is, what the heart is when there's no desire there—see that lovely contentment. And then with it comes the peace. And hopefully you're beginning to experience that even during these times of quiet abiding where we're trying to develop the more passive side of the factors of enlightenment: the calmness, calmness of the body, just being still; calmness of the heart, stillness; the silence of the mind—all that comes under calmness in a way.

And the attentiveness, just the ability to just be attentive, focused, not particularly focused on any one thing, but just to be here and to focus on whatever arises and passes away, that sort of very spacious, open awareness. And the equanimity, just that ability, just the openness to what's coming into our field of awareness.

And just every so often to be like that and just to rest within the present moment—relaxing into the present moment wide awake. And then as you do that, when it passes, to ask yourself: now what was that like? Was that a pleasant place to be? Now fair

enough, we can get attached to that too and then it becomes—and our practice becomes a sort of quietism—that we're just seeking this lovely quiet place. Leave me alone. Get out of my way.

But then, of course, that's balanced because we then bring in these other factors, the more active factors of the process, which is that interest, the interest of wanting to see, the effort to begin to see things, and the effort to remain at that point of interest and the investigation of the *Dhamma*.

So, during your day, try to balance those things. Just go through your day and say, "Well, this is when I'm practicing this *Samatha*-type meditation, peaceful abiding, and this is when I'm doing *Vipassana*." And get to know yourself. Know where your weak points are during the day. Say, "Well, now here I've got to—I mustn't fall asleep again. Or here I just let my mind go, I give up effort at this particular point in the day." And just catch your rhythm. They're probably also to do with just the natural rhythms of our bodies, the circadian rhythms as they call them. So there's all those rhythms going on too. So once we've attained, once we've got to this point of observation, then we can see all this happening.

Let's just pause for a moment and just whatever thoughts come up, let them come up and pass away.

So, let me encourage you to keep putting in that little bit of effort. For Nick and Sarah have been here now for two weeks. It's coming to the end, so you have to be careful that your energy level doesn't drop. More like the long-distance runner—like when you see that wire. You've got to put on that little extra spurt to get there. So that's important. And this is about your fourth day, isn't it, Haji? So in a sense, hopefully, you'll be more at ease with the schedule, with the regime. So with that, there's a danger of, "Well, this is now easier now." And there's a drop of commitment, a drop of energy.

So you've got to keep lifting it. You've got to keep seeing where the effort begins to drop, and you just very gently push yourself. That's what one of my teachers says: push gently. And then you'll see the energy comes, the energy comes. So keep going. That's all there is to it.

May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 31

Bodhisatta Before Taking Human Birth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 40 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma begins a contemplative series on the Buddha's life, starting with the period before his final human birth. He explores how the Buddha serves as both archetype and exemplar for practitioners, examining the story of Sumedha's encounter with Dipankara Buddha and what it reveals about our relationship to spiritual authority and surrender.*
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> *The talk addresses fundamental questions about how we relate to teachers, the meaning of bowing and humility in practice, and different conceptions of time - circular time versus linear progress versus the timeless present of awareness. Bhante discusses why spiritual development takes so long despite intellectual understanding, emphasizing the deep conditioning that requires patient, sustained practice to overcome.*
>
> *Drawing on the traditional accounts while acknowledging their archetypal rather than purely historical nature, this dharma talk offers practical insights into developing right attitude toward the path, cultivating inner confidence in our Buddha-nature, and understanding the position of the observer in meditation practice.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa

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

There are different traditions for chanting. Next time I'll shut up and just let you get on with it.

I just thought I would take the life of the Buddha and mosey on around it and just see what thoughts arise when we contemplate the life. I suppose there are two things that the Buddha stands for for us. He's both an exemplar and an archetype. I've got a definition here of archetype: it's a primitive mental image in the collective unconscious and a recurrent symbol or motif in mythology. I'm sure that's what it means, but I suppose what I mean by it is some sort of template, some sort of inner image which we have really already within ourselves and which the tradition defines for us in specific ways, so that the specific actions that the Buddha takes during his life become for us examples of how we ought to behave.

That exemplar and archetype really exists in all walks of life, doesn't it? We have an image of the artist, of the academic, of the worker, and so on. So these sorts of background blueprints exist in our minds anyway. And spiritually speaking, we have these great figures which remain for us, exemplars and archetypes of our spiritual lives.

One of the interesting questions which arose really from the way the West discovered the Buddha is that there was a time when they didn't actually think he was a human being. He was a solar deity and the nimbus that was around his head symbolised this origin of being a solar deity. And the reason I bring it up is because if the teaching had come from a solar deity, how would we feel about that? It had been channelled down to Ānanda and he wrote it all down. And what the solar deity is saying is that there's a place where there's no suffering and that he's got there and he's got the t-shirts and it's possible for everybody to make the same place.

But the fact that it's a solar deity does raise a question in the mind, doesn't it? For instance, if you knew that a deva or some great angel being had climbed Mount Everest, and so you knew it was possible by certain beings, but you weren't absolutely certain that the human being could actually make the top. The fact that one person did actually make the top makes it open to everybody. And everybody can make it, if they want to, that is. And I remember some time ago, a seventy-year-old woman climbed up there. So it just shows that once somebody has actually done something in our history, it makes it open to everybody.

Another example of that would be Einstein's theory of relativity. There was a time, if I remember rightly, when Rutherford, who was a scientist I think in Britain, said there were only two people who understood relativity: Einstein and himself. Now it seems to be first degree stuff at universities.

Unfortunately, the image stops there, because even though the Buddha did make it, it doesn't particularly make it that much easier for us that there's been 2,500 years of history of people trying to climb this particular spiritual mountain. However, it does make it tangible that another human being actually achieved a state of non-suffering. And that should give us that inner confidence that we have all the same potential. There's no difference in terms of our faculties and being from the Buddha himself. And that is simply a matter of time. And we'll get there. So that should lift our hearts a bit, I hope. Even in the worst moments of our meditation, when we seem to be wallowing in hell, we should remember that there is always that potential and it lies within us, and hell after all is transient.

This idea of the Buddha being an archetype and an exemplar is something that we begin to internalise. And it's not really important – so this is another question that often arises – as to whether it's historically true, the stories around the Buddha are historically true. The only thing that we can say with, I think, absolute certainty is that there was a person called Gautama who lived approximately 2,500 years ago, lived a life and then died and left the teaching behind. The bare bones of the story, how he was born and how he left home and all that, probably has a basic truth around it, but the stories that are built up around it are, shall we say, apocryphal.

Just to give you an example of how that can happen, even in this modern day and age, there's a famous monk in Sri Lanka – at least he's famous in Sri Lanka. He's a Danish monk and he lives out in the forests. And he lives in what is a three-sided kuti. So there's only three sides to his hut with a roof. So that means that he lives quite happily with snakes, poisonous creatures, poisonous spiders and things like that. And that's his life as an ascetic life. There's two or three of them now that live like that up there.

He would wander down to the local village for his food. And on one occasion when he came back, an elephant jumped out, and he told me he didn't have time to chant the *mettā* sutta, and the elephant ran over him. Unfortunately, he stood on his hip and broke his hip, and he lay there all day, all night, until the villagers thought, why hasn't he arrived? So they went off looking for him and found him on the path. Now, the fact is that that elephant did not mean to kill him. They tell you if an elephant means to kill you, it will definitely kill you. The elephant, it seems, only came out to give him a little shock. But unfortunately, in so doing, went and stood on him and broke his hip.

This story filtered down to Colombo, which is about, I suppose, maybe at the most eighty, one hundred miles away. And I was visiting Colombo at the time, and there was a Swedish monk there. And he said to me, have you heard about so-and-so? And I said, I have. By then, I'd only heard rumours. I said, yeah. I said, this thing about an elephant. He said, oh, yeah. He says, quite remarkable, he said. He was sitting in posture under a tree in meditation and a big she-elephant with a little child came along and they were entranced by him, and the little baby elephant moved towards him and tried to sit in posture, fell over and broke his hip.

So this happens within a couple of months, one hundred miles distance. So this gives you an idea of how apocryphal stories gather around somebody who has a certain reputation about them. But for our purposes, the stories are just there really to enhance the basic template, which is the path that we're on, that's all.

So in the story, of course, the Buddha doesn't begin with the life that he's born into. He's been through these thousands of rebirths. And there's a point when he is an ascetic called Sumedha. Now, you won't be surprised to know that Sumedha was, in fact, a very rich prince who gave everything up when he saw the vanity of life and ended up taking on the ascetic life. He heard about the Buddha, and having heard the name of the Buddha, was greatly moved by it. So he went to meet Dīpaṅkara. And when Dīpaṅkara came, there was a puddle of water. I'm sure you know the story. And he threw his cloak upon the puddle and threw himself down upon the cloak and asked that Dīpaṅkara, the Buddha, and all the Arahats who were following him should use his body as a stepping stone. And when Dīpaṅkara saw this and saw the qualities of Sumedha, he prophesied that this person would indeed become a future Buddha.

So now, you see, we have to consider, is there anybody you know that you would do that to? Throw your coat down, lie in front of them and say, please use my body as a stepping stone? So it brings up this whole relationship that we might have to a teacher and how we relate to the teacher in our spiritual lives.

One of the two things that come to mind are around this word authority. So we say somebody is an authority and we also say somebody is in authority over authority. And these two things are very different relationships, aren't they? So when somebody is in authority over you, it inspires fear, a certain anxiety, because they have power over your life. But an authority is somebody who obviously you respect, and that brings up in you a certain sense of reverence.

However, that split is not so, shall we say, easy. You can't just say, well, I look upon the Buddha as an authority, but he definitely doesn't have any authority over me. There is that, shall we say, point where having respect for somebody, you therefore accept their teachings. You, as it were, surrender to what the person says or what the person is asking us to do. So even these days when we're very sceptical of doctors, once we've, shall we say, had faith in the doctor, once the doctor has prescribed a certain thing, we tend to follow the prescription.

So when we're thinking about our relationship to the Buddha, and indeed to any teacher, there is that reflection to be had as to what my relationship is to this person. At one end, of course, you've got the fawning devotee, the one who goes around kissing the teacher's feet, and whatever the teacher says must be true. So this isn't quite what the Buddha would have wanted, I think. He wants a person to maintain a certain independence. And if you remember, I think it was just before he died, wasn't it, there was a

young monk looking upon him with great admiration while he was there, and he sent him packing off to the forest, didn't he? He didn't particularly want to be surrounded by people with adoring eyes.

And yet the other end, of course, is the continual sceptical follower who doesn't believe a word you say and who won't actually do what you want them to do. So those of you who have been teachers, I know they must have come across these two types of people. So it's a case of, again, recognising that the *Dhamma* that we have is spoken, is passed on to us by another human being. And it has that quality of having been lived, having been experienced.

So sometimes reflecting upon that, reflecting upon the personage or the person of the Buddha, brings about that sense of reverence, that sense of right attitude to the teaching. Then of course there's the whole business of relationships even to our teachers here and now, who we listen to. And that ability to receive and yet not to lose one's own independence, as it were, to receive and to have that attitude of trial and error to make sure that there isn't just that blind acceptance, a blind faith to what's being said or to what we're being asked to do.

So all these things are important in our spiritual life, just to get the attitude right. And these attitudes, remember, are beneath our practice. They're there as certain traits that are subconscious, or should we say subliminal to our practice. And so if you find yourself, for instance, always balking and always not wanting to do things, sometimes ask yourself, what is your basic attitude to the *Dhamma*?

So here we come to this whole business of bowing. So bowing for Westerners is a bit of a pain, really. I remember when I first went to my first classes in Zen, and there they only bow from the waist, of course. And everybody did it, so I mean, I did it, but I thought, oh, this is ridiculous. And it took me quite a long time to get the hang of what bowing was about, actually. I mean, I did it. You do it because, well, because he's doing it.

And in the Zen practice, of course, you bow even to the room you're leaving. You bow to your cushion. You bow to your plate. You bow to your toilet. There's nothing you don't bow to. So in the end, you get the feeling that there may be something in this bowing. And bowing is just a strong body language, isn't it, for surrender, for that ability just to receive without negativity, without aversion. And that connection between the mind and the body.

Remember that the Eightfold Path always begins with right understanding, then right attitude, and then right speech, right action, right livelihood. So somehow the right understanding and the right attitude needs to be expressed in a certain way. So when you feel a resistance, when you feel a resistance against the practice, some form that you don't want to do it, you can't do it, something like that, bow. Just actually try it, just actually, just secretly in your room – you don't have to do it as a public display. And to actually bow and to, when the body is in that posture, it's in that posture of surrender. It's ready to be trod upon and to be used by a higher being as a stepping stone. So that brings about that sense of humility. And in there, that feeling of reverence. I was going to say the word obedience, but that's a horrible word for us. We don't want to be obedient.

So these little stories, when you read about them about the Buddha, if you just let your mind wander about it and just ask yourself, what's its meaning for me? How does it relate to me personally? How can it inform my own practice? And in that way, this archetype, this exemplar is imbibed. It becomes part of our own nature.

The next thing of course is the whole teaching around these rebirths. And at some later date maybe I'll go into the idea of rebirth. What always interests me is this underlying conception of time, how we relate to time itself. So in the Buddha's time, the idea was that time was circular. It was constantly repeating itself. And I think if you just look at just an ordinary year, then you can see how that can be understood. I mean, it's the seasons. And every day the sun rises and it sets and you get up and you go to bed and you're born and you die. And so there's that feeling that, in fact, although everything is, shall we say, a little bit different, the underlying blueprint, the underlying motion is one of constant circularity, constantly going round and round and round.

And if you can just imagine now, if you really believe that, just for one moment put yourself into that mental state of believing that you've lived a life over and over and over again. Sometimes there's a horse or an elephant. Sometimes there's a little being, a mouse, and then a human being. But always you just keep coming back, keep coming back. And it's always birth, old age, sickness, death, a bit of happiness stuck in there somewhere. But this never-ending, ceaseless movement of just going round and round, the same old thing, the same old job, the same old relationships, the same old fallouts, and the same old making it up, and the same old breakfast, and the same old toilet. It's always the same, going round and round.

And you get that feeling, maybe, of that growing despair of how the hell do you get off this wheel? So if you have an image, shall we say, of a roundabout, and you've got your horse, and you're going round and round, and having a good time, and the beer

and all that. And then suddenly, the leg falls off your horse and you've got to get off and put it back on and things fall off and arguments start and people start throwing bottles about and you think, I want to get off. And then when you want to get off this roundabout, all you see around you is this void. Whether you look down or up or across, there's just nothing there. You're just stuck on this roundabout and there's no way off it. And if you were to jump, then you just get sucked back into it.

So if you can imagine that mentality, that was the mentality around the Buddha's time of circularity, of constant repetition, of no escape. And so the idea of escaping this was one of the obsessions of the time. How do you stop this rebirthing? So there were many answers, of course. There were some who believed in...

even at the end of this life, you completely annihilated and that was it. And that the best bet would be to make the best of this life as you can and really go for it. So that sort of thought is well known to us these days. And there were some who thought that you went on for a few rebirths and then you're annihilated after that. And then there were some who thought, well, you did carry on rebirthing, but it got better. And you ended up being a great Brahma up in the high heavens.

These things, of course, the Buddha would have known. He would have known all these arguments, all these ideas. And even so, as you know, through his practice, he came to realize that no matter what beautiful state of mind he could attain, it didn't last. There was still that falling off, that particular level of being, you might say.

Now, as opposed to that, these days, and that's why we find it difficult, perhaps, to accept this idea of rebirthing, is that our idea of time is an arrow. We actually think we're going somewhere. We have this idea of progress. We're going from this place to that place. This is embedded, really, deep within the Judaic Christian religion, but especially in Christianity, where the early Christians for many years presumed that the second coming was about to happen. And the idea of the medieval society was to establish something stable, something which was godlike, ready for this second coming.

As the centuries rolled on, and it didn't quite seem that it was going to happen, there came the idea started off by a monk, writing at the time, who talked about three ages. The age of the Father, which was the age before Christ, the age of the Son, which was the age that we're living in, and the age of the Spirit, which would come in some future time when the human race had progressed to receive it. So there came this idea of progression, the idea that we were going somewhere, the human race was actually going somewhere.

And this has been accentuated in our day and time by technology. It would be foolish to say that technology has not progressed. And we get the impression that just because we have this enormous progression in technology, therefore we must be going somewhere. But unfortunately, when we look around us and see what we're doing with this technology, then that hope begins to fizzle and fade. But even so, we're stuck on this idea that this progress, that we're actually moving towards some sort of aim.

And when we bring that to the Buddha's teaching, then we find the idea of rebirth difficult to accept because we've lost that sense of circularity of time, that constant repetition, the repetitiousness of time within time. And this idea of progress, of course, seeps into our practice. So there is that quality. It's not as though Easterners don't have a sense of progress—people who live still with that sense of circularity, which is, I would say, most Easterners. It's not as though they're not grasping in their practice, but in a sense it's coming from a slightly more superficial level. Within us, I think, we have a much deeper level that we think that there's some sort of progress to be had through the practice.

And what it does is it seeps into our practice as a sense of trying to do something. Trying to do something. So we've been able to do a lot with our technology. So when we come to sit, there's that underlying, I think, understanding or presumption that we can do something. And the idea that actually we don't have to do anything but just watch is difficult for us.

Sometimes when I was in the East, and especially in the villages, it always seemed to me quite remarkable how people could just sit and seemingly stare. They would just stare at things, whether it was a fly going around a window or just the countryside. But when you looked into their face, it wasn't as though the face was dead, but they were just able just to stare. And that ability of just to relax into the present moment and just to be in it without wanting anything from it at all, but just to be completely receptive.

So we find that, I think, a little difficult. And I'm suggesting that maybe it's to do with our conception of time at a deeper level, the idea of progress, that we've made progress, and that it's up to us to do something. And the idea that the whole process of purification of the heart and of insight comes by actually a process of relaxing and just watching, and everything arises quite naturally, is, I think, just a little bit difficult for us.

With these two types of time—the circular time and this arrow, the time as an arrow—there's another time, and this time we can call the immediate presence. In Christian mysticism, they talk of the *nunc stans* and the *nunc fluens*. So there's a now which is in a state of flow and a now which is absolutely still.

Perhaps you've had the impression sometimes on a train where there's another train next to yours, and when one of them moves, you don't know whether you're moving or whether the other train is moving. It just takes that little bit, that little moment to gather the fact that either you are moving or you're not. You might have got the sense sometimes, driving, especially driving, just driving down a motorway, for instance, of instead of you passing through that space, that you were still and the space was passing through you. It's something you can try anyway, so it's only another way of positioning yourself. So suddenly to find within yourself that position where there is that stillness and everything that is arising within our perceptual faculties is what's moving.

Now that presents us with a different idea of time because the idea of circular time and the idea of time moving as an arrow demands that we go with it, demands that we are part of that motion. So now when we sit in meditation and we gain that position at least of the observer, being aware of transience, being aware of things arising and passing away, means that that which is aware of it can't itself be arising and passing away.

And it's sitting in that position which gives us a different feel for time. It's not that time isn't circular or that there isn't some sort of movement. For instance, you can't go back on time. But the fact is that in terms of the actual experience of being in time is only momentary. So this idea of time is just a way that the mind relates the way things have happened in the past.

When we talk about space, what do we mean? We mean simply the relationship of objects, don't we? It's the way all that space is, is a measurement between objects. If there were no objects, there couldn't really be any space. So it's with time. If there were no events, there'd be no time. And our concept of time, circular or arrow, is dependent on how we, the mind, that's it, this particular consciousness, organizes events.

So all memory is past. You can't go back on memory. That's it. It's finished. And the future hasn't happened. So by remembering that, all these concepts that we have of time are simply mind-made. And that if we can find this position within ourselves of observing events arising and passing away, then we find this other position where there's no time.

The other thing that comes up with the idea of rebirth and these constant, such a long time that it takes to become an enlightened being is the question of why it takes so long. Why is it that once we've grasped the teaching, the *anicca dukkha anattā*, everything arises and passes away, we cause our own suffering and there is no self anymore—why isn't that enough? Why isn't that enough for us to move forward rapidly and find ourselves in a week or two fully liberated?

I remember a friend of mine who, when he first heard about Buddhist teaching and Nibbāna and all that, he decided to do a course. And if you think about it, when you go on a course, at the end of the course, you achieve what you get, what you went in for, and you get a certificate. So he presumed that by the end of the week he'd have grasped this idea of nirvana and he'd be away. And he told me, as the week wore on and the time came for him to leave, there was this growing sense of despair and disappointment. Later on he was able to overcome that, of course, and continued his practice.

But the fact that we have this idea or this hope that things might progress very quickly is undermined by our practice. We find it hard, we find it difficult. And surely the reason is that our conditioning is so deeply ingrained and we keep falling back. Every time we progress a little bit, we then fall back a bit. So here we're working very hard for a couple of weeks, a month, a whole year, and then we go out, and before we know it, we slip back into the old ways. And so all the old conditioning gets lighted up again.

So it's a case of recognising that it's going to take quite a time to develop enough momentum to keep moving forward at a pace which seems to us obvious. Often you can only really look back over a good space of time, maybe five, ten years, and say, oh yes, I have progressed. But if you look back over a week, it does seem appalling. I put all this work in and we don't seem to be getting very far.

So it's a case of, again, that sense of realism, really, a sort of humility about ourselves. There was a very famous Hindu saint in Sri Lanka whose saying was, the spiritual life was one step forward, two steps back. So you can see it's even, in all traditions, it's understood to be difficult. And it's a case of building up these *pāramīs*, these virtues within us, and that takes time.

The other question, of course, when we go back to this archetype and exemplar, is the fact that there must be something in us which already knows that it needs to seek liberation. These stories which talk about eons and eons and eons and going back to Dīpaṅkara Buddha many world systems ago, from an archetypal point of view, is suggesting that within us, at all times, there has been that seed that wants to find out its own true nature.

When Buddhism developed through the Mahāyāna, of course, it became known as the embryo of the Buddha. And the embryo of the Buddha, through the practice, through these constant rebirths, finally becomes the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata Garbha, the embryo of the Tathāgata, becomes the Tathāgata. So the idea that there is something in us which is seeking liberation is presumed within the practice.

And this, of course, is in the Buddha's own life, in his growing dissatisfaction with the way he was living. So, in a sense, whether the Buddha had arisen or not, we would have been seeking, we would have been, in our own way, seeking our own liberation.

So that then now brings us to his descent into his mother's womb. And I wonder if I might not have too much time to do this. I suppose the last... The last thing to say before I go on to, because this will take two or three talks to finally get through his life and just see what we can glean from it.

Just to go back on the whole idea of the Buddha being an archetype and an exemplar. The idea that he was an actual human being and that we as human beings therefore have the same capacity to attain exactly what he attained and how that rises in us, that inner faith and confidence about our own practice. So when you have doubts about yourself—everybody else can do it, but I can't. I'm special that way. So remind yourself that, in fact, the capability of becoming fully liberated is there within you. And to ponder that, to ponder that, to really sit within that inner confidence.

The idea of a relationship that we have towards a teacher as an authority or in authority and how those two can become confused and how we must maintain that certain distance within ourselves, that certain capacity to constantly reflect upon our practice and make sure that we know what we're doing.

The idea of time, time being only a figment of the imagination, it's only the way that we look at things, experience things. And that if we can, as it were, stand outside the process, which is exactly what we're doing when we're sitting, standing outside the process. Remember that everything is being created by our own minds, even though the world out there has some reality. The reality that we experience is only being created by our own minds. So to be able to sit back and take that position within ourselves and to watch our minds and to watch the flow of events within our minds immediately pulls us out of this idea that time is circular or that it's going anywhere. That is another position.

And to have the patience to work with it, not to presume that things are going to happen too quickly. So I hope my words have been of some assistance and that before very long you will join the Arahats and become fully liberated.

CHAPTER 32

Bodhisatta's Birth to Renunciation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46 min

In this contemplative talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma continues his series on the Buddha's life, introducing the Benedictine practice of lectio divina as a model for spiritual reading—approaching sacred texts not for intellectual accumulation but for heart-level absorption. He traces the Bodhisatta's journey from his birth under the sāla trees at Lumbinī, through his luxurious upbringing, to the existential crisis that led to his renunciation.

The talk examines key themes including our relationship with nature (noting the Buddha's connection to trees at birth, enlightenment, and death), the debt we owe our parents, and the fundamental tension between worldly life and spiritual aspiration symbolized by the prophecy of the cakkavatti (wheel-turning monarch) versus the sammāsambuddha. Bhante offers a nuanced understanding of nibbidā—typically translated as 'disgust' but better understood as 'weariness'—that quality of having had enough of sensual pleasures without aversion.

Particularly valuable is Bhante's detailed guidance on investigating pleasure through mindful eating, distinguishing between satisfaction (which increases craving) and contentment (a quality of the nibbānic mind). He connects the Buddha's encounter with the four signs—sickness, old age, death, and the ascetic—to our own existential struggles, drawing parallels with Camus's Sisyphus to illuminate the first noble truth of dukkha. The teaching emphasizes that facing fear directly, rather than seeking comfort in beliefs about afterlife, brings us closer to liberation.

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

I wanted to continue with the Buddha's life, and there's something I should have mentioned in the last talk, but better late than never: the idea of spiritual reading as opposed to the way we would normally read.

Normally we read with an effort to accumulate knowledge, trying to gather information. But spiritual reading—reading for spiritual purposes—was developed best, I think, by the Benedictines. They had three methods called Lectio, Meditatio, and Contemplatio.

One reads an inspiring book—say a book by Ajahn Chah or something written from the heart rather than an academic text, although even academic books can inspire. You read it as if you're reading poetry or listening to music. You're reading along and of

course it's going in. Every so often there will be a paragraph, a sentence, or a phrase which seems to hit, to catch you. What you do is keep repeating that until you've absorbed it, like you might listen to a piece of music over and over again or read a poem repeatedly. You're not thinking about it. You're allowing the heart to grasp it—an intuitive feel.

When you feel you've had enough of that, you stop still. Maybe some thoughts come around it, some ideas. You can follow them for a little while and develop them. Then you just drop them and fall into silence. Then you go to the next passage.

What you may find is that it has an inspiring effect. It makes you want to go and sit. And it's interesting because it pops out when you're talking every so often. You haven't tried to remember it, but it's there, more deeply absorbed. In a sense, that's the purpose of all art: to allow us to re-experience in our own way what somebody else has experienced.

T.S. Eliot called it the objective correlative. What he meant by that, as I understand it, was that I have an experience and I want to pass it on to you. I have to find some symbolic way in which your heart and mind can communicate with mine. So I have an idea—say, music. It comes out as a feeling, say joy. Joy comes up in the heart and I'm a musician, so I want to express that joy through a certain medium.

And it's specific culturally, isn't it? Unless you've listened to Chinese or Japanese music or even Indian music, you've got to get into that symbolism, that way of expressing these particular emotions and understandings. That way, two people can communicate at a deeper level than just an intellectual one. If I say I'm depressed, that's one thing. But if I write a piece of music that makes you depressed, then we have some deeper communication.

So when I'm going through the life of the Buddha here, I'm really just allowing thoughts to arise in that way and seeing what comes up. Often when I go through the same material, different thoughts come up because other information from somewhere else has come in, and other feelings arise. Every time I reread the life of the Buddha, there's always something new that comes up for me around it.

This isn't an academic approach. Whether it's history or myth is in a sense immaterial, because it lies there within the Buddhist tradition as a sort of archetype, as an exemplar whom we're following. And anyway, I'm not an academic—I'm a would-be academic. So you have to take everything I say with a pinch of salt.

We got to the point where the Bodhisatta was about to be born. He was born somewhere around 2,300 to 2,500 years ago. When you consider that length of time, and you consider how many religious leaders have probably appeared, started something, and then their teaching has disappeared—one example would be the Jains. If you look at the ancient maps, the Jains were just about as numerous at some point, maybe even more numerous than Buddhists in India. But somehow they fizzled out and are now down to somewhere around three million, which in the population of India is very small. This doesn't mean that the teachings of the Nigantha were wrong, but there's obviously some feeling there of fading out. It may grow again. But there are lots of little religions, especially these days with gurus popping up here and there—that sudden rush of interest, it builds up, and then it slowly dies away.

So when you think that this is a 2,500-year-old tradition, it inspires faith and inspires a certain trust.

Remember that faith in our understanding is not a belief. A belief is putting faith in a statement. So if you were to say, "I believe the Buddha was enlightened," you're in great danger of being deluded. There's a difference between believing that statement and trusting it. And in a sense, we don't know, do we? We don't know what he was talking about until we get there. And when we get there, we don't know whether it's the end. There may be something more. Who knows?

So it's a case of trusting, and the trust grows as we practice because we get the benefits of it. That leads us towards the goal, and hopefully we get a peek of it, a little touch of it. At that point, faith becomes immovable because now we've had a taste of that end we're moving towards.

When we consider that for 2,500 years millions of people have been practicing in this way, have been contemplating the life of the Buddha, and it's affected them, and cultures have grown around it—this is part of the basis of our faith. The fact that it's been such a long and deep tradition, and that it's spread across cultures. Obviously similar to Christianity and Islam, which have been able to go far beyond their cultural bounds and move into different cultures, being developed by them in their own way. There is, I think, a trust that comes with something which has such an ancient history.

So in the sense of this recollection, thinking of that raises a feeling of faith, raises a feeling of trust. And you stay with it. You delight in it. Remember that part of our practice is going through all this difficult material. But the other part is developing what is beautiful in us. When something joyful comes up, don't kick it out. Don't say, "Oh, where's all my depression and anxiety?" When you're reading in the library or listening

to a tape and suddenly you get this lovely pīti come up, this joy around the teaching, this interest—then stop the tape, close the book, and just stay with it. Let the heart absorb it. Don't rush through it.

That age, of course, just as an aside, was quite an age for human beings because at the same time there was Moses, Lao Tzu in China, Socrates. It's known in the history books as the Axial Age. Something happened in human consciousness. Something moved, something turned. And from that you can say history begins. Written history, the history that we know, actually begins around that time. History in India begins with the life of the Buddha, frankly. That's when it begins. History in the sense of facts begins.

So anyway, he's born, and being a very advanced being, he's chosen his mother and father, and seems to have chosen rather well. His father is a local potentate, and his mother also belongs to a family which is rich and powerful. He's got the good kamma there. And as you know, she wants to go home to have her child, and he's born under these sāla trees on the way. She gives birth in the park at Lumbini.

So this is the theme, isn't it? The Buddha and nature. He's born under a tree, he's enlightened under a tree, and he finally dies under a tree. And that connection with nature—something that in our society you can obviously lose, especially living in a city.

I remember I was once at a meditation center and this little chick had fallen on the ground. It had fallen out of a nest. And being a townie, I just looked at it and wondered what to do. I'm looking at this chick thinking, "Now, what do I do with this?" So I went to pick it up and put it on the wall just in case the cat would take it. And as I bent down to pick it up, it bit at me and I leapt out of my skin. This tiny little bird scared me to death. So eventually I did finally get it on the wall, and I don't know what happened to the little thing. And I was saying afterwards, probably if I'd found that in the town, I'd have stamped on it and put it in the bin.

That's how detached you can become from living beings and nature.

So again, it's a case of simply recollecting on these things and what nature means to us. Walking in nature, being close to it, hugging a tree occasionally. How close are we to the ground, to the actual earth that we live on? Do we ever sit and consider how we are utterly dependent on what the earth is giving us in terms of the produce of the ground? The air that we breathe. The water that we drink.

And that understanding of the body being in this constant change—it's like a double-edged fountain with stuff coming in through one aperture and then escaping through all the rest. You get the feeling of the body not being at all static, but in a state of flow. It's digesting and giving away, receiving and digesting and giving away. You get this feeling of being a little bit part of that process that we see in nature.

Then, of course, there's the consideration of the importance of our parents. The Buddha chose these two people—well, I doubt if we chose the people whom we ended up being born to. Just to recollect what we owe our parents. Usually we hold on to the more sticky, bad memories that we have of them, but when you consider what our parents actually did for us, then you come to the conclusion of the Buddha: that even if you were to carry your mother and father on your shoulders all your life, you would not have repaid them their gift. Even if they kicked you around a lot, you're still here. You made it.

Parents being so much part of our makeup—even the little habits we have, just the way that we do things, we pick up from our mother and father. That intimacy we have, especially with our mothers. And then, of course, his mother dies within a week. One wonders what effect that might have had on a week-old baby. We know that the intimacy is already there in the womb. The child actually knows the mother's voice, the feel of the mother. Having tasted her milk and got close to her, and then suddenly there's a change. There's a change of environment. And although it's her mother's sister who takes over, one wonders how that early child would have been affected by that.

Knowing later on what identity crisis he goes through, his existential crisis with sickness, old age, and death, there's a suggestion from our own depth psychology that this was the beginning of his suffering in terms of that awakening to loss. Never mind the birth process.

So now he's born, and the next thing is that he is recognized by the seer, the ascetic Asita. The ascetic says he's either going to be a world-conquering monarch, or he's going to be a fully self-enlightened being.

This business of the world-conquering monarch is like an alter ego that runs through the scriptures. There's always a picture of this monarch who rules the world out of the Dhamma, by way of the precepts. It runs almost concurrent with the idea of the Buddha being the fully self-enlightened being. In other words, if he hadn't chosen that path, this is what he would have done. He would have set his horse loose—this is the way it was done—and followed his horse, and wherever the horse went, he'd have conquered, and eventually the whole world would have been brought under his Dhamma rule.

The story about the Chakravartins is that finally one of them doesn't keep the precepts, and the whole thing begins to collapse. There's one discourse which is rather interesting from a modern point of view—well, from any point of view, but specifically these days—and that is that poverty is the root of social evil. That's what the particular discourse says. And that's something we can think about.

But this idea of the split within us, between the worldly life and the spiritual life—that stays with us all the way, doesn't it? That stays with us all the way. Not to say that we're going to become world-conquering monarchs, but there's always that pull towards the world. What is the world? It's riches, isn't it? Riches, power, fame, and sensual pleasures—the pleasures of life.

And so even here, when you're doing your meditation and you get that feeling—which is not sustainable from the body's point of view—that you might have a cup of tea and there's no need for it, then you might say, "Oh, there's the world-conquering monarch." I have to let go of that, and then get back onto your seat. If you consider that there's always that split within us—one part renouncing the world and one being dragged away into it—it's just good to see it in these terms.

So here the Buddha has been prophesied that he's going to take the one path or the other. And now he's brought up in a very worldly way. Once his father knows that he could shoot off and become an ascetic, he definitely doesn't want that. He wants him to follow him in the family and build up the empire. He surrounds him with pleasures, basically. This is the tale. But I would have thought that his particular group, the

the warrior caste, the Kshatriya caste, which were the dominant caste in that part of India. As you move towards what is now Bengal, it would have been the Brahmins. But in his part of India, it was definitely the warrior caste which were the top caste.

That's why you'll see him always taking the mickey out of the Brahmins in the scriptures. He always says, "Well, a true Brahmin does this and does that. He doesn't do this." He never talks about the warrior caste—the true warrior caste is always the Brahmin. So he's knifing occasionally, in, of course, a very compassionate way, I'm suggesting. It's usually Brahmins that are approaching him when he's talking about Brahmins.

So he's there in his palaces, and we go through this whole business of an identity crisis. It's very interesting, really, from the point of view of the general growth of our psychology. He's married around about the age of sixteen—this is the myth, which would have been normal in those days. We know in India you get married pretty soon. And somewhere in his mid-twenties, I would have thought, this happens. And this hap-

pens, I think, to a lot of people. It's the first sort of crisis in life about letting go—like youth is passing. There's something within the person which is saying, "Actually, let's get serious."

So it's usually around about twenty-five onwards that people get married, they get a job, and they stop being fools. And they think more about what they can get out of society. And this carries on, doesn't it, until the midlife crisis when you're looking for a bridge to throw yourself off.

In that time of the age of twenty-five, I'm not at all surprised that he suddenly begins to waken up to the reality of life itself, having had such a good time for twenty-five years—sex, drugs, and rock and roll. And this crisis has two parts, which is rather interesting.

The first part is this: he's had a good old party, and there's a disgust that comes up. This is the story of Gautama Buddha, and it's the Jataka—it's one of the tales, and it's creative. It's got some lovely passages. And here it's describing how he woke up after this night, and this is what he saw:

As the Bodhisattva woke up and sat cross-legged upon the couch, he saw those women —see, these are the women who had been enticing him and dancing—who had lain aside their musical instruments and were sleeping, some of them with saliva pouring out of their mouths, some with their bodies wet with saliva, some grinding their teeth, some talking in their sleep, some groaning, some with gaping mouths, and some others with their clothes in disorder, revealing plainly those parts of the body which should be kept concealed for fear of shame. He saw the disorder in which they were and became all the more detached from sensual pleasure. The large terrace of his mansion, magnificently decorated and resembling the abode of Sakka, king of the gods, appeared to him as an existence, seemed to him a house in flames. He made the inspired utterance, "Alas, this is beset with obstacles, alas, it is constricted," and his mind was greatly drawn towards renunciation.

Now, unfortunately, it stresses the business of disgust. And to me, that's always been not a very good word. They often talk about, they translate this word *nibbidā*, which also you'll see comes up in one of the sermons—vipassanā knowledge is *nibbidā*. For some reason, they always describe it as disgust.

Now, to me, the word disgust always has an aversion to it. But if one were to enter the spiritual life with aversion, then obviously there's some feeling there of pushing away, of not wanting. And that will come back upon you because you have to face that disgust. You have to go beyond disgust.

Sometimes it's translated as boredom. But I think the real word in English is *weariness*. Weariness. When you've done something often enough which has brought you pleasure, you get weary. You might listen to the same piece of music and get a lot out of it, and then you become weary of it. It's like you've had enough of it.

And one of the things that you might have experienced is, for instance, playing tiddlywinks with a child. I don't know what you call it in the States—it's just flicking little things into a pot. And a three-year-old might come to you and say, "Come and play tiddlywinks." So because you want to communicate and you enjoy being with the three-year-old—they're delightful little beings—you play tiddlywinks. And after a good ten or fifteen minutes of tiddlywinks, when all the little things are in the pot, you think it's been a good little game in your way. But the kid's jumping up and down saying, "More! More! More!"

And suddenly you find yourself saying, "Well, I've got to get on, I've got to do this," because another game would definitely make you feel weary.

So it's that sort of quality—if you can get the idea of world weariness, like you've had enough. Enough of trying to get rich, enough of getting into the rat race, enough of worrying about this, worrying about that. And it's not that you're disgusted with it or angry with it. It's just that you've had enough.

I had a friend who was something of a jazz follower, and he went along to this jazz concert. Partway through, there just came this sense of weariness. It wasn't disgust. It was just, "Enough." And that was it. He didn't need it again.

So there's something about staying with a pleasure. Be careful that you don't push pleasure away out of fear, but actually experience the pleasure fully. If you have an obsession with something—like food, say you're a chocoholic—take a piece of chocolate and really nibble at it. Make every nibble worth its salt. Completely taste it, let it melt around your tongue, experience it fully throughout your mouth. Do everything you can to get the fullness out of that. And you may find that after one piece, you've actually had enough.

Because normally speaking, when we're obsessed with something, when we're addicted to something, we're feeding into something else. We're trying to feed something deeper. And when you see how unsatisfying that chocolate can actually be, one becomes weary of chocolate.

I always remember during student days one tends to drink a bit. And I went through this period of getting absolutely paralytic. I don't think you have this syndrome in the United States so much, but in Britain we have what's called binge drinking. You just drink and drink until you drop. I know people on the continent seem to be getting into it now, which isn't a very good thing.

But I remember waking up—literally I woke up in the gutter. I woke up in the early morning and my head was in the gutter, my body lying on the pavement. I turned over and thought, "Oh my God, this is terrible." I got up with this throbbing head, feeling sick. The closest place to me was a graveyard, so I entered into the graveyard and lay on top of a grave because I was feeling so awful.

And it slowly dawned upon me that the suffering I was getting from the pleasure wasn't worth it. It wasn't worth getting that drunk. So I set myself this task: the next time I'd get tipsy, but I wouldn't go over the top. And to my surprise, I really enjoyed myself. I came off all that binge drinking and still have a decent liver.

Sometimes there's a lovely little poem from Blake which I was trying to find. He says it so beautifully—that the road to salvation is often through the road of excess. In other words, you get to this point where you've saturated yourself so much with something that you just don't want it anymore. You're utterly weary with it.

So when it comes to pleasure, especially here, make it a real exercise in food to get in contact with what pleasure actually is. Get in contact with the tongue. When you approach the food, get in contact with the body. There's hunger there, and this hunger is mixed. It's both a natural appetite coming from the body, but there's also greed there—a seeking of happiness in food, a seeking of relief. I mean, after that sitting, you really want to have some happiness. So there's this seeking of happiness in the food, and that's greed.

As you approach the table and put food on your plate, just be aware of how much you're putting. Be aware of the feelings and the contact you're making with the food, the way the mouth is salivating. Remind yourself you can always go for seconds. Then when you're sitting in front of the plate, just wait.

Get in contact with the body and just feel that magnet. You want to become the food. What did we have today? Ghetto? You want to become that food. And then, mindfully making that intention, lifting, scooping, lifting. And as that food touches the tongue, you get this amazing explosion of delight.

Now stay with that, stay with that at that physical level, and make it very clear to yourself. This is taste, this is the physicality, the basic ground upon which all my happiness rests. There's two inches of skin on top of the tongue. At this moment, my happiness is dependent on that. And I'm chewing, I'm feeling the texture of it, and I'm actually feeling the sensations of pleasure.

What is pleasure? That's the question. What is pleasure? It's not a question of trying to describe it, but of direct experience—the tongue in delight. And then when that's really clear in your mind, when you've penetrated it, you might take a few bites—sometimes even at the beginning, it depends how you want to tackle this—and you can come away a little bit and see that it's surrounded with this joy. That's the mind, the heart. It's delighted in this food.

And then if you stay off it like that, especially if you just leave the fork on the table and stay there looking at the food, you can see that there is this desire for the sensual pleasure, this desire to eat more. Somehow what was being satisfied when we were eating now becomes like a magnet, like a drawer, sucking you into the plate.

If you can just stay with that—and all we're doing is investigating. Because remember, part of it is natural. Part of it is appetite. You've got to eat. Just stay with it.

And then as you keep eating and investigating these three qualities—the basic sensual stimuli coming into the brain, which the mind is working with to produce an idea: spaghetti, lettuce. What are the sensations it comes up with when it says spaghetti, lettuce? And you're aware of the delight. Delight in food—there's nothing unskillful about that. The heart should respond with delight to things.

But there is something twisting it, something putting a kink in it—that consciousness wanting to seek delight, to somehow identify with it, to grasp it, to attach to it. You might feel it as a sort of magnet, a draw, being sucked in. And if we keep eating like that, very mindfully, at some point we begin to get these really clear signals from the body: enough. Enough. Now, you can't always trust that, because if you have some emotion in the body, if you feel a bit anxious or something, then it's tight and it doesn't take all that much food. But let's say, generally speaking, you are relaxed, you're in a decent mood. The body begins to give you these signals: enough, enough.

Now normally we override that and just go for the cream cake. But here, because we're strictly doing our meditation, we hang on in there and we feel the override more deeply. More. And you hang on in there. You wait, and wait, and wait, right to the very end of that. Right to the very end.

What we want to make a distinction between is the satisfaction—to use that word—the satisfaction of eating something, of fulfilling desire. That satisfaction, remember, increases our attachment, increases our desire, and after a little while we want more, more, more. So that's satisfaction.

And then there's contentment, which is when the mind is not in a state of desire. The practice is to taste those two as quite separate experiences, and to know that contentment is a figure of the nirvanic mind. One of the qualities of

the unconditioned mind is that there is no desire. So we can experience that by watching right to the end point when the desire just goes out, right at the end. Like a light on a wick, it just goes and it's out. And then just catch that peace in the mind, that contentment.

When the Buddha is asked—when somebody complains to him, a deva complains and says, "Look, this training is very hard." He says, "Well, it is. But people do it, and they attain liberation. And Nibbana." And the deva says, "Nibbana, yeah, but so what?" And the Buddha says, "Well, when you get liberated, you are contented and with it happy." *Tutti sukha vahati*—you are contented and with it happy. So he's describing to this person his state of mind: contented and with it happy. That's the state of his heart—at peace, contented, happy.

Now, we can begin to taste that in these moments when especially desire has been very strong and we just watch it, feel it just dying away because we're not feeding it. And of course the added benefit of that is that we get over our obsession with food.

The next thing that moves the Buddha-to-be are what's known as the four signs, sometimes the three signs. You remember the story—he's out hunting three times, and he comes across a very sick person, a very old bent-over person, and a corpse. And in some stories, an ascetic sitting under a tree, in which case there's that hope: maybe there's a way out of this suffering.

So here he's entering into what we would call these days an identity crisis, some sort of existential crisis, a sort of feeling of the absurd. If you say to yourself that at the end of this life there is complete disappearance, complete annihilation, that's it—you're stuck with this terrible fact that we're conscious and we're suffering. The idea of suffering becomes absurd. It becomes ridiculous. It becomes unreasonable, beyond reason.

I thought to bring along the myth of Sisyphus, whom some of you might know. Going back to ancient Greek mythology, Sisyphus promoted navigation and commerce but was avaricious and deceitful. He killed travelers and wayfarers, and from Homer on-

wards Sisyphus was famed as the craftiest of men. When Thanatos—Mara, the king of death—came to fetch him, Sisyphus put him in fetters so that no one died, till Ares came and freed Thanatos and delivered Sisyphus to his custody.

But Sisyphus was not yet at the end of his resources. Before he died, he told his wife that when he was gone, she was not to offer the usual sacrifice to the dead. So in the underworld, he complained that his wife was neglecting her duty, and he persuaded Hades to allow him to go back to the upper world and expostulate with her. But when he got back to Corinth, he positively refused to return—until forcibly carried off by Hermes. It's a lovely story.

And of course, finally, he has to go to hell. He's in hell because he's been a bad boy. And his job is to roll a boulder up a hill. When it gets to the top, it rolls back down. So he's got to roll it back up. That's his job for eternity.

Albert Camus, one of my favorite writers—a French existentialist—actually wrote a book on Sisyphus, in which this became a motif for the absurdity of life. If you really, really believe all there is, is annihilation, why get up in the morning to roll that boulder up the hill, go to sleep, let it roll down again, and the next morning roll it back up?

When he was absolutely at one with this idea of the absurdity of suffering—which I think the existentialists understood very well; they definitely understood the First Noble Truth—he said that the only dignified way to approach this problem was to commit suicide. That was his answer. Luckily, he did not have to follow his own thought too far, because he sadly died in a car crash in 1956. He didn't have to take his logic into action, you might say.

So this idea of death—especially death, the whole process of dying, of illness, of growing old and then dying—unless there is some understanding, you have to really face the whole thing of annihilation.

Last week, when I was answering a question about afterlife and rebirth and all that sort of stuff, one thing I like to say is that in terms of the Buddhist teaching, the people who don't believe anything's going to happen when they die are, in my estimation, much closer to becoming liberated than those who do believe. For the simple reason that when we believe something is going to go on, it comforts us. The self feels comfort in the fact that, "Oh, when I die, I shall be born. I'll be happy if I'm born a rat, as long as I'm born, as long as I keep going—this *I*."

And so there's never any facing of the collapse of the self, which happens at death. I mean, that's what's supposed to happen. And even Muhammad, I think, said: you have to die before you die.

And I think even Christ expressed something similar. "Unless you are born again"—he put it in a more positive way—"you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven." So there's something about facing the horror of that point of complete loss of self, which is death, that is part of the process of our liberation. The future Buddha was so shaken by this that he decided to leave home.

So in your meditation, when these fears come up—these fears of sickness, old age, and death—go into them. They've come as messengers from the gods. They're there to awaken us. And remember that it's all delusion. It's all symbolic in the mind. You must always go beneath the thought, beneath the image, to the viscera, to the actual mental state that's driving it. You have to go into that fear, feel it, get accustomed to it, get comfortable with fear, and really allow it to express itself.

Because this fear, remember, is always generated out of that delusion of self. As we become accustomed to fear, that's Mara—the expression of our fear, the expression of our delusion. As we become accustomed to it, the sense of self begins to disappear. The sense of self manifests through these negative states, but as we become accustomed to them, we see them. If you remember, when Mara attacked the Buddha, Mara had to slink away because the Buddha saw him.

Seeing and feeling those emotions, burying ourselves in them, seeing them, even going beyond the idea of an emotion, beyond the idea of a feeling, to the constituents themselves—the feeling of sickness, the feeling of tightness, the nausea, getting right down to the physical level—in so doing, it's a process of depersonalizing. You are depersonalizing the process. And that, of course, eventually relieves us, and hopefully we can stay steady in fear. Once we've lost our fear of fear, what is there to frighten us? And I shall quote your own very great president, Roosevelt, who said: What have we to fear but fear itself?

So I'd like to bring our talk to an end there. In one of our sessions I want to do an exercise rather than give a talk—an exercise on looking at the body, examining our relationship to the body, our feelings of disgust with the body. These are exercises that come out of the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse. And then toward the end, I'll move toward a little new age input of healing. I'll tell you when I'm doing it, so if you're not particularly attracted to that, you needn't come. Because somehow we have to find a way of making this deeply meaningful to us in ourselves, rather than it just being stories.

I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance to you, and I can only hope that even by the end of this course you will be fully liberated.

CHAPTER 33

Bodhisatta's Training to the Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 59 min

In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma continues his series on the Buddha's life, following the Bodhisatta from the great renunciation through to his awakening. The teaching begins by distinguishing true spiritual disenchantment from mere boredom—a crucial insight for practitioners. When we are truly disenchanted, the old pleasures no longer draw us, even when placed before us after time has passed.

The talk explores the Bodhisatta's training under Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, examining why mastery of the jhānas—while creating beautiful mental states—did not solve the problem of dukkha. Bhante explains that jhāna states, however refined, are conditioned and temporary; when they fade, the same old person returns with their unresolved suffering. The subsequent period of severe asceticism is also examined, along with the pivotal moment when the Bodhisatta remembers a childhood experience of natural, clear awareness—what Bhante calls satipaññā, awareness combined with intuitive wisdom.

The dramatic battle with Māra is recounted from the Jātaka Nidāna, presenting it as the final death throes of the self-structure, where the hindrances arise in full force. Bhante emphasizes that what defeats Māra is simply holding one's ground—the accumulated perfections (pāramī) that allow one to witness fear without being moved by it. The talk concludes with readings of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59), and the Ādittapariyāya Sutta (SN 35.28), along with the Buddha's victory verse (Dhammapada 153-154). Throughout, Bhante encourages practitioners to cultivate religious emotions—awe, gratitude, devotion, and rejoicing—as supportive qualities that give warmth and juice to the practice.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

For those of you who have just joined us, I've been using the story of the Buddha as a platform to talk about the Dhamma. The first talk was about him before he was born, in his previous lives, and we followed the story all the way up to the point where he was leaving home.

There's one thing I wanted to revisit from the great renunciation. Remember, what drew him out of the good life was getting fed up with pleasure. A thought occurred to me that we often get confused between boredom and dispassion—or disenchantment, disinterest, a spiritual state.

The real difference is this: when we get bored with something and go on a diet or fast from it, after not too long a time the craving comes back up again for the same old thing. That's not the feeling of disinterest that comes when a part of us has truly had enough of something. In that case, even though it's placed before us and time has passed, there's nothing drawing us to that old pleasure. That would definitely suggest a movement in the heart, moving away from the sensual life.

When we refer back to the disgust he felt after the party, when they were all hanging about looking terrible—if we stress the disgust, I think we're slightly off the point. It was the fact that there was no drawing towards it again, no pleasure to be had there, no happiness to be had there. On top of that, remember there were the four signs, the messengers of the gods: the sick person, the very aged person, the corpse, and the person sitting under a tree in some of the stories.

Then he makes the great renunciation. He leaves. There's that lovely little detail where he peeps in and sees his newly born son with his wife. He doesn't go towards them because that would again bring up all his doubts. This gives a human touch to what might otherwise seem like desertion. But he was simply empowered to go.

There are many times when people are called away from family life—in war and situations like that. When I was thinking about this, I remembered that somewhere in the 1980s, the British government decided to position American missiles at Greenham Common, and there was a huge uproar about that from a certain section of the population. It became an encampment taken over by women. Some of them were there for two years. I remember one woman being interviewed who had left a young family—not very young, they were ten, twelve, thirteen. So there are times when things are even more important than our families.

For the Buddha, or the Bodhisatta as he was then, there's that drawing, that calling. And there may be times in our lives when we get that feeling of wanting to go deeper into the practice. We have to honor that as best we can.

When I was in Sri Lanka, there was a young girl who would tell her father that in the evening, whenever he went to bed, she would go up to the deva realm. In the deva realm there were shrines where the Buddha and other beings would appear and give teaching. She was collecting notes for a book on the Buddha. The father, of course, would humor her. She wasn't six or seven—she was eight, nine, ten.

I think it was ten when she came to our monastery. She had gotten fed up with her parents not believing her. So one night she said to them, "I'm off now." And right there before their very eyes, she rose up and disappeared. The father and mother then thought this was very strange. When she reappeared, they went visiting monasteries with her and ended up at Kanduboda.

I wasn't there for the interview, but I heard the little cassette they made of it. She said exactly what I've said to you. She wouldn't bow to monks because she was an Arahant. When they asked her about meditation, she seemed to know what it was—there was no problem there. She said she'd come down really to look after her grandfather; that's why she'd taken rebirth.

The reason I mention this is that in the book she was writing, the Buddha turned back six times before he finally made the decision to cross the Rubicon and make the big detachment.

When you read the scriptures, you always get this coming in of what we might call the supernatural—that which is above what we would consider to be nature. These days, of course, we tend to dismiss all that. But it is right there within the scriptures. This is really just to contemplate that the spiritual life does ask us to renounce things that we truly love. It can be very difficult, but once that seed is within you, once you know you've got to go, then you've got to go.

So now he's left, he's cut his hair off, and his horse has died from sheer grief—poor old Kantaka. He's put on the rag robes and he goes off to his first two teachers, two yoga teachers: Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta.

Remember that his big quest is: Is there an end to suffering? Is there an end to unsatisfactoriness? Is there an answer to why we're conscious and why we should be suffering because we're conscious?

Both of these teachers train him in what we now call the jhānas.

So the first teacher, Alara Kalama, took him up to the third arupa jhana, and Udaka Ramaputa took him to the end. He completed the four rupa jhanas and the four arupa jhanas. On both occasions, his teachers were so taken by his adeptness at entering and

re-entering these jhanas that they both declared him their equal and invited him to come and teach alongside them. And on both occasions, he of course said no. The jhanas hadn't answered his fundamental problem.

So what is it about the jhanas that doesn't answer the problem of suffering?

When we practice jhana—and it's becoming more fashionable now—we should understand what we're doing. When I came into Buddhism, jhana practice was a definite no-no. You didn't do things like that. The Zen school I was in called it "ghetto Zen"—bad, bad Zen. And everybody else, from Ajahn Sumedho right through to the Mahasi tradition, rather put you off it. But these days it's coming back in, I think through the work of Leigh Brasington and especially perhaps Pa Auk Sayadaw.

So what is it about the jhanas that makes some schools avoid them? It's because the jhanas are about creating a state of mind, just as we do when we see a good film or have a good meal. You're trying to create a beautiful environment within ourselves. That's what it's about. Because that's where the pain is, that's where the suffering is—inside us. So we seek pleasure often, we seek distraction often, in order just to get away from the pain inside us. Even here in our meditation we might find ourselves walking simply because we just don't want to sit anymore, it's too painful. Even small things can be little distractions for us.

The jhanas are about developing a state of mind, and there are many ways you can do it. But why can this become a path that takes you away from the deeper practice? It's because when a person is truly adept at the jhanas, when they can just turn it on, that state stays with them all day. It's not that they go into deep absorption continuously, but the mental state stays with them. The teacher of jhana knows when a student is becoming adept—when even if you were to pull their ears and box them around the nose, they're still very happy. They're not touched by it because their heart is gleaming with happiness and joy. It's that telltale sign that the citta, the heart-mind, is being lifted up to that level.

People in ordinary daily life might do something similar, on a slightly different level. Somebody who is tremendously interested in what they're doing—their lives are empowered by that interest, or empowered by being in power. Business people who have a goal and are driving themselves toward it can often lift themselves to that level of energy and commitment whereby they never drop. Until, of course, the business fails. And then they drop.

And that really is the point about the jhanas. When the jhanas go down, what comes up is the same old Siddhartha Gautama. That's what he discovered—that while he was in this state and could maintain it, he actually hadn't rooted out his emotional problems. He could see deeply that when you come out of that state, you're back to where you were.

With that disappointment—and it must have been disappointing for him—we can presume that as a layperson in the palace he had explored all these things both theoretically, with the Brahmins and others, and that now he was into the practice. This was the practice that everybody said was where it's at. Remember, the idea of the jhanas wasn't simply to feel happy now. It was that when you're reborn, you get reborn in the jhana realms, and those last for eons upon eons, endless times. As you go up the jhana scale, you enter into the lower heavenly realms, then into the arupa realms, and finally into the great Brahma realms, where you can hang about for a very long time. But then, of course, it drops. However, because of your good karma, you probably only drop to being a human being, where you do the jhanas again, rev them up, and go back up. In terms of how people thought in those days about this constant round of birth and rebirth, at least that seemed to be a viable answer. It was much happier up there in those realms than in this one.

Anyway, he's disappointed with that, and the next thing he does is go off to practice these mortifications. Now, I've never been able to really find what the understanding behind the mortifications was. I've tried to look at it, but the only reason I can think of—which is also taken from the Christian tradition—is that the reason why we're unhappy is because of the body. It's the body that lets in images. It's the body that has greed. It's the body that has lust. We feel it in the body. So if we can somehow control the body, then this would liberate the mind.

All these things the Buddha did—he said he starved himself until he was down to a grain of oats or something every day. He got to the point where he could hold his spine through his stomach. That very fierce asceticism, I think, was based on this understanding: that if you reduce the appetite of the body, then somehow the citta is liberated.

Now, for those of you—I'm sure all of you—who have done a ten-day fast or longer, perhaps a month fast, you'll know that the first three days are absolutely horrible while the body's clearing out its rubbish.

But then after that, you do enter into this very clear, very easy state. And of course, no feelings of hunger because the body's eating itself. So in that clarity, it's much easier to do certain practices. And I've always presumed that that's what self-mortification is about.

Interestingly enough, the whole practice, if you look at the words, is actually about self-mortification, about the destruction of self. But here we're using it in that old form of some form of controlling the body.

For whatever reasons there were—and remember that some of these practices came from the other leader who was a contemporary elder of the Buddha, the Jain leader, who was definitely into these sorts of things. Of course, his idea rested on karma. His idea was that as soon as you do an action, you're creating more saṅkhāras. So you've got to stop doing. You've got to stop doing. So eventually the Jain saint starves themselves to death. That's the Jain way of doing things. And there's a presumption that the Buddha followed that a little bit just to find out what all that was about. But eventually, as you know, he ends up being very disconsolate and he just says it was just painful, that's all. He didn't seem to achieve anything at all.

So now we can imagine him coming to a point of despair. He's taken everything that the society has given him in his search, and it just seems to have come to a dead end.

In the story, of course, he's sitting on the roadside when a woman, Sujātā, comes along with a bowl of offering for the gods. She's going towards the shrine and she sees him—and scriptures are, you know, these apocryphal tales will be what they are. And of course she sees a god sitting by the road, a deva, and she honors him. But frankly, he must have looked pretty ragged and pretty awful. And as she's walking by, she must have thought, "Oh, this poor ascetic probably needs my rice pudding." So she offers this rice pudding—and somebody actually corrected me and said that was a British Raj invention. That is, there was no rice pudding. What there was, was a rice cake, which they have in Sri Lanka called kiribat. It's basically rice boiled in coconut milk, which is then boiled out and patted into a little block.

Now of course, if I had a choice, if I was in the Buddha's position there and had a choice, I'd definitely go for the British variety. And the reason for that isn't just facetious. It's because as he's eating this, or at some point close to that time, he remembers this point in childhood. And what he remembers is watching his father opening up the plowing season by doing some sort of plowing ceremony. And there's something about that watching, there's something about the way he's looking, which gives him an inspiration. Somehow he remembers being in a state, to use that word, which is different in quality to all the jhānas he's done and all the states that might have come up when he was doing the self-mortification.

I was walking through Birmingham Station in Britain, and as I was going up the escalator to the shopping mall, there was a great big poster up there with different pictures on it. And there was one picture which, as soon as I saw it, I almost shouted with

glee. And before they took me away, I was able to take a picture. This little picture is what I call satipaññā. And I think it's the closest thing I've seen as an image to that state of mind which arises, shall we say, either just before or just upon the seeing.

And this little baby—you see, all those eyes are completely open, completely absorbed in what... well, you can't tell if it's a she or he, you see. That's the other thing about satipaññā, isn't it? It's not been diversified. And of course, the mouth has dropped. Now, that relaxed jaw is a great sign to us that the thinking mind has stopped, because the connection between the tongue and the jaw is intimate. You may have seen that when you're thinking, there are these little vibrations on the tongue. It's already ready to move.

As children, we have that capacity, just that very simple capacity, especially until around the age of six or seven, of just being able to look. And I'm sure you had the bad experiences I had of having looked like that and your parents telling you to shut your mouth because you look gormless. And after that, you never look the same, which is very unfortunate. So if you ever see a child looking like that, you have to stop very still while the child is absorbed. And if you see a child doing that, there's a moment of complete silence, you see, and then suddenly the question: "What is it?" But it has to be absorbed first.

So, this quality of satipaññā. Now, in the jhānas, there's sati, awareness. In fact, right awareness. Well, it's awareness, shall we say. Awareness never leaves us.

It's there when we're asleep. I mean, something turns us over. Something pulls the blanket over us when we're cold. So it's not as though awareness goes or disappears completely. It's always there in some way. And when somebody practices jhāna, awareness is there—that's not the problem, you see. But it's this other quality that was missing, this paññā, this jñāna, this intuitive intelligence, that question mark. And that question mark is talked about in Zen as the great doubt. Not meaning that you're doubting the practice, but that wanting to know. That's what he remembers. That's what he remembers.

So this brings also to mind the importance of food. Keep that in mind.

Now, having made this discovery, really sort of enlivened by that, he's got a new tack, a new something to follow. He goes to find this place near the river Narañjanā where he's going to sit. And again, one of these lovely little apocryphal stories—he puts his bowl into the river and it goes upward, against the flow. And for those of you who come to my little morning talks, I pointed out that I once got a card which had a dead fish floating in the river and the title was "Only dead fish go with the flow." So if you think

of this magical moment, which is representative of the fact that the Dhamma will always go against our conditioning, the self-conditioning—it's always an uphill struggle, right? The small self, the lesser self, doesn't want to fight it. But you've got to go up, you've got to go against the conditioning all the time. And I'll try and spend a bit of time in one of these talks just revising some of the hindrances.

So now he's found himself a seat and he makes this wonderful great determination. In the scriptures it's expressed: "Let my skin, bones and sinews remain, and let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, but not until I attain the supreme enlightenment will I give up this seat of meditation."

Have you tried that? You can give it a go. It's sort of humiliating, but it's worth doing. Because then you see that to be able to make that sort of determination, he's really built up that power—resolution, forbearance, and all that sort of stuff. In fact, you might say he's come to a point where either he finds the answer to this, or he may as well not hang about. He may as well die. What's the point?

So at this point, of course, he gets the attack of Māra. And this book is the story of Gautama Buddha from the Nidānakathā, the Jātakas. I thought I'd read out this lovely battle so that you get the way these stories build up in that metaphysical, supernatural way. We've lost a lot of this in our over-rational culture, but it's a lovely scene.

So Māra has come. He's a devaputra, a son of the gods. He's not a devil from the hellish realm. He's somebody who entices people. It's like the Satan in Islam. When Ayatollah Khomeini called America "Satan," he wasn't thinking of it as an evil Christian devil. He was thinking of it as that which entices you away from the way of Allah.

So now Māra has come with all his armies. He's really wound up and he's going to attack the Buddha and get him off the seat, because he shouldn't be there. Māra should be there. The world is about the sensual world. It's not about getting enlightened. He's in the wrong seat.

"So then the Devaputra Māra raised a tornado, wishing to drive away Siddhartha with it. Instantaneously such gales rose from the east and other directions as would have shattered to bits mountain peaks of the height of half a yojana, two yojana, or three yojana, and could have uprooted shrubs and trees of the forest, and could have reduced to fragments the villages and townships of the neighborhood. But by the virtue and majesty of the great being, they lost their force, and on reaching the Bodhisattva they were not able to shake even the hem of his robe."

"Wishing to engulf him in water and slay him, he next caused a heavy downpour of rain."

By his great miraculous power, clouds gathered in hundreds of thousands, layer upon layer, and poured forth rain. The earth was hollowed out by the violence of the torrential downpour. A great flood came, submerging the treetops of the forest, but it could not moisten his robe, even to the extent of the little space on which a dewdrop could fall.

Next he raised a great shower of rocks. Large mountain peaks came swirling through the air, issuing smoke and flames. But on reaching the Bodhisattva, they turned into wreaths of heavenly garlands.

Next he raised a storm of missiles. Swords, daggers, darts and other weapons, single-edged and double-edged, came hurtling through the sky, smoking and flaming. But on reaching the Bodhisattva, they turned into heavenly flowers.

Next he raised a shower of burning coals. Embers the hue of Kimsuka flowers came flying through the sky and were scattered at the feet of the Bodhisattva, turning into heavenly flowers. Next he raised a storm of ashes. Red-hot ashes, glowing like fire, came flying through the air, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into sandal-wood powder.

Next he raised a sandstorm. Fine particles of sand came smoking and flaming through the sky, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into heavenly flowers. Next he raised a storm of mud. The mud came smoking and flaming through the air, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into heavenly ointments.

He next created a gloom which was as thick as when four conditions are found in combination. And on reaching the Bodhisattva, it disappeared as darkness that vanishes with the oncoming radiance of the sun.

It's lovely stuff. You can call it literature, I suppose.

And eventually, of course, he won't budge. So Mara then approaches him and asks this question. Remember, all this is being watched by the deities on the ridge of the universe—this is a square universe—continually raising their heads and craning their necks, looking out, saying, "Alas, ruined indeed is the handsome physical frame of Prince Siddhartha. What will he do?"

Then the great being told Mara, as he stood there claiming the throne accruing on the day of their enlightenment to Bodhisattvas who fulfilled their perfections, "Mara, who will testify to your having given away in charity?"

Mara stretched forth his hand in the direction of his army, saying, "All these are my witnesses." Instantaneously, the cry of one accord—"I am witness, I am his witness"—came from the followers of Mara, resounding like an earthquake.

Then said Mara to the great being, "Siddhartha, who will testify to your having given in charity?"

And the great being answered, "You have sentient beings as witnesses to your having given away in charity, but in this place I have no living being whatever to be my witness. Let alone the generosity I have practiced in all other existences—let this great and solid earth, non-sentient as it is, be my witness to the seven hundredfold great alms I gave when I was born as Vesantara."

And extricating his right arm from underneath the folds of his robe, he stretched it out towards the earth, saying, "Are you or are you not witness of my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vesantara?"

And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand echoes, as though to overwhelm the forces of Mara, saying as it were, "I was your witness to it then."

Then as the great being continued to reflect on the alms he had given as Vesantara, saying to himself, "Oh Siddhartha, you have given away vast charities and made the highest sacrifice," the elephant Girankala—which is Mara's elephant, one hundred and fifty yojanas in height—went down on its knees. And the followers of Mara fled in every direction. No two fled the same path; they ran in whichever direction lay before them, discarding their head ornaments and the clothes they were wearing.

So that's the great attack of Mara, put in a metaphorical way. And of course, those are the hindrances coming. Those are the final shaking of the self, which doesn't want to come off. And at root, it's fear, isn't it? When you get right down to the root emotion of delusion, it's fear—the fear of the loss of this idea of who I am. And that's what it's really portraying, trying to get across that. If you just hold your ground, it disappears. It turns. It changes. It just turns into its opposite.

What keeps him there, what keeps him able to resist the attack, is of course his perfections. Here it's the charity. But in our meditation, it's that ability to stand and to observe those reactions that we get when fear arises, to be with it and allow it to just be there, to get accustomed to fear. And if we can begin to lose our fear of fear, well, nothing can frighten us. But it's that ability to stand still. So even though this is a mythological way, it's a lovely sort of way of portraying what must be the final death throes of the self—that moment when it just disappears.

I'll try to go a bit more deeply into the hindrances another time. But I want to move on to what happens then. He is moving towards the Enlightenment now. And one of the things that I suppose has always been a little disappointing for me—because having been brought up in something like Catholicism, which in my experience was a happy religion (it doesn't go for everybody who is a Catholic), but also Christians and those in the Judaic tradition too—there is this sense of jubilation, this sense of rejoicing and blowing horns and music.

And when you remember this lovely music — say, of Bach's Alleluia Chorus or Handel's Messiah — it sort of lifts you.

Well, I always remember Buddha Day. Buddha Day is the big one. It's celebrating the founder. Everything that even this place here now is totally dependent on this being that existed 2,500 years ago. And so one wants to blow horns and whoop a bit.

So on these lovely Buddha days, especially — I'm thinking more of Kanda Bodha where I was most of the time — the only difference between Buddha Day and everything else was you lined up a bit earlier for food because there was more stuff around. And that was it. Then there were these terrible talks, and then you went away. And that was it.

I want to read out just one more piece, which at least shows you that in the literature there is this mudita, this wonderful sense of rejoicing at this great act. I remember visiting a very famous monk, he's died now, Ajahn Tate, who used to live right up on the Mekong River, at the top of North Thailand. They were building this meditation hall — I slept in it, actually — and on the wall, this artist was drawing a depiction of the Enlightenment. A more glorious picture you couldn't have come across. It was just full of action, like an exploding star with these beautiful colours. In a sense, sometimes we forget that. We forget that actually there's a point where you can rejoice and be happy and have a feast.

So here, just before he becomes enlightened, the gods know that Mara has been completely routed and the path is completely open for the Bodhisattva. The signs go up from one realm to another, and the whole of the thousand-world system is now agleam:

So the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the eastern ridge of the world sphere spread as far as the western ridge. Similarly, the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the western ridge, the northern ridge and the southern ridge spread as far as the eastern, southern and northern ridges respectively. And the radiance of the

banners and streamers hoisted on the surface of the earth remained in constant contact with the world of Brahma, and those held aloft in the world of Brahma penetrated to the very surface of the earth.

Flowering trees in ten thousand world spheres blossomed forth. Fruit-bearing trees were weighed down with clusters of fruit. Flowers that bloom on tree trunks, branches and creepers blossomed in their respective places. Lotuses on stalks sprang in clusters of seven, breaking through rocky surfaces and were heaped layer upon layer. The ten thousand world systems revolved and remained like a wreath of garlands tossed about, or like a well-arranged spread of flowers.

The intervening regions of eight thousand yojanas between the world spheres, which had not been lit before even by the radiance of seven suns shining together, became one mass of light. The great ocean, eighty-four thousand yojanas deep, turned into sweet water. Rivers ceased to flow. Those blind from birth were able to see objects. Those deaf from birth were able to hear sounds. Those crippled from birth walked on their feet. Bonds and fetters broke loose and fell apart.

So this rejoicing — he now makes the big breakthrough. That's the point of what we call his Enlightenment.

There's just a little thing I'd like to say before I leave this: religious emotions. What part do they play in our spiritual life? Especially in something like Theravada, it can get pretty dry, just doing your vipassana. But that sense of awe that we get, for instance, in the carol Silent Night — just letting the story of the Buddha come and getting that sense of awe, the brilliance, the amazing thing. And then shifting it over to consider the Dharma as an actual living force that runs through the universe.

Praise. Adoration. It's actually one of the objects of jhana meditation, contemplating the Buddha. You can get, it seems, to first or second jhana with that. And the sense of rejoicing that we just heard — to bring that up, a sense of rejoicing.

Then of course there's gratitude. Just that lovely feeling of gratitude, made more poignant because this cannot be repaid. You can't pay the Buddha back for what he did. In fact, you can't pay anybody back — that's an idea, paying somebody back. But just being able to receive the gifts. That's why we have this flow of what I call a gift economy — I read that somewhere — where people give each other gifts: the Dharma and sustenance.

And devotion. In the morning when I ask people to devote themselves —

Not so much a hard sort of giving yourself, but more like the heart wants to do it. You have to cajole yourself a little. You have to massage the heart to feel that way.

And one thing that I think especially we in the West have to begin to look at is this whole matter of bowing and what bowing actually means. Now, as you know, there are many ways to bow. The Tibetans do a full prostration. The Theravadans do this bowing like I do when I come in here. And then there's the Zen way, which is just bowing from the waist. And then some people simply come in and bow their head. And then again there's just that blink—it's just a suggestion of bowing.

Bowing, at first, always seems a bit strange. I remember when I first had to do it in Zen. I did it because everybody else did it, but I didn't really get into it for a long time. If you think of bowing as a body language, as a way of expressing these types of emotions, then it becomes a way of reinforcing the action of the heart. It's a way of actually giving it a vehicle in which to express these religious emotions. And these religious emotions are all bound up around faith and trust and the act of giving oneself to the practice. There's a sort of underbelly to it.

Now of course, to think that these practices alone get us to be liberated would be a silliness, but they're there as a support. Some people feel a need for that more than others. The more intellectual you are, the less you feel you need it—but probably the more you do need it. And to find a way of expressing that devotion in some sort of body language, I think you'll find very helpful.

The first time I went to Burma to work with Sayadaw U Janaka was the only time. After doing the old hard Mahasi practice in a hall, I got the opportunity to visit Rangoon. It was difficult to get let out; you had to have a good reason. So I gave him the reason that I wanted to buy religious books. At that time, to get religious books out of the country, you had to go from one government department to the next to get these bits of paper—the religious department, the censoring department, the export department. Of course it would take a whole day going to see these departments, and therefore I spent the last week wandering around Rangoon.

Walking into the beautiful big pagoda—the Shwedagon Pagoda, supposed to be one of the seven wonders of the world—I saw these people pouring water over Buddha rupas, bowing and mumbling. And I remember distinctly the sentence that came into my head. It said, "Well, I'm not a Buddhist." That immediate rejection of any form of ritual was almost obedient. It was cool and cold, just like that.

But as this whole idea of religious emotions came to me and slowly began to develop, the last time I was in Burma—which was in the year 2000 at Sayadaw U Pandita's place—I had again the opportunity to go to the Shwedagon Pagoda. And it's quite remarkable to find myself not quite pouring water over Buddhas, but hanging around in this lovely, limpid atmosphere.

There's a beautiful temple in Sri Lanka called Kelaniya, just outside Colombo, if you ever go. And if you go there on a full moon day, you can actually slice through the butter of devotion in the air. It's enormously beautiful, with people just wandering around the Bodhi tree and making their blessings and their offerings.

And you might say that what it does is it gives a glow to the practice. It gives a certain glow underneath. Most people try to do a bit of metta to soften the practice, but even these devotional things are very softening and give the practice just that little bit of juice sometimes—especially when it gets miserable, like the weather we've been having.

So these things that I've read out are really just examples of how the heart moves sometimes. Buddhism, generally speaking, will always veer towards that more wisdom base because it's centered on knowing, on this idea of perception, of discernment. But these little practices that we can do just put the heart in the right sort of position, so it moves with that desire to investigate.

So I thought that I would then just read out for you the three sermons which the Buddha gave after his enlightenment—just read them out because they're pretty straightforward. Remember that when he was enlightened, he left searching for his people. I'll come back to that in another lecture. But on this one here, I'd just like to read the discourse on the turning of the wheel of the Dhamma.

And I've done my own little bit with it so that it reads more smoothly, because sometimes it feels stilted.

So this is what I heard.

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Benares in the deer park at Isipatana. And the Blessed One addressed the group of five ascetics: "Venerable friends."

"Yes, venerable friend," those ascetics replied.

"Venerable friends, these two extremes should not be practiced by anyone who has entered the spiritual path. Firstly, the pursuit of happiness in sensual pleasure—this is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. And secondly, the practice of self-mortification, which is ignoble, unbeneficial and painful.

Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata has discovered the middle way. This gives rise to insight, to knowledge, leads to peace, experiential understanding, to enlightenment and nirvana.

And what is this middle way, awakened to by the Tathagata? It is this noble eightfold path: right view, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness, and right concentration.

Now this, venerable friends, is the first noble truth of unsatisfactoriness. Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Sickness is suffering. Being with what we dislike is suffering, and not being with what we like is suffering. In fact, not to get what we want is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of grasping—form, feeling, perceptions, emotion, thoughts, and consciousness—are all unsatisfying.

The second noble truth of the cause of unsatisfactoriness is the craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and indulgence, seeking happiness here and there. That is the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving to become, and the craving to annihilate.

And the third noble truth of the cessation of suffering is the fading away without remainder, the cessation of that craving, the giving up and relinquishing of that craving, and the freedom from it—non-attachment.

The fourth noble truth is the path that leads out of this unsatisfactoriness.

Now, venerable friends, in regard to these understandings that have never been known before, there arose in me the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the penetration, and the light—namely, that this is the noble truth of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be fully understood, and this noble truth has been fully understood. This is the noble truth of the cause of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be abandoned. This noble truth has been abandoned. This is the noble truth of the end of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be realized, and this noble truth has been realized. This is the noble truth of the path leading to the end of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be developed. This noble truth has been developed.

So long, venerable sirs, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths, as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects, was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, maras, and brahma, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. But now that these noble truths have been fully realized by me, it is so proclaimed. This knowledge and vision arose in me. Unshakable is the liberation of my citta. This is my last birth. There is no more renewed becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said. And those venerable friends delighted in what he had spoken. And while the discourse was being delivered, there arose in the venerable Kondanya the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dharma: whatever is subject to arising is all subject to passing away. And the Blessed One proclaimed, "Kondanya knows! Kondanya knows!" And that is how Kondanya earned his name, Añña Kondanya—the Kondanya who knows.

So that's when he went up and met with them. Remember that they first rejected him because they had this feeling that he'd been soft and gone off and eaten rice pudding—and that was the limit. So when he went back, they didn't particularly like him coming. They thought he was coming to tempt them. But in fact, it seems as though they were so taken by the way he looked that they were prepared to sit down and discuss these things with him. These scriptures, of course, were written after the event.

So then they all went off to get their alms round. And on the way back, having eaten their alms round, they all sat down and he gave them another talk. And this one is the characteristic of not-self.

This is what I heard.

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Benares in the deer park at Isipetana. And there the Blessed One addressed the group of five ascetics.

"Venerable friends."

"Yes, venerable friend," the ascetics replied.

"Form is not self. If form were self, then it would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to determine form: 'Let my form be like this. Let my form not be like this.' It would be the same with feelings, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, and even consciousness itself. If consciousness were self, we would be able to say, 'Let my consciousness be like this, let it not be like this.'

"Now I ask you, is form permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, venerable friend."

"And whatever is impermanent, is that satisfying or unsatisfying?"

"It does not satisfy, venerable sir."

"And is that which is impermanent, does not satisfy, and is subject to change, to be regarded as 'this is me, this is mine, this is myself'?"

"Not at all, venerable friend."

"Can we not say the same of feelings, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, and even consciousness itself?"

"Indeed, venerable friend," replied the five ascetics.

"So it follows that any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all form is to be correctly regarded as 'this is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself.' And the same goes for feelings, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and even consciousness itself.

"Now, venerable friends, when someone who has heard this understands in this way, they become disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feelings and perceptions, disenchanted with emotions and thoughts, disenchanted even with consciousness itself. And once disenchanted, they become dispassionate. And through this detachment, the citta is liberated. And when liberated, it realizes 'this is liberation.' And they come to know: birth is no more, the spiritual life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been done, there is no more returning to any state of becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said, and those venerable friends delighted in what he had spoken. And while this discourse was being delivered, the citta of those five ascetics were liberated from the floods through non-clinging.

So now we have five Arahats in the world.

I would like to read another short discourse as well. This is the one that T.S. Eliot writes about, somewhere in his poetry. It is the one describing burning. Here the Buddha is speaking to a thousand monks.

This is what I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Gaya, at Gaya's Head, together with a thousand monks. And there the Blessed One gave this discourse:

"All is burning. And what is this all that is burning? It is the eye that is burning, forms are burning, eye consciousness is burning, eye contact is burning, and whatever feeling is conditioned by that eye contact, whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fires of craving, the fires of aversion, the fires of delusion. Burning with birth, aging, sickness, and death. Burning with sorrow, pain, desolation, and despair.

"And so it is with all the senses: with hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. And the mind itself is also burning, burning with the fires of craving, the fires of aversion, the fires of delusion, burning with birth, aging, sickness, and death, burning with sorrow, pain, desolation, and despair.

"Now when a meditator, properly instructed, grasps this by direct experience, they become disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with eye consciousness, disenchanted with eye contact, and disenchanted with whatever feeling is conditioned by that eye contact, whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. And so it is with all the senses and the very mind itself. Once disenchanted with the sensual world as a source of happiness, the meditator loses interest. And through this dispassion, they become liberated. And with that liberation there comes this knowledge: there will be no more birth, the spiritual life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been done, there will be no more returning into states of becoming."

That is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's teachings. And while this discourse was being delivered, the hearts of those thousand monks were liberated from the taints through the way of non-clinging.

So, just to bring this to an end, I want to return to his victory verse, and then I shall chant it in Pali. We'll sit for a while in silence, and then we'll do the metta.

Sometimes I think we don't read the scriptures enough.

So now he's fully enlightened, he's broken through, he's awakened. And this is the victory verse that he told Ananda sprung spontaneously to him upon that awakening:

Seeking but not finding the house-builder, I have travelled from birth to birth countless times. Painful indeed is birth over and over again. But now, O house-builder, you have been seen. You shall not build another house again. Your rafters have been broken, your ridgepole demolished. My citta has attained the unconditioned and gone beyond any kind of craving.

Aneka jāti saṃsāraṃ sandhāvissaṃ anibbisaṃ, gahakārakaṃ gavesanto dukkhā jāti punappunaṃ. Gahakāraka diṭṭhosi, puna gehaṃ na kāhasi, sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā gahakūṭaṃ visaṅkhataṃ. Visaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ taṇhānaṃ khayamajjhagā.

CHAPTER 34

The Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h00

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines what the Buddha discovered during his awakening beneath the Bodhi tree and how this revelation formed the foundation of Buddhist practice. Drawing from the traditional account, he explores the Buddha's three insights: knowledge of past lives, understanding of kamma and rebirth, and the destruction of the āsavas (mental influxes). The talk delves deeply into the Four Noble Truths as the Buddha's fundamental diagnosis of human suffering, explaining how dukkha arises through our wrong relationship with the phenomenal world.*
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> *Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the three characteristics of existence - anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness), and anattā (not-self) - as practical tools for investigation rather than mere philosophical concepts. Using vivid analogies and practical examples, he explains how meditation practice involves taking the position of objective observer to see through the delusion of selfhood. The discussion includes detailed exploration of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) as the psychology of suffering, showing how ignorance leads to the cycle of craving, grasping, and becoming.*
>
> *The talk emphasizes that liberation comes not through force of will but through the gradual undermining of wrong view through Right Awareness (sammā sati) and wisdom (paññā). Bhante concludes by pointing to that transcendent sphere beyond the six sense doors - the goal toward which all Buddhist practice aims.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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

For those of you who listened to my earlier talks, I'm following the life of the Buddha and we got as far as his enlightenment and then we went into details about Mara, the evil one. I had only meant to take one talk over the hindrances, but I ended up taking two, and I haven't finished them yet. I don't want to overplay that, so I'm going to leave the other ones—aversion, doubt and all that, which I'm sure you know anyway.

I wanted to move on to the question of: so what was his awakening? What was it that he discovered? And how did that translate into practice? I'm not going to say anything which is going to surprise you, but at least it's just an occasion to reflect on what his awakening was all about.

If we go back to that point where he's sitting by the roadside and the rice pudding turns up, and this enlivens him and fills him with great glee—as you know rice pudding does—he went off to make the great determination to sit beneath the tree, saying that he would not rise from this posture even if he were to die. So he sat there, and he went to sit, remember, with that memory of the child—the child who was watching his father doing the ploughing ceremony.

The ability of the child just to receive, especially around about the age of one onwards to about six, just that ability to let the jaw drop and the eyes wide open. And just that entire receptivity with no mentation at all. There's nothing guarding anything coming in because there's not enough history, there's not enough experience to block or to play around with.

So seeing his father doing the ploughing ceremony was a surprise, it was a joy for him. And with that, what we now understand to be *sati*, that awareness, *satipaññā*, with intuitive intelligence, just that receptiveness—which is the definition of equanimity, remember: the ability to receive without reaction—he went and sat. And luckily for him, and for us of course, he finally cracked the puzzle, his koan: Is there an end to suffering?

The context of his awakening—it's the normal one that's, shall we say, accepted—was his insight into past lives, his own past lives. His insight, or his being able to see how people were reborn according to their moral or immoral actions. And that he knew that the *āsava* were completely destroyed. The floods—we'll come back to them.

So there are these three things that he understood. The first one: when he was able to review his past lives and understand how he got to where he was then, it became a personal understanding, you might say a personal law. But when that ability to go beyond himself, to see other beings arising and passing away according to what became the law of *kamma*—what had been a personal law then becomes a cosmic law. And that's what he taught. He taught the law of *kamma* and the law of rebirth.

And the *āsava*, these floods, as they're called—there are three of them. Normally there are three, then somebody added a fourth one in the later scriptures. The first one is, of course, the flood of desire for sensual pleasure. Here, "sensual" you have to stretch out a bit to include emotional—emotional pleasure. It's the pleasure of the senses which includes the mind and heart, so it's the whole pleasure syndrome: seeking pleasure in the phenomenal world or in the transient world. And the second one is, of course, the desire to become, to continue, to keep reappearing as myself.

And the third one is ignorance. And the ignorance was then reinforced by the idea of this flood of wrong view. So in a sense, the wrong view is an expression of ignorance as to why they added on—I don't know. But those three were the basic *āsava* that he had destroyed.

These *āsava*, these floods—it's like the image that I have is of a painting, of a watercolour, where the artist first puts a wash across the back. Sometimes you get watercolours on a black background, don't you? Or at least I've seen them like that. They might use oil, I can't remember. But anyway, they put a wash on the back, you see. And this wash gives the whole picture a certain tone.

So if we look at our mind-heart complex, the psyche, then it has these three basic tones. It has the tone of seeking happiness in sensual pleasure, the tone of wanting to become, to become, to become, and the tone of that ignorance, which is that wrong relationship that we have with the world we're in.

Now, when he talks about the world we're in, he then talks about the Four Noble Truths. And these Four Noble Truths: the truth that there is suffering—just a straightforward statement—the cause of suffering, which is that desire for sensual pleasure in the phenomenal world, and that there is an end—so there's your prognosis, not bad, is it? That there is an end to this constant misery—and that there's a path which leads to that place.

And in the Four Noble Truths, you'll get one way he says it where he says "*loke*"—in this world there is suffering. When he then defines *loke*, he says "in this fathom-length body." So this suffering, this *kamma*, this onward going, this *saṃsāra*, is happening actually within us, within the mind itself. And what he discovered was that there was a position which lay beyond that. A position which lay beyond that.

I've got a couple of quotes, if I can find them here. So, one of them is, for instance: "There is a sphere." Now, a sphere, an *āyatana*, is a level of experience which don't overlap. So, for instance, through our eyes we see form and colour. Through our nose we have smell or aroma. And you can't see through your nose and you can't smell through your eyes. I mean, you can try, but it doesn't happen. And that's what he means by a sphere.

So there are six spheres, the sixth one being the mind itself. And now he's saying that there is another sphere—there is a sphere which is to be experienced, direct experience, where the eye stops and perception, and the perception of form fades away, or disappears. And that perception is the mental noting.

So there's a sphere where form and perception disappears, to do with the eye. The same with ear and sound—they disappear. The perception of sound disappears, like "that's a bird" or "that's pleasant." The nose and smells, aroma. The tongue and its tastes. Body with its sensation. And the intellect with its mental objects, so the images and the thoughts. All that disappear. And he says this sphere should be realised.

So there he is pointing to something which goes beyond this body, this mind, this heart, the five *khandhas*, the five aggregates, and as he uses them here, the six spheres or the six avenues of consciousness. So we can only know the world through these six consciousnesses. We can only see it, smell it, hear it and so on, and we can only know it as an internal image. So what he's saying is that there's a place beyond that.

Having stated that, he points out that this can't be got by a simple act of will. You just can't get there by saying, "Well, okay, let's take a rocket or something and get up to that sphere." It just doesn't happen like that. It's beyond the will. It's beyond the self. And if you remember his next talk—having laid out, at least this is in the mythology, the way the scriptures were later collected—he then talked about the self.

Now this sphere that is to be known, which is beyond all else, is beyond the dualistic world—it's beyond objects—and therefore it can't be known as an object. So it's something which is totally subjective experience and it cannot be known as an object. And therefore, somehow, we have to, as it were, approach it by some little trick.

So, what all the Buddha is saying is: all you have to do is look at whatever is arising and passing away and simply know that that's not me, not mine. So here, the knowledge comes into a direct practice. And that's what he means by this *satipaññā*, this awareness and intelligence. And he's saying that if we can take this position within ourselves of the observer, if we can find that observation post and begin to see things within ourselves as objects, then very slowly at least we'll be very clear as to what we are not.

And it's presumed that if we're very clear as to what we're not, then hopefully, eventually, we'll be very clear as to what we actually are. That's the idea, anyway, of the practice.

So how do we do that? What process do we use in order to access that vantage point? We can begin to investigate things so that it liberates. What's it liberating? It's liberating that which is this special sphere. And what is the content, or what is that made up of? It's the *sati*, it's the *paññā*, it's the awareness and the wisdom, it's the looking, it's the seeing, it's the looking and the seeing.

So he always says: first of all, you look and then you see. So if you take that into your life, in ordinary day life, you can see that first of all, you've got to look. If something goes wrong with the car, you've got to open the bonnet and have a look. And then when you look, you see. So it's the same with anything, that process of looking. But we're looking, remember, with that attitude of wanting to know. So that has to be there. There has to be that desire of wanting to know.

What is it that we want to know? We cannot know *Nibbāna*, we cannot know the end of suffering directly, we cannot turn round upon it and say, "Gotcha." It doesn't work like that. So, if you think of an archer—this is an image that works for me anyway—when they are firing the arrow at the distant target, they never point it at the target directly, they're always pointing it up in the air somewhere. And they know that if it travels at a certain speed and it passes through that point, it's going to hit the target.

So the Buddha shifts that sort of investigation away from *Nibbāna*. He says, "Don't worry about that." He says, "That will arise in its own good time." He says, "Just shift it towards the way you are looking." So this element that we have in us—in Theravāda, it's dryly referred to as the *Nibbāna dhātu*, the element of *Nibbāna*, which I think takes on a certain fleshy quality when you call it *bodhicitta*, the heart seeking enlightenment.

So when that arises, when we actually bring that forward by lifting this awareness to look at what is happening within the body and mind, he says, "Don't worry about *Nibbāna*." He says, "Just see how you're looking." And then he gives us these three vantage points: the *anicca*, the *dukkha*, the *anattā*—the sense of impermanence. Where is the suffering? Where is it? Where is it in this complex of the body, mind, heart? Where is the suffering? Where is it arising from? What's actually the cause of that suffering? And then the more subtle teaching of not-self.

So, he's taken our gaze away from worrying about *Nibbāna*, worrying about liberation, lots of stuff, and he says, "Why not investigate what you are experiencing from these three vantage points?"

So, when we're looking, and we take the vantage point of *anicca*, of transience and impermanence, we're becoming aware of that quality that everything is in a process of change. Now, if we centre simply on that, you see, then you'll find that the mind is very much aware of the beginning of things, but not the end of things. Because beginning—new for us—symbolises something exciting. Even if it's something horrible, there's still a sense of awareness that it is beginning.

Then as it begins to end, our attention really goes to what is the next beginning. So we always know who the new film star is or pop star, but we never actually know what happens to them. They've disappeared. They just fade away from consciousness, from cultural consciousness.

So by putting the attention on the ending of things, on the ending of things, we begin to see that actually this process, this process of change is not a continuum. There is an actual stopping. There is an actual stopping. The image there is of a row of billiard balls. So they're all joined up together but they're actually all separate. Usually that's explained as showing the difference between the Buddhist position on this and the Hindu position which says that there's something which continues through the arising and passing away of things. So it's like a row of beads with a string through it. But the Buddhist position is radical change. It's actually something completely finishes before something else can begin.

And that radical change, as we get into it, you see—so as we get into it, there's a seeing of it from the point of view of the intellect, the point of view of actually understanding things arise and pass away. But it's actually at the emotional level, it's at the heart level that it begins to strike home.

So even though in our school we go for the minuscule, we go for the actual seeing of things in the minute, watching the rising and falling of the breath and even eventually the rising and falling of a sequence of sensations, at the heart level, it doesn't have to be that particular find at all. Somebody close to us who dies can hit you just as hard as watching the arising and falling of the breath. And it's hitting at a point of attitude. And when that attitude is broken—this assumption of continuity—when that attitude is broken, it reverberates back onto our understanding.

So there's always different ways in which the quality of transience can strike us, and it's constantly putting that attention there that there is this slow beginning to understand what's happening. Now what is it that's arising and passing away?

So remember that the Buddha's teaching is that everything is mind. Our knowledge of the outside world is totally dependent upon the senses that we have. So even though we're in this room together and nobody would dispute that this meditation hall actually sort of exists when we go away—in other words our mind is not actually creating this hall—the fact of the matter is all of us have walked into it, we all have a different view of it, a slightly different feel of it and so on.

So in a sense our experience of this hall is all varied, individual, and that's true for everything we experience. It's only through language and general communication that we can get across to people that we generally see the world as they do—and of course some we don't—and therefore you get this image of parallel universes. We're all sort of running parallel to each other in some way, sometimes we sort of crash a bit. But the idea is that everything that I know is within my mind.

So all these stimuli—the light, the smells, the touch and all that—they're all being brought into this central box which we call the brain. But there's also, in Buddhist understanding, a mind-matter there, which is a more subtle form, which produces for us a picture. Now we know that from our own knowledge of how the brain works. This picture that we get is, shall we say, that act of cognition. And there's something that knows it. There's something that knows, that has a double take on it. It knows it knows.

And that picture, as it were, is arising and passing away, holding an image for us so that we can grasp it and then it disappears, and the next image comes up dependent on the stimuli coming in from the outside through the senses or from the inside through our memories.

And when we see that the world is arising and passing away, I think personally it would be truer to say that what we're watching is our minds arising and passing away—the actual act of cognition. Now to see that, of course, undermines the idea that I can be that.

So *anicca*, the quality of transience, does refer back to the self. And this is what the Buddha said if you remember in the discourse that I read: is something which arises and passes away to be understood as me, mine and so on? So that quality of radical impermanence does reflect back to the not-self. And in so doing, of course, it ruptures a type of relationship that we have, which is a holding on.

Remember that the self is constantly trying to build a world of comfort around itself, a sort of castle, so that it doesn't shake, it doesn't fear anything, it doesn't fear death. But to see that *anicca* quality, that real radical arising and passing away, reverberates back onto the self in its relationship to the world it's in.

Now, there I said the relationship of the self. That was wrong. It's a relationship of this *satipaññā*, of this *bodhicitta* or this *nirvāna dhātu*. It depends what school you're in and what expression you feel happy with.

So now we're getting this idea that there is something within us, this awareness, this very basic intuitive intelligence which is at the root of our being, and it moves into every moment with some sort of wrong view, and that not knowing. It comes from the position of not knowing is the basis of, the beginning of, the wheel of dependent origination, which is how the Buddha explains how we come to suffer.

I think I said before in an earlier talk, when I was answering a question, if we go back to our little origins in this particular life, remember that we became alive as just a bundle of cells. So in that bundle, what did we know? And it's only through the growth of the senses that we come to collect, as it were, enough information. And then finally we find ourselves out in the open world and gasping for a bit of breath. And then we grow up. And all the time there's this presumption, which is gained right back there in the womb, that this must be me, because this is what I experience.

Now, that delusion stays with us all the time, and it's only through meditation, by taking this objective position in ourselves, that we begin to break through that delusion. And the process and nature of transience, of impermanence, is coming from a slightly different angle, which is saying that even if you hold on to it, it's going to disappear. Nothing stays the same. Everything is in a state of radical change. So that even the effort to try and hold on to something, to maintain a comfort, is a non-starter. It's not going to get you anywhere.

So watching *anicca*, even at the breath, is a constant undermining of that wrong view. A wrong view, remember, that has not come from a position of stupidity. That's the unfortunate thing about this English word ignorance. There is another word, nescience, but nobody knows it, so there's no point in it. Only the dictionary knows that word. And it means a simple don't know. Don't know, you see. And from that don't know is a frightening place to be. So one throws oneself into something, defines oneself as something.

Now this has happened to you all, I'm sure, at a time when you've been in a strange hotel or in somebody's house and you've just woken up and you don't know where you are. And there's that sudden sort of rush of panic as to who you are. And it's only when you remember that, oh, you're in this hotel, that you can breathe again. Now that panic, you see, is the self. At that moment, the self can't define itself. So it's rushing around like a mad fool, trying to work out what the hell it is. And so when it grasps it, fantastic, then it's happy. Oh, it's me again.

So that sense of transience, really seeing transience, is not only coming back to the idea that nothing in this world is worth holding on to – that's a direct quote from the Buddha – but the fact that if it's transient it can't be me, because it's arising and passing

away. So as we're watching it at all levels, remember at all levels, whether it's right there in the minuscule arising and passing away of a sensation, or whether we're just watching these leaves fall, and just watching the change of leaves, and just catching our feeling towards it.

Sometimes if you stand by a river, just watch the river coming at you and just catch your feelings that come up with that coming, the newness. And then turn around and watch it flowing away and just catch how your feelings are at letting something go. If there's a puddle around or a pond, look into that and see how you feel when there is no flow. So it's not as though we have to do this meditation in order to break through these things. All this meditation is doing for us is making more and more clear to us what this *satipaññā* is.

So if we sit with the idea that right now I'm going to crack it, I'm going to really break through this sitting like the Buddha did, you can try it. It usually ends up with severe frustration. So if we see our sitting simply as training, all we're doing is we're just training ourselves to constantly lift ourselves into this position of at least the objective observer.

Now, from this position of not-self, we've created these delusions. The fundamental delusion is that I am this person. That's the fundamental delusion. I am this personality and I am this body. And those we call our *sankhāras*. And a *sankhāra* is all those things that we've been able to create through an act of will. So once you've got a body and you've got an eye, the eye will see, that's not a *sankhāra*. Whatever's coming into the eye is a given. What we do with that which comes into the eye, or with the image that comes, that's our *sankhāras*, because there comes that intention into what we're doing. And that's building up a mood, it's building up an attitude, and it's building up a whole series of thoughts, it's building up a history.

These intentions, remember, at all levels in all areas of our lives turn into an action. So you have an intention, it turns into an action. When you've got similar actions going on, you've produced a habit. And once you've got a compendium of these habits, a collection of habits, that's your personality. And once you've got a personality, it just drives you towards your destiny, until, of course, you come to meditate. And then you can reverse some of it, and hopefully end up with a decent destiny.

So, here we are, with this *satipaññā*, this awareness, this *buddho* within ourselves, and then we're born. So that's the next stage, *nāmarūpa*, you're born. And with that being born, there arises these acts of cognition. So this body-mind complex and the act of

cognition rebound off each other. The one can't arise without the other. You can't cognize something if there's nothing there. So there can't be a cognition unless there's something coming in through the perceptual faculties, the eye and so on.

So once that's started, once you've got that, once you've got the consciousness and the basic body, which has these six senses, so that's your next step, the *salāyatana*, the six sense bases, then finally you can have some contact. And that's your next stage, your contact. At the point of contact, there has to be these three things. You have to have a sense base, you have to have something that stimulates that sense base, and you've got to have that consciousness.

Once that arises, then the mind, the perceptual faculty comes in, which knows what it is, but then that quality of judgment – now this isn't a judgment to do with good and bad and all that, it just experiences what comes in as pleasant or unpleasant. It's as simple as that. So sometimes we get a sensation which is pleasant, like when we're eating, and sometimes we get something which is unpleasant, like when it's getting cold. So whatever sensation comes in, after the contact, there is this relationship built up with it. So the relationship is, like it, don't like it.

Now, once the self grabs hold of that as a position, pleasant, unpleasant, you see, then it has to take a position. Now, its position comes from that fundamental misunderstanding that this is what it is. And it knows there is suffering. It's not happy. Now, what is it that's not happy? See, what is it that's not happy?

So we started off way back there in the womb, being this, shall we say, this *satipaññā*, this Buddha nature. And it's formed a relationship. So when we talk about the self, we're not talking about something, we're not talking about an object, we're talking about a relationship. We're talking about a relationship.

So, when we're suffering, what is it that's suffering? If it's not this very nature, which is our essential nature of the Buddha. That's what's suffering. And it's suffering because it's formed this wrong relationship. So when we say the self, you see, there's a tendency to substantiate it. There's a tendency to think that it's an object. But we're much closer, I think, to understanding what the self is when we realize it's to do with our relationship.

So when this perception comes, that this is pleasant and unpleasant, the knowing, which is ignorant, which is creating the delusion, says to itself, I've got to make myself happy. This is where happiness is. I've got to make it now or else I've had it. So whatever it sees creates a certain state, a mental state, which is happy, it'll want to grab it, hold it and develop it. And once it's into that relationship, that's when we get that

greed in all its forms. It doesn't matter what it is, power, sex, drugs, rock and roll. It doesn't matter what it is. The fact is that the more I can have of it, the happier I will be. It's as simple as that.

Having built that little castle, that little place of joy, now, of course, it has to protect it. So anything which it sees is not pleasant, then it'll want to destroy, want to annihilate, get it out, push it away. And whenever that is too much, when it's overwhelming, then it runs. It runs for it. It picks up its bags and goes for it.

So there we have the fundamental psychology which arises out of that wrong perception of the self. This is me. This is mine. So you've got on one side the attachment, the holding, the developing, and on the other side, the protection and the pushing away. And the running away. That's all included in that word aversion.

So having got to that stage, we then very quickly can move into immoral action, which is basically doing harm. It's doing harm to others and doing harm to myself. And then once I've started doing harm, I'm into the second level of emotions to do with shame, guilt, horror, all that sort of stuff, remorse, regret. All those flow in once I start doing something which is unwholesome.

And of course, there are those, there's that side of the development which we take pleasure in, but which are horrible. So, you know, we like getting angry at people. It's a relief. We like banging the door. We like being cruel. We like stepping on people's toes and doing things like that. And saying that little sentence which really digs them. And like cruelty and then not being generous, being selfish, you see. All these things can be very pleasant. So there's a whole area of unpleasant behaviour which we enjoy, and that of course is creating further psychological problems for us.

Now all that, all that is included in those three little steps after *vedanā*. So the *tanhā*, the *upādāna* and the *bhava*. So the *tanhā* is that movement from the self moving towards it because it likes it, it wants it. So having perceived something as likeable, it now moves towards it as wantable. I want that. Just a minute. Want, want that.

Once that want has come, and this is the sequence of psychological events, according to the Buddha, the I comes in. See, the I doesn't come in first. In our language we say, I want that. But it's not, it's want I. First the desire arises, and then there's the association with the desire, there's the identification with desire, and that's the *upādāna*, that's the grasping.

Once that's happened it's very difficult to stop the action coming in which is the will. And the reason is this – because that delusion of I, I want is coming, remember, directly from the Buddha. The Buddha within which is deluded. And with it there comes the

power of the will. And that's also coming from that centre. It's also coming from that centre. So immediately we say I, it's very difficult to stop the grasping, the actual going for the object. And that's the *bhava*, that's the becoming. At that point we've created an act. And that act now, as I say, repeated, becomes a habit.

Now what we're trying to do in our meditation in terms of seeing the path through understanding *dukkha*, understanding how we create this unsatisfactory situation for ourselves, is to put our attention right in between that which we perceive as likeable and unlikeable – and of course neutral – and to catch that relationship of wanting, not wanting and ignoring. Not wanting, just simply ignoring it, simply not knowing it. And if we put our attention there it can't go, it can't move anywhere else, it can't go into I. Why is that, you see? It's because the awareness, this intelligence we have, this Buddha nature within us has taken a completely different position. It's now become transcendent to the whole psychological process. It's now above it or beyond it, and it's watching it from above.

So, if we stay in that position, it can't go into that identity. It just can't do it. So, in that position, we're actually snapping the idea of me or mine. As soon as you see a desire and let it go, you're destroying constantly the idea that desire is me. I am the desire. And it's through that process of seeing that that we can find this realization through just understanding how we create suffering for ourselves.

When I was in Thailand, I did a tour of all the different techniques. The Thais are very creative, you know. And I went down to a place called Boon Kanchan around, which is on the bay around Bangkok. And when I got there, the teaching, I'd heard about it. She had died. She's obviously a very good teacher. But the instructions are very simple. You don't stop doing what you're doing until it hurts. Really hurts. Really, really, really hurts.

So you sit and it starts to hurt. And you're not supposed to do anything until it really, really, really hurts. And then, when it really, really, really hurts, and you can't handle it anymore, you then change your posture. But you do it very, very slowly, and all you're looking at is, as the pain arises, as the discomfort arises, you're just watching your reactions to it. And as it gets to the point where you can't take it anymore, and you're shaking with it, you just watch your reactions to that, you see? And then when it comes to a point where you really can't take it anymore, you say intending to change. And as you change, you watch very carefully how the physical body, the physical sensations are changing and how the mind is changing. And then you come back to a state of comfort. So from walking you might go to sitting, to lying down, whatever you're doing, but you keep doing it until you get to that point where you're able to see that change.

And in seeing that change, you're seeing the distinction between pain, which is both physical and mental, and how you can take a position to it whereby you're not actually suffering. And by observing that process, you're actually undoing the idea of a self. Because the self is always identifying with that process. It says, oh, it's pain, I'd better go and get an aspirin. It's always moving off it. It's unable to stay with it. So even by going through this process of understanding *dukkha*, of understanding how we create suffering for ourselves, we again undermine that wrong relationship which lies at the base, which is the idea that this is me, this is mine.

Now, when that is finished, of course, you're also cutting the end of that process of the wheel of dependent origination, which is birth, aging, death, or arising, decay, death, arising and passing away.

Should we say, the traditional teaching is three lives, but the other teaching which is right there in the scriptures and is right there in the commentaries is of course moment to moment. So as we see something which we like and we indulge in it, then we become the indulger, and that arises and passes away.

So with every sequence of actions in which we've indulged or which we've pushed away or which we've run away, we've become somebody and there was a beginning, there was a middle, there was a decaying and there was an end. So not everything we do is part of the wheel of dependent origination. Not everything we do is continuing with the self, because for instance just some simple action like opening a door, there's not a moral problem there. It's only where a moral and ethical situation arises of greed, hatred or aversion that wheel can actually turn. So when we do something out of a correct intention, when we eat in order to nourish the body, we eat to live, not live to eat. When we eat to nourish the body, then we're not turning the wheel. In fact, we're going backwards on the wheel.

Now, why is it that the wheel doesn't come back on itself? So you start off with not becoming, and then you go down to not grasping, no I, then you come back to desire. No, the Buddha starts the negative side of the wheel, the wheel which is drawing us to enlightenment, back at ignorance again, back at the point of this wrong view. And the reason he does that is because when we're meditating, we're always correcting that view. And whenever you correct a view, whenever you correct the way you're looking at something, the whole castle of cards that we've built on that wrong view simply collapses. You don't have to take everything apart. As soon as you see transience, the whole thing that you've built on transience completely collapses. And that's why these insights are immediate.

Not all these insights, of course, have a colossal effect on us. We don't jump up and down and all that. But they're little. They're slowly just cutting away at the delusion. Slowly cutting away at the delusion. And that's why the whole of the Buddha's teaching is concerned with right view. As soon as you see something, everything corrects itself.

There was a friend of mine who was going to pick me up and we were going to go for a walk and his car broke down. And it was parked by the road there, so I, being an expert mechanic, said, "Well, open the bonnet." So he opened the bonnet, and he told me what had happened. The engine just cut. So my immediate diagnosis was, "Well, it's electrics." So we opened the bonnet and I tried it and I said, "No, it's either, it'll be the dynamo," I said. And I pointed at this part of the machine, I said, "It'll be the dynamo."

Anyway, the AA, I don't know what you call it in America, but the mechanic came. And he opened the bonnet and he immediately saw that the fan belt had broken. And what he pointed to as the dynamo seemed to be different from my own description of a dynamo. Now, if my friend had taken my advice, of course, the car would have ended up in a scrap heap. But luckily, somebody who knew came along and saved the day. So you can see how wrong view can end you up in a hole.

So there we see, this mechanic came along and that was it. As soon as that right view was there, the whole problem disappeared and I felt a real idiot. But there we are. So that's why the wheel starts again with ignorance, and that's why the whole force of the Buddha's teaching is right view. To see things as they really are, to understand, to know and see things as they have, if you want the direct translation, as they have come to be. To see the process. It's often translated as to see things as they really are, but it's not. It's to see things as they have come to be. So it's always catching that process in which we create the world we live in.

Gee, can't stop talking. Then there's the final characteristic of *anattā*, not-self. So we've talked about that from the point of view of *anicca*. If something arises and passes away, it can't be me, it can't be mine. And we talked about it through seeing this *dukkha*, through seeing that, in fact, if I can take this transcendent position, this transcendent position to this mental process of greed and stuff, then unwittingly I've snapped the self, I've broken the self, as soon as I'm in that position.

There's a lovely little quote here actually to do with *anicca* which I'd forgotten to read out and it's William Blake and I think he puts it in a beautiful little poetic way. I'm sure most of you know it. "He who binds to himself a joy does the winged life destroy, but he who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise." So that's a lovely expression of how to, well, it's the Buddha mind. That's how we're supposed to be.

Now, *anattā*, the doctrine of not-self, is just getting that position where, instead of within yourself, when you're watching something, you see, and you turn it into an object that you're looking at, you see, it's catching that little distance. Although I talk in terms of space, I mean, it just feels that you're looking at something.

Remember that we're told that a child up to about the age of four months doesn't have that distance. Everything is me. It doesn't matter what it is. It's all me. And only slowly, after four months, does this object arise out of this bath, which is me, and his mother, isn't it? And that object now, as it were, becomes something in the mind of the child, something that's not me, just the beginnings of a perception. By the age of three, the child is very clear, this is my body and I'm not that. They're very clear about what their boundary is.

All we're doing is continuing that process inward. That's all we're doing. We are slowly deciding, or rather we're slowly realizing that within us all these things that I thought were part of me is actually an object. And one of the things that the Buddha talks about when he talks about not-self is this idea of control. If the self can't control it, how can it possibly be that? The whole idea of being a self is that you're in control. This is me. This is mine. I do what I want. I do my own thing in my own way, in my own time. And of course you can't.

So there's a constant destruction of this idea of a self every time in your ordinary daily life when you can't do what you want to do. If you can't do what you want to do, then you're not in control. Therefore you can't be the self. And that's the logic behind that.

So here you see, as we go into the body, I mean even the body itself, I mean, we cut ourselves. What do we do? You keep it antiseptic, but who mends it? You're not in there telling the cells to do this and do that. The body just gets on with it. When you breathe, what do you know of your body? Even when you go into yourself, what do I know? Do you know the marrow of your bones? I mean, we're told we've got them, but can you perceive it? Can you know it's there? The brain, we can't even feel the brain for heaven's sake. At least I can't. Perhaps I need a cat scan. And then the whole system, how it's working. We're breathing. I have no control over it at all. If I stop breathing, I panic.

The digestive system, I haven't a clue what goes on there. I mean, I'm told about enzymes and all that, but I don't feel anything at all. I just feel good. I haven't a clue what's happening. Even now, you see, if you look at me and your whole vision is filled with my face, right? This isn't an ego trip. If you fill your whole vision with my face, right, where's yours? Where's your face? It's just there in your imagination, isn't it? You haven't a clue, have you?

And when you look in the mirror and you look at your face, you think that's how people see you. At least I do. But it's only when you take another mirror and have a look at what's in the mirror that you realize that you didn't know your ears were that big. And you catch your face from the proper way that people see it. But normally that's not our vision of ourselves. So we walk around with this enormous delusion of either being ugly or beautiful, and it's completely our own idea of ourselves. So when you meditate or when you rather contemplate on these sorts of things, then again it's destroying this idea of who am I?

Emotions. We know what control do we have over our emotions. You don't go to bed thinking, "Well, tomorrow I'll wake up depressed." You just wake up depressed. Tomorrow you say, "I'll wake up happy," and you do, and you think, "Oh, I've got some control." But you haven't a clue how you're going to wake up. You might not wake up. Heavens. I mean, take that, you see. We go to sleep with a sheer presumption, a sheer presumption that tomorrow we're going to wake up. You go to bed, you feel absolutely comfortable, you're all curled up and it's all nice and warm, and there's just this underlying presumption that I'm going to wake up. Now, if the doctor said to you, "You fall asleep, it looks like curtains to me," you'd be there with pins in your eyes and pulling your nails out. Anything to keep awake. But we're quite happy to lose the self for 8, 10 hours. Some people 16. As long as we're absolutely certain within ourselves it will reappear.

And there's a lovely poem here which comes from my favourite author. Some of you might know Samuel Beckett. He's known for his getting to grips with death. I mean, he's got one of his plays was just a mouth speaking. And every so often it would wake up, "Still here." That was one of the refrains. It would just stop. "Still here." And he's at the edge of death as to what happens when you die. And he's got this very simple but lovely poem. He says, "Just think, if all this, one day, just one fine day, just think, if one fine day, all this stopped." I like that.

So, going back now to the Buddha's original understandings, so he's had this experience. He now comes back on himself and he spends his time reflecting on how he got there. And he comes up with this wheel of dependent origination, which is the psychology of suffering. That's all it's about. It's the psychology of delusion. And he sees these three vantage points and that's what he begins to teach. That's all he's teaching. To get into this position, the *vipassanā,* to see things as they really are and to observe these three points of view.

When we finally make it, when we have the glimpse at least of *Nibbāna*, he also talks about it in this way. "There is a sphere where there is neither earth nor water, nor fire nor wind." Now you've got to be careful here because this comes from a question as to where does the physical earth end? And he doesn't say the physical earth ends. He says there's a place where it finds no footing, which is very different. So the Buddha's enlightenment did not destroy his body. He just found a different relationship with it. And for the rest of his life, 40 odd years, he lived in what he called *Nibbāna*. And that's *Nibbāna* in this life.

"Where there's no infinite space, consciousness, nothingness, perception or non-perception," these refer to the four formless absorptions. He says, "No this world, no next world, no sun, no moon. There is, I say, no coming, no going, and no standing still." Now, we can understand in our meditation that the no coming and no going, because we can stand above in our meditation, things arising and passing away. But there's also no standing still. In other words, that's not a position in relation to what's happening. It's transcendent, completely transcendent. There's no passing away and there's no arising. It is without ground. It's without ground. There's nothing underneath it. There's nothing holding it. It's without foundation and it's without support. And he says, "Just this is the end of suffering. Just this is the end of it."

Now, I'm going to suggest to you that in your meditation, when you get at least the position of very clearly being the observer, an observer of pain, an observer of physical pleasure, an observer of emotions, an observer of thought, even though we can't say that's a pure *Nibbāna* because there's still the self there, at least we've got some idea there that there is no coming, no going, and there's no standing still within that process. And it's recognizing that that will draw your interest into really beginning to see that everything we experience is not me, not mine.

And then, in those quiet moments, when you're very still, when there's just the breath, and you get that very strong sense of being the observer. So now that's the subtlest of things that we produce. That's the subtlest of things that the delusion has produced, this idea of "I'm the observer. This is me." And that is a reflection in the mind.

So the image I use is when we watch TV. When you watch TV sometimes, you can see your image in the screen. Now you've got a choice. You're going to watch yourself watching TV or you're going to watch TV. If you watch TV, you then lose that sense of self which is in the screen. And that's what happens when in your meditation you feel yourself to be the observer and you're looking with interest at an object such as a feeling or a sensation and suddenly there's that collapse into it. That collapse into it is the loss of self.

And it's a direct perception by this *satipaññā*, this Buddha within, this intelligent awareness of exactly what's going on. And when we come away from that experience, whether we like it or not, or whether we're even aware of it or not, there's been some undermining of delusion. Those are the little power points. Often, when we're in that, there doesn't seem to be a comeback. We don't seem to have some understanding. But in time, remember, there's this subtle change going on with the way we're looking at things. And it's changing the level of consciousness we're at. It's a very slow process, that's how it feels, of this slow changing.

And every so often, there may an insight come in terms of words, a sudden understanding. You suddenly find yourself behaving in a different manner. You're reacting to a situation in a different way than you did before. And all these are telltales.

So here, we enter into the Eightfold Path. So from right understanding, moving into right attitude, it expresses itself through right speech, right action, right livelihood. Now, this Noble Eightfold Path, remember, starts at any of those points. So when you make the effort to speak well, to speak truthfully and all that, when you make the effort to do something which is wholesome, when your livelihood has a wholesome effect on you, it reverberates back on your attitudes. It reverberates back on your understanding. So the whole thing turns upon itself. Turns upon itself. And in this way, over a period of time, we do feel a certain change within ourselves, hopefully for the better.

So I think that brings me to a sore throat. So I think I'd better stop before I die. So I hope my words have been of some assistance and I can only hope that in the very shortest length of time you will be fully liberated. Thank you.

CHAPTER 35

The Years of Teaching and Parinibbāna

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 55 min

> *In this concluding talk of his series on the Buddha's life, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the 45 years of teaching that followed the Buddha's Awakening and his final passing into Parinibbāna. Drawing from various suttas in the Pāli Canon, he explores how the Buddha's initial hesitation to teach was overcome by compassion (anukampā), leading to the establishment of the Saṅgha and a lifetime of skilful teaching adapted to individual needs.*
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> *Through vivid stories including Aṅgulimāla's transformation, Kisāgotamī's lesson on impermanence, and Bahiya's instant liberation, we see the Buddha's extraordinary ability to perceive what each person needed for breakthrough. The talk also reveals his engagement with social and political issues, his humanity in caring for sick monks, and his clear but compassionate leadership style.*
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> *Bhante Bodhidhamma concludes with the Buddha's final words - "All conditioned things are impermanent. Work diligently for your liberation" - and his ultimate instruction to make ourselves and the Dhamma our refuge through the practice of satipaṭṭhāna. This deeply moving portrait shows the Buddha not as a remote figure but as an accessible exemplar whose path we can follow.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

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

For one or two who have just joined us, I've been over these past few weeks going through the Buddha's life and using it as a basis to consider his teachings. We finally come now to the years of teaching and his final hours, his final days. If we recall to mind on that wonderful night he became enlightened with the dawn, that's how they put it, in the full moon of May. He became fully awakened and understood exactly why he had been in a state of dissatisfaction or suffering.

He spent the next night considering the Dharma and going through especially the Wheel of Dependent Origination, which was his psychological paradigm as to why we get ourselves into such a dreadful state. After that, his first thought was who can I teach? Who can I pass this on to? Then came the doubt that there wasn't anybody he could think of that really would be open to this.

If you consider that at that time, all the philosophies, all the understandings were about the self. They were about, did the self annihilate? There were some people who just presumed that when you died you annihilated, which would be equal to our materialists. There were those who believed in some sort of future life, rebirth, but eventually you would annihilate. There were those who thought that actually all you did was just keep being reborn and there wasn't much you could do about it, it was just the way it was. Some were so convinced of that that one teacher said, if you went down to one side of the Ganges and did all sorts of compassionate and wonderful deeds and came up the other side burning, murdering and thieving, it wouldn't make a jot of difference. Your karmic line is already set, it was fated and there's nothing you can do.

All the philosophies around that time were to do with the self and what happens to the self. When he suddenly realized that this self that they were talking about was a phantasm, didn't actually exist, was just a concept in the mind, then as he's thinking who can I get this message across to, he gets this block. This is my own interpretation, you understand. It says in the scriptures that the great Brahmā Sahampati came and said, "No, Lord, do teach, for some people have only a little dust in their eyes."

We can either, these days we'd be rather cynical of Brahmā Sahampati turning up. It's more in the sense that he had a second thought about it. But you must remember that there's always a little bit of propaganda in the Buddhist texts. Brahmā, of course, is the highest of all gods in the Hindu pantheon. That he should be coming down and asking the Buddha to teach was simply saying that the Buddha had gone beyond the teachings of his day.

Leaving that aside, he then decides to teach. There are some writers you'll come across who said that he hesitated to teach, that he could have just sat there and simply done nothing, just sat in bliss until the body gave up. But this goes completely contrary to his own teachings. The Eightfold Path that we call the Eightfold Path is one path. We can think of it as a highway with eight lanes in it, but I think we're closer to the mark if we think of a tightrope made of eight strands, because it's so easy to fall off. That's how we find it's difficult to walk the path.

These eight strands move together. It's not possible in the Buddha's teaching to separate out right understanding from its expression in action, in what we do. Wisdom will naturally express itself into compassion. That's the whole point, that there's a flow downward and outward, inward, into the very heart of our existence, of our being, for want of a better word. Once we've understood such things, then of course there's that change of attitude in the heart. That's why in the Eightfold Path we go from right understanding to right attitude.

Right understanding is always about these three characteristics. It's always about understanding the role of desire. It's always about undercutting the idea of self. When that translates into the heart, then it manifests as an outward going. When he talks about himself as a teacher, the word he uses is *anukampan*. He says, "I as a teacher have done everything that a teacher could do for you out of compassion." But the word isn't the usual word *karuṇā*, which we've come across, but *anukampan*, which means moving towards the other, an empathy, a sympathy. That's what drives him to teach.

When the self goes, or as the self goes, we begin to understand this idea of interdependency, interconnections, all that. When that goes into the heart, that expresses itself in love, compassion, sympathetic joy. If it doesn't do that, then it can remain as an idea, as a notion, but it's not going to affect our behavior until it moves into the heart.

In the Zen tradition they will tell you that compassion arises naturally with wisdom and I think we can take that as fairly true, but even so we should budget along a bit because sometimes we can stay up in the head a bit too long. When it moves into the heart and we are in communication with people, then that naturally expresses itself by the way we speak kindly, appropriately, and how we behave in a gentle manner, not getting angry and killing people, in our livelihood. You can see there's an outward flow.

There's the Buddha, he's had this amazing insight, he's suddenly understood something to which there is no further profundity. He's thinking about it, he's worked it through, and as it drops into the heart, there's that movement outward of who can I bring to this liberation? The doubt isn't whether he should do it or not. The doubt is whether people are ready for it. Once he's overcome that, he moves forward.

The first two that come to mind are his old teachers, because they trained him and he knew their religious and spiritual depth. But they died. When I was in Burma last, there was a statue which I'd never seen before, the actual *mudrā*, the shape of it. The Buddha was sitting there and his hand was pointing towards the heart centre. I'd never seen it before and asked what it was. I was rather touched when they said that it was the sadness he felt when he realised his two teachers were dead and he wasn't able to pass on the message of his teachings. I thought it was rather touching.

The next people he thought about, of course, were his own five companions. He walks about 100 and odd miles from where he was up to Isipatana Park, perhaps a little more, and finds them there, and that's where he begins his teaching.

Even we ourselves, you see, we have to accept that once you're on the path, whether you like it or not, you become a teacher. It might not be an official post, and you might not get paid for it, but you're immediately there as an exemplar. I think I've mentioned

before that if you tell somebody that you meditate, and that it's done you a powerful lot of good, and then they find you completely drunk in the gutter, then they have second thoughts about whether they want to do any of this meditation.

As soon as we take on a path, whether we like it or not, we have the responsibility of being as best we can an exemplar. By that way, we are a teacher. That question that you'll see discussed in various books, as far as I'm concerned there is no doubt about the Buddha's desire to pass on the message. The compassion must come forward.

When we look at the other tradition, that is the Pacceka Buddha, the Buddha who's a private Buddha, in other words somebody who simply becomes enlightened, it's not that they don't want to teach, the idea is that they can't, they don't have that ability, something that has to be learned. This comes out in the Buddha himself.

He's now got up from his seat and he's off searching for disciples. He comes across a *samana*, another ascetic. The ascetic looks at him and says, "You look very bright, you look very clear. Who's your teacher?" The Buddha announces, "I have no teacher, I'm the fully enlightened being, I know the cosmos in and out." The ascetic simply says, "Oh no," shakes his head and moves on.

He obviously learnt very quickly that's not quite the way that you teach somebody.

You'll see that in the scriptures. If you read the early parts of the scriptures, like the Sutta Nipāta, it's not so formalized, four of these, ten of those, twelve of them. It's very personal. You can see that they are memories of actual conversations that he's had with people. It's only as he's teaching and as people come to him and want to remember what he's teaching that these mnemonics are worked out. It's easy to remember if there are five of these and four of those and 37 factors of enlightenment. By the end of his life it was beginning to turn into almost an academic exercise which later on turned into the Abhidhamma.

The teaching was just part and parcel of his nature. When you go through his life there's all sorts of incidents that happen. I only covered a few but just the sense of his teaching. There was one very dull monk who was so dull that it's said that as he remembered one phrase it pushed the other phrase out. He never got beyond this one phrase. His brother said to him that he really wasn't fit to be in the order because part of it was trying to remember the Buddha's teaching. If he couldn't remember the Buddha's teaching, what the heck would he do?

When the Buddha heard about this, he went to visit and immediately gave him an exercise of just taking a piece of clean cloth, wiping his face, the sweat on his face, rubbing the cloth, and simply saying, "*Anicca,* impermanence, impermanence." Lo and behold, in no shorter time, as the scriptures say, he became fully liberated.

The gloss on that, "in no length of time," in the commentaries, is around about 25 to 30 years. It's not as though he just wiped his face a few times and bingo. I don't know whether you ever want to try that. It didn't work for me.

It's a case of understanding that the teacher has a marvelous ability to actually get into the person and just catch what they want.

Another one is, of course, the very famous story of Aṅgulimāla. Aṅgulimāla is a murderer. He's actually, according to the story, fulfilling a demand made of him by his teacher who was jealous of him, fearful of him taking over his position. He demanded of him as his guru reward, in fact you give a present to your guru in those days, that he collect a thousand little fingers.

Off he goes and does that. At some point the Buddha either meets him by chance or he's heard about him or through his powers understands that Aṅgulimāla is not a murderer in his heart, he's just been driven to this. I wouldn't be surprised if he knew of him because he was supposed to be a Brahmin, he was of a Brahmin caste.

The tale goes when Aṅgulimāla spies him and starts to hunt him down, the Buddha produces this magical trick of walking and yet always staying ahead of Aṅgulimāla who's racing and racing trying to catch up. When Aṅgulimāla shouts out, "Stop, monk!" or "Stop, ascetic!" the Buddha turns around and says, "Well, I have stopped. It's you that haven't stopped."

Somehow that just cuts into Aṅgulimāla and makes him consider what he's actually doing. Presumably in the following conversations with the Buddha, he recognizes that he's fallen foul of his own heart by following a tradition of giving a present to the guru even though that present was unwholesome. He then takes on the Buddha's teaching, becomes a member of the order which saves him from execution by the king, by the way, who comes looking for him, and in no length of time becomes fully liberated.

The other one which I'm sure you all know is Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth. Bāhiya is a very old man and he only wears a bark-cloth. He's a long time ascetic and he's not getting anywhere. He's stuck and he hears about this great *samana*, the great ascetic, and off he goes to find the Buddha.

When he finds the Buddha, he says, "Can you give me some teaching?" He wants to sit down and talk about all his issues, and the Buddha says, "Well, this isn't the time, because I'm off on alms round." Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth is a very elderly person so he says, "Listen, I could die any minute. It's very important for me to hear any teachings you've got." The Buddha simply says to him, "In the seeing there's only the seeing, in the hearing there's only the hearing, in the cognizing there's only the cognizing." Right there and then Bāhiya breaks through the delusion and becomes fully enlightened.

As the story goes, not long after leaving the Buddha, walking along the street, an angry cow butted him to death. So he was extremely lucky that the Buddha actually answered his question there and then. I love these stories.

There's also another little story from Nanda, who was his half-brother. He joins the order and he's struggling and struggling to practice and falling into the error of over-effort. Realizing that he's not getting anywhere, he immediately thinks, which is understandable, that he's wasting his time, and he may as well leave the holy life, go back, live the good lay life, bring up some children, and hope for a better rebirth.

When the Buddha hears this, and actually what's drawing him away is lust, he takes him up into the highest heaven to see these most beautiful nymphs and sets this as a goal that he could actually attain, rather than go off and just be with human women. He then carries on with his practice, and lucky for him, he also, in no length of time, becomes fully liberated.

There are all these lovely little stories about how he was able just to really see what was necessary in a person as they approach him, see right into their heart and give them just the technique that they needed to make a break.

You'll see that although in the scriptures you do get this idea that there's a basic technique around the breath and so on, you can see from these stories that actually anything that works will do, anything that brings us to some sort of realization of these three characteristics, the transience, how we create suffering for ourselves and the not-self will do.

Just one last one to finish this off, his sense of humour comes through. Humour doesn't carry very well and you've got to presume that this must have been a rather humorous scene. In those days, if you remember, there was this great idea of ascetic practice. Somebody leaves the sensual world recognizing that the sensual world is not going to be a place where they're going to be happy. They go off and they practice *jhāna*, following the same path as the Buddha. The Buddha isn't doing anything up until he's sitting under that tree that lots of people weren't doing at that time.

They get into the *jhāna* and the happy states, and then they realize, well, that doesn't do it. The next thing is to blame the body.

The body's at fault, so then we get into this sort of ascetic practice. And there were some very strange ideas. So if you think there's some wacko ideas going around these days, it must have been living at the time of the Buddha.

So there are these two ascetics who are called the dog ascetic and the cow ascetic. And the understanding is that they're going to preempt any future rebirth as a cow or as a dog by living as a cow or as a dog right here in this very life. So the dog ascetic approaches the Buddha with his friend the cow ascetic and says, "Lord, my friend here is practicing the cow ascetic practice. What will be his future? What will be his born? What happens to him when he dies?"

And the Buddha says, "Don't ask me." And his second time, the dog ascetic said, "Lord, please." "Please don't ask me." And for the third time they insisted that the Lord give them some answer. So the Blessed One said, "This cow ascetic – he is developing cow perceptions. He is developing cow feelings. He is developing cow consciousness. Therefore upon death he will be reborn as a cow." And the cow ascetic wept heavily and finally came to his senses. And then having come to his senses, he approaches the Lord and says, "Blessed one, my friend is practicing the dog ascetic practice." And I'll leave you to finish the story.

So you get these lovely little instances in the scripture where obviously the Buddha is having a bit of a pulling somebody's leg. There was – I heard somebody say, I can't remember where – that the Buddha was only, there's only one or two incidences in the scriptures where he's actually engaged in a compassionate act. And in a sense that undermines the whole point of teaching. The teacher is, or a teacher is compassionate. When somebody is actually teaching anybody, that is a compassionate act. Whether it's a parent teaching a child or a teacher in a school or a Dharma teacher, anybody. Once you teach, you're offering something. What you're offering is your own wisdom and skills and understandings.

So when we talk about compassionate acts, it needn't be something quite so, shall we say, so obvious as, say, serving in a leper colony or something. Compassionate acts can be very small and very simple and they might not need at all any sense of bravery or anything of that nature.

So when it comes to what you might look at, what you might see as actual acts of compassion, as these days people might see it, there are just one or two. So remember the lovely story of Kisagotami. So she had lost her child and the dead child was looking

around for somebody to bring it back to life or to do something for the dead child. And bringing it to the Buddha, he simply set her this task of finding a mustard seed, of which of course there are over plenty in India, from a house, but with the proviso that nobody had died in that house.

So Kisagotami is in a state of desperate bereavement, leaves the child with the Buddha and goes off searching for the seed. And going from house to house, the message is the same. "Sure, I've got plenty of mustard seeds, but my Lord, this house has known death. It's known death from who knows when, right up to this present day – so-and-so died, grandfather died, this child died," and so on. And very slowly it dawns on her that death is just part of life and this brings her to her senses. And coming back to the Buddha she takes refuge in him and again later on joins the order and in no length of time becomes fully liberated.

There's also a lovely scene where there's a monk who's sick and the Buddha hears about this and goes to visit him. And the poor man's got dysentery and he's in a dreadful state. It's all over him. And he says, "Well, why aren't the monks helping you?" And the monk replies, "Well, I don't do anything for the monks, so they're not going to do anything for me."

So the Buddha goes to the monks and says, "Look, this man is sick, he's dying, why aren't you doing anything for him?" And they say, "Well, he doesn't do anything for us, so we won't do anything for him." So seeing the callousness of the monks, the Buddha with Ananda go and tend to this fellow. And then he gave the talk to the monks saying, "You know, you have no mother and no father, and if you don't look after each other, who will?" And there he is, he's being a nurse to this monk. It's one of these little incidences which as it were brings out his humanity.

Even there on his deathbed, I mean, he's actually – he himself, of course, dies of dysentery. And he's on his deathbed and presumably getting weaker and weaker, when somebody turns up, a *subhadda*, and asks for ordination, a direct ordination from the Buddha. And he keeps asking, knowing that the Buddha's dying, and Ananda keeps saying, "Go away, this isn't the time, the Buddha's dying, come back afterwards and I'll ordain you." But the Buddha, on hearing this, insists that he be ordained right there and then.

So one of the, I suppose, blessings, you might say, of the Theravada scriptures is that you really do get a feel of just an ordinary human being walking around the place and being in contact. There's a little tale in there where somebody walks into a room with, and he's there amongst these monks. And they have to ask him, "Which one is the blessed one?" So they get that sense of ordinariness, and just a real sense of humanity

about him. Something which gets lost when you move into the Mahayana scriptures, where, of course, he only appears in his *sambhogakāya*, the body of bliss, teaching to hundreds of thousands of bodhisattvas. So this brings us back to his simple, simple humanity.

Apart from that, there's a whole business where he's actually engaged in society, in the politics of the time. One of the disputes that he helped to disarm was around the water rights between his own people, the Sakyas, and the Koliyas. And he went up there to help them overcome this argument. They were going to enter into some sort of war or something. And he simply asked them what was more precious to them, the water in the river or the blood in their veins.

There's a lovely little tale that goes with it where he asks the people who are the leaders, the warrior caste, what is the fight about? And they're not very clear. And then as he comes down to stratifying society, they don't quite know why they're fighting. They're just very angry. And they hate the Koliyas. And the Koliyas hate the others. And it's only when it gets down to the farmers that the farmers actually make it clear. "Oh, we're fighting over water rights." And I think that has a certain resonance for these days, exactly why we're fighting. There's only a few people actually know why we go to war.

There's another incident where, right towards the end of his life, where so much is happening. The king Ajatasattu wants to attack the Vajjian confederacy and sends an ambassador along to ask the Buddha whether in fact this was the right time to do it. It's a rather strange thing to do. And the Buddha actually gives him some directions as to what maintains a good society. And I thought I might just read out his things, which some of them, I think, make sense to us.

So he turns to Ananda and he says, "Ananda, have you heard whether the Vajjians hold frequent and well-attended meetings?" "They do, Lord." "As long as they do so, Ananda, they can expect to prosper and not decline. Have you heard whether they assemble in concord, rise in concord, and do their duty as Vajjians in concord? Whether they avoid enacting the unenacted or abolishing existing enactments and proceed in accordance with the ancient Vajjian laws as enacted? Whether they honour, respect, revere and venerate the Vajjian elders and think they should be heeded? Whether they honour and respect and venerate the Vajjian shrines both in the towns and country without allowing the lawful oblations hitherto given and made to lapse? Where the lawful protection, defense, and guarding is provided among the Vajjians for the religious?" Here you see Arahats.

So he's got these various ways in which he says that a community will remain strong. And when the ambassador hears this, he goes back and tells Ajatasattu that it's not quite the right time to attack them. So in that way he was able to undermine that. Later on of course through devious means Ajatasattu did actually attack and take over the Vajjian territory.

There's also this quite astonishing story when you think about it. Virudhaka became the next king after Pasenadi of Kosala, and he was the overlord of the Sakyans. And when Virudhaka wanted to marry into the Sakyan clan, the Sakyans thought that his caste was too low for them so they tricked him into marrying a lower caste. When Virudhaka found out about this of course he was utterly mortified and determined to attack the Sakyans and destroy them.

So the Buddha having heard this and knowing that he was out on his elephant went out and stood before him and was able to turn him back. And he did that a second time and a third time. And the fourth time – and this is something to record – when he was told the fourth time he'd gone out, the Buddha said he could do nothing. And it seems those people were attacked and the city was destroyed and they moved Kapilavatthu.

Now this has, I think, a teaching for us these days because of our understanding of being engaged in society and how much you can do, and being aware of the circle of power we have and the circle of influence. And that once we touch the edge of those circles, there's nothing more you can do. So any frustration, any disappointment, any despair about the situation, which you can't do anything about, is actually unnecessary and is coming from some other centre, which is not being, shall we say, humble about oneself. Like, what can I do? So anything else after that, one has to simply accept. It's part of what you might call our social *kamma*, for want of a better phrase. So the Buddha's, he's done his best. He's been out there three times. And when the fourth time comes, he says he can't do anything. And that's the end of it.

Now, towards the end of his life, there's all sorts of things happen. Ajatasattu, this king, kills his father, starves his father to death so that he can take over the kingdom. And he's supporting Devadatta, whom I'm sure some of you know. Devadatta was the monk who decided that he should lead the order. And there's a lovely passage here where he approaches the Buddha: "Lord, the Blessed One is now old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life and come to the last stage. Let the Blessed One now rest, let him dwell in bliss in the present life. I will govern the *Saṅgha* of *bhikkhus*."

And the Buddha's reply: "Enough, Devadatta, do not aspire to govern the *Saṅgha* of *bhikkhus*." And so he rebukes him. Devadatta then of course, as I'm sure you know, tries to kill him. He sets the elephant, Nalagiri, to rage upon him. And there's a lovely story

where the Buddha, as the elephant's coming towards him, just actually offers his loving kindness towards the elephant, and the elephant actually stops before him, sucks dust from his feet, and blows it over his body, his own body, not over the Buddha's.

And the other story is of course he rolled a boulder down a hill which caught the Buddha's big toe and made it bleed. So Devadatta has really bad press. But actually if you think about what he was trying to do, then in a sense one can understand what was happening. The Buddha, remember, his early life as an ascetic had been quite basic, living under tree roots, living off rag robes, only taking what was in the bowl to eat. Very, very basic life of a beggar.

And as the order grew, and there were invitations to come into the families, to food, to be served food by his supporters, he was given monasteries with rooms and carpets and things like that. And you can understand that Devadatta, and it would seem quite a few monks at the time, just thought the whole thing was getting very soft. And so he comes with these 60 men, you see, that they live only in the forest and not live in villages. That they eat only from arms round and not go to houses. That they only wear robes that are made from the rags from dead bodies. That's what they used to get them from. That they lived at the root of a tree and that they were vegetarian and not meat-eaters.

And what this brings us to is, you know, the Buddha's feel for not being fundamentalist, not being rigid, recognizing that within any society there has to be some sort of latitude, there has to be some sort of give and take.

When he starts the order, he doesn't seem to come from any ideal. He's not sat down and thought, "Now, you know, what sort of order do I want to create?" There were the basic rules of those times of how you should live if you had left the lay life and undertaken what became of the *brahmacharya*, the holy life. So he was simply following the customs of the day. As people said to him, "Well, you know, we'd like to join you, we'd like you to be our teacher, our guru," as they would say. He said, "Well, do likewise."

So for 20 years, such were the quality of people who joined him that there wasn't any need to create a rule. And then as people with less integrity, you might say, joined, then things began to get done which were against the customs of the day and he would make a rule about it. So the institution of the *Saṅgha* as it grew up wasn't something which came from an ideal, it just gathered this law as people did wrong, as people made mistakes and then he would make a rule. So eventually there came this body of law by the end of his life which constitutes the institution. And if you think about an institution, an institution has an aim and it has a body of law, the body of rules and regulations which hopefully make that aim possible.

So when he's instituting or when he's developing the *Saṅgha*, the only duties that he says that order members have is to study the Dharma and to practice *vipassanā*. That's the actual duties that a monk or nun have. There's actually no duty there to teach. And there came this complaint where the lay people had gathered on a full moon day where the Buddhist monks and nuns were gathered in a park. And that was the custom of the day, the full moon, very bright, very easy to see. And they would spend the moonlit hours discussing Dharma. That was what seems to have been the great custom of the day.

So they complained to the Buddha that when they approached his monks and nuns, they just sat there like dumb pigs. So then there came this rule that if you were asked a question of Dharma, you had to answer it. But it's interesting to know that that's, shall we say, something that the monastic does because of a response. So it's not within the tradition to go out and proselytize. One has to wait. One has to wait to be asked.

I wanted to, we have the idea of the Buddha being a very warm, compassionate, huggy-wuggy, touchy-feely sort of person. But I thought I'd read out to you what happened when somebody actually goes against the rule. Unless you've read the Vinaya, the books on the Vinaya, you probably won't have come across this. Now, the only one in this book, unfortunately, is to do with the first *Parājika*.

Now, a *Parājika*, there are four *Parājikas*, whereby if a monk or nun, as you know, the nun order died out about a thousand years ago, but it has been re-established, and there are, to date, I heard anyway, about 200 fully ordained nuns in Sri Lanka now.

Now Suddina had left his wife because of his urge to seek liberation. But when he went back home, they cajoled and insisted that he cohabit with his wife to produce a child so that the family would continue. And falling for the argument, Suddina does cohabit with his wife and she gives birth to a son. However, when the monks heard about this, they of course rushed to the Buddha and said, do you know what he did?

And so the Buddha brings him to him and I'll just give you a bit of the language so you can get a feel for him as, shall we say, well, the leader, you know, the tough leader. "Misguided man, it is unfitting, unseemly, improper and unworthy of a monk. It is unrighteous and must not be done. How can you not live out the holy life in complete perfection and purity after going forth into homelessness in the Dharma and discipline as well as proclaimed as this? Misguided man, have I not taught the Dharma in various ways for the sake of dispassion, not for the sake of passion? Have I not taught the *dhamma* for the sake of unfettering, not for the sake of fettering? Have I not taught the *dhamma* for the sake of relinquishing, not for the sake of clinging? The *dhamma* thus taught by me for dispassion, unfettering and relinquishment, you would conceive to be

for passion, fettering and clinging. Has the *dhamma* not been taught by me in various ways for dispassion, for disintoxication, for curing thirst, for abolishing attachment? For severing the round of being, for exhausting craving, for dispassion, for cessation, for *Nibbāna*. Have I not described in many ways the abandoning of sensual desires, the full understanding of perceptions of sensual desires, the curing of thirst for sensual desires, the eradication of thoughts of sensual desires, the allaying of the fever of sensual desires?"

"Misguided man, it would be better for you as one gone forth that your member should have entered the mouth of a hideous venomous viper or a cobra than it should have entered a woman. It were better for you that your member should enter into a pit of coals burning, blazing and glowing that it should have entered a woman. Why is that? For the former reason, you would risk death and deadly suffering, but you would not, on the dissolution of the body after death, reappear in a state of privation, in an unhappy destination in perdition, even in hell. But for the latter reason, you would do so. Therefore, misguided man, by this act, you would pursue the Dharma's opposite. You would pursue the low, vulgar ideal that is impure and ends in ablution."

And he carries on like that, so you can see he holds no punches, doesn't mince his words. He's very clear about if you undertake the rule then that's what you do, you don't fall for arguments of this and arguments of that.

So, we also have to balance our idea of the Buddha as somebody who's very clear, very precise about the way he wants people to behave. Now, this *sila*, this conduct, which we've just chanted before, so the five basic ones, of course, are to do with our moral behavior. And what we have to really grasp is that our unethical behavior is a measure of our delusion. Delusion expresses itself in the way we speak, act and what we do. And therefore, whenever we do something wrong, it mirrors back to us the level of our delusion. And that's another reason why if you put your accent on making sure that what we do and what we think and what we say is wholesome and skillful, it comes back on the path and comes back to our understanding and our compassion.

So these three things of right understanding, right attitude and right action, speech, body and thoughts, are a wheel which turn around each other. It doesn't matter where you start on those three, it's going to affect the other two.

So I think I've just got time for the last little bit here. I just want to, there's a lovely sweet little thing here which gives us a feel for those last days. So as he's approaching old age, you see, Ananda says to him, "It is wonderful, Lord, it is marvellous. Now the

colour of the blessed one's skin is no more clear and bright. All his limbs are flaccid and wrinkled, his body is bent forward and there seems a change in the sense faculties of his eyes, ears, nose, tongue and bodily sensations."

And the Buddha replies, "Well so it is, Ananda, so it is. Youth has to age, health has to sicken and life has to die. Now the colour of my skin is no more clear and bright, all my limbs are flaccid and wrinkled, my body is bent forward and there seems a change in the sense faculties of my eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and bodily sensation." So you get these little hints throughout the scriptures that he's also very much aware of his own dying.

And then there's a lovely little bit here which I would like to read out to you. So now, if you can gather, this Ananda has been accompanying the Buddha for 20 years, tending to all his needs, protecting him from people, taking over. Like, for instance, the Buddha had a bad back. So one talk he says to him, "Listen, my back's really bad, can you take over my talk?" And since my back is bad I have a direct feel for that with the Buddha's life. I think that's probably where the similarity ends, but there we are.

And he says, "Poor Venerable Ananda, seeing the Buddha now coming to the end of his days, then the Venerable Ananda went inside a dwelling and he stood leaning against the door bar and wept. 'I am still only a learner whose task is not yet completed. My teacher is about to attain final *Nibbāna*. My teacher has compassion on me.'"

Then the Blessed One asked the *bhikkhus*, "Monks, where is Ananda?" "Lord, he has just gone inside the dwelling and he is standing, leaning against the door bar weeping. 'I am still only a learner whose task is yet to be completed. My teacher is about to attain final *Nibbāna*. My teacher has compassion on me.'"

And the Blessed One told the *bhikkhus*, "Come, *bhikkhus*, go to Ananda and say to him in my name, the teacher calls you, friend Ananda." "Even so, Lord," the *bhikkhus* replied, and he went to the Venerable Ananda and said to him, "The teacher calls you, friend Ananda." "Even so," the Venerable Ananda replied, and he went to the Blessed One. Paying homage to him, he stood at one side, and the Blessed One said to him, "Enough, Ananda, do not sorrow, do not lament. Have I not already repeatedly told you that there is separation and parting and division from all that is dear and beloved? How could it be that what is born, come into being, formed and bound to fall, should not fall? That is not possible, Ananda. You have long and constantly attended on the perfect one, on the *Tathāgata*, with bodily acts of loving kindness, helpfully, gladly, sincerely and without reserve. And so too with verbal acts and mental acts. You have made merit. Indeed, keep on endeavouring and you will soon be free from the tense."

So now we actually come towards his death. And as he's dying, he asks, are there any more questions? So he's got all these monks who have gathered around him. And no more questions are coming. And then, very sensitively, he says, "Listen, if you have a question, but you feel a bit ashamed about asking it, or you don't have the courage, ask somebody else to ask it for you."

And then there's more silence, and then at that point he decides to die, not before he's spoken his last words. So before he goes he says, "Whatever is formed and compounded will dissolve. Work diligently for your own liberation."

And whenever I read that I always ask myself, well I wonder what my last words will be. "Why me?" Something like that. And I always remember in Unforgiven by Clint Eastwood, and he shoots all these enemies and I can't remember the name of the actor but his last words are, "This shouldn't have happened." I thought it was marvellous. And then there's a story of dear Oscar Wilde who as you know became derelict at the end of his life and was dying in a room in Paris as a destitute, and he hated the wallpaper. And it seems as though he turned to the wallpaper and his last words were, "One of us will have to go."

So there's all these lovely last words, you know. So there's the Buddha with just very simply saying, "Listen, everything that is formed or compounded will dissolve. Work diligently for your own liberation."

And finally, going back to the earlier talk I gave, after his death there's a certain Brahmin called Moggallana who asks Ananda, "Is there any single monk who possesses in all ways and in every way those qualities that Master Gautama possessed?" And Ananda refuses to reply, he doesn't reply to it. And right at the end of this particular discourse, this is what Ananda said: "The Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the producer of the unproduced path, the declarer of the undeclared path, the path-knower, the path-seer, skilled in the path. When disciples dwelling in conformity with the path become possessed of it, they do so after him."

And that's really the position of the Buddha. So I entitled these talks, The Buddha as Archetype and Exemplar. It can be heartwarming to begin to read the scriptures and to flesh out the Dharma, rather than four of these and four of those and all that, and to recognize that there was an actual human being who lived through this and came to this wonderful conclusion for it. And with that, there arises that lovely feeling of gratitude. And here you see this wonderful centre. It simply wouldn't have happened if 2,500 years ago this particular person had not made this breakthrough.

And finally, when Ananda says to him, "Who are you going to leave to govern the order when you go?" So his reply is, and I may as well read the actual text, he says, "Each of you should make himself an island, himself and no other his refuge. Each of you should take the Dharma as an island, the Dharma and no other refuge."

And how do we do that? "Here, you abide contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully mindful and aware, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, contemplating consciousness as consciousness, contemplating mental objects as mental objects, ardent, fully aware, mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. Either now or when I am gone, it is those, whoever they may be, who make themselves their island themselves, unto themselves, and no other island, who make the Dharma their island, and the Dharma are no other refuge to themselves, who will be foremost amongst my disciples, of those, that is, who want to train."

So his final instructions to us was that eventually we have to find that strength within ourselves. We have to, what we're doing here is to find a way, or taking his teachings as a refuge, taking that Dharma as a refuge, to find for ourselves our own liberation. And that old teaching that the Buddhas only point the way and that's all they can do, it's left to us to do the work.

So I think that brings me to the end of my sojourning. There's lots of stuff I haven't touched upon around the life of the Buddha. I haven't actually, unfortunately it was there written on my script but I skipped over it, was the whole incident around women and joining the order. But I'm sure you've heard all those sorts of things before. So the purpose really is to be inspired by his life and his works and to make them our own.

So I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance to you. May you be fully liberated even before you leave this centre.

CHAPTER 36

Meditation and Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 45 min

Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the common difficulty practitioners face in connecting meditation practice with daily life. Drawing from his early experience with Zen Buddhism, he explains how Vipassanā meditation naturally flows into everyday activities through the structure of the Noble Eightfold Path. The talk explores the Buddha's concept of 'the all' (sabbaṃ) - the six sense doors that constitute our entire experiential universe - and how establishing awareness at this interface allows us to step back from identification with the psychophysical process.

The discussion moves through the progression from Right Understanding (sammā diṭṭhi) to Right Livelihood (sammā ājīva), showing how wisdom naturally expresses itself through compassionate action and service to others. Bhante emphasizes practical techniques for maintaining mindfulness throughout the day, such as pausing when the phone rings and setting time boundaries for activities. He addresses common questions about ambition and career choices from a Buddhist perspective, advocating for an attitude of service that honors both self-care and care for others.

The talk concludes with practical guidance for establishing a daily meditation routine and maintaining the meditative perspective through regular 'stopping' practices, making the connection between formal sitting practice and the lived expression of the Dhamma increasingly seamless.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sampuddhasa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sampuddhasa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sampuddhasa

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

There's always this blank when I begin a talk. Starts somewhere. I suppose what I'd like to do is make a link between what we're doing in meditation and what we do in the world out there. And people find that difficult. I was rather fortunate. When I say people find it difficult, I mean people in this particular tradition, especially Theravāda, also in other traditions, but I always feel fortunate because I began with Zen Buddhism up in North England, the Throstle Hole Abbey Foundation, I don't know whether you know of it.

And Zen practice is very much based on work—you do a lot of physical work. I'm now talking about the monastic routine up there. Obviously when they do a special course of just meditation there tends to be more meditation—they call it a session—but just in their ordinary daily rota they do a lot of physical work. They keep gardens. And this came about because of the history of Buddhism in China which then spread to Japan where the idea of begging was just not on. And so the Chinese monks began to grow their own food, things like that.

The reason you worked hard, I mean you put a lot of energy into it, was because in the work you got your concentration and your mindfulness so that when you went to sit there was that attention, there was the ability to watch. So that mixture of working, even though it was physical work, and meditation, made it quite easy for me to see how the meditation worked in daily life, how it just moved into it. There was no real thought about it, it just went into daily life. Whatever you were doing, you attended to it.

And one thing that helps, of course, is the way that Zen or Chan or Dzogchen, some of you might know Dzogchen from the Tibetan tradition, begin their meditation. You might describe it as awareness at the six sense doors. In Buddhism you have the five senses, which we're all aware of, and the sixth sense, which is the mind itself. It's a sensing thing, it receives. It receives thoughts, it receives emotions. And being at the forefront, within the all, it's easy to maintain that general awareness when you go out into the world. So there didn't seem to be this huge distinction.

Now I just used the word there, the all. That's the Buddha, you see. He says the all. The six senses is the all. So to understand that, we have to get the idea that we are actually living in this bubble, this bubble of consciousness. It doesn't have an edge to it which is contained. It's just this space. So at this present time, in terms of my eye consciousness, I'm just caught within this room. It's difficult for me to see outside this room. So visually, I'm caught within the bubble, you might say, of this visual consciousness. And that's all I know, isn't it?

And it's a truism—all you know is what you know. You can't go beyond what you know. And what you know is that which the senses give you and your own mind and your own heart. There's nothing else. You can't go beyond that. So in a sense we're living in this enclosed little universe of my consciousness. And it's obviously similar, but different from yours. Otherwise we couldn't communicate.

But walking into this room, nobody will deny that the room has, as it were, its own existence, for want of a better word. So if we all leave, nobody believes the room disappears. It's not here because we see it. But on the other hand, thinking subjectively, this

room—there exist as many rooms as there are people in it, in terms of how the room is experienced. So we all walk in here and there's your room and my room, etc. And with it we have our relationship to it.

So that's the all, that's the all that the Buddha's talking about. Within that all, there is the whole of *saṃsāra*, the whole of onward going, the whole of unsatisfactoriness, and within that whole, eventually, is the Nibbanic experience. So the nirvanic experience isn't outside consciously—we're not going somewhere to experience *nirvana*. It's not like you take a train down from Manchester to London, and it's over there. *Nirvana* is simply another way of being in the world. So what we're investigating is the way we're being, or perhaps better, becoming, this constant sense of becoming somebody in the world.

So now, with the Zen Dzogchen approach, that distance between being up in the front of your mind, as it were, and then going out into the world didn't seem so separate. But in this other tradition, which is the Theravāda tradition, and also in the Tibetan tradition known as the Mahamudra tradition, they also have this form of meditation. We're actually trying to find within ourselves a sort of observation post, a position which is at the interface of consciousness and what the mind is offering, what the senses are offering. It's as though we've stepped out of ourselves, stood behind it and just watched. Or above it or below it, it doesn't matter what image you want to use. But it's as though we are exiting from the personality. Sort of finding a place where you're up front as to where thoughts arise. They arise there.

Now, you see, as I'm speaking to you now, I can't be looking at my thoughts that way, or else I'd lose it. If I become objective to my thoughts, I'll just know thinking, and the talk comes to an end and we'll have to do some walking meditation. I can't do—I've got to be up there in the thought. So it's the same with my emotional life. If I'm now, say, depressed, you see, and I start feeling my depression, well, it's going to be really depressing for you all, because I'm just going to express how depressed I am.

Somehow, I've got to maintain that distance, but in a sense, when I'm talking, I've got to manufacture. I've got to manufacture a particular mood to go with the talk. I manufacture a particular mood to go with when I meet somebody I know—a happiness arises. So but I've got to be up there, I've got to be in that emotion as it were. Whereas here you see I can somehow step behind it. I can see it. I can point to it. So I can say joy and it's there as it were in front of me.

When we have a pain—a headache or something—and we're trying to do some work, it's there, we're in it. It's very difficult for us to separate entirely from it and we immediately search for some pills to get rid of it. But here I can form a sort of space as it were between that which knows—the knowing—and the headache, the knee ache, the back ache. The sneeze. I can see the body going, "achoo," like that in front of me.

So there's some way in which I can objectify the whole psychophysical organism that usually I'm in. I'm in it and being it, walking around the world as this being. And to do that, we use this little technique, you see, of pointing with a word. You don't have to do that. There are perfectly viable *vipassanā* techniques that don't do the pointing with the word. But they still get that position. They still know it as an object.

The reason why the noting is there is, as we discussed last night, just to keep the intellect pointed, but there's a more subtle reason in that even when you are not using a word, you are still conceptualizing what you look at. You're still seeing it by way of a concept. So just to say the word, at least as it were, brings that concept to mind, and then we can move towards it.

So one thing might be, you see, is that you might have an itch. So you recognize it, "itching, itching," you see, and you can feel it. I've got one in here now. And you feel the itching, you see, and so long as I say "itching," there comes that whole response to it. Got to scratch it, get rid of the itch, you see. If I can just keep saying "itching," but I put my attention directly on to the sensation, it's as though I'm going beyond the idea of itching, and when that idea of itching goes, the idea of reacting to it goes, because I only react to something that I recognise.

When I get down to an itch as an itch, as it really manifests in the body, it's just a little sense disturbance, like a little scratching on the surface of the skin. And being with that, it means that this awareness I've got, this intelligence I've got, is pulling itself out of its embeddement, confusion with the intellect.

When I was at the college I used to work at, I once went to a colleague who was a fundamental materialist. There is the body, full stop—when you're dead that's the end of it. And I said to him—this is on the corridor—I said to him, "Is there an intelligence which doesn't think?" And he looked at me. We used to have these silly conversations. And he looked at me, and just for a moment, he looked. And he never said it. He just turned around and walked away.

And I was left thinking, what the hell have I said? And he took about ten, twenty paces, stopped, turned around, came straight back at me and said, "No," and then walked off. So presumably he's still stuck in the mire of delusion, you see.

So what we recognise by noting and by seeing thought—by recognising thought, there must be something that recognises the thought. There must be something outside thought which knows thought. And then we begin to see that thought is just there.

What do we mean by concept, you see? What do we mean by concept? They're symbols, aren't they? They're just symbols which carry history. If I say, for instance, "ice cream." Just say ice cream. What comes immediately, you see? It's not just the word, is it? I mean, a cornet came, with a twirl of ice cream. And then I'm on the beach and there's donkeys. You see, there's all sorts of things. Blackpool and stuff. All these things come up just with the word "ice cream." If you said it to me another time, I might get a whole load of different history. And there comes with it this deliciousness. See, got to have an ice cream.

So whenever we have a word, we always bring with it our understanding, which is historical, and our emotional involvement in whatever it is that we're conceiving. And that's okay. That's okay. You need it in ordinary life. But here, you see, in our meditation, we actually want to see that process and how it stops us from directly experiencing what we're actually experiencing.

So, for instance, today we had lasagna. Am I correct? I think it was lasagna. So there'll be, I'm sure there'll be amongst us, a specialised cook who knows what exactly a lasagna ought to be or whatever, what it should be cooked. So the pasta was not al dente, you see. It wasn't quite right. Teeth should go through it, but there should be a hardness to it. It shouldn't be too soft. If there's a little hardness in the middle, it's not properly cooked.

So anybody going there with a concept of what lasagna ought to be like because they are this expert lasagna user, they might not like that at all. They might have formed a real aversion to it, unable to eat it. You get that with gourmets, don't you? "It's terrible, take it away, I can't stand it." And it's perfectly good food.

So, as we're eating, we can see how the concept is affecting us. The chips, you see. So, while the chips came, I thought, oh, it's lovely, you see. The chips came, but I had no vinegar, so I could feel this disappointment. I had salt, but I had no vinegar. Where's the vinegar? And I thought, well, relax. It's not the end of the world. Chips without vinegar. No HP. Terrible. And this just arises naturally because of my conditioning with chips. What can you do?

If you battle that, if you think, well, you shouldn't be thinking that. That's terrible. That's just suppressive, isn't it? You're just layering another negativity. So here we are, we're taking this position always behind the mind, if you'll excuse that image, and you're just watching things arise and pass away.

I mean, what is there? There's sensations, sensations coming from the body, pleasant, unpleasant, feelings from the heart, pleasant, unpleasant, thoughts and images. That's it. And it all works in unison with different little habits and it produces this personality. And the personality changes, doesn't it? You're this way with this person and then you're slightly different with another person and you're slightly different when you're by yourself. It's not as though the personality is a static thing. It's got all sorts of shades and nuances depending on the situation you're in. Different types of habits arise.

Next time you happen to talk to a policeman, just watch your body. Or even seeing a policeman as well. "Not me. All the guilt comes up. Not me. I didn't do it." Or when you're standing next to somebody over whom you have some position. You just watch your body posture. You always lift it. Lift your chin. Even if the person is six foot six. Just engage. And if you walk into a room of somebody whom you have to have respect for, even a doctor—very few people have the old respect for doctors—but even so, walking into a doctor, just notice, you see, you just lower yourself a bit.

But this is just normal body language, you see. In the West, where we've come to this wonderful state of total equality, of course, we deny all this. We behave as though we're all perfectly equal. But in fact, if you watch yourself closely, you change. You change depending on who you meet, who you're with.

One of the more obvious ones is when you meet little children. You suddenly take on this baby voice and act in a stupid way. The kid thinks there's something wrong with this adult. As far as you're concerned, you have this special communication with a child. "Hello, how are you doing?"

So here we are, taking this position within ourselves, and the process is a detachment. We're not getting involved. It's one of allowing things to manifest and watching them die away. So it's very passive. It's not active. We're not actually manufacturing anything in the mind. What it's leading us to is a stillness of thought, a complete calmness of the heart, and a stillness of the body. Silence in the mind, calmness in the heart, stillness in the body. That's what *vipassanā* would lead you to, you see. It would lead you to that point of just bringing all that energy, finally just rolling down to this perfect stasis. Perfect stasis.

Now, if that was it, if that was the end of the plot, you see, then of course that would be the end of the practice. You would just meditate, come to this end point and that would be it.

Now if you go back to the Buddha's life, so he's struggling to find a way out of his question. Why do we suffer? Why are we unhappy? Why don't we find perfect fulfillment? Why am I here? All these existential questions. And just as an aside, remember that he remembers this point in childhood. This is really very crucial, very important. These stories that come through, they give you a pointer as to where the insight about how to go beyond suffering comes.

He's tried all these different methods, the absorptions and the mortifications. And he comes to this point, he remembers this point in childhood, where he's watching his father doing the plowing ceremony. So what is it about that attention that he had there, which is different from all the attention that he'd got through all this practice with these teachers, and through his mortification practices, and it goes back to that mind that the child has—best recognised before seven, that pre-conceptual, when the mind, before it begins to really proliferate, where you can see, especially young children, where they might see something which they'd never seen before, a bug or something.

I have a picture of two little girls watching this bug and it's perfect. And they just lock on to it. It's like the world shuts down and all they know is this little bug. And the jaw drops.

Now, that's why in your meditation the jaw has to be relaxed. Because the jaw and the tongue are intimately connected to thought. And sometimes you'll actually catch, if you watch, you'll actually catch your tongue moving with thought. It's already ready to speak. It's just tickling away on the top. So by relaxing that, you immediately relax the whole process of thinking.

And after it's actually observed this little bug, only then, when it's absorbed it, when it's really absorbed what it's looking at, will it ask for its name. And once it's told it's a beetle, it has a concept and a history. So the next time it sees a beetle, it's much more interested to tell the parent that it recognizes what it is, a beetle. But it's not seen the beetle. It's not seeing the beetle like it saw the beetle before. From now on, all beetles are seen with that history, with that word, with that concept. Even if the beetle is slightly different, it's still a beetle. That's a beetle. That's the end of it.

And that's what we're doing. We're not specifically seeing what's coming in without the clarity of that historical garbage that comes with everything that we experience. So here, we're trying to cleanse that. And that means that we have to go through the pro-

cess of very gently allowing the mind to calm down, to bring it to a stop. Calm down, bring it to a stop. To let these emotions become, to let them express themselves, because that's the emotional history we have. That's the baggage we're carrying from all the past. And to allow it to pass away, to burn itself out.

Now, if that were the end of the process, when the Buddha was enlightened, that would have been it, wouldn't it? He'd have just turned into a blob. He'd have just sat there and people would have come and said, what's wrong with you? And he wouldn't be able to speak, would he? He'd have just said, ugh, or something. Enlightened, shut up, go away. So he just sat there and did nothing because he's done it. He's perfectly happy.

But peculiarly enough, that doesn't happen at all. The first thought, or the first thoughts that arise in his mind is, who? Who can I teach this to? Who can I teach this to? So now we have a very different thing arising. There must be some connection. There must be some connection between this wisdom, this intelligence we have, and the world it finds itself in, the world it finds itself in, and the people that it finds itself connected to.

Now that's put into the Eightfold Path. So as soon as there is right understanding, there moves into a right attitude. And it happens naturally. I mean, we do have exercises. We do *mettā* practice. That's a practice on developing goodwill, developing our compassion. There are all sorts of practices in Buddhism to do that. But actually, it's not necessary because that wisdom will always want to express itself.

How do we know this wisdom always wants to express itself? Because this same intelligence, which has now become, shall we say, very wise, when it was deluded, wanted to express itself. So this intelligence we have, this intuitive intelligence, is always in a state of wanting to express what it knows. And the reason for that is that it doesn't know what it knows until it's expressed. If it did not express anything, it would stay in a complete state of original ignorance. And that's the beginning of the Eightfold Path, the one that we chant in the morning. *Avijjā*, not knowing.

This ignorance isn't a culpable thing. It's not as though we're evil because we don't know. We don't know because we don't know. So it's like little children. They don't know. They have to be taught. So it's a case of not knowing. It's the function, it's the inner quality of intelligence that it wants to know. That's how it's defined. It wants to know. Intelligence wants to know. And in wanting to know, it needs to be able to know it knows. And it can only know it knows when it expresses something, when it says something, paints something, creates music, talks to people, relates to people, does

something in the world, creates something in the world, a business, whatever it is. Those are all expressions of the either delusive nature in our intelligence or its wisdom nature.

So in other words, you can't exist and not express. Otherwise you just remain a vegetable. So there's the Buddha. He's become fully enlightened. And he says, I've attained the unconditioned consciousness. Unconditioned. Perhaps a better word is unbound, unbounded.

So this intelligence that we have, it's bounded, it's caught up in the sensual world. So it thinks itself to be what it sees, and the seeing process. It experiences itself as not only the hearing, but I hear, I am the one who hears. That binds us to hearing, and it binds us to seeking in hearing the happiness that it craves.

I mean, what is suffering? I don't mean, that's not a definition of suffering. I mean, what is it that is suffering? Does the body suffer? I mean, when you get pain in the knees, is the body suffering? It's just a sensation, isn't it? The knee isn't saying, ouch, I'm suffering. The knee is just giving off certain sensations. When you're depressed and the depression is there in front of you, is the depression depressed about being depressed. The depression is just a feeling. It doesn't have any intelligence. It doesn't know anything. It's just there as depression. Does a word, does the word, does the intellect understand what it's actually saying? Words are just little symbols, aren't they?

So that which understands, that which has a relationship to emotions, that which has a knowledge, understanding of sensations from the body, that is something else. So it must be that that suffers. So the answer lies not in the pain of the body, or in the emotional state of the heart, or in the way the mind thinks, but in the relationship that this intelligence has to the psychophysical organism it finds itself in.

So the relationship we have now is, this is me. And because of that, we're constantly expecting this to give us that sense of peace and joy, calm, that we want. And we get upset when it doesn't. Pain in the knee, and all that.

So, there's an intimate link between the wisdom that we gain from observing ourselves, the purity that we gain from allowing these emotions to expend their energy, and the new attitudes that arise in the heart which we recognise as sharing, love, giving, generosity, compassion, sympathetic joy, because of that communication we have with other people.

And when that drops further outward, as it were, as an expression, even if you're stuck there with this love, what use is that? If you went to a cave and just sat there and said, may all beings be happy. Well, you might. Of course, you might. I mean, I'm not be-

ing cynical about this. You might be sending out waves, colossal waves of love with changing the world and all that. But in a sense, it might also be just you in this cave feeling very happy about how much you love people. And if somebody comes along and says, can you help me shift this bowl? You say, go away. Don't disturb me, I'm in a state of perfect love here.

So, you can get stuck at these stages. You might think, well, the whole purpose of life is just to sit and meditate and get into this perfect state of peace and happiness. But that's not what the Buddha did. Remember that he's the exemplar, he's the paradigm of our path. And you might think, well, in that case, I might stop that attitude and just develop this huge compassion, the Buddha heart. But that just turns you into just a self-regarding person. You just sit there beaming out this love.

So it has to move out, it has to express itself, and it expresses itself through right speech, right action, and right livelihood. So you can see how the Eightfold Path just follows, follows the one after the other. So the way we speak, the way we communicate is an expression of that heart, the kindness, compassionate way, sympathy, joyfulness, which is an expression of our understanding, of the way we relate to the world.

When we start doing something, it's done with that attention because that's what this intelligence is. It's a state of attention. And that's a nice word in English because there's also the word attend, to attend to. Nurses attend to their patients. There's a sense of, in that word, there's almost an inclusive, the idea of caring, attention and care, care and attention. So you could say that those are the hallmarks of your daily life. There are some things that you have to pay more attention to, like a phone call. And there are some things that you have to be more careful with, like when you're cooking. Be careful.

So the two are one and the same, but they're coming from, shall we say, a different type of relationship. One is more based on the intellect, the understanding, and one is more based in the heart, on a sense of care. They're always there. So now you can see how this intelligence which we've been training to sit back and watch, to sit back and watch and understand and see and understand what's going on, how it now begins to, as it were, come down into the attitude into the heart and how it begins to flow outward into the world in the way we speak and the way we act and finally the very livelihood that we have.

So here's the Buddha putting livelihood. Logically speaking, there's no need to put livelihood there because it's included in right action. But such is his understanding of the fact that most of our lives are doing something, unless we're unfortunate not to have a job. But even then, in the West anyway, they come and go. So now, your attitude. What is your attitude to the work you're doing?

Yesterday I was talking to somebody who was going through one of these awful periods where there's that vanity about what they're doing, about the uselessness, why am I doing this, it means nothing to me and all that. And what you often find when you get into that mood is that actually it's coming again from this idea of self that all we're concerned about is making the job interesting to me. It's interesting to me. What's it for me? How much am I earning? And there's always going to arise that dissatisfaction because the I always wants to aggrandize. That's the self. It always wants to accumulate. Because the more it accumulates, the safer it feels. I mean, you feel much safer if you had a million pounds in the bank than just a hundred. I would. I mean, you'd have this fallback.

So, I can't remember, there was, I think, one of these rich people said, I've done poverty, and I've done riches, and being rich is better. So, there's no particular virtue in being poor, it's just the way you end up. But you can see how the self is always trying to make the world safe and wonderful around itself.

So what's missing is missing that connection with the other person. So again, as soon as we do that, people become objects. You're just using them, using them to fulfill your desires. And that's bound to bring a dissatisfaction because people refuse to be objects to your desire. They always do something which you don't want them to do. And then you get angry and say, why did you do that?

If we now turn around in ourselves and we say, right, well... What would be a proper attitude to my work? Well, there has to be, obviously, some self-care. So we've tried to make that distinction with our eating, that we're not eating just to gain happiness, just to feel blissed out on chips. We're not doing that. We're actually trying to feed the body, we're trying to change our relationship to food, seeing it as medicine, seeing it as nourishment. That gives us a very different attitude.

So now, when I'm doing my work, when we're doing work in society, surely the attitude which I ought to give out is one of service, isn't it? Service. As soon as you serve other people, you're immediately in a state of communication to them as people, because you're trying to be of service to them. So to be of service to somebody means that

you have to open up to them as individuals. They have to speak to you. They have to tell you what they want. Even if it's just brushing the streets, for heaven's sake. You're doing it as a service.

So this puts a very different timbre on life, doesn't it? It puts a very different shading on life. I mean, we do it naturally with people whom we love, with family members. We'll do things for them and do it with a good heart and with an open heart. And when you do that, you get that good feeling, don't you? You get that glow. So that's the attitude of livelihood. It's one of being of service.

That doesn't take away the fact that there has to be that self-regard as well. You have to do something which is good for you, good for them. So in this way you can see how the meditation is preparing us to develop a completely different, not completely, I'm sure you all have this sense of service, is to develop the attitude of service and to distinguish between doing something just simply for ourselves out of selfish motivations and doing something which is caring for us, caring for the other.

And that brings us into that funny area where people get stuck, where they say, well, should I go for a position? Where does ambition come in? Should I then just say, well, I want to serve society, I want to serve people, and I'll just wait for the job to come. And you end up on the dole. Again, it's always, if you're serving, if you're serving, what you want to serve is your best, isn't it? If you invite a person round for a meal, you want to serve the best food that you can make, don't you? You want to serve them the best. You want to offer what you have as the best. If you invite a friend round for beans on toast, it can be depressing. Unless you told them, of course.

So when you offer your services to society, you're offering your best. So if there's an opening which you feel you can do, then you go and offer your service to that. If you don't get the job you want, if you don't get the position you wanted, because you did it out of an attitude of service, in other words, there's an acceptance that you don't fit into what they want, then there's no pain, there's no hurt. The potential to do that job still lies there. It's just they either found somebody else or whatever.

We had a case just recently at Gaia House where somebody came to apply for a job, one of the managers' jobs. And we knew her. She was a fairly regular visitor. And she'd set herself, set her heart on becoming a manager. But there was another person who applied for the same position. And eventually it was this other person who got the job. Well, it was like a disaster, really. Weeping, despair. And it was only a year's job. I mean, you'd be out after a year. There wasn't some huge life commitment to it. But the suffering that she went through because of that belies that

Even though there was that wanting to serve, there was something else there which attached her to that job. And not getting it brought about the pain. So it's a case of offering ourselves as a service and then recognizing that it might not be received, it might not be accepted. And that's okay. That's okay. So it doesn't stop you from following an ambitious route. There's nothing stopping any of you becoming Prime Minister if you feel that's where your talent lies.

So I hope that makes a connection between what we're doing here in the sitting and your daily life. I hope it makes you connect. There's a very intimate connection to it, very intimate.

So to reinforce that, you have to take some of the tricks that you gain from your meditation retreat into your daily life. And one of the most powerful ones is to stop. Keep stopping. Very simple occasions like if the phone rings. So when you get the first ring, you don't have to launch yourself at the phone, do you? You can note that the phone is ringing. And just relax. Like most people will hold on for three rings. I hold on for seven, ten rings for heaven's sake. I'm very patient. Well, three rings at least. So there's just that recognition, the phone is ringing, and then you just finish off what you're doing. You don't just forget, and then when you come back, you've lost your place. Then the next one goes, and you pick it up on the third ring. You're calm, you're collected, you're not in a rush, and therefore you're open to the telephone call.

After you've set yourself a task at work or just in your daily life, if you're aware of that intention, then put an end time to that intention. Like, for instance, I mess around a lot with this crazy computer stuff. And if I don't put a time on it, like two hours passes. I'm sure you've all experienced that. You wake up and two hours are gone. Two and a half hours. Whoa! And I've got in the habit, I have this little watch here which gives me a beep every 40 minutes. So just stop for a minute. It stops you getting caught up in something.

So when you set yourself a job, no matter what it is, it doesn't matter of length, you could be just mowing the lawn. So you say to yourself at the end of that, I'll just stop. You just relax. And then the accumulation of that job, maybe you got a bit of an irritation, who knows, maybe you picked up some irritation, maybe you developed unwittingly some irritation around it, some rush, some pressure. Just stop, let it, let it. And in this way, throughout the day, we're constantly bringing ourselves back to this very posture, this posture of just being here. Then you move again from that base.

And for those of you who haven't done this before it's important to do meditation in the morning and evening. Two hours is good. But 20 minutes is enough. You just need enough time to access this level of consciousness. It's a level of consciousness. A way of

being in the world. Just remind yourself, this is where I'm supposed to be at all day. And then throughout the day you do these little stoppings. Keep bringing yourself back. Remember how it was in that sitting.

And then in the evening when you come back, always better before you eat, before you have an evening ahead of you. Just to sit for 20 minutes and just see what you've accumulated during the day. The tensions, the irritations, the disappointment. Just let them calm down, calm down. And of course it makes your evening much more pleasant. If you do it too late, you just fall asleep. If you do it just before you go to bed, it's just preparation for falling asleep really. Nothing happens. So do it when you're still awake, especially before you eat. And then you'll see it has an effect on the evening.

So just very slowly, very slowly. And after each of these meditations, just a moment of developing *mettā*, goodwill, which we'll do tomorrow. And that prepares this intelligence to move into the world with a proper attitude. So that's the path in a nutshell.

CHAPTER 37

Meditation and the Weekly Group

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides us through the components of a weekly meditation gathering, explaining the deeper purpose behind each element. He begins with the significance of ritual actions like bowing as acts of surrender to the spiritual path, then explores how the flame symbolizes the three aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path: understanding (light), love (heat), and skillful action (movement).*
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> *The talk addresses core Buddhist teachings including the Three Characteristics of existence (impermanence, dukkha, anattā), the psychology of selfishness versus generosity, and the practical method of vipassanā meditation. Bhante emphasizes finding an "observation post" within ourselves to investigate this psychophysical organism objectively, noting sensations and mental states as "not me, not mine."*
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> *A significant portion covers the conditioned nature of choice and free will, explaining how genuine spiritual decisions arise from wisdom rather than confusion. The discussion includes practical guidance on working with emotions in meditation, the importance of regular group practice for maintaining commitment, and concludes with loving-kindness (mettā) practice to integrate wisdom with compassion. Essential listening for understanding both the theoretical framework and practical application of insight meditation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha-sambudassam namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha-sambudassam. Namo dasa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I like to start like that just to remind me that I'm supposed to be teaching what the Buddha taught, in case I slip in with my own little bits.

Just to go through an evening like this and to understand what we're trying to do. When we bow, for instance, if you look at any religious form, it always has some form of bowing. The Muslims bow from the waist, the Hindus bow, Christians genuflect. So there's something about a physical action of bowing, which is, what its main purpose is, that surrender.

When you actually bow, if you just watch yourself with people whom you consider to be slightly above you, have power over you, your boss or whatever, you'll see, whether you like it or not, your position changes, your shoulders lower, you tend to try to

lower yourself, your voice softens, and all these little indications which we as Westerners, because of our deep individualism and equality don't like to show, but actually it's just there, it's just manifest.

So the idea of any spiritual path is a surrender to that path. And the reason why all these religions have a physical representation of it is because whatever spiritual path we're on, it'll always ask us to do exactly what we don't want to do. I mean, the whole point is to go against desire, the self, its selfishness and all that. And we don't want to do that. So any spiritual path worthy of its name will always ask us to do things that we simply don't want to do. And that action of bowing is a surrender to that, it's a yielding. It's saying, well, whatever has to be done, that has to be done. That's one of these little pat phrases that comes up in the scriptures when somebody becomes fully liberated. They always say, what had to be done has been done.

And what this takes us to is a different understanding about free will. Free will is really a delusion about somebody having a choice and that choice is somehow an expression of my free will to do what I want. But as we know, everything is conditioned. So this idea of some sort of individual that's floating around the place, completely separate from the universe, who can make decisions, it's just ridiculous. The spiritual path doesn't give you a choice. Whenever choice arises on the spiritual path, it arises because of confusion.

It's a bit like going for a walk. When you take out your map and you think, well, I'll walk up here and I'll go up St. Brendan's Hill and all that, there's the path. So you get to a place where there's suddenly a crossroad and you don't know where you're going. So what do you do? You don't make a choice. You take out your map and you look at it and you think, well, this is the way. So it's the same with the spiritual path. You can presume that whenever there's a choice coming up, it's usually a point of confusion.

Even in ordinary life, whenever you're presented with a choice, should I do that job or that job, should I pick this tin of beans or that tin of beans, it's confusing. It's just there because you don't know. And we don't like being in a place of don't know. So we tend to make rash judgments. But the point about the bowing in any of these religions is that commitment. Being open to being told what to do. That's the point.

And I failed to light the lamp which was put out there especially so I would light it. It was unfortunate really because light, the flame, is the universal spiritual symbol because of its light which symbolizes the path of understanding, the path of investigation, the heat, the path of love, and its action, the path of doing, the path of action. So those are your three paths and they are expressed through the Eightfold Noble Path.

So one starts the Eightfold Noble Path by trying to understand the way things really are. And what this means is to begin to see things from the enlightened person's point of view, from the awakened person's point of view. And that is to constantly awaken that way of looking, of seeing that everything arises and passes away. Now that's pretty obvious when you look outside yourself and sometimes it's pretty obvious when you look in the mirror. But it's when you go internally to this idea of a self, and you just have to contemplate certain things like, well, when I go to sleep, I disappear. The alarm goes and here I am. So, where have I been? Where have I been these past eight hours? And that's loss of self there.

Now, if a doctor said to you, if you fall asleep, you will definitely die, you're going to pin your eyelids to your forehead to make sure that you do not fall asleep. So the only reason that we fall asleep in that sense of peace is that we presume that the I will arise again in the morning.

So the other thing is to understand the doctrine of not-self. That's a bit more subtle. But remember, the Buddha never saying that there is no self. It's not a metaphysical statement. It's not about who we really are. The whole teaching of not-self is to be able to point at something and say, well, this is not me, not mine. And that takes us to the meditation, which we can go into a little bit more deeply in a minute.

And the other thing is to understand this quality of where does suffering arise. Psychologically speaking, it lies around that quality of desire, desire of attachment. So when we see these things in the right view, there's a change of attitude. And that attitude, which is based on a self, must necessarily always be attentive to the needs of the self. And what the self needs at base is safety. It needs to feel safe. If you don't feel safe, then you feel very anxious, very fearful. So our lives are about making ourselves feel safe. The warm hearth, the food on the table, the insurance policy. Even for the grave. Make sure you get a decent grave.

My father, towards the end of his life, took out a special £2,000 mortgage to make sure that he got a decent amount of stuff. I still feel guilty about that because he didn't spend it all on his grave. So, the case of safety, and to make ourselves feel safe, then of course we have to accumulate. The more we accumulate, the more we feel safe, and hence we move into greed. Greed, accumulation, all that. And that takes us into, at worst, criminality. And because we need to feel that safety, because we've accumulated these things, then of course we have to guard it against those who might rip it off us, and hence aversion arises. And when that attacker, when that person or society or group feels as though they've got the better of us, then we have to run for it. So we're

into the next stage of our psychology, which is just aversion and fear. And from that, of course, comes all the secondary stuff around shame, guilt, remorse, we push things away and get depressed, and so on and so forth.

But the self, once it's been established, it has to have that base of safety. And the fact of the matter is that no matter how much it accumulates, it never feels, it cannot feel utterly safe, because it knows that it arises and passes away. So it's a fact.

So these three ways of looking at things begin to change our attitude. So our attitude moves from selfishness. As the selfishness disappears, the self-centeredness, safety, then of course it turns outwards and it moves towards generosity. It's a natural movement. Where once we felt aversion, we feel love. Where once we practice cruelty, we begin to feel compassion.

So the heart, sometimes you get the feeling that what Buddhism is about is moving towards almost the state of a cold stone, because basically it's all about investigation. But the Buddha heart is there for us to read. He's quite open about his emotional states, about the mental states that he's in. He says he's happy when people take on the Dhamma, take on his teaching, but he's not unhappy when people don't. And he says constantly, he says, whatever a teacher can do for his students out of compassion, *anukampa*, and that word *anukampa* means moving towards the other. It's an actual action, moving towards the other. And whatever a teacher has done out of compassion for his students, I have done for you. So it would be wrong to think that the Buddha went around with some sort of equanimous indifferent heart that didn't actually connect with people. Far from it.

And then once the attitude changes within us, it has to express itself. So attitudes need to express themselves. If you don't, you just become a vegetable. And it expresses itself through right speech, right action, right livelihood. So our language changes, our actions change, and what we do with our lives becomes important. So all that is prefigured in the Eightfold Noble Path. The flame, the light, the warmth and the action is right there in the Noble Eightfold Path. And that brings us to the reason for ritual.

So ritual is just that moment where we actually do something which is symbolic of our spiritual life. So the lighting of the candle, the bowing, and then praising or bringing to mind the quality of the spiritual leader. So here we acknowledge the Buddha as somebody who said he was fully self-enlightened, and that he had worked towards it by himself, and that we have a relationship to that historical figure. It may be a relationship of just one other teacher, somebody whom we refer to, or it could be that that is our central archetype, the very exemplar of our own life.

So it depends where you put that historical personage. If you look at all these scriptures, if you look at all these religions, the people who follow that leader are simply following that same lifestyle. So the life of love and sacrifice would be a Christian approach. The life of insight and compassion would be the Buddhist approach. So all these paths have a particular view of how to get to the top of the spiritual mountain.

So having praised the qualities of the archetype of the Buddha, one then begins to take refuge. So the refuge is in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. And we take it three times because that's an ancient habit of making sure that you actually mean what you say. So in the scriptures when somebody asks a question of the Buddha and he says no, they always ask it three times to make sure that he actually means it. So he said you take this refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha.

So the Buddha here for people who are born Buddhists, cultural Buddhists this always refers to some historical figure but for those who are into the actual spiritual path what you're taking refuge in is the Buddha within there's something which in us has to be awakened and unless you have an inkling of that unless you have some sort of small faith in that then it undermines the whole practice there has to be that understanding that what we're trying to do is awaken something inside us.

And the Dhamma is that teaching, here specifically the meditation that we're doing. And the Sangha refers to, in the religion, to all those people who've experienced some form of enlightenment, so that we're taking refuge in people who actually have had this same experience. But for us, as practitioners, it's each other.

And because you recognize, you begin to realize that actually, unless you're with a group, unless you're with people around you who are going the same way, it's very difficult. Just to come here and make that effort once a week through the hail, rain and snow to come to a meeting is an act of will. And that act of will is a commitment to the path. And just to come here once a week and practice has an effect on your weekly practice. I know all this from my own personal experience. Just to make my way across Birmingham, come hail, rain or shine, it had an effect. And if I laid off it, if I didn't go a couple of weeks, it would revert back to my morning practice. It's as simple as that. And what we're doing by making that effort is strengthening that commitment, strengthening that will. And that reverberates through the rest of our lives.

So then, having taken the refuges and precepts, and that little blessing I gave, it just simply says that we've taken the refuges and precepts, and then it leaves you with the final exhortation of the Buddha, which is to practice diligently for our own liberation.

Then we come to the actual practice. What is that? Well, we're trying to find out. We're trying to find an observation post within ourselves, some sort of position where we can actually observe this psychophysical organism that wanders around the world calling itself me. And you want to know when you get that position.

So this is a very exceptional position. You really can't do this if you're walking around and in action. In the sitting posture, it is specific about finding this position where you can feel sensations and you can actually investigate them. You can investigate your relationship to those sensations. If it's pleasant, how you want to indulge it. If it's unpleasant, how you want to turn away from it. In this position, you can actually begin to feel an emotion as something not me, not mine, rather than saying, I am depressed. You say, there is depression. You point to it there.

And it's by making that inner world as objective to yourself as the outer world is objective, which begins to abstract, disembed that which in us, which is the Buddha nature. And that Buddha nature is simply the one who knows. And as you begin to see thoughts as arising and passing away, distance, not me, not mine, emotions arising and passing away, distance, not me, not mine, feelings in the body arising and passing away, distance, as not me, not mine, you're then thrown back to this feeling of being the observer.

But that feeling of the observer, remember, is also a distortion, because it's the self, it's that intelligence catching its own presence within the atmosphere, within the mirror of the mind itself. So I liken it to watching television. When you watch television, sometimes your image is in the screen, so now you can decide, are you going to watch yourself watching television, or are you going to watch television? And if you keep concentrating on the television, that sense of a self disappears.

So in your meditation, even though you might feel that very strong sense of being the observer, the witness, the one who feels, the one who knows, keep putting your attention on what it is you're actually trying to investigate. And every so often you might just experience just the disappearance of the knower, the observer. So there's a collapse of that which knows into what it knows. And that, in a sense, is your pure *vipassanā*. It's only at that point that we can talk about pure *vipassanā*. Not that insights can't come before that, that's fine, but it's only at that point that we can begin to experience things at a level which truly begin to turn the way we see things.

So that's the point of the practice, and that's why we need to do it morning and evening especially, because in the morning we have to set ourselves to that way of being in the world. You have to remind yourself that you must keep that sense of awareness of what I'm doing from the time I get up to the time I fall asleep. And in the evening it's

important. Best done when we come back from work, have a cup of tea or something and relax. Not when you go to bed, you just fall asleep. It's a case of sitting there and just seeing what we've accumulated during the day. Any tensions, any irritations, whatever we've accumulated, we sit there and we just wait for it to pass. And then we acknowledge these have arisen because during the day I've lost that moment to moment life on earth. And then you normally have a decent evening.

Then finally, there has to be this *metta*, this goodwill. So the purpose of that is to remind us that we are drawing this intelligence into the heart. And that change of attitude will come naturally with the growth of wisdom, but we can definitely help the process by practicing this loving-kindness.

By bringing people to mind, there's that reconnecting with the world. If you don't do that, this meditation can have the effect of you remaining too aloof and people feel that you're distant from them. So you have to be careful. You have to bring it into the heart and reconnect with people. And in so doing, you then remind yourself that you're actually also doing this for the benefit of all beings. When you change, the world changes. Not immediately, of course. So that's the whole idea.

So that connection is made in your meditation. So we're moving from that inward gaze, the inward understanding, then an attitude out into the world, and when we rise from the seat, it should express itself in the way we speak, and what we do, and in the livelihood that we choose to follow. Yeah. Easy, easy peasy.

When you talk about bringing the intellect into the heart and bringing *metta*, what exactly do you mean by heart?

Ah, just your emotional life. Your warmth, your feelings... I mean, it includes all, everything that you would normally describe as emotions, moods, mental states. But they would be around... Well, it depends, you know, we split. I mean on one end of the scale there are the thinkers, who think their emotions are up in their head, and on the other end you get the feelers, who think their thoughts are actually in the heart. And it depends where you are on the scale of things as to what you have to do. Generally speaking.

I think, you know, I know that some people, for some people, such is their block in thinking, that they actually think they feel their emotions up here. I don't think it matters where you actually feel the emotion as long as you understand that that is an emotion. But I think as you begin to meditate and that separation of thought comes from the emotional base, then it's here that you feel emotion. This is the exchange box for emo-

tions. I mean, you might feel nausea, or you might feel tightness in the stomach, but you're only guessing that it's anxiety. It's only when anxiety rises into the heart that you know, oops, I am actually anxious. As a mood, as a felt emotion.

So we know that certain parts of the body tend to hold emotions for us that we've suppressed out of consciousness. And often in our meditation what we think is actual physical pain is none other than an emotion trying to release itself. And often if that emotion has been deeply suppressed it needs to come out as a physical feeling and you never know really what the emotion was. So, for instance, pain in the neck, headaches, pain in the back, stomach pain, chest pain, all sorts. And sometimes you don't know. You don't know what it was.

What I'm saying may be silly, but when I'm meditating... normally the attention is turned on the breathing. But I also heard about turning the attention away from the breathing and on to mind, the nature of the mind. But when I do that, okay, there's something, mind there, all right, but right there in front of me, or somewhere in my head, I seem to have this ball of tangled rope, or something like that. It's there, and if I let my mind rest on that, and I can more easily than on my breath, I can keep it there. And sometimes my body begins to twitch. I don't know what it's all about. Could it be, because you just said something about some people feel their emotions in their head, is it something related to that?

When you say a ball of string, are you saying that's an actual image that you see?

It's almost tangible. It feels like something inside my head or inside in the area that I'm observing. It's quite distinguishing. I suppose it feels a bit like a ball of tangled rope.

Well, what's important is to know the relationship between the mind with its thoughts and images and stories and what's motivating them, which is these emotions, these emotional states. In the Wheel of Dependent Origination, which is the psychology of the Buddha, he points out that at the point of contact, consciousness arises and awareness arises of something. That contact is either physical, something we see or hear, it's emotional, coming out from the heart, or it's something that touches the mind, a thought, an image.

As soon as you've got that contact, that basic percept, perception arises for it to be either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. At that next point there is a grabbing of that object in terms of either indulging it, pushing it away or ignoring it. Now, how do we indulge an emotion? How do we indulge an emotion? It's through the head, isn't it?

There's a feeling of irritation comes and before you know it you're arguing with somebody in your head. You're feeling depressed and there you are walking to the bridge. You see? It's all in the head.

When you begin to recognize the connection between what we do in our heads and what we do in our emotions, you cut your head off. You really do. You cut your head off. And what you do is, as soon as a thought arises, you just cut it. Absolutely. Cut it. And any time an image or a film arises, you cut it. And you turn away from that to what is actually empowering those thoughts. And you always find it in the heart as a mental state or emotion. You see? I'm talking about all these things that are negative, by the way, and unwholesome, yeah?

And when this emotion, when this state of mind, which is nothing but an energy form, and when you go into it, what is it that you actually experience depression as, or anxiety as, or anger as? What is the actual direct experience of that emotion as a felt state, not as a thought? You see, that's what you've got to discover. When you get down there, what do you feel? A bit of heat? A bit of pressure? Sensation? It's nothing at all. And we made such a big thing, didn't we?

And when you can stay with that in a calm and sensible way like that, you see, where has that energy got to go? It can't go anywhere. It needs your empowerment for it to grow. And the way you empower it is by creating a fantasy around it. The fantasy feeds into it and it builds up. It's like you put your foot on the accelerator. If you take the foot off the accelerator, where does it go? It fizzles out, it goes out. So all these deep depressions, anxieties, eventually they all fizzle out. 25, 50 years. I don't want to give you false hope, because this stuff is really empowered.

Now, when you recognize that and you recognize the power of the mind and what it's actually doing, of course, every time you get a skillful thought, a wholesome thought, then you generate those thoughts. And that's what we're doing with the *metta* practice.

So, if we feel something negative within us, then whatever image the mind offers, come off it, come off it, go into that state. You go into the state.

If you turn off what's in the mind, does it automatically go back into the heart centre?

No, you've got to put your attention there. You see, every time you put your attention on something, whether you like it or not, you've made an act of intention. Whatever you attend to is conditioning you. So even going along the road in the car and you see a billboard and you look at it, you've conditioned yourself. You've always got to buy the

same biscuits. And it's really understanding the power of attention and its conditions and how it conditions us that then you understand the Buddha's advice to restrain the senses. Not to look, not to listen to those things which you know are unwholesome. The restraint of the senses. It's so strong.

You started off at the beginning talking about choice and decision, and you're saying it's conditioned. I didn't quite understand that at the beginning, because surely you make choices. That's one of the only things you can really do as a human being, to be aware, to make a choice.

Yes, absolutely. You have a choice, you make a decision, but the choice is always because of confusion, of not knowing. Unless you wouldn't have a choice, you wouldn't know what to do. See, if you get up in the morning and you know you have to go to work, you don't have a choice. You just go to work. Well, you think you do.

Isn't it more subtle than that? You say, for instance, you have a choice. Maybe there is no confusion. Maybe you know quite well. Then surely you can bring... that's not a problem but when you go into your reasons as to why you've chosen to do good rather than evil you'll find that those conditions were conditioned your reasons were conditioned.

And the whole point of the practice is to begin to see clearly how every time we act from the base of an unskillful thought, an unwholesome thought, we actually create suffering for ourselves. It's a consequence. And every time we work from the basis of a skillful, wholesome thought, it actually makes us happy. And that's all we're doing. There's no mystery about it at all. It's just basic psychology.

And remember what we're trying to do is to liberate, that's the word, liberate this quality, this essential quality we are from its delusive relationship with the body, mind and heart and the world it finds itself in.

It would be difficult to teach very young children that kind of philosophy, wouldn't it?

Well, the thing is with young children, little Fionn here, is it's all there as little seeds, it's dropping into his ears and it's there hanging around and at some point I'm sure he'll be fully liberated. But remember, for children, it's about doing good and all that. It's the usual thing that you would teach children. I don't know if it's 25, 50 years, he's got a better chance than that. He has indeed. Definitely.

If you were conditioned from a very young age to this kind of idea, it would be a great advantage, wouldn't it?

Well, yes.

Would they be able to take it in?

Well, not necessarily. I mean, you go to Buddhist countries and they're just as pathetic as we are. It's just that every religious tradition has its own wisdom and stuff, but there are other things going on, aren't there?

So just to go back to this business of choice. If you, say tomorrow, you decide that you will note every time a choice comes into your head. Like, for instance, shall I have a cup of tea? Right? And you stop. And you go into that sense of choice. Will I have or will I not have a cup of tea? So as soon as you stay with it, you see, you'll find the mind arguing for and against. For and against. And then you make a decision on one of these for or against.

Now then you say to yourself well I had free will I could have chosen this but I didn't I chose that but you didn't this is the point you didn't choose the other one so therefore your choice was conditioned by your own arguments do you see what I mean you can't escape the conditioning that you are.

So now, the self holds this wonderful position where it thinks that it has made a choice. Because at one point it had two things it could do, have a cup of tea or not have a cup of tea. And therefore it gets this lovely sense of itself being above the world and above conditioning. And it can do what it wants in its own time, in its own way. And that is one of the great delusions.

Where is the origin of the idea that you have choice?

Well, it's actually, we have to blame St. Augustine for this. You see, it doesn't exist in the East. This idea of a free will does not exist in Hindu and Buddhist or in Chinese.

How do they make a choice?

There is no choice. It's *kamma*. And what you do is, through your wisdom... If you make a choice or decision about, say, a career or a life option, how do they do something like that?

Well, they'll think they were just conditioned to do it. And what they're trying to do is understand things so that it changes that conditioning and therefore changes their choosing. But they don't fall into this idea of free will. All acts that we make are determined.

But isn't it just another way of saying the same thing, really?

I know where you're coming from, but I think what she's saying is that basically Easterners have a different word for it. Whereas we call it free will, they call it *kamma*. But in fact, the natural law cannot be broken. I think that's what you were saying. Basically, the natural law is there. And even if we think we're breaking it, or changing it, or doing something, we can't actually go against it. Because if we go against it, we'll end up in a negative place. We'll end up collecting all of that negative power. If we go in the positive direction, we'll accumulate the benefits, and so will everybody else. That's what I think.

Well, no, it wouldn't be. You see, what can we say? The Buddhist position is not that we are essentially evil. There's a very different tack on life. Well, the Buddhist position is that we're essentially deluded, which is a very different position. And the delusion is entered because we come into life in a position of not knowing. So whether you want to believe in past lives or not, even in this life, what did you know in the womb? What did you know at birth? So we come in in a state of not knowing.

Now that not knowing is not culpable. You can't blame somebody for not knowing. So then from then on we are told what we should know. And then round about the age of 16, 17, 18 or something, for some people much earlier, they reflect on this and they begin to shake off those things that they've been conditioned with or they agree with it. In that not knowing, we fall into the error of thinking that this body, this person, this personality is me. And just as we described before, this leads us into safety, the problems of safety, the problems of accumulation, the problems of aversion, etc., etc.

So evil and unskillfulness is secondary. Now, what this means is that because evil is secondary and has been caused by a mistake, when you go back on the process and the mistake is undone, you find that that ignorance had in it an essential innocence, and therefore you can return to purity. If you were essentially evil, you couldn't do it. So, ignorance moves to wisdom, innocence returns to purity.

What you've been saying, though, would also indicate that I'm not really fully able to make a decision, say, for good or for evil. Because I'm being conditioned. So I can always say, well, you know, when I took that money, that person was just conditioned.

Yes, absolutely. Well, no, you see, that undermines the fact that there is also this intelligence. So although we are not essentially culpable for our unskillfulness for our evil, we are paradoxically fully responsible for it. And that's the law of *kamma*. And there's no way you can undo the law of *kamma* apart from suffering the consequences of your actions.

Now, your actual *kamma* is not something coming at you from the outside world. It's not the fact that you end up in prison or that you win the lottery, anything like that. Your *kamma* is your mental state. When you sit like that, in your posture, that's your *kamma*.

Yeah, but can I say that I've inherited it?

From?

From the past, from past lives.

Yeah, absolutely. What we're talking about is not thought, we're talking about attitudes.

What you inherit from your past lives are your attitudes and understanding. Even in this life, you wake up in the morning and you're carrying the whole of this life into that morning. Only one part of it becomes part of your consciousness, but it's all there as potential, and given certain conditions, certain potentialities manifest. But you can change.

Ultimately the idea is that you recognise that you've actually created this mind, you've created this personality. People have given you things, shall we say, people have given you material to work with—your language, your culture. But what you make of it, you discover, is totally you. That's why you can't blame anybody for your internal suffering. You have to give up the comfort of being able to blame your parents for all your misery and society. It's all us, we've done it. And when you actually take full responsibility for this, then of course you begin to change it and you realise that the very things that, the little acts of internal will that you made which created these states, can now be undone.

You end up with a heart which you can then develop indefinitely. So love, compassion, joy and peace don't have a definite ending to them. They're difficult to say infinite, but indefinite. That's why they're called illimitables. These states are illimitable.

"Can I just ask you about the choice thing?"

"What's the choice thing?"

"I understand when people are making a choice about eating a cup of tea, or not a cup of tea, that's something you do in a split second. But when people are making even more serious choices, life-changing choices, whether they're moving home, whether they're moving country, whether they're moving jobs, that kind of thing—you were

talking about all that to-ing and fro-ing and all the conditioning that goes on in people's minds, and sometimes people can take months to make decisions. But where... How do people come to that point then of making a decision for either or?"

Well, I think sometimes it's because we lack information. Just simple information. And also because there is that lack of clarity in the heart as to what it actually wants to do. So often you have to just wait.

I mean, just to take my personal experience, it took me two years to decide to robe, to leave the job and robe. And I struggled with it for one year. And when I went to see my teacher and said, "Bhante, I want to become a monk," he said, "You're too old." And I felt an enormous relief. I thought, oh, that year in my head going around with lists and all that.

And then I struggled with it a bit more and I went back and he gave me another excuse, something about he needed me at the Vihara because by then I was teaching and very involved. And then I went away and I spent two weeks by myself in Wales, in somebody's little cottage out there, and there just came that absolute certainty. It took two years.

"So it was from the heart then at that point and not from the head, really?"

Well, it was always coming from the heart, but the head was confused. That's the point. Because of attachment. I was attached to the way of life I was with and what it meant, selling the house and all that, and I knew it would be the end of the career as such. It's like a massive change. And of course there is that question, do I really want to do it? Do I really, really want to take three—at that time it was just three years—take three years out to do a bit of meditation?

"And because of that, actually, what you're saying there is that sometimes in a choice, and I have found myself in big choices like that, you really want to do both."

"Yeah, that's it. And that's because of conditioning."

"It is. You just said it right, the attachment."

"Yeah, you want your cake and to eat it."

"Absolutely, yeah."

"Was that a clue for the cup tea? Sounds like it. Sorry, he had the last of the cake."

"I had the last of the cake."

If you're fairly well enlightened, you don't have to worry about making choices that come to you naturally. I would—who can guess what the Buddha's mind is like—but I can't imagine him worrying about a decision. It wouldn't make sense.

"So are you saying you don't need to go through that two years of turmoil and..."

"I know you do. You still have to go through it."

"Yeah, yeah."

Because that's the measure of our delusion. You have to work through it. Sometimes it is painful.

I remember my sister went, two years, I think she took three years to decide to marry this poor bloke who was certain after about a month of needing her. Kept waiting about her. I mean, for her, of course, she was then a strong Catholic. I mean, it was a real decision because you presume it's going to last the rest of your life. It was a good decision. She's all right.

"When I was trying to decide... in France and we had always had the ambition to come back and live in Ireland. And we worked and worked and saved and everything. And we had so many good reasons for coming back. There were so many good reasons. And then when we fixed the date about two years before we did come, I began to question the reasons. I was excited anyway. And I found myself, I found that every one of them was in bad. I wasn't worth coming back to Ireland for. But I stayed where I am. And then we had to, but we went through all the motions of putting the house up for sale and things like this. And the day came when we had to say, yes, I know what we're selling the house. And I had about half an hour to think about it. And I walked up here on the road. There were no reasons to come back. Why go through all that trouble? And then all of a sudden, brightness came into my life. Ireland, for me, is brightness. Illuminosity. I never thought of that before. And that became a valid reason for going back and it has proven true. Even for my children, they speak in the same terms. Where did that come from?"

Well, eventually, the truth comes forth. It was a thing I didn't look for.

I mean, if you look at all these great spiritual leaders, they all go through that huge business. Christ in the desert, the Buddha in his desperation getting his little pot of rice pudding and then deciding that he was going to ascend to the tree and die or make it. And he's there in total confusion. He's sitting by the roadside wondering what the hell he's going to do. He's tried everything, getting nowhere. I put it all down the rice pudding, of course.

And just in that moment, the light comes. He remembers this point in childhood and the way he was watching his father doing the ploughing ceremony. And that gave him the clue. It's only in those moments of catastrophe, the break, it's like—what's that theory in evolution of the stick—two forms. Do you know what I mean? I can't remember that. If you remember it, will you tell me? Because it's exactly what happens in the spiritual life or in any form. You're bending the stick and you're bending it and the more you bend it, there's more resistance. More resistance, more pain. Then suddenly snap and you've got a different state. You've got two sticks.

And that's, generally speaking, how we work spiritually. You just keep working and working. And it's just at the point of its most intense pain that the snap comes. And it's often where people give up. This is the problem.

"Yeah, and isn't that then important, this point to remember, to stay with the wish we make? Where do I want to go? In times like that, and the more... the more intense it becomes, the more it's important to remember this wish again and again and to work against the ingrained habits which always come back and the stronger the possibility at this point for change, the stronger is also the counter power. And then to stick with this wish and to remember, remember, remember."

That's right. That's symbolised in the life of the Buddha, the attack of Mara, the armies of Mara came bursting upon him.

"With cups of tea."

"We are very silent, thank you very much."

"Can I say something? Why does it have to all be so agonising?"

Well, for some people it... No, we're not simple people, basically. For some people it isn't. I mean, I've just run this retreat at Sunyata. It was about seventeen-odd people, eighteen people. And if you'd have talked to most of them, it was agony, it was painful and all that, right? But there was one on that retreat who was blissed out all the time. She was in seventh heaven every time she sat.

CHAPTER 38

The Eightfold Path and Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 35 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the profound connection between formal meditation practice and ordinary daily life through the lens of the Noble Eightfold Path. He begins by exploring different approaches to spiritual traditions—from fundamentalism to universalism—before focusing on how Buddhism's path of understanding (sammā diṭṭhi) naturally flows into right attitude (sammā saṅkappa) and ethical conduct (sammā vācā, sammā kammanta, sammā ājīva).*
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> *The talk emphasizes practical techniques for maintaining Right Awareness throughout the day: creating conscious pauses between activities, bringing ceremony back into simple tasks like making tea or answering the phone, and learning to respond rather than react to challenging situations. Bhante particularly addresses the liberating insight that "nobody makes you angry"—understanding that our emotional responses are conditioned reactions we can learn to observe and transform.*
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> *Drawing from the Buddha's encounter with an insulting Brahmin, he illustrates how we need not accept others' emotional offerings, and introduces the abhaya mudrā (fearless gesture) as a practical tool for maintaining equanimity. The discussion concludes with guidance on establishing morning meditation as preparation for the day and evening practice for releasing accumulated tensions, making this essential listening for anyone seeking to integrate Dhamma practice into contemporary life.*

What I wanted to talk about really was this linkage, trying to make some linkage between the meditation we do and ordinary daily life. I wanted to approach it in a slightly different way in terms of view of the paths, the different paths of enlightenment.

I think we can talk about five different types of ways of looking at the spiritual paths, the religious paths. The first one I think you're very conversant with, the fundamentalist. And the next one is a relativist fundamentalist. Then there's the relativist. Then there's the relativist universalist. And then of course there's the universalist.

What I mean by the fundamentalist is someone who says, I'm right, everybody else is wrong. It's a pretty easy universe to live in. I'm right, everybody else is wrong. I'm the only one climbing a mountain. Everybody else is thinking they're climbing a mountain,

but actually they are descending a pit. They're moving towards perdition. And the world's very simple. Everybody's got to become like me. This obviously doesn't have much respect for other traditions.

The relativist fundamentalists are people who have respect for other traditions and accept that they are, in fact, climbing mountains. But of course, my mountain is higher. And at some point you will wake up and realize that I'm up here and you're down there and you'll come over. That's pretty straightforward too.

The relativist is one who says that they're all mountains and you can't distinguish one from the other. You don't know whether the top of one mountain is the same as the other. They're completely relative and it doesn't really matter which one you climb. And that's of course the post-modernist, isn't it? It's basically a lot of the stuff that's peddled these days. How can you tell? It's a case of your take on the truth, your take on reality.

The fourth position is this relativist universalist who actually perceives that all religions are on the same mountain and that they're all going towards some final resolution and that reading the mystics of these religions, they seem to be saying much the same thing. But when I say relativist universalist, it's that they still see religions, they still see three separate four or five separate religions going up this path but I think what the universalist sees and this is of course where I am myself is that there are actually three paths and that they are expressed through a culture in its own way. And that depending on the culture, you get a leaning to one path rather than the other.

Now, the one religion which has them, I think, at least fairly well delineated in a very clear way is Hinduism. Hinduism talks about the three yogas, jnana, bhakti and karma. And that they refer to the path of knowledge, the path of investigation, insight, the path of devotion and the path of action.

But the three fully world religions, the three that have actually transcended culture and really spread about the world, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, you can see here that each one of them has a particular bent. Buddhism is definitely Gnostic. Most of it is about understanding. It starts always with right understanding. The Eightfold Path starts with right understanding. Christianity is very much to do with love, isn't it? It's coming from a devotional thing, which then expresses itself through compassionate action. And Islam, just its very word, subservience to the will of God, doing the right thing.

And it's very interesting to see these three leaders. The Buddha, in himself, is very outside society. I mean, he's obviously drawn in. People go to him for advice and stuff, but he's very much separate. And he's created this little group of monks and nuns which are specific to a specific task. And lay people, of course, are very much invited in.

But he never gets too involved in lay life. So, strictly speaking, there's no ceremonies of marriage, death ceremonies, anything like that at all. He doesn't take part in any of that. He leaves all that to the culture around him. And his drive, ever since he left home, is seemingly this wanting to know. He just wanted to know whether there was an end to this suffering or not, or this dissatisfaction. So that's the driving force. It's the driving force of a scientist, isn't it? Wanting to know.

The devotional person is much more concerned with how to relate, isn't it? How to relate from a heart base. Much more to do with an emotional heart relationship. And Christianity developed these enormous meditations and contemplations of Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ. Now, if you read the Mystics, interestingly enough, this meditation on Jesus is only half the way. Once you've developed this pure loving, this pure heart which is full of love, if you read people like, say, John of the Cross, then you have to leave all that. You have to leave all that completely. And he keeps going on about nothingness, nothingness. So the whole business of this purification is to do with getting rid of all that is nasty within us which is equally the same with the Buddhist path and then developing this heart of love which is purified and laser beamed and then letting go of that until you leave go of anything which is phenomenal and Christian mystics often talk about things like nothingness. The void.

Jesus Christ, of course, was very much half way, wasn't he? I mean, he was in society, but he wasn't particularly involved in it, but he definitely wanted to change it. Unlike the Buddha, he definitely wanted to change things in that society and bring about revolution in that, especially with the way that religion was being taught, through rules and regulations, and to bring in this whole idea of something which was beyond religion. To my mind anyway, a personal God, believe it or not. But that's just my own little view on things. It was only later that when Christianity left Judaism and came into the Roman Empire that it began to be reinterpreted by way of those people. And remember that the Roman Empire at that time was polytheistic. So the next movement from believing that there are many gods is to believe in one personal God. That's your shift. And then only then do you shift to a higher level where there is an impersonal God so you see that in Hinduism from Brahma, Shiva and then they go on to Brahman, the neutral you can see that shift of consciousness so you see that Jesus is very much involved and he lives in society he doesn't go out into the, I mean he has little times off in the desert but basically he lives right there he moves from house to house living with ordinary people.

And his teaching, of course, is basically about love, isn't it? About love.

Now, when you get to Muhammad, Muhammad was rather interesting because he obviously had a very deep spiritual insight, but he didn't like monasteries. He didn't like it at all. He was married and lived an ordinary life. So what he had to do, in a peculiar way, was to create a monastery around him. So instead of creating a little group of people who would be directly involved in trying to become enlightened, he has to involve everybody. Well, in doing that, of course, you've got to deal with all sorts of characters, and hence the rules have to be a little bit more strict, so you get this growth of the Sharia. But his thing was the will of God, action, the will of God. And the jihad was, in its most corrupt form, of course, is about the spread of Islam, but in its most purest form, he himself said the inner jihad is more important than the outer one. So this inner jihad, of course, was to struggle with the bad conditionings that's inside us, to purify ourselves. And again, if you read Sufi literature, they also talk about getting into this final state of nothingness. The word just slips my mind now. Faniya. And what they mean by that is, if you read the literature seems to be saying the same thing as what the Buddha is saying.

So if we just for a moment take this universalist position that there are three paths, the path of understanding, the path of mind, the path of the heart and the path of action, the body, and we turn to the Eightfold Noble Path, then we can see that, in a sense, it is included in that.

What we have, first of all, is right understanding. And what the Buddha means by that is that we have to see things correctly. And we have to get beyond the delusion that ego puts us into. Now, the fundamental delusion of ego is to believe that this is what we are. When you look in the mirror, this is me. When you've got a headache, I'm suffering. When you feel happy, it's me that's happy. So everything we experience, we experience as me. Now what he's saying is that this is a delusion. So he asks us to, as it were, deconstruct the event.

Through the meditation you begin to see that what we thought was whole and entire is just made up of parts. Even the simple act of eating. There's many things going on. There's taste at the sense base. There's a heart response of enjoyment. And there's this consciousness that knows. There's lots of little bits and pieces that go into making up one simple event.

He asks us to see that nothing is permanent. The ego likes to be permanent, doesn't it? You want to be here forever. Forever. We don't want to change. And we don't see that change. We might see it in the leaves outside and in people dying and all that, but we

don't particularly see it in ourselves. If we really saw it in ourselves, then we wouldn't be so attached to these emotions, to these thoughts. We'd actually see them as just passing phenomena.

And at fundament, in terms of our psychology, we're very much committed to this life form. We think we can be really happy here if we just get it right. The right job, the right partner, the right... And then I'll be happy. You can draw a line, finally. So that investment in our lives as a place where we're going to find happiness, from the Buddhist point of view, is a profound illusion because everything's arising and passing away. And secondly, there's a presumption there of it being me, of an identity, something that you can control. That's the definition of me, isn't it? I can control it. And the fact of the matter is that even when we are delightfully happy with something, there's an inbuilt obsolescence to pleasure. I mean, the same chocolate won't do, will it? You've got to go out and buy something else. Variety is the spice of life.

So now, if we take that as right understanding, how does it affect the heart? That's your next step, right attitude. So you drop down into right attitude. From right understanding, we develop right attitude. Right attitude is normally described as moving from hatred to love, cruelty to compassion, stinginess or selfishness to generosity. But in fact, it's the movement of all vice to virtue. And that is a development in our attitude, in other words, the way we feel about things, the way we look at things, and that immediately affects our emotional life.

So in the Buddhist way of doing things, you move from right understanding, so it affects your attitude, and then the next flows, right speech, right action, right livelihood. So if we go into a situation with the right understanding and the right attitude, then our speech will be truthful, it will be kind, it will be gentle, and so on. We won't fall into the error of telling whoppers. Coarse language, shouting at each other. And when we're in an action of any sort, then we'll do it with that mindfulness, with that carefulness. And finally, our livelihood will be careful what we do with most of our lives. Because what we do has an effect on our personality, doesn't it? I mean, supposing now you decided to join a drug gang. It would be different, wouldn't it? And you'd have to develop different qualities. So what you do is very material.

Now, you can see the feedback here, can't you? There's a loop. So what we do, what we say and how we act feeds back to reinforce that attitude. There's a feedback because the world responds to us when we're good in some way. So there's a feedback which reinforces it. This attitude then reinforces or puts a stamp of approval on the way we've seen things. And therefore there's more effort to see things even more clearly. So there's a round there.

And that fundament beneath all that, that is this practice of meditation, which is basically to do with getting that right, the right understanding, the right attitude, and the right action, speech, and livelihood. That's what it's supporting. So what the Buddha's saying is that we have to take some position within ourselves so that we can see very clearly what's going on, where we're making mistakes, where we're being unskillful, and where we're being skillful, where we're actually doing what is correct.

So our meditation is primarily concerned with accessing a post of observation in ourselves, in the sitting posture, where we can see the mind and the heart unfolding, just offering its goods to us, sometimes turbulence, sometimes loveliness. And then somehow we have to learn how to maintain that mindfulness when we go from the sitting posture into ordinary daily life.

And one of the important things to remember is that when you move into daily life to maintain that mindfulness, you have to be careful not to be hijacked by emotions, snowballed by them. So there has to be this constant effort to stop whatever you're doing, to stop, recollect what you've done, catch the little bit of silence, the centeredness, and then intend and do the next thing. And in this way you create these breaks.

Even answering a telephone, the normal action is to launch yourself at it. But I mean, most people wait for three rings. I'm very impatient if they wait for three rings. So when you hear the bell, if you're in an office or something, you have to spend a moment just recognising what you're doing. It's a moment of acknowledgement, of recollection. Then you turn to the phone, and in that moment there's a little silence and you're ready to receive the phone call. If you try to do two things at once, then this motor starts up. So it's these little techniques that bring this mindfulness to daily life.

The mindfulness is coming from right understanding. The right understanding sees a situation and what it needs. It also sees what it needs from the heart point of view. The right attitude arises within a given situation and the right action is taken. And the whole thing begins to, as it were, work for us. It's a new conditioning.

Now because there's this loop, you can see you can start from any vantage point. Generally speaking in this school you always start from the meditation but you could equally start by just developing right relationships with people and concentrating on that and that would loop into the way you understand how things are and how you should do things properly.

If you concentrate on doing, on good works, and it can be anything, remember. It doesn't have to be, you don't have to go and look after lepers or something. I mean, you can just carry bins about, but it's the way we do things with this carefulness and attention. Even that has its effect upon the way we see things and the way we feel about things.

So there are three starting points. This right understanding, right attitude, and right action, speech, and livelihood, which include just this right action, this way of doing. So when lay people say to me, well, it's all right for a monk, you're not doing anything all day. You've got all this time in your life. But what about us? Well, that's a wrong understanding to my point of view because there's too much of an accent on the sitting meditation. There's too much of an accent thinking that you've got to do these vast long sits in order to get enlightened. But actually, if you get your daily life right, you'll see that the whole thing begins to work for you.

Because it's coming from right livelihood, right action, right speech. As soon as you do something good, there's got to be a training in the heart. There's got to be a right understanding.

So that's why in the scriptures, a cobbler becomes fully enlightened cobbling his shoes. And a woman has this great insight, I think it's first path and fruit, just caring for the bread in the oven, just the crackling, seeing the *anicca*, the transiency.

So take heart. It's only around the corner. Keep struggling with it.

Let me just say something quickly about daily life. I think this business of stopping and starting, really cutting the day up into pieces where you recollect what you're doing and stopping, just allows any emotional turbulence which you've accumulated through some sort of conversation or somebody says something nasty to you, just allows it to die down. And then, just in that little moment, you can collect yourself and then go into the next moment with that sort of more liberated mind. A mind which is not caught up in something.

You can do it any time. You can do it walking up the stairs, opening and closing a door. So you're in one room and somebody's something and you're irritated. Well, normally you'd walk into the next room and take it with you. And whoever's in there gets it as well. But if you just stop for a moment, just close the door and just let it all die down, and wait, just wait for it to pass, then you don't carry it.

There's this business of bringing a bit of ceremony back into our lives. I mean, now, so many people just grab something out of the fridge, stick it on a plate, turn the TV on and sit there munching and watching. And it's like life becomes more coarse. There's a certain coarseness to it.

The idea of ceremony is it's a sort of help to your concentration. It's a sort of help to the whole feeling of something. So we all know what it's like when you prepare a meal well and you set a table out well and you sit there in front of it. And there's a certain ceremony to it.

Instead of... You say, I want a cup of tea. So you go in there and you bang the kettle about and you stick it under the tap and plug it in and bang the teapot on. Slap the kettle, stick it back and you wonder whether you've had a tea or not. You know what I mean?

Whereas if it's a moment of mindfulness, then just that way of doing it mindfully immediately brings about a certain way of doing things, a certain ceremony. Taking our time. Actually tasting the tea. Even tying your shoelaces with delicacy.

Well, it's just there's always the next thing to be done. So you make it actually a very conscious, self-conscious, a very conscious decision. Often we have about four to five intentions in our mind. That's why we're rushing about. We're trying to do ten things at once. And you just get jumbled over. You just trip over yourself.

Whereas if you just stop and you prioritise and you make your intention for the next thing, then there's a clarity. Because normally you can't do more than one thing at a time. When you finish that, you stop, you recollect what you've done, you start. So you keep regaining that ground of peaceful existence, of calmness, quietness. And I know that's difficult in work situations which can be stressful.

The other, I think, very important insight is to really, really grasp the fact that nobody makes you angry. Nobody upsets you. Nobody makes you happy. I wonder if you've really, really grasped that because when you do, it's an awesome liberation. You can stop blaming people. You can actually find the source of the problem within yourself. You can correct the whole of your life overnight once you've actually really, truly grasped that nobody can affect your heart directly. It's always our conditioned response to a given situation or a given person. Always.

You're looking at me as though you don't believe me. How many of you would say you'd actually grasped that? You'd actually seen it? It's very liberating, isn't it? Because now you stop blaming people. And you can just take control of your own life. But that

still doesn't mean that you'll stop reacting in that way because of the conditioning. So you have to guard your heart. You have to be quick to put a guard, as it were, in front of your heart so that it doesn't bounce off this incoming stimulus.

So an obvious situation is when somebody is angry with us. So the anger comes, we can feel it, we can see it, the person's angry with us. So our normal reaction is either to combat it, to come at it with anger, or to shrivel, to sort of wither, because you're afraid of it.

Now you have to guide yourself against that sort of connection. So how are you going to do it? Well, mindfulness, of course, to be mindful of it is the first step. Most times we just slip into the old habit of either getting into the argument or allowing that person to ride over us. So the first thing is the mindfulness, but then there has to be this sort of moment of just inward glancing, where you actually contact the way you're feeling. And then, as it were, you've got to put your hand over it. You've got to sort of quieten it.

And when you look up at the person, or when you re-contact the person, you have to be very careful that you only deal with the problem, not with the person. Now this means that the person now who is angry with you has to answer the problem and not your personal reaction. It's sort of an easy thing to do when you try it.

So what the person's getting from you is that their anger, whatever it is they're trying to lay on you, isn't having an effect. And they feel that in your voice, which is steady, assertive. So what's the problem? So you actually discuss the problem. And that often takes all that stuff out of the situation.

Now, in this sense, we're taught always to offer loving kindness and all that. But when the heart's responding in that sort of way, it's good enough just to offer no harm. You don't have to gush with love every time somebody comes at you with a knife. No harm is a decent position to take. You can get pretty skillful at that.

I myself have used this business of... you see this posture of the Buddha here. So that's called the *abhaya* posture, the fearless posture. It's meant to come from a time when the dastardly Devadatta set a mad elephant on him. And as the elephant came towards him, roaring down towards him, he held his hand up and offered him loving kindness. The elephant collapsed into a state of adoration by the time he got close to the Buddha. It's a lovely story, isn't it?

So what he was doing, this hand, was fearless. But from the heart, he was offering loving kindness. So I find for myself that's a very potent sort of way of just to image this hand. It's the Buddha hand. My own hand is here. So it's a case of allowing this stuff to

come at me, but it doesn't get beyond this hand. It stays there on the outside. And from behind this hand, at least I can offer an attitude of no harm, or of at least wanting to know what the problem is, not getting involved in personality.

There's a case where, I think I might have mentioned it before, where the Buddha turns up at a house and this Brahmin has nothing but insults for him. You know, useless and all that sort of stuff. What people normally say about me. And he listens patiently. He just takes it. And then he simply asks the man, if somebody offers you a present, do you really have to accept it? He says, no, you don't have to. He says, well, everything you offered me, I offer back to you.

So when people are offering you their stuff, you don't have to accept it. That's their stuff. You want to take somebody else's suffering off, haven't you got enough of your own? Leave it with them. Leave it with them. And you can do that by taking this objective stance, by seeing the problem, not getting involved in the emotional thing, being aware of what's happening inside us and just being still.

So this is a moment when that consciousness is both outside and inside. So you remember we have to develop these three positions. Sometimes we're aware of the inside, sometimes the outside, sometimes both the inside and the outside. So it's to find that steadiness, and that's really the purpose of the morning meditation.

The morning meditation is a time when we re-establish, recognise where we ought to be for the rest of the day. So if you miss that, in a sense, you've missed clicking into that frame of, into that level of consciousness. So then you stay with it and you keep bringing yourself back to that. As many times as you can during the day, you just bring yourself back to that, just to that silence, just to that stillness. Then you move.

Then when you get to in the evening, the evening meditation is about letting go of all the accumulations. So it may be that you've developed little irritations and little sadnesses and who knows what. So you have to sit with it and wait till it goes out.

Just now I got an email, a very old friend of mine who's just died. And it's funny. You read it and it hits you. You can feel it. You know, an old friend died. That's how you feel. You feel the sadness. So I'm going to have to sit with that. Then it'll go and I'll be happy again. These things come at us and we have to feel them and then you sit with it. You don't do anything about it. You just let the heart do what it wants and then it passes away.

The other thing which is important in terms of the spiritual life is to really find, this is part of the Eightfold Path of right effort, is really, you know, begin to tackle some part of the personality which is unskillful and really work with it. And what happens is, if you deal with one part of the personality which is unskillful, whatever it is, it shades all the way through, it shades all the way through.

So for instance, since we've talked about anger and all that, if you are very quick angered, you really work with it. Which means that you have to sit with it, you don't respond to the anger, you keep reminding yourself that any time you walk into a situation this is the way you're going to behave. And of course that will feed right the way through the personality. Remember everything is this interconnected business.

And the other thing to do is to choose a virtue. You don't have to choose it for a very long time, just for the period of time which you want to develop. And actually develop that virtue. Some people, for instance, find it very difficult to forgive. They hold grudges. So work on it. Every time somebody says something, I forgive you, just keep saying it. Don't actually indulge. And then eventually there comes this easy forgiveness, just easily letting go of little insults and little daggers that people stick in us.

So this is the last time I'll probably be seeing you in this way. So may I wish you a very fruitful practice and that you be enlightened by the end of the week even. I give you a little blessing.

CHAPTER 39

Right Livelihood

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h00

> *In this Dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines sammā ājīva (Right Livelihood) within the context of the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths. He begins by outlining what constitutes unwholesome livelihood - trades that cause harm to others, including dealing in weapons, living beings, intoxicants, and poison. Moving beyond these obvious prohibitions, he explores the more subtle aspects of motivation in our work lives, examining how the pursuit of wealth, power, and fame can distort our professional activities.*
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> *The talk emphasizes that Right Livelihood isn't simply about avoiding harmful occupations, but about transforming any honest work into a spiritual practice. Drawing on examples like the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika, who generously supported the Buddha's community, Bhante shows how entrepreneurship and business can be expressions of service when approached with the right attitude. He discusses practical strategies for bringing mindfulness and compassion into the workplace, whether dealing with difficult colleagues or performing repetitive tasks.*
>
> *A central theme is viewing our work as a training ground for developing the brahmavihāras (divine abidings) - loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Bhante offers concrete guidance on starting each workday with meditation and loving-kindness, maintaining awareness throughout daily tasks, and using evening reflection to learn from our experiences. This approach transforms ordinary work life into a path toward awakening, making the workplace as spiritually valuable as formal meditation retreat.*

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa. Homage to the blessed, noble, and fully self-enlightened one.

I thought to say something about right livelihood this evening, and then if there's time to answer one or two of these questions.

When the Buddha formulated his teaching, it didn't come immediately. It was something that grew as he taught. He ended up with the path, the Eightfold Path, and that's part of the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth simply states that there is *dukkha*. And dukkha translates as a hard place. We're in a hard place, that's what it means. And he defined that as being because it was in a constant state of change, then there was this ordinary suffering that

we get through our unfulfilled desires and so on, and then there's that more subtle suffering of knowing that the self is not real. There's an underlying feeling, I think, about life because of death, because it's not steady, because it's always there in the background. The sense of self doesn't have a ground and that causes a deep anxiety within us. Indeed, you can say that all anxiety and all fear is the fear of death, fear of disappearance.

Then he goes on to be a bit more specific and he says that the cause of suffering is this desire. And he simply points to that as a kernel psychological position that we have, seeking happiness in things that are simply not going to deliver, that's all. You wouldn't invest in a stock anymore which was told to you by everybody that it would fail. So life will fail us. We're going to die. And yet there we are, investing everything in it.

That desire is a psychological point and from that he then goes on to give us the wheel of dependent origination which is a template of all sentient beings, that's what he says, not just human beings, which is definitely common to all human beings as to how we cause suffering for ourselves. That's the basic psychology that he's into. It's not developmental psychology. I mean, there is a little bit about the psychology of perception, but he's very clear, one-pointed, always centering on this problem of dukkha. And therefore, the whole psychology is centered on that.

In that Second Noble Truth, he pinpoints where the problem lies, psychologically. And then the third one, of course, he states quite categorically that there is an end to dukkha. He doesn't use the word *nibbāna* there. Nibbāna is in other texts. But in terms of the formulation of the Four Noble Truths, the Third Noble Truth is there is an end to dukkha, *dukkha-nirodha*. And then finally, of course, he states the path leading out of it.

The formulation of the Four Noble Truths simply follows the way that doctors wrote their, or at least worked with an illness. First it was diagnosed, like dukkha, and the cause of the illness was discovered. And then finally the prognosis, which in this case is perfect health and happiness. Not health, perfect happiness. And the fourth was the actual medicine to be used. So the medicine that we're using is the Eightfold Path.

We begin, through this practice of meditation, with trying to correct this *sammā-diṭṭhi*, this right understanding, to see the world in a correct way. And when we do that, it has a systemic change, which doesn't mean to say that we can't work on these other parts of the path. So the second part, of course, is getting the attitude right, getting the right attitude to things.

Today, for instance, we've been trying to develop a much clearer attitude around food. Why are we eating? You sit there and say, no, the pleasure is secondary. It comes up, but I'm not eating for that purpose. I'm eating specifically for nourishment of the body.

And then, having got the intelligence right and the heart right, got the mind and the heart right, there is that natural flow into action. So it's through speech, through action, right action, and then right livelihood. Interestingly enough, there's really no need logically to put right livelihood in there because it's included in right action. Livelihood is an action. But he obviously felt it to be so important as to have its own particular category.

There's an interesting passage which relates to this, where Ānanda, who was his companion for the last twenty-odd years of his life, comes to one of these conclusions, where he seems to always get it wrong, and one of these conclusions was that good companionship was half the spiritual life. And the Buddha says, "Oh no, Ānanda, it's the whole of the spiritual life." So that's how important our companions are, the people whom we mix with, because, of course, they affect us. We're in constant conversation with them. We relate to people who are close to us, work with us, etc., etc.

So then he states this right livelihood as a section on its own. So it's worth thinking about it a little bit, reflecting on it, and seeing what pointers we can get. The fact of the matter is that livelihood takes up so much of our life, generally speaking, that obviously it has to become a vehicle through which we can practice and hopefully liberate ourselves.

Just very quickly, we can dismiss all those things that are not right livelihood. Anything that brings harm to other people. Trading in arms, in living beings, intoxicating drinks, poison, slaughtering, fishing, soldiering, deceit, treachery, soothsaying, trickery, usury, etc. There's a whole load of things which would not be considered skillful because they are inherently doing other people harm.

Remember that all ethics, the whole of the ethical life in the Buddhist teaching simply comes down to doing harm. To do harm to somebody else in any way is considered to be unwholesome. So any job that you can see is actually doing harm to another person, or we can extend it these days to the planet, may give you cause for concern. I hope I've not made anybody redundant.

Just on that note, if, of course, one finds oneself in a job which the person has ethical problems around, then you have to be kind to yourself. You can't just drop it there and then. But just by deciding that you don't want to do this job anymore and inclining towards another job, then you'll slowly find your way out of it. There are other conditions to be taken into consideration, generally speaking.

For instance, I know somebody who was in the beer trade, sold beer for a company. Once he became into the Dharma, then he had this problem about he shouldn't be selling beer. I never quite got a straight answer from him as to how he finally rationalized himself into keeping the job. But the fact was that he wanted to know what I felt. I said, well, if I really felt strongly about that, I would move towards another job, but I'd have to take into consideration the effects on my family. So I don't want to take a hard position on something and then find myself being redundant and putting a huge pressure.

I know somebody else who was in the police and had similar problems. He really didn't like the way the police worked. He got a lot of ethical problems about the way the police force works. So he wanted to move, and he was interested in some sort of therapy, I remember. But he took the road of trying to get some funding for it, and eventually he couldn't get it. So he simply found a corner within the police force where he felt at least he wasn't joining in those parts which he felt were unethical. He ended up in special branch. Looking after politicians. Yeah, that's an ethical problem. Don't be too cynical.

Leaving all that aside, we can then also delineate those motivations which are not as bad as selling human beings and that sort of stuff, but are unwholesome, they're unskillful. Here we come to this whole area of the celebs. What are celebrities? It's somebody who's made it either with riches, power, or fame, isn't it? They've done something that makes them well-known in their field.

Now, you can understand if that's the aim of your life, to get rich or to get power in order to realize your aims or simply to become famous, then it puts a twist on the job you're doing, doesn't it? It puts a twist on the job. I know that we have downers on people who've made a lot of money out of their business, poor old Bill Gates comes in for a hammering. But the interview that I saw, I mean, his interest wasn't so much in making money, but it began with a real interest in the whole idea of computers and what computers could do. Then, of course, it's very successful and you build an empire. And then, of course, you're into defense and you're up against Sony and people like that. And the whole thing becomes slightly twisted.

Again, whenever we look at it, it's to do with attitude. It's not about not getting money. The Buddha, again, is quite clear. It's not how much you earn that's important. It's how you earn it. The amount you get is neither here nor there. And then, of course, what you do with the amount. What do you do with the money you have? And if it's done for the benefit of others, then obviously it's a very wholesome thing.

So the Buddha is definitely into entrepreneurship, and I'm sure he'd be a supporter of some form of capitalism if he was here. I hope nobody's going to shoot me.

The case is that this business of making money, if you look at somebody like Anāthapiṇḍika, he was one of his great supporters. Anāthapiṇḍika was a merchant, made a lot of money and bought grounds for a monastery. In fact, so the tale goes that he wanted to buy this park from Prince Jeta. And the prince didn't want to sell it at all. So he said he would only sell it if it was completely covered with gold coins. So Anāthapiṇḍika wanting to make this gift to the Buddha completely covered it with gold coins and got it from Prince Jeta. And it's known as the Jetavana Monastery. And obviously the Buddha liked being there. It was a nice place.

Anāthapiṇḍika then, it seems, loses all his money, and even in abject poverty, he never comes to the monastery without something. So at one point, he arrives just with soil in his hands that he's picked up from his own garden, good soil, and he spreads it onto the monastery grounds. Later, it seems, he does become rich again and as the story goes he dies as one who has intuitive *nibbāna*. So there's hope for us, hope for us all. I think even hope for the rich.

So it's a case of there's nothing actually wrong with being rich. That's the point from the Buddha's point of view. And of course the same can go for power. I mean people who use power just for purely selfish reasons, well we've got lots of examples of those these days. It's one of the big problems, for instance, in Africa, isn't it? Really bad governance where people just screw their own people of all sorts of things. But obviously when you get somebody who is in power and has power for the benefit of the society that they're in, then obviously it's not something to be seen as unskillful or unwholesome. Somebody has to make decisions. Even in a small workplace, somebody has to make decisions. Whoever makes decisions has the power.

So it's a case of, again, power not in itself being something unskillful or unwholesome, but basically how we use it. And just on the side of that, in our lives, especially in places at work, we all of us have a ring of power. We can all do something, affect something. And then there's another ring, which is about influence, so we can influence people to do things. And then, of course, it stops.

A lot of our problems arise because we don't recognize where the end of that ring is. So when we try to exercise more power than we have, then of course we tend to become frustrated. And if we find ourselves not using our power but being overridden by others who are less powerful than us, then we feel that we've let people down, we've not lived up to our responsibility because with power there comes that responsibility.

And it's the same with influence. Whatever influence we have, we should use for the benefit of others. But when we see that our influence is not working, then you have to be very careful that you accept that boundary. If you don't accept that boundary, then again you start feeling frustrated and all sorts of stuff. So people, especially in those areas which are caught up in work where there's a lot of emotional value put on it, like ecological issues and political issues. And if they don't accept where their boundary of power and influence lies, then they just get burnout, and that doesn't help anybody at all.

So that's important too, isn't it? To know the extent of what we're capable of doing ourselves and of how much we are capable of getting other people to do things.

And then fame. Fame is probably the shallowest of them all, really. But as you know, famous people, either film stars or football stars and whatnot, you can use it for the benefit of others. I suppose a very good example of that is Bob Geldof, isn't it? After all, he's only a musician. And yet he's able to motivate people. And so anything that we have, even within our small area of influence, which is done for the benefit of others, is thereby wholesome.

If one becomes famous and then one gets a very big head, then it just becomes a headache in the end, doesn't it? And all these things, of course, when they're taken from you, they cause misery. They cause a lot of misery.

I always remember that case of a very young East European immigrant to Australia, who in a very short length of time built up this huge property empire. And when property dropped in, I think it was in the 80s, he committed suicide. So you can see how we can make this mistake of actually identifying with the power we have, no matter how little it is, and the riches, and the fame.

That's one of the big problems with being made redundant, isn't it? I mean, being made redundant in our society, sure, it's a catastrophe in a sense that your wage can go, your sense of work can go, all that sort of stuff. But what turns people, what makes it despairing, of course, is that relationship that the person had with the job. You lose your sense of identity because unwittingly you define yourself by the work you do, don't you? Whether you like it or not. If anybody says, "What are you? What do you

do?" You don't say, "Well, I clean the toilet at home." You say, "Well, I teach." You don't say, "I cook a meal every so often." You say, "What do you do?" Even our crucial questions always point to, actually, what do you do in society?

And from what you do in society, we tend to build up our self-esteem, our self-importance. All those areas. And of course our basic wealth. So when these are taken from us in an act of redundancy, that's when you hit that despair because you have to redefine yourself. And the definition of being unemployed isn't a particularly happy one in our society.

So it's really just being aware of that, being aware of that. And if things happen to us which take away our wealth and power and good name, fame doesn't here just mean famous in the sense of pop stars, it just means your good name. So somebody can take away your good name. And to do that you have to watch that and watch your reaction to it if that happens to you and recognize that the suffering you're getting from it is the measure of your attachment to the wealth you had and the power you had and the good name you had. And in that way, you don't justify it. This is the problem with these negative emotions.

We actually justify them. We say we ought to be angry. We ought to be depressed. We ought to be fearful. And as soon as you do that, you empower these states. So whenever something like that happens, you have to really back off and sit in your meditation and recognize that these are actually all measures of some form of attachment, some form of wrong view. That's it.

So even if we look at various jobs, most people can find some sort of compassionate angle to what they do. It's easy in areas of service — health workers, people like that, teaching profession, doctors, and even the police, for heaven's sake. All that sort of area is, I would have thought, fairly easy to develop a right attitude, to see the job as something that is being done for others, a sense of service.

When it comes to other jobs such as entrepreneurship, business work and all that, you often get a bit of a downer on that — making money, setting up a business and all that. But actually, it's another service, isn't it? And depending on your attitude, depending on the purpose of what you're doing, then it can be tremendously worthwhile, wholesome.

Now when it comes to even those jobs that at one point we used to use the word "workers" — now it's more politically correct to talk about "operatives" — so when you're a machine operative and you're doing something very repetitive, very monotonous, then I think that you can engender that sense of it being a service. Somebody has to

do the job — that's a bit of a negative way of looking at it — but in the sense that whatever the product is, so long as it's a wholesome product, a good product, then this is what the society's offered you at this particular point, and one does what one can within that situation.

Now, there are some jobs which are more directly effective upon the heart. To work with the sick, with the dying and all that, immediately, especially working with people, has an immediate effect with right attitude of extending the heart, of making it grow in those areas that we call the immeasurables, because they can be developed indefinitely. So love, compassion, sympathetic joy, care — all those lovely attitudes can be developed.

But when you get into a job where you're working with a machine, say in an office or in a factory, then of course it's difficult to have the same value of compassion towards a machine and whatnot. But there is an opportunity there to see it as a meditative exercise. And I often think about people these days, but even more so in earlier times in our society where so many people had very repetitive jobs doing the same thing. And of course that's all we're doing, isn't it? Rising, falling. You couldn't get more repetitive than watching the breath. And if you were to take that same attitude to a repetitive job, no matter what you're doing, of using it to establish this constant mindfulness, then you can see it would definitely have a strong spiritual effort to it.

I remember, even I myself, when I was a kid, used to get a job, 16, 17, get a job after school. And one job I had was in this bakery, this cake factory. And there was a line of women who followed the process from when the dough arrived or whatever, when they baked. And they swung round and went round this little machine and things were added onto this cake as it came round. And I was given the job of adding the cherry round the top. It was the last point. And as it swung round, I had to get this cherry in and stick it on.

Well, occasionally, of course, I'd miss, or it wasn't centred, and I'd go after it and try and put it... And eventually they shifted me. I was absolutely useless. And there was a... Even though I protested that I was school captain, it was dexterous of my feet, and if you'd just give me time, I could actually do this job! And I remember these lovely, kindly, simpering looks from the women — oh, he's only a boy, and all that sort of stuff. But the thing is that just being able to accept one's position there and just to use it as a concentration exercise, you can see that even something so repetitive can be turned to spiritual advantage.

So you might think then, well, what would be — how would you profile a good day at work? How would you set your mind to take as much spiritual advantage out of the work that you can get? So the first thing, of course, is to get up and do your two-hour meditation. And then, after that, to develop a bit of loving-kindness. Now, in that loving-kindness that you're developing, to actually bring the people whom you work with to mind, to bring the place to mind, to bring everybody associated to mind. And what you're doing is you're establishing a right relationship. So, right attitude is right relationship.

And if there's somebody whom you're having problems with, to at least offer an attitude of no harm and occasionally just think of their brighter side. So in a sense, you're setting yourself right with the people, with the people whom you have to work with. But there's also the job. Now, I can't think of a job which doesn't have this quality of repetition to it, no matter how — everything in life has this repetitive quality about it. And we go through periods of boredom with it and periods of not wanting to do it.

So if you get out of bed in the morning and there's just this huge desire to take a day off, then to actually stay with that, not to be hijacked by it, no matter how much you can justify it for all sorts of reasons. And to let that feeling, that down feeling, just evaporate a little bit and then to make that commitment to give your best to the job in hand. And by doing that, the heart will lift. The heart won't lift unless you make a decision. Once you make a decision to do something, the heart will follow your decision.

So it's a case of, for instance, if you want to do a job, say you've got a job at work, and you want to do the job, if there's a negativity towards it — now it's the same in meditation — if you suppress it, then it remains there as a rumbling within the psyche. But if you accept that there's a negativity towards the job, and you're just there with it and you can distance from it with this wonderful noting technique, and it's there, you know it's there, and then you override it with right attitude. And that lifts the heart.

On a slightly parallel situation is when you might feel angry towards a colleague or a workmate. So these days, especially through certain therapies, not all of them, you get these things about owning your emotion. Now that's all right, it's just that people confuse that owning with actually being. So it's all right to say, you know, there is anger arising with this person. But as soon as you say, "I am angry with this person," and then of course you have to be authentic, and you have to tell the person that you're angry with them.

Now, how do you feel when somebody comes up and says, "I'm angry with you"? What's your response to that? While I was at Gaia House, I had a manager who was forever coming to see me and would sit there and say, "I've got problems with you."

What am I supposed to say? I'd say, "Oh, what can I do about that?" And she was being authentic. She was being truthful. And of course, the presumption is that I am the cause of her dissatisfaction with me. And when you go to work and you say, "Look, I'm very angry with you," what you're saying is you are the cause of my anger. What are you going to do about it?

So it's recognizing that all those negative states are arising out of me because of some wrong attitude. Now we know from our meditation that we can't sink them, we can't push them away, try to bury them, but we can, as it were, shift them to the side. This is being skillful. So it's not me, it's not "I am angry" — there is anger, and I'll deal with you when the opportunity occurs. So it's not a case of pushing it away and suppressing it, it's simply putting it to the side, dealing with it at an appropriate time. And then, of course, one raises the attitude of kindness. Kindly words, a smile. And then, of course, you find your heart lifts towards that attitude and supports you. But again, it would be a mistake to think that, therefore, I am kind. It's just that there is now kindness and this is the relationship that I'm engendering towards this particular person.

So getting the attitude right every morning is important. So now, when it comes to the work itself, to re-establish why it is you're doing this work, and give it an attitude which is worthwhile and meaningful spiritually. You can do that. Apart from these dreadful jobs that some people do, most times you can find a worthwhile reason for doing the work.

So then one goes into the workplace and one sits at one's place or takes up the position of your workplace and just to stop for a minute and to re-establish, to constantly re-establish that sense of mindfulness, right attitude and then to give yourself to the work. Now, it's a case of being loose in that situation and of recognizing that we're in relationship with other people. This is if you're working with other people. You're in relationship with other people.

So it's much the same as our meditation. When you're sitting here in meditation, we've got this desire to investigate what's going on inside me, but if somebody comes in here now and starts talking and draws our attention, if we see that as a disturbance we're immediately in conflict, so we're immediately raising all those dreadful states that here we're supposed to be trying to let go of.

So it's the same at work, where you're doing work and a colleague comes and they're all flustered or whatever, and it's a case of you can say little things like, "just one minute, just one minute," and you know where you are, and then you respond. And remember that when somebody comes to you with fluster, with anger and whatnot, it's putting your concentration on what they're saying, not how they're saying. If you put

your concentration on how they're saying, it's very difficult to stop that reaction of that immediate reaction coming from us of anger towards anger, anger towards their dumping their anxiety on us. But so long as your attention is on what they're saying, then you can guard yourself from that immediate reaction that arises.

Just on that point too, when you're with somebody who is coming at you in that way, one of the things you can do is image, if you're quick enough that is, or at least have the idea of the Buddha hand. So remember this, there's a statue called the *Abhaya* posture, the fearlessness. And this goes back to when the dastardly Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha, three times I can say. And the third time was this dreadful elephant whom he set loose. And Nalagiri, the raging bull elephant, paced down upon the Buddha. And the Buddha stood there, held up his hand in a fearless posture, and blasted the elephant with compassion. And the elephant, of course, immediately stopped and adored the Buddha.

Now, whether we believe the fullness of that story, the fact of the matter is that that tells us how to deal with situations where we find negativity coming towards us. So it's a case of protecting ourselves. So you don't have to receive somebody's anger. You don't have to accept it. You don't have to take it in. You don't have to empower it by actually reacting to it. This is what we do, isn't it? You empower anger when you react to it. So it's a case of, right? And by doing that, you protect your own heart. But from behind the hand, at least you're offering an attitude of no harm. And I personally find that very easier if I'm actually listening to what they're saying and not how they're saying.

So in my job, of course, I get occasionally very strange people. And I was running... Nobody here. Nobody here at all. And there was this occasion over a Christmas retreat that I run at Sharpham House, which is a very beautiful place, by the way. It's a lovely place to have a Christmas retreat. And because of some mistake on the calendar, one advert said the Wednesday and another one said Tuesday. So this elderly lady came who had seen it was Wednesday. And when she came and realised that she was late and it was all... She got very, very, very angry and flustered about it.

So I was working with a very good manager who'd been a manager at Gaia House. And she went out of her way to... she gave her back a day's money, tried to make her feel at home, showed her, et cetera, et cetera. And when we met, she was still very, very angry about it all. So a huge heart of compassion embraced this elderly lady and to make her feel at home. And explained everything.

And then the next day, she arrived in the evening. So the next day, I spent some time with her and showed her around the house. And she was still very angry. And once she realized that it wasn't the retreat she wanted, she wanted a hard retreat like Zen. And the one I was leading was more of a reflective, contemplative time. Just spending our time a lot in reflection. She was angry about that.

So I was still, keeping my hand up and beaming out an amazing amount of compassion and all that sort of stuff. And then, of course, we had on Christmas Day, we broke the silence and we had cake. And everybody got fairly loud and all that sort of stuff in the conversation without turning off people. And she was sitting there by the side. And earlier I'd seen her chatting quite well or openly with these other people. So I just went over to her and said, "Oh, how is everything?" And off she went, moaning and groaning. Well, I said, "Oh, for heaven's sake. You've been giving them nothing but..." You see?

So there, I'd lost my guard. I'd chewed into it. Well, of course, she didn't moan again. Not in front of me, anyway. Unfortunately, we didn't have the opportunity, because we were leaving about the next day, to make it up, really. But I doubt if I'll be seeing her again.

So, now, what did I do? Well, frankly, I found it rather funny. But the last thing I tend to do is to get into this big self-judgment of, for God's sake, you're supposed to be a monk, you're not supposed to lose your temper. I just accept that there was a failure there. So one records it. One says, ah, right. So you've got to be on your toes, because you never know where somebody's at, is it?

So this whole business of working with people who, remember, like ourselves, are going through various ranges of emotion within one day. I mean, just think. If you were to log the amount of mental states that arise from the time you get up and the time you fall asleep, it's just madness, isn't it? You're happy, you're sad, you're depressed, you're angry, you're fed up and you're bored. It's constant. And every so often there's a little blip of peace. Oh God, relaxation. I'm happy, I'm happy. You tell the world and suddenly, oh, get angry again. So there's the skeleton of our emotional life. And when you actually catch that that's how I am and I expect other people to be compassionate and kind towards me and not to get angry and to understand me and give me a hug every so often, it asks us to behave in the same way towards other people.

So this whole business of interrelationship at work, and especially where there's difficulty with colleagues, these for us are real points of growth. Another bloody opportunity for growth, as somebody said, to look upon things positively. To see these other people who are absolutely awful as our teachers—that's the attitude we ought to have.

Then of course there's that constant effort to bring us back into the present moment. Some of you might know Thich Nhat Hanh and Plum Village, and one of the little techniques they use there is they have somebody who randomly rings a bell every so often. And when the bell goes, you have to stop. Whatever you're doing, you just stop. And then you wait for the third bell, and then you can carry on.

And they even do that with telephones. Now, you see, most of us work around telephones or have a telephone at home. So when a telephone goes, normally we launch ourselves towards it. So ask yourself, most people will hang on for three or four rings. And it's a case of acknowledging it. So if you're doing a piece of work, it's very confusing, at least for males, to have to do two or three things at once. So it's a case of seeing where you are, acknowledging the phone call, and then just that moment, just that moment of clarification, of clearing the mind, stopping.

And then so that when you answer the phone you've actually given yourself to the phone call. So half the mind isn't still doing your work, half the mind isn't still over there—you're actually dedicating this time to the phone call. And then of course when you put the phone down the same thing: that moment of reflection as to what has passed, anything that needs to be done from that phone call, whatever, and then a return back to the work you're doing. A moment of stopping, a recognition, because you've left it mindfully, it's so much easier to remember where you were at, and off you go.

Now, by doing that, you stop this rollercoaster, this rollercoaster of how emotions gather during the day like a storm. Even simple occasions where people have said something which upset you a little bit. So, you've all been through this, where there's been that little irritation, but you've palmed it aside. It's just the way they are. But it's not being dealt with, and it's a little suppression. And then just when the mind relaxes and you're having a cup of tea or something, "How dare you!" and all that, and you get into this telling them exactly what you feel. And then, of course, it builds up and by evening you're hanging them and ripping them apart and then you have to take an aspirin.

So it's a case of watching that, being very clear as to when that happens to actually stop. And that's where this meditation we're doing has an immediate role to play in our everyday life. Because that's what we're learning. We're learning that as soon as I feel any sense of irritation, immediately there's that alarm bell goes and I'm with it. I don't join it, I don't get into it. There is irritation or there's anxiety. As soon as it's there, the alarm bell should go and I should be awake to it. It only takes a second. And then to

make sure that there's a right attitude and a right understanding from which you're acting from and not from this negativity. Otherwise, you just get hijacked, don't you? You just find yourself being angry, being anxious.

So if we take the workplace as a place to train spiritually, you can see it's got massive potential. And then when you finish work and you come home, that evening meditation really is very important because that's the point where you allow the day to come up. So at the end of each sitting, I ask people to reflect. So what are we reflecting on? We're reflecting upon how skillful we've been through this past three-quarters of an hour, an hour. And by bringing that reflection up and thinking about it, and then we can see where we've gone wrong, then we talk to ourselves. We talk to ourselves in a way that's going to guide us in the proper direction in our meditation. So it's exactly the same in daily life and at work.

So you come back in the evening and you look back and you think, oh, I did this and I did that and I shouldn't have done this and I shouldn't have done that. And then one reflects upon it, makes a little determination, and makes that very firm determination that when a similar occasion arises, you'll be right there on the ball.

Now, on the other side, remember, you have to balance that with congratulating ourselves. If you're always concerned about the negative, then you never get the joy of having succeeded, of having been successful in some spiritual training. So when you look back on the day and you've had a difficult situation and you know that you've handled it fairly well, then we ought to say, well, that was good. A little pat on the head, things like that. A cake. Give yourself a cake. These are the times that we ought to give ourselves little treats. You shouldn't eat cake just because you want to eat a cake. You should eat cake to celebrate.

Now, if you think about only eating a cake to celebrate, by the end of the day, you've always found something to celebrate. There's no problem with that at all. It's a case of getting our attitude right and trying to balance the books. And in that way, I think, over a period of time, a real balance comes to your life, a sense of purpose, meaningfulness. And that's really what we want, isn't it? Meaningfulness, something that's meaningful.

And paradoxically, we get most meaning when we do things for others. Compassion, love, sympathetic joy. Now, when you do that, when you actually do things for others, there's a natural comeback in the heart of feeling joyful. So you're joyful for somebody else's joy. You're joyful that you've been able to help somebody in distress. And you're joyful with friendship. That's a natural thing. And that doesn't mean to say that you

can't do it for yourself, but you do it for yourself for the right reasons. But in this case of doing it for others, when we have those beautiful states, that's what Buddhism means by *puñña*. Puñña means merit.

So it becomes vulgarized when you think of merit as some sort of piggy bank. And when you die, you go to heaven because you've been so good. That may very well be true. I mean, there is karmic consequences through time, which has its original effect in the past, the original cause in the past. But when we do something which is wholesome and good, the feeling of joy that we get, the feeling of contentment, the feeling of well-being that we have, that is our puñña. That's the merit we have.

You can see now the connection between the process of awakening and the process of good conduct. You can't have the one without the other. They come in tandem. You do get this understanding in Buddhism sometimes that there are two types. There's one type about kamma and creating good in order to get a good rebirth and off and on and then sometime in the future you might go for the enlightenment. But actually, the one is completely enveloped in the other.

It's a case of understanding that, fine, we can sit and we can devote our lives just to pure meditation. We can become a hermit and sit in a cave, and surely that's one way. I mean, that's the Buddha's way, yeah? I mean, there's a lovely bit in the scripture where some people, some of the monks, go to these various high-standing monks and ask them, what's the path? What's the path to awakening? And they split into two main types. There's the one type led by the great venerable Kasapa, who's a big forest monk, hard on the rule and the Vinaya. And he says, look, you've got to keep the rules absolutely perfectly, and you've got to sit, meditate, meditate.

And then they go to this other side, which is more Sariputta, and he says, no, you've got to understand the Dhamma, you've got to learn the Dhamma, and you've got to meditate. So for that side, the rules don't take primacy. And so after that they went to the Buddha and said, well, we asked these people and they said this. And the Buddha says, no, that's all well and good. Everybody teaches you the way by which they themselves came. And they said, well, what would you ask us to do? He says, oh, meditate, meditate, meditate. So it's pretty direct.

So sure, there are some of us, some human beings, who are drawn to that path. Drawn to the path of just pure meditation. But for most of us, there is this path of action. And that's the way most of us go, I would have thought. So we've got to make that the path. We've got to make what we do the path to our own awakening. If we don't, then we miss out on a chance. If we think that we're only working spiritually when we come on a weekend retreat or when we're doing meditation in the morning and even-

ing, then a whole chunk of our lives is wasted. But when you actually turn to your work and see it as the vehicle, as your major vehicle, because heavens, it's the best eight hours of your day going into work. So when you see that as your major vehicle, then, of course, that's where your whole effort goes into making sure that vehicle's working for you. And that's the importance of right livelihood. And it's right there on the path. Number five. It is number five. Right livelihood.

So, once we understand that, once we understand the importance of right livelihood, then we need to reflect upon it. And keeping a diary, a spiritual diary, can be very helpful, at least to set us off, to start us going, where at the end of the day you write up what it is that you've done, and what you've learned from the day, and then your little *adhiṭṭhāna*, your little determination. And then in the morning to repeat that determination.

So when we come to see that, you see, the split that a lot of people make between the monastic life and the lay life, it doesn't appertain. The only plus, you might say, of a monastic life is that, of course, generally speaking, not always true, your companions tend to be of the same ilk, of the same interest, and they're actually supportive of your effort as you are of theirs. The problem with living in our society, which is all over the place spiritually, is that, of course, you often work with people whose intentions are quite the opposite.

In a more homogenous society, say in a Christian society, say in the Middle Ages, or even right up to, say, the 18th century before our own Enlightenment, or in present-day Muslim societies, they're probably the best examples, where you have a whole society which is centred upon a particular vision, upon a particular understanding. I suppose you could say the same of places like Japan or Thailand—then at least you're working with people of similar understandings who, well, Burma, yeah, Burma. People who have similar understandings, so you can appeal to people at that level of understanding about the spiritual life. In the West, that's very difficult because many people don't have that at all on the agenda. So in that way, that good companionship is the whole of our livelihood, then yes, there can be that draw of having to work with people who are not specifically supporting the way that you want to work.

But even so, if we look at that in a more positive way, rather than see it as a negative thing, then we can make that work for us too. Working with people who are negative towards what we're trying to do.

So I hope I've convinced you, without any shadow of a doubt, that the path to full awakening lies in the very work you're doing. Just like the biscuit. Yes, so any questions arising from that?

"Well, comments about your angry old lady, when you dealt with her, was the anger the only successful one?"

All four of them. Yeah, to deal with somebody with anger. I struggled with this myself over this business of Iraq. And my essay on the subject, which of course you can all read, is on the website. And one of the things that helped me was to make a distinction between force and violence. When something is wrong, one has to use force to put it right. So, for instance, we have a police force. We don't have a police violence. We don't. And we expect the police to use appropriate means to stop violence, not inappropriate means. And that, of course, is a fine judgment, but it's to do really with attitude.

So I think in my case with the old lady, I think I might have been slightly more, shall we say, appealing to her, and sat by her and said, do you realise that since you've come here, you've done nothing but grumble? Do you realise that all you're doing is creating this very deep, unhealthy feeling within your own heart? You see, I could have taken her into my confidence, as it were, gently. As it was, I just plastered her with this little spike of anger. And of course, fine, she didn't grumble, but I'm sure she was still grumbling. I mean, it was still in her heart. So I don't think it achieved—she would say silence. But unfortunately, the occasion never arose for us to re-establish a warm relationship that had existed when I was being all compassionate and holding.

So in a sense, I don't think it was particularly skillful. It's one of those moot points that comes from justifiable anger. That's very difficult in Buddhist understanding, to justify anger as such. I mean, one can simulate anger, like you might do sometimes with a child. You can simulate anger and get what you want, but even that can have a—I mean, the child still receives it as anger, even if you don't feel it. So it always has some sort of backlash on it.

You might have caught that program, Supernanny. Have you seen that? Did you see some of that? Well, I was very—I wish I'd have seen all of those. I thought they were fantastic. But I only saw the one. And it was this family where the kids were just ruling the roost. There were four kiddies. Absolutely amazing. And this poor mother was just—she just didn't know how to handle them. And I thought the little girl was especially wonderful. And such a lively little personality. She was about six. And she wouldn't go to bed. She had to get up. And the advice was not to communicate.

Now, she was coming down to communicate, but the advice was to just gently take her by the hand and put her back in the bed. And it was just so funny listening to her comments, you know. "I don't want to go to bed. I'm fed up with it." But it was the father

who was doing it. And as soon as she was down, he just gently took her hand and took her all the way upstairs and put her back to bed. Thirteen times it took. But after that, it completely stopped.

And it's that gentle way, that gentle insistence which gets the right response. So if he'd have done that angrily, then of course it would have layered onto the whole situation the anger, and it would have brought up in her anger and all that awful feeling comes up. And of course, that quality of patience—the Buddha calls it the highest form of ascetic practice. But it is, isn't it? It really is ascetic to have to stand there and take the punishment, as it were.

Are there any other questions that arise from Right Livelihood?

That business of stopping—of course, you can, especially if you're doing something on a machine or like a computer. Well, you're supposed to stop anyway, aren't you, after forty minutes or something? By law, isn't it? You're supposed to. So if you put your alarm clock on, your little watch alarm—I mean, I do it when I'm working because you just get so absorbed in the machine. Time just passes. And every time that bell goes, just to give yourself a break.

CHAPTER 40

Starting a Retreat

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h27

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma opens a residential Vipassanā retreat at Gaia House with the traditional ceremony of taking the three refuges (tisaraṇa) and ten training rules (dasa sīla). He carefully explains each precept's purpose in supporting intensive meditation practice, from harmlessness and celibacy to maintaining noble silence and avoiding entertainment that disturbs inner observation.*
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> *The talk includes guided instructions in four meditation practices central to the Mahāsī method: standing meditation for developing global awareness, sitting meditation focusing on the rising and falling of the abdomen, walking meditation for cultivating steady attention through noting the four phases of each step (lifting, moving, lowering, placing), and loving-kindness (mettā) meditation extending goodwill from benefactors through difficult people to all beings everywhere.*
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> *Throughout, Bhante emphasizes the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhāṇa) — impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā) — as the foundation for Vipassanā insight. He guides retreatants in developing the four factors leading to liberation: awareness, calmness, concentration, and equanimity, while maintaining the paradoxical balance of alert relaxation that allows clear observation of arising and passing phenomena without reactivity.*

I'm going to explain this little ceremony just to open us into the retreat. And then I'll do a standing meditation, a sitting meditation, a walking meditation, and a loving-kindness meditation, by which you should be thoroughly exhausted and ready to go to sleep.

Now, what we do is the three refuges and precepts. So for those of you who don't know, this is very regular in practice in Buddhist countries. But there are special training rules. Let me go through that first. The first five are pretty straightforward. So not to harm any living being — that's pretty straightforward, not give up killing each other for the weekend. Not to take what is not freely given. Not to indulge in erotic and romantic delight — difficult, but we need all the energy we can muster to make spiritual progress. Not to use wrong speech. That's easy. We keep the silence. Not to take substances that cloud the mind. So even strong tea can make your mind race. So be careful.

Not to overeat. So we keep the rule of not having anything after lunch. Now, for those of you who've never done a fast or never passed more than three hours without a biscuit or something, I can assure you, one does not die. One continues. If anybody has problems with that, diabetes or something like that, of course, it doesn't apply. For everybody else — not to oversleep. A bit difficult in the first three days, especially for those who are for the weekends, because everybody comes with some sleeping balance. Either they're not sleeping well or they're oversleeping. So it just takes a couple of days to get that sorted. And then after that it is definitely dullness and lethargy, sloth and torpor. Don't kid yourselves.

Not to indulge in entertainment. So to observe ourselves, you have to stop the input. You want to observe the output. So you don't want to read. You don't want to write. I mean, to jot a few things down for a diary, that's not a problem. It's just when it gets into an autobiography. And for those of you staying long term, even to keep your eyes down, not to get involved in anything around, you see. Stop the inputs.

Not to indulge in self-beautification. Here we don't have to worry about how we look — it's a relief. To cherish the noble silence, very important.

Now these are called training rules. They are something that we take on to establish a boundary for ourselves. The other thing is the schedule. So that's also your discipline. It's not a word we particularly enjoy these days, but that's really something which you devote yourself to so that you get a rhythm. Sitting, walking, sitting, walking. That's important, to get that rhythm going. And if you can, to stay within the boundary of Gaia House. If you think you're going berserk, by all means take a walk up the street, talk to the cows — very cool and calming. Just watch them chew.

So we'll take those training rules now. When it comes to the *pūjā* — Buddhaṃ pūjemi, Dhammaṃ pūjemi, Saṅghaṃ pūjemi — bowing is a very strong physical language for surrender. And remember, the spiritual life always asks you to do exactly what you don't want. It's always against the flow. So bowing is one way of surrendering to it. If you don't want to actually do it physically, at least do it mentally. Just to give yourself to the course.

So you pronounce Pali as you read it. So this is just honouring the Buddha, honouring the teacher. So the teacher is both the one who has taught us — this is also the exemplar — and the Buddha is also an archetype because there's the Buddha within us that has to be liberated.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi — going to refuge to the Buddha. So traditionally of course that's the historical Buddha, but spiritually speaking it's the Buddha within us. So it's an act of faith that there is — an act of trust that there's something in us to be liberated.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. So here it's the teaching specific to the Buddha, but you can also be quite universal about that. These days everybody has their own spiritual portfolio. So if you want to add other things that make sense to the Dhamma, then by all means. But it's that which is going to give you your spiritual teachings.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi — as the community traditionally refers to those people who experience *Nibbāna*, because they are witnesses to the Buddha's own awakening. But you can also open that out to everybody who's on the path. So all of us, each other. So we're taking refuge in each other. It's much easier to do something when it's with a group rather than by yourself — even painting a room, you've got somebody to come along and help, it's easier.

We'll repeat that three times. On the other side, you've got the three Vipassanā verses. And this is what we're investigating, really, all week. All conditioned things are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self — not me, not mine. So for those of you who haven't come across that teaching before, by the end of the week, that should be pretty clear with a bit of luck.

And then a couple of verses from the Buddha himself just expressing the end game, and then his final words. That's what he said just before he died: "All conditioned things have the nature to decay. Work diligently for your liberation."

And then just before we say *sādhu sādhu sādhu*, I'll just ask you to spend a moment committing yourself to the course. Remember this is for you. This is an opportunity just to devote your time entirely to your own benefit. And remember, some of you might think, well that's selfish, but it's not. It's self-care, isn't it? It's looking after ourselves. And remember that if we get it right within ourselves, when we meet people they also get affected by our goodness, aren't they? I'm glad you're all shaking your heads vigorously.

So we'll start with that and then, as I say, I'll do this standing meditation.

Buddhaṃ pūjemi, Dhammaṃ pūjemi, Saṅghaṃ pūjemi

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

I undertake the following training rules: not to harm any living being, not to take what is not freely given, not to indulge in erotic or romantic delight, not to use wrong speech, not to take substances that cloud the mind, not to overeat, not to oversleep, not to indulge in entertainment, not to indulge in self-beautification, to cherish the noble silence.

And our verses:

All conditioned things are impermanent. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory. When this is perceived with wisdom one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

All conditioned things and the unconditioned are not-self. When this is perceived with wisdom one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

There is the unborn, the undying, the uncreated, the unconditioned — refuge, harbour and home, perfect contentment and peace.

Just as the great ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, so *Nibbāna* has only one taste, the taste of freedom.

All conditioned things have the nature to decay. Work diligently for your liberation.

So just spend a moment there committing yourself to this course. Getting the best out of it that you can for yourself.

Sādhu sādhu sādhu

So we'll do some standing meditation. Just make sure you're standing on some firm ground maybe. It's a bit better, I think. Probably better. It doesn't matter what you do with your arms — by the side or joined in front.

And just lift up to the top of the head. Pass your attention down your face. Jaw relaxed. Lips together, teeth apart. If there's tension there, just waggle it about a bit. Shoulders — if there's a bit of tension there, just give them a good squeeze. If during this exercise you find yourself getting shoulders becoming tight and what not, just give them a good squeeze, keep relaxing.

Bring your attention to the soles of your feet. Can you distinguish two types of sensations? One to do with pressure, the other with heat, coolness. Are there parts of your feet that you — the soles along that side — that you can't feel or are very, very neutral? Any empty spaces? Can you acknowledge how the sensations are continuously changing as the body rebalances itself? And can you acknowledge that these sensations are arising whether you want them to or not? They're not under your control.

In the same way, make your way up the body and just be aware of any sensations on the surface, inside the body, areas where you don't feel anything — like an empty space. When you get to the abdomen, can you feel the breath there? Or is it tight? If it's tight, can you relax it? Not to worry if you can't. Feel the breath in the chest, maybe a heartbeat.

Shoulders still relaxed. The jaw. And when you get to the scalp, do what you did to the soles of your feet. Just scan it. See what sensations you can feel there.

Keeping your eyes lowered, not looking around, launch your attention outward. Just become aware of what you can see — shape, colour — what you can hear, the sense of other people, atmosphere of the room. Your attention is completely out there. Don't choose what to experience. Let the experience come to you. One moment we're seeing something, the next moment we're hearing and so on.

And now at the same time, bring the in here, feelings in the body, the breath. So you get a sense of a global awareness, both the inside and the outside. Don't look for something or listen out for something. Just let it come to us. And relax. Just relax into this presenting moment, ever presenting moment, always here, always now. Relaxing into the present moment.

In this way we're not trying to achieve anything. So remember, when we're trying to achieve something we're always doing something now for some future result. Being here like this, completely open, is the achievement. Being like this has no reason beyond itself. Relaxing, just relaxing into this present moment. No need to plan, there's no future. We're not going anywhere. We've already arrived.

Relaxing, just relaxing into this present moment, we're just in a mode of receiving. So there's no need to react or respond. No need to present a personality. Here we can feel the relief of abandoning that hope to become a celebrity. Relaxing. Just relaxing into the present moment, achieving nothing, going nowhere, being nobody.

Relaxing like this, wide awake, full awareness, we're developing four factors that lead to liberation: this awareness itself, calmness, steadiness of attention — focus, concentration, steadiness of attention — and equanimity. Equanimity means not coming from a fixed position, not coming from a place of "I know, I'm sure," but from a place of "don't know, not sure."

This abiding in the present moment, inhabiting the present moment, you can take directly into daily life. After a job, leaving one room for another, waiting for a bus, waiting at the lights, walking upstairs — if you were to add all those times together you may be surprised it comes to an hour, maybe two hours every day where we let the mind wander. Relaxing into the present moment, wide awake.

The great benefit of this is that you can see an intention arising. When we see an intention arising we can discern whether it's wholesome or unwholesome. And because of our calmness, if we see it's unwholesome we can just wait — wait for that desire to exhaust itself. In this way we uncondition, we decondition those habits we see are unwholesome. And where we see a wholesome intention, when we empower it, we reinforce that habit. Just in this very, very simple way we can completely change ourselves. But it demands this level of attention, awareness, and paradoxically, relaxation.

Our next intention will be to sit. And as we make that intention, just really take your time. Be aware of all the actions it takes to get us into a sitting posture. And if it helps, using the little noting word — touching, pushing, leaning — just to keep the attention steady, we can use this labelling. Intending to sit.

Make sure your posture is comfortable. It's not so important what you do with your legs — whether they're cross-legged or sitting on a chair, it doesn't really matter. It does matter what you do with your spine. Make sure it has its natural curvature and that you're holding it up through the top of the head.

And pass your attention down your face. Eyes gently closed, jaw relaxed. If there's tension there, just waggle it about a bit. Lips together, teeth apart. Shoulders — give them a squeeze if there's any tension. And it can be quite relaxing to take a deep breath, hold it for a little while and just let the rib cage fall. Hands on your lap, palms facing upward is usually the most comfortable.

And bring our attention to the breath. In the Mahasi tradition we observe it at the abdomen — rising and falling of the abdomen. Or if you have a shallow breath, rising and falling of the chest. If you're already established at the nostrils you can choose to stay there if you wish. If you make an intention to come into the body, come down into the body to the breath at the abdomen or the chest, it might take just two or three days to establish a different habit.

And as you contact the breath, use a little noting word. The noting word is there to stop the mind wandering. But the intention is to feel, experience the sensations caused by the breath. And as the abdomen rises, "rising." The label has to be — the note has to be concurrent with what's happening. If you say "rising" and then breathe, you'll get the impression you're controlling. Just let the breath breathe, let the body breathe. Rising, falling.

If the mind is wandering, really recognise and acknowledge what it's doing. Planning, planning. Dreaming, dreaming. Fantasising, fantasising. Judging, judging. Just be very clear as to what the mind is doing. You're not concerned with the content. You're concerned with the attitude. And then just gently turn away from that, back to the breath.

As you begin to relax, you might find that the gap at the end of the out-breath before the beginning of the in-breath grows. And if it gets a little too long, the mind can tend to wander. So choose a touch point like your hands. Rising, falling, touching. If you're observing the breath at the nostrils: in, in, out, out.

Rising, falling, touching. If the mind is wandering, be quick to recognise and acknowledge what it's doing. Worrying, worrying. Planning, planning. Not concerned with content, only with attitude. And just turn away from it, just turn back to the breath. If you're beginning to feel sleepy, tired, lift the spine. You can open the eyes a little, let the light in. You can even stand up.

Rising, falling, touching. If the mind is wandering, be quick to recognise and acknowledge, turn the attention away back to the breath. Feeling sleepy or tired, lift the spine, open the eyes a little, stand up.

Perhaps we are experiencing the sensations of the breath as calming, maybe even pleasant. Observing the breath silences the mind, calms the heart, stills the body. Observing, feeling, experiencing the sensations caused by the breath. Rising, falling, touching. If the mind is wandering, recognise, acknowledge what it's doing, bring that attention back to the breath. Feeling sleepy or tired, just make that effort.

Hopefully now you feel more steady in your attention, more focused, more calm. See if you can get a bit closer to the breath. Focusing in, catching the very beginning of the in-breath, following it to the very end, catching the very beginning of the out-breath, feeling that process to the very end. If when you do that you find yourself getting tense, pull back a bit, relax and keep going towards the breath.

Rising, falling, touching. If the mind is wandering, really recognise, acknowledge what it's doing, patiently bring the attention back to the breath. Feeling sleepy or tired, make the effort. Remember you can stand up.

The breath is our anchor, it's our reference point. When we get confused or lost, we return to the breath and just remind ourselves that this is the simplest of exercises — just to observe, feel, experience whatever is within our awareness. Whatever we become aware of, that we observe, feel and experience. We don't do anything. We don't try and change anything.

So hopefully now we feel more calm, more focused, we can open up. Whatever draws our attention within the field of awareness, inside and outside, that is the object to observe, feel, experience. It may be a sound.

We're not concerned with the object making the sound, with the bird. We're interested in the process of hearing. Maybe a sensation in the body, pleasant or unpleasant. We go to it if it calls our attention, feel it, experience it. It can be a feeling in the body caused by a mental state, depression, happiness. If it calls our attention, we go to it, we feel it, we observe it, we experience it fully. We don't do anything.

If there's an image in the mind, as soon as we become aware of it, we just note "imagining" and bring ourselves back to the body. When we come out of a thought pattern, we just note what the attitude was that created it and just come back into the body. You may find that when you have an angry thought, for instance, as you come back into the body, you can feel it as a physical state. And whenever we get lost, we just begin again. Always with the breath. Rising, falling, touching.

Can you catch how you're reacting to what you're experiencing? How when something is pleasant there's a desire to maintain it, to increase it? How when something is unpleasant there's a desire to ignore it, try to push it away, turn away, resist? Noting that also, and you become aware of how everything you're experiencing is arising and passing away. Nothing remains.

Having accessed this observation post within ourselves, a perch from which we can observe, feel, experience the body with its sensations and feelings, the heart with its emotions and moods, the mind with its images, even thoughts if we're quick enough. Can you see that when we're in this mode everything is happening of itself? Not because we determine or will it. It's all happening outside our control. It's not me.

Perhaps you can sense a distance, a space between the observer, the feeler, the experiencer and what is being observed, being felt, being experienced. Although this isn't the fullest state of *vipassanā*, here at least we can see clearly that sensations, feelings, moods, emotions, thoughts, images are there, not here. They're objects. Not the subject. Not me.

Putting aside now all instruction, relaxing into the present moment, wide awake. Just observe, feel, experience whatever draws the attention within the field of awareness. And when we lose it, just begin again with the breath.

When we come to the end of a sitting it's good just to reflect upon it a little. How diligent were we at bringing ourselves back to the present moment? How did we deal with the various physical and mental states that arose? Were we skillful, unskillful, confused? Which of these three characteristics of existence – the impermanence of things, the role of wanting and not wanting, and this "not me, not mine" – which one of those was most obvious to us? Penetrating any one of these three characteristics leads to liberation. And then it's good to make a determination, a real intention for the next sitting or just as a general attitude.

And now we're going to do some walking meditation and being aware of that moment where we intend to rise. Just be aware of all the actions it takes to get us standing and then to put it on the circle. So if you just find a position on the circle all the way around the room, intending to stand.

Walking meditation balances the sitting meditation and it's very good for developing the steadiness of attention, focusing, concentration. It's a much louder, more obvious action than the breath and it's still neutral. All we're doing is just feeling, observing, experiencing the sensations just around the feet.

We begin by just feeling the feet on the floor and a noting word would be "standing, standing." These words are just gently repeated and the purpose is to keep the intellect happy, stop it wandering. When we feel established standing, we make the intention "intending to walk." There are four parts to the footstep: the lifting as the foot peels off the floor, moving as it moves forward, falling as it moves to the ground or dropping, and then placing as your weight moves into it. At that point there should be two feet on the floor, and then the next step begins. "Intending to walk, lifting, moving, lowering, placing, lifting, moving, lowering, placing."

If you haven't got the balance for this, just "lifting, placing" will do. And bringing ourselves to a standstill, "standing, standing, standing." When that feels established, "intending to turn, turning, turning, standing, standing." When that feels established, "intending to walk, lifting," and bringing ourselves to a standstill, "standing." Normally you would choose a place where you can do this for ten, maybe fifteen steps backwards and forwards.

So now we're going to sit again and draw our practice to an end with goodwill meditation, loving kindness meditation. So make sure you take your time, being aware of all your actions, see if you can find a noting word to match them – stretching, pushing and so on. Intending to sit.

The practice of loving-kindness transforms our understanding into an attitude. We have to be careful that the equanimity that we experience in the process of *vipassanā* doesn't slip into indifference. And we do this by re-engaging with the world. *Mettā* goodwill is not an emotion, it's an attitude. So you can practice this even when you don't feel so good, if you feel depressed. In time of course the heart resonates with the attitude, but it's not necessary for it to do so to develop goodwill. That's why you can be kind to somebody even though you hate their guts.

The four or five traditional blessings which you can use if you wish. May you be safe. Everybody wants to be safe from danger, both inside and outside. From within ourselves and from the world out there. Everybody wants to be healthy, well. Everybody wants to be free of distress, mental distress. They want to be happy, and to live a life which is contented, more contentment in it, happy with what we have and in harmony with the world. Even when the world is not so pleasant, but to be in harmony with it, working with it. Safe, well, happy, contented, in harmony with the world.

We start with our benefactors, bringing people to mind who've helped us, raises gratitude, and with gratitude it's easy to wish them well. And then we offer it to those who are near and dear to us, to friends, people at work and so on. To neutral people, people that we know – or we see rather, but we don't know. Neighbours, people we

travel with, even people at work. We offer them the same quality of goodwill. Then we turn it towards ourselves. And in that heart of goodwill we can bring somebody in we find difficult – not that they are difficult, we just find them difficult. Then we begin to radiate outwards, first of all to each other, to our neighbours, and here you can relocate to where you live, all the people in our country, all the peoples of Europe, all peoples on earth, and finally to all beings in all directions, so that this attitude of goodwill becomes universal, not determined by whether we like or dislike somebody.

Bringing to mind a benefactor, somebody who's helped us in our lives. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

Bring to mind those who are near, dear to us. May you be safe, well and happy. Live contented, in harmony with the world.

Bring to mind friends, people at work, whomever we wish. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

Bringing to mind a neutral person or persons, people we see but don't know. Offering them the same quality of goodwill. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

Turning now that stream of goodwill towards ourselves. May I be safe, well and happy. May I live contented, in harmony with the world.

And into the heart of goodwill, someone we find difficult. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

Beginning now to radiate outwards, first of all to each other, our spiritual companions. May we be safe, well and happy. May we live contented in harmony with the world.

To our neighbours, remember we can relocate to where we live. All the people in our country, all the peoples of Europe. All people on earth, and as you scan the globe, hover a little while over those places where there's war, natural disaster, poverty. And finally, to all beings in all directions.

And we end with a little chant: *Sabhe satta sukhita hantu* which means "may all beings be happy," and then *Sadhu sadhu sadhu* which means "well done" three times. *Sabhe satta sukhita hantu. Sabhe satta sukhita hantu. Sabhe satta sukhita hantu. Sadhu sadhu sadhu.*

Take this mindfulness with you now until you fall asleep. Just take your time, make every action deliberate. Don't do an action which you didn't know you were doing. So these noting, this little noting can be very helpful to do that. You have to slow down, slow down all these actions that we do every day. They become numbed.

When was the last time you tasted your toothpaste? And if you really tasted your toothpaste, would you buy that one again?

And finally, when you get to bed, you're lying down, especially those of you who have difficulty sleeping, you do this practice of *mettā*. Make it very simple, just somebody whom you have no problems with, if there is anybody. If not, just somebody you don't have problems with. And then to yourself, and then to all beings, and choose a very simple phrase, like, "may you be happy." And just keep repeating that, just very gently. And it creates a certain level of concentration, and that becomes the substrate of your sleep. That makes you sleep more peacefully.

Or just the breath, just the calmness of the breath. If you find yourself being very, very restless, tossing from one side to the other, try just lying very still and refusing, under all circumstances, to move. You may be surprised to find that you suddenly wake up tomorrow morning.

And of course, you mustn't fall asleep without making a severe determination to wake with the bell.

CHAPTER 41

Starting a Retreat

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 55 min

> *In this opening session of a retreat at Gaia House, Bhante Bodhidhamma establishes the foundational approach for intensive vipassanā practice. Beginning with a detailed standing meditation to cultivate embodied awareness, he guides practitioners through a systematic body scan that develops the 'bubble of consciousness' - our immediate field of present-moment experience.*
>
> *The talk transitions into seated meditation instruction following the Mahasi Sayadaw method, emphasizing slow, mindful movement with noting practice (lifting, placing, sitting). Bhante explains how proper posture expresses the dignity of the Awakened One, then guides breath awareness at the abdomen using 'rising, falling' noting to anchor attention.*
>
> *Key teachings include working with the five factors of awakening (sati, samādhi, vīriya, passaddhi, upekkhā), understanding desire as the cause of dukkha, and recognizing the three characteristics: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). The session concludes with guidance on post-meditation reflection, encouraging practitioners to assess their diligence and make specific resolutions for continued practice.*
>
> *This comprehensive introduction provides both newcomers and experienced practitioners with clear, practical instruction for establishing the contemplative foundation essential for insight development during retreat.*

So we can start the standing meditation. It takes about ten to fifteen minutes, and if that's too long for you, we'll just sit down. Standing, make sure you feel grounded, balanced, lifting up through the spine to the top of the head. Standing tall.

Spend a moment now relaxing the brow. Eyes looking downward, unfocused. The jaw. Is there any tension there? If so, just waggle it about a bit or clench the jaw and relax. Shoulders. Any tension there? If so, give them a good squeeze. Hands joined in front or by the side, whatever's comfortable. Just acknowledge the posture, energy running up the spine to the top of the head, everything else just hanging off, relaxed.

Draw your attention now to the soles of your feet. What can you feel down there? Can you isolate the sensations of pressure? Can you isolate the sensations of warmth or coolness? What about the more subtle sensations that tell you what you're standing on? The sponginess of carpets, the hardness of wood? Can you isolate areas of the soles where the sensations are neutral? Can you get in contact with those around the instep

maybe? Becoming aware of how the sensations are continuously changing as the body rebalances itself. And just acknowledge that these sensations arise whether we want them to or not. They're not under our direct control.

So let's take our time. Let's come up the body, see what we can feel both on the surface and the inside of the body. And be aware of areas that seem to be devoid of feeling, just empty. When you get to the abdomen, can you feel the sensations caused by the breath there? The rise and fall? Is there any tension? Coming up into the stomach area, can you feel the breath there? Is it more prominent? Is there any tension there? Moving up into the chest. Can you feel the breath there? Is that more prominent? Do you have a shallow breath? Any tensions? Feel the heartbeat? Shoulders still relaxed. The jaw. The brow. When you get to the scalp, scan it like you did the soles of your feet. What can you feel up there?

Now, without moving your eyes, just become aware of the colours and shapes ahead of you. Any sounds? If you're in a quiet room, it might just be the sound of the electrical equipment or your body humming in your ears. What's the atmosphere of the room you're in like? Can you sense the presence of those around you or near you? So your attention is completely out there. Now at the same time, bring in the in here, the feet, the breath, sensations in the body, both inside and outside.

This is the bubble of our consciousness. This is the world we are actually experiencing moment after moment, being created by this complex organism. We can't get outside it, underneath it, above it. This is it. This is the world as we experience it. This is our universe. And we're always at the centre of it. So we may as well relax. Relax into this present moment, wide awake. And just allow the attention to move to whatever draws it. Something you see, now something you hear, now something you feel. Just hang loose within that globe. Relaxing. Abiding in the present moment, wide awake.

In this mode, just being, we can let go of ideas of achieving something. That's doing. Doing something now for some future result. But here, in this mode, just being, this is the result. There's no reason for being. It just is. Relaxing. Dwelling in the present moment, wide awake.

In this mode, just being, there's only this ever-presenting moment. There's no past, there's no future. Just this moment, here and now. So there's no reason to plan, even looking forward to anything. It doesn't matter. We're not going anywhere. In this mode, we're always arriving. Relaxing. Inhabiting the present moment, wide awake.

In this mode, we're sitting back within ourselves. We're not reacting, not responding. Just watching, feeling, experiencing. And the world is just arising and passing away. Because we're not engaged, we don't have to present somebody, be a person, a personality. We can be anonymous. Relaxing, abiding in the present moment, wide awake, achieving nothing, going nowhere, being nobody.

In this mode, we're developing five of the seven factors that lead to liberation. There's the awareness, of course, and there is that steadiness of attention, a phrase I prefer to concentration, which I think makes us feel tight. It's just the effort needed to maintain steadiness of attention. A sense of calmness in that steadiness, even if the body feels restless and the heart agitated, the watcher, the observer is calm. And then there's the quality of equanimity. The dictionary says this is a balanced mind, but it should be a balanced mind and heart. Just letting go of holding on to views and opinions, be completely open-minded. And the heart, to let go of its prejudices, its fears, its aversions, its preferences, open-hearted. Open-hearted and open-minded.

When these are established, we can bring in that curiosity, specifically around the three characteristics of existence. Impermanence, how we create suffering, and not self. So this is the base. You can always return to it in sitting and in daily life.

And in daily life, to maintain this poise stops us from being carried away by emotions. You've had a phone call, you've finished a piece of work, you've been out and about, and you feel anxious, irritated, overexcited. But if you can just stop after every action, after every piece of work, after every conversation, and let the heart empty itself, then in the clarity and calmness, you can see the next intention. We can decide whether it's wholesome or skillful or otherwise.

If it is unwholesome and unskillful, we just stay still with that energy until it dies away, or at least begins to die away. And so it doesn't have such a hold on us. If it's skillful, of course, we empower it. Just in this very simple way, we can better our habits and improve our personalities. But it takes this degree of attention.

Our next intention is to sit. So let us now begin to practise in the way the Mahāsi Sayadaw would have us by slowing everything down and becoming aware of the tiniest movements. We can begin to use noting words to keep the attention tethered to the object and stop it wandering off into fantasies. Moving, stretching, lifting, placing, lowering. Taking our time, aware of all the movements it takes to get this body into a sitting posture, intending to sit.

Make sure the posture is the expression of the awakened one, like a good statue. Lift up from the lower abdomen, the muscles in the lower back. When you do this, you will feel the breath in the abdomen much more clearly. And then lift up the spine to the top of the head. Spend the initial moments relaxing the brow. Eyes gently closed, the jaw, shoulders, and hands on your lap, whatever feels comfortable. Acknowledging the posture, energised up the spine, everything else relaxed.

If in our sitting the body begins to slump, just make the intention: intending to lift, lifting, lifting. If the body becomes tense: intending to relax, relaxing, relaxing. Draw the attention now to the breath at the abdomen, or wherever you feel it most, using a noting word. Rising, rising, falling, falling. If you're established at the nostrils and don't want to move to the abdomen: in, in, out, out. Get in touch with the breath, the feel of it. Just relax the attention onto those feelings.

If the mind is wandering, when you wake up out of it, really recognise and acknowledge what it's doing. Worrying, worrying, planning, planning. And draw the attention away and bring it back to the breath and determine to stay there. Feeling sleepy or tired, just lift the spine, open the eyes just a little, and if the sleepiness is still there, you can open them wide, but keep the attention inward. Just relaxing the attention on the sensations caused by the breath, allowing those neutral sensations to bring silence to the mind, calmness to the heart, stillness to the body.

If the mind is wandering, when you wake up out of it, really recognise and acknowledge what it is doing. We're interested in the mood, emotion, mental state or attitude that is driving the fantasies. Let go of the story. We're only interested in what is actually motivating it. Irritation, irritation, excitement, excitement. Then draw the attention back to the breath and determine to stay there. Feeling sleepy or tired, keep making that effort, lifting up, opening the eyes. And don't forget, if the dullness and lethargy become overwhelming, you can stand up.

Allowing the attention to settle on the breath. As we feel more settled, draw yourself closer to see if you can catch the very beginning of the in-breath, stay with it to the very end, and the very beginning of the out-breath, and stay with it to the very end. If when you do this you find yourself getting tense, then sit back within yourself and have the impression of receiving the breath. Rising, rising, falling, falling.

From now on, when the mind wanders and you recognise and acknowledge what's driving it, instead of coming back to the breath, come back into the body. See if you can feel it. If it is excitement, come into the body and see if you can feel the agitation. Feel the restlessness and perhaps heat of worry. If it's romance, feel the warmth and happi-

ness. Stay there till it all evaporates. And again, feeling dull-minded or lethargic in the body. You can also get into the feel of these states, the sensations, the feelings. Keep energising the spine, and you can still open the eyes to let the light in.

When we get lost, we can always begin with the breath. The breath is our anchor and reference point. When we're confused, for instance, best to go back to the breath. Let's begin again with the breath. Rising, rising, falling, falling. And find the noting you need just to help keep the attention steady.

Becoming aware of how we are reacting to what we're experiencing. How when something is pleasant, we're drawn towards it, we want to maintain it, to develop it. Can you feel the force of that desire? When something is unpleasant, we first ignore it, but then we just want to get rid of it. If the posture is a little uncomfortable, we want to change it. Can you feel the strength of the desire? Can you feel these desires and not do anything? Just allow them to express themselves and exhaust themselves. This is the desire the Buddha points to as the psychological cause for our suffering and unsatisfactoriness. Is that true for you?

Becoming aware of how everything we are experiencing is arising and passing away. Everything is in a process. Nothing repeats itself. Even though each breath is similar, they're never the same. Everything is vanishing, disappearing. Nothing remains. Is there anything reliable?

Becoming more aware of how everything we're experiencing is an object. If we have discomfort in the knee, we're looking down from the position in the forehead as the observer. It's a sort of observation post. Can we make that separation, that distance between the observer, the feeler, the experiencer and the object more obvious to us? At times we can use a word like "there," so there's aching, there over there is an itch. If it's an emotion or mood in the body, there's irritation, there's excitement. When it is an image in the mind right in front of you, you can point to it, there's an image. You might even be able to do this with a thought. Are the observer and the observed, the feeler and the felt, the experiencer and the experienced, the same or distinct? Can the perceiver be the perceived?

Becoming more aware of how everything is happening of its own accord. In *vipassanā*, we've taken the objective position of the observer, the feeler, the experiencer. We've separated out from the psychophysical organism and allowed it to manifest as it wants. We find that the body offers us sensations and feelings, pleasant and unpleasant, whether we want it to or not. The heart, its moods and emotions, pleasant and unpleas-

ant, whether we want it to or not, and the mind, its thoughts and images, wholesome and unwholesome, whether we want it to or not. We don't have direct control. If control is being exercised by the body, the heart and the mind, how can they be me?

Putting aside all instruction, have absolute confidence that this intuitive awareness is able to understand the way things really are, that it can have profound insight into the nature of things. We don't need to keep thinking about it, prompting it. No need to do anything. Don't try and change anything. Just absolute acceptance of this is the way it is. All we need to do is just observe, just feel, just experience whatever draws the attention within the field of awareness.

When we come to the end of a sitting, it's good to spend a little time reflecting on our experience. You can ask questions of yourself. How diligent was I in bringing myself back to the present moment? If I thought I was diligent, then I should congratulate myself. If I thought I could have been a little more committed, I should encourage myself. There's no need for self-criticism.

Was there some mental state or physical state that you had to work with? Some form of discomfort or agitation, perhaps? Some sleepiness? How did you deal with it? Just choose one of them. If you thought you were skillful, you can congratulate yourself. If you thought you could have been a little more committed, you could encourage yourself. Don't get into self-criticism.

In this sitting, what was most prominent for you? The role of desire in creating unsatisfactoriness? Or was it the impermanence of things? Or was it that everything you were experiencing was an object, not under your direct control?

And it's good to make a resolution. It can be quite specific. Next time I feel dozy, I'll immediately open my eyes. Or it can be a general commitment to affectionate mindfulness.

When we come out of a sitting, don't jump out of it. Open the eyes gently, and let the light in.

CHAPTER 42

A Detailed Guided Meditation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 45 min

> *This guided meditation offers detailed instruction in the Mahāsī Sayadaw tradition of vipassanā bhāvanā (insight meditation). Bhante Bodhidhamma begins with establishing proper posture and relaxation techniques, then guides practitioners through breath awareness using the abdomen as the primary meditation object with noting practice (rising, falling, touching).*
>
> *The teaching progresses from developing samādhi (concentration) through mindful observation of the breath to establishing satipaññā (mindful awareness) of all arising phenomena—sounds, sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Practitioners learn to maintain the observer's position, noting whatever arises without attachment or aversion.*
>
> *The instruction culminates in understanding vipassanā's ultimate purpose: recognizing the three characteristics of existence—anicca (impermanence), anattā (not-self), and dukkha (unsatisfactoriness). Through this bare attention and choiceless awareness, practitioners develop the intuitive intelligence that leads toward nibbāna realization.*
>
> *Perfect for establishing a solid foundation in Mahāsī method vipassanā practice, suitable for both beginners learning the technique and experienced meditators deepening their understanding.*

Firstly, we must settle our body into a meditative posture. Some sit on chairs, others use kneeling stools, but the usual position is to sit on the floor with a cushion in a cross-legged posture. Your hands should rest on your lap, preferably one on top of the other. Now whatever posture you adopt it should at first feel comfortable. Then make sure the spine is straight though keeping its natural curvature. It's best not to lean against anything for this will induce sleep.

Now imagine a puppet string running from the base of the spine to the top of the head and it being gently pulled up so that all the vertebrae separate and there's a feeling of growing tall and light. A feeling of energy running up the spine without any tension or tightness. And the head should feel balanced on top. Now just let everything relax off that central column.

Here we can help ourselves relax with some simple exercises. Firstly, let's see how relaxed we can become by simply telling muscles to relax. Start from the top of the head and go down the rest of the body, relaxing muscles as best you can. So start at the

top of the head, come down over the brow, the eyes, the cheeks, the jaw, especially the jaw, the neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. Just feel everything getting heavier as tension stops supporting them. Now go back to the chest. Relax it. Go down the body to the stomach, to the abdomen. Just relaxing as best as you can. And finally, just feel your legs heavy on the floor.

Superficial surface tension should now be released if only a little, but we may feel a deeper level of tension more habitual and therefore not easy to relax by a mental volition. We can use a second technique here of muscular tension. Where you feel tension, tense the muscles in that area as hard as you can and release them slowly. This is especially good for tension in the face. Just screw up the face as much as you can now. Hold it. And relax. Now let's try that again. Hold it. Hold it. And relax.

It's also good for the neck and shoulders. Just tighten up that whole area now. Hold it. And relax slowly. Let's try that again. Tighten up the whole area. Neck and shoulders. Hold it. And just relax slowly.

A third technique is best for tensions felt in the chest, though it has an effect on the whole body. Controlled breathing. Take a slow, deep in-breath, fill the lungs to capacity, hold for as long as comfortable, and just let the whole ribcage fall quickly, expelling all the air. Then wait for the next breath to arise naturally, and this will prevent hyperventilation. So now let's take in a deep breath, hold it, and just let it go. Let's try that again. Take a deep breath. Hold it. And just let it go.

Hopefully you will have developed a deep relaxation. So now we should find ourselves in a posture highly conducive for meditation. The spine should be energised but not tense. The rest of the body should feel relaxed, hanging, as it were, off this central column of the spine. And the head should be gently poised on top, symbolising the balance between physical alertness and relaxation. So now, for a few moments, let's feel this posture as a whole, and recognise its qualities of alert energy and yet calm relaxation.

Now we need to develop the same sense of energetic alertness and relaxed calmness in the mind, and to achieve this we use the breath. Place your attention on the abdomen and feel its rising and falling motion as you breathe naturally. Please note this is not a breathing technique. The breath should not be interfered with. Now it may be that the breath is not obvious to you at the abdomen, in which case see if you can feel it at the chest, rising and falling. The breath at the nostrils may also be used, but for the Mahāsi technique it is preferable to use the abdomen. See now which one is most obvious to you.

Now whichever place you've chosen, this is your primary object of meditation. This means you will use this place to establish an alert and calm awareness. If you move from one place to another, say from the nose to the abdomen, this will undermine your ability to become concentrated, that is, the ability to watch with an alert but calm attention without flitting away.

If you're watching the breath process at the abdomen or chest, observe the movement, the rising and falling, and use a noting word to still the thinking process. With the in-breath, note "rising, rising," and with the out-breath, note "falling, falling." After the out-breath, there's a rest, and there's danger that the mind will run away on fantasies. Now, to stop this happening, we choose a touch point. It may be the feeling of your hands on your lap, or the feelings of your legs on the floor. Choose what is most obvious.

So as you feel the abdomen or chest rising with the in-breath, feel those feelings, watch them closely and point your attention directly at them, noting "rising, rising." In the same way as you feel the abdomen or chest falling with the out-breath, feel the feelings, the sensations of the movement. Watch them intently and note "falling, falling." If there's a pause before the in-breath, note a touching point: "touching, touching, touching." Now be sure as soon as the in-breath starts to return immediately to the abdomen or the chest.

If you're concentrating at the nostrils, it's the same, except it's more appropriate to use the noting words "in, in," "out, out," while remembering to concentrate on the sensations at the nostrils or the upper lip, wherever the passage of air is felt most acutely.

Please note it doesn't matter how many times you say the noting word. Once may be enough. What is important is to be attentive to the feelings or sensations as they arise. The word itself is of little importance. It's just a simple and very effective way to stop the mind from wandering. What you must pay attention to are all the sensations caused by the process of breathing.

Now you may find that your mind wanders off on thoughts and fantasies. When you wake up out of them, just note "thinking, thinking," or "dreaming, dreaming," once or twice, and then quickly and firmly go back to watching the sensations of breathing. But you mustn't be rough or forceful. Training the mind is a bit like training a puppy dog to sit. When it gets up, you have to pat it down kindly but firmly. If you get angry and hit it, it will just want to run away.

So now, let's practice this breathing meditation for a while, observing and noting all the sensations. "Rising... falling, touching." If your mind is wandering, note what it's doing – dreaming, thinking, worrying, and so on – and bring it back gently but firmly to the breath. If you feel sleepy, put more energy into the spine, sit tall, but not tense.

This part of the meditation is mainly concerned with establishing concentration. It's normal to spend a good ten minutes doing this until the mind becomes fairly still, at least until gross restlessness has gone, and you can watch the object, in this case the breath, fairly constantly. We use the breath because it's a neutral feeling – it doesn't excite or depress us. So the mind becomes still and moves to a point of concentration by way of calm and peacefulness.

This is different from the sort of concentration we get when we are doing something engrossing, such as watching a film, or having to do a job carefully. That depends upon stimulation, but the concentration we need for insight must arise out of a quiet and still mind. And when this sort of concentrated, quiet mind is established, we find another faculty becomes prominent: our intuitive intelligence, *paññā*.

Sometimes, when you're trying to listen to shortwave radio, there's so much interference, it's hard to hear exactly what's being said. Once the fuzz goes, everything becomes clear. So it is with paññā, our intuitive intelligence. Once the heart is calm and concentrated, and thinking and imagining has stopped, the intuitive intelligence is able to see and understand clearly what's going on.

So now, what we have to do is establish this concentrated attentiveness, alive with intelligence, *satipaññā*, not just on the breath, but on anything that comes into our field of awareness. The example I like is that of a bird watcher. They sit in a so-called hide. They hide there, hidden from the birds they are watching. In this way, the birds are not disturbed, and their natural habits can be observed. All the knowledge, such as of feeding, nesting, mating, and so on, comes by just observing, merely watching. In this way, this ability to be simply observers, interested to discover the true nature of our body, mind, and heart, is the key to spiritual insight.

But this watching, please understand clearly, is not a searching for something. We are not looking for something. We're just non-interfering observers, just looking at whatever comes into our field of awareness, just watching whatever arises right here and now, while it's happening, without any thoughts about it or questions.

So we begin by establishing attentiveness on the breath. Should a sound be heard, we avert to it immediately, noting "hearing, hearing." Now, try to catch the quality of the sound at the very eardrum. In this way, we'll stop the mind flying out, as it were, to the object, such as a chirping bird or passing car, and set up a whole train of imaginative thoughts.

The same with smell. Note it as "smelling, smelling," right there in the nostrils. And again with any sensations on the body, such as itching and prickling, just note "itching, itching," "prickling, prickling," right there where the sensations are felt, and plunge your attention into them.

Then there are feelings that arise in the body, such as heat and cold, heaviness and lightness, all sorts of discomforts and pleasures. A particular word, such as "heat" or "cold," can be used where appropriate, otherwise a general word, "feeling," can be used. Now, it's important we don't react to these feelings unless they are too severe to tolerate, for to react to them will lead us into restlessness. And do remember the noting word is a technique we use to keep the attention steady on the object. In other words, it controls the thinking faculty, but the attention itself should bury itself into the actual sensations.

Again, there are feelings in the body arising from moods and emotions. Dislikeable ones, such as fear and depression, and likeable ones such as joy and love. We can use specific words here, such as "love," "guilt," and so on, but all the time feeling fully the mood or emotion, the actual feelings wherever they occur, such as in the chest or stomach.

Finally, there are thoughts and images. Note these as "thinking" or "imagining," and they will stop. Otherwise, they will carry you off onto a daydream, sometimes for the whole of the meditation period. And be especially aware of the judging mind: "That's terrible," "That's good," "That's bad," "That's nice," and so on. Don't correct or interfere with such thoughts. Just acknowledge them and note "judging, judging."

We're not trying to become spectators, getting involved in all the mental play, supporting this against that. We must take the position of an observer, an objective observer, just allowing all the play to unfold right there before our very gaze. All the time we're trying to maintain that separation, that distance, that detachment from what's going on in the body, mind and heart. We observe all these psychophysical events as something other, as if belonging to someone else. In this way we can investigate objectively.

So whatever is offered – a sensation, a feeling, a thought – just watch it carefully. So now, let's sit tall, and with keen interest, let's watch the flow of physical and mental phenomena. Begin always with the breath: "rising, falling, touching."

If the mind is wandering, note what it's doing – dreaming, thinking, worrying, and so on – and bring it back to the breath, firmly but gently. If there's sloth, energise the spine, re-establish the posture, slowly, very slowly, or you may disturb your concentration, noting the whole movement: "straightening, straightening."

Sometimes there's a lot of pain, aching and tension comes up in the body. This won't be due to posture so long as the posture is correct. They'll probably be caused by unresolved emotions and mental states that have until now been suppressed out of consciousness. It's important to relax around them and develop an attitude of interest. Such discomfort, sometimes severe, may continue throughout a whole sitting or for many sittings until it resolves itself, and it may be that the underlying reason, such as an emotion, will not manifest itself. Just the passing of the discomfort will mean that the curing has taken place.

We need to develop patience to bear this sort of thing and use the opportunity to see pain as pain – just sensations – and to separate out the suffering which is the aversion or fear we feel towards them. We make both sides, the painful sensations and the mental attitudes, objects to be noted, observed, and understood.

So, keep noting, keep observing, maintaining a sharp attentiveness. If you get lost, start again with the breath, your home base and anchor. Always begin again with the breath: "rising, falling, touching."

If your mind is wandering, bring it back firmly but gently to the primary object of our meditation, the breath. If there's tiredness or dullness, raise energy up the spine by sitting tall, though not tense, remember. Be especially aware of tension around the shoulders, neck and jaw.

Here we are sitting within ourselves, as it were, watching the inner films. The body, mind and heart display themselves just as they want. We don't interfere. It's a natural process of revelation. In time, many things may arise out of the subconscious which have long been suppressed. They'll reveal themselves when the time is right and the time is right when we'll be ready to accept them. In this way, insight meditation brings about a psychotherapy. Even painful traumatic memories from childhood will be eventually cleared out of the system, and with them all the neuroses and tensions they've caused. All we have to do to attain this purification of the heart is to remain steadfast at our observation post.

Now, although the cleansing of our psychology will happen naturally, it's not the aim of our meditation. The aim of our practice is to go to the deepest levels to see why suffering arises in the first place. One way is to note the relationship we have to whatever is being observed. The mind constantly jumps from liking to disliking, wanting what it likes, not wanting what it dislikes. This sort of involvement is simply a way in which we try to find happiness in pleasurable states and escape unhappiness by running away from unpleasurable states.

This constant oscillation, this ricocheting from greed to aversion and back to greed, this is what the Buddha taught as the cause of our suffering in the Second Noble Truth. So, as pleasurable or unpleasurable objects arise, we must keenly note this secondary reaction of grabbing at them or pushing them away, sometimes turning away in fear, the twin of aversion. In this way, this reaction will cool down and even stop, and we shall experience a deeply satisfying equanimous mind. And this in turn will allow us to investigate deeper into the causes of suffering.

So let all that pain and pleasure surface and express itself. Watch the reaction, the grabbing, the aversion, the fear. Begin again with the breath: "rising, falling, touching."

If your mind is wandering, note what it's been doing and re-establish your concentration on the breath. If you're sleepy, sit tall and raise energy up the spine.

As we begin to deepen our awareness of all the phenomena arising in our body, mind and heart, we'll become increasingly aware of what the Buddha called the three characteristics of existence. The first is the fact of transience. Everything is arising only to pass away.

The second is the difficult teaching of non-self. As we watch all these mental and physical phenomena, we'll notice they arise of themselves. There's no one controlling them. They have their own life, their own energy. At times the body, mind and heart may seem distant, something other. Before we talked of "my sensations," "my thoughts," "my emotions," but now we find ourselves pointing at them, as it were, through the noting technique. "There's a sensation," "there's a thought," "there's a feeling." We're slowly moving away from a relationship of identity and possession: "I am my seeing," "I am what I think," "I am what I feel," "I have a body," "I have a mind," "I have a heart." Instead, we're moving towards a position of detachment. This is the beginning of the experience of non-self. We discover that the psychophysical organism we call "me" doesn't constitute anything substantial. It's just made up of many parts that work in unison, just like a car. But there's no core to it, no substance.

Thirdly, as we've noticed, whenever we do fall into a relationship of attachment, desire or aversion to the body, mind and heart, of identifying and possessing, suffering follows.

This is the third characteristic of unsatisfactoriness. We should develop an attitude towards the body, mind and heart as one who rents a house, not as one who owns one.

It is the observation of these three characteristics of transience, insubstantiality and unsatisfactoriness that brings about the spiritual insights that releases consciousness from its delusions and leads to liberation from all suffering. And it is this practice of *vipassanā* which is the tool we use. This bare attentiveness, simply observing all that arises and passes away, this choiceless awareness that does not control or manipulate, this impartial watchfulness that does not question or judge, this intuitive introspection, fully experiencing each mental and bodily phenomenon as it really is—this is the faculty of intuitive awareness, *satipaññā*, the very faculty that will eventually bring the realisation of Nibbāna, the unborn, the unbecome, the unmade, the unconditioned.

All we have to do is watch, just observe, whatever arises as it arises and passes away. So let's begin again with the breath. Rising, falling, touching.

During daily life, to sit like this even for a few moments, long enough to re-establish a calm and alert attentiveness, will stop our emotions from snowballing. It will undermine the causes of stress. Just fifteen seconds may be enough to re-establish our centre. With practice, this can become a regular state of mind, instead of something that comes only under special conditions.

This calm heart and alert mind is the state we ought to be in all the time, even under stress. It is within this inner environment that this intuitive awareness, *satipaññā*, can operate. Otherwise it becomes lost, drowned and controlled by runaway thoughts and emotions. Constantly make the effort to regain and maintain this inner posture. This is to live fully consciously.

And in this way, the practice of *vipassanā*, insight meditation, will seep into every moment of our lives, and we will be rewarded with great benefits.

Now, when we come to the end of a meditation period, it's best not to just jump out of it, but come out slowly. First, opening the eyes and taking in the light, and gently swaying from side to side. Then, rising slowly and mindfully, and in this way our intuitive mindfulness, *satipaññā*, will be maintained.

May you be well, may you be happy, may you soon be liberated of all your suffering, may you experience the peace and bliss of Nibbāna.

CHAPTER 43

Investigative Eating Meditation - An Explanation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents eating meditation as a profound contemplative practice for understanding the mechanics of craving and attachment. Drawing from the Brahmāyu Sutta's description of how the Buddha received and ate food—experiencing taste without experiencing greed for the taste—Bhante explains how this simple daily activity can become a vehicle for liberation.

The teaching explores the crucial distinction between enjoying and indulging, revealing how indulgence leads to five forms of suffering: attachment and compulsive behaviour, frustration and anger, grief at loss, underlying anxiety, and ultimately boredom that drives endless seeking. Bhante connects these insights directly to the Second Noble Truth, explaining how insatiable thirst (taṇhā) generates moment-to-moment becoming and obsessive pursuit of fresh excitement—the very psychology of addiction that underlies consumerism.

Practically, the meditation involves distinguishing body from mind (sensations from emotions and thoughts), and recognizing the gap between desire and action where transformation becomes possible. This gap offers what Bhante calls 'a chink of freedom' where we can consciously choose whether to empower or release a desire. By bearing with unwholesome desires until they burn themselves out, we weaken habitual patterns. The talk concludes with an important warning against the opposite extreme of self-mortification—the narrow path lies between indulgence and aversion, allowing us to enjoy life's pleasures without clinging to them.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa.

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

This is a talk about eating meditation, or using the process of eating for purposes of becoming fully liberated.

The first thing to consider is: how bad can greed get?

Erysichthon, the Greek king of Thessaly, had the temerity to build a banqueting hall over the shrine of Demeter, goddess of earth's fertility and protector of the harvest. In Rome, she became Ceres, from which we get the word "cereal." She cursed him with insatiable hunger. First, he ate everything there was to eat in his kingdom. Then he started on his people and even ate his own family. Still famished, he ate himself.

While I was staying at Kanduboda Meditation Centre in Sri Lanka, a man told me that once when out in the wilds he had got lost, and over a period of a few days became so hungry that when he finally caught a pigeon, he ripped it open and ate it raw. He was a good meditator.

Hopefully we will not have to suffer such extreme conditions. Even so, there are other good reasons to investigate the process of eating: to distinguish between enjoying and indulging; to distinguish between the body and the mind—that is, sensations from emotions and thoughts; and to distinguish between a desire and an action, the role of the will.

We will want to make the distinction between enjoying and indulging when we come to realise the suffering that indulgence causes.

The first complication that arises from indulgence is attachment and compulsive behaviour. When we indulge some unwholesome but pleasing habit, it means that we are using something to create a certain mental state that we enjoy. It's not the biscuit we want, but the mental state it produces, be it happy or comforting. But this also produces a dependency, and just like any addict, we're compelled to raid the biscuit box. Only a strong act of will and refusal to have biscuits in the house can break the habit. It is precisely at the time we renounce the biscuit that we suffer the strength of that habit and the hold it has on us.

But of course the potential is always there. Just as a person who gives up smoking and after a long time thinks they're immune to becoming habituated, on surrendering at a party to have just one, finds themselves buying a packet. Attachment is none other than a dependency on something—or indeed someone—to create a mental state of happiness.

The second complication is the suffering of frustration. Anger arises when we can't get what we want or what we want is denied us. We live at a time of almost immediate gratification. Consider fast food. Amazon has spent millions on delivery, knowing that to satisfy a customer as quickly as possible is to ensure their loyalty. You want some beer? Non-alcoholic, of course. We'll get it to you tomorrow. We can even be angry with

ourselves for forgetting to buy tea or coffee. We get angry if the bus, the train, the taxi is late. We get angry if someone doesn't turn up for a meeting. Frustration doesn't help. It just burns us.

The third is grief. The misery we feel when we have to diet. The shock we suffer when we lose a mobile. The distress of leaving an expensive hat or bag behind in a restaurant only to find it has disappeared. But although we believe in possessing things, in reality we can only use them. If a thief has run off with our mobile, for all intents and purposes it is their mobile, no matter how much we keep moaning and complaining of the loss of "my mobile." And grief takes on a different intensity when we lose a spouse, partner, family member, or friend.

Fourthly, there's anxiety, which always sits beneath everything we possess. The run on flour, pasta and, bewilderingly, toilet paper at the start of the lockdown was driven by fear of what may or may not happen in the future. The more we possess, the more we feel loss. And the more we have to possess to cushion any blow. A billion pounds to a billionaire cannot be enough. They must cushion it by moving towards a trillion. We're afraid of loneliness, so we build up a coterie of friendships and lots of things to do. We feel insecure, so we accumulate excessive insurance or power, which manifests in controlling and bullying.

Finally, there is boredom. If you remember, Māra—the evil tempter, the sensual life personified—sent his three daughters to inveigle the Buddha to return to the good life: sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure, and boredom. Boredom is that state where what once gave such pleasure and excitement is now stale, overindulged and unpleasing. It is an aversive state, and to escape it we seek some other pleasure.

Variety is the spice of life—this is the basic motto of the consumerist. Consider the foodies who choose their holidays depending on a variety of restaurants. And just as all the other consequences of indulgence can become mental illness, boredom can drive you into depression. Indeed, what would be the purpose of living when there is nothing and no one who can raise any degree of excitement?

Here lies the distinction between happiness and excitement. True happiness is based on contentment. Excitement that passes for true happiness is based on an insatiable appetite for the new and the thrilling. This excitement is what fuels consumerism. And the underlying engine is boredom—caused by the lack of excitement—that drives the consumer to seek relief in more excitement. This is none other than the psychology of addiction. Just as a drug addict feels normal when under the influence and abnormal

when in need, so the consumer feels they have to buy something or go somewhere, do anything that excites, no matter how little, in order to feel happy. Retail therapy is no therapy at all. It is an addiction.

The Second Noble Truth states that the cause of suffering is the insatiable thirst which generates moment-to-moment becoming, accompanied by obsessive indulgence, finding fresh excitement now here, now there—namely, the insatiable hunger for sensual pleasures, for continued becoming and non-becoming.

So what do we do? Well, first of all, we need to make a clear distinction between the body and the mind—between, on the one hand, sensations and physical feelings, and on the other hand, the heart-mind with its emotions and moods, thoughts and imagination. This is part of the endeavour to undermine the sense of self, the wrong view of self. This is the sense we have of being one entire undivided integer, a single uncompounded being, whole and absolute. By drawing apart what the body does through the senses and what the heart-mind does, we begin to realize that we are but a compound made up of many pieces, all depending on each other to create an embodied person. We are beginning to undermine this delusion: I am what I feel or think I am.

Secondly, we need to distinguish a desire from an action. This will give us that chink of freedom where we can change the conditioning we don't want to a conditioning we do want. Remember, our personality is but a collection of habits and will always be so. Our work is to rid ourselves of habits that bring any degree of suffering and dissatisfaction and develop those that bring a sense of well-being.

So long as there is only a desire, nothing has actually happened. It remains an idea laced with the energy of wanting. It arises out of a state of discomfort and is itself uncomfortable until gratified. If we are fully aware of a desire, we will not be caught up in its demands but will have the occasion to ask whether it is wholesome—whether it is beneficial to myself, to another, or both myself and another. If we determine it is unwholesome, all we have to do is bear with the desire until it burns itself out. In so doing, the habit that it expresses is weakened and will eventually lose all power over us. If a desire is judged to be wholesome, well then we empower it. It produces an act of body, speech, and mind. This reinforces the habit. In this quite simple way we can change ourselves—though, as we discover, it is not easy. We need a highly alert attentiveness, or we are quickly gratifying those habits we don't want and so developing them.

In the Brahmuya Sutta, there is a passage describing how the Buddha receives food and eats it. Here, he describes what he actually experiences: he takes the food experiencing the taste, though not experiencing greed for the taste—in other words, just the pleasant sensations. This is on occasion chanted by monastics at mealtimes: "Food I take

has eight factors. It is neither for amusement nor for intoxication, indulgence, or for the sake of physical beauty or attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of my body, for ending discomfort and assisting the spiritual life. I consider thus: I shall terminate old unwholesome feelings without arousing new unwholesome feelings, and I shall be healthy and blameless and live in comfort."

Now, what we are developing is an attitude, and an attitude is a way of relating. It is not specific to a particular object. So as we undermine greed around food, we are undermining all indulgence, for the same psychology appears in relation to everything that delights us—whether sensual pleasure, art, nature, even people and animals. The same problem of attachment arises. Once we have understood—I repeat—that attachment is a psychological dependency on some object or other for happiness, we begin to be more aware of other dependencies and slowly begin to let go of all obsessiveness. The Buddha tells us that the taste of Nibbāna is freedom. It is freedom from unwholesome desires.

Now, a warning. I once sat next to a monk who, by the look of him, you would presume a true ascetic—hollow-cheeked and gaunt. When the delicious fruit salad with buffalo curd was offered, he placed it before him, and while the other monks continued to eat, he simply stared at the bowl. As we were finishing, he picked up the bowl and, as quick as lightning, spooned it down his throat. Now, of course, I may be judging him very wrongly, but it seemed to me that he was afraid of enjoying the food for fear of indulging.

Such an attitude, if taken to all we enjoy, would turn life into a sour grape.

As always, in our spiritual practice, we have to tread that narrow path between direct enemies and subtle enemies of virtues—here, between indulgence and self-mortification. The pleasures and joys of life are a human birthright, but they come and go like everything else. What are we actually holding on to?

In conclusion then, since our personality is made up of a compendium of habits, our psychotherapeutic task is to liberate ourselves from their control—but not the habit itself when it is wholesome. After all, we have to eat. So our task, when it concerns anything which is pleasurable and enjoyable, is to begin to experience what it is like to enjoy and not indulge. Our insight task is to see clearly how we create suffering. Suffer the renunciation of unskillful desires, arrive at unalloyed joy.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your careful, attentive eating you will liberate yourself from all suffering.

CHAPTER 44

The Mahasi Technique

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this detailed exploration of the Mahasi noting technique, Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how this particular method develops the Right Awareness (sammā sati) that the Buddha taught as essential for liberation. Drawing on the Buddha's own journey through different approaches to spiritual practice, he shows how vipassanā meditation requires finding an 'observation post' within consciousness that can objectively witness whatever arises.*
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> *Bhante explains the three core elements of Mahasi technique: deliberate noting of experiences, catching intentions before they become actions, and cultivating slowness to see mental-physical processes clearly. He emphasizes that noting should be concrete and concurrent with experience - not a mental mantra but a way to focus awareness more precisely on the object of meditation. The technique aims to establish the balance of sati (awareness) and paññā (wisdom) needed to investigate the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā).*
>
> *With practical guidance on applying these techniques throughout daily activities - from walking meditation to eating - Bhante shows how this systematic approach can transform habitual patterns and lead to the cooling of mental fires that constitutes liberation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa (repeated three times) — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this evening I want to go just a little bit more in detail as to this particular technique. This morning we were really trying to understand what the Buddha meant by right awareness in this process of liberation, and we went through his life — specifically those four sections where as a young person he enjoys the ordinary sensual pleasures of the world but finds them empty, not leading anywhere, and he's still very much concerned with sickness, old age and death. And then he tries these absorptions, these blissed out states. He finds them wanting. They're beautiful in themselves and it's part of our — he made it part of our practice; it wasn't unwholesome for us, so it was good to do it — but it had this shortcoming that it didn't really tackle the fundamental problem of suffering. And then he tried the business of self-mortification and he only found that painful, didn't get him anywhere at all. He doesn't have a good word for it at all.

When we're practising — just as an aside to one of the questions — remember that we're not trying to get rid of the joys and pleasures of life. We're just trying to find a different relationship to it. So when the Buddha's eating, he knows that it's well-cooked food and tasty. He knew the last meal was off. He probably had eaten too much of it. And it's said he died of that meal. So he knew it was off. He told Chunda, the guy who made it for him, to bury the rest of it. Somehow he wasn't quick enough to stop himself eating it. So his teaching is not about getting rid of the pleasures and joys of life. It's about finding a different relationship — not seeing them as sources of complete, continual, eternal contentment. They just don't deliver.

And the fourth phase was when he had this insight about a different way of approaching suffering, which was to actually investigate the suffering — to stop trying to run away from it, find somewhere else to live, because he always seemed to carry his suffering with him — but to actually investigate the cause of suffering. And that's when he became liberated from it.

And what he meant by this awareness in terms of our *vipassanā* practice was to find this observation post within us, this place from which we could observe whatever was coming into our vision, our consciousness. So when we sit here and we put our attention on the breath just to collect ourselves, we're aware of the breath, the sensations caused by the breath. When some feelings come in the body and draw our attention, we go to them, we feel them. And you couldn't do that if you were already involved in, caught up in the feeling itself — just as when we get angry, for instance, slam the door. We lose that objectivity.

And you can't be thinking about it, because if you think about it, then in a sense you're lost in conceptual thinking about what it is you're experiencing. So that's once removed. It might be pleasing to sit there and wonder why we're suffering something or why we're being happy. But that wondering mind, that thinking mind, is just another place that we hide in — the place that we can escape to.

So this awareness that he's talking about in the sitting meditation is a place which is right there within the body and mind but somehow separate from it. It must be separate from it because it can look at it. It can feel it, can experience it. You've all been doing that all day. So therefore there's something about this awareness which doesn't belong there. That's the point. And our search in a way is to find out what the quality of this awareness is — what is it? What is this ability I have to be conscious of things, to be aware of things?

And that brings in another factor: this idea of curiosity. Although we separate the two — *sati*, *paññā*, awareness and intuitive intelligence — they're both the same thing. So that's why we practise this abiding in the present moment, this inhabiting the present moment in a very open way, completely receptive, teaching ourselves to be completely passive. No matter what's coming into our awareness, we just let it come and let it pass away. Even if it takes a whole day, it doesn't really matter. It will pass. And that's practising this ability just to receive, without questioning, without trying to do anything.

And once that's established, maintaining that state of the objective observing, objective feeling, objective experiencing, we turn on this curiosity.

Curiosity. I like to tell the tale when I was once in Penang and somebody offered a hut — well it was a house really — up in a plantation. And in the evening one evening I set this table out and sat on top of this table and put a net up, a mosquito net, and a great big mug of coffee. I was going to watch the sunset. It got darker and darker. And I suddenly realised that I was facing east. It was a disappointment. Anyway, every evening, these two dogs would meet. And they were great friends. They'd chase each other round and round this hut that I was living in. Well, this bungalow I was living in. And on that very evening, I was sat there, and one of the dogs arrived and began to whine because his friend hadn't turned up. And he hadn't noticed me, or perhaps he had, but he just wasn't concerned about that. He was concerned about where his friend was.

Now, when his friend turned up, they greeted each other. And then as he turned around, he saw this table with a net and somebody in it. And he looked and he went... See? Dogs have Buddha nature. They have this intelligence. They have this curiosity. And that really struck me because it's the same. It's the same consciousness that we have. It's that same ability to be aware and to question. I don't know whether the dog became fully liberated on that occasion. But definitely, I thought to myself, well, you see, even dogs have it. And they are free from this conceptual thinking.

Now, does that mean that all our education has been to waste? No, far from it, because our education has increased the ability to understand. That's the point. This intelligence we have comes in, as it were, blind. And the education that we have has increased our ability to understand, to think. So remember, we're not trying to get rid of anything. The Buddha was accused of annihilation, annihilation theory — everything was destroyed. He said, no. He said, the only thing that is annihilated is greed, hatred and delusion.

So remember that once he became liberated, he spent the whole night, the first watch of the night, trying to understand the process whereby suffering is caused. The second watch of the night, how it was undone. And the third watch of the night, both ways, just in case he got it wrong. And that's what we call dependent origination. That's the psychology he teaches. Now he couldn't have done that without thought.

And one of the things that happens to us in meditation occasionally, is as we're looking, as we're observing, something will pop into the mind. It might just say impermanence, or, "God, that's suffering," "that's desire." It'll just, as it were, pop out. This is this intelligence telling itself what it knows. We don't know what we know until it manifests. It has to manifest as a word, or as a piece of art, or as an action. It has to come out somewhere. And then we know we know it.

I'm sure you've all had this amazing experience of saying something enormously wise to your great surprise. See? You didn't know you knew it. And then suddenly you are making these amazing statements. And the opposite — which is the measure of our delusion. It's fine. It's the way we are.

So it's not that we are in our meditation trying to get rid of thought. We're just trying to stop it for a while. And you might think to yourself, well, why doesn't it stop? Why do I have so much difficulty in just stopping this thinking mind? Well, just consider: from the moment you wake up to the moment you fall asleep, does it ever stop? No. The mind's always thinking. And it's usually thinking about me. Right? "Why do they think me and I should, why not myself and they should, I, I, I, I, I." It goes on and on and on, just thinking about ourselves. So there's never a point in the day where the mind actually stops unless you purposefully do so, and then it would only stop for a short while.

So here we are coming to a meditation retreat thinking that well we'll just sit for a minute and it'll just stop. Now one of the reasons that we practise this noting technique is to at least bring that intellect, that thinking mind, to a simple concrete place. Right? And in that way we can as it were contain its power and draw that energy from it just directly into the looking. Now we'll come to that in a minute.

So having understood that business of right awareness, intuitive awareness — sometimes called intuitive awareness — there are many techniques to establish that. In the scriptures there isn't a specific technique. The Buddha just guides. He says he observes the breath knowing it to be either short or long, heavy or coarse. In other words, when you first sit you're just contacting the breath as a feeling, and then you train upon it — calming the body, calming the mind — and then you begin to see its impermanence. Of

the three, that one is the simplest to see — that it's impermanent. And when there is just enough awareness, just enough inquiry, curiosity, insight arises. That's all it is. And the breath is that part that we use to develop that quality.

Now there are many *vipassanā* techniques. If you've read Jack Kornfield's old book *Living Buddhist Masters* — I think there's only one alive now, but I think they've renamed it — and you'll see there are about twelve in there, if I remember rightly, all of whom have quite distinct different ways of approaching how to develop this right awareness.

And some of you will have experienced other techniques than this. Some of you will have tried for instance the Vipassana technique taught by Goenkaji, or that place in Wiltshire. And they centre, really their practice — because I did it for a while — their practice centres entirely on this *anicca*, this impermanence. That's enough, see? It's enough, because when you see impermanence, you see that holding on to anything is suffering, so you see the cause of suffering. When you see impermanence, you realise that nothing remains, so it can't be self, it can't be substantial. So impermanence, in the Buddha's understanding, is a gateway into these other two qualities, these other two characteristics of existence. It's a gateway. And you'll find that various techniques have a particular angle.

One that I practised in Thailand, in the bay of Bangkok there — that bay, I think it was called — and the teacher had died. And her teaching was entirely centred on *dukkha*, suffering. I'd never come across this before. And I was instructed — the instruction is very simple: to remain in the sitting posture until it hurt, until it really hurt. I mean until it really, really hurt. And then you could move either to another posture or standing posture. And then off you went again until it hurt, it really, really hurt. See?

And the idea was that you got into this dreadful state of pain, seeing your reaction to it, constantly trying to let go of your negativity towards it, trying to find a peacefulness with it, you see, until it became unbearable. Then as you moved, you noted, you saw that as the body became comfortable, the mind became comfortable. See? So just in that process of seeing pain and the rejection of pain, the resistance to pain, getting to a point where you can't bear it — which is only a limit within our ability — and then using that movement to see how the body and mind relate and how it's all manufactured, it's all two processes. And these were the directions I had. The only time we weren't supposed to follow them was when we were eating. Which makes a bit of sense.

So all these techniques have that purpose: to establish a certain level, a certain type of awareness, right awareness, to observe these three characteristics. And they've got their checks and balances. There's always a downside to these techniques and always a plus. And it's up to us to be able to know when we're going off piste and when we're directly on it.

Now, one thing that you have to give up if you want to do Vipassana in its pure sense is just give up any idea of it doing some good psychologically. See? Because if you set yourself a task — "Well, I'm going to sit here now and I'm going to get over my depression. I'm going to get over my anxiety. I'm going to get over this, get over that" — your whole practice is skewed onto observing this quality. And if you're sat there and it doesn't come up, you're disappointed. You want to work with this depression that's not coming. In fact, you feel happy and you can't be bothered with happiness anymore. You go, "I want to be depressed so I can really understand my depression." So the whole practice becomes skewed towards this idea that we're going to do something about our psychology.

It's not about trying to get rid of any physical problems we have. If you have some sort of backache or something like that and you're trying to use the posture and everything to cure it because you've heard that sometimes physical problems disappear with meditation, then your whole effort is just trying to get rid of this problem, see? And you miss the point. You miss the point.

Now if you come off that and you practise the *vipassanā* in its pure sense, then of course the therapy takes care of itself. The body takes care of itself. The body will heal itself if it can do so. And if you need extra help to get it healed, then obviously you go to a therapist or a doctor or something. But when it comes to centring your attention on that, you see, you're going to come off — you're moving off the real purpose of our practice. The purpose of our practice is to cut right under that stuff, to go right down to the foundations as to how this whole suffering and dissatisfaction arose in the first place.

So it's not as though all these techniques that we have now — therapeutic techniques, psychotherapy, all these other therapies out there — are useless. Far from it. To use them in order to better our lives, that's not a problem. It's not against the Buddha's teaching, for his sake. When people fell sick, he was lucky to have the chief doctor, the chief person who looked after the king, who offered them free medical assistance, free medical care. I can't remember his name at the moment. And what happened was, this became so well known that people who are sick join the order, especially to get free

medicine. So now when you join the order, you can't join the order if you're sick. See? It's against the rule to join the order if you're sick. See? I'm not talking about colds and flus. I mean some serious illness.

So, putting all that aside, you see, right? And bringing ourselves just to the practice of just establishing this awareness and being able to investigate it from this position of the objective observer. And that takes a bit of faith, you see. But hopefully, as our practice deepens, we see that the mind heals itself, just like the body does, for the most part. When you cut yourself, who heals it? I mean, we keep it antiseptic and all that, but the body does it. You're not in there telling the cells where to go, urging them on. They just do it.

So the mind, you see, you begin to realise that all these moods and emotions that we experience are just energy. They're just turbulence. They're just forms of energy. And if you just feel them, just let them express themselves, they exhaust themselves. But whenever they enter into this dream world, we grab them and we start through our stories to make them grow. And when we identify with them, they become solid. They become me. These are the sorts of things that we're looking at when we're practising Vipassana.

And as soon as we begin to see how we cause ourselves suffering, then of course the effort is to stop that. And as you stop it, everything begins to cool down. The mind begins to cool. So one of the descriptions of *Nibbāna* is coolness, like the fire goes out. So our purpose then is to establish this right intuitive intelligence and allow this intuitive wisdom to do its work. Remember that there is a connection between thought and this intuitive wisdom.

And as he's getting into his bath you see, relaxed, at ease, I'm presuming, isn't he? He sees the water rising, dependent on the volume of his irregular body. Boom, boom, he's made it, you see? Eureka, I found it. That's how it works.

Those of you who know about Rinzai Zen, the koan. See, the koan posits impossible, posits paradoxes, which you try and work out, you see. There's some truth in it somewhere. What does it mean? One hand clapping. See, so you're trying to work it out, trying to work it out. And then finally, when you come to the end of what the intellect does, you drop it. But in that process, there's been a honing of that intelligence. And the insight comes. See?

So, always remember, we're not trying to get rid of anything. We're not trying to destroy anything except greed, hatred and delusion.

Now the other thing I've written here is the practice. Remember that especially those of you who have been practising a long time, you get this laziness about it, you know. It's easy to sit here and you find yourself sitting here for three quarters of an hour, an hour, and it's easy weasy peasy, you know. And then you get up and you go and do some walking but actually nothing's happened. And it's because we've fallen into that state of losing that sense of urgency, that sense of really investigating things, where you can just sit for an easy time. Maybe some stuff comes up, you get some things occasionally that interest you, but generally speaking your mind's in this flappy, flaccid state where nothing's happening - a gentle awareness. Or you get so lazy that in fact the mind really starts wandering and you find yourself three quarters of an hour, you know, saving the world, or worse.

And so that effort to keep bringing the attention back into the present moment is absolutely paramount, absolutely paramount. As soon as you see the mind wandering, to come out to recognise the attitude which is making it do that, and then to come back to the body. And it may be that as you come back to the breath, you can feel the attitude which is empowering. You can feel the emotional state - maybe the anger or the joy or the excitement. In which case you stay there. You stay there, you don't go back to the breath. You stay there. And as that begins to express itself as feeling, it's exhausting itself. And when it disappears, when it's gone, the thought stops.

When you've done that a few times then you realise that the problem doesn't lie in the head, it lies in the heart. It lies in our emotional base. So at the end of each sitting, that's why it's so important to do this little reflection. It doesn't have to be long, just pick up on one or two things, that's all. I mean I've given a certain structure to it but it doesn't have to be that way. It's just looking back and thinking well, you know, I could have put more effort into that, you know. Why did I fall asleep, you know? You know, it's like you just question yourself and if it was good you say yeah, that's good, you know. I really put some effort in there and the benefit was this, the benefit was this. You see, I was really very still on the breath, I got highly concentrated, I got right into that feeling, you see, that sensation. So you congratulate yourself as well.

And then that resolution - you see, now I know that the path to hell is paved with good intentions, but the idea is that you really empower a resolution. So for instance if you have been lazy about lethargy and you've allowed yourself to just fall asleep unwittingly, you know, half consciously, you might say, then you make that determination: Right, I know how overpowering that mental state is. The next time I feel even a dodgy of it, I'll get up, I'll stand up, because I know its power, yeah?

So that reflection after every sitting is important, see. Doesn't have to be long, just a little reflection. And it's like you're telling yourself, you're constantly urging yourself, constantly cajoling yourself, encouraging yourself.

So, what are these techniques and why do we use them? The Mahāsi himself was quite a scholar. He was famous at his time for his scholarship. So much so that when they had the 1956 sixth council - there's only been six great councils since the Buddha died - he was asked to be the questioner, the pucchaka. So this was an honorary position, but it meant that people recognised him as being a real scholar. Not just a scholar. If it was just a scholar, there were probably others who would have qualified. It was the fact that he was also a meditation master, meditation teacher.

And he was brought down to Bangkok just after independence, 1948, by the Prime Minister and some others. And very quickly he established a name for himself. And during the fifties he was travelling to Sri Lanka and all over the East. And then he came here, I think, in the seventies, something like that. I think that was his first time, the late seventies. And by which time this particular technique had really taken a hold. At the same time that the U Ba Khin technique - so these two techniques coming out of Burma really became quite fashionable and really showed you the state of play at that time when people, monks, monastics, monks and nuns really went meditating. So this was really something that was really pushing the system again. So in that sense he was an incredible inspiration.

Being a scholar, you see, being a word person, he took from his teacher this idea of noting. And I was surprised to find that it's also used in certain forms of Sōtō Zen. And the idea was that you kept the intellect contained through these very simple words, but they were also pushing you towards the object.

So if you think of a child, when they see something, they shout, don't they? Car, car, you know, bird, bird - they shout, you see, they're shouting. And what they're doing is they're actually making their attention stick onto the object. So the Mahāsi talked about it as throwing a stone at a wall. If you've got a bottle on a wall, you aim at it, you know, and the stone hopefully hits the bottle. So this word is something that you are using to get closer to the object.

Now what we find, especially for those of you who are trying this for the first time, is that the word is so loud you can't see anything. It's just up in your face, yeah? Rising, falling - that's all you can be aware of, this rising, falling, rising, falling. What this is telling us is that this intuition, this intuitive intelligence is stuck right there in the intellect.

So what we do is we keep that rising and falling but as it were we sneak around the word. We look over it or through it or under it - use whatever works for you - and contact the feeling, you see. And then there's this experience where the word becomes softer and begins to somehow receive. It feels as though it's coming from behind rather than leading you in front, see. And that shows us that this intelligence is just coming out of that confusion with the intellect. And the more you do that, the more you'll find the word really helps you to keep your attention on the object.

Now one of the questions is should we do it all the time like a mantra? You should do it all the time. From the moment you wake up, get in the habit of doing the whole day, no matter what you're doing. But it shouldn't be like a mantra, see. It should be really deliberate. So when you're saying rising, falling, it's a deliberate note concurrent with the action. Remember, if you say rising before the breath, you get the feeling you're controlling it. But if you're just feeling the breath and you're just using this word to push you into the breath, to get closer to those sensations, then that's the way it's supposed to work.

When you're opening a door, you see, you stand in front of the door, see - standing. You see the intention, intending to open the door. These intentions, like intending to walk, intention to open the door, they're not overpowering emotional states, right? They're just a desire, intending to open the door, right? That's what you mean to do. That's all you're saying. But you're making it a conscious thing, intending to open the door. You're not just crash through it, okay? So you're intending to open the door.

As your hand goes towards the door, you're feeling it. Your attention is in your hand, right? The feeling of your hand and your arm stretching, moving, see? Then as you hold onto the handle, there's that contact, see? So you're pressing, pressing. So first of all, there's the contact whereby you sense it to be metal. Even if you had your eyes closed, you'd pretty well guess it was metal, see? So it's actually getting down to that feeling. And then as you're pushing it down, pushing, pushing, you're communicating with the spring. You're not just trying to break its back and just burst through the door. You're actually just feeling the pressure of the spring, right? So that your effort and the spring's effort is exactly the same except yours is a little bit stronger because you're pushing against it.

And then when you finally got it down to its open state then you push to open the door, see. And then pushing, pushing, pushing, releasing, releasing. So you're still there with the spring, see. Standing, standing. Intending to walk, walk through the door. Standing. Intending to turn right.

So this should take you at least five minutes to get through the door. Now you don't have to do it with every door - you never get here. But you can do it at least once or twice to get to that minutiae, to see how when you really slow things down you see things very particularly. You really, really get down to how the mind, how the body is working.

So the word that we're using should be deliberate, it should be concrete. We shouldn't be searching for words. If a word doesn't come up, use something quite generic. Use the word which is expressing the process. So instead of feeling, feeling - in other words pain, pain - you can use the word feeling to express what it is you're actually doing. And any word like that - sensation. If the word doesn't come up, just go for a generic word like feeling. But if a word does come up then just use it.

One thing we discover is that language is very poor when describing feelings, emotions, sensations. They're very general words. And we shouldn't spend time thinking for the right word, the poetic word. I mean, that's just silly. So it's really just using very obvious words for very concrete things we're doing.

So now the retreat, especially for those who are staying for the week. See, it's the same every day, see? Every day, you get up, you meditate, you walk, you eat, you meditate, you sit, see? All the day. So eventually, there's only a set of words anyway. It's not as though you have to keep discovering what to call this, because it's usually always the same. Every day is the same. And that's purposeful, see? The purpose is to make something so repetitive, so repetitive, that you can see the process, these mental, physical processes, over and over again. And it's seeing them over and over and over again that eventually, you know, like Chinese torture, it drops. It all gets through to you eventually. And there's a change of attitude, see? When there's a change of attitude, it's becoming systemic. It begins to express itself in the way we speak, in what we do, in our livelihood, see?

So it's not good enough to do the eating meditation once or twice. It's constant, constantly doing it, you see. And the end of that process doesn't come until we're liberated from delusion, see. So, you know, think of it as a long term practice. We're in for the duration.

So that business of noting, you see, is deliberate, it's to the point, and it's continuous, continuous. And like was suggested, you see, it becomes a mantra if you don't watch it. So, rising, falling, see? The mind shoots off to Acapulco. So you wake up and the mind's going, rising, falling, rising. Because you've trained it, you see? Completely useless. Absolutely completely useless.

We just talked about intentions. So intention in the Buddhist psychology is where it all begins. And I'll be going into this more deeply during the week. Intention is the beginning of an action, okay? When you repeat the action you're forming a habit. When you collect all your habits together that's your personality. And your personality is driving you to your destiny, right? When you come back on these habits and begin to sort them out as being wholesome or unwholesome, then your destiny changes, okay? And it all begins with this intention.

So what is an intention? An intention is just an idea, a thought empowered with desire. That's all - very simple. And if you catch the intention, it's not done anything. It's the product of a habit, it's not actually producing an action, it's not producing a habit. It's just come up as an idea laced with desire. And if you can stay with that, if you can catch it, you see, then you've got that moment, you see. You've got that release from it and you can let it go, let it die away if you see it's not wholesome. And if it is wholesome you can empower it. If you want, it might be the wrong time to do it, it doesn't matter. The point is, it's that moment of discernment.

So throughout the day, you see, and I'll keep urging you to do this, just keep stopping, keep stopping, keep stopping. Stopping, relaxing into the moment, noting the next intention, empowering it. Constantly like that. And what you'll find is when you do that, is that you really do begin to slow down. Because this stopping just stops things from snowballing, stops things from growing bigger and bigger.

Now, all these techniques can be taken into daily life. So this business of stopping, you see. When you - often we walk into a room and we walk into the atmosphere of the room and we're in conversation and we might be developing, quite unwittingly, some form of irritation with somebody, yeah? And then when we walk out of the room, we carry that with us to the next person, see? But if you actually stop at the door just for a moment and recognise this little irritation you've picked up and just let it drop, you're walking liberated of it. So it's the same with excitement. So you're getting yourself all excited, see? And instead of exhausting yourself by the end of the day, you just stop, see? Let it drop. And then reestablish calmness, see?

You can't do that without stopping. You can't do that without creating a break. So this business of stopping and just turning inward and just seeing where we are, just letting it drop—even if it doesn't drop away and if we've got ourselves truly excited or truly irritated, at least now we're aware of it so that when we walk into the next situation perhaps we can just leave it there. We can park it.

Parking an emotion is not the same as suppressing it. Whenever you suppress something, you're always using some form of aversion, some form of fear, or some form of pleasure. The pleasure is when you direct your attention away from it to something delightful. But by parking it, you know it's there but you're not paying attention to it, so you're not actually adding any further turbulence to the system. So this business of stopping and noting the intention is something you have to get into the habit of. The more you do it, the more you'll get that sense of presence, of being here.

And finally, there's slowing down. As I think I mentioned yesterday, driving through a forest is different from walking through a forest. So slow everything down. Just take your time. Get that feeling of having an eternity of time to do the simplest of things. Not that you have to take an eternity of time to do the simplest of things—it's just that sense of time. Get rid of that something that has to be done.

When I was with my teacher there, he would say, "Eating." I remember once a group of us were eating, and we were taking up to an hour to eat this food. And he'd come towards the end of the meal and stand over us and say, "Slower, slower." That was his constant command—he was constantly telling us to go slower. If you saw, even when you were going at the speed of a snail, there was this command to go slower, keep going slow, keep going slow.

The thing is that if you can find times of the day when you can go slow—there's the walking meditation, there's the eating meditation, but there's other times too when there are not people around you waiting or something like that—then just remind yourself: go slow. And you'll see the whole system calms down and things become very obvious, very obvious how we're causing suffering for ourselves.

One little thing is, if you find yourself rushing, just stop, acknowledge, and then go back to where you were and start again—but don't rush back. Go back slowly. Go back slowly. And then you'll see just that little correction—just like at school there are corrections—just that little correction re-establishes a new habit. You only have to do it once or twice and you'd be surprised.

One of the things about coming on a retreat like this, or any *vipassanā* retreat held here, is how quickly we can change our habits. I mean, you might not normally get up at five, or definitely not half past three or four o'clock—isn't it here? And not eating in the afternoon. At first it might feel a bit difficult, but then after that it's easy peasy. And sitting for so long—at first it's difficult, isn't it? The first day is hard, the second day is worse, third day is not much better. It's only by the fourth, fifth day that you suddenly get the fruit of your practice, the ease of practice and the natural calmness that comes with it. But that's all it's taken, just to change ourselves.

So with all these mundane things especially—opening doors, brushing your teeth, going up and down stairs—don't miss any of that as opportunities to just continue this mindful investigation. Clear comprehension—that's the Buddha's word for it. Clear comprehension. And it's translated as mindfulness sometimes.

So that's it really, just going through those techniques. Three basic techniques: noting, noting intentions, and going slow. That's it. That's the Mahāsi technique. And whenever you join a course and you see people walking slowly, like zombies, then you know, ooh, this is the influence of the Mahāsi. Whenever you hear somebody suggesting you might note, that's the influence of the Mahāsi. So it's just there, really, within all *vipassanā* teachers.

Most of the *vipassanā* teachers have done all sorts of techniques and have found their own particular way of teaching this *satipaṭṭhāna*. I try to maintain a fairly strict line, but I don't think if my teacher were here they'd be happy with my approach either, because in the East it's all full on—it's eighteen hours sitting, walking, sitting, walking, none of this open awareness space out. It's just try harder and then... And in the end, it works. For some people, it didn't. For some people, it was just the wrong technique.

So this is, as I said at the beginning, this is just an opportunity to investigate yourself. This is for you. This is self-caring. This is trying to do something about ourselves, with the obvious understanding that when I change, things change around me. People change.

So take this opportunity to really devote yourself to this practice. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May by your devoted effort, unrelenting devoted effort, you achieve liberation from all suffering sooner rather than later. That's what you're supposed to say. *Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.*

I'll try again. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later. That makes me feel good.

There were scriptures where the monks and nuns delighted in the Buddha's words, and there were those where they were silent. They didn't respond with delight. So *sādhu* is just the way of expressing your delight. So if you don't say it, I think, oh, well.

CHAPTER 45

Basics of Insight Meditation 02

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 34 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the Buddha's spiritual journey from his departure from family life to his profound breakthrough under the Bodhi tree. He explores how the Buddha's childhood memory of natural concentration and inquiry during a ploughing ceremony became the key to his liberation, shifting from trying to escape suffering to investigating its very nature.*
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> *The talk introduces core Buddhist concepts including the three characteristics of existence (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self), the five khandhas, and the six sense bases. Bhante explains how vipassanā practice involves returning to that childlike awareness—simply receiving and observing without conceptual overlay. He discusses the five hindrances not as obstacles but as teachers, showing us the three characteristics in action.*
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> *Drawing from the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta and referencing the Kevaddha Sutta's description of non-manifestive consciousness, Bhante emphasizes that awakening involves recognizing the observer within—that which is aware of experience but doesn't suffer. He concludes with practical guidance on cultivating Right Awareness through simple observation, warning against the poison of seeking progress rather than understanding the present process of liberation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So if you can imagine what it was like for the Buddha to leave his family. He's twenty-nine, he's married and he's just had a child born. It's not as though he made a sudden decision — he's off. It must have been hanging around for quite some time. I often wonder whether his marriage was in good faith or bad faith — according to the philosopher Sartre — just to follow customs and not to follow what your heart's really telling you. I'm wondering whether the birth of his child was like a crisis point where he realised he wasn't ready to be a father or whatever. But obviously, during that late youth, round about twenty-five onwards, there is usually an awakening to the fact that youth is passing. For some people, it can be like a midlife crisis, an early midlife crisis.

So he leaves anyway. I can't imagine he was happy about leaving, but determined to do so, perhaps just to taste the life of the *samaṇa*, the recluse, the wandering recluse. What drives him is, of course, this urge to try and get beyond suffering. That was the big theme of the age. Everybody was concerned about bringing suffering to an end. Some thought, well, if you practice the *jhāna*, these absorptions, that's where you ended up forever in these heavens. Others were materialists — they just said, well, when you die, you die.

So he goes in search of teachers and he probably already knows them because one of the entertainments of the age was to go out into the park at full moon — and the full moon in the east is really almost like the sun coming out — and to listen to these debates where these religious leaders would try to better each other. So he was well into it, and we know that because after he becomes liberated, he's able to hold his own with his arguments and understandings. He's well into the whole spiritual, religious turmoil that was part of that time. It was the same time that the Jain leader was there and all the Upaniṣads, the Hindu scriptures, began to appear. So it's an age of awakening. I was going to say a bit like ours, but I'm not sure about that.

He tries these various teachers and the first two tell him how to get into these blissful states. In both cases, he's good enough to become a teacher in that tradition. In both cases, he leaves because when he comes out of those states, he's back to being anxious, depressed, and so on. They've not answered his fundamental urge within him to find if there's an end to suffering, which I think for him would have been the end of rebirth, because it's there in the scriptures. He often talks about "and this is the end of becoming." Now, you have to underline that as the end of becoming as a self.

So then he tries this other form, this very hard ascetic practice with the understanding — which I think was a Jain understanding — that the soul, the eternal soul, was trapped in the body and that the body was a manifestation of your bad *kamma*. So if you didn't have eyes, you wouldn't have lust. If you didn't have a tongue, you wouldn't have greed. So the idea was to draw the body down, and that was done mainly through fasting. He got so thin, he said, he could hold his spine through his stomach. So if you try that, you'll see he was very thin.

At some point, if you can imagine it, he's there with six companions who probably have been with him all that time. So they're close mates, spiritual companions, all urging each other to be more and more ascetic. At some point, he realises he's not getting anywhere — he's just more suffering, he says. And he leaves. I'm sure that in all our

lives we've taken up something and then realise it's not working for us and we're going to start again. We've got to go somewhere else, got to find another way of spending life. So I can only imagine that he's pretty depressed in our terms.

We have two fairly acceptable biographical points in his life that we know about. There's something in his early life, which I'll come to, and there's this point where he's sitting on a road and a woman with offerings for the local god offers him some — a mince pie. It revives him and it makes him consider what he's doing. That's when some determination takes him to have one more go. It comes from this memory, which is understood to be a real, true biographical moment where he remembers watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony.

He remembers himself being concentrated and full of inquiry, full of a sense of curiosity. I think that means that his whole approach completely turned around on itself. Instead of trying to get rid of suffering, he now turns towards it to find out what the cause of it is. He finds himself a nice place near modern day Bodh Gaya, and there's a village close by where he can get some food. He sits and he becomes liberated from suffering in his own terms.

Such is his demeanour that when he turns up again to see his friends because he thinks, well, who can I teach? — and at first he has that doubt about whether it's worth doing it — but when he approaches his people, they first of all turn off. They don't want to know him. He's gone soft. But as he approaches them, they begin to see that there's something about him which has changed. In the conversation that follows, which is in the Vinaya rather than in the scriptures, he's constantly asking them, "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?" So he's made a real profound breakthrough and he's trying to get it across to them.

That breakthrough goes back to that childhood way of looking at things. When we're born, we've already got it. It's there at birth, this ability to just receive. It is said that during the first four months, it's just a catastrophe of information. We're seeing things, we're hearing things, and it's just coming at us. There's no objectivity. We're absorbed in the process. That little baby knows very clearly what's pleasant and unpleasant. So you're born directly into that duality.

Then it would seem after four months, you begin to push the world outwards. The first object tends to be your carer, your mother. So eventually, what was right in the head here, happening here, becomes out there — pushing it out there, becomes an object outside. We forget that everything we're observing and seeing is actually being put out onto the world out there. What we're seeing is what the mind is creating at this present time.

That sense of awareness that he found, that intuitive awareness that he discovered by just relaxing within himself and observing, he picked up from that experience he had watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. That's probably, I would have thought, around about the age of seven and eight because that's when we become a bit more self-aware in that way. For instance, guilt comes into play around about the age of seven, and around about the age of seven we drop the idea that what we can see or what we can imagine has to be real. So Father Christmas can't come down the chimney anymore.

This awareness that he then isolates from everything else that's in the body, all the senses, the consciousnesses that arise dependent on the senses — that whole process, that whole process of investigation is the process of liberation. That's what he discovered. That's what he's trying to tell us to do. This word *vipassanā*, which just means to see clearly, to really look and see.

He's very clear on what it is that we're trying to investigate. It's not amorphous. It's not some funny, fuzzy idea. He says, "Have a look. Have a look at desire, this process of desire." He gives us three models of a human being — actually, there's another one, too — but the three main ones are the five *khandhas*, whereby he deconstructs the human being as a cross section. So there's your physicality. Then your mentality is made up of your feelings, your perceptions, all your habits, which are made by us through acts of will. That's the important thing. They're conditioned and conditioning. And consciousness, which here means a screen upon which all the information lands upon.

Then he points out that the consciousness is dependent on the six sense bases. There's the five obvious ones, which are your five physical bases — your eye, ear, nose, and so on — and the mind itself, which is sensing your emotions and your thoughts. Then the final one, which again is more like a cross section.

Then he gives us a process, which is dependent origination. He starts off with that sense of ignorance. This ignorance isn't culpable. It's not as though that four-month-old baby should have known better. It's just that's what happens to us. We come in not knowing. That's the word, not knowing. Then we manufacture some idea of ourselves, a sense of me, which concretises round about the age of three. So that you have a very little individual boy and an individual girl. That's necessary. We have to start off with a self. It has to be a stable sense of self, a good sense of self. Often in the scriptures and especially in the Dhammapada, there's a whole section on being a good self.

But once you've established it, once it's stabilised, then we've got to — it's not that you get rid of it completely — it's just that you recognise that it's also creating a wrong relationship of identity. Every time we come into the *vipassanā*, we've moved our iden-

tity. So we have a physical identity sometimes, like when you bite your tongue when you're eating. Just for that one moment, you and that excruciating pain are one. Then you get angry with yourself. Then you become an emotion. Then you might reflect upon why it happened. Then you become your thought processes and so on and so forth.

Here in the *vipassanā*, we've accessed some place within us, this observer, this feeler, which also has a sense of self. That's the one that has to be cracked. That's the last sense of self that has to be undone, you might say. In the discourse on not-self, which is the second discourse that he gives according to the tradition — so the first one is just laying out the teaching which eventually formalises into the four noble truths, but one person listening to that, one of his six companions, becomes what we call a stream-entrant. He makes a breakthrough through that delusive idea of self.

Then they all go off seemingly to get some food and they come back and have a bit of a lunch, have a rest, a cup of tea, and then he gives his second talk centring on this *anattā*, not-self. It begins by saying, "If I were the body, I could make it different. If the hair on my head was mine, I'd make it grow, but it'd disappear completely. What to do? If this body and if these emotions were mine, I'd have total control over them." But obviously, we don't have that sort of control. If the sensations in my body were under my control, I'd be able to do something. Now, it's not as though we don't have some control, but it's very surface. Even if you think about your body, have we any idea at this moment what the spleen is doing? I'm not so sure I even know what a spleen is. All I know is you don't want to get rid of it or try not to get rid of it.

Then he talks about impermanence and he says, "If it's impermanent, how can it be me?" So he's struggling with this word *attā*. This was the word which was being used for an eternal self. It's the same word *ātman* in Sanskrit. It's used by the Hindus or the Brahmins — it's not Hinduism as such yet, it's Brahmanism we call it — it's used by other teachers, such as the Jain teacher, to point to something which is not part of this psychophysical world, this psychophysical material world.

The discourse is not saying we don't have a self. So remember, it does get confusing. Here what the discourse is a pointer, which is saying, "Look, if there is this self, where is it? What is it?" The next point he comes to is impermanence. He says, "Well, if this self is meant to be an eternal soul, an eternal spirit in our language, if it's so, it can't arise and pass away."

So even by investigating everything that we're experiencing as momentary experiences, we're beginning to understand that anything I experience can't be me. It can't be this soul. Can't be this permanent sense of self. Even the sense of self disappears when we sleep. So I can't be that either. So it was really trying to point people to really invest-

igate whether there was this eternal soul. It was this process of investigation which is the liberating factor. So this is the path, you might say. The specific path of the Buddha was the process of investigation.

Then of course he says if something arises and passes away and you're clinging on to it then it's going to cause suffering, and that's the *dukkha*. In a later way of explaining that, he talks about the three types of suffering. So there's the suffering of reactivity, *dukkha-dukkha*. Life has suffering whether we like it or not. But how we relate to that, the unpleasantness of life, that also causes suffering. Everything is suffering if we're attached to something. We get attached to what is pleasant, to what is beautiful. The impermanence of that — catching the impermanence — that we can let go. We accept beauty. So that's the thing: it's accepting and enjoying beauty, enjoying that ecstatic mental state. When it goes, to remind ourselves, it's gone. That will never repeat itself. I'll get something like it. But I'm chasing the dragon. Well, it's the same psychology as any drug addict.

Then finally, the *saṅkhāra* dukkha. It's the dukkha, the suffering or the unsatisfaction that comes by not seeing that everything's compounded. There's nothing that has any solidity, that has any substance. We know that. On a physical level from our science — somebody once said to me, if we took all the space out of the body, we'd end up with something like a centimetre cube of matter. So that's what we're made of, these subatomic energies, whatever. It's magic when you think about it.

So it's investigating these three characteristics that lead us to discover within ourselves something which is not part of that process. He doesn't like to name it. He doesn't like to call it something. He prefers to talk about the experience *Nibbāna*. What he says about *Nibbāna* is that there's nothing in it which you've ever experienced or can experience. It is beyond the body and mind and heart. It's beyond all. Whatever we call being a human being, it's not that.

Then in another scripture where he's in a sense pushed by the question to answer in a very direct way — it's called the Kevaṭṭa Sutta, it's very famous amongst monastics, amongst certain monastics, because it goes against the idea that *Nibbāna* is nothing. Like it's a clever way of talking about annihilation. There's this monk Kevaṭṭa, and he wants to know where the world comes to an end. So now the world in this sense, and the Buddha often uses it in this sense, is the world you're experiencing. It's your world. It's not the world as an objective thing. He goes and asks somebody, and they don't know, and he asks these devas, these gods, and they keep saying, "Well, we don't really know the answer to that. You need to go up higher to the next load of gods." And he goes...

He goes up and up through all these scales of godly realms, deva realms, till he gets to the great Brahma, who is the creator. And he says to Brahma, where does the world come to an end? And Brahma answers, "I am Brahma. I am the creator of the world. I am the all-powerful, the all-knower," and so on and so forth. And he says, "I didn't ask you that. I wanted to know where the world comes to an end." And this happens three times. It's quite a funny discourse.

And then Brahma pulls him aside behind a curtain. And he says, "Listen, I don't want them to know that I don't know the answer to that question. But I do know who knows. And that's the Buddha. And you made a mistake coming up here. You should have gone to him."

So he nips down back to see the Buddha. And he asks the Buddha, "Where does the world come to an end?" And he says, "That's not the right question. The question is, where does the world not find a footing?" So *Nibbāna* exists at the same time as the world, as it was for him, the Buddha.

And then he comes out with a statement. He says, there is a consciousness. So now, whenever somebody has an insight into the human nature or into the world as it is, there's always a struggle for a word because the words that we have are always based on history, are always based on what we know. So, for instance, Freud, he has a real deep insight into the human psyche and there's no words that he can use, so he makes them up. The id, the ego, the superego.

So the Buddha doesn't particularly make up a new word. He is using consciousness in a particular way. And what he says is that there is this consciousness which is non-manifestive. And what he means by that is you won't find anything that the six senses offer us. So that's one way of looking at a human being, that the consciousness is based upon one of the six senses. You're either seeing or hearing, feeling, thinking. And he says there's nothing, there's no manifestation within that consciousness. And then he says that there's no boundary. There's no boundary. In other words, there's nothing there which there is a relationship to. It's complete, whole and entire unto itself. And then he says it's full of light.

And that's one experience, an experience of Nibbāna. So, that's our aim. Nibbāna can be experienced in different ways. I mean, that is a specific experience of the Buddha within itself. But every time we sit in the position of the observer, we're actually almost on the point of a Nibbāna experience. Because when you're in that position, ask yourself, am I suffering?

It might be that there is some very negative mental state there. You might be feeling very sad about somebody, somebody who's died, for instance, a friend. And as soon as you become aware of it, as soon as it's there, you're allowing the heart to express its sadness and therefore its healing. But whatever is aware of it, ask yourself, is that actually suffering?

So this is a magical position to find within ourselves. It doesn't heal the heart, it allows the heart to heal itself. That's all the heart wants to do. The heart just wants to express its problems. And it expresses it in feelings. And that's where we start dealing with these so-called hindrances. All those things that are agitating, are depressing. The five, all the ones to do with desires that we want, all the aversions that we have, which include the fears and anxieties, all the internal dullness and lethargy which has been a way of indulgence and a way of suppressing stuff.

Often when we're in a miserable state we'll just throw ourselves on the sofa and fall asleep, and so it's a nice way of just pushing things away, and of course it's very pleasant, isn't it? I mean, you wake up in the morning on a Sunday and you might just have been tempted just to keep sleeping in that subliminal state where you just keep turning over and you might get up and have a cup of tea and get back in the bed. So there's all this laziness. Well, of course, it's building up a mental state. And that's what we often feel when we're sitting as a hindrance. A hindrance meaning it's the danger of us being pulled into it, of giving into it. That's why it's a hindrance, is that they're actually teaching us something, these hindrances.

And then there's all that area of shame and guilt, remorse, secondary stuff that comes when we've not behaved in a way that's moral or ethical. And there's also included in that the sense of just that restlessness. A restlessness which can be physical. It can be emotional. It can be mental. It can be the three of them. And you just can't stop fidgeting. You can't stop doing something.

And the final one is doubt. But this is a type of doubt. I mean, the Buddha definitely wants us to doubt in the sense of ask ourselves questions, is what the Buddha's teaching true for us. Remember, this is a process of investigation. So belief becomes a real hindrance. He doesn't want us to believe anything, but he does want us to have confidence. And that's what skeptical doubt takes away from us. Because if you don't have confidence, then that doubt takes you over in anything, in any walk of life, and you can't move. You're paralysed.

I once had a student, I don't know what happened to him, but he got into this terrible psychological place of extreme doubt. He couldn't decide whether to get out of bed or not. I mean, it's just amazing when you think about it. And I'm not so sure I could help.

I'm not sure I helped him except to say, make a decision at some point to get out of bed and get out of bed. But he couldn't motivate himself. It was very strange. Unfortunately, I lost contact, but I presume he's found a way out of that.

So these mental states, these hindrances that come up are actually to be used in order to keep reinforcing in ourselves to reestablish a different relationship with the world, not me, not mine. And of course the danger is then that you're opting out, you're finding a place where you're becoming non-engaged, and that's why whenever we practice vipassanā it's always good to do a bit of *mettā* because that re-engages us. And basically that's what the Buddha did, if you remember having attained this full liberation.

No, just before that, you get the great doubt where Māra attacks him. So he's sitting there and all those old desires are coming up, to go back to the family, back to the life that he once loved, et cetera, et cetera. And he tries to steady that doubt by touching the earth. And the earth goddess rises and says, "You've got every right to seek this liberation," because Māra is telling him that he's not good enough. He's no good. It's a waste of time. Why are you doing this? And having perfected the virtue of generosity, it means that his purpose wasn't just for himself. It was actually to try and recognise that if he found it, he could help everybody else. And that was his engagement. That was what gave him that courage to just break through.

And then afterwards, having overcome the doubt that anyone would actually understand him, sends him into forty-five years of teaching. And that's what he devotes his life to.

So just to sum up, right awareness, bring to mind that childlike way of looking at things before conceptual thinking, before words, just to be able to see. And we can practice that just a very simple way. We can stare at something. Just stare at it and let the information come to us. And what it is, we're actually investigating these three characteristics and to use the five hindrances as ways of seeing these three characteristics. And slowly but surely, I'm sure you've all experienced life getting a little bit better because of our practice. Just a little.

So abandon progress. That's a poison, honestly. It's a poison. Students always get saying, "I'm not progressing" or "Where am I going?" You're not going anywhere. You're standing right here and you're observing process. And in observing process, that is the process of liberation. To see and understand how things have come to arise. That's the Buddhist sentence.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. And that by your devotion to practice, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 46

Basics of Insight Meditation 04

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 27 min

> *In this fourth talk on insight meditation basics, Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the Buddha's revolutionary discovery back to a childhood memory of watching his father's ploughing ceremony - a moment of pure, non-conceptual awareness that became the foundation for vipassanā practice. He explains how our minds constantly overlay concepts onto raw experience, preventing us from seeing things as they truly are.*
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> *The talk explores the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana) that vipassanā reveals: the futility of clinging desire (taṇhā), the reality of impermanence (anicca), and the investigation of self-identity (anattā). Drawing from the Buddha's second discourse on not-self, Bhante emphasizes how recognizing our lack of control over the psychophysical process undermines our fixed sense of identity.*
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> *Practical guidance includes bringing awareness of impermanence into daily life, acknowledging the fear of death that underlies our grasping, and cultivating contentment through ethical intention. The ultimate goal, as the Buddha described it, is to be "contented and with it happy" (tuṭṭhi sukha) - a state of genuine fulfillment that comes from seeing reality clearly rather than through the distortions of conceptual thinking.*

So I just thought I'd start with, just in case there are some questions about the actual practice. Are there any questions? No? Everybody's perfectly clear and proper. I can't see everybody when I'm on this. You'll have to put your microphone on. No, no questions. Fantastic. Well, that's pretty easy then.

So just the usual reminders. We have to ask ourselves, what was the Buddha's discovery? And when we go back through his life we can see that he tried all the various techniques that were present at the time – very concentrated states that we call absorption; fasting, controlling your food intake on the understanding that the body was the problem and if you could just draw the body down then all the temptations that come with the body would disappear. So he just got very thin and presumably almost died. I don't know, but he definitely got very thin.

So he was a man of his time, even though we see him as extraordinary. There was a time of great ferment. I mean, it's known as the Axial Age. And the Brahminical tradition was producing all these new scriptures. And there was the Jain leader, too, who

was a contemporary of the Buddha. And there were six other teachers at the time whom the Buddha had to contend with, one of them being what we would recognise these days as a materialist. So it was in that melee that the Buddha was working.

Now, just as these days, I mean, Trump isn't extraordinary. He's just an expression of our neoliberal situation. Without that situation, Trump would never have appeared. So it's the same with the Buddha. He's the flower of this enormous investigation that was going on at that time into consciousness, into afterlife, all the things that were obsessing people. And what he discovered was that by turning inward – so up until then, seemingly he's trying to escape. He's trying to escape the suffering of life. He's trying to escape rebirth, this problem of constant reincarnation. And when all that fails and he's sitting under a tree, he does have this memory. And as far as I know, this is the only true biographical memory – not biological, autobiographical. This is the only true biographical memory in the whole of the scriptures. Everything else we can presume was made up. All that business about him being a king, the son of a king, and having these three gardens that he would go to and all that stuff. But the one point that seems to be true is this memory.

So it's a kernel memory of him watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, which opened up the ploughing season. His father was the head man, basically, of a tribe which is situated in North India, now into the border of Nepal. And what he remembers is sitting there, watching his father with that sense of curiosity. And he's absorbed. He's absorbed into that process. He's not thinking about it. He's not reflecting on it. He's just watching. He's just watching. And at the end of that watching, he comes to understand what his father's doing. So I position him somewhere around about the age of seven, seven, eight, something like that. And somehow that opened up to him a way of looking which was not conceptual.

So that's our real problem. Everything we look at, everything we taste, everything we smell, everything we touch comes with a concept. That concept can be very simple like hot, or it can be huge like democracy. But it's conceptual. It's an idea which we then plunk onto the experience. So we never – I won't say never, but usually, more often than not – we experience things through a concept.

Now, it's not as though we want to get rid of concepts. You need to know when something is hot and when it's cold. But it's drawing that attention back down out of the conceiving mind, out of conceptualising things. It's extraordinarily difficult. And the only way to do it is to drive the attention towards what we're actually experiencing in this present moment.

What the mind does is it gives us a reality that we can live with. Take time, I mean. We have a memory of things past and an idea of things future, and that somehow time is a funnel that we're passing through – we're in time. But actually that's not what's happening, is it? What's happening is things are arising and passing away in this present moment, and there is no past. Whatever there was, even a nanosecond ago, has completely disappeared. And what's coming in the future, I haven't a clue.

Generally speaking, because we're in a situation like ours in the West, which is fairly peaceful, we don't get that sense of insecurity. But if you were living now in one of the war zones in Ukraine, you never know when one of these bombs are just going to blow you to pieces. You're living right on the edge, which brings you right into the present moment when you're like that. And it's this effort to begin to experience things before we have an idea of what it is that allows us to see things like impermanence, because we're right there. The mind is always constructing. It's always constructing.

So that's the purpose of *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā*, remember, means to see things as they really are. The *passanā* means to see – *passanā*, *passati*. And the vi is just a strengthener, to really see it. And just that effort to keep the attention on exactly what we're feeling, exactly what we're experiencing – the breath. Take the breath, for instance – to stay with it and to drive the attention right into it with that sense of curiosity, which is asking, am I actually seeing this as it really is or is there some conceiving going on?

In the Zen tradition of Korea they have this thing called the Hwadu which just means what is it? What is this? What is this? And it's just a way of centering that attention, constantly asking ourselves, am I seeing this the way it is?

Now when I say constantly asking ourselves, I'm not saying that we should be there asking ourselves constantly, "What is this?" That is just driving you potty. It's an attitude. It's an attitude that we're trying to develop of a radical doubt about ourselves as to our ability to see what's actually happening. It's an honest doubt. It's asking ourselves, am I seeing this as it really is? On a grander scale, am I understanding the world as it really is? Do I understand where we are historically, where we are economically? It's like a general interest question. But in terms of the practice of ourselves, am I actually seeing myself as I really am? That's the question.

And this effort to draw ourselves into the present moment opens up the possibility of really experiencing the fact that we are totally momentary. Totally momentary. The whole thing – the whole body, mind, everything – it's arising and passing away at the moment. This has a systemic effect because it makes us realise that the whole thing about holding on to something, keeping it, trying to stop things moving, trying to stop things changing is a fool's game. It just creates frustration. It creates sorrow.

Even in relationships, to try and hold a relationship as it is – "you're not the person I began to live with, you're not the person I married" and all that. Those statements don't make any sense within a situation which is in a state of continuous change. So that trying to hold ourselves as we are, where we feel comfortable, trying to hold the other person where they are, that sense of trying to control. And underneath that, what do you find? You find fear. Fear. At the fundamental base of our existence, you'll find fear. Fear of what? Fear of death. It's always underneath everything we're doing, this fear of death.

And death, in all its aspects of loss – every moment is a momentary death. Every time you lose something, you've lost something that was part of you. Even if you only owned it, you didn't describe yourself by it, you didn't identify by it, but it was part of you. It's a little death, a mini death. And that fear, if it's not brought into our lives, begins to affect us in all these peculiar ways.

During the pandemic, you'll notice – I'm sure some of you noticed or read about it – everybody went out and bought loads of toilet paper. What an amazing thing. I met somebody and they'd actually – I think it was a bit cheeky. There was this elderly woman and she walked out with a whole tray full, a whole one of those trolleys full of toilet paper. And he made a big comment on it. There were all sorts of people around and made a comment on it. Why? Well, if you read about what the suppression, the repression of death does to us, you'll notice that we make these connections with excrement, excuse the word, with money. That's why money is dirty. Somehow we construe money as being part of death, a part of loss. And so not bringing that death into our lives is really undermining us. It's not opening us up. It's making us clamp down with fear.

So that in the morning, if you were to say to yourself, "I might not live the whole of this day. I might actually die, or I might see the first signs of a terminal illness." Now at first you might think, well if I do that I'm just going to get depressed. But actually the opposite happens. By bringing death as a possibility in our lives at all times – we don't know the hour or the day, as Jesus Christ said – as soon as we bring that into our life, the effect is to make us realise how amazing life is, how we have this consciousness in the first place. How is it there is something anyway?

The fact that there is this – I'm looking out onto a scene where there's the sun shining and the snow is full of this whiteness and it's a rare occasion these days. And there's beauty out there. One can feel it. And that beauty and the joys of life become more accented when you recognise that everything's transient and that ultimately it'll all disappear and I'll disappear.

So all these things, when you're looking into your practice, when you're actually diving in to your feelings, to your sensations, to your breath, and getting down there to see that it's just made up of little bits and pieces, little sensations arising and passing away – all this is part of seeing impermanence. And as we go deeper into this impermanence and see what the suffering arises by not accepting impermanence, we're getting down to that deep level of fear. And that fear is pointing to something. It's pointing to a concept about who I am. And that the deepest fundamental problem of our existence is identity.

And I've noticed that now – some of you will know Sutta Central on the website. It's a great site. He's done this – Sujato, this Ajahn Sujato. He's done all the scriptures now, which he seems to have translated. Some of his translations are a little bit, as you would say, inventive. But they're good. They're good. And I've noticed that he's now translating delusion as identity. Finally. Actually pointing to it. That's the root of it.

That's the whole discourse that the Buddha gives, his second discourse, which allows his other – which allows the five companions of his to become fully liberated. Now, that's not magic. Remember, they'd been practising like him for years with these absorption states and with the more self-mortification things about not eating and all that. And they all become liberated after this talk. And what's the talk on? It's the talk about not self. And what that talk is simply saying is, is the idea of me as a person, is that real? Can I substantiate it?

And the first thing he points to is control. So as you're doing your meditation inside yourself, you can see that things are just happening. You're not telling the breath to breathe. You're not telling your heart to express its sadnesses or its happinesses. You're not saying to your mind, "Now think about this, think about that." It's just all happening. And that sense of not control begins to take away this idea that I must be this psychophysical organism. That's what you're undermining. And then when you look at impermanence, you can see that whenever you hold on to something, it's going to cause suffering because it's not going to be there. It's going to change. Something's going to happen.

So it's this process of *vipassanā*, which, the more we can really devote ourselves to doing it properly – often in our practice, we get lazy. And I'm just as much guilty of that as anybody else, where you sit and you start off with a good intention, but then the mind wanders. And before you know it, you're worrying about this and you're thinking about that. So that opening gambit where we sit and we really talk to ourselves and say, "Come on, settle down, calm, be peaceful, draw your attention into the breath," and be aware of what mental state you're beginning with. If it's a very agitated state, perhaps a

scan through the body might be very helpful. Going down if you are agitated, coming up if you're slothful – it raises energy. And if we acknowledge the mental state that we start with and work with it, and then we have that steadiness of attention to actually turn it into something we're investigating. So that's what we're actually practising.

So the practice and an ordinary daily life – they shave into each other. They move into each other. So that, for instance, at the end of a piece of work, or you've done a bit of gardening, or you've done this, or you've made a cup of tea, just to stop for a moment and just recognise that's gone, that's finished. That's the end. It's not there anymore. And then just to relax into this present moment, just to stop. And then the next intention comes. And you empower that intention. And that way, there's a sense of at least guiding your life. I don't want to use the word control. You're not controlled. You're guiding your life in a way that is going to lead to greater happiness, greater contentment.

There's a section in the Dhammapada, which is a collection of all these verses that the Buddha made up. It's totally devoted to making the self happy. This self that we feel, it can actually make itself happy. That's why we practise *mettā*, we practise joy, we practise compassion. The practice is to make ourselves happy, but not excited. There's another confusion we get into. So excitement is that level of agitation that comes when we're feeding into a desire and the unfortunate consequence of that is that you can't feed it enough and it keeps coming back, keeps coming back. So one of the things about happiness and joy which is coming from the goodness of the heart is that once it goes there's no hankering after it and it always comes with a sense of calmness.

So there are all these indications in the Buddha's teachings that our practice is supposed to actually make us more contented and happy in all of our daily life. And that's taken over time. You can't measure it by week by week, because some weeks are awful and some weeks are pretty good. But over a measure of time, you can see that your life is becoming more settled, more calm, more peaceful, more joyful. And the practice is what is, shall we say, pushing you a little, just pushing you a little to look a bit more deeply.

And if we can bring that sense of just being, just stopping every so often, and then noting that intention, making sure the intention is, as the Buddha would say, to our own benefit, for the benefit of ourselves, for the benefit of someone else, or for both our benefits. And that's what makes work so meaningful is when you can see it as a benefit, when you can see it as a service.

I've just watched a wonderful film. It's by the German director, Wim Wenders. It's called Perfect Days. And it's basically about this man. I mean, we find out more about him when he goes, but he basically cleans toilets and he fills his day. He fills his part-time day with a bit of photography, a bit of music, looking after trees. And you can get the feeling that here is someone who has dropped his...

dropped out of a type of life which was stressful and has now found a way of just being. And he's taken a very simple job to maintain that sort of connectedness with society. By the way, the toilets in Japan are amazing. I mean, they are architectural beauties. It tells you a lot about the Japanese. And their toilets are something else. So you have to look that up on AI to find out what the Japanese toilets are like.

So just to recap, we're practicing to see the three characteristics of existence. That's what they're called. The first one is to see the process of desire. And it's a wrong type of desire. It's the desire that wants to cling, that wants to have it all, that wants more. In our society, that word "more" — before it used to be more of something. You know, I want more chocolate. I want more ice cream. But now it's just more. There's more. More of everything I've got and more of what I haven't got.

And then there's this process of seeing impermanence and to bring that into our daily lives all the time, to see that everything comes to an end, everything comes to an end. And then finally, this idea of self, not-self, of constantly questioning who this person is, who am I, what am I. Just constantly questioning that.

Now, in that process, unwittingly — well, or in fact, quite self-consciously — we're drawing something away from its confusion with this psychophysical organism. And it's this awareness. Every time you're aware of something, you're pushing it away from your awareness. You're becoming more aware of what the awareness is. And it might be that at some point in your practice, either on retreat or even in daily life, if the attention is quite clear, you might just become aware of being that awareness. So you're up here, as it were, and you're being aware of being aware.

And you can glance back in, glance back into that awareness. And when you come out, you can ask yourself, what's it made of? What do I see there? What did I feel? What did I know? And you might surprise yourself to find out what that is. That's just a little exercise that I've culled from the Mahāyāna tradition.

So our practice is onward leading. That's the important thing. And even though we have dips in it, even though sometimes you look back and you think, well, I haven't changed that much — that's only because of expectation, of expecting the practice to be a magical thing. But the Buddha said — he didn't disguise it. He didn't say it was easy.

And I always like to quote this person who asked him. He said, you know, this training you're giving us is very hard. And the Buddha said, well, yeah, he said, but in the end, you achieve *nibbāna*, which is variously described. But one description would be without that unwholesome desire. And he says, yeah, but then you get to nibbāna. And then the guy says, yeah, but so what? So what's this nibbāna business? He says, when you get there, he says, you are contented and with it happy. You are contented and with it happy. And the word for that, the words for that are *tutti succuahati*. So I always say tutti frutti and succuahati.

So our practice is leading us towards a contentment with life, a general happiness, and eventually this understanding of a transcendental state, this experience of a transcendental state that we call *nibbāna*. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 47

The Hindrances: The Psychotherapy of Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's categorization of all suffering into five hindrances (nīvaraṇa): sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and skeptical doubt. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he explains how these mental defilements (kilesa) and latent tendencies (anusaya) arise from our unresolved psychological material and block both concentration and insight.

The teaching emphasizes the power of the thinking and imaginative mind in creating these mental states, and provides detailed instructions for working with each hindrance through the practice of objective observation. Bhante explains how to disengage from dream-like fantasies by noting the hindrance, returning to the breath, and investigating the underlying emotions in the body. He particularly focuses on the process of disidentification - learning to observe mental states as objects rather than identifying with them as 'self.'

Special attention is given to practical challenges like working with boredom (a form of aversion), distinguishing between genuine tiredness and the hindrance of sloth-torpor, and understanding skeptical doubt as fear-based resistance to commitment. The teaching concludes with encouragement about the gradual nature of purification and the ultimate liberation from these mental obstacles.

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

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

This evening we have to revise our hindrances—that's the normal thing. So for some it is a revision and for others it might be just an introduction.

The Buddha categorises all our suffering into five different types: all that to do with pleasure desire, all the problems we have with pleasure desire, attachment, indulgence; all those problems we have with hate, aversion, fear; all those problems that we have—what my teacher used to call our two very good friends—dullness and lethargy; all those problems we have with restlessness, which is a bit of a catch-all really, but it also includes remorse or guilt, guilt, shame, that sort of area; and sceptical doubt. So those are your five areas.

We have to know how to deal with them when they come up, because in the discourse on how to establish this awareness which leads to liberation, we have to know how they arise, how to undermine them, and how to stop them ever arising again. This is the hard work. This is the work of our meditation. If we had no hindrances, well, you'd be there really—just a couple of weeks meditation and you'd made it.

It's the hindrances that prevent us from making insights. And they are also hindrances to concentration because, as you know, they just take us away from the object, take us away from meditation. They set us up into a dream place or a sleepy place.

So we have to know what to do, and this is part of the skills of meditation. The other part we do tomorrow, which is developing the seven factors of enlightenment—that's the beautiful side. Best to leave the best wine till last. And those also demand a certain skillfulness, but for most of us it's this hard grind of dealing with our defilements.

Defilements is another word that the Buddha uses—*kilesa*, defilements of the mind. That's how it's translated, defilements. And he also has another word, *anusaya*, which means latent tendencies. So this comes close to our understanding of having things that are buried in our psyche and which we don't know how much is down there until somebody presses the right button. And then we realise just how angry we are.

So we have this underlying base of unresolved problems, and then they arise every so often, dependent on circumstance, whichever makes them come out in ordinary life. But in meditation we're just letting the heart speak for itself. We're just sitting back. And whatever comes up, that's what we've got to deal with. We don't choose to deal with any of these hindrances. They just come up by themselves—the *nīvaraṇa*, the hindrances.

As I'm sure many of you know, one retreat, you're falling asleep all over the place. And the next week, you're a jumping bean. You can't keep still. The mind—one day, you're like that. The mind, one day, is that. One sitting you fall asleep, next sitting you can't stop still. So there's no logic, there's no rationality of that sort in the heart. It has its own internal logic which is completely illogical from the rational point of view, because you're sitting here and—why am I feeling depressed? Why does this anxiety come up now when I'm trying to be peaceful and fully liberated?

In a sense, once we step out of the system, once we put ourselves in a position where we just want to let the heart manifest its turbulences, then of course it does all sorts, and we've got to be ready. We've got to know what to do. So if we go through these, then hopefully we'll remind ourselves of these skills or pick up some new ones, pick up some new ideas.

Now, what I've been saying all weekend is the power of the mind—the thinking mind, the imaginative mind—because it's through the imaginative mind, the thinking mind, that these mental states develop in meditation. They do it also in daily life. Everything that we've seen, everything that human beings have created, from jet planes to vaccines, it all began in the mind. All the horrors that we've committed, as humanity against humanity and dumb beasts and all that sort of stuff—that's all begun in the mind.

So it's really beginning to realise the importance of understanding what the mind does. By mind here I mean this imagination, this thinking capacity, this rationality. Through our Enlightenment—the 18th century Enlightenment—we put a lot of faith in rationality, in reason, in being able to sit and reason things out. And what was misunderstood was that reason always depends on a premise. If the premise is wrong, then your reasoning will lead you into trouble. So that's why we ended up with Nazism, Communism, and all the rest of it. And it's undermined a lot of our faith in rationalism, what it should have done. That's why we have a postmodern idea of—my reality is my own and to hell with yours.

So once we understand the power of the mind—the thinking mind, the imaginative mind—to create a world for us and how it develops and produces these mental states, then we're very wary of it. And one of the things that we have to do in meditation is to keep coming off the thinking mind and plunge into—as Sayadaw U Pandita's way of putting it—plunge into, to get into, to really feel what's motivating it, which is coming from the heart.

In our sitting practice, it's normally beginning from the heart, normally beginning from the heart, and then it moves into these higher faculties of imagination and thought, and then it begins to churn itself. In daily life, of course, it can come the other way. So you're watching television or something, which is some usual stuff about murder and divorce and argument. It's all going in. And, of course, you're responding to it. You're resonating with what's happening on the television screen. Every time you listen to the news and its usual horror stuff, then you resonate with that. So, in effect, that's coming the other way. It's coming from the mind into the heart.

But our problem in the meditation, in the sitting, is usually coming from inside, from memories, from unresolved turbulences in the mind. I much prefer the word turbulence. We have this word about blocks. A block gives you the impression that that's it. It's blocked. There's no way you can get out of this. It's stuck. It's like something in your

throat. But if you look at the mind as an energy system, just as we experience the weather—sometimes it blows hot, it blows cold, it storms, sometimes it's beautiful and peaceful, and so on.

So the first thing is all this stuff with desire. And remember that deep down, our aim is just to be happy. That's all we want. Just to be peaceful and happy. And whenever we see something which is making us happy, then we hold on to it. We try to aggrandise it. And we might come to this, a deeper understanding later on in the week.

Of course, we associate happiness, real happiness, with a mental state, with an emotional state. So when you say, "I'm happy," what you're saying is, emotionally, I feel happy. My heart feels happy. I'm filled inside with a happy feeling. Now, that's the first thing we have to, in a sense, begin to disconnect from.

So that when happiness arises, and it's trying to look for an object to increase its happiness—so there you are, happiness arises, and suddenly there you are with the person you've been looking for all your life on a dreamy island beneath coconut trees. Love abounds, and you're walking down the aisle, oh my goodness—or it's just raw sex, wonderful. And you wake up: oh my god.

So these feelings, coming from old desires of wanting this lovely relationship and so on—that's just arising. And now what's happening is that this is latching on to that and you're dreaming it. So within the dream, it's real. When you're dreaming, it's real. This is the problem. When you wake up out of it, suddenly you realise you've been fooled. It's only a dream. God, it's only a dream. And then you get this depression and this feeling of, I'll never find the person I can really love.

And so it's being able to recognise that we have to stop that, and you go back into just the feeling of excitement or that desire and you're pulling out of it, you're pulling out of it to make it an object.

Just to go back to childhood: when we're born, so they tell us, we experience the world without any depth. It's just a blank screen or a screen full of colour and shape and movement and all that. And that's why they say that babies, they're always reaching out for those rattles and stuff in their pram. And what they're doing is they're creating distance. They're creating a third dimension. You've got to believe these people. And slowly, that young child, the world begins to separate out. Before it was them. They were in that bath of sensations. And this slowly pushing out to the world, so that sometime—I don't know when it happens, maybe two or three years old—they're quite clear the world is out there and this is me, and they're pretty clear that I'm a boy or a girl.

Now all we're doing is taking that process inward. The world inside now has to be externalised. So you're pushing it away from yourself and you're looking at it. So whereas before, "I am happy," "I am in a state of excitement," "I love this and I love that"—come off the mind. Come off the mind. And you're pulling away from this emotion. So that's your first state: making it an object.

So it's just like this room. The room is outside us. This is now outside this consciousness. You've made it an object. Yeah? You're all nodding vigorously, so I presume—yeah, you feel it's there.

Now that distance, that distance is allowing us to actually create that knowledge that this is not me, not mine. It's not me, not mine. And when that's steadied, when I know that, then I can re-enter into it and begin to investigate it more closely. But I have to first of all establish that position of objectivity within myself, and what I'm doing is I'm breaking a connection with it. I'm breaking an identity with it. This identity is telling me that this happiness is me. That's the problem. So long as I think that this emotional happiness is me, I'm going to be seeking what makes me happy in this emotional way.

So at first you think you're losing something. So how the hell am I going to be ever happy in life now that I know this happiness is not me? So you pull yourself out. So this is an awful place to be because it's an identity crisis. How am I ever going to be happy if I can't be this happiness that I feel?

So one has to—if there's some fear come up, some anxiety around that—you go to that, you feel that. Don't let the anxiety throw you back into this happiness and back onto the beach. Maintain your position of objectivity.

And then as you become clear about that, then you re-enter the happiness to investigate it. And slowly becoming convinced that in fact this is just a form of energy. It's just like a light or just like a nice feeling, just as you might have an itch. It's just a feeling. That's all there is. That's all there is in the body, a feeling.

So the Buddha's word for this is *vedanā*. Vedanā covers virtually everything we mean by a feeling. Both a sensation, when I say "I'm not feeling well," or "I'm feeling really good," meaning physically good, and sometimes when you say "I'm feeling unhappy," "I'm feeling sad"—that's a mental state. So this word feeling comes very close to the Buddha's understanding. And what it does is it tells us that everything we associate with in the body is just feeling, whether it's a raw sensation or some great form of delight.

So when it comes to things that are around this area of happiness, we begin to realise that having identified with happiness as the purpose of my life, seeking happiness in the sensual world—and remember when the Buddha means the sensual world he means everything you're experiencing—having sought that happiness in the sensual world, of course all my energy goes to make it real. So if I know that I'm going to be really happy if I find the right person, off I go clubbing, doing all sorts, looking for this right person, especially in my dream world.

So I come back and I recognise the power of this desire, whatever it might be—a good job, money, fame, whatever's driving me. By doing that, this begins—I'm disidentifying with it. I'm able to see it for what it is, just a mental state. And then slowly it loses its energy. Losing its energy, that conditioning of seeking happiness in the sensual world is slowly being undermined.

So that's our process. Our process is to—and we see ourselves lost in a dream or a fantasy around the whole idea of happiness and pleasure—we stop the thinking as we move back down to the breath, we connect with whatever is in the body, the heart area usually, and we stay with it and we wait for it to pass away. And then if there's nothing else comes up, you go back to the breath. If it pops up again, do the same thing over and over and over again. That's the practice.

Now, of course, when I talk like this, people say, "Well, you mean there's not going to be any romance? There's not going to be any happiness in the world? Can't I...?" No. Quite the opposite. Now it's not that the Buddha fell in love once he was liberated—in a sense the liberation, that level of liberation when you're totally liberated, you're no longer attracted to the sensual world. But that doesn't mean to say that these things don't have their place and don't have their time.

What we don't want them to be is cloying. What we don't want them to be is overpowering, completely rushing our lives towards a certain obsessive destiny, whether it's to be rich or whether it's to be famous and so on.

So when—for instance, just talking about romance, just talking about a relationship—if one wants a relationship, one has to trust yourself. One has to trust that as we put that act of desire into the world, as you will it, then it will manifest or it won't. But if it becomes obsessive, then it just becomes an area of disappointment, of addiction.

So it's the same if you say to yourself, "Well, I want this sort of work in the world." So you push out that act of will, and of course you're open to it, you look around for it, but you're always open to the fact that it may not manifest, that's all. And therefore there's no big, huge disappointment or grief. It just becomes something that you put out there.

Now, you might say, "Well, how does that work?" I'm sure you can all look back into your life and you can see that once you will something, there's something quite magical about the interconnectedness of the world. The world seems to—the cosmos even—seems to make an effort to help you to manifest what you want. Correct? Nod rigorously, please. There's something about the interconnection of things.

I mean, I'm sure most of you have had the experience of, for instance, wanting to know something and the very book turns up. It's sort of magical.

I'll give you one out of my own life. When I began this teaching, I really, really, really didn't want to do it. What I wanted to do was just find a hut somewhere and continue. But once I decided to live in Britain it seemed impossible to do that because there wasn't the infrastructure. And so I began teaching and it evolved to what it is now. But over the crisis of it—it was actually the millennium, 2000—I went to meditate at Sayadaw U Pandita's place in Rangoon, Yangon.

This was in the back of my mind. I wasn't thinking about it. I just put it to the side, you know, as to... The question was open. I just laid it out there in front of the Buddha, you know. I just said, look, if this is what I have to do, then I'll do it. I don't particularly want to do it, but there's a call. People are asking me. So I just laid it out as it were, see.

And there it was, this book taken from the... You know, *A Course in Miracles*? Well, somebody had extracted all the stuff in *A Course in Miracles* about teachings, and it was this little thin book and it was stuck in a huge library and I happened to find it. And by the end of reading this book I knew I had to teach. There was no doubt at all in my mind. It was the strangest sort of thing.

So in a sense there also has to be that trust in that once you put out a real act of will, a real decision in yourself that this is the way you want your life to go, more often than not, it will go that way. You can't entirely depend on that because you don't know what forces are against you. It's no good me wanting to become prime minister. There's got to be a sort of realism about the desire. You have to test it. You have to be tested.

But in terms of the obsessiveness we have around desires, you see, we overcome them by coming off the dream world and sitting in the midst of that turbulence, that strong desire, the addiction. And the thing is that our habits are the whole habit of clinging on to something, an attachment of having to have, must have, all that. Once you tackle the real tough nut, it all fades away because it's all one attitude. You don't have to go from this obsession to that obsession and then all the way down the line. If

you hit the big one, they all begin to fade. And that's a bit of a blessing because we'll be here for lifetimes trying to get rid of it. So if you go for the big one, you see, then everything begins to be undermined.

And what we're trying to do, and this is why the eating that we're doing here, the exercise around eating is so important. What we're trying to discover is: How can I be with pleasure, with the joys of life, with a loving relationship, without this attachment, see? Without this obsessiveness, without this need, you see?

And what we're doing is we're not just breaking away from those things we're dependent on. By finding this position within ourselves of the objective observer, we're actually discovering a new identity, see? We're taking the identity out of the body with its sensations, out of the heart with its emotions, out of the mind with its thoughts, and very slowly we're beginning to identify with something which is much deeper within us, which is our Buddha nature. And the more you identify with that which knows, the less you become needy for the world to give you happiness. Because you're finding your resting place in the one who knows, the Buddha within. See?

And part of that process is to let go of the world as a place where we can find true happiness. Not to confuse these passing happinesses and joys and pleasures of life with real, sustainable, unchangeable, unalloyed, non-suffering, as the Buddha would have it. That's his way of putting happiness. He prefers to tell you what it isn't. Because as soon as you say, "Well, Nibbāna's happiness," everybody thinks it's some sort of blissed-out state. But it's not.

Now, you know what it is because when you're meditating in that state of the pure observer, you're actually it. But you may not have recognized it. You may not have recognized the absolute peace and stillness that there is within the observer. You don't look as though you believe me.

So anyway, that's all to do with this business of attachment and indulgence, addiction, compulsive behaviour.

The next business, of course, is this area of aversion. And of course, this is much the same. You find yourself in a dream world, you're hating people, you're chopping their heads off, all that sort of stuff. And then you just note, you know, anger, hatred. Or you're full of sort of anxiety, worrying about this, worrying about that, you know. These days, people might be worried about financial problems, losing their jobs. I mean, it's not a pleasant place to be in at the moment. And so you get these anxieties. You see, you note it, you come back. And as you go down to the breath, you feel, you get into those feelings, okay?

So this again is the other side of this attachment. It's the other side of this wrong identity, you see. And just by tackling the big one, you see, where you feel most aversion and where you feel most fear, that you're undermining that whole attitude of being averse to the world, to people, of being afraid of it. So it's the same. It's the same technique. Just coming off the dream, feeling the fear, you know. That book, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. So that's it. Just feel the fear.

Now of course in both of these cases, as it's true for all the other hindrances, you're also being aware of your relationship. So how when something good comes up we see the relationship of indulgence, wanting it, grabbing it. So when it comes to things like hatred and... well, hatred also. And cruelty, we want to indulge, yeah? We don't like to accept that, but being hateful can be very satisfying. Being angry, hurting somebody can bring quite a bit of internal joy.

Fear is different. You panic with fear. So remember that when fear comes up, you want to be aware of the fear of fear. There's your panic, hmm? And so long as you can keep the two in mind, the two there within your observation, and just keep breathing in and out, wait for that fear of fear to go, you see, and the panic stops, and you're with fear. And the more we get used to the texture of fear, see, that's why it's so important to come into the body, off the mind, you get into the texture of fear, the feel of it, the nausea, the trembling of it, you know, and then you lose your fear of it. And then, of course, it's not fearful anymore. I mean, what's going to frighten us? When we've lost our fear of fear, what can frighten us? But it's getting beyond that barrier. And you do it always by sinking into, feeling the fear.

So again, this is the Buddha's language. To feel feelings in feelings. That's the way he puts it. To feel, to know the body in the body. To know mental states in mental states.

With all these dream factors, when you come back off the dream and you come into the body and you're feeling the... There has to be a very clear decision that you're not going to go back there. See, if you don't, if it's a sort of semi-decision, especially with those things that we like to indulge, whether it's an averse thing or an indulgent thing, then there's that leakage of desire. And so you've come off something, you see, and you come away noting, noting, I don't know... Well, we'll go back to romance, you see. Then you come back, but actually there's a part of you that still wants to go there. See? You've not actually said no to this leakage. So there you are feeling, whoop, and off you go again, you see. So it takes a moment of mindlessness. One millisecond of mindlessness coming off the subject and you're away. You see?

So there has to be a clear recognition and acknowledgement. And as you turn away, there must be a decision. You don't want to go back there. And that stops that leakage of desire. See, that's important. So if you find yourself in a sitting and you're constantly going back to this dream thing, it may be just restlessness. It may be just the power of that desire. But just see if you've made a real decision not to go back into that dream space.

Just passing over the third one, which is normally this sloth and lethargy. And next after that is restlessness, you see. Restlessness is sort of catch-all. And in a sense, you've got to be very patient. If the mind is constantly in a state of just agitation, agitation, you see, then you've just got to be patient, you see. It's just this energy in the mind. And sometimes, you know, you think you're going mad, you see. And you are mad when you are mad. And so you just have to note, you know, restlessness, madness, and then just keep coming back to the breath. And if that's all you do, the whole sitting, the whole day, the whole week, that's the practice.

So you don't think to yourself, "Well, I've sat here for 40 minutes just saying madness, madness, and trying to get back to my breath. It's absolutely useless," you see. No, it's not. That's the practice. If you note madness and you think, "Well, why not? Let's go mad," and off you go. That's bad. You should feel terrible. You should really feel guilty and horrible. See? But that's the practice. Keep coming off the mind. Keep coming off the mind, you see, until that energy has exhausted itself, because that's where the energy has gone. It's gone into the head. What can you do?

Same with the body. If you feel tremendously restless and you really want to move, you see, one thing you can do is to just feel sensations from the top of the head going down to the feet and just keep going from the top downwards, you see. That tends to calm the body a bit, you see. But don't do it entirely for the purpose of calming the body. Do it to see where restlessness is. Did you ever feel restless at the end of your nose? Very difficult. It doesn't happen. So you have to sort of come down the body, where you feel the restlessness, hang on a little bit, keep moving, you see. And that also stops the mind wandering too.

And with that there's this other business of guilt, shame, remorse. So again these things have to be felt, and often it's because we've left things undone. We might have hurt somebody and we've not apologized. It might be that somebody's hurt us and you've not told them, you've not forgiven them. So those are processes that you can do in your sitting.

If you find for instance a lot of guilt coming up over something you've done, you see, then stay with the guilt, you see, but then write yourself a note and say, "Well, when I leave this is what I'll do," and that puts that to rest at least for a while until you've put

right what you did wrong. If there's a lot of hate and vengefulness over somebody who's hurt you, you see, then you know, feel it, feel it, feel it, you see, and then write yourself a note, see, that you know you'll approach the person then when you leave.

If of course the person is unapproachable either because they're not to be found or they've died or something, then, of course, you have to, in a sense, do a little ritual for yourself, you see, of writing a letter, doing something whereby you can externalize this problem. It helps, that's all. But eventually, it's actually coming into those feelings, you see, and resting with them. There's a whole load of stuff around that area which I tend not to tackle until the end of the week. So if that stuff comes up and you find it difficult to handle, then just come and see me.

Then there's skeptical doubt. Now this is really pernicious in any part of our lives. Pernicious doubt, skeptical doubt, is that doubt which stops you doing something. That's what it does. It stops you doing something. So if you're applying for a job and there's this constant, "Well, I don't know whether I can, maybe I shouldn't, I don't know whether I could," you see, before you've decided the job's gone. If you get into a relationship and you think, "Well, maybe I can't live, maybe I'm not, I don't know whether I should," it's gone. It's gone away, isn't it? And you can't commit yourself. That's what skeptical doubt does, you see.

Now, the fact that you've all come here and you're all meditating means that there can't be much skeptical doubt about meditation, you see. But it has its little ways, you know, like, for instance, the main one that people suffer from, I think we all suffer from, to some degree, is doubt about ourselves, doubt as to whether we can make progress in this practice. You know, you look around, everybody's sitting very, very still, and you think, "Well, I can't sit still," even though everybody's looking at you saying, "My God, you're sitting still." But we have all this sort of doubt going on about ourselves.

So when that sort of doubt comes up, you know, just remind yourself of the Buddhist teaching. It's a psychological, it's a spiritual imperative that everybody, all beings will become liberated. All beings. It's a spiritual imperative because that's the way consciousness is moving. Just because it's not moving fast enough doesn't mean it's not moving. And often in our practice we go through times when it's very dreary, like a desert, nothing seems to be happening, where we seem to be putting a lot of effort in and not getting any real results, see. So those are testing times. You just got to keep going, see, until you move through it. And often it's caused by, you know, false expectation.

I was once, when I was in Birmingham, a man turned up to do some meditation at the centre and he said when he first came on a retreat, this is going back a bit to the late seventies, he was going on a course, okay, it's a course, a meditation course, in which one achieved Nibbāna. So he went to this course and he thought, you know, Saturday, Sunday, that's it, I'll have made it. As the time rolled on, you know, and it came to the end, there was this, "God," you know, "we didn't turn him off," we came back and did some more. But that's what we think, we think, oh, you know, I keep doing this for a while, things will get so much better. I'll be liberated and all this sort of stuff. But, of course, these expectations eventually undermine our practice because they're not real. They're not real.

So be careful about expecting something from the practice, you see. We have to have a certain faith that there is purification going on. There is wisdom slowly being formed. It's just as soon as you enter into that position of the observer it has to happen. It can't not be happening, see. As soon as you're there taking that position of observing, of feeling things, of allowing things to manifest, you see, there must be some small change within our looking. It's like a, like I said before, it's like Chinese torture, you know, the drip, the drip torture. And slowly there are little aha moments, you see, when finally the penny drops a bit.

It's very rare for somebody to have a sort of cosmic, you know, opening where everything sort of bursts into light and one suddenly rises up in the air. It's very... most times it's just this plodding, plodding, plodding. And then when you look back over time, you know, five, six, ten years, you say things have changed. So it's a slow process. The Buddha warned us, it's gradual.

There's nothing... I know you hear in certain traditions the sudden enlightenment and the, what is it, sudden and gradual enlightenment. But these are misunderstandings because when an insight comes, of course it's sudden. An insight doesn't take time. You either see it or you don't see it. But to get there can be one hell of a journey. So it depends where you're standing. If you're standing in the insight, yes, it's sudden enlightenment. But if you're standing outside the insight, you're blooming gradual. Right? So all those arguments about sudden and gradual insight seem to me to be a bit silly, really.

Nobody here, I hope, is going to the Zen school.

Then there's of course doubt in the teaching, doubt in the Buddha and all that. And really that again is undermined through the practice and through reading and through thinking about it and reflecting on the teaching and making sure that we understand what the Buddha's talking about. And through our practice it becomes realistic. And that's it, you see.

So here we're understanding all this business about defilements, about mental states that are difficult to work with. And then of course there's doubt in the teacher. Heaven forbid. And of course that has to be tested because the teacher in Buddhism is only there to guide. It's not a faith in the teacher in that guru sense. That would be really undermining the process.

See the Buddha himself, he couldn't handle that. Just before he died, there was a young monk who looked upon him mooningly. He sent him off to the forest. He's on his deathbed. This is when he saw that he'd got this wrong relationship with the Buddha. Sent him off. Get out. So it's not that sort of guru relationship. It's not meant to be that at all. It's meant to be someone who is just giving instructions, pointing to the moon, as they say. The Buddha points to the moon. He shouldn't be looking at the end of his finger.

So, sceptical doubt. That's something just to be aware of. And again, when you go into it, you may find it's just fear. Fear of failure. Fear of criticism. Usually it's some sort of fear down there, which stops us making that commitment.

This often comes up when I offer people the opportunity to take refuges and precepts. It's the same, the distinction between, shall we say, a partnership and marriage. Somebody explained to me once there was a difference between bacon and eggs. Have you heard that? See, when it comes to eggs, the chicken gives of its egg, but the pig gives of its life.

So there is something about a marriage which is like it's a further giving of oneself and it's not surprising to me to find that often people who've been in a partnership for quite some time finally decide to get married go through an actual ceremony of marriage. I've done that for a few people and it just points out that so long as it's just a partnership there's always this clause underneath it gets you out. But the point of a marriage is a complete commitment to the other. Like we had this lovely wedding. Sickness and health are poor for rich. It doesn't matter. You're committed to the person entirely. And that, of course, is an act of compassion. It's an act of complete giving of oneself to the other. Of course, it works as long as the other is giving their complete self to you. Once that begins to separate, then you're stuck.

So, sceptical doubt, yeah? So be careful of that. Again, be careful of what the mind's doing. Be aware of it.

Two things I haven't looked at is boredom. So remember, boredom comes under the heading of aversion, and it's important for us because the boredom comes up in the practice. I mean, if you put it out in the ordinary world that you just spent a whole week trying to observe the breath, they would probably think, well, I can't think of anything more boring than watching my breath and feeling the breath arising and passing away.

So when boredom comes, remember, this is the product of indulgence. So remember there are five negatives that come up there's an aftermath from indulgence and once you connect these two once you connect this then of course you tend to come off at least gross indulgence a gross dependency so there's addiction there's compulsive behaviour there's frustration when you don't get it there's grief when you lose it you're always afraid of losing so you take out an insurance policy and boredom.

Remember when the Buddha was fully liberated, for seven years, Mara chased him with his three daughters. Sensual desire, sexual desire, and boredom. Interesting, eh? Now, of course, what that story is telling us is that there were still remnants in his mind for seven years of old habits. Of seeking happiness. But Mara goes away slinking away, saying, the Buddha sees me. So even though there were still these, what's known as *vāsanā*, in the Buddha's mind, even after he was liberated, which took seven years to completely die out, there were still these three things. And boredom is there.

So boredom is a state of aversion, right? Not wanting, seeking excitement. And that's what it tells you to do. It tells you to seek divertissement. It tells you to seek excitement. But what you do with boredom is repetition. You feel the boredom and you keep repeating what you're doing. So this is true for anything in life whether you're trying to learn an instrument work at work where boredom arises because you're doing the same thing day in and day out or whatever so you recognize the boredom and you just keep doing what you're doing you don't indulge the boredom you don't seek distraction.

All these things that we're talking about, they all pertain to ordinary day life. You can't just do them when you come on retreat. It's just constant. It's terrible, but there we are.

And then finally, there's our two very good friends, dullness and lethargy. Or if you want to put a moral twist on them, sloth and torpor. Now, we have to make a distinction between tiredness where the body needs rest, the mind needs rest, and this dullness and lethargy.

So tomorrow, for instance, we get up a little earlier, and there may be still some remnants of tiredness from when you first came, because virtually everybody rides on a retreat with some sleep imbalance. Either they are oversleeping or they're undersleeping. They're not sleeping well. And it normally takes three or four days for that to slowly iron itself out. So tomorrow, getting up a little earlier, just pushes the system a bit. But we shall struggle. And then by the fourth day, of course, there's massive energy, and one wonders where it was all before.

Now, how is it we have this conditioning of dullness and lethargy? So just consider how many times you have indulged in that subliminal state of sleep. Just, hanging around at the weekend in bed on that lovely level where you're neither asleep nor awake. Where you've taken a newspaper to bed or you're listening to the radio and you just keep wafting in and out into these pleasant states. How many times when you feel a bit depressed, a bit low, a bit down, you've just flung yourself onto the couch and just fallen asleep for a while?

So, in other words, it's a way that we get rid of ourselves. It's a way that we can annihilate ourselves. Of course, we wouldn't do it if we didn't think we were going to wake up. But it's a way that we keep pushing ourselves into this state of oblivion. And the reason why we do it is because there's no suffering there. There's no suffering in oblivion. Unfortunately we'll wake up what we hope is that on waking all the troubles will have gone so it's actually a small way in which we commit suicide that's what we're doing we're getting rid of the self every time we use sleep to annihilate ourselves we're actually desiring non-becoming.

So the Buddha points to three desires: sensual desire, the desire to become, and the desire not to become. So that is in us always when it gets too heavy a desire to escape and one way we escape is fall asleep so what we're suffering from when we have this dullness in the mind like porridge and the body feels as heavy as lead and all that is the consequence of these indulgences.

What do we do? We refuse to be annihilated absolutely completely and utterly refuse. We use noting to keep ourselves awake. You can come up the body up from your toes to the top of the head just keep the attention moving so there's energy being displaced into that looking that process and you're looking to see where is it that you feel this heaviness. You feel it in your toes. You feel it in your knees. See where is it and if you keep coming upwards like that it just keeps the energy coming up and you're able to stay awake within that state.

When it comes to the body feels great but the mind is just full of this heavy dullness like big fog or smog then just roam around it. Roam around it feeling it seeing it. And you might be surprised to find that you wake up like a bulb right in the middle of that fog. I'm sure you've all experienced that surely. Of course you have. So why do I ask these questions?

And you wake up completely bright and alert in the middle of this dullness in the middle of this awesome smog and that just shows you that what's actually making us become the dullness is association with the dullness. It's an association. It's an identity with the feelings of lethargy and the more you move around in it the more you're pulling out of it the more you're trying to investigate the taste of it, the feel of it, the texture of it, the more this knowing is awakening until eventually it wakes up completely and it's like you're there in the middle of this smoke, this heaviness.

And it's a mental state. It's as valid a mental state as depression, anxiety, all these things that we have a no-no on. This is also a no-no. It's an awesome state to be in. So when you get to that point, what you're allowing is this energy to dissipate. And it's an energy that's like a whirlpool. It's drawing you down into the black hole. It's not these other energies that are swishing you out into galaxies. This is mirrored in nature. It's quite remarkable, really.

So as soon as you feel yourself being washed down into this black hole, make sure that you lift yourself up. Keep awake. And you can open your eyes, let the light in. You can stand up. If it gets too much, then just gently leave the meditation hall. Do some walking. I've walked for hours up and down with this stuff. It used to, at one point, it used to last for ten days, just up and down, up and down. One point I was doing the times table, I got as far as 17 going forwards and backwards. Can you imagine that? I knew the 17 times table backwards. Not bad. And that was just to keep myself awake.

When I said this to my teacher, Janaka, he said, it's very good, he said, better to think of the Dhamma. Spent all my time learning these times tables. So just the effort of just staying above it. I'm not so sure that was all that skilful. It would have been perhaps more skilful to do this investigation more. But it was just the effort to stay awake, to stay awake.

So there's a lot of it. All this stuff that we've talked about, unfortunately, there's mountains of it. But we struggle on. We continue.

So that really covers all our negativity really. If I've missed something, I think you'll be able to slot it in to one of those five. All those things to do around indulgence and pleasure, all those things to do around aversion and hatred and fear, all those things, all

those feelings and stuff we have to do around dullness and lethargy, all the restlessness, the guilt, shame, remorse, and finally, sceptical doubt. That covers the whole range of stuff that we have to deal with.

And just to repeat, our job is to recognise it, to point to it, to know what it is, to know what to do about it, so that we undermine them, and eventually they stop altogether. So the Buddha is liberated from all that, he's liberated from that suffering. Somebody who is fully liberated doesn't have these *kilesa,* they're gone. He doesn't suffer from them anymore. So the future looks bright.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering by your acute and unrelenting practice undermining these dreadful hindrances sooner rather than later. I can't make them feel good either.

CHAPTER 48

5. Right Awareness: Introduction to Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 28 min

> *In this foundational talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the Buddha's spiritual journey from his existential crisis and departure from household life, through his training with teachers of jhāna and his near-fatal ascetic practices, to the pivotal memory that transformed his approach entirely. Rather than seeking escape through blissful absorptions or mortification, the Buddha turned his inquiry directly toward suffering itself, asking how dukkha arises in the first place.*
>
> *Bhante illuminates how the Buddha's childhood memory—of watching his father's ploughing ceremony with pure, concept-free awareness—became the key to his awakening. This 'original mind,' as Zen traditions call it, represents awareness before conceptual overlay, before we label a beetle as 'beetle' and never truly see one again. All meditation techniques, Bhante explains, serve this single purpose: drawing our intuitive intelligence out of its confusion with the intellect and returning to direct experience at the level of sensation.*
>
> *The talk distinguishes between formal vipassanā practice—investigating the three characteristics (impermanence, suffering, and non-self) from a place of quiet, non-grasping observation—and mindfulness in daily life, which requires re-engaging with action while maintaining clear comprehension. Bhante offers practical guidance for both: during sitting practice, we must resist 'trying to see' and instead trust the Buddha nature within that constantly seeks liberation; in daily life, we maintain global awareness of inner states while giving attention to present action, neither suppressing difficult emotions nor identifying with them.*

The purpose of this little talk really is to make sure that we're all fairly clear as to what the Buddha means by right awareness.

I always think it's good to go over a little bit of his biography, which makes it, I think, more plain to us.

Remember, he was brought up in an aristocratic family. Later tradition, of course, builds him up into this huge kingship and all that sort of stuff, but basically his father was a vassal to the local king, and his people were just part of that kingdom at the top of India, which borders Nepal. Being of that caste, the Kshatriya caste, the warrior caste, his education would have been mainly about flashy swords and shields and

maybe a bit of astrology—things like that. There wouldn't be any cooking or domestic stuff. So we can presume that he lived a fairly happy life, sensually anyway, just getting what he wants.

Somewhere in his twenties he gets married, and round about twenty-nine he leaves his wife and newborn child. For us, of course, that sounds terrible—desertion. But you have to remember it was an extended family; it wasn't as though his wife was out on the street. But if somebody does that, if somebody leaves a home and the people they love, then one presumes that there is something very urgent in that need. And we can only presume that he had what we would call an existential crisis.

Remember, it's put in that mythological sense that as he's taken out to do some hunting, he comes across a very sick person, a very old person, a corpse, and an ascetic sitting under a tree. They're called messengers from the gods, and what the myth is trying to tell us is that somewhere in his mid-twenties he came out of youth and realized that in fact what he was heading for was sickness, old age, and death. That can come as a shock to some people—this realization that all the effort we put into life, everything we do personally, just ends up with a load of ashes scattered here and there. That basic meaninglessness of life.

In his day, of course, it would have also included this idea of rebirth or reincarnation, which meant that having done all that which was completely meaningless, ending up as a pile of ashes, he'd have to do it all over again. And all over again. And over again. It just seemed to be a ceaseless process of life after life going through this same routine. That was partly the despair of the age, and it was mirrored in a lot of people moving out of lay life into some sort of ascetic practice. There were many other religious teachers; perhaps the other famous one was Mahavira, the person who founded the Jains. He was a contemporary of the Buddha.

So when he left, a bit like the hippies in the sixties who left everything for sex, drugs, and rock and roll—just for a different purpose—we have to imagine that he's in a pretty turbulent mental state when he leaves home. It's put mythologically as in the dark night. He leaves on his horse, Kanthaka, with his servant. He goes to the river, crosses the river—the Rubicon. A change of life. Cuts his hair off, all that sort of stuff. And even his horse dies of grief. Can you imagine? It's a terrible time.

So now he's left what we would call the sensual life, the life of pleasure, the consumerist life. What drives him is this essential sense of uselessness about it, the vapid uselessness of sensual pleasure if you're seeking true happiness, everlasting happiness.

The first thing he does is join teachers who show him how to establish very beautiful states of mind, blissful states. This you'll find in all religions—the ecstasies. The great thing about jhāna, the absorptions as we call them, is that you don't need anything at all once you can access them.

Last night we did a little bit of mettā practice. Just by repeating that gently over and over, there's a sort of draw inward, and the heart begins to respond. There's a lovely beauty that comes to it, and the body feels good. As you draw inward to that, you leave the body into a beautiful state of the inner mind. And you can stay there. So all you need is a loincloth and a bit of food. You need a little bowl, hang about, go and get your porridge, come back, sit under a tree, and get blissed out all day.

The problem with that, he found, was of course when he came out of it, he was still the depressed, anxious Siddhartha Gotama. Even though he had now found a joy far superior to the ordinary transient pleasures of life—something you could really maintain within yourself, and when you become adept you could just click into it, settle down, and in you went into this inner ecstasy—there was this sense of uselessness again, because eventually you came out of it. It wasn't eternal, and although it wasn't based on anything outside yourself, it was based on some technique, some ability within yourself.

He had two teachers, and both of them took him to a point where they actually invited him to come and teach with them. But he hadn't really solved this gnawing problem in his heart concerning the meaninglessness of life, that true existential angst.

The next thing he tries are mortification exercises. For this he was obviously influenced by the Nigaṇṭha, the Jain founder. The Jains have this sort of idea that the jīva, the soul, is weighed down by these clumps of chewing gum—karmic clumps. When you do something wrong, it's like a splodge on your soul and it keeps it weighted down. The way to get rid of it was through these heavy mortification exercises, and all these splodges fell off and the soul rose to the highest heaven. It's very material, a very concrete idea of what happened.

Of course there's a truth in it—that once our defilements disappear, we enter into a very beautiful state. The idea, or the understanding, was that the problem was the body. You wouldn't have greed if you didn't feed your hunger. If you let go of all sex and just denied your body, then you wouldn't have any lust. So the idea of the ascetic life was to deny the body, to draw it down to essentially just bones and a bit of muscle, and keep yourself away from the world. In which sense everything would finally just drop off. The Jain saint is one who starves themselves to death, by which time of course they're

not attached to anything. They also understood the role of desire. That was coming through from the Brahminical tradition too, the idea that the problem was desire. Socrates understood that—that the problem was this desire, this attachment to things.

So he tried these exercises, and he talks of himself being able to hold his spine through his stomach. Have you tried that? He got thin, really thin. But unfortunately, he still ended up being miserable. There came a point where he realized this wasn't taking him anywhere either. He almost killed himself, you could say. At that point, he leaves his companions, his five companions.

Now we can only presume that he's in a state of despair, because he's gone out with this real hope of finding an end to this inner suffering, this inner meaninglessness of life. He's tried all these famous teachers and he's almost killed himself with these mortification exercises, and he's still stuck. He still hasn't answered this deep inner problem. So one can only presume that he's feeling pretty wretched, standing on the roadside. Some of you will know that Sujātā comes with an offering of rice pudding for the local god.

And seeing this poor wretch, she offers it to him. In the literature, you'll see that he's shining like a god and she mistakes him for a god, but basically he's pretty miserable. And eating this food revives him.

Now, shortly after that time—and this is why we call him self-enlightened—he has a memory. The memory concerns watching his father, as a child, doing a ploughing ceremony to open the ploughing season. He remembers the state he was in while watching his father perform this ceremony. The state he's in is an absorption state, but it's also full of inquiry, full of curiosity. It's the first time he's really become aware of this ceremony, and he's a child.

At this point, his whole practice turns around on itself. He's no longer trying to escape suffering by finding some other heavenly state. He now turns upon suffering and asks the question: how does suffering arise in the first place? And it's with that new inspiration that he goes to sit under a tree. He sees no other way apart from this particular approach, and he determines to sit there either to crack this problem or die. Lucky for him, lucky for us, he cracks it in a mere six hours. And from that point on, something has deeply changed within him. His relationship to the world has been completely turned around.

So now let's just go back a step and consider this state that he remembers from childhood. If we take anybody under six or seven years of age, when you see a child looking at something they've not seen before—like a beetle—their eyes become fixed on it. They

even stop blinking. The jaw drops and they look gormless. They're completely fixated on it. There's no thought in the mind because they can't describe it. There's no concept to attach to it. And then when it's completely absorbed, they turn around and say, "What is it?" And the beautiful parent says, "That's a beetle." From that point on, that child never sees a beetle again. Because every time we see a beetle, we put the experience of all past beetles onto that beetle.

In other words, the life that we lead is constantly being distorted by concepts, by our history. In order to find this path to the end of suffering, we have to go back to that mental state. We have to go back to what Zen calls the original mind—the original mind of the child. And that is our difficulty. Our difficulty is to draw this intelligence, the Buddha within, to draw it out of its confusion with the intellect. All meditation techniques are trying to make us do that. That's the prime object. All this stuff about mindfulness and constant attention, concentration—all of that is subservient to the point of trying to purify this intuitive intelligence we have.

So for instance, in this technique—and I'll go into it in more detail this evening—the idea of using a single word is at least to draw the intellect down to a singular concrete concept. Rising, falling. There's no thinking around it. And at that level, it's possible to draw this intelligence directly into the experience that's happening, which is at the level of sensation, of feeling. Whatever techniques you've practiced, you'll see that the whole technique always draws you back to your body, back to your sense base. Because it's there that you begin to rediscover this way of looking at things.

The practice of quiet abiding that we do is to clarify that awareness—an awareness which is not engaging, which is completely open. Just like the child's mouth dropped, just like its eyes fixed. Just receiving. And it's only when that has been established that we bring in this quality of curiosity. It's an open curiosity, the curiosity of a cat. It mustn't come from any expectation or any ideas. It's just a complete state of curiosity, best coming from a position of don't know.

So that's what we mean by right awareness in terms of its quality. But this curiosity, remember, has already been educated to look at certain things, and that's where the three characteristics come in. Anybody who's into science, anybody who's into nature, an artist—they all have to develop that open-mindedness again, or else they just repeat. The whole point about an original artist is that they see the world differently. To do that, they have to drop all the art that they've learnt before. A philosopher has to drop all past philosophy in order to see in a new way. A scientist has to investigate not from the point of view of what has already been discovered, but from what has not been discovered. It's the new question, the new way of looking at things that brings discovery.

But even so, there is that scientific knowledge, there is that philosophical knowledge, and there is all the artistry sitting as it were behind, supporting the looking. So with us, it's the Buddha Dhamma, and especially the teaching around impermanence, the role of desire as the cause of psychological suffering, and the fact that nothing has any substance. Nothing's real. You can't point to something and say, "This is real, this is me." Because every time you hold on to something that's me, it's constantly disappearing.

We understand that, and it lies as it were underneath the looking. We're not thinking about it. We're not bringing it into the practice. It's there. It's already there because we've been taught to look like that. And so when we sit, we put all that to the side. At the end of last night's instructions, I said, "Putting all instruction aside." So you use your instructions, you use your techniques to get yourself primed to a point where you're just observing, just feeling, just experiencing what's drawing your attention within the field of awareness. It's simply that. And it's the simplicity which foxes us. We're looking for something a little bit cleverer than that, something a bit more demanding.

So as long as we understand that, in our practice we keep bringing ourselves back to that simplicity. Then slowly but surely, that original mind begins to manifest much more obviously to us, and we know when we're in it and we know when we're not in it.

Now the other thing is, of course, to bring that same sense of mindfulness into daily life. So this morning we were talking about work, about actually bringing it into everything we do—when we're conversing with each other, when we're thinking about something like planning our holiday, when we're doing something. So obviously there, it's a different type of awareness. The awareness now is into action, into doing. Before, it was abstracted; it had found this observation post within ourselves. But now it has to re-enter.

He has to re-enter the psychophysical organism—body, mind, and heart—and through it into the world. Once that happens, the idea is not so much to be observing ourselves, but to maintain that wide open awareness so that we are also aware not only of what we're doing, but of what we're feeling.

We know, for instance, when we meet somebody and feel a high degree of irritation and hatred. On the surface of things, I may be presenting a very kind, lovable, huggable person. But inside, I just want to strangle them. So here I am, not getting caught up in either, but putting my attention more in the process of observing.

When I'm at work and outwardly doing my job very well, all very diligent, inwardly I'm utterly and completely bored—and I'm aware of that. Somehow I can stand above it. I can be with the boredom and yet pay attention to what I'm doing, coming from a different place: a place of wisdom, a place of compassion, whereby I can actually put my energy into the right intention.

I can only do that if I can dissociate from, disidentify from, this boredom, this irritation, this depression, this anxiety. As soon as I drop into an identity—"I am bored"—then who's going to get me out of that? As soon as I say "I am depressed," that's it, I'm stuck.

The whole point of this meditation is to continue that sense of objectivity within us—not suppressing it, not pushing it aside, not turning away from it, but allowing it to express itself at that level of awareness somewhere within the field. Meanwhile, my attention is on what I'm supposed to be doing. And with that attention there comes an intention. Whenever I place my attention, it must be an act of intention, and that's what's conditioning me.

So every time I start a job, every time I meet somebody, every time I go to work, every time I come to sit, there has to be just that moment of inward gazing. There has to be a sort of global awareness of both what's outside and what's inside. And then, having recognized it, I can make a skillful decision as to what I'm going to do.

That's the distinction between this vipassanā, which is about investigating the three characteristics, and mindfulness in daily life. What daily mindfulness draws us to, as the Buddha says, is clear comprehension—that's his phrase. When you're stretching your arm, you know you're stretching your arm. When you open the fridge, you know you're opening the fridge. When you're closing the fridge, you know you're closing the fridge. In other words, you're not walking out of the kitchen slamming the fridge behind you. When the bell goes for lunch, your mind is not already in the dining room while your body catches up ten minutes afterward. Your mind knows that it's going to the dining room, but your attention is right on your footsteps. It's that knowledge of where you're going somewhere in the future, but bringing yourself constantly back to what is actually happening in the present moment.

This distinction has to be made. Otherwise, you might make the mistake of always trying to observe yourself at all times of the day, and that just drives you potty, frankly. On the other hand, you might think that when you're meditating, you're trying to create something, trying to see the three characteristics. That's wrong effort.

You have to have a certain faith that there is within us this quality—this Buddha nature, call it what you wish—which is constantly seeking its own liberation. That's what's suffering. And it's constantly seeking understanding, crying out all the time: "Get that meditator out of the way!" So as soon as you see yourself trying to do something, trying to see, trying to attain, turn on it and say, "You're the meditator. Get out of the way." And then start again.

During the day you can practice this open awareness. As you walk around the grounds, for instance, put your attention on a flower and see how the mind immediately tries to position it—what type of flower it is, describing it, how wonderful it is. Let all that pass. Just keep the eye on the flower and be aware of the process of perception. How is the eye seeing the flower? Not what you think about it, whether you've seen one before and all that rubbish—just how is the eye seeing the flower?

When you're sitting or walking outside and you close your eyes and start listening, see how the mind wants to know what bird it is and where it is. Just let that go and put your attention entirely on the process of hearing. What is it you're actually hearing?

In this way, you're constantly drawing this intelligence out of its confusion with the intellect, its confusion with history. And it's very simple to do because all you have to do is relax. Just relax and put your attention directly on the sense base.

When you go for a meal—and I'll remind you of this when we go for lunch—as soon as you put food on the tongue, there's always that comparison. "This isn't curry. This isn't pizza." Or, "Oh, this is wonderful!" Let all that pass. Put your attention directly on the tongue, and you're back to being a child.

You're back to being a person who can directly experience what's coming from the body.

And that's the beginning of our practice. All the time, all the time, to come back to the body. The body offers us its sensations, its feelings. It offers us moods and emotions as felt sense. And by drawing ourselves into that, leaving thought alone, we begin to have these deeper insights into our nature.

And before no length of time, we will surely be liberated. The scriptures talk about so-and-so having listened to the word of the Buddha, went away into the jungle and forest to practice, and in no length of time became fully liberated. And the commentarial gloss is "after twenty-five years." So it's a gradual process. A gradual process.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your fierce practice, liberate yourself sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 49

The Seven Factors of Awakening (Bojjhaṅga)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

> *In this teaching from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the seven factors of awakening (bojjhaṅga) as the natural qualities that support insight meditation. He explains how these seven factors - sati (awareness), dhammavicaya (investigation of dharma), vīriya (effort), pīti (joy/interest), passaddhi (tranquility), samādhi (concentration), and upekkhā (equanimity) - work together in perfect balance to enable spiritual realization.*
>
> *The talk emphasizes the crucial distinction between mere belief and the confidence (saddhā) needed for genuine investigation. Bhante explores the three stages of wisdom - received knowledge, intellectual understanding, and direct realization - showing how vipassanā practice moves us from conceptual learning to experiential knowing. He offers practical guidance on balancing effort and concentration, using the Buddha's simile of tuning a stringed instrument - neither too tight nor too slack.*
>
> *Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Bhante shows how establishing Right Awareness naturally manifests all seven factors. He addresses common meditation difficulties like restlessness from excessive effort and dullness from insufficient energy, offering the Middle Way approach that allows genuine insight to arise. The teaching concludes with inspiring stories demonstrating that awakening depends not on intellectual brilliance but on patient, balanced investigation of the three characteristics of existence.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.

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

So first of all we revised or were introduced to the actual technique that we're practicing. And then we revised or were introduced to the hindrances, which is the Buddha's way of categorizing all those things that take us away from meditation. There are other categories, as you know, the ten defilements and the ten *anusaya*. Does anybody know how to translate that? I've forgotten it. Don't worry about it.

So these five hindrances are just a way of looking at things that arise in our meditation that take us away. The idea is that we can see what it is, we note it, we're clear about it and we know what to do to stop them taking over. We don't want to stop them

arising because that's the purification process, but we definitely don't want to get taken over by them. We want to remain awake within them and to use them actually to investigate these three characteristics, especially the characteristic of suffering, *dukkha*.

Remember there's three types of *dukkha* that the Buddha points to. The first one is *dukkha-dukkhatā*, the suffering of suffering. It's the relationship we have with suffering which is the suffering, not the original stuff that comes up. So I'm sure you're all very clear on that by now—that the pain in the knee is not suffering but our aversion towards it, which is the actual suffering. And we can prove that to ourselves by finding an equanimity with this painful knee. And the same with our emotional life too. We can find a position with our depressions and anxieties and over-excitements and all that, in a way that it's carrying on and we're just with it. There's a separation. And I think for most of us, that tends to be 99% of the practice. It's 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration.

However, running concurrent with that are the seven factors of enlightenment, and conjoining that or running along that too are the five spiritual faculties. So the five and the seven meld into each other. The spiritual faculties are confidence, effort, awareness, concentration, and wisdom. I'm going to say wisdom for a moment. And the seven factors of enlightenment are awareness, effort, concentration, calmness and interest and equanimity, with investigation of the Dharma.

So first of all just talking about this faith business. Remember that in Buddhism, faith or confidence is not to be confused with belief. So belief is putting our confidence in a statement to the point where we believe it to be true. I believe it, see. So what that obviously does is stop investigation. And the whole of the Buddha's path is about self-realization—in other words, me realizing the truth. So if I just repeat the Four Noble Truths, that is suffering and origin of suffering, which is desire, and then bow to the Buddha statue, you see, and I think that's it, well, it's an absolute waste of time.

So just believing in that sense that we might... Like so many things we believe that we don't know. We believe, for instance, that the Earth goes round the Sun. It doesn't happen perceptively, does it? Not for me, anyway. The Sun still comes overhead. But I have this absolute belief that it does, that we're going round the Sun. There's a whole load of science that I believe, but I don't know if it's true for me or not. I mean I haven't tested any of this stuff. So a lot of stuff we just believe because in a sense it's neither here nor there. Whether the sun goes round us or we go round the sun, as long as it's shining that's the important thing.

But when it comes to the Dharma, when it comes to the Buddha's teaching, it is about us realising what he realised. So that means that we have to go through the very same process he went through. In that sense he's not just an exemplar, he's the archetype. So there's a Buddha within us following that same similar path.

So this faith is more of a confidence, and the confidence is in the teaching. And the wisdom is in three stages. All of us came to this practice by hearing about it first of all, so it's received knowledge. And then if that interests us, if we're drawn to it, then we tend to read a bit more and eventually we think about it. And this thinking about it, then it becomes our own intellectual knowledge. Even if you quote everybody it doesn't matter, it's your quote from now on. So what was received now becomes your knowledge.

I don't know about you, but at one point I was trying to understand relativity theory. And I would read it and say to myself, oh yeah. And then I tried to explain it, it was impossible. I couldn't explain it. So it's that gap between thinking you've understood it and actually when you try to explain what it is you've understood, you get all tongue-tied. So that business of, you know, say dependent origination, you see, the Four Noble Truths—could you explain the Four Noble Truths to somebody else? If you can explain the Four Noble Truths to somebody else, then that means that you must have thought about it and you're able to pass on that information. If you can't do it, it's still at the level of received knowledge. That's the same with all the important teachings around dependent origination, around this *vipassanā*—could you introduce somebody to it?

And then of course that isn't enough, it has to be realized. And that's where the *vipassanā* comes in. So that's the next stage of *paññā*, of this wisdom—is when you actually perceive it for yourself, actually realize it for yourself.

So this confidence and this whole process of investigation and realization are linked. Obviously if you didn't have confidence you wouldn't go into it, full stop. You'd go into some other form of spiritual practice. So that confidence underlies really everything that we do, you see—putting faith in the teaching, faith in the tradition, faith in the Buddha. So these are called spiritual faculties. They're spiritual faculties. They're what enable us. They're what enable us to enter the path. Then there's concentration and effort, and we'll come to that in a minute. And then there's awareness.

So if we now switch over to the seven factors, what we have is this—again, it's a repetition—this effort with concentration. So remember that concentration is a word that tends to make us tight, "concentration," mainly because of our school days or whatever. If you think of it much more as a steadiness of attention—how long can you hold your attention on something? That's what it's referring to, right? A real steady gaze. How

long can you hold your attention? And these days, because of the enormous amount of information we have to process and computers and iPods and all the rest of it, our concentration tends to be a little bit short, especially, they say, of children. A couple of seconds and that's it, they're off somewhere else. So a lot of our practice is to bring us into a state of steadiness of attention. Steadiness of attention.

And the effort that we need is just to keep that. That's the only effort you need, is to keep that attention steady. Okay.

Now if the effort is too much, then what you get is restlessness, right? Now we're presuming now that the meditation is that these hindrances aren't there, you see, for the moment. We're presuming that in fact there's clarity in the mind, there's a stillness, and there's concentration. There's this steadiness of attention, a focus. If some other stuff comes in, apart from just maintaining that steadiness of attention—such as the idea of trying to see, trying to attain, trying to make the focus more focused—then you get this little bit of extra energy which starts shaking it. And before you know it, you find yourself getting quite restless. And at worst, if the energy is really over the top, there tends to be a collapse in the meditation. Some of you might have experienced that, where it just stops. And that's it, really. It's difficult to describe if you haven't experienced it. But you basically have to take an afternoon off and start again. And it just drops like that. And you just can't do it. And it's like... it's like when you, if you force yourself to run and run and run and run and eventually the body just stops. And that's that's that's a telltale to the meditator there—putting too much effort into it.

On the other hand, if you don't put enough effort, then this steadiness of attention, you see, drops you into a state of unconsciousness. And you'll know it's not sleep because when you fall asleep your body rocks and shakes and you start banging your head on the floor. But with this you're still sitting bolt upright, and anybody walking in the room would say, "Now there's a meditator," but actually you're just not there. You've gone asleep, you're completely asleep. And depending on the force of that concentration, you can be there for quite some time.

In the Hindu tradition, there's a tale of a guru who asks for some water and then enters into this state. And then many years afterwards, ten years afterwards, you see, he wakes up and his first words are, "Where's my water?" Nothing's happened for ten years. It's just one of these little tales you get about states of unconsciousness.

And unfortunately in the Theravāda tradition, sometimes they mistake that state of unconsciousness as a jhānic state. So to me that's a little bit of a confusion, but let that be.

There's a place in Chiang Mai, Wat Long Pern, where you do this Mahāsi—he teaches this Mahāsi system. He's a very old man, he doesn't teach himself, but the system's there—in which you really go at it. I mean this is soft stuff compared to what they'll put you through. And then right towards the end of your three weeks—it's a three week bash—at the end of the three weeks you're not allowed to sleep. And during those three days, if you have a blackout, they suggest to you that was *Nibbāna*. Well, I've always thought that was a bit fishy. In fact, somebody turned up at the meditation centre in Sri Lanka and said this, and the chief monk there said to him, "Do you think it was *Nibbāna*?" He said, "No, I fell asleep." So it's a dodgy one, you know, you have to be careful.

So if that happens to you, if you wake up and you find yourself still sitting like this, you know, bolt upright, then you know—ah, concentration's good, the focus is good, I'm just not putting enough effort in, see, not enough effort to keep the wakefulness.

Now this tells us also something about good sleep, you see, because if a person finds difficulty in sleep—you know they can't sleep for one reason or another—often it's the case that the underlying mental state beneath that unconsciousness is in a state of restlessness, and it keeps bursting through and making us wake up, you see. So that's why the Buddha says if you practice loving-kindness before you sleep, it creates this lovely underlying state under sleep, you see. You sleep well, see. You can do it on the breath if you find the breath easier. But people I think often tend to rush around all day, come back, eat, watch TV and then just launch themselves into bed when it's time. And of course, you know, that hasn't been a preparation. You have to prepare yourself before sleep. You have to—very few people can just blank it out, and often that's not such a good sleep. So you have to wind down at the end of the day, wind down, play some sleepy music or something like that. And what you're creating is this subliminal level of beautiful mind.

So that's why they put effort and concentration together. Remember, I'm using the word concentration because that's the word you'll come across. But what we mean is steadiness of attention. And these two are always linked. They're always balanced together.

When there's a case of a monk, whose name escapes me, who is trying very, very hard, getting nowhere, and he decides that he's had enough and he's going to go back to the lay life, get married and have a decent time for a change. And when the Buddha hears about this, he goes and has a chat with him, and he says it's like tuning a string, you see. It's not too tight and not too slack. You've got to be able to tune the string on an instrument. It would have been a string instrument, the vīṇā. And that's how he describes it, you see. So just getting that point where the effort is just right.

Now, this is all part of our skills of meditation. This is us experimenting within ourselves to get the right level of concentration. Nobody can tell you that, nobody can—all the Buddha could do is give this guy an example, you know, that, okay, you know, sometimes it's too much, sometimes it's too... you've just got to get it right, you see. So nobody can tell you how much effort to put in, you see. We ourselves have to discover our own level of effort, our own level of concentration and so on. And that's part of the practice, part of becoming skillful.

Now when I started teaching—this is going back to the late 90s really, and even before that I was doing a little bit—I used to teach in the method of my old teacher, Uja Naka. So even on a weekend retreat I had them up at half past three. Get in there, beat them up, you know, sit there, don't move. And there used to be a—like they're having these fusion reactors, this plasma—the room would be filled with this plasma, sitting there going through this dreadful pain. And I used to do these really heavy retreats, even for a weekend, you see, because that's what I used to do, that's what I was brought up to do, you see.

And nobody came back. Only the real hard nuts came back, you know, the bruisers. So I thought, well, something's wrong, you know. And I even did it up in my first long retreat, well, you know. And it was when I came to Gaia, you see. So I've a lot to thank Gaia for, because my four years spent here was really my teacher training college. And it was here just seeing what the teachers were doing and recognising that maybe this was a bit of the wrong tack. Because frankly, of all the people whom I remember—I mean you hardly remember people—but you see when the Mahāsi teachers came in the late 70s, a retreat would have 100, 150 people, you know. And in those days the men and women were all separated, you know, it's the eastern way, you see. And the side of the men was chock-a-block, knee against knee, and the women were just up here, a few, and we'd be looking over thinking, "Why can't we?"

And I don't remember them. I don't think any of them actually ever came back. There was—I mean very few that I remember. I got to Burma once and there were five or six. And I often wonder what happens to them, you know, whether they're even still practicing. I know one person gave up and he came to see me. I'd just ordained in Birmingham and it was this push, you see—push, push, trying to get the passing that insight. And he came to see me in Birmingham. I hadn't seen him for about four or five years. That year he'd spent ten thousand pound on crack, as he told me. This is an ardent meditator.

So just, you know, like too much effort, and then that sense of failure, you know what I mean? And within that, you give up, really. Mind you, in those days, there was a tendency to be the erroneous idea that, you know, you went at it for six months, and then it was sex, drugs, and rock and roll for the next six. Then you went to Burma to do a bit more headbanging. Because it never did get people very far, really.

So I began to reflect on this, on the way, you see, and Westerners, the Western culture and its efforts, you know, the way that we put tremendous effort into things compared to certain Eastern cultures. And I began to stress the other two factors, the one of interest and calmness. And people returned, you see. This was a great breakthrough for me.

And so this business of interest and calmness. So interest here is that fundamental curiosity that arises with intelligence. You see it with birds, you see it with all creatures that have some form of consciousness that we can conceive for ourselves.

I mean, I'll just give you this little thing, just to show you how intelligent. We think that we're the only species that plays with other species. You know, we play with dogs and cats. But I was at Candaboda once, waiting in a line for a meal, and the place was always full of dogs. And crows, you see, they used to just put the food out on the floor, on the ground. It's all gone now. It's a bit cleaner.

And there was a little dog, a little pup, chewing away at this rice. And a crow jumped towards it and bit its tail. And the dog turned around. See? And the crow bounced back. And the dog went back eating. And the crow jumped forward, bit its tail. And the dog turned around. See? And I thought, well, that's very clever. The crow wants the rice.

So he went the third time, and the dog went, and then just walked away, fed up with it, you see. And the crow, I swear, looked longingly after the little pup and then flew away. But when you see things like that, you think, well, a crow could become fully liberated.

So this business of curiosity is just a fundamental quality of this intelligence, you see, this curiosity. And the word interest, I think, gets across the idea that it's joyful. So in the list of seven factors of enlightenment, you'll see the Pali word *pīti*. And this *pīti* is also put with these absorptions we're talking about, which means a mental state, a pure mental state of happiness. But here, it's the joy that arises when you're interested in something. So think about it, you know, the times when you've really been interested in doing something. It's been full of joy, see?

Now, even that interest can become too interested. It can take on this business of wanting to know too much. And that's why it's balanced with calmness, okay? So calmness and interest. And again, it's the usual thing. If you get too calm, you fall asleep. And if there's not enough calm, the interest gets too excited and you find yourself getting restless. So it's always this lovely balance.

And the final one is equanimity with *dhammavicaya*. So in the standing meditation that I did at the beginning there, trying to point out the quality of equanimity. See, the quality of equanimity is to come from a place of don't know, to come from a place of not sure, as if this is the first time we've ever done it. The beginner's mind, as Zen would say. And it's also not an emotional involvement. It's not coming from a prejudicial place. So these two factors describe this even-mindedness. That's another way of putting equanimity.

Unfortunately, both the word equanimity and even-mindedness puts the accent too much upon thought, but it's also an emotional state, see? It's also a calm, even emotional state. And in a sense, it's the qualities you would expect of a judge, you see? You don't want the judge to get caught up in the clever arguments of lawyers, and you don't want them to get caught up in the baying of the crowd, you know? Hang them, see? You want to keep equanimous, you see, above it all. And this allows us to investigate the Dhamma.

Investigating the Dhamma simply means the three characteristics, the five defilements, the five hindrances that we've been talking about, the four noble truths. It can be anything which will then lead to understanding, understanding to liberation.

Now if there's not that equanimity there what we're tending to do is to look for something that we've conceived see and the mind is very clever remember. So, even though, I mean, we've heard about these words *nibbāna* and all that, you see. So, unwittingly, we can be searching for or looking for this experience. We can have some idea of what it means to be a stream-enterer. Woo! See, and things like that.

And what that does is it distorts the looking. And with expectation of that sort, even if it's quite unconscious, yeah, there arises a certain disappointment, disappointment that it's not happening. There arises a feeling that you can't get it because you've got this ideal in your head about what a spiritual insight is or where you should be. So again, that leads to discouragement, giving up the path.

And if unfortunately you do see what you've conceived then surely you're deluded you've simply manifested what you wanted so I had one lovely experience with a man at the centre came back and said that he'd had this amazing experience believe it or not

while he sat on the toilet. Now if you remember Luther also had his great insight while evacuating so those are moments of relief and release remember so one can expect to have amazing insight on the pot.

Anyway, he came back. I mean, the way he described it, it was obviously, I mean, a lovely mental state, but it was obviously from his description. But there was no way he was going to believe it wasn't *Nibbāna*. That was it. He was convinced that he'd had this experience, and that's it. So now, what happens to such a person? Well, they might stop investigating. They might think, well, that's it, and that's it. Why should I carry on practising or anything else?

So there's always that problem that when we have an experience, we overestimate. The overestimation is often coming from some preconceived idea as to what a spiritual insight is. So generally speaking, if we have an insight, you might go to a teacher and say what it is, and he might explain it and put it into context. But the spiritual progress is that as you go along your next insight throws light on the one you've had before so eventually there comes a balance about what you feel you've experienced and what you haven't so it's best not to decide you can definitely if you have an experience you can definitely say what it was that's not a problem but it's rating it which can be the problem see.

And it's best just simply not to rate it but to accept but just to say to yourself this is what I experience and this is what I have come to understand see and what I've come to understand ought to affect us systemically you see it's no good going around saying you know had this amazing experience into interconnectedness and then going around shooting everybody I mean it's not. That interconnectedness when it falls systemically into the heart expresses itself as love. And that's what love is, isn't it? It's the heart's connectedness with all beings. And if it doesn't do that then it's just been a head thing. It hasn't been a real spiritual experience. That's the difference.

Now you'll notice that all these factors everybody has. The only thing that turns them into factors of enlightenment is *dhammavicaya* investigating the dhamma everybody's got concentration of calmness and interest and effort and confidence in one way or the other. But it's actually getting all those qualities and placing them into this investigation that brings about spiritual insights.

Now when we begin meditating when we sit like this you see you're trying to manifest these factors both mentally and physically okay so physically you're calming you're still in the body mentally you're calming the heart you're silencing the mind okay and you're finding a position within yourself as the objective observer. Ñāṇaponika, in his

very good book, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, calls it the observation post. It's like a crow's nest on a ship. You found a particular place. These factors of enlightenment, as you move to that place, withdraw into that place.

So all these factors of enlightenment are in the looking that's why awareness is the governing factor everything I've said this evening is virtually a complete waste of time because if you centred the whole of your effort just on this awareness all the faculties come up to support it it's a natural movement of these faculties to support that awareness that's why we always start off with the breath and establishing awareness this mindfulness on the breath see now remember what we're talking about is this *satipaññā* this awareness intuitive faculty within us some traditions call it buddha nature and what it's trying to do is to abstract itself to bring itself out of this morass of the psychophysical organism and as it does so and it finds this place where it can observe the body, heart and mind it is pure awareness at that point and it's when the light goes on of the intelligence that all these factors are already there in the looking that's why.

We can have all these factors there when there is enormous restlessness, enormous dullness, the mind expressing itself, the heart emoting, and yet you can maintain this poise. Okay? But we get it through the practice of, first of all, quieting the body and slowly raising ourselves up to the level of the objective observer. See? Perfectly clear.

So our practice, you see, is to get always into that position of the observation post, right? And once we're there, all the factors must be there, see? All the factors must be there. And that's basically our practice. That's what we're constantly trying to do.

And once it's there, you see, this intelligence, this curiosity is able to investigate. And in investigating what it sees what it's experiencing out there in the mind, in the heart, out there, you see, that's why the noting word is so powerful, because it pushes things away from us, makes us look at them as objects, yeah? It slowly begins to realise its own nature, see? That's the process.

So these seven factors you'll see some are passive and some are active. It's that quality of the feminine and the masculine. So eventually we ourselves you know, we ourselves begin to develop those two qualities within ourselves, their balance, you see, the passive and the active, the feminine and the masculine. And what balances it is awareness.

So you have, on the more passive side, you have the concentration and the calmness and the equanimity. And on the active side, you have the effort, the interest, and the investigation. And they have to be absolutely balanced for insight to come.

So, one of our dangers, now that we know all this, is to be worrying about whether my interest is high enough. So that's why I say, abandon all that completely. Forget you've heard a word. And just put your whole effort into just this moment to moment awareness. It's enough. It's enough.

And that's what the Buddha says in the Discourse on How to Establish Mindfulness. He says, start off by observing the breath, contacting the body in the breath, and you know it's long or short, coarse or fine. And then as you keep watching it, you train yourself on that until the body's become a bit calmer, the heart's calm, the mind is still, you see. And then you begin to observe. See, by now you've found this observation post. And then you begin to observe the quality of impermanence. The beginning and end of each breath. And he says, just keep doing this until there is enough awareness and enough intelligence, this intuitive intelligence, for insight to arise.

So, essentially the practice is very simple very simple indeed doesn't take a great big intellect so remember the story of the monk who was so dull that he said when he learned a phrase of the Buddha's teachings because in those days nothing was written it was all you know rote learned when he learned a phrase from the Buddha's teaching it knocked the phrase he'd just learned out of his head see and his brother said he was just too dull to be a monk and he'd better go back to lay life and when the Buddha heard this he went to see him and he gave him a very simple exercise of giving him a clean cloth and he said just rub it and wipe your face from the sweat and just keep saying impermanent impermanent and before long he was fully liberated it didn't work for me so.

So there's a special, the Buddha has a special insight into where you are you know and this story is told to show that you know this is not, you don't need intellect as opposed to that there's a story in the commentary about a monk who's extremely clever a real scholar and an expert and all his students become liberated and then he starts thinking to himself How is it I'm the teacher and everybody else and all these students, I'm not liberated?

So he goes to see them. And one after one, they see this guy's just too intellectually conceited. So they kept saying, well, you know, I'm not really the one to help you. Why don't you go and see so-and-so? And he went all the way down the line until they gave him to a child. That was very humiliating, but he thought, well, I'll have a go.

And the child took him to this anthill. And when ant hills are, when ants move out of their ant hills, snakes live in it. You become a snake's home. So he said, supposing this ant hill had six holes and you wanted to get the snake out, what would you do, you see? So the teacher said, well, you'd just stop up five holes and it would have to come out from the sixth.

He said, that's what you've got to do. Stop the five senses and everything comes out through the mind. And observe, you see. They went away and in no length of time fully liberated.

I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you by your wise reflection and excellent development of the seven factors of enlightenment arrive at that wonderful place *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 50

The Ethical Psychology of the Buddha (Paṭicca Samuppāda)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) not merely as cosmological doctrine, but as the Buddha's revolutionary psychology of human experience. He carefully examines each of the twelve links—from avijjā (not-knowing) through saṅkhāra (conditioned formations), viññāṇa (consciousness), nāma-rūpa (name-and-form), the six sense bases, contact, vedanā (feeling), taṇhā (craving), upādāna (grasping), bhava (becoming), to jāti (birth) and aging-death.*
>
> *Bhante explains how this ancient teaching reveals the moment-to-moment process of how we create suffering through mistaken identity with our psychophysical experience. He emphasizes that this isn't about past lives, but about understanding the present-moment arising of the sense of 'I' and how it grasps at pleasant experiences while rejecting unpleasant ones. The talk offers practical guidance on where liberation becomes possible—particularly at the crucial point where taṇhā arises but before upādāna (identification) occurs.*
>
> *This teaching bridges profound psychological insight with practical meditation instruction, showing how vipassanā meditation works directly with the three characteristics of existence (anicca, dukkha, anattā) to undermine the very foundations of suffering while cultivating wisdom and compassion.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

You may find it useful this evening to have the dependent origination in front of you, the chanting that we do, because I intend to go through that and make it clear so I can explain it. I called it the wheel, I think there — the wheel of dependent origination. That's the Tibetan thing because they have that lovely picture of the wheel in the jaws of Samsāra, the evil one. But it's just dependent origination — in other words, things arise dependent on something else. That's the basic position of the Buddha: that nothing has its own existence. There's no such thing as an independent entity in the universe. All things are arising dependent on other conditions. That's the basic teaching, and the connection in terms of *kamma* I'll do tomorrow.

So today it's really trying to understand the psychology that we're studying about ourselves, to understand it and then to see if actually we can realise it for ourselves through our meditation — actually see this process. So it starts with this word *avijjā*, and it's translated as ignorance. But ignorance gives it a pejorative meaning; it makes you think, well, you're ignorant, you should have known better. But it's basically a not knowing. I did find a word which expresses just not knowing — it's nescience, but nobody knows it, so there's no point in me using it. English is full of all these redundant words.

So this *avijjā*, not knowing — what's it referring to? What is it that doesn't know? In the Theravāda tradition, the southern school of Buddhism, there was kept to the original Buddha's approach about what is the experience. As Buddhism developed, the question shifted slightly to, well, what is it that has the experience? And so the psychology shifts. We get into a more metaphysical psychology — psychology that includes a consciousness which doesn't belong to this realm of existence. That's *Nibbāna*.

But in the Theravāda school, what they tend to term these days as southern Buddhism as opposed to northern Buddhism — to get away from the prejudice that there is between these two schools — the accent is more on the actual experience of *Nibbāna*. However, when it comes to this word *avijjā*, not knowing, it's obviously something that doesn't know. It's not a blank nothingness out of which conditions arise — that is a not knowing. And the closest we can get to that understanding is birth.

So at birth, what do we actually know? We've come with some baggage, if we're to believe rebirth, having come from a former life. But in terms of that moment, whether it's within the womb coming to some awareness, suddenly hearing mother's heartbeat — I don't know — or whether it's when you're actually born and suddenly you're out there taking your first very painful breath... at some point we can say that this child knows nothing. We can agree on that, can we, to a certain extent?

So then, of course, all the stuff piles in — parents, society, education, all that. And the child comes to know. But at that point of *avijjā*, that not knowing, there is right there at the beginning an association, there's an identity. So when that child cries, it's me that's crying. When that child's happy, it's me that's happy. So there's no distinction in the child between the I which is experiencing things and the experience, as far as we understand — not until the age of four or five months, it seems, does a child actually create its first object out of this mass of sensation that it's experiencing.

Suddenly something separates out — usually obviously your mother comes out — and from then on the child objectifies the world. So that I don't know what age that gets to, but maybe somewhere around two, between two and three, the child knows there's

a world out there and I'm in it. I'm here. But the important point for us to understand is that there is a moment when this knowing presumes it is what it's experiencing, and what it's experiencing is this psychophysical organism. So there's no... that's who I am. I am this. That's the point.

And what this does is it creates a relationship with this, and that relationship is one of trying to be happy — which is understandable; you want to be happy. And anything that makes me unhappy, I want to get rid of. So right there within that first relationship, that first hazy sense of who I am — we're not talking about a concept here, we're not talking about words — there is an immediate knowledge that some things are painful and some things are un-painful, and that when things are painful I don't like it, and when they're pleasant I do. Even if it's not at a language base, it's at that fundamental animal base.

An animal, even a primal animal, knows when it's suffering and when it's not suffering. Even a worm — if you prod a worm it curls up, doesn't it? It's not doing that for fun, is it? We can't get into the head of a worm, I know, and it's all meant to be the pathetic fallacy and all that, but the fact is... I had this in a magazine that I get called The Week, which collects all the news from all the newspapers. It's like a leech, really — it lives off the newspapers, but it's very handy because it puts all these opinions for you there. And it always has these reports occasionally from scientists. It always has a report from the science community. And one week it was proven without any shadow of a doubt by scientists in Canada that fish do not feel pain. The next week it was proved without a shadow of a doubt by scientists — I can't remember where — that fish do in fact feel pain. So how they work this one out...

Anyway, so here we have this not knowing, this awareness, this consciousness. It's difficult to find a word, and probably the best word is "the knowing" — a gerund, which is a verbal noun. So it gives us the idea that it's not an object but a process: the knowing. You see that in the literature, and I much prefer that word because it takes us away from the idea that it's something like an object in the universe. It's a process — the knowing.

And this knowing has made a mistake. That's the point. It makes a mistake. You can't say it's blameworthy; it's just made a mistake of believing it is what it's actually experiencing. And this creates this primary mirror image that I was talking about yesterday — of the self. This knowing feels itself within the psychophysical organism. It's a sense of presence. You can get it now if you're in a very silent place — you get a sense of your being here, that sense of presence. And that's often looked upon by traditions elsewhere as your soul, because you've always got that sense of presence. You don't have it in

sleep, of course, but when you wake up, there you are. Here I am. Every morning, here I am. And that sense of presence, which seems to be constant with me all the time — constant — is what you might say my first object. I create myself. That's my mirror, and I myself cannot be separated from what I'm actually experiencing. That's another point too.

So if you ask somebody, "Well, who are you?" they'll say, "Well, I am my thoughts, I am my emotions, I am this, I am that." They describe themselves. So this I and what we experience are one and the same thing. Only in meditation do we find this other place within ourselves where the I sits as seemingly retreated out of the body, out of emotions, out of thought, into this objective observer. But it's still there in the sense of me.

So that's what you might say is a fundamental delusion about me, about who I am, running under every moment of my life. It's always there — it's not always activated, but it's always there as a way of looking, a way of experiencing my life. It's always underneath there, and it rises up as the "I am," which manifests later in this sequence.

And because of this, dependent on this not knowing, the delusions arise. And these delusions, these habits that we have which are based on wrong understanding, are known as your *saṅkhāra*. So that's the *avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāra*. Dependent on this delusion, this initial mistake — the *avijjā*, this not knowing — we have created a whole mass of conditioning. And again, how we create that mass will become obvious. But important for us to understand is that running underneath our lives is this fundamental delusion, and on top of that are our habits, our conditioning, always running underneath at this unconscious, subliminal level.

And the thing is, we don't know how much of it's down there. That's why it's so horrific when you meditate — you find you've got all this stuff. And when you think you've got rid of it, you find more. And it's all down here in this psyche. So you've got these two things just running underneath our lives like that.

Now, dependent on the *saṅkhāra*, these conditionings, consciousness arises. So how does that work? Well, a consciousness — and this comes again later in the wheel — is based upon a sense base. So as soon as a sense base touches on something... as soon as I see a tree — I was walking around just recently — as soon as I see a tree, the photons hit the eye, and all that, but it taps into this base I have around trees. And up comes my relationship to trees, dependent on all the trees that I've had a relationship with. And that's determined, and that's what we're trying to do — we're trying to undermine that by cutting through these old perceptions, but they're there.

Coffee — as soon as you get the smell of coffee, it goes into it and there's a conditioning there to get coffee. So it comes out and off you go. Tea, whatever it is, biscuits — it's all underneath here, all underneath, just waiting like a devil to grab you and throw you in the pot. So those are your *saṅkhāras* underneath. *Saṅkhāra* means those things made with... they're not only *saṅkhāras* in the past, conditionings coming from the past — they themselves are conditioning. Every time they rise, they condition you in the same way, and that's how they manifest. So if you're greedy, the more you feed your greed, the more greedy you get. Very simple.

And you get some funny translations, really — concoctions. You'll see them translated as volitional conditionings. And what that's pointing to is that what makes these conditionings is your will. So again, we'll make that clearer as we go along. But tomorrow, when we talk about *kamma,* then that becomes a central concept.

So you've got not knowing. We begin with a non-culpable not knowing. We make a mistake. We create a self. We create the world. And this world is our habits underneath — the underlying habits which will make us see the world in a particular way. You've only got to think of being born in a different culture — a different world.

So now, dependent on that and on this arises this consciousness, this cognition. So that's your basic awareness of things. So we're not talking here about this insightful intelligence — it's buried in that consciousness, but it comes out as a discriminative consciousness. You know this from that, you know what it does, you know where it's going, you know what it's for. It's that understanding consciousness. It translates as a discriminative consciousness.

Now, dependent on *vijñāna*... dependent on consciousness arises... *nāmarūpa*, that's right — body and mind. *Nāmarūpa* refers to your body and your mind. Now I have to be careful here. The body here is the sense body. Of course there is a physical body — like your nails. But what do I know of my nails? I know the shape, I know the feel of them. But I can't get inside my nail. I can't be my nail. Have you noticed that? And have you noticed that when you cut it off, it's fine. But if somebody cut your hand off, it'd be completely different.

So it's more in the sense of relating to our sense body — what we actually know through our senses of the body, rather than the body itself, although we can include that because obviously even if we don't know parts of the body such as our hair, if you lose your hair it can be a disaster. I can tell you that now for certain.

So *nāmarūpa* — and in the Buddhist teaching these are two different forms of energy. This is the thing — two different forms of energy. Difficult these days in certain circles because everything's reduced to matter, but mind is of a different form of energy. And we can sometimes separate that in our bodies. For instance, if you feel angry, in a really good moment of perception you may separate out the body, which is quite burny, from the mind, which is a much lesser feeling. And this mind is just of a finer substance — I'll use the word of a finer material. But remember, nothing here has any substance in itself. It's just a finer energy, for want of a better word.

Now, this *nāmarūpa* — *nāmarūpapaccayā* — there arises the six sense bases. Now the six sense bases are important because they define this consciousness. So your consciousness is dependent on the sense base, the Buddha says. So for instance, my eye consciousness is dependent on the eye. I can't have eye consciousness through my ears, no matter how much I try. Even if I had enormous powers, I don't think I could still see through my ears. So whatever consciousness I have must be dependent on the sense base.

Now the sixth sense base, remember, is the mind itself. And what that's referring to is the processes — the basic processes the mind has to perceive things. So for instance, at the eardrum there is only pressure; there is no sound. But these pressures are taken inward and there's this whole process of turning that — what are basically contacts, if you tap your finger like that, your thumb and finger together, that's what happens on the eardrum — there's no sound at all. But it's taken in and a sound is manufactured, and then it goes through the process of naming the sound: bell. And then it gives you a reason: alarm. And then it says, "I've got to get up." So there's a whole process that goes on in the mind which is all really to do with the mind base.

So those are your six sense bases. And it's because of these six sense bases that we can contact the world. So that's your next step — the *phassa*.

Now, the three things that we need to have contact: we need to have that sense base, we need to have an actual object to have sense of, and we need that consciousness. And what the Buddha says is when those three are there, that's when you have perception. And if one of them are missing, you don't get it. So if you're unconscious, you probably don't see anything — you won't see the gorilla walking across your room. If you're in a room where there's no light, you've got your eyesight, you've got consciousness, but you can't see anything. So those three things have to be there for a perception to arise.

Inwardly, on the sense base of the mind, that of course refers to your memories, to your images, to your thoughts that arise out of this base of *saṅkhāra*, this underlying base. And as we discover in meditation, once you stop controlling your life and just sit, all sorts of stuff comes out of this dustbin, doesn't it? There's no reason for it. There's no reason within the heart. It just effervesces.

So we've got to the point now of contact. Now it's the next stage where we begin to live in a dual world. And the dual world is those contacts that are pleasant and those contacts that are unpleasant.

There's a whole range of contacts in the middle that the Buddha talks about as being neutral, but if you go into them and really feel them as they are, I think you'll see they tend ever so slightly towards being pleasant or unpleasant. So there's a fundamental dual world we live in, in terms of our experience. What we're experiencing is either pleasant or unpleasant.

And you'll notice that the word there is this *vedanā*. So remember vedanā includes all the sensations, feelings, moods, emotions as we experience them in the body — that's vedanā. It's the felt sense of our lives. And included in that, although it's not written into the actual process always, is the saññā, perception. So whatever we experience always has a mirror image at a conceptual level, and there's your memory. Every time you eat an apple it goes into this memory block, and then every time you eat an apple this memory comes on to the apple that you're eating. Without saññā then that wouldn't be possible. And that's your level of experience, which is most of it is completely natural.

I mean, if somebody stands on your foot, that's going to be normally painful. If somebody offers you a sweet and you put it in your mouth, that's normally pleasant. So there's a certain base. Other parts, other things can be to do with our culture. I remember my teacher who was Burmese almost feeling sick at the sight of a Marmite jar. Can't understand it. Mind you, if you've ever had their fish paste, then you know what life's about. Have you had that fish paste? Thailand and Burma, yeah. Oh, well. I'll leave that for another lifetime, I reckon.

Some of it's cultural like music — some music we love because it's our culture of the music we find strange. And so on and so forth. These days tend to be a bit more multicultural. Food, all that. Also personal likings, things like that. So all that will have an effect at that visceral level of the body and feeling.

Okay. Now this is a really important point in the wheel because what happens next is the cause of suffering, and the word that the Buddha uses is *taṇhā*. And taṇhā refers to those desires and those wishes that arise from this delusion, and it's arising out of that mass of conditionings.

So when we go in for a meal, part of it's quite natural to the body — the sense of appetite. But there's something else coming out of that conditioning base, the *saṅkhāras*, where we've developed an enjoyment of, in the wrong sense, an attachment to food, something that we're trying to make ourselves happy with. And that's what you call a greed.

So when that food comes, there arises the desire for more of that pleasure, and that's your taṇhā. The taṇhā comes up and it wants to grab that vedanā in a way to make it satisfy itself. But the important point here is that at this point nothing's actually happened. Nothing's actually been created. All this is the product of the past.

So when I chew an apple and I get the pleasant sense base, that's to do with all past apples plus the apple I'm eating of course. And when the desire for the apple comes up — hold on, I've done the sequence wrong — when I see an apple and the desire for an apple comes up, and I've not done anything, I'm just there with the sight of the apple and the feeling of wanting the apple, then at that point nothing's happened. It remains as a potential. The desire hasn't manifested.

And that's a really important point to get because just because you feel bad about something, because some bad feeling has come up, doesn't mean that therefore you should feel guilty. It's like a double take. But desires come up just because of past conditionings. So if guilt comes up about feeling certain feelings, or shame about certain feelings in the past or certain feelings that arise, that's something that we don't really have to put on this particular desire because that desire is just a product of the past. We've not done anything yet.

So for instance, if the rule is to take only one biscuit, and I'm standing in front of those biscuits and everybody's taking a bit and there's two left, and I have the desire to take that extra biscuit, this remains at the level of potential. Nothing's happened there.

And being a good yogi, of course, I allow that to arise and pass away. Now, I shouldn't feel guilty about that. That's just my conditioning. Every time I see a biscuit, I want it. Fair enough?

So at that point, the taṇhā — we have to understand that these are the products of past action. For those of you who know your Pali, that's a *vipāka*. It's not a *kamma*. It's not an act. It's a product.

So here we have a pleasant feeling arising because of some perception — the biscuit — and here we have the desire to take it. And at this point nothing's happened. Now you can see if I can hold that position and wait for this to die, wait for this to fade away — what's it come out of? It's come out of these saṅkhāras, these underlying conditionings. And in allowing it to fade away like that, I'm undermining the power of this conditioning, this desire for biscuits.

So there's your renunciation. That's what renunciation means. It means to let go of a desire in order to undermine a certain bad, a certain unwholesome conditioning.

So there's your *upādāna*. There's your taṇhā. If, by misfortune, by a moment of mindlessness, I attach to the desire for the biscuit, then the I comes in. So it's "want I". Now at that point when I've identified, when I'm lost in the desire, it's almost impossible to jump out of it. Before you know it you've grabbed that biscuit. But then it's too late, you've done it. So you may as well eat it. You've committed the sin. That's it, you've done it. Of course you could put it back and there will be forgiveness.

But at that point where it turns into an action — so this upādāna, upādāna means grasping the I. So our sequence is "I want a biscuit," but the actual psychological sequence is "biscuit, want, I". If it were "I want a biscuit" there'd be no escape. You wouldn't be able to escape because the identity would be immediate. It's the very fact that identity comes last that you can cut into that process and allow these desires to pass away.

So what you're identifying when you do that is of course with the wisdom inside you and not with the greed. Even so, we should beware of the biscuit.

So then after that upādāna there is some sort of empowerment. Something goes into the desire which manifests an action, and that's *bhava* — that's becoming. Bhava is the same as kamma, an action. It's the same as cetanā, the will. Because at this point, there's some sort of fuel, some sort of energy goes in there, which brings what was potential into an actual.

Now, when you're doing walking meditation, just stand there for a minute, say, intending to walk, intending to walk. And you can feel there's an intention to walk, but nothing happens. You can do that all day, nothing will happen. And then suddenly, the foot moves. So something's gone in there. And that's the will.

And as soon as you've empowered a thought or a word or an action, you've created a kamma, you've become. Now this becoming — the reason why the Buddha uses the word becoming here and not say kamma or other words is because what's really be-

coming is the I. The I is becoming. It's being reborn every time you create an action. The I goes in there. And that's where the fundamental delusion lies, right underneath the whole lot about who I am.

So upādāna — this I rises to grasp it. "This is me." And once that's happened, there's an empowerment and the I rounds again and that identity is strengthened.

Now at this point you get birth, ageing and death. So the dependent origination is written as though it were three lives. That would be the sort of traditional way of teaching it. So the ignorance, the delusion and the conditions are all in the child being born. And then you pass through everything that we've described throughout lives, the wheel turning and turning and turning. And then in the next life, you go through the whole process again — birth, ageing and death.

But for a meditator and for the more spiritual side, the Buddha is obviously really pointing to this present moment. This present moment has all the not knowing, the ignorance and the potential right here. There is this constant process. When I say constant, it's obviously not continual because it's not there when you're asleep. It's not there when, for instance, you're behaving in a wise way. At least the saṅkhāra, the unwholesomeness is not there when you're acting in a wise way.

But this fundamental sense of self — that's always there somewhere. It's always there somewhere. And then there's this, the action, the actual action has a beginning, has a process and has an end. That's your birth, ageing and death. And that to a meditator, that to us as meditators are seeking liberation from this circle, that makes much more sense to us. Because that tells us we can become liberated right now.

So that's the dependent origination. In its forward movement, or in its positive — that's a funny thing to say because it's getting worse — in its negative movement, where it's getting better, is when you start undercutting that process.

And there are two points where you undercut it. At that point of desire, wherever you see a desire which is unwholesome, unskillful, not virtuous, if you can just hang on in there and wait for it to pass away, then these saṅkhāras, these conditionings are being undermined and slowly, eventually, in time, all these *kilesa*, all these defilements are taken out of the system.

At the same time, there's the goodness — all the love, the compassion, sympathetic joy, generosity. All the beautiful virtues begin to enter into that space. So remember in this process nothing is destroyed, it's transformed. So where we see selfishness, when

that selfishness disappears it naturally moves to generosity. Where you see cruelty it naturally moves to compassion. It helps to push it along a bit with little exercises, but it's a natural process, a natural process.

So that's what's happening, actually, we say, a more obvious level, where we are changing ourselves by the simple process of not feeding into those desires we see as unwholesome and feeding those desires we see as wholesome. And you couldn't get simpler, really, could you? Absolutely.

Underneath this, there's this ignorance, this not knowing. And this is where the *vipassanā* strikes home because vipassanā is right here where this fundamental delusion lies and it lies in these three particular perspectives that somehow there is some sort of continuity, some sort of substantiality about my life and who I am.

And impermanence — beginning to really grasp impermanence that actually things are not just changing, it's not like you get a piece of clay, mess it up and make a cup and then make a saucer. It's actually moment to moment and each moment has to collapse entirely before the next moment arises. So we're actually living in a process of living-dying, living-dying, living-dying. That's the way — the radical impermanence taught by the Buddha.

The second one is of course the psychological problem which is where we experience suffering and that's to see this *dukkha*, this unsatisfactedness. And that's what this wheel points to at that level of desire. So we're undercutting deep down when we're actually also working with desire.

And the third one is the not-self, which is this primal mistake we've made about who we are, this identity. And of course, in our meditation, we're constantly pushing stuff out to look at it. So whereas once I may have been certain I am the body, especially as a child, I'm now not so sure. Whereas once I would say, I feel — well, looking at them, who's feeling what? Where once I would say I think, I am, I think therefore I am — well, how can it be if I'm looking at it, if I'm aware of it?

So this disconnection is actually a relocation. We're relocating constantly backwards into this other place that we call the observation post, the observer, the feeler, the experiencer. But even here, to our astonishment, we find me. I'm still there. I'm feeling. So obviously this goes deep and I find that I can't jump behind that. The only way I can jump behind that is by falling asleep. And then I completely disappear for a while. But you can't get rid of that last me. You try. Every time you think you're going to get rid of it, you find another me getting rid of that me. So it's impossible. You're into a mirror image, which is like you can't get beyond it.

So that's why — this is the genius of the Buddha — he says, "Don't try. What are you trying that for? It's a waste of time. Rather, place your attention on the object. Place your attention on the object. Bypass that sense of self." And very slowly, one begins to experience life without this sense of self in little blips and blobs. And that's what I'm referring to when you have these moments of absorption. Again, I use that word because I can't think of another one.

However, having said that, if you get to a point where the body is absolutely still and the mind is stopped, like there's no thought, and the heart's very calm and there's a complete peacefulness, and as you're watching the breath, which is the only thing that's left, there comes to you this very strong sense of self, a sense of presence, a sense of the observer, the feeler. So, turn your attention onto that, with no — not the idea of trying to get rid of it or anything — just turn your attention onto that sense of presence and find out how that's being manufactured. Because that can't be you, that's also an object that you're aware of. If you're aware of something, it can't be what is the actual awareness.

So it's that process and hopefully there'll be a little crack in that deep identity as to who we are. And then finally of course, the Buddha's clear that the final end is not an annihilation. Very clear about that. He's accused of it because he tends to prefer a negative explanation, negative words that we repeat — the unborn, the undying and all that. But he says the only things that are annihilated are greed, hatred and this fundamental delusion about who we are.

And twice in the scriptures, but there are other places too where he points directly in a way to this experience which is beyond the phenomenal world, and he states quite clearly there is a consciousness. So he has to use the same word unfortunately because the language doesn't reach that far. But he says there is a consciousness which is not coloured by the senses, it's not manifested, there's nothing in it, without boundary — which means that there is nothing in it to create a sense of a boundary. You've got to have phenomena to create boundaries — and in all directions full of light, in all directions full of awakeness.

And of course when one is fully liberated, when one actually has cleared all this stuff, then the person re-enters life, re-engages. So don't forget that. It's not as though we're going to this place of sublime indifference. The Buddha immediately — his first thought is, "Who can I teach this to?" The compassion arises immediately, the connection with other beings. With wisdom, compassion arises naturally. That's what they say in Zen.

And so, let's face it, the future does seem bright after all. And that's what I would call our spiritual hope — to distinguish between expectation, which is some idea, some future time, an idea of a date, "I will be liberated on the 6th of June," some idea of what liberation is, all these great expectations. But when you consider the teaching and what he's saying...

and when you look into your own experience there arises this spiritual hope, an existential hope. You see that all this massive suffering will eventually be worth it. It's a whole process of evolution, you see, it's a whole process. And although again he won't make absolute statements because he'd always be accused of the other side, being an eternalist, you will see that through your practice, that it's an absolute psychological or spiritual imperative that consciousness will move to its liberation. It's just a spiritual imperative. You can't stop it.

So all beings, in the fullness of time, will be liberated.

And on this happy note, I can only hope my words will have been of some enormous assistance and that you will be inspired to continue your labours and arrive at that wonderful place sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 51

The Law of Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

> *In this exploration of kamma, Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies one of Buddhism's most misunderstood concepts. He explains how the Buddha distinguished kamma (action) from vipāka (result), emphasizing that we create our own experiential worlds through consciousness rather than simply receiving predetermined fate.*
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> *The talk covers the Buddha's understanding of causality through paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), examining both linear causality from past actions and immediate contingent causality. Bhante discusses the five natural laws (niyāma) operating in the universe - physical, biological, psychological, karmic, and spiritual - showing how personal kamma is just one strand among many.*
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> *Crucially, he distinguishes between outer kamma (external results like imprisonment) and inner kamma (our ethical relationship with experience). True liberation comes from understanding that we create our own psychological suffering through wrong relationship with the world. This insight reveals why the Buddha's path focuses on transforming our internal responses rather than controlling external circumstances.*
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> *The discussion touches on rebirth as the continuation of consciousness seeking happiness through mistaken identification, and addresses common misconceptions about karmic justice and predestination.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

These past two talks really are more theoretical, just so that we can put our meditation into a greater perspective. Yesterday we looked at it from the point of view of the psychology that the Buddha taught. Tonight, just to go a bit wider into what we understand by *kamma*. So for many of us it will just be a bit of repetition, but it's worth reflecting on these things over and over.

Just as a warning: when Ānanda had been with the Buddha for quite some time, he said to him, "Bhagavan, Lord, I think I understand this dependent origination." And the Buddha said, "Oh no, Ānanda, this stuff goes deep, subtle." So that blew him out. Everything you hear from me you have to understand is not as deep as obviously somebody like the Buddha would go, but at least it gives us some indication.

Kamma is a very central concept to the Buddha's teaching, and of course it wasn't as though it wasn't known at the time. There were many ideas about *kamma*. *Kamma* here means action, more than karma with the R. Karma has come into our languages as result - you deserve it, it's your karma. But technically *kamma* means an act, and what follows is known as *vipāka*.

First of all, two general statements. The first one is about the way the Buddha saw our experience and the way it was understood at those times. The world and consciousness were one and the same thing. We, over a period of two or three hundred years, have separated the world out and seen it as very objective. It's brought us the scientific revolution, industrial revolution, technological revolution. It's brought us a huge load of gifts.

But we generally live under the delusion that what I see and feel really exists out there, and that it really is out there and I'm actually experiencing it as a true object. These days of course, with our neurobiology and all that, we've come to realize that in fact that's completely untrue, and that we live in a world that we have concocted ourselves in our own little brains within our own bubble of consciousness. The magic of it is that it does produce this world outside.

That doesn't mean to say the world outside doesn't exist. It exists - if all human beings disappear from this planet there'd still be the planet. It's not as though it doesn't exist, but we cannot see it in itself.

What this means is that when you're reading the scriptures, when you hear a questioner ask "How do you get to the end of the world?", we might think he's talking about a flat planet because in those days most civilizations thought the earth was flat. But generally speaking, it was always meaning: where do we get to the end of consciousness? Where does the world end? In that phrase I quoted last night - there is a consciousness which has nothing in it, it's not manifested, without boundary and in all directions full of light - the questioner had asked where do the four great elements come to an end? By which he means, where does the world come to an end?

And the Buddha says, that's the wrong question. He said, that's a mistaken question. The question should be: where do the four elements not find a footing? And then he comes out with this phrase. In other words, this consciousness which we are close to when we are in the state of the observer is something which is beyond this phenomenal world.

The real point about *kamma* is that the world we are living in is truly being created by us. It depends on our eyes of course what we see, our ears - a lot depends upon the culture we're in, the way we understand things. That's all information coming in, but what we actually experience is actually being created by us. If this room, for instance - nobody would deny it disappeared if we all left, but all of us have a different experience of this room. So there are as many rooms here by way of personal experience as there are people.

Now what this means is: if I'm creating my world, if I'm truly creating my world and it's a mess, then it must be me that's creating the mess. If I'm suffering, nobody's causing it - it's me, I'm doing it somehow. So then there is this investigation of: well, what am I doing to create this mess? And that's the process of *vipassanā*, the process of insight.

The next thing is to understand what the Buddha means by causality, and it's known as the *idappaccayatā*, which means "the law of this and that." To put it simply: because that happened, this happens; and because that didn't happen, this doesn't happen; and because this happens now, this happens; and because this doesn't happen now, this doesn't happen.

At first sight you'd think, well that's a little bit "this and that." The first one is the linear causality which most of us would understand very simply as: because this happened in the past, this happens now. For instance, at the end of the week when you look at your bank account and you've seen the wages go in, then you know that's because you just worked this past week. If you didn't, it wouldn't go in. There's a definite way of looking at what's happening now with its relationship to what's happened in the past.

Now the problem with that is: logically speaking, where would creativity come in if everything is some repetition of the past or caused by the past? It would suggest a very repetitive universe, like a mechanical wheel. And from a moral point of view, it would definitely suggest some form of fate or predestination, because how can you change anything if it's determined from past action? Sometimes you do get the feeling that things have happened to you as a fate. So having only that view of time, that view of the way things happen, puts us into a strange place. It wouldn't make any sense to think about looking at our intentions and being able to change them because everything would have happened anyway - all because of something in the past.

The other one is: because this happens now, this happens. This is much more immediate. From a linear point of view, we've all arrived in this room. But from an immediate causality point of view, the whole situation would be different if even one of us left.

It's taken all of us to create this course. If all of us hadn't been here, this course wouldn't be here now. If you all suddenly decided this Bodhidhamma is just a load of rubbish and you all get up and left, the course will come to an end. That'll be the end of it. So the fact that we're all here means that I can give forth. That brings us into an immediate causality.

Now the problem with that one is: if everything is just immediate, then presumably we're looking at a chaotic universe because there's no connection between anything. Anything could happen anytime depending on what was happening at the present moment. There wouldn't be any sense or connection. And morally speaking, that leads us to an amorality because you murder somebody and maybe get away with it, maybe you don't. You rob a bank and you might get away and you might not, and that's because of present conditions.

That leads us into an impossible situation from the Buddha's point of view if we think that our actions have future effect. If you live in a chaotic universe, well, you don't know what's going to happen. There was a case - listening to this news - this man, crazy fellow, unbelievable really, married this poor woman and within a week or a year of their marriage he killed her, caused a crash, set this car on fire, and claimed this massive amount of insurance, and got away with it. Then he tried it again in New Zealand - he got copped. Then they found him, he escaped, and they found him later trying to get this poor woman to give him her will, give him all her money. You might think, well, if he'd have got away with that, we live in a chaotic universe. It doesn't really matter, there's no connection. You can get away with things. That would lead us to a position where morality wouldn't be so important.

Now, the Buddha's position is that there are both of these laws. There's both this causality coming from the past, and there is also this contingency, this immediate meeting of these different lines of *kamma*, these different lines of actions. We can include in this all nature as well. Physically, the physical universe and the plant life and the animal life and the human life are all converging all the time into little events which are a compendium of all these streams of actions coming from who knows where.

What this gives us is a very creative universe, because first of all there's always some connection to the past - there's a rationality to the process - but also there's an unknowability because you don't know exactly what's going to meet. If you just look at a natural disaster - this dreadful tsunami in Japan - that was happening from one law and these people were just getting on with ordinary living and suddenly this happened. That's looking at it in a negative sense, but also in a beautiful sense: the weather suddenly becomes beautiful and everybody's out on the beach. There are things coming from the

past but they're meeting in the present, and the effect of their meeting in the present is unknowable. In that sense we live always in that sense of uncertainty. We don't know the hour, the day, the time when we're going to drop dead. If we knew that, well, we could run from it, we could try and get around it somehow.

So it's that unpredictability and yet this amazing creativity. When you take it into the human realm, what you have is philosophy, art, technology - that's all working on these same principles. Things are coming to us from the past, people are meeting in the present, minds are meeting and suddenly something is produced.

You might say that's the basic template upon which the Buddha understood the world to be behaving.

Then there are these five laws, of which *kamma* is only one. The first one is the law of heat, as it's translated, or energy, which we can very easily translate into physics and chemistry. It's that level of matter - the mineral world as they would talk about it - and of course that has its own laws. We just talked about the tsunami, earthquakes. There are these different laws running alongside each other, and every so often they produce something beautiful such as this planet, and other times they can be quite destructive. But there is this law concerning the material world.

The next one is *bījaniyāma*, which means seed. So here we're talking genetics. The bodies that we have ended up with are the product of past generations. The actual original cell of our body contains with it stuff that's come from the past, material stuff that's come from the past. When it develops, it develops in the particular way of that original seed. Again, this isn't our personal *kamma*.

I'm sure some of you will remember the English manager talking about congenital diseases or being born - Glenn Hoddle. He says he was misinterpreted, but he said that if you're born with a deformity, that must be because you did something horrible in the past life. That disgusted so many people that he lost his job. And of course, that wouldn't be the Buddha's point of view. Although, in a sense, that's the way traditional Buddhists would actually think about it because they transpose this personal *kamma* onto everything. Even when the tsunami hits Sri Lanka, they might come up with some idea that that was personal *kamma*.

Just on that note, there's this tale in the tales after the scriptures, that are all added on to Buddhism. One of them is, I thought, rather telling, in which a ship is going along and it suddenly stops. There's a wind up, but it suddenly stops. So the captain wonders what to do and asks the monks - there's a group of monks there - what they think is happening. The monks went into deep and profound concentration and discovered ac-

tually it was his wife. His wife in a past life seems to have drowned so many dogs, so the only way the ship would move was to chuck her overboard. That's a clever way of getting rid of your wife, isn't it? Anyway, they did so and the ship moved on.

So you get this dreadful mechanical type of *kamma* taught to kids and everything. I once asked this elderly man who used to look after us at the monastery - I was just generally interested, we were talking about *kamma* and this and that - I said to him, "Why do you think Jesus Christ ended up on the cross, dying such a painful death?" He said Jesus must have done something terrible in a past life. There just isn't the concept that you can suffer for compassion's sake or for love's sake.

This idea of our bodies being personal *kamma* also doesn't work because it comes from situations which are simply not under our control. We just end up with this body. Of course, when we're in the body, when the mind and what we do to the body gets in there, well then that is part of our personal *kamma*. But the original structure and all that is there. That's how you get family diseases. All mine, up until now apart from one, die of strokes and heart stuff. So I'm expecting to go any moment. I'm coming to the age when I should fall off a cliff or something. That comes through the family, and it may be that this is because some earlier generation was immoral in some way and has caused a weakness within the genetic structure.

This lovely thing that you read in the Bible: that the sins of the father will be on the generation for seven generations. That's very interesting because there were some reports I read where...

If your grandmother or grandfather was overweight, then it's probable that you will be. And that's how quickly the genetic structure can be changed and affected. So if we care for our future generations, stay slim. So there's that whole area of genetics and our bodies as physical, which is not part of personal *kamma*. That's the important thing.

The next thing is *citta*. So *citta* is your mind—psychology. And here, some writers stretch that out to include our society, because society is simply a conjoining of minds. What we're really talking about here is just the fundamental way the mind works. So in other words, we have sense bases, which brings in certain stimulus. The brain-mind complex—remember, in Buddhism the mind and the brain are two different forms of energy; there's not just the material brain there—but putting that aside, there's this whole mentation process going on which is producing for us images, thoughts, etc. And it's obvious that there's some sort of physical base to our thoughts and feelings. That comes under mind itself. Some writers stretch that out into sociology, but it really depends on where you want to put the dividing line between that and *kamma*.

Leaving *kamma* aside just for a minute, the fifth one is, of course, the spiritual laws, which is what we learned from the Buddha. Just the law of—well, the first one was cause and effect, but it's mainly to do with the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path and those instructions that take us out of the world of suffering. So all that is also a separate area.

If you keep those divisions of the world separate, then you've got this business of *kamma*. Now, we've said that we create our own worlds. The next one is to do with understanding that all our suffering and joys are an ethical problem. The whole psychology in Buddhism is to do with ethics—it's ethicized, as it's put. For instance, when somebody now falls into depression, we would see that rightly as maybe a medical problem, a psychological dis-ease, and I think that's perfectly skillful and perfectly alright. But from the Buddha's point of view, the fundamental problem would be an ethical problem. And this ethical problem isn't to do with a simple morality of right and wrong—it's to do with relationship.

If we go right back to the beginning, all this massive suffering—all the depressions and the anxieties and the worries and the guilt and all that—all come about because of this wrong relationship with the world, which substantiates itself into a feeling of me, the self. The self isn't, remember, a thing—it's a process. It's a bit like the word marriage. A marriage doesn't exist; what exists is an ongoing relationship. Some writers use the word "selfing" just to get that point across, that it's a process of becoming somebody else all the time.

We think of our mental problems as perhaps medical, and we tend to psychologize things, whereas from the Buddhist point of view it would be much more of an ethical problem. Now, it doesn't particularly help knowing that if you suffer from depression—you've got to treat it as a mental dis-ease, and we're getting rather good at that generally speaking in this society: coming off drugs and teaching people how to use mindfulness.

This *kamma* is to do with our ethics, which is specifically to do with the way we're creating suffering. Once we've grasped that, then we understand what this *kamma* is. It's nothing to do with the outside world. It's to do with the inner world. It's to do with the world I'm creating. That's my real *kamma*.

For instance, I've just pointed out this guy who's committed these murders. So he's going to end up in prison. Now prison itself is not the suffering. The suffering will be how he can bear with that situation. And that situation is within his own mind. So what happens to us from the outside is not our personal *kamma*. It's not the *kamma* which leads to liberation. It's always what's happening inside.

And that's what we're working with when we practice *vipassanā*. So when we sit here, and somebody coughs just at the point when we're going to become fully liberated, and then we get all angry and hot about it, then that's it. We've created this world of heat and horror. Actually, all there was was a cough—it was just a sound—but we've turned it into a disturbing noise.

If we can grasp the idea that when the Buddha's talking about liberation and *kamma*, he's talking really about the world we're creating inside ourselves—that's the real *kamma*, that's the real comeuppance—so when you do something harmful, the karmic result of that is not being put in jail. Sure enough, that's obviously a result of it. The karmic result is the feeling of guilt and shame and having to live in a room for the rest of your life. And how you deal with that. So that's where spiritual *kamma* is—that's where the escape is from suffering. It's within us.

Whatever happens to us from the outside, which may have some direct causality with us—I might have done something in the past which now produces some bad or some good results—heaven's sake, like you buy a lottery ticket and you win a load of money, well that's pretty straightforward, that's good *kamma*—but that's not the *kamma* of liberation. The *kamma* of liberation is to do with how we're now becoming attached to money and how it's drawing us into a wrong relationship with the world and which will eventually cause suffering.

Once we grasp the difference between what you might call an outer *kamma*, which is all related, it's all contingent, and this inner *kamma*, then you're much more concerned with the inner *kamma* because it's the inner *kamma* which is actually producing the suffering, not the outer *kamma*.

For instance, these days people are losing their work. Well, to lose your job is bad enough. To lose the finance that the job gives you is bad enough. But then there comes loss of status. What do I do now? I've always defined myself as an engineer. And now what am I? I've always defined myself as a doctor. What am I now? I always define myself as a bureaucrat. Now, what am I now? And it's that loss of identity which is going to create all the depressions and all that sort of stuff. And that's unnecessary. That's the point. It's all come about because of a wrong relationship with the work you're doing.

Tomorrow we'll go into what might be a right relationship so that suffering doesn't arise. The obvious word is service—to see your life as a service. And if it's not wanted, well, that's okay. You've entered into it with a proper intention.

So that's the clarity we need when we're looking to the end of suffering. We're creating our own suffering. Nobody can cause us psychological suffering. Can you grasp that? Nobody can cause you that. Physical suffering, yes. Nobody causes psychological suffering—that's all an internal process. And if it were not so, how could I become fully liberated from suffering unless I get rid of you lot? I've got to get rid of all human beings and anything that disturbs me before I can become fully liberated! It's the very fact that I'm creating my own suffering that means that I can uncreate it and enter into this state, this relationship with the world, where there's no more psychological suffering. That's the point.

So what you're saying here is that if I did something that is considered really bad, say, killing someone, if I decided that actually I'm very happy about this, and I'm not going to be upset because I'm going to be in prison, and I'm going to deal with this in a good way, then actually, punishment doesn't need to exist?

What happens is that that attitude is a very surface attitude. And it's not really connecting with the true heart of the person. So what happens is that one becomes callous. And then what happens is that callousness goes out into the world and the world begins to mirror back your callousness.

Jung talks about this woman who turned up at his office and she had murdered her rival because she wanted to marry this man. And she had come to a point in her life where she realized that all her children didn't want to know her. She'd lost all her friends. All these catastrophes happened. And she made the connection that it all went back to this murder. And he said in his book that he felt she'd suffered enough. There was no point of him reporting this to the police. She already understood what happens when you do something harmful.

In a sense, even that doesn't make sense unless you see some continuity after death, because you might get away with it and you might live a good life. Even if you do become callous, you still might end up generally happy, and that would seem to us a little unjust. So here we have the doctrine of rebirth.

Now the doctrine of rebirth—just very quickly—it's not something you can scientifically prove. How can you scientifically prove it? Those people who remember their past lives, and there's a lovely clip that's going around on the websites about this young boy in America who remembers himself being killed during the Second World War against the Japanese. He was in an airplane, and he remembers it quite distinctly. And the Japanese director is very interested in this and takes him out to where his plane went down. The interesting thing is he remembers his sisters and he says things about his sisters who are still alive in America. He remembers all about them. And he knows exactly

where the plane went down. And they even found somebody who was on the ship who remembered him and who remembered where the plane went down. And this is all done by a little boy of about nine, ten, eleven. And of course he's got this creed that we shouldn't go to war.

You get stories like that plenty in the East. I think probably in the West we still suppress these things a little bit. But if we understand that there is this consciousness, there is this Buddha nature, and it finds itself in a material world, it finds itself in this physical world, forms a relationship to this physical world where it thinks that this world is me, and in so doing it forms an unethical relationship which creates acquisitiveness, greed, thieving and all that, and aversion, fear and all the rest of it—when it leaves, upon death, we can see it wanting to seek a similar world elsewhere. It's seeking always rebirth. Even outside in the mental body, it's still seeking—I don't know, we call them ghosts, but basically they are these beings that have found rebirth exactly around the places where they died.

This consciousness is always seeking where its happiness is, and that's why it's drawn back into another life form constantly, into another life form. In the verse that we chant in the morning of the Buddha's birth, he's been born from life to life to life, but he's found the house builder. He's found this mechanism that keeps creating the house, this body, this mind. And he said he's broken the rafters, smashed the poles, all very terrible stuff. And he said, "I have now achieved the *cittam asaṅkhataṃ*"—which means the unconditioned consciousness—"and all my defilements are destroyed."

And that's the point. The whole thing about rebirth—without trying to work out its detail in hell realms and the whole cosmology of it—is that process whereby this *cittan*, this consciousness, is constantly seeking happiness and it's making this mistake. So that's why it keeps being reborn. And so when it achieves its liberation from that delusion, there's no knowing. We don't know what happens to that consciousness. Later tradition says the Buddha reappears in a blissful body and so on. But generally speaking, the Buddha was silent, because it was beyond descriptions, beyond words.

What you come back with is attitude. And this attitude manifests within a given society as patterns of behaviour. So if you come back with greed, you're going to find yourself in a greedy situation, because you're manufacturing the greedy situation. If you come back with hatred, you find yourself in it. If you come back with love—well, that has a strong effect, just like when you go to sleep. If you go to sleep with some big anxiety on your mind, what do you wake up with?

Now that's what I always point out: if you want to understand rebirth, see what's happening now, because it's happening right now. We're rebirthing right now from moment to moment—not the same, not different. Not the same, not different. The connection's there, but there's something different, and that's where the creativity comes in.

The Buddha would point out that what drives us to seek the end of suffering is suffering. Very simple. If we didn't suffer, we wouldn't bother about it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your careful investigation of the mind and the world we live in, attain that peace sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 52

Living Life according to the Dhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 58 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the practical application of Buddhist teachings to everyday life, drawing from the Noble Eightfold Path and the Buddha's guidance for both monastic and lay practitioners. He explores the jewel of Buddhist meditation instruction—the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10)—which was originally taught to lay practitioners in Kammāsadhamma, demonstrating that the path to awakening is accessible to all, not just monastics.*
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> *The talk covers Right Speech as speaking with kindness, honesty, and appropriate timing, distinguishing between aggression and true assertiveness rooted in equanimity. The discussion of the five precepts includes nuanced perspectives on vegetarianism, generosity as the antidote to taking what isn't given, and the role of intoxicants in clouding awareness. Bhante emphasizes Right Livelihood as transforming any work into spiritual practice through the attitude of service.*
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> *The teaching concludes with an explanation of taking refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) and the five precepts as a formal commitment to the spiritual path. This ceremony provides practitioners with a stable reference point for ethical guidance while remaining open to wisdom from other traditions that align with Buddha-Dhamma.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

This evening I wanted to pre-empt a lot of questions over the weekend concerning daily life. Not all of them, but some of them. To look at the way the Buddha advises us to live, and then to try to explain what it means to take refuge and precepts, because that's the little ceremony that I offer on Sunday morning. And why we should do it, or why you might want to do it. The ceremony is on the Sunday just after breakfast, 9:30, and I'll talk about that tomorrow in more detail.

When the Buddha started to teach, the first people who were attracted to him were people who wanted to live a similar sort of ascetic life. And many of them had already been living the ascetic life, out in the jungle or the forests, going on alms round rather. That's the preferred state. That's the preferred expression, on alms round, not begging for food. And when they were attracted to him, he said, well, come and try. *Ehi passiko*.

There is of course the story about the women who turned up from his court later on in his dispensation, and I'm sure many of you know the story that when they turned up he didn't want to ordain them. He didn't think that they could take the life, and he refused them three times, which is basically no. But Ananda said, can women become fully liberated? And he said, yes. So he said, well, why not give them a chance? So he did. Ever since then, he's been blamed by the men.

Now, although that story exists, it would seem now actually that that's not quite right. Research has shown something else, that these people who turned up from court were in fact his own relatives. They were his stepmother, his wife and a few other court ladies. So they were obviously people who'd been living the good life. It would be difficult to wear rag robes. They would have been probably still wearing rag robes then, collect robes from the bodies of the dead, sew them up and boil, and that was it. Later on he made people cut them into squares so that when you look at a robe it looks like paddy fields with passages.

And then he made them dye it in arecanut, which turned into a sort of colour of, as one monk said, baby shit. So it's not particularly fashionable.

But there does seem to be, especially a nun there, the name of course escapes me, who seems to have asked him, it's in her verse, if you look at the verses left by the *Therīs*, by the enlightened women. There's one verse there where she states that when she asked the Buddha if she could join him, she'd already had *jhāna*, he said the same thing, *ehi*, come, *ehi passiko*, come and try.

So that was one part of it, and slowly but surely an institution developed, and an institution basically is determined by its rules and regulations. So there were general rules and regulations of the time, but as monks and nuns misbehaved then, or people complained about certain behavior, he would make a rule. One of the ones that you're all suffering from is not to eat after lunch. So that came about because lay people complained that the monks and nuns were turning up at all times and more than once for a bit of food. They got fed up and they said no, this is not right, going back to big bowls of food. So what are they doing all day, just sat there eating? So he made the rule that you can only go out once, it had to be in the morning and it had to be eaten before noon. And the monks complained because all the best foods cooked in the evening like in most cultures, but he was quite strict about that. He said no, if you want to join this dispensation, that's what you do.

So that was one side of his dispensation. The other side of course was that many lay people began to be attracted to his teachings, and so he began to develop a lay way of life because he had to answer their questions. And this comes out in the Eightfold Path,

which we'll come to in a little bit. But the one thing that I really like to stress is that the jewel of the collection, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, in which the Buddha describes how to meditate, all the stuff you've been hearing from me is out of that discourse. Like feeling feelings in feelings and all that sort of stuff. That's all from this discourse.

That is addressed to the Kurus of *Kurusadhamma*. That's how the discourse opens. It always opens with where he was and who he gave the talk to. So he was in a place which was close to modern Delhi and he had been there before and he'd given teachings about mindfulness and meditation and all that. And when he came back he was taken by how committed the village was, the little town was, to the practice. And that's where he delivered this discourse.

So the discourse explaining the whole process of meditation, and it ends with, if you maintain your mindfulness for seven years, for sure you will be either a non-returner or fully liberated. Never mind seven years, seven months. Never mind seven months, seven weeks. Never mind seven weeks, seven days. That means you don't lose your attention for seven days. As we found out, that's a wee bit difficult. And it's good to remember that, he didn't pull any punches. He didn't think, well, only monastics with their special form of institution and life can become liberated. Not at all. And there are examples in the scriptures of many people becoming fully liberated. One is a cobbler.

He had to, shall we say, wandering through the countryside. That was his normal thing. He would go from one monastery to the next, spending so much time here, so much time there. And on the way, he would stay in little villages and towns. And in those days, the wandering ascetics seemed to be the entertainment. I mean, there was obviously folk entertainment, bands and jumping up and down, but they would have these big gatherings on full moon. And the people would go to the parks and they'd have these talks given to them by these ascetics, these spiritual seekers, and they'd be questions and all that sort of stuff.

And in fact, we know that the lay people complained to the Buddha that when we go to these teachers, they always answer our questions and these teachers also give, these monks and nuns they also give talks, but yours sit like dumb pigs. So he said right, he made a rule. All these rules come about because of silly things like that. So he said if a monk or nun is asked a dharma question they have to respond. It's a rule.

So he has lots of advice concerning the lay life. And this comes out, as I say, in the Eightfold Path. So it's good to look at that. It's good to look at the Eightfold Path and see what he's actually saying.

So the first is right understanding, right attitude. So that's really what we've been developing over this week. We've been developing our understanding about the way things really are, and hopefully that will in time sink down into an attitudinal base, an attitude. And then from there there's an outflow. So that outflow is into right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

So now right, there's always the negative and the positive. So wrong speech of course, telling whoppers and coarse language and useless language and slander. Those are your four types of wrong speech, and all those bring us problems. Right speech is kindly. It's always from a position of kindness, which you can include any positive attitude of kindness from compassion, kindness from joy, sympathetic joy, kindness from friendliness, from *mettā*. Kindness, honest. That honesty even stretches to not to exaggerate. And then finally, which is the most difficult one, at a suitable time.

So if you want to say something to somebody which you know might upset them, then you have to choose your time, say it kindly, and be upfront about it. And that's what the Buddha is saying. If you choose the wrong time, then you can expect it to completely go wrong. So this idea of choosing the right time, a suitable time, I think is rather insightful. Sort of blurting out.

And that brings us all to this business of aggression and what's that other word where you're being direct, aggressive, assertive, that's right. To be assertive. So people think when you're assertive you have to stamp your foot and put your fist on your hips and say quite straightforward, I will not have this. But to be assertive is coming from a place of no fear, no aversion. That's what they feel. And when it comes from that place it can be terribly kind, but they know that you mean it.

A slight example which gives you some idea of that is, I remember Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she went to Lebanon when that dreadful stuff was going on and some school had been stuck in the middle of two firing lines it seems. And the school has lots of children in the school, they'd been caught in the school, and it was a dilemma as to what to do. They were very afraid to bring the kids out. It's very strange to see because I saw it on television, some of you might have seen it, and she's brought to the school. So I was thinking, why don't they shoot her in a crossfire? But anyway, the officials and all that, they brought her to this place where she could see the school, they told her what the situation was and what to do.

Well she had no problem. She just walked to the school and brought them out. Everybody else is so afraid and full of fear and all that confusion, but that's what had to be done, and she was prepared to perhaps sacrifice her life to at least make the attempt.

So when you find yourself in a position of being bullied or somebody saying something which is rather nasty and all that sort of stuff and you want to talk to them, it doesn't have to be upfront straight on the nose, I will not have this sort of behaviour. Coming from that position of no fear and no hatred, no aversion, to say it very kindly, look, I won't take that sort of language anymore. And it hits much more strongly. If there's any fear, any anger, then subconsciously they'll bounce back off it. So coming from equanimity is a much better place, whatever we do, always, always, always.

It's been a regular experience of mine. I wrote in one of my little diaries, I call them diaries, I call them blogs, on my monthly email where I came, we had to get rid of this big tree, this oak tree, because of oil tank regulations. And I came out of the house, and my neighbour was in an absolute rage. I've never seen, I mean, it was real rage. He completely lost it. And he was saying things like, I'm from Liverpool, and I'll have you shot. Don't say much for Liverpool. A killer, that.

And oh, he doesn't listen to this tape. And the lumberjack who was okay by the way and quite an expert, he was standoffish, he seemed to be very cool, but that's because he had these two great big strapping young lads next to him. And I came out into this and I thought, so I thought it was nothing to do with me, so I was really calm, cool, collected, the peacemaker, and I said, what's going on? And he raged on about this tree should have never been cut, it's not our tree, we've had all this business before, somebody was fined so many thousand pounds, on and on and on.

And then he turns on me and he says, and I'm going to drive my tractor up and down the side of your fence all day to disturb me, all sorts of stuff. And finally sort of cool him down and say, well, and then he realised that I'd employed this lumberjack, he wasn't part of Satipanya. That cooled him down a bit. And very slowly over a little bit of period of time he sort of began to cool down, and this guy then approached and reminded him that he just threatened him with his life. A simple apology would do, and finally he just made a very quick apology. That was good, and he went out with his tail between his legs. He'd got the whole situation completely wrong.

And it was, I mean, I don't know whether I would have reacted like that if I'd have been there at the beginning of the argument. It was that I entered into it thinking it was nothing to do with me. I was absolutely stable, and when he turned on me I was able to maintain that sort of stability. And that immediately gave nothing for this rage to hang on to. So that's always a little example from my own life telling me that equanimity is always the best policy.

So that's this right speech business, approaching people in a way which is always kind. And kindness undermines any form of anger. It's got nothing to hold on to. As you know, if somebody approaches you in a sort of accusatory way, as soon as you say, I'm sorry, that undermines the whole thing. And then, of course, you prove it was their fault. But it's just always undermining their anger is part and parcel of the good life. Which as we can see doesn't stop you from getting your point across. It's just making that little distinction there.

So it's a good thing to keep in mind the distinction between being aggressive and being assertive. And that when we're assertive it doesn't have to be done with a sort of strict, loud voice coming from the position of righteousness. I mean, that's basically another form of aggression in a way. So this right speech has always the negative side and the positive side with these instructions.

When it comes to right action, that's normally described as these five precepts that we say in the morning. And it's basically, that's what you don't do. So we try not to harm any living being, not to kill any living being, not to harm any living being. Well, I mean, as soon as you take that position, then of course you move towards caring for all living beings.

And, of course, this takes us into that whole area of vegetarianism, which is a constant question within Buddhist circles. Should we be vegetarian? In Buddhist culture, the only vegetarians that I know of are the Chinese monks. They can be very strict vegetarian. And I once did a wedding ceremony for a Chinese woman who was marrying an Englishman. And after the ceremony, she came up to me quite worried and said that at the banquet, at the banquet which they would have after this ceremony, they'd be eating meat. So I gave her the normal line that the Buddha didn't ban eating meat. That wasn't the problem. So, it's up to a person's sensibility, really.

At the monastery I joined in Sri Lanka, one of the monks rather proudly came up to me and said, we're vegetarians, because monks eat meat if they're offered meat. It's not a problem, but the message had gone out that monks at Kanduboda were vegetarians. So I'd not been there for two or three meals when fish turns up. And so I didn't say anything, of course. One has to be careful. And I heard later that a rather wry Westerner had said that, well, in Sri Lanka, fish are self-propelling, automated vegetables.

So that's it, you see. So it depends where you draw the line. As you know, in Western culture, the Benedictines were vegetarian, but they did eat fish. They had pools in which they kept fish. So, you know, fish vegetarians.

The problem is not the eating of meat, of course, it's the killing of the animal. And it's up to a person to decide, you know, where they are in that sort of loop. So of course when you buy the meat you support the butcher and so on and so forth and it depends on really what your body needs. So I know a woman who has only got half a kidney you see and basically she has to eat meat it seems. There's also this argument of blood groups, certain blood groups are meat eaters rather than vegetarian eaters which mirror our ancestral history. But I think it's up to every individual to decide whether they want to be vegetarian or not or even vegan or not. It's up to you.

As a monastic of course because you're receiving alms, that's what you eat, you see, because you haven't been in that loop. This is the point, you see. You might say, well, you hold your bowl out and you get a great big chunk of beef. I mean, you know. But the thing is that monks don't invite people to give them food, you see. They can say, I prefer to be vegetarian. In Burma, during the rainy season, when monks and nuns gather to do special practice, often they'll take a vegetarian vow. But if I know that you've killed an animal to feed me, I can't eat it. That's my rule. If it's a leftover or it's part of something and then I turn up at the door with me bowl and you say, I'm a monkey again, give me... took a leg of chicken in there, then that would be allowable. But if I'd known you'd rip this leg off, especially for me, then the chicken was hopping around, I'd have to refuse it, you see.

So there's this whole murky area around vegetarianism where the Buddha didn't basically make any strict laws. And you must remember that in those times there was famine. And you had to kill your livestock to keep alive. And how are you going to teach the Buddha Dhamma to Eskimos? Or Inuits rather, as they prefer these days. Or people who live in deserts. So it's like there's no... In this idea of a relative universe, everything dependent on something else, you can't make absolute laws. Even killing, you can't make an absolute law about killing. When I was at the monastery in Burma it was regularly fumigated for mosquitoes so nobody complained about that. So there are different degrees of moral law out there, you know, and it's up to the individual to decide where they are. That's all. So it's very rare that something is absolutely black and white.

So the second one, of course, is not to take what is not freely given. So that's a pretty, when you think about things that you might even, you might become sensitive to taking even a pen home from work, you see, because it's not given for that reason. So it gets, the more you get into these rules and regulations, the more refined they become. It's not just, you know, thieving something.

In the Buddhist monk's rules, if I have a liking for that bowl, for instance, it's a singing bowl, and I think, hmm, and I'm looking around to see if I can just slip it in my bag and borrow it, you see, then of course that's still at the thought level. So I haven't actually broken any rule. All rules to do with monks and nuns are to do with action. And then if I come in again and see that rule, you see, and then I'm overtaken by my desire to slip it away, and my hand moves towards it, but I don't actually, you know, even to the point of touching it, you see, that's called a *dukkata*, that's a bad thing to do. Moving it, moving towards it, you see. If I touch it, then that's called a heavy offense, you see.

Now if I move it a nano centimetre and then decide not to take it I've still committed an act of theft and I'm no longer a monk. Yeah. See, so the Buddha is quite clear about what constitutes an act and what doesn't constitute an act, see. So if you take that into all sorts of areas of your life you can see so long as it's in the mind it's not manifested outward, it's not done harm out there. It's done harm within here if you've indulged it, but it's not done harm out there. And so long as you're moving towards something, towards you're about to do something, of course, you're now into a dangerous area where you might, you know, might actually find yourself doing something you didn't want to do. But once you've actually done it, even if you then decide not to do it, but once it's done, it's done. That's it. The act is complete, you see.

Of course, the consequence is different. The consequence of, say, just moving that bowl a nanocentimetre and then saying, whoa, no, and then walking away, well, there's going to be no consequence to that. But to actually stick it in my coat and shoot off with it and be caught at the gates, that could be... My whole reputation as a completely enlightened being might just fall apart. You can't imagine the Buddha shoplifting, can you? It wouldn't sort of fit.

So, you know, that whole business about not taking. Now, the opposite of cow, of course, is generosity. Move towards generosity. And generosity was the subject that the Buddha always began his talks with when he talked to lay people, because anybody can be generous even a thief can be generous with the stuff we've just thieved. So generosity is not, it's a sort of, it comes prior in a sense to the rule about taking and not taking. Anybody can be generous with what they have. And remember generosity is to do with both time, both wealth and time, and that's what it leads to, you see.

Once you stop thinking about what I want, you see. So at the worst end, it's taking something which is not ours, right? But then in the middle, it's this sort of greed of always wanting something. It's always wanting what other people have and envy and jealousy and all that sort of stuff, you see. And when all that passes, where does that en-

ergy go, you see? All that wanting, you see, it moves outwards into wanting others to have it. And that's this natural transformation of the negative side of our characters and personalities towards the positive. It just happens naturally.

And I think one way that we can judge, it's one of those words, isn't it? One way that we can see that we're progressing spiritually is that we're getting far more delight in giving than in receiving. That's always a good sign, that you delight in giving. That's one of the Buddha's phrases, to delight in giving.

The third one is normally translated as around sexual activity, not to abuse our sexual activity. And of course in those days, as in previous times in the West, that would have been confined to the married life, to a proper to that type of relationship. These days of course it sort of lengthens out to a loving relationship doesn't it, you know. Whenever I talk about this I always say this of course that sex is just by itself it becomes an empty experience and then I always quote Woody Allen but as empty experiences go... Laughter. Laughter.

So you see it's just one of those things but really that precepts I think you can lengthen it out to any lust for anything, lust for food, lust for getting out into the open. It's just that part of us that is, you know, overreaching, you know, overreaching again. It always comes back to this seeking happiness in the sensual world, it's...

The fourth one is wrong. Oh, wait a minute. I said wrong speech first, did I? So it should have been not to harm any living beings, wrong speech. That should have come fourth, actually. Sorry. And then there was not to take what is not freely given. And then there's this business of not to abuse the senses. And then finally, always a tricky one for a Western culture, not to take drigs and drunks. Drigs and drunks. Drinks and drugs that cloud the mind, you see.

So the normal question is well what's wrong with a, you know, what's wrong with a glass of wine, you know, especially if you're French. What's wrong with a glass of wine? Italian, I mean how can you, how can you not have a glass of wine with your spaghetti? So really again this comes back to the individual. I mean generally speaking in our culture to have a glass of wine with food is neither here nor there, it's not... But in the scriptures, the reason for this is that under the influence of, you do things which you would not normally do. That's the problem with specifically alcohol.

And it's up to a person's refinement. I mean, I, you know, some monks would, some teachers would say that you mustn't ever go near alcohol, you know, that sort of stuff. But it's up to the individual to decide what mental state arises when they take alcohol. I remember when I first started meditating I'd come out of an evening session and I

hadn't eaten and I went into a pub and I had half a bitter, you see, just to test it actually, to test the effect of half a bitter on the antibody. That's true. I did, I did, I did. And I drank this half of it and I sat there and I swear I felt this curtain fall down on the brain. It just came right down and I thought well this is it, you see. This is what it does. It, it sort of does have, even a small amount of alcohol does have an effect on your level of consciousness and what, what you're doing.

So considering that we're trying to develop our awareness, you know, the last thing we want to do is do something which is underlying that development. So again it's left up to the individual. The western, the eastern culture is not so alcoholic based as you know. I mean they have alcohol but as far as I know there's none of this, there's none of the culture of wine, culture of tea but not of wine.

And when it comes to recreational drugs, well, that's the same thing. Recreational drugs distort your consciousness, so you'd have to decide whether that's what you want to do or not. So that whole area, really, for somebody who is bent on purifying their minds and on consciousness, then, of course, they'd come off all that stuff.

So those are the five basic rules, you might say, of what not to do. But that doesn't cover, in a sense, all the goodnesses that we're asked to develop. So the four of them, the four illimitables, are love, compassion, joy, and peace. And I'll say more about that tomorrow when we do the loving-kindness meditation, the *metta*. But these are your basic relationships to life and they're illimitable because the development of the mind is seemingly indefinite. It's a bit like number, no matter how great a number you can conceive you can always add one. It's like an eternity of numbers.

So it's the same with the mind, the heart. You can continue to develop it. And there are meant to be innumerable number of beings. So you can be there forever offering metta and an occasional lunch break.

The others are the seven, the ten *parami*. Parami means the other shore. And it's normally translated as perfections, which is a bit, you know, that gives you the idea that you've come to the end of this, you know, a perfection. But basically they're virtues. I would much prefer the word virtues. And they include a host of things. I'll just read them out. Parami.

The first one is this generosity. The second one is moral, the moral law which we've discussed. The third one is renunciation. So here we have to make, you know, I think I've said before the distinction between self mortification and renunciation. Renunciation is giving up something to see what our attachment is to it and in seeing our attachment we wait for that attachment to go, you see.

So one of the things I've suggested is whatever your most enjoyable program is on the telly, to sit there with a cup of tea and a biscuit and don't turn it on. And just feel the pain. So you wait for it to pass, wait for it to pass, and keep doing that until it's all gone and you don't care about that program anymore. So then you can watch it.

Wisdom, of course, energy, so that's, you know, that business of right energy, putting the right energy into something. Patience, the Buddha calls the highest form of ascetic practice, to be able to bear with, not to lose one's patience over things, to become irritable, you know, and all that. So, of course, that, to be patient, you have to sit in the other person's place, don't you? You have to be in the other person's side to understand why they're behaving like that, you know. Why the train is late, you know, all that sort of stuff.

Truthfulness, we've talked about. Resolution, you see, you hear me go on and on about resolution. So there it is in one of the *parami*. It's a commitment, you see. You keep making resolutions. Even if you fail, it doesn't matter. You just keep putting energy into a resolution. And eventually, it grows in energy, you see. And it takes a hold on us.

Loving kindness, metta, which we'll do tomorrow, and of course equanimity.

And I'll just read out what this says in the commentary, which sort of puts them all together for us, so that you can understand that although there is this negative, you know, what we shouldn't do, there's much more about what we should be doing to develop our hearts and develop our relationship to the world. So here's what the... what it said in the *Visuddhimagga*. Visuddhimagga is a later work which is considered the handbook, really, of Theravada Buddhism, and it's probably one of the greatest spiritual classics of the world, really.

But this is what it says, anyway. As the great being, meaning someone destined to become liberated or Buddhahood, are concerned with the welfare of living beings, not tolerating the suffering of beings, wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings, and being impartial and just to all beings, therefore they give arms to all beings so that they may be happy, without investigating whether they are worthy or not. By avoiding to doing them harm they observe morality, and in order to bring morality to perfection they train themselves in renunciation.

In order to understand clearly what is beneficial and injurious to beings, they purify their wisdom. For the sake of the welfare and happiness of others, they constantly exert their energy. Though having become heroes through utmost energy, they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings. And once they have promised to give or to do something, they do not break their promise. With unshakable

resolution, they work for the will and welfare of beings. With unshakable kindness, they are helpful to all. And by reason of their equanimity, they do not expect anything in return.

See? That's nice, isn't it? Very good. So that's the positive side of our... what you might call right action.

Then there's the we move on now to right livelihood. So there are those livelihoods we're not supposed to get involved in like, well, one of them is of course killing animals and arms trafficking, human beings. I mean, you know, you can think of those. But the big thing about livelihood is not what you do but how you do it. See, this is, I think this is the real core of the thing. Whether we're doing some, you know, some of the unskilled jobs of society, you know, like clearing parks, cleaning, that sort of thing, or whether we're doing some of the most highly skilled work in society, in spiritual terms it's irrelevant. In spiritual terms it's the attitude of which you do it.

So if you see what you're doing as a service then it becomes a spiritual practice. And once we've grasped that then, you know, it makes, it makes work very worthwhile because all the things that we might suffer at work such as the boredom of it or the tedium of it or the...

the fact that other people are nasty to us all that whole area you see when it becomes at the service of when it's a service that you're giving then it all becomes very worthwhile and I think that's you know if we start from that if in the morning you see having done your two hours meditation you sit quietly and offer *metta* to all beings you see and then you get round to work see where you're going to spend really the better part of our lives you know eight hours a day or so and so you sit there you see and you just consider what you do and you do it for the benefit of see for the benefit of the people you're working with for the benefit of the firm or the organisation and through that for the benefit of all and if we engender that within us of course then it becomes meaningful no matter what we're doing.

When I was a kid you know I got a job from school. I worked in a cake factory. And they had this belt, you know, with the cakes coming off. And there was a group of women, see, and they put me on the end of the line. And the women, of course, were very used to this sort of work, and I'd just joined them. And they were very quick with their hands and could keep up quite complex conversations. My job was to stick this damn cherry on the top. And every time I missed, I had to shut the machine down. They got a bit upset with me. And I didn't quite get the hang of it. They didn't give me enough time. They'd have given me half a day to get into it. But they were very kind. "He's only a lad, leave him alone."

Now you think, well, how could you do something like that and turn that into a spiritual practice? Especially on a sort of production line like that. How could you do that, you see? Well, if you think about it, it's an enormous, you know, if I'd have known, if I'd have been into this sort of practice, this was an enormous opportunity to develop moment-to-moment concentration. Right attitude, completely there with the cherry on the cake. Just like that, on the cake, on the cake. Instead I was, "Oh, bloody hell, I've been doing this for all day." And of course, if you're on the line, you're on the line for hours. You know, it's two hours, ding, the bell goes off, a cup of tea, bang, off you go again. I once had a job just punching holes in this damn thing that shot, you know, in front of my eyes.

So any situation can be seen as having potential for some sort of spiritual practice. So, yes, that is service. Service is the important thing to remember when it comes to work.

So now, you know, if we leave it all there in terms of general guidelines about our lives, I mean, there's books written on it, lots of good books about daily life and all that. The idea of taking refuges and precepts for the people who do it is that, in a sense, you've got to have some sort of reference point in the spiritual life. It doesn't matter what it is so long as it's obviously worthwhile. But if you keep hopping from here to there then it's like you're using different value systems which eventually can just confuse you, see.

So if we look at our lives and think well, is there an authority, a final authority I go to for moral problems, for actual guidance? Is there a moral authority, an ethical authority I go to whom I really trust and from there I would be able to put into context any other information I get, any other spiritual instruction I get? If you take that position it doesn't stop you from this authority taking in other teachings, other traditions, except that it has to make sense to this central authority. If it doesn't you've got two authorities and that's when your confusion starts. Like who do I follow, what should I do? And the idea of taking refuges and precepts is at one level it can be a very general commitment to the spiritual life and at others it can be quite specific.

Okay, so we take refuge in the Buddha. So the Buddha is a historical personage. We have lots of information about his life and how he lived. We have lots of information about the people around him at the time, with an enormous amount of information about his teachings and what he proposed. And to take refuge in that is to take refuge in not simply some personage but an exemplar. So this is your example, you see. And in a sense the Buddha is mirroring some archetypes within us. There's something in us that has to be liberated.

And so that would, and the Buddha's path is, shall we say, specific to the Buddha. If you were a Christian, then Jesus, Jesus Christ would be your central authority. So often I get, for instance, people who are Christians saying, "Can I meditate," you see? So my answer is, I don't see a confusion, but you've got to make sense of this within the teachings of Jesus Christ, see? And if you can't, then it creates a contradiction. It just creates wasted energy.

So some people, of course, won't go near other practices who are more fundamentalist Christians. But there are many monks and nuns, actually, within Christianity, within the Catholic tradition, and also the Anglican tradition here in Britain, who practice some form of Buddhist meditation. And there's a nun who lives who lives out in the Brecon Beacons there and she holds the Chan lineage, the Chinese Buddhist lineage, and she's also an ordained Anglican nun under the Archbishop, Archbishop Canterbury. So she's able to hold these two without contradiction. For her it's a great sort of exploration, but for others it would be impossible.

So it's the same with people who are committed to the Buddha. They wouldn't see it possible to do something like yoga or to practice any other form apart from something which is strictly within the Buddhist tradition. But in our post-modern world where people gather their own spiritual portfolio, the problem is not the amount of choice we have but to make it make sense to some sort of central position. So this is what I mean by having some sort of commitment to a fundamental authority from which you move and you can accept teachings from all traditions and practices from all traditions which make sense to you, which makes sense to that authority.

So in the widest sense, to take refuge in the Buddha is to take refuge within one's own Buddha nature rather than being too specific about this personage in the past. Your absolute refuge is in the Buddha, but because this is connected to the historical Buddha, then the historical Buddha becomes your point of reference.

Now what do we mean by that? The Buddha says quite clearly, "Who sees me sees the Dhamma. Who sees the Dhamma sees me." What he's saying is that his life, his teachings are an expression of the truth. So what we're really taking refuge in is the Dhamma. And I know that we in the West we're called Buddhists, but that's not what Buddhists call themselves. Originally they used to call themselves *Saddhamikas*, which means followers of the true law. And you'll still get that translation in certain Chinese texts.

So we're always coming back not to a person. It's not a guru based dispensation. It's a *dhamma* based dispensation. It's about the teaching. And the teaching has both the theoretical side and the practice. And that's the *dhamma*, see, the Buddha-*dhamma*. So

you'll find some people are committed to Buddhism, being called Buddhist, getting very upset about being called Buddhists, you see. They don't like being called Buddhists. They want it to be called Buddha-*dhamma*, you see, because Buddhism, the word Buddhist centres us too much upon the personage of the Buddha. Whereas in fact that's not the way the Buddha saw himself. The Buddha said, "Who sees the Dhamma sees me," see.

So when we take refuge in the Dhamma, it is taking refuge in these two factors, both the theory and the practice. And then finally it's the Sangha. So the Sangha is all those people, traditionally all those people who've experienced *Nibbāna*. So they stand as witness to the Buddha's own experience. And that's the real refuge.

But of course it can open out, and these days in the West the word Sangha, which is normally restricted to the ordained Sangha, is used to mean any Buddhist community. And I think the reason for that is that there doesn't seem to be a word whereby Buddhists can refer to themselves. So when you refer to yourself, to your group, you might say well this is the Gaia Sangha. And I think that's where, in a country which is all Buddhist you don't have to do that, everybody is Buddhist. But here in the West where every religion under the sun can be found, then there has to be some way in which people who are committed to the Buddha-*dhamma* refer to themselves. And the word that's been chosen is Sangha, which means community.

When the Buddha, when he's dying or towards the end of his life, he says that he's happy that he's been able to establish the four assemblies. That's how it's translated. It's a slightly different word, the four assemblies. The monks and nuns, the lay women and the lay men. And he talks about them as being four assemblies. He doesn't use the word Sangha there, you see. But we, you know, I don't see any problem at all in when we take refuge in the Sangha, we take refuge in, in a restricted sense, of those people who've been fully liberated because they are again our exemplars. But they're also all those people who are practicing with us. And all those people in a sense who are practicing spiritually, they're all part of our support system.

People often say, "Well, it must, you know, it's difficult being a lay person and practicing." Well that's because of the fragmented nature of our society and its enormous restlessness. If you think of say Islam, if you were a Muslim and you went to somewhere like Saudi Arabia and right there at the prayer time, right there when you're having your, if they cos a coffee I presume it's in Saudi Arabia, I can't imagine it not being in Saudi Arabia, and you suddenly stop everything and bow towards Mecca, nobody would bat an eyelid, you know. That's what you do.

Now, if you did that in Britain, you know, you'd probably get locked away or something, you know, you'd sort of carry away. If you, you know, we live in that sort of society where spiritual practice is seen as sort of, well, it's your own thing, it's your own thing, you know, and you keep it to yourself. And generally speaking, it's a bit odd, a bit off, you know. It's all right if you're one of the regular ones, you know. But like, you know, even to the point where people can't wear their insignia, it's become sort of peculiar. You remember that nurse who had to take the crucifix? The stewardess, yeah, I mean, it just becomes, in a sense, pathetic, really, because of this inability, really, to see a spiritual path. You know, it's just one of those things. Everybody's afraid of, you know, fundamentalism and how wild it can get.

So that's this taking of refuges and the precepts, of course, we discussed earlier. So now if it occurs to you that you'd like to do that, what I do, what I suggest, is that you take it for a time. So one year, you see, and if you act according to your commitment, at the end of that one year you can see whether it's been of benefit to you. So that's up to you. Some people take it for life. They've already got that feeling about that commitment. I'd been working with Zen Buddhism only for about a year and a half and I just knew this was the answer to my problem. So I ordained very early on really up at Throssel Hole Abbey there. The Jukai ceremony takes five days for heaven's sakes. By the end of it you definitely know you've committed yourself. This is just a 15 minute ceremony. And if you do, if you think well you might want to take it for a year or for longer, five years, it doesn't really matter.

It's nice to take a name. It's nice to choose a virtue which you'd like, you know, particularly to develop. And if you give me that word I'll find the *dhamma* equivalent and that becomes as it were your little secret spiritual name, you see, which you mustn't use as a password except on *dhamma* sites.

So that's it. So there's plenty of time tomorrow for you to consider this. And if you want to, you're very welcome. So on the Sunday after breakfast, 9:30, we'll gather here. And it's done in a repetition way, not like we do in the morning where we all chant. It's as though I'm handing you the tradition. So I chant and then you chant, you see. And then after that I'll explain it more on the day, but that's the main part of the ceremony.

I hope I've given you an overall general view of the Buddha's teaching when it comes to how to live and that there is maybe a time in your life when you want to just commit yourself to it. So you just stop all the maybes and ifs and all that and just see if it works for you.

Those of you who did it last year, for instance, if you want to recommit, that's also possible. And you can also change your name. Even we can change our names. There was a monk who was named after one of the early disciples of the Buddha who'd been one of his companions. And it was rather unfortunate in English. He was Dutch himself. The word was Whopper. So in time he had that changed to *Jñana Tusita*, which means the heavenly realm of knowledge. Yeah, it was rather funny that.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and I trust that you will continue your practice and deepen your insights and arrive at that wonderful place of liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 53

Guided Mettā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 28 min

> *This guided mettā bhāvanā session offers a complete practice of developing loving-kindness, one of the four brahmavihāras (divine abodes). Bhante Bodhidhamma leads practitioners through the traditional sequence: beginning with a loved one, extending to family and friends, turning mettā toward oneself, and radiating goodwill progressively outward to all beings everywhere.*
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> *The session includes the beautiful chanting of the Karaṇīyamettā Sutta (Discourse on Loving-Kindness) from the Sutta Nipāta, followed by practical forgiveness work - both seeking forgiveness from those we have hurt and offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Bhante emphasizes that mettā practice is primarily about cultivating the right attitude of goodwill rather than generating particular emotional states.*
>
> *The guidance incorporates the 'four great efforts' from Right Effort, encouraging practitioners to abandon unwholesome mental states and cultivate beneficial qualities. This comprehensive approach makes mettā practice not just a meditation technique but a foundation for ethical living and spiritual development, ultimately pointing toward the peace and bliss of Nibbāna.*

Mettā bhāvanā, developing goodwill. Don't be concerned if during the exercise loving feelings don't arise. Here we're concerned with attitude, developing an attitude of goodwill, *mettā*. If pleasant emotions do arise, all well and good. If not, the exercise is still working for us and eventually the heart will respond. Remember you can stop the tape any time and develop a part of it further. So make sure you're now sitting in a comfortable position and feel free to move. So long as you move slowly, it won't disturb your concentration.

So let's begin. Bring to mind someone you have a warm regard for, not connected to erotically or romantically. An old friend, friend of the family, and so on. Offer them some worldly blessings—good health, long life, prosperity, whatever's appropriate—and we can offer them some spiritual blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill-will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Allowing those images to fade away, sensing that goodwill in our hearts, bring to mind all those who are near and dear to us, offering them worldly blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Allowing those images to fade away, bring to mind friends, people at work, whomever we wish, offering them worldly blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Allowing those images to fade away and turning the stream of compassion inward towards ourselves, let's offer ourselves some worldly blessings.

May I be free of greed and selfishness. May I be free of hatred and ill will. May I be free of fear and anxiety. May I be free of ignorance and delusion. May I be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May I be forgiving and compassionate. May I be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May I be peaceful and calm. May I be liberated of all my sufferings. May I experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Having generated now this goodwill within our hearts, let's begin to radiate it outwards. First of all, to those immediate to us, in our household, in our group, offering everyone worldly blessings.

May we be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May we be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May we be forgiving and compassionate. May we be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May we be peaceful and calm. May we be liberated of all our sufferings. May we experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Continuing to radiate it outwards till we've covered the whole of our area or town or city, offering everyone—the good and bad alike—worldly blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Continuing to radiate it outwards till we've covered the whole of our country, offering everyone worldly blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Continuing to radiate it outwards till we've covered the whole of the earth, offering everyone worldly blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Pausing for a while to consider those areas where there's war, destitution, oppression.

And now, choosing a phrase which most expresses whatever quality we wish to develop, be it love, compassion, joy or just peacefulness—a phrase such as "may all beings be happy"—gently repeating it in our hearts and offering it to all beings, to all beings before us and behind us, to the left, to the right, below and above and all around.

I shall chant the Discourse on Loving Kindness:

Kāraṇīyam attha-kusalena yantaṁ santaṁ padaṁ abhisamecca, sakko ujū ca sūjū ca, suvaco c'assa mudu anatimānī. Santussako ca subharo ca, appakicco ca sallahuka-vutti, santindriyocca nipako ca, appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho. Na ca khuddaṁ samācare kiñci yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṁ. Sukhino vā khemino hontu, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.

Ye keci pāṇabhūtatthi, tasā vā thāvarā vānavasesā, dīghā vā ye mahantā vā, majjhimā rassakā aṇuka-thūlā. Diṭṭhā vā ye ca adiṭṭhā, ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre, bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.

Na paro paraṁ nikubbetha, nātimaññetha katthaci naṁ kiñci. Byārosanā paṭighas-aññā, nāññamaññassa dukkhaṁ iccheyya. Mātā yathā niyaṁ puttaṁ, āyusā ekaputtam anurakkhe, evaṁ pi sabbabhūtesu, mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇaṁ.

Mettañca sabba-lokasmiṁ, mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇaṁ. Uddhaṁ adho ca tiriy-añca, asambādhaṁ averaṁ asapattaṁ. Tiṭṭhaṁ caraṁ nisinno vā, sayāno vā yāvat'assa vigata-middho, etaṁ satiṁ adhiṭṭheyya, brahmam etaṁ vihāram idham āhu.

Diṭṭhiñca anupagamma, sīlavā dassanena sampanno, kāmesu vineyya gedhaṁ, na hi jātu gabbha-seyyaṁ punar eti'ti.

Having established this goodwill, a heart of openness, generosity, compassion, let us now work with that area of forgiveness.

First, bring to mind someone we have hurt, and as the incident comes to mind, the attendant emotions will arise—perhaps a feeling of self-righteousness, or a feeling of shame, guilt, remorse, whatever. As those emotions arise, we will have a reaction to them. We'll want to indulge our self-righteousness and we'll not want to feel or experience our sense of remorse or guilt.

So, using that memory to contact these emotions and being wary not to allow the memory to shoot off into fantasy, but just to contact emotions, let those emotions arise, and let's see how we relate to them. Just working with that little vicious circle: the memory, the attendant emotions, and how we relate to those emotions. Can we see how we cause suffering for ourselves? Can we acknowledge these attitudes and emotions as unskillful, unwholesome, negative, life destructive, not life enhancing? Undermining our capacity to love, to relate, leading only to more suffering, not the end of it.

And the antidote, of course, is to ask for forgiveness—arising out of a sense of remorse, a desire to be reconciled, a desire to put right what we did wrong, a desire to compensate.

Bringing that person to mind, let's talk about the situation with them and ask them to forgive us. Whatever harm I have done to you, in thought, word and deed, by way of greed, hatred and delusion, intentionally or unintentionally, please forgive me.

Perhaps you can see a change in them, a desire in them to forgive, to become reconciled. Can you accept their hand of friendship? Can you accept their forgiveness? Can we forgive ourselves?

Let's offer them some worldly blessings.

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

So, allowing that image to fade away, sensing that goodwill in our hearts, let's bring to mind someone who has hurt us. And again, using that memory to contact feelings, emotions—the feelings of hurt, the feelings of revenge. And again, to see that reaction, how we don't want to feel the hurt, how we want to indulge our sense of revenge. Just working with that little vicious circle: the memory, the attendant emotions, and our reaction to those emotions, being careful not to spin off into fantasy.

Can we see how we cause suffering for ourselves? Can we acknowledge these attitudes and emotions as unskillful, unwholesome, negative, life-destructive, not life-enhancing, undermining our capacity to love, to relate, leading only to more suffering, not the end of it?

And the antidote, of course, is to forgive. Remembering that to forgive is not to forget, it's not to excuse, it's not to condone. It's simply a change of attitude, away from revenge and hurt, towards understanding and compassion. Driven always by a desire to be reconciled.

Let us bring that person to mind, talk about the event and offer them our forgiveness. Whatever harm you have done to me, in thought, word and deed, by way of greed, hatred and delusion, intentionally or unintentionally, I forgive you.

Perhaps we can see a change in them, a feeling of relief, a desire to be reconciled. Can we offer them a hand of friendship and with it worldly blessings?

May you be free of greed and selfishness, hatred and ill-will, fear and anxiety, ignorance and delusion. May you be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May you be forgiving and compassionate. May you be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May you be peaceful and calm. May you be liberated of all your sufferings. May you experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Allowing that image to fade away.

And now we've completed two of the four great efforts to develop what is beautiful in us and to get rid of what is ugly within us. The next two are to prevent further ugliness and to develop virtues which are not developed.

So first, let us recognize a certain trait, unskillful, unwholesome within us, which we don't want to develop. Using the four affirmations: I can, I am able to resist its temptation. I ought to, for my own benefit and the benefit of others. I want to, and I will. Can, ought, want, will. And let us make a resolution that should ever a temptation arise, we will be resolute not to fall to it.

Sometimes there's a trait within us, a virtue which is not fully developed. Sometimes we see a virtue in another which we would like for ourselves. Again, using the four affirmations: I can, I am able to develop that virtue. I ought to, for my own benefit and the benefit of others. I want to, and I will. And let us make a resolve that should an occasion offer itself, we will practice that virtue.

So again, let us turn that stream of compassion inwards and offer ourselves again some worldly blessings.

May I be free of greed and selfishness. May I be free of hatred and ill will. May I be free of fear and anxiety. May I be free of ignorance and delusion. May I be kind and gentle, sympathetic and benevolent. May I be forgiving and compassionate. May I be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May I be peaceful and calm. May I be liberated of all my sufferings. May I experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

And so finally, let us offer our goodwill once more to all beings in all directions.

May all beings be free of physical pain. May all beings be free of mental distress. May all beings be liberated of all their sufferings. May all beings live in contentment and joy. May all beings live together in peace and harmony. May all beings experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hantu. Sabbe sattā sukhitā hantu. Sabbe sattā sukhitā hantu.

CHAPTER 54

Guided Bodycare

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 29 min

> *This guided meditation practice by Bhante Bodhidhamma explores developing a skillful relationship with our physical form through mettā (loving-kindness) directed toward the body. The session begins by examining our wrong relationship with the body—our tendency to identify with it as 'self' or possess it as 'mine'—and works to undermine these attachments through contemplation of bodily aspects we find disgusting, ugly, or pleasurable.*
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> *The practice incorporates the Buddha's three contemplations that inspired his spiritual search: reflecting on the body's inevitable subjection to disease, aging, and death. These reflections help break our obsession with health, youth, and life itself. After acknowledging past harm done to the body through neglect or abuse, practitioners offer heartfelt apology and cultivate genuine care.*
>
> *The guided meditation systematically moves through the entire body from head to toe, offering blessings and healing intentions to each part. Drawing from Tibetan Medicine Buddha visualization, the practice concludes with imagining golden healing light descending and filling the body, then extending these blessings to all beings. This practice transforms our relationship with embodiment from attachment and aversion to wise appreciation and compassionate care.*

Body care. Offering *mettā*, goodwill, loving-kindness to the body. Remember you can stop the tape any time to develop a particular section.

First we need to undermine the wrong relationship we have to the body. We think it to be me or mine. As we weaken this identity and possession, so we can develop a more wholesome, skillful relationship.

Working first with possession. We hold on to what we like, we discard, we don't look at what we dislike. Bringing to mind a part of the body that disgusts us to some extent, here's some of the Buddha's own list. Faeces, bile, pus, blood, sweat, fat, urine. Choose something, something to get in touch with, to feel that disgust.

Now change your perspective and see it from a biological point of view. Perhaps your feelings are changing to equanimity, even interest.

Now take a part of the body you dislike because it's ugly. Too thin, too fat, too long, too short, so on. Again, get in touch with that feeling of dislike. Beauty and ugliness come from the judgmental mind. Can't things be just okay as they are? See if you can turn towards those parts with the heart of acceptance.

Finally, there are those parts that bring us great pleasure. Take any of the five senses, for instance. Consider now suffering from an impairment or loss of one of them, say hearing or sight. As we know from people with disabilities, it doesn't mean we couldn't live equally fulfilling lives. So we can see that such suffering comes from attachment.

Now let us work a little with the delusion of identity. Here we can use the three contemplations that awoke the Buddha-to-be to his search for the end of suffering. Repeating each phrase in the heart and accepting its truth value.

First, to undermine our obsession and intoxication with health. This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness.

Now to undermine our obsession and intoxication with youthfulness. This body is subject to aging. This body has not gone beyond aging. This body is now in a process of aging.

And now to undermine our obsession and intoxication with life itself. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

Having undermined to some extent the wrong relationship we have to the body, we can now develop a right relationship. The Buddha said this was a precious rebirth. Here we experience joy and woe and we have the intelligence to rise above them.

Firstly, we can't be here without a body. It's as simple as that. Secondly, it's through the senses that we experience the world and learn. Thirdly, it's through the body we relate, communicate and express ourselves. And finally, in this tradition, it's through the very breath of the body that we can develop the spiritual faculties.

Once we realise how precious the body really is, we can't but want to care for it. Now, we haven't done so in the past, so before we can offer it, loving kindness, let us apologise for all the rough times we've given it and perhaps are still giving it.

Whatever harm I have done to you in thought, word and deed, by way of greed, hatred and delusion, intentionally or unintentionally, I'm heartily sorry for it, and I determine from this day on to treat you with due care and respect.

So now we can begin to offer our blessings to the body. Choose a phrase which expresses for you healing or well-being. Place it in the heart and offer that blessing to the whole body. Now it may be that you see light or feel heat, all well and good, but there's no need for such manifestations as such. What is working for us is our acts of will, our intentioned intentions.

So now let's take our time and go through the whole body from the top of the head to the tip of the toes. Starting at the hair and scalp, offer your blessings there. Come down into the brain and fill it with loving-kindness. Bless your eyes and your ears. Bless your nose and nasal cavities. Bless your mouth with its tongue, teeth, lips. The jaw. Pour your blessing into your throat, the precious voice box, so that the whole head feels warmed and energised. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Turning our attention now to the top of the spine and make your way down, offering each vertebrae your blessing. Come down the neck, down the back, down the small of the back, down to the very tip, so the whole spine feels warmed and energized. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Starting at the left shoulder, massage it with loving kindness. And make your way down towards the elbow. Down towards the wrist. And into the hand. Massage your hand with warm loving kindness. So the whole arm feels warmed and energized. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Moving to the right shoulder. Again, massage it with loving kindness. Making our way down to the elbow. Down to the wrist, and into the hand. Massage your hand with warm, loving kindness. So the whole arm feels warmed and energized. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Turning our attention now to the chest area. Now you can either offer your blessings to particular organs or you can just fill that felt space with loving-kindness. So the whole chest feels warmed and energized. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Moving down to the midriff, the stomach area. Again, fill that area with warm, loving kindness. So the whole area feels warmed and energized. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Moving down into the abdomen with all its varied systems. Offer your blessings there. Fill that area with warm, loving kindness. Though the whole area feels warmed and energized, may you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Moving to the left hip. Massage it with loving-kindness, making our way down to the knee and down to the ankle and down to the foot. Massage your foot with warm, loving kindness. So the whole leg feels warmed and energized. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

Moving to the right hip. Offer your blessing there. And making your way down to the knee. And down to the ankle. And into the foot. Massage your foot with warm loving kindness. So the whole leg feels warmed and energised. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong.

So now we fill the whole body with warm blessings. Now perhaps there's a part of the body that needs special attention. Go there now and spend a while filling that area with goodwill, loving-kindness.

So now it's time to open ourselves up to whatever source of energy there is in the universe, using a method taken from the Tibetan tradition of the Medicine Buddha. Imagine there's a golden light descending upon you from above. Remember, any colour will do, which you feel is healing or energizing. And as it pours down, it begins to form a ball just above your head. Don't worry if the image is not strong.

Let it pour down until the ball takes on the feel of warm water, the consistency of warm water, and it slowly begins to rotate on itself. Still pouring down from above, the ball gets heavier, and we can begin to feel it upon our scalps.

Let it slowly descend down through the scalp, gently rotating, feeling it over the forehead and the back of the head, descending into the brain, filling it with that warm, vibrant energy. Feel it enter into our eyes, and ears. Feel its energy and warmth entering into your nose and nasal cavities. Slowly, gently rotating. Still pouring down from above. And we can feel its energy now entering into our mouths. Filling our mouths with its warm golden energy. Down into the jaw. Still pouring in from above, the ball gently rotating. And we can feel its warm, golden, vibrant energy filling our throats. The whole head is now this golden ball, gently rotating, full of energy, warmth.

Still pouring down from above, we can feel it beginning to spread over our shoulders and continuing to rotate, gently sinking into our chest, deep into our arms, deep into our chests, filling that whole area with warm golden delight.

And it's still pouring down from above, down through the head, down the throat, into this ball gently rotating around our chest. And it continues downward, filling the rest of our arms, down to the elbows, filling that whole midriff, the stomach, that whole area, filling it with this warm golden delight.

Still pouring down from above, down through the head, down the arms, down the throat, down the chest, into this ball, gently rotating around our stomach. And it continues to go downwards, gently turning, filling the whole abdomen with its warm, golden delight.

Still pouring down from above, down through the head, down the throat, down the arms, down the chest, through the stomach into this ball, gently rotating around the abdomen. And we feel it descending, filling our hands, filling our hips, gently filling those areas with warm, vibrant, golden energy, spiralling downwards, slowly. We can feel it entering our knees, downwards until we can feel it around our feet. Filling our feet with its warm golden energy.

Still pouring in from above. Down through the head, down the throat, down the arms. Down through the chest, through the stomach, into the abdomen, down through the hips and legs, into this ball, gently rotating around our feet.

So now we can use this energy. With the in-breath, draw that energy, with our own energy, up the spine to the top of the head. And there, let it join with all that energy still pouring down from above. And with the out-breath, let it all cascade down the body. Just breathing in and up, breathing out and down. Just breathing in and breathing out. And if there's a part of the body that needs special attention, let it pass through that part like water through a sponge.

So now we can share this energy with individuals by bringing people to mind and offering them our blessings.

And finally, we can offer our blessings to all beings in all directions. Just breathing in, into the heart and breathing out to all beings.

May all beings be free of physical pain. May all beings be free of mental distress. May all beings be liberated of all their suffering. May all beings be well and strong. May all beings treat their bodies wisely. May all beings strive diligently for their liberation. May all beings experience the peace and bliss of Nibbāna.

Sābe satā sukhitā hantu. Sābe satā sukhitā hantu. Sābe satā sukhitā hantu.

CHAPTER 55

Developing the Factors of Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma provides detailed guidance on cultivating the seven bojjhaṅgas (factors of awakening) through vipassanā meditation practice. He leads practitioners through a step-by-step meditation exercise, demonstrating how each factor—sati (awareness), dhammavicaya (investigation of dharma), vīriya (energy), pīti (joy), passaddhi (tranquillity), samādhi (concentration), and upekkhā (equanimity)—naturally supports the others when properly established.*
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> *The talk emphasizes that these factors are not special qualities reserved for advanced practitioners, but natural human capacities that can be developed through gentle, sustained effort. Bhante explains how negative mental patterns like depression are cultivated through repetition, and similarly, positive spiritual faculties can be strengthened through mindful practice. He distinguishes between mental states (citta) and levels of consciousness, showing how vipassanā creates an observational stance that prevents identification with passing phenomena.*
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> *Drawing from the Buddha's core insight that delusion lies within our way of seeing rather than in thoughts or emotions themselves, Bhante guides practitioners to investigate the three characteristics of existence directly. The teaching concludes with practical advice on maintaining these factors during daily life, emphasizing that true achievement in meditation is simply being aware in the present moment.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah

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

So make sure that you're comfortable. Always begin your meditation by creating at least that physical comfort. Begin by making sure your basic posture is comfortable and then lifting up that spine without any tension. Then just begin to physically relax around it. Pass your attention over your forehead, your jaw, your shoulders, and just feel that relaxation coming.

If there's any spots that are tense, like the shoulders, give them a squeeze. Or if you feel a lot of tension in the face, give it a squeeze. Screw it up and let it go. Sometimes a deep breath, holding it for a little while and just letting it go.

Now as you scan your body, as you feel the whole of your body, you may just feel the calmness there. So that calmness is *passaddhi*. It's one of the qualities, one of the factors of enlightenment. It can become quite delicious, that sense of calm.

So having established that at a basic physical level, we can now just bring the attention to the breath, becoming aware of the sensations of the breath. Now you can do it at the nostrils, but with this sort of exercise, you can contact the abdomen, just the rising and falling of the abdomen, just the sensations there. Just get in touch with them, feel them, experience them as if you were feeling cloth.

What you're bringing to that is just awareness, which is the leading factor of enlightenment. As you begin to become aware of those sensations, those gentle feelings, calm *passaddhi* feelings, calm feelings, the rising and falling of the abdomen, use a little noting word just to keep the mind steady: rising, falling. If there's a gap after that outbreath, feel a touch point like your hands: rising, falling, touching.

As you contact these sensations, these feelings, as it were, go closer to it. Get the feeling of focusing in. It's a gentle thing. If you're knitting your brow and forcing it, then that's putting any pressure. You're just looking and you're focusing. It's like you're looking at a countryside in the distance, you see something, and suddenly your eyes stop and focus in on that object. Get that feeling of focusing down into the breath.

That's the concentration, and all the effort you need is just to keep that focus in and hold it there. In the old cameras you had to turn the lens to focus it; now it's done by electric motor. So the effort, the gentle effort, just focusing in on the object are two factors of enlightenment. As you focus in on the object, other things begin to fade into the distance, as it were. You become less aware of sounds, other feelings in the body. All this is a sign that you're beginning to focus in, to concentrate on the object.

You can see it's very much a relaxation, just drawing your attention more and more particularly into the sensations and feelings caused by the breath. So now we have a general calmness and awareness. We know what's going on. We can see, feel, experience the breath. There's a general focusing down and an energy to support it.

Now we bring in the factor of investigating the dhamma, which means that we don't just focus on the feelings and sensations, but on the quality of impermanence, transience, change, process. Become aware of that now. This is the quality of investigating the dhamma. Now this is supported by the quality of equanimity, which means that we're not coming from a fixed position, some expectation, some idea. We actually want to experience the arising and passing away, first of all, of the gross long breath: the beginning and the end of the in-breath, the beginning and the end of the out-breath.

We can say, yes, the in-breath begins and ends. The out-breath begins and ends. Very simple. As we draw our attention to that, you might feel a sort of joy, a sort of delicate energy in the body, and that's the interest. Now we've raised that wanting to know, a childlike curiosity. Am I really seeing things as they really are? Or am I just seeing a concept in the mind, an image in the mind?

So hopefully now you're actually moving towards pure *vipassanā*: awareness, focusing and effort to keep us there. Calmness of the body and the joy of interest. Equanimity, not coming from a fixed position, investigating the quality of impermanence.

As you observe the breath, you might notice that there's an image in the mind of the abdomen rising and falling. There's even an idea that something is rising and falling. These are mental concepts, mental constructs. Focus in more deeply into just the sensations.

That brings us to the end of our little exercise. You see you can talk yourself into that. Going through these qualities, remember that all of this rests upon a quality of trust, a quality of faith, *saddhā*, which is a spiritual faculty. We wouldn't be here if we didn't have that initial confidence.

When that confidence goes, for instance, the usual loss of confidence is in oneself: everybody else can do it but not me. When you get that wavering, that doubt in the mind about one's own capacity, that's when you have to remind yourself that these qualities are natural to all human beings and just there within us. It's not as though they are special qualities to somebody who's a Buddha or who's already spiritually advanced.

Once a child's over the age of seven, you can talk them into this sort of state. It's easy, any time before puberty. After that it gets very complicated. So these qualities are just to be developed, just like any other mental quality that we have.

We're very good at developing the negative qualities. We've learned how to do that very well. So you feel, you start whingeing, and you know how to do that. You whinge. You know that sound with the whinge, and you just develop it. At the end you become a whinger. If you look at all these qualities that we've developed which are negative, all the irritations, same with depression. You feel a bit depressed, so you say to yourself, "I'm depressed." Then you go around saying, "It's really depressing. Everything's depressing." Then you start saying, subtly underneath it all is, "I am a depressive. May I be depressed?" Then you want to spread that out. "May all beings be depressed." Then you feel you're in communion. You look for other depressives.

I once went to a Depressives Anonymous. A bit sad, really. They're all sat around in this circle, and the leader said, "Like everybody who'd like to just speak out," in one of these counselling sessions. "How do you feel?" So everybody told everybody else how depressed they were. Everybody said, "Yeah, really depressing." I was getting depressed.

There was one fellow who said he'd had a fantastic week. You could see he was on a high, he was manic. He was lifting himself up. So everybody was looking at him. Then there was this lovely moment where the leader of the group said, "Well, I've had a very good week, and I was doing very well and I was keeping high. It's all the experience of talking yourself into this high. Then I tripped over a pavement. So I wrote to the council and said, 'I've just tripped over your pavement and I've hurt myself, and I asked for compensation.' Well, they wrote back and said that there was no compensation for that. So I felt really angry about that. And now I'm depressed." It's amazing. I was out there thinking, hmm.

At the end of it, I gave this talk on how we make ourselves depressed. It was funny. I said, "Well, I teach over in North London there at the Bihar." Of the twenty-odd people that were in the room, maybe seven or eight came over to see me, and they all determined that they'd come over and learn this meditation so they wouldn't get so depressed. Well, they never turned up. I just presumed they got so depressed they couldn't come and see me.

I left that meeting feeling very sad, because they were obviously trying to help themselves. There was nothing immoral or wrong about it. It just hadn't clicked. They just hadn't understood how they were continuously recreating the same old scenes and just driving themselves deeper and deeper into depression. Anyway, after a while, I heard that they must have gotten really depressed because the money ran out and they had to stop the meetings. It's very unfortunate. Very depressing.

Here you can see that through practices like *mettā*, you can develop quite the opposite. Now, if you develop *mettā*, that's loving-kindness, compassion, all those sorts of things, but you don't develop the *vipassanā*, then you're laying over the top of your mind like a manic. You're laying over it this sort of icing, like an icing on top of dung. When it cracks, all this stuff comes pouring out. It's very depressing.

Here, in the *vipassanā*, we're actually trying to create a level of consciousness. Don't confuse that with a mental state. I'm using mental state to mean a general state. So the physical feelings, for instance, that go with depression, the heart state, the depression in the heart, and the thoughts that go with that depression - all that I'm calling a mental state. This is, in the Pali, for those of you who know, that's *citta*. That's the mental state.

Now, to associate with that, to identify with that, to go around saying "I am depressed," is a level of consciousness. Because there, you believe yourself to be that state. So there's no separation between me and that. "I am depressed." It's there in the sentence. The "I" and the depression are one and the same thing.

What we're doing in our meditation is we have the same feelings as anybody who's depressed. You've got the sensations, you've got the heart feelings, and you've got the mental thinking that goes with it. But now you're observing it. You become an observer of your own inner state. So you must have pulled yourself out of that. You no longer identify with it. You no longer say "I am depressed." You're saying "there's depression." That's it. Can you see that's a very different way of relating to ourselves? It's a different level of consciousness, and the image I gave you this morning of a cone: on top of the cone looking down on this vicious circle.

What we discover is that we can develop beautiful mental states. We do that with pleasurable things like ice cream and stuff. But here, when we develop these states, they're dependent on something within ourselves. So they're not dependent on something outside. The weather can be awful. There can be no ice cream. There can be no tea. And yet you can develop these beautiful mental states just by this inner exercise.

All you have to do is just keep gently pushing yourself. Just gently. When I say push, it's against the grain. The grain wants you to fall asleep, get tired, go to bed, take a walk, jump up and down, beans on toast. When you go against that, it feels like you don't want to do it. But as you keep doing it and these beautiful feelings start arising - the calmness, sense of joy, the wanting to know - then all your energy begins to move that way. Very slowly these factors of enlightenment are becoming developed.

The Buddha says they have to be developed to perfection. The perfection is when you start having insights. When it comes to all the negative stuff, these five hindrances that we've mentioned - the greed, the hatred, all that sort of stuff - you have to see how they arise and how they pass away, and how they are not maintained. You've got to see that process. That's the *vipassanā*, when you're doing insight on these negative states that are arising.

On the other side, you've got to see: now this is a spiritual faculty, this is a factor of enlightenment, this has to be developed. So the acuteness of my awareness, the sense of one-pointedness in the mind that we call concentration - that word concentration is unfortunate for us because it goes back to school and people giving us cuffs on the back of the head and told to concentrate. But actually, when you're interested in something, when you're really interested in something, have you ever had any problems with concentration?

It's raising that interest, that wanting to know, and immediately you get that focus. Immediately you get the mind coming into *ekaggatā*. *Ekaggatā* means going one way. It's not coming here and there. One-pointed is probably a much better word for us than concentration. A one-pointed attention.

It all begins with this factor of *sati*, this awareness, which is essentially the Buddha mind. It's essentially that Buddha nature within us. *Sati*. It knows. There is this knowing. Its quality is knowing. In English we have this facility of making a verb into a noun. So there is the knowing. If you say consciousness, it blocks it into an object. Whereas if you think of knowing or the awakening, it gives you the sense of process. It gives you a sense that it's not something, it's a faculty, it's an ability.

There's this knowing, *sati*, awareness. They've got all these other words for it: mindfulness, being in the moment, being now, being here, all that sort of stuff. But its quality is it knows.

As you place your awareness on the breath, so you always begin with that to create these faculties. As you put your awareness on the breath, there is that raising of interest. I've done it slightly different, but you can do it another way. You can raise the interest by saying, "Oh, let's see this. What is this?" You can drop a question in there. "What is this? Who am I?" It doesn't matter, but you don't think about it. You just stay in that emptiness after the question. "What is this?" And then you look.

As you focus down, as you become focused down, all the peripheral stuff begins to fade away. So you can become centred on the breath, and you don't hear anything. Then suddenly somebody coughs, and you can be shocked out of your meditation. You might want to kill the person, but that's a good sign to you that you were fairly concentrated. There'll even come a point where you're so concentrated, somebody coughs, fires a gun, and you won't hear it. Because you've brought yourself down into this singularity.

That's an effort. That's all the effort you need to become awakened. Just that. Just that of looking. Just like in the body, all the effort you need is just to keep the spine erect. You can get away with just breakfast. If you just have breakfast and meditate all day, within seven years - the effort needed is a very gentle effort.

If there's any force comes in, if you feel that forcing, something's getting in there. You're trying to see. As soon as the trying to see comes in, there's the "I." It's looking for something. As soon as you know that, as soon as you get the tightness - you stay with

the body, you can feel the tightness coming - then you know, stop. Wanting to see something. That's not like you're looking for something. What we should be doing is just looking at.

Have faith. Have faith that if you look at something, there will be a seeing. This is the Buddha. He says, first of all, just look at something, and the insight arises naturally. For instance, if your car breaks down and you open the bonnet, first you look, don't you? If you go to the bonnet with preconceived ideas as to what's happened, then you can be looking for a long time. But a trained mechanic, they know what they're looking for. They open the bonnet and they see. Same with the doctor.

It's a case of training ourselves to see these three characteristics. With something neutral like the breath, it's always the sense of transience. Always the sense of something arising and passing away. It can also be the sense of that distance, not me, not mine, that you can get. But remember that that's only a first position. Once you've created that objective stance, you go towards the object, investigate it. So that concentration is better developed when you draw up the interest of wanting to know.

And you'll see there's a natural focusing in on the object. And just that effort of wanting to know—that's enough. You don't have to go beyond that.

Now, as you do that, this is supported by the calmness in the body. So that calmness in the body is balancing the joy that's coming from the interest. Sometimes you might, if the calmness goes a bit too far, then that's when you begin to get feelings of heaviness, sloth, torpor. There's too much of it. So when you feel that, you just lift the spine, correct your posture, and just raise the interest. So the interest will raise the energy of wanting to know. If you start looking for something, so the interest overreaches itself, then you find yourself getting restless. So all these are little pointers to what's happening within us. So it's that sense of general awareness and then being aware of anything that's happening and then slowly just moving towards the object.

Now, we've been primed and this is where the faith comes in. What we've understood from the Buddha's teaching is that the delusion lies within the looking. It doesn't lie within thought. The thought is only an expression of our delusion. It doesn't lie within the emotional life. That's only an expression of our delusion. The delusion lies deep within that which is looking. It can't see properly. There's a kink in the way it sees things. And what the Buddha points out is that this manifests in these three characteristics.

So where there is real radical impermanence we have a sense of continuous time. But actually there's no such thing as time in any continuous sense. Time is just the way the mind relates events or experiences a sequence of moments. How long is a moment in time? Is it as long as the word "time"? It's a bit longer than "time." How long do you experience an actual piece of time for? Interesting, isn't it? But at some point we lose the present. It suddenly becomes the past. But this present is long enough for us to believe that it's the same person moving through time. We've got this idea that there's time like a tunnel or something like that, and we're moving through it. So the past somehow exists in a way, and the future exists because we're going towards it. But actually, nothing in any essence exists.

When you get down to the actual moment as it arises and passes away it's just a sudden coagulation of energy and it dissipates—it's gone. That's why when you keep watching the breath eventually you'll get down to a point where there's no breath. All there is is a sequence of arising and falling away of sensations, which is frightening. Because before, you thought you existed. And this existence was based on your experience of your body, and of your emotions and thoughts. So it's beginning to perceive that.

Now, the process is undoing, undermining all our concepts about who we are and what we are. We believe we're human beings. This is a big mistake. If the word "being" means anything beyond the present moment, it's a big mistake. Because at some point, the body of the human being will be as lifeless as a useless log, it says in the scripture. It'll just lie there, totally lifeless. Somebody will pick it up and chuck it in a hole. So, whatever we mean when I say, "I am a human being," and you go into that as an investigation—not much there, is there? Investigating that is to begin to realize that this self that we've constructed is a delusion. It doesn't exist.

So by observing the quality of transience and by observing that quality of "not me, not mine," we're undoing these essential misunderstandings we have. Now, if it were to lead us just to an annihilation, just to the fact that there was nothing there anyway, and that's the end of that, and when you die you disappear, then that would be depressing. But what the Buddha's saying is that as you begin to perceive what you are not, what you truly are becomes more and more obvious to you. So the process is one of negation. It's one of "not me, not mine." Now to do that these spiritual faculties have to be clearly honed. They've got to be nicely developed and you've got to be able to hold that steady gaze within the calmness. Keep the interest going and keep looking at these three qualities.

Now even when the negative stuff comes up, even when the body now begins to shake with restlessness or it begins to feel heavy with tiredness or sloth and torpor, even then you can maintain that same quality of watchfulness. Even then there can be that quality of, as it were, calmness behind what's happening on the surface of the body and the mind. Even then you can maintain an interest. Even in dullness where all it is is just porridge in your head, you can wander about that and be completely awake as if you'd woken up brightly in the morning. Because it's within that awareness to be awake like that. It's only by way of association and habit that it keeps falling into that state of drowsiness and sloth and torpor. By way of habit. By way of, in the past, seeking refuge there. Seeking refuge in the bed. The final haven. When everything goes wrong, go to bed. Just when everything goes bad, you get this little neon sign come up. "Head for the bed." That's it. You dive in and you wake up and you feel better, usually. And all you've done is use sleep to suppress, to push it down. Whatever it was that made you head for the bed.

Now you begin to see all these things. You begin to see how we are moving away from what is unpleasant, moving towards what is pleasant. And that's that psychological vicious circle that we get caught up in. So again, having established this watchfulness, having got these seven faculties developed, we begin to see that. Just the seeing and the understanding is the moment of liberation. It's the moment of liberation in the sense like a moment, "Ah, now I understand." But then, of course, there comes the training. If it were just that, well, I should think in a very short while we'd be all fully awakened. If it were just a matter of seeing these things, I should think we'd be very quickly out of this state.

But the problem is that the conditioning is so heavy and so deep that you have to keep working against it all the time. So here on this retreat, you're moving forward a bit. Then you leave. And you say, "To hell with it," and you go back a bit. This spiritual life is like up and down, up and down. That's why it takes so long to look back and think, "Oh, something might be happening." So that effort has to be kept up even in daily life. Remember, this is not whipping yourself or kicking yourself or forcing yourself. It's a gentle self-cajoling, encouraging yourself.

So, just to revise these seven factors that we've tried to distinguish in our meditation, which you, in every sitting, that's how you should begin. You should begin by trying to establish that state. If you lose it, go back, start again. Bring yourself back to the breath, et cetera, et cetera. When I say lose it, I mean when there's too much thought around. But remember that sometimes the mind is just like that. It goes mad and you just have to have patience and you just keep bringing it back and bringing it back. And remember that you can have these seven factors even though there's a negative mental state

there. You can still see the quality of transience as we've mentioned. The depression, you can still see how you relate to that depression, which is understanding how we create suffering. You can still see that there is depression—not me, not mine.

So these factors of enlightenment, as it were, are sitting behind, or beneath, the presenting quality that's arising in the mind. So the essential quality is this *sati*, this awareness, the knowing. And what empowers us, what empowers the meditation is that sense of interest, the wanting to know. And it's wanting to know something quite specific. It's wanting to know these three characteristics. It's wanting to experience them, to see them very clearly.

And to support that, the body has to support it. So there has to be that stillness. So even though you might feel depressed in the chest, the body can still be quite energized and relaxed. Even though you feel restless, very restless, you can still relax the body around that restlessness. So that quality of what's known as *pīti*—often it's translated as "bliss" I think, which is way over the top. It's just that sense of joy in the body and the calmness of the body balancing each other. And what's driving that is that interest.

And then you're investigating the Dharma. You're investigating these three characteristics. And to investigate that you have to come at it as somebody who doesn't know. You don't know. You've heard this from the Buddha but you don't know. So you've got to keep looking. So you've come from a point of no position. You've not taken a position. You're not saying to yourself, "The Buddha said everything's transient, so it must be right." If the Buddha says everything's transient, "I'm not so sure about that. Let's have a look." So it's a case of that investigation. That equanimity.

And you have to be careful with the sense of achievement. It's a difficult word for us in English because achievement is always something in the future. You're doing something now to achieve something in the next moment, in the next year, by the end of your life, when I'm retired. Achievement is always ahead of time. But if you define your achievement, if you want to use that word, as being aware in this present moment, then that's the achievement. So to be aware is to be there. There's nowhere else to go.

So if you think about achievement in your meditation, don't think about some insight, or where you'll be in ten years' time or something, or what you're going to do, like planning to live in the now. That's a lovely one. Actually, just bring yourself, just say to yourself, "Am I aware?" Yes, well, that's it, that's the achievement—I'm aware. That's it. Once you're aware, you're there. So you keep saying that to yourself. It's a secret mantra. "I'm aware, I must be there. I've done it." And so, get rid of the idea of something achieving in the future time.

So, awareness. And we can actually make things very simple for ourselves. Sometimes, especially for those of you who are more established in your meditation, you can see these faculties, you can do things to balance them. So that's the skills of meditation. But for those of you who are new, and all this sounds very complicated—what, seven of these, ten of those, and five—you can actually put all that aside because the one factor which draws everything into balance is that awareness. And that's the key discovery of the Buddha. Once you place your awareness on something with right intention, to observe the characteristics or to be stilled, then all these faculties just come up to support that awareness.

Now that awareness, you might say, is our intuitive intelligence, but it's in its passive mode. In a passive mode, it's receiving, "to be aware of." And as that information comes in, there's a sudden seeing. So that awareness has an active mode of an intuitive understanding which is known as *paññā*. And you will notice that our trust is called *satipaññā*. *Satipaññā* is the Buddha mind. It's that which is to be liberated, to be awakened, to be enlightened.

So, having said all that, having gone on like this for too long, there is a very simple approach which is just to keep placing the awareness on the object. Just that activity of wanting to feel, experience exactly what's going on now, whether it's the subtle feelings of the breath or the feelings that are associated with a heavy state or a beautiful state, that's enough. Just doing that, and the insights will arise. Remember these insights are not cataclysmic. They're just little incremental points which over a period of time for most people build up to a change in the way we see things. It's a change within consciousness and when that change begins to take place it has a systemic effect. It affects your attitude to things.

So if you see transience, then of course you don't hold on so much. So when you're watching the TV and somebody phones you, you can turn it off right in the middle of a soap. It doesn't matter. Just as he's about to score the goal, you can turn it off and go and answer the phone. Before you couldn't do that. Now you've understood. So it's a case of this change becoming a change of attitude and that immediately expresses itself in the way we speak, in what we do and how we do things. And in our livelihood. People change their livelihood if they meditate sometimes. Because they find themselves in a livelihood which they find doesn't fit with the Dharma. So they make this effort to move over. Change. Even if it means a loss of wealth. A dislocation.

Now, just as that happens that way, outwardly, from understanding into livelihood, remember, it's also coming back the other way. So your livelihood has a great effect on your attitude. It has a great effect on your general understanding. So as you know, if

you're trained as a policeman, you're always suspicious. You have to be. You're trained to be suspicious. Anybody you see, you think, "Hmm." If you're a soldier, you're trained to kill. So your profession—those, of course, are heavy examples. If you're a nurse or a doctor or in a more helping profession, then you're developing that compassion, usually.

So, remember that the whole of the teaching is one composite. It's a mandala. As soon as you affect one part, the whole mandala changes. Something happens. So, I hope that little explanation does clarify for you these factors of enlightenment and how to establish them and to use them in order to gain slowly, just to gain little insights and change our view of things. So I hope that's been a benefit and I can only hope that your liberation is sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 56

Exploring Dukkha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines dukkha - often translated as suffering but more accurately understood as unsatisfactoriness or life being 'a hard place.' He explores the three types of dukkha, beginning with ordinary suffering rooted in wrong view and the psychological cycles that perpetuate our distress.*
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> *Drawing on the Buddha's core teaching, Bhante explains how our meditation practice offers a third way beyond suppression and indulgence - the transcendent position of mindful awareness. Through developing Right Awareness (sammā sati), we learn to objectify our experiences rather than identify with them, discovering the liberating insight of anattā (not-self).*
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> *The talk weaves together practical meditation guidance with profound psychological insights, explaining how we construct our experienced world through mind and how the three characteristics - impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā) - work together to deconstruct our fundamental delusions. Bhante emphasizes that awakening comes through understanding rather than force, offering hope that small tastes of nibbāna are available in daily life through practices like mindful eating and letting go of unnecessary desires.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The Buddha's teaching is a mandala. It doesn't matter at which point you enter it. You end up touching all parts of its petals, and somewhere along the line you touch the base. It's one whole teaching. It makes sense in the whole. Just occasionally I allow myself to wander around and see where it takes me.

So my entrance point is this little word which is central to the Buddha's teaching: *dukkha*. This word *dukkha* has various etymologies put to it, the roots where it comes from. One of the strangest ones, I think — because in those days the early commentators were creative in their etymology; if a word sounded like something else, it must have its root there — is an axle and the rod which goes into the bracket doesn't fit properly. You get that? It's not... you get that crunch. But the one that's most obvious is just a hard space or a hard place.

So what the Buddha is saying is that this life is a hard place. If he had left it at that, we'd have been stuck in the existential horror of just being in a hard place and not being able to make much sense of it. But through his own investigations, he discovered at least the psychological cause for it — the deeper causes, but at least the psychological cause — which we translate slightly badly as desire. And then, of course, the announcement that there is an end to it. There is an end to *dukkha*. It is possible to come to an end to *dukkha*, which is not annihilation, by the way.

So what does he mean by *dukkha*, this word of a hard place? Well, the first one is rather comically called dukkha-dukkha, which means just the suffering of ordinary suffering. I don't think I have to go into that too deeply. That's just the pains in the body, the emotional states we come across. Even these pains in the body are not, strictly speaking, what he's referring to as *dukkha*, although they are unpleasant.

These emotional states that we get into, these mental states, have their root cause in some sort of wrong view. We aren't seeing things properly. We don't have a right perspective. And this perspective causes us to form wrong relationships. That wrong relationship includes within it a whole set of emotional responses which we end up as conditioning. These emotional responses, because we can't find our way out of them, reinforce the original wrong view. So we get caught up in this cycle.

This cycle of going round and round — that's the root meaning of the word kamma. That's what we mean in Buddhism by kamma. It's not, strictly speaking, what happens to you on the outside. You can also call that kamma. But in terms of what we're trying to do, which is come to the end of suffering, this kamma that the Buddha is referring to is these cycles within our own head. These cycles within our own head, of course, are then projected onto the world and we keep recreating similar situations. And through our dullness, we blame the other. It's got to be my parents. I would never have ended up like this were it not for my mother. Comes in for a lot of stick, poor mother. And then there's society, education, educators. Oh my goodness. Everybody has caused me this dreadful suffering.

So this sense of ordinary *dukkha*, this sense of ordinary suffering, has its root cause in some sort of wrong view. We're not seeing things properly. We'll come to that in time. Our meditation is concerned with undermining that whole process. That's what we're doing when we practice vipassanā. Vipassanā is not simply a correction of view — that's its actual main point. But fortunately, as one of the gifts of vipassanā, the purification of the heart takes place of its own. You don't have to do anything to purify the

heart. In fact, if you try to purify your heart, then it's a bit like the blind leading the blind. It's the very deluded part of ourselves which is trying to do something about the effects of its own delusion. And you just end up being in a mess.

So when we're sitting here and this *dukkha*, these mental states arise, what possibilities have you got? What can you do about them? One side, of course, is to suppress it, to turn away from it, turn your attention somewhere else. If you feel lonely, turn the TV on. Easy enough. But it's there, you see. It's a conditioning within the mind. That hasn't been dealt with. So we know that from our own Western psychology. And it sits there, just bubbling away, boiling away, burning, burning. This is the Buddha's old expression of burning.

The only other side is to indulge it. If you indulge loneliness, you get into self-pity. Why me? And that self-pity simply fuels that sense of loneliness more and more. Eventually you end up on Westminster Bridge on Prozac.

So here we are, we're stuck with a feeling of me wanting to do something about myself. As soon as I want to do something about myself, as soon as I want to change myself, I have to engage in this state of mind. This engagement leaves me with two options. I can either suppress it, try to destroy it, kill it, turn away from it, ignore it — or try and do something about it and get involved in it. Both sides, we begin to realize, are actually going to cause more suffering. More suffering.

Through vipassanā, we discover this third position. If you imagine a triangle, and the base is this suppression-indulgence, suppression-indulgence, suppression-indulgence, creating this vicious circle. And at the top of the triangle, or the cone perhaps, the circle of the cone — that's good, I never thought of that. Yeah, that's good. The vicious circle at the base of the cone. That's a good one. And as you climb up the cone, as you lift yourself out of that involvement with what the heart is presenting you, you're discovering a transcendental position. It's transcendent of this game, of this play. It's transcendent.

Because now you're able to discover a place where you're looking at something. You're no longer involved in it. When you shift your consciousness to that point, when you lift yourself up to become the onlooker, the experiencer of what is going on inside you, you've discovered a different level of consciousness. It's not the same as a consciousness which considers itself to be emotional: "I am happy. I am sad." It's not the same as a thought consciousness: "I think, therefore I am." And it's not the same as a body consciousness: "I am this body." It's something which is, shall we say, transcendent of all that.

Discovering a position where it objectifies, it turns into an object, everything that previously in our lives we've experienced as a subject: "This is me." As soon as we do that, you see, we have, as it were, discovered the understanding of *anattā*, this very difficult doctrine of not-self.

Now, when the Buddha talks about not-self, that's not a philosophical or metaphysical position. He's not saying there is no self. If he were in his day to say there is no self, then he would have been in this constant argument with people who said that there were. He didn't have to argue. The *anattā* doctrine, the doctrine of not-self, is just a skillful tool with which whatever you experience — whatever you experience, within yourself or without yourself — can be looked at and you can say, "Well, this is not me. This is not me." Which doesn't deny the fact that there may be something. We'll come to that in a bit. It's just a very skillful tool in which we can say, "Well, this is not me."

That's the purpose of accessing that level of consciousness. Because every time you experience something — a pain in the knee — you can look at it, you can feel it, you can sense it, and because of that distance you've created, because you haven't fallen into the error of suppressing it, turning away from it — "I don't want to feel this" — or indulging it — "Oh, my knee" — all that stuff. Because you're there, just feeling, sensing, experiencing the pain, you see, it's an object. You're looking at it. If it's an object, it can't be the subject. It's as simple as that.

Even though I say it's as simple as that, when the pain gets too heavy, of course, if you feel that your knee is just about to explode, all that lovely doctrine disappears. This not-self business takes us so far, but when it comes to the hard point, then we immediately collapse into the old level of consciousness of being a human being.

Level of consciousness here, not to be confused with a state of mind. What I'm referring — the word in the Pali, for some of you who know, is *citta*. So, a state of mind is, you know, whether you're happy, whether you're sad, the thoughts that go around that, the physical feelings that arise with that. All that, you can say, is a state, a state of mind, you can say.

A level of consciousness is concerned with how we understand things. So one of the obvious leaps of consciousness that happens to the vast majority of human beings happens to us around about the age of seven. Two important things happen to us around about the age of seven. First of all, we shift from a universe which has no basic moral laws to one in which suddenly there is right and wrong. So this is the truth within the myth of the Garden of Eden. The other thing, of course, is that we stop believing in our imagination as being real. It has to be reality-tested.

That's why now we are in this pitiful situation of being unable to believe that Father Christmas will come down that chimney and present us a present. Which is sad, isn't it? I mean, those magic days, they've all gone, they've disappeared. We now live in this rather terrible reality. So that shift, you see, is a change in the way that young consciousness understands and sees the world.

When the Buddha's talking about the process of awakening, in our language, in our terminology, it is a movement within consciousness itself. Because the root problem lies in consciousness itself. It's consciousness itself that knows which doesn't know properly. That's why it's so difficult for us to awaken. Because that which is trying to awaken is that which is deluded. And the whole definition of delusion is that you don't know where the delusion is. If you knew where the delusion was, then you wouldn't be deluded.

So here's the Buddha with his very clever teaching saying, "Listen, don't worry about who you are. You don't get involved in that question of who you are, but who you are not." If you can find who you are not, eventually you should end up finding out who you are. So the doctrine of *anattā*, the doctrine of not-self, is a teaching tool. It's not a philosophical statement.

In our meditation, through the process of distancing from what we experience, that little distance which objectifies what we're looking at is taking us backwards. So we're not the body, we're not the emotion, we're not thought. And then we're stuck with this: "I must be the thinker, the knower, the witness," you see. So now we make that final mistake of thinking that we are that consciousness itself.

The mistake there is one of, shall we say, a mirror. When you look at your face in the mirror, generally speaking you believe that's how people see you. Big mistake! Because they see your face the other way around. It's only when you use two mirrors do you realize how big your ears are. I was very upset with my sister. I was surprised at the size of my ears when I cut my hair off. It can hurt, you know. So it's coming to recognize that what we see in the mirror isn't actually what people see.

Now, when this knowing, this awareness — I'm just using the word consciousness — just, you know, awareness, there's many words for it: sense of being, sense of presence, the now. There's all sorts of ways that writers try to explain this level because it doesn't happen in our language. We don't have an actual word for it, in a sense. The closest we get to it is intuitive intelligence and intuition.

When we're at that level, you see, this consciousness feels its presence within the mind. A good example of that is when you're watching TV and you can see yourself in the screen watching TV. Now you can decide: are you going to watch TV or watch yourself watching TV? But as you're watching TV, you're aware of that thing. So there's a slippage. There's moments of consciousness which are absorbed in the TV program, but also switching over to this image that you see of yourself in the television screen. So it's oscillating like that.

That's what's happening when we are very much self-aware of being the onlooker, the witness, the feeler, the experiencer of what it is we're actually experiencing — whether it's a pain, an emotion, a sound, something we're looking at. That's why in meditation there's always this accent of bringing ourselves back into the present moment. The immediate present moment which isn't any longer than a millisecond, if that. And that's what we mean by this concentration.

Now whenever you say to somebody "concentration," you always get this tension. "You've got to concentrate." Knitted forehead. I remember as a kid getting a clout on the back of the head because you weren't concentrating. This idea of force. But actually concentration comes about mainly through interest. Did you have any problem with concentration when you were interested in something? It doesn't arise, does it? If you're interested, there's an immediate giving of oneself to what you're actually doing.

So, in our meditation, again, there is this wanting to know. I mean, that's the essence of this Buddha mind within us. It wants to know. And that wanting to know, if you join into it, will draw you into the investigation of things that are arising and passing away. And that in itself is strong enough to actually make us focus in and in to a single point.

But when that single point appears — very occasionally, virtually impossible on a weekend retreat, I'm sorry to say, although I know that you are good enough probably to get there — there is that single point where there isn't time for that reflection. And those are the moments of pure vipassanā. Those are the moments when this consciousness is experiencing itself in its purity. And at that point, to confuse matters, the object-subject relationship collapses. There's no object and there's no subject. There's just that direct experience.

We get it occasionally in our lives as adults. It's very difficult for us to get that. It's like you'll get it, for instance, just for a moment when you trap your finger in the door. There's just a single moment there of pure pain, and there's nobody experiencing it. It's only the moment afterwards that you say, "Oh, my thumb." Just that moment of absolute pure stillness within the present moment.

So when you're meditating, you see, and you're watching the rising and falling of the breath and you're looking at its quality of transience, you're looking at the quality of its process, what you're trying to do is to see it more and more closely so that you begin to break up the idea that somebody's breathing, that there is anything called a breath. That's only a mental idea.

All there are are minute moments of sensations arising into consciousness. It's from these minute moments of sensations that the mind is able to build up a concept whereby you can hold a certain length of time within which you call it the in-breath or the out-breath. And that's all mentation. That's all done in the mind. The only thing that's actually happening in terms of input are these little sparky moments of sensations.

To get down at that level is to deconstruct the way we construct the world around us. It's to begin to see that everything that we experience is being totally, completely manufactured by the mind. Everything. Even this room — you wouldn't doubt the objective existence of this room in the sense that if we all left, the room would disappear. The room has, in a sense, its own being, using that word very loosely. But when we walk into this room, there aren't as many rooms as there are people here. Because each of us experience the room in our own way. So in this sense, you see, we're living in a world which is completely mind-made.

This *dukkha* that we're looking at, one of the ways that the Buddha talks about it is loke dukkha, dukkha nirodha. It's in this world that there is this suffering, this unpleasantness, whatever, and there is an end to it in this world. And when he defines "in this world," he defines it as this body, mind and heart. In his terms, it would have been, for those of you who know, the five aggregates.

So this whole world that we're living in which has no doubt an objective existence outside us is recreated by us and we have to live in it, we have to live within that creation. Now what we do of course is to project all our ways of looking onto the world we're living in, and if that projection is wrong, if that projection is unwholesome, unskillful, then it's not surprising that the world should mirror that back to us.

So, for instance, if I have an angry disposition, I shouldn't be surprised that people should get angry with me. Because I'm exciting in them. There's a resonance between us, isn't there? Even though there's no direct contact within our emotions, there's a resonance. So we can feel another person's emotions against our own hearts. So if I go into a situation angry, that resonates. So everybody comes back at me angry. Or fearful, or run away, which is preferred.

So this unwholesome place that we found ourselves in, is slowly being manufactured by us. The first of it is to do with this wrong view, this me, this mind. That's where its root is.

Now, if you really think that this body is what you are, taking it at that absolute basic level, if you think this body is what you are, then two things, isn't there? First of all, it has to be protected at all costs. That's the first basic thing, isn't it? That's what we want from our government. We want safety first. Prosperity next, but you definitely want safety first. So we try to make the world safe. Safe at all levels.

That safety, of course, overreaches itself. And we feel far more safe with a million pounds in the bank than 10,000. Or than none, definitely. So there's that accumulation, that greed. And that greed steps into other people's territory. You can see how the world, especially at the moment, through our economic system, is just constantly trying to fill this gap, this lack, this feeling of any minute now something terrible could happen. So I have to surround myself with security.

Consider, consider the amount of money spent on insurance, all through fear. And silly things like, you know, that council that wanted all those flowers taken away from lampposts in case they fell on somebody's head, which they hadn't done for 1,500 years. Now, of course, it may happen, who knows? And it would have meant some sort of compensation, the fear.

So this self that we have, this idea of self in the body, seeking safety means that subconsciously it lives in a state of fear. So the root emotion of the self is fear. And we touch that when death approaches us. We touch that fear when death approaches us.

Now, once we have the understanding that the more I accumulate, the safer I feel, then of course anything which approaches that safety from a negative point of view is seen as an enemy. You get your aversion, you get your pushing away. And of course if you can't, if what you're pushing away is too big, then you run for it. So that fight-flight syndrome is the other side of the self, presuming always that this is what I am.

Through the process of our insight, as we disengage from that, as we deconstruct all that sort of wrong understanding, the fear lessens. You begin to live in a more benign world. Now there comes a point through the process of awakening when a person knows quite distinctly that they're not this body. So the fully liberated person has no doubt whatsoever, they know they're not the body. So you can see if you now are absolutely certain within yourself through your personal experience that you are not the body, what can frighten you? And that's really why we say that the liberated person doesn't have any fear, can't have fear. There's nothing there to be fearful about.

Now, how do we begin to undermine that sense of self, you see? First of all, it's to use that technique of distancing within our meditation where noting something is like pointing at it. So when you've got a pain in the knee, if you say, "pain, pain," you're already distancing from it. You have to be careful with that technique because it might be a way of pushing it away. You know, "pain, pain." It's more like an acknowledgement, a clear acknowledgement. And once you've steadied yourself to go towards it, to plunge into the experience of it.

Same with our emotions, no matter how painful they are. To distance for a moment and say, this is an emotional state, whatever it might be. Despair, all that sort of stuff. And then once you've gained that equanimity, once you've gained that position of courage to go into the emotion and to stay there and just watch it as feeling, just as sensations.

If we can stay at that level, you see, it loses its name. Despair is just an awful sickly feeling. Fear is just an awful sickly feeling. And you can stay there with it. And all the time, you're just allowing this state, what is it? An energy. That's all it is, a turbulence. To express itself. All these emotional states, remember, all they're saying is, you know, listen to me, I'm very afraid. Help. They only want to tell you how they feel. That's all. And to allow that to happen is the process of liberating ourselves through understanding dukkha, through understanding suffering.

So, the distancing allows us to understand that this is not me, not mine, undermining that fundamental position that we have, that this is me, I am a human being. I am in a sense of continuous, continual am in a sense of forever. There's this feeling that you're never actually going to die. Everybody else does but it might happen tomorrow. So it's that case of undermining that and then of going into what you're being presented with to actually see how we create the suffering. So how do we create these mental states?

So that's when we begin to discover this split of indulging and suppressing, indulging and suppressing, indulging and suppressing. That process of psychology which is called in Buddhism the wheel of dependent origination, sometimes they call it interdependent origination, is the psychological teaching of the Buddha. And as far as I've read from people who should know better than me, it was completely new within Indian literature. There was nothing like that sort of psychology until the Buddha came.

And the Buddha begins with this lovely word, *avijja*, which means not knowing. So this consciousness that we've been talking about begins from a position of not knowing. Sometimes it's translated as ignorance, but that gives it a sort of pejorative, heavy, you know, like you're stupid. But it's not that, you just don't know. And from this not know-

ing, it begins to build up a world. So this world is built up around the middle part, where we experience the world as pleasant or unpleasant, and then we try to that accumulation.

Now that process of accumulation, that process of attachment, that process of holding on to things, grasping on to things, that's what's meant by this word desire. And unfortunately that word desire covers also desires that we ought to have. Desires such as wanting to meditate continuously. So you have to be careful with that word desire. Sometimes it's translated as craving, which is over the top. It's desires which arise from a wrong view of self.

And what we build up, the picture of the world that we build up and live in, in this uncomfortable way, you see, when you hit the root, when you hit the root of this not-self, when you begin to see it's not me, not mine, you're actually taking away the foundation. So the whole pack of cars just falls. It's not a case of having to go back step by step. It's as soon as you see something, the whole delusion collapses.

So for instance, if somebody were to come up on the street and give you a kick in the butt, and then you turn around and they ran off, you might go away thinking, you know, that's the worst thing that's ever happened to me in my life. You know, how could anybody do that? And you'd be angry and furious. And then you read in the evening news that it was somebody who'd lost their bottle and was going around kicking people in the butt. And they suddenly think, oh, well, the guy was a lunatic. Suddenly, everything's forgiven. He's just gone off his rocker. There's a sudden forgiveness, all because of a change of understanding, a change of view. So that's all we're doing. We're trying to undercut the original view we had. And in so doing, this whole pack of cards just begins to crumble.

The third view, so the first is that seeing of not-self. The second is trying to understand how we create this suffering through attachment, through grasping, through aversion, through suppression. The third view is to see the transience of things. To see that everything that we're experiencing is only here for this millisecond and it disappears.

And that's where we get, that's you can see that most in the breath. That's why we always begin with the breath as a certain position. First of all, it's always there, or you've got problems. And secondly, because of its movement, especially in the belly, especially in the abdomen, it's rising and falling. And just to stay with that flow, just to stay with that wave of rising and falling, and if you can, to feel how delicious it is. They're very subtle, gentle sensations.

We always live on this high point of wanting sensation, our sensational life to be sensational. We're always living at that point where we ought to be in a state of gross happiness, jumping up and down. And the point is that there's a much deeper and a much more subtle and a much more gratifying happiness to be found in peace. And that peace is measured or is found in the body in these neutral sensations. Just a state of contentment with just a simple, neutral feeling. And as you get into that, you'll see there's a lovely loveliness there.

Now, you can go down to the river here, you see. Now, that river isn't exciting. It's probably one of the most boring rivers. It just flows and it's flat. There's no ripples, I mean, on this little corner here. There's no ripples, there's nothing, it's just this glass plate which continually changes just slightly catching the shades of light. And if you watch, if you keep your mind on that and just keep watching it, you'll catch its peace. And it's trying to use nature like that or just the starkness of the trees, just the blueness of the sky which never changes in a sense. And just to see that there's a real deeper sense of contentment and happiness in stillness, in quiet, in silence. In fact, one of the epithets of Nibbāna is the noble silence.

Now, when we watch the breath and we're beginning to see actually that that's just a concept. You can't see the belly, you can't see the air. All you have is sensations. And from these little building blocks of little sensations, the mind builds up a concept. The stomachs are rising and falling or the air is coming in and out of your nose. And there's an image there, you can see your nose, or you can see somewhere in your mind, your belly. But behind that, there are just these sensations.

And it's cutting through that, through this process of just looking, just focusing, drawn by interest, that we begin to experience that in fact life is extraordinarily momentary. Now what's the effect on our psychology when we realize that everything is extraordinarily momentary? Well, there's nothing worth holding on to. There's an immediate release. There's an immediate stopping of trying to grasp things, keep things as they are. It's a relief. And one of the things that the Buddha says, which we read out in our little opening ceremony, the taste of Nibbāna is the taste of freedom. It's the liberation from, it's the relief. Every time you get that little sense of relief, of letting go, of just letting be, in all these little pat phrases that you get, these are little touches of Nibbāna.

Tomorrow, I hope I remind you, I probably will forget, as usual, but when you're eating, you see, there's a distinction to be made, these are just my own distinctions of words, between satisfaction and contentment. So if you want satisfaction, you keep eating until you feel satisfied, until you feel completely full, bloated, and you think that's enough, and then you go and have a sleep.

Now, if you practice your meditation when you're eating, and you can feel that draw of greed just for that extra toast. We're promised toast tomorrow. Just for that extra piece of toast and marmalade. And you wait and you know that this is not necessary. This is overeating. Bad for the body. Producing early death. Toast can be lethal. Taken in vast quantities. Once you see that, now hold on, this is greed. And you just hold on in there. And you let the greed come. This wolf. Marmalade after all. And you just wait for the wolf to die. To die, you see. There will come a point where there's no desire in the mind. That's contentment. That is a taste of nirvana.

So it's not as though nibbāna or this awakened state is something which is totally transcendent from what we actually can experience here and now. It's something that we can get little bites of. But you have to acknowledge it because this consciousness does not know that this is actually a better place than satisfaction. It's driven by everything in this society. The whole of our industry, the whole of our advertising is driven to satisfaction. And it's only when you begin to realize that that place actually produces more desire, more greed, a non-end to it, a churning of it, that you begin to realize there must be a better place than this. And that's it. Now, you can't get there without enduring happily, joyously, the suffering. That suffering is not the suffering of hell. That's not going to get worse. That's the suffering of purgatory. That's the suffering of purging.

I was brought up a Catholic and we had these three distinctive realms. Hell, purgatory and heaven. Hell, you were stuck. You couldn't get out of that one. Couldn't even get a drop of water from heaven. Purgatory was a transient state where you went through these sufferings in order to attain the final glory of heaven. Now, in terms of whether these actually exist or not is not a particular consequence to us here and now. But in terms of mental states, definitely. Those mental states that we enter where we see no end to it, the despairs, the sudden impossibility of life, all that, that's hell. Purgatory are those states of mind where we're quite happy to suffer because we know there's an end to it.

So our meditation is 99.999% purgatory. I hold out no great hope for sudden or swift liberation. And neither did the Buddha. He said it was a gradual path and I shall leave you with this quote. Somebody comes to him and says, listen, this training you've got to be doing, very hard, very painful, very awful. And the Buddha said, well, yes, it is. But, you know, you just keep going and you'll attain Nibbāna. And the reply was, Nibbāna, so what? And he says, well, when you get to Nibbāna, you are contented and with it happy. And he's describing his own state of mind, contented and with it happy.

CHAPTER 57

Question & Answer Session

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this question and answer session from Christmas at Sharpham 2005, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores diverse aspects of Buddhist practice and philosophy. He addresses whether Buddhism stifles creativity, explaining how spiritual insight actually enhances rather than diminishes creative expression by transforming conditioned reactions into wise responses. The discussion covers engaged Buddhism and how the Eightfold Path, particularly right livelihood, connects personal practice to social responsibility.*
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> *Bhante explores the balance between personal meditation and service to others for householders, emphasizing that every moment offers opportunity for Right Awareness, not just formal sitting practice. He provides practical guidance on dealing with harmful individuals, cultivating patience over intolerance, and skillfully handling difficult family dynamics. The session concludes with an illuminating comparison between Buddhist vipassanā meditation and Christian contemplative practices, particularly the role of compunction in spiritual purification and the unfortunate loss of meditative teachings in mainstream Christianity.*

Does Buddhism stifle creativity in the birth of ideas?

The mind creates. It's always creating, isn't it? You can't stop it from creating. It's the purpose of the mind. I mean, that's what you might call, define the mind. The mind is intention, isn't it? I think it's something to do with time as well. And something to do with *kamma* in the widest sense of that word. Meaning that at any point in time there's a junction of what is coming out of one's own mind and what is coming into it from the outside. And so there's always, there's got to be always some sort of creativity as we move from moment to moment.

So even just in this walk this afternoon we got to the top and the wind was so great that we had to be creative and come back down. The idea was to continue walking but the conditions were contrary to our expectations. But just in the wider sense of creativity, in the sense of creating art, after the Buddha's enlightenment, after the Buddha's awakening, it's not as though his mind stopped. In fact the first thought that came into his mind was who can I teach this to? There's already a movement outward from that initial insight and the great insights he had.

And of course he spent the rest of his life, forty years, being creative. If you read the discourses, they're very much personal conversations with different people. The later discourses, the ones right at the end of the book, in the long discourses, become much more set pieces. But if you read a lot of them, they're just somebody asking a question and him responding. And he responds normally in two ways. First of all, in a rational way, a logical rational way. And then he always likes to give an example, a metaphor, for those who think better that way. That's how it's put. For those who think more energetically, he expresses it that way. I wouldn't go as far as to say that he was a poet or anything of that nature.

But then all religion finds expression for these truths in some form of creativity, don't they? Paintings, architecture, poetry, music, film these days. So it's not that creativity is stifled, more it's opened up. An endless possibility of creativity on moral, social, economic, religious themes, which are there as a teaching tool. There's no end to it.

If you look at something, if you look at art, you can see that one end of it is sort of base, pornographic in the biggest sense of that meaning, just abusing people's emotions. You could even say some of these films that come out of Hollywood which feed into people's greed and violence is pornographic, there's no way that could be sexual. And then you get films which are much more social or just pure entertainment or whatever, but then you get films which have a deeper meaning.

So it's not that spiritual insight undermines creativity. I would say the opposite. What it does is it stops certain types of creativity because it does harm. Simple as that, really.

When the Buddha was asked what he taught, the way he would express things was always in this negative sense. We read it out, the unborn, the undying, etc. Not that there's no self, but he would talk about not-self. So he would be accused of annihilationism. That was the normal accusation. And he insists that the only thing that was annihilated, completely destroyed, was greed, hatred and delusion. Nothing else.

So everything we have is given back to us, renewed, you might say, refreshed, purified. So the mind is returned in its purity. The heart, see, it's the same with emotions. You might get the impression that *vipassanā*, watching the emotions arise and pass away and fade away, that you're moving towards a sort of... I don't know, like a blob, you know, at the end you've got no emotions, and you're just sitting there like a non-emotional blob. But it's not true, because what happens is the emotions are transformed. The emotions are transformed, and that's the importance of this *mettā* practice. So everything is given back to us, renewed, refreshed, reformed, however you wish to look at it. And that's the process.

On that similar line, you can make a distinction between reaction and response. So a reaction is coming from conditioning, from the past dictating the present, dictating the future. You know, if I did that, that wouldn't be me. That's a lovely one, isn't it? I've heard people say that. If I did that, it wouldn't be me. So they've got this really hard idea of who they are.

And most of our actions, most of our thoughts are continuation of past habitual ways of thinking and feeling and reacting to things. So when that's purified, then we respond to a situation coming from a different level. Not conditioning, but from wisdom. Compassion and wisdom. So the response is creative because of that.

Conditioning isn't creative. Conditioning just completely, constantly makes you go round the same circle. That's the meaning of kamma. If you look at your life, you look back, you'll see that there are rounds of behaviour. You keep falling into the same sort of pit. If you haven't seen that yet, if you don't think that's happened, then you haven't looked closely enough. Because that's what kamma means. It means that you're on this wheel of going round and round. If you want to use a psychodynamic term, that's the meaning of neurosis. You keep going round and round the same thing. An obsession. Obsessiveness.

So when that's clarified, when that's cleared out, then there is a spontaneity in the present moment which has to be totally creative because now you're not coming from a fixed idea or a fixed habit. It's coming more from wisdom and wisdom simply means that you really see the situation as it really is, not as you would want it to be, hope it to be, how it ought to be, just as it is. And that clarity allows you to respond in a way which feels spontaneous. It's spontaneous because it's not coming from a habit, it's coming from a preconceived idea of how to behave. And that's one of the meanings of living in the moment, living in the present moment.

How is it possible to put into practice Buddhist teaching and method into the wider society, and how does it relate?

That's a very... I mean, there are books written on that. Engaged Buddhism, you know? Engaged Buddhism.

The Eightfold Path, you see, you'll notice that the Buddha begins with right understanding, so there's a correction in the way we see things. This affects our attitude. And then both this understanding and attitude express themselves in right speech, right action, right livelihood. Now, logically speaking, you didn't have to put right livelihood in there because it's part of right action. But livelihood is, in that wider sense, how we affect society.

So from a personal point of view, what we do in society is our teaching. You see, every time you move, every time you say something, you're presenting an example, whether you like it or not. Other people might not see it as that, or accept it as that, but everybody in that sense is a teacher. And as you know, if you happen to tell somebody that you now meditate, you know, you're meditating in a Buddhist fashion and that is all the past, now and then they see you wandering around the streets completely drunk and they say oh that's what meditation does for you. So as soon as you state who you are to what you do, there comes a sort of responsibility with it.

So when it comes to the wider society, each of us have to consider what we do, what we support, the way we vote, what we say about things that are happening in the world, and to make sure it's true to our own understanding. And whether we like it or not, that goes into the general understanding of a society, of mankind, doesn't it? It feeds into it. It's like stuff coming into the computer. As soon as you say something, it becomes part of human thought patterns. It's there in the ether, you might say.

Specifically, this is what Buddhism is working with. It's one of the areas it's working with. How do you translate teachings that were given 2,500 years ago into a modern society? And there's lots. Personally, you could read of people like Ken Jones, he's written a nice book on that. Everybody, there's a lot of people now who are trying to make sense of that, trying to make sense of what would a Buddhist economy mean? What would a Buddhist society look like without getting into idealism, some sort of, somebody called it, Buddhopia? That wouldn't be particularly Buddhist to have some sort of idealistic end point, because then you're imposing upon a future an idea which you've had in the past. That's exactly what you don't want to do.

So when the Buddha is formulating the order you can see he's not got a particular ideal he's working with. The forms that were already there in society for people who were living in this ascetic way, so there's nothing particularly new about that. There were plenty of people sleeping under trees and all that sort of stuff. And it's understood that for the first twenty years such was the high calibre of people joining the orders that there was no need to make rules. And then people of lesser calibre began to enter and did silly things and so you had to make a rule. So these rules grew up and they grew up in a sort of peculiar way because there are rules there in the order which are to do with morality, to do with things like thieving and sexual conduct and all that, but a lot of them are also to do with the monastic relationship to lay people and to society, even going down to the way we eat. You're not supposed to suru suru and chapu chapu, you're not supposed to slurp and chomp loudly. These minute little rules.

An institution is defined by its rules, isn't it? That's what an institution is, its set of rules. Whether it's something like marriage, or something huge like the WTO. And in fact you could say that as soon as, even you yourself, even you yourself, if you live on your own, have your own rules and regulations, your own routine. So when somebody comes in and says, I'll wash the pots, you get very irritated when they don't wash them the way you wash them. You're supposed to wash them, no. Polish on your shoes with the cloth, not the brush. I just remember that as a huge argument with my parents when I was a kid, still hangs on in my mind, you know. I could only have been about eight.

So that whole area of how does the Buddhist teachings relate to society is something which is thought about a great deal these days and presumably will be a constant investigation of how the teachings relate to modern society. I can't see that really coming to an end as such. You all know of the N.E.B.D, the Network of Engaged Buddhists and the publication they make? So that's, you know, they deal with all sorts of vegetarianism and all that sort of stuff. I used to be active in that in the early days, the peace, what was it called then? Peace, something peace. We used to on those peace marches and we had the sort of arrogance of bringing peace to the peace march. We hit people who became unpeaceful. Now we would sit from a great height, peace.

How to best use one's time? As a monk, nun or householder? As a householder, how much time to spend on oneself meditating, meditation contemplation, and with others doing good service to others? What does the Buddha say?

Well, I don't think it's a case of a person saying, just to answer the first part of the question, whether one should be a monastic or not. I don't think it arises like that. I remember the old, well I knew it was very old, Ñāṇaponica, who wrote The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, which is still the classic. And it seems as though somebody came to see him, a few people came to see him, and they were talking about monastic life and what it was all about. And there was a woman there said to him, but supposing we all became monks and nuns? And he said, don't worry my dear, it won't happen.

I think it's not a case of a choice of being a monastic or a householder. One is simply drawn one way or the other. Not to say that people don't try or spend a bit of part of their life. There's a lot of people, I feel, a lot of Westerners who've become monks and nuns for a while. In fact, most of those who pass on to teachers have spent time in the order. You know, like Christopher Titmuss and even Joseph Goldstein I think spent a month or two. So remember that the order is very fluid like that. In Burma you can join

for any time. And I think that's a lovely thing because even if one is not drawn to it as a way of life for themselves, it's a lovely thing to do. And it connects you with the monastic orders. It gives you a sort of heart feeling for them. That's what I think.

In terms of being a householder, how much time do you spend on yourself, meditation, contemplation, or with others, doing good and all that? Well, that's very individualistic, isn't it? The split is rather false, really. At first it does seem that meditation is here and everything else is over there. And I'm only really doing spiritual practice when I'm sitting in meditation. And that's a false split, of course, because it's right there in the Eightfold Path. That right livelihood is part of the path. So somehow you have to make your work and what you do in society, you have to make it material to your spiritual life. That's your responsibility to yourself. And I can talk a bit more about that tomorrow.

But that's very important. When we're in meditation, those of you who've done a course, we also create that sort of hierarchy even within a meditation retreat. Sitting is important. Walking is a little less important. And everything else we're doing during the day, like eating, is unimportant. So the mind gets concentrated in meditation and then loses it all for the rest of the day.

But when you realize that every moment of the day is concerned with establishing this mindfulness, then of course it doesn't matter what you're doing. It doesn't matter what you're doing, as long as you're being mindful. Even now you see, as you're listening to me, you can be attentive and still generally feel what's going on in your body. It can be quite a spacious, restful awareness. And when a speaker is saying something which is asking for more attention, then one loses attention on the body, one loses that contact with the body, one becomes attentive only to the spoken word.

Now, to be focused in on something like that, or to have the wide focus, it's all meditation, it's all awareness. So what we have to stress to ourselves is that the object of awareness is not awareness. The object of awareness, in other words what you're aware of, is not the awareness. So whether you're aware of, in your meditation, a single arising of a sensation, or you're aware of the whole body sensation, the whole body feeling, it's all awareness.

And you can be aware of transience, the rising and falling away of a single sensation and you can also be aware of it in the wider sense of the coming and going of seasons. The arising and falling of a human being. Every time somebody dies whom you know, that's also reminding us of the transience of life, the impermanence of it.

So to develop the meditative mind, to develop the contemplative meditative mind, to develop this wisdom, that's a constant effort. You can't take a holiday. You can't take a break now and do something else. Every time you do that you create another bad habit. You go back on old habits. And that's why it takes so long because we make this big effort, we make an effort in meditation. And then we go home and forget all about it.

When I was living in Birmingham, I used to go and do a retreat every month at the local Vihāra for a weekend. And I would always notice that the effect of that weekend would last till about Tuesday. It sort of began to fade completely out by Wednesday and Thursday.

So that's it you see, but over a period of time it sort of had an effect. So you have to have that sort of patience, perseverance. So if you find yourself judging your spiritual progress, be careful. If you judge it over a week, you get very depressed. You have to make an effort and judge it over, say, twenty-five years. You think, I have moved, I can see I've moved. Because one thing we come across, isn't it, in our practice is how tenacious, how clinging these habits are. They go deep.

So when it comes to daily life, how much time you spend on yourself and how much time you spend with others is very much to do with your circumstance and your inclination, your personal inclination. Some people are more drawn to contemplative life, others more to an active life. It's just up to you to decide, to get that balance. It's the balance you want, so that you feel your life is balanced. You've got enough time for yourself and enough time for others. And of course it changes. It changes at different times in your lives and depending on what's happening around you. So it's nothing fixed. You don't get the idea of some sort of mathematical equation.

Please discuss skillful ways of dealing with a situation in which someone seems repeatedly to harm others. I don't know. If somebody is repeatedly harming others. Well, it seems to me if somebody is... If I find myself in a situation where somebody is harming me, emotionally, shall we say, emotionally abusive, or something like that, and I'm aware of it, and I'm aware of the dynamics, but the other person isn't, or they are, which is worse, and they intend, quite consciously, to do you harm. It seems to me that after you've made a fair effort to get them either to become self-conscious about what they're doing or to ask them to stop, really the only thing you can do is to get yourself out of that situation, isn't it?

I mean, I presume here we're not talking about a psychopath or anybody. We talk about this, the subtle ways that people can harm each other. So if we find ourselves in a relationship, and I'm not particularly talking about a partnership or something, or a marriage, any relationship, at work, you can be bullied. These terrible stories you hear

about being bullied at work. So there's a point where you do what you can and then you say to yourself, well, no, I've got to guard myself, I've got to get out. I mean, somebody who bullies, somebody who harasses is very clever because they always have a very good rational reason for doing what they do. Very difficult to... And they're often not aware of it. Sociopaths. Various levels of sociopathology.

So, as a general thing, one tries... one makes an effort to mend the situation, to correct the relationship, but when you see that it's just going to go on and on and on and there's really no end to it, then I would have thought the best policy is to get out of it. And one has to have a certain trust in the Lord of Karma. At some point the situation that the person's creating through their harmfulness will come back on them at some point. I mean to give it the full karmic value there has to be some openness to the idea of some future life some future way in which the habit that they've created creates enough enemies that finally the enemies all gang up and hit them with a mallet. It builds up and up and up until there's a whole sea of enemies ready to rain down upon them. Or worse, they just find themselves being completely isolated, completely lonely, completely blocked off, nobody wants to know them.

There's an interesting story from Jung about a woman who turned up for counselling. And it was a confession, really. It was a confessional. And she said to him that she was so jealous of this woman who had fallen in love with the man that she wanted that she poisoned her, killed her. And that this guilt and this horror of what she'd done had affected the relationship between herself and her future husband. And the relationship had broken up. And it also had affected the children, so that the children don't speak to her. And she had somehow come to this point of connection as to how that murdering somebody had caused her situation of total isolation within her own family. And then Jung goes on to say that he didn't feel he needed to report it to the police, because she'd actually come to understand how it was that she'd ended up in this pitiful state.

Please can you explain how we can skillfully lose it when all else fails and not lose our mindfulness. Well, you can't. Once you've lost it, you've lost your mindfulness. But if... That's it, you've lost it. If you mean by that, how can you express something forcefully or get across your disfavour in a forceful way, I'm sure you can do that mindfully. I'm sure that there's even a sort of skillful way of showing anger, like an actor does. I mean, parents sometimes, they were children, don't they? Sometimes they pretend to be angry so that they have a five-minute peace. You know what I mean? So there is the actor in us, but you have to be a good actor. If he comes out a hound, nobody's going to believe you, you know? They won't believe you. But, you know, you can't, once you've lost it, you've lost it.

How can I cultivate the negative emotion within me of intolerance? You don't mean that, do you? How can I cultivate the negative? I think you mean undermine, is it? It is a weakness in me that I am ashamed of, but have difficulty in letting go. It is an intolerance of myself and an intolerance of others and things.

I think everybody suffers from that to some extent, intolerance. Well, intolerance comes down to not wanting things to be the way they are. You become frustrated by it. And if it's very frustrating, if you take a position, this is not the way it should be, then you become intolerant. Then all you want to do is get rid of that which annoys you, which you think shouldn't be there.

So, this goes back to this whole idea of patience. And patience, I think, is based on acceptance you know this is the way things are that's a lovely little sort of mantra this is this is the way things are now this is the way it is yeah when you walk into a situation or something happens you know just keep saying that now this is the way it is you see until you've actually until you've actually come down to that position of this is the way not this is the way it ought not to be or I want it to be or I expected it to be or it should be you know what I mean all those

You see, when you get down to it and you say, this is the way it is, then I think you'll find patience arising easily within that. And that intolerance, the intolerance towards ourselves, I mean, that also is an acceptance of, well, this is the way it is. This is the way I am at this present, or this, be careful here, This is the conditioning as it is now. So if I find myself, say, anxious again over something stupid, over something silly, then I say, OK, this is the way it is now. This is the way it is now. And then you work with that, letting the anxiety pass, etc., etc.

And once you've worked with that a little while, once you've allowed the intolerance to die away, that sense of, you know, it shouldn't be like this, like that person, this is the way it is, then that's when you find *mettā* having a very strong effect. Once that's died, as soon as you wish goodwill towards somebody or to yourself, then that creates a different attitude, you see. And that attitude of openness, kindness, gentleness, acceptance begins to undermine all this business of, it should be like this, etc., etc.

And although I'm coming very late to it in my practice, I'm really beginning to see that the practice of mettā is, I think it's quite crucial really. It's quite crucial. Because it's to do with developing right attitude. When you're meditating, for instance, and you feel, for instance, you feel very impatient with yourself because the mind's wandering so much. And you're judging yourself, you see. So that immediately becomes your object to observe, to feel, to experience. Judging, judging. And you feel the self-hatred. So, all that sort of stuff. When that dies away, you see, then there has to be that effort to turn upon

oneself with compassion, to turn the stream of compassion within oneself by offering oneself good wishes. And that eventually completely undermines the basis. You can't be loving and angry at the same time. That's the point. These two mental states can't exist together. So the more that we bend the mind towards being gentle, being kind, that undermines those old habits with things like intolerance.

Remember there's always a view and an opinion there are these three states conceit, view and attachment so if you take religious intolerance. There's a view, very simple. I'm right, you're wrong. We can't get more simple than that. I'm right, you're wrong. There's a conceit there. I'm right, you're wrong. I've got it all right. And there's an attachment to it. There's a heart attachment to it. So the head is here with this is the truth, everything else is not the truth. There's an identity with it, I'm right, you're wrong, and there's a heart attachment to it. And that's why intolerance, whatever intolerance it is, is so hard. Because how can you penetrate a wall which says, I'm right, my thinking is right, your thinking is wrong, this opinion is right, your opinion is wrong. You see, you can't. You're up against a real block.

When my grandmother demands that one of us make her a cup of tea, because it is important that we respect our elders, what is the most compassionate and skillful response. It is to make the tea with absolute attentiveness and compassion, and then to accidentally spill it all over. After you've done that a few times, she'll stop asking. Yes, there's nothing more off-putting than somebody asking you to be compassionate out of moral duty. It undermines the whole idea of being compassionate. So, I don't know. Oh, I think I would just do it. It depends. If I have to live with her, it would be different. Is it patient acceptance by any chance? It is, yes. Patient acceptance, yes. Patient acceptance.

Well, that's the way she was brought up, obviously. And how does one reach ninety and have developed the ability to request a cup of tea respectfully and skillfully when this is the model demonstrated to us? Oh, well, that's it, isn't it, you see? One reaches ninety understanding how painful it is to have your duty demanded. One then at ninety, in that sort of very weak, demanding, compassionate voice, asks for a cup of tea. Drawing on your nieces and nephews and whoever, your grandchildren's compassion.

As meditation is now known to have such a beneficial effect on our spiritual life, why is it not more part of the Judeo-Christian form of worship? Well, these the Judeo-Christian and Islamic form of spirituality is to do, has its roots in relationship, has its roots in a relationship with God and therefore is centred very much on the meaning of love, meaning of love, loving service. The Eastern religions, although love is there, and especially in Hinduism with Krishna, the Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna that the path of love is easier than the path of insight. So there was also an un-

derstanding of love in both and I'd have to look up the scripture now but there's I think there's a monk called Pingala or something in the scriptures where the Buddha tells him that his path to awakening is through the path of love and faith in him specifically. Very guru thing, which seems so out of place within the Buddhist context but it's there. It is there as a path you see.

Now if you read the Christian texts, if you read people like St John of the Cross, it is very much a situation of attending, attending, attending and in that attention, open attention, there arises these negative states, just like in meditation. And the instructions are to feel them and let them go. Feel them and let them go. So I'm not so sure there's all that greater separation, really, between the one and the other. And although in, shall we say, specifically Christian terms, one uses the image of Christ as the beginning of that love. When you read the mystics, that also has to be got rid of. In the end you enter into that place of no image. No image, you see.

Now, you know, I don't know much about it myself, but from what I read and from what I have been told by certain monks, well one monk really, in the Christian tradition, the process of mental purification arises through compunction. If you go back on the Buddhist idea that everything begins with delusion, once we enter a state of self, we then form this relationship based on the self. And immediately there arises this fork of attachment, greed and hatred, etc. As soon as we move off the base of that delusion, we're doing harm. And once we do harm, the only way to overcome, the only way that, I'll put it this way, the insight into the harm we do allows compunction. It allows tears.

So, for instance, in the prayer of the Eastern Orthodox, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us. Something of that nature. The mercy is to seek forgiveness or to feel the forgiveness, to feel the compunction for having done things wrong, unskillful things, which have always harmed other beings. So whether we like it or not, sin is there in the sense that we're constantly doing harm at some form, some level within our... Now, that is completely dissolved through... and you may find that even in your meditation great feelings of sorrow about one's past actions comes and it's feeling that sorrow which is the process of cleansing the heart. As you work on that path of forgiveness then of course you have to come down to the very base of why it is that you're behaving like that and then you come across the self. And it's that separation of our true being with, shall we say, the all, that is dissolved through this process of compunction. That's as I understand it. And, to a certain degree, I've experienced that myself through my own meditation. So sorrow about one's own actions leads one to seek the root cause as to why we behave like that in the first place.

For ordinary Christians it would seem that that form of meditation just isn't taught. They don't seem to know it. And that's one of the sad things really. I think that's one of the reasons why we see churches haemorrhaging really. In Buddhist understanding, if the dispensation of the Buddha comes to a point where the meditation has gone and nobody on earth has now had an experience of nibbāna, so there is nobody who really has experienced the truth of the Buddha's teaching, it is said that the religion will descend into empty ritualism. You know, just bowing and lighting candles and doing things for good karma and all that sort of stuff. At that point it just becomes a useless ritual. Which doesn't mean to say that ritual in itself is useless, you know. It does prepare one's mind, like the chanting and all that, prepares you to do the meditation. Gets you into a mindset. Some people need it more than others, you know.

CHAPTER 58

Revising the Principles of Meditation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 32 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma returns to the Buddha's own meditation journey as recorded in the suttas, tracing the path from concentrated absorption (jhāna) practice and self-mortification to the rediscovery of pure, childlike awareness that led to Awakening. He emphasizes how the Buddha remembered a childhood experience of simply watching without conceptual overlay—a state of receiving without judgment that became the foundation of vipassanā practice.*
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> *The talk explores the crucial distinction between being caught up in mental and emotional states versus observing them with detached awareness. Bhante explains how this witnessing consciousness, when balanced with mettā (loving-kindness), allows practitioners to investigate their inner world without identification. He addresses the ultimate goal where even the sense of 'observer' dissolves into pure knowing.*
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> *Practical guidance covers working skillfully with the five hindrances: sloth and torpor, ill-will and hatred, sensual desire, restlessness, and doubt. For each hindrance, specific techniques are offered—from standing meditation for dullness to staying with bodily sensations rather than mental fantasies for anger, and resting with anxiety rather than rushing into decisions when doubt arises.*
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> *The teaching emphasizes that meditation extends beyond formal sitting into daily life, particularly through mindful eating as investigation of pleasure without indulgence. This accessible yet comprehensive overview provides both newcomers and experienced practitioners with essential tools for developing Right Awareness and understanding the mind's conditioning patterns.*

So really just to revise the principles of meditation and some of the pitfalls.

It's always good to go back to the Buddha himself, his own personal experience, and to remember that right until the very end of his search for an answer that was deep within his own heart, this business around suffering, he couldn't find the answer to it and he was pretty stuck. By the time he came to leave his companions, it must have looked to him that there really wasn't an answer, because everything that the society at that time had to offer had been offered and he'd done it to the best of his abilities and he got nowhere.

It was only when he sat there and was refreshed with a bowl of rice pudding—everybody knows the power of rice pudding—that he just remembered this occasion in childhood when he was watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, and there was something about that watching which awoke in him another possibility.

His earlier practice had been to do with what we call the *jhānas*, these absorptions, which is something you can manipulate, something you can do with your mind. You can make it feel, you can make your heart feel blissful. So it's an actual doing, it's an actual something you can achieve, just like we can achieve through the repetition of phrases, just repetition of phrases and scenes and just talking to ourselves, and we can get into a nice deep depression. In the same way you can talk to yourself and lift yourself up.

Then there was that business of self-mortification where the error was seen to be in the body itself. So it's the body that has pleasure, and therefore one tries to subdue that, and in doing so one attains a certain type of peace. But the problem was that just led him towards starvation and death, which didn't present itself as the most brilliant answer to his problem.

So it was only when he went back to this childhood experience. And what is it about the child, especially before the age of seven, that is different from an adult's way of seeing the world? It's that it isn't yet confused by concepts and experiences. So that intelligence is still, shall we say, in a very pure state of just receiving, just receiving, and the ability to receive without criticism, receive without judgment, receive without past experience. And then of course it has to make sense of it, and adults tell it how to make sense of it, and that's the end of that.

So it's a case of really rediscovering that original mind that we had then, the original intelligence we had then. That's all it is. And to do that, we keep pulling ourselves out of the mind. We keep getting out of our own mind, exiting from our own emotions. We find that position within ourselves where we're actually watching, feeling, experiencing an emotion, which is very different from being it, isn't it? Very different from being angry to feeling the anger as something within you.

And when the body comes with its tickles and its pains, to actually see it as objective and to investigate it just as a sensation. What is a sensation? What is an itch before you call it an itch? As soon as you say it's an itch, you've got to scratch it. But if you go before you call it an itch, there isn't the impulse to scratch really. All it is is little fiery little sensations.

The same with eating. As soon as you say I'm hungry, or I am hungry, or there is hunger, there's the impulsion to eat. If you go below that, just the sensations, they're just tickly sensations in the stomach.

So there's something happening in our mentation which is losing, shall we say, that initial direct contact. It immediately flips into conceptual thinking, historical thinking, conditioned thinking. That's what we mean by this conditioning. It's something we build up within ourselves.

So what we're trying to do in the meditation is to allow the mind to express all this, allow the heart to express all its emotional states. Let the body be uncomfortable, comfortable, doesn't matter, and to discover that access point where we're no longer involved in it, we're no longer caught up in it, and from that point we can observe, we can feel, we can experience, and in so doing we can see how we create the world that we live in.

So the whole of our practice is keep on accessing that position. And that position has to become clear to us. It has to become clear to us by direct personal experience. Nobody can describe it to you, can tell you what it is, to a point. All these words that I'm saying now would be meaningless unless you've done some meditation and actually tried to experience this business of distancing from what was inside you.

Just as we don't have any problem with knowing that this room is outside my body—we've made that objective, we've made that an object—we can create a relationship to it and say it's my room, in which case I get worried and anxious about it, but I'm much easier with just saying it is a room, it belongs to somebody else, and I can do what I want inside it and not get too worried.

So that business of being able to see things as not connected to me in that way of being mine. So when I go inward, I have this anger, this depression, this stress. And on the other side I have joy, affection, love. As soon as I say it's mine, I'm forming a relationship with that which is going to cramp the mind and heart. Now in what way does it cramp it? It cramps it because it has the service. It comes into the service of me.

So when you drive yourself down to this me, what does this me want? What do I want from the world I live in? As we said last night, I want to be happy. It's fair enough, isn't it? I just want to be happy. And unfortunately this I presumes that its happiness can be found by manipulating the world. I'd be happy if people served me food and drove me around a bit. So then I have to manipulate people to make sure that I get what I want. And of course if they don't service me, then I want to get rid of them. What's the point of having people around who aren't going to service my wants?

The same with objects. If I don't like an object, I chuck it away. And if I do like it, hold on to it. Put it under lock and key. So the world becomes a place of—it becomes a dangerous place. It becomes a place where I have to hold on to what I have in case I become unhappy. I have to keep away all those things that make me unhappy. The Scrooge. Keep what makes me happy.

So when we are practising meditation, we're going in, into the mind, into the body itself, into the heart itself, to actually feel what's going on there and to recognise that relationship we have: like it, don't like it, want it, don't want it. So it starts here. Everything out there is just a projection of what I've decided I need.

So if I go in here and I feel loneliness, I project it outwards. I've got to heal it out there. So I phone up a friend and say, "Look, I'm very lonely." "Oh, don't worry. I'll come and have a pint with you." And you think, "Oh, that's healed." You have a pint, you feel good, and you think, "Oh, that's how to cure loneliness"—until your friend drops dead. And then the loneliness comes up and says, "The friend's not there," and you're stuck with this loneliness.

So now all these problems we have within us can't be solved by anything outside us. It's actually only through coming into contact with these problems inside us and to actually feel them and allow them to express themselves and to express themselves without any interference that we realise actually that that's the curing process. All they want to do is tell us how sad they are, how lonely they are, how upset they are, how angry they are. Once you've listened to it and felt it, they just go away. They just fade out. They exhaust themselves. And it's just having that patience, that willingness to receive, no matter how hard it is. I mean, some of the stuff's pretty awful. And it's just being able to be open to that.

Now we'll be much easier with the stuff if we don't identify with it. So that's why in our meditation we try to take this position of the onlooker, the observer, the one who knows. And that distance, that distance from what we experience within ourselves, that's the process of detaching.

Now so that that distance, detachment doesn't become brittle, doesn't become hard, doesn't become in a sense another subtle way of not feeling things, you have to open your heart out as it were to what's arising, and that's the importance of *metta*. So this looking, this onward looking has to be—it's best if it's flavoured with that attitude of wanting to heal what's there. And you've got to be careful here because that presumes some sort of achievement. But it's looking down or looking at what is happening within us in a kindly way, in a gentle way. And that's the process of metta. That's why this vipassanā and metta are two things that need to balance each other.

So it's a warm, it's a warm onlooking, it's a warm investigation. And when you do that, it undermines all those judgmental phrases that come up: "This is terrible. I'm useless." All that sort of stuff. So developing that looking down upon with compassion. So in the Mahāyāna you see the Avalokiteśvara, the compassionate Buddha, the one that looks down upon with compassion. So that's what we're trying to do within ourselves is to create, is to discover the Buddha within us and to give it that flavour of compassion towards ourselves.

So now, once we're pretty clear about that we want to always access this position of the onlooker, the witness, the observer, that's not, remember, the most perfect state. It's only when the idea of me looking down, me observing, disappears too, that it's any true vipassanā. That can't happen by an act of will. We can get ourselves to an onlooker by an act of will. You can say, "Right, now let's look at this," and immediately you pull yourself out. This consciousness pulls itself out. But it can't do that with the self. And that's our unfortunate situation. You cannot by an act of will get rid of the self. All you do is create another self, getting rid of the self you don't want.

So the only way that sense of self disappears is by bringing that attention—and that's where this sense of concentration comes in—bringing that attention into the immediate moment. And when, as you draw through interest and through investigation, through concentration and effort, into the immediate moment, there's no time for that reflection, for the afterthought, "I'm looking." And those are moments of pure vipassanā. They're happening anyway in your practice, believe it or not, but they're just so small that you probably haven't noticed. And it's extending those moments and waking up out of them that you realise for that point of time, for that little measure of time, there was just awareness. There was just the knowing.

Now that is what we're trying to develop towards, and our skills of meditation are about how to work with the hindrances when they come up. So that's a skill and that takes effort.

So what do you do when you get these feelings of tiredness and sloth in the body and dullness in the mind? So the first thing, of course, is so long as you're clear that it is lethargy and dullness, that it isn't that you need sleep. This might not be clear on such a small retreat like this. So give yourself the benefit of the doubt. But not too much.

And so when you get these feelings of lethargy, know that they're there, and just make that mental determination: "I'm not going to give in to this." Just refuse to be annihilated. And then work with them. Open your eyes to make sure that you're awake. Stand up. Don't feel that's a failure. Standing meditation is perfectly equal to sitting

meditation. Don't stand up thinking, "Oh, all these people are there, what a terrible meditator." Stand up. If it's really, really bad, before you fall over, you can leave the room and walk up and down a bit. And just keep yourself, keep yourself awake.

And what is your object? What is it that you're investigating? Well, these very feelings. The dullness in the mind—it's like porridge in the mind, in the head. And the feeling of the body just wanting to collapse. And you just keep, you just walk with it, that's all. Like you're walking with a great big fat dog that doesn't want to come with you. Just keep moving up and down. Very slowly, just very slowly.

And then of course, don't be surprised—I'm sure some of you have experienced it—that the energy just turns. Suddenly you've got all this energy. Sometimes it turns the other way and you find yourself being very restless. Then you realise they're just two sides of the same coin.

So when it comes to something like hatred, all these delicious things that we like to enjoy—cruel thoughts, getting your own back, poking people in the eye, things like that—don't be... Be aware of that, of the self-judgment that comes with it: "How could you possibly think things like that?" And then just note that: judging.

Remember, you can't kill the conditioning. You can't destroy the conditioning. All you can do is disempower it. And you disempower it by disidentifying and not joining in. Now even though you may find yourself joining in unwittingly, that's not being a real act of will, a conscious act of will. It doesn't have the force of a conscious act of will. It only has the force of a conditioned will. But even so it does push it a bit. If you sat here and said to yourself, "I am going to murder that person," you'd be off, wouldn't you? You'd be writing your notes, you'd be who you could phone up, and it would be a positive line of thought driving you to murder. Terrible.

But here it just arises. You're nervous, throwing them out of the window. So when that comes up—this is because you've been watching the wrong films. The films have taught you how to deal with these sorts of situations. So the mind is using all sorts of things to get rid of this problem of hating somebody.

So when that comes up, as soon as you become conscious of that dream, of that fantasy that's been created, you notice it. You don't note the fantasy. You're not worried about the actual content or anything like that. You're worried about what's there, what's empowering it. So it's hatred. Anger. So then you come into the body and go into the body to feel. To feel it as an emotional state. Because that's where the engine is. The engine's here in the heart.

And so long as you keep your attention here, it has a chance of just exhausting itself. Every time it slips up into these higher faculties, whether you've done it wittingly or unwittingly, it is turning itself, it's growing. I'm sure you've all had the experience of somebody saying something to you in the morning, in the early part of the day at work or somewhere, and you've been slightly irritated by it. But you've thought nothing of it. And then a couple of hours later when you're having a cup of tea... Then come lunch... and by night you've got this headache. And it's just because you haven't been mindful, you haven't noticed. As soon as the irritation arises, right, let it go, let it pass, let it just... don't join in the fantasies.

These emotional states generate themselves through the fantasies that they can create. As soon as you come off them, at least they're not generating. And now where can they go? They've got nowhere to go. They just have to come out through the body. Sometimes these things come out, sometimes they come out and they're so bedded in the body that actually they come out just as pain.

So when you feel pain in the body, fine, it could be that the body's in the wrong posture. It could be the start of a terrible and dangerous illness. You don't know. But it could also be just one of these little turbulences that are blocked in the body and again all you do is just stay with it. Let it blow itself out. Just be patient with it. Often when it happens like that you haven't a clue what it was, what caused it. It's been totally dissociated from its origin.

When it comes to the other side of all things that we like to indulge in — you know, the lusts and the greeds, making money, fame. When will my 15 minutes of fame come? As soon as the mind begins to agitate around that, well, these are quite delicious things to get into. So here you have to really be quite sharp and quite disciplined. And as you come away from it, as you come away from that thought pattern and you come into the body to feel whatever the emotion is, the excited emotion is that's empowering it, you have to make a determination not to go there.

Now, if you come into the body to feel this but there's still a part of you that wants to go to that fantasy, it only takes a moment of mindfulness and off you go. Half an hour later, you think, oh God, come back. So you have to stop, you have to stop and say, you have to acknowledge it. Ah, planning, planning, you know, planning the next great move. And then as you come off it, you can still feel that desire to go there. You have to stay with that desire, wait for it to begin to decrease. You have to be patient with that because sometimes they're very strong.

When it comes to restlessness, again, don't fight it. It's much more to do with relaxing around it. If it's a restlessness in the body, just relax what you can of the body around that feeling of wanting to get up, wanting to move. Whatever it appears in your hands, just relax around it. Just relax. And then put your attention right into those feelings of that restlessness. And just stay there. Investigate that. Feel that. See it more just as little transient moments of sensations.

Remember that the mind is always picking up a set of sensations and creating something out of it. It creates objects in the world for us which is necessary — you don't live in the world not being able to see objects — but we keep being fooled by it, that's the problem. So when you feel restless, this is one of those sensations that you can really get into and see that all it is is just little moments of these fiery movements, fiery windy movements.

The mind is more difficult when it's really restless. Some people think they're going mad. But we are mad. There shouldn't be any worries about going mad. It's pretty straightforward. Everybody's mad. Only somebody who's fully awakened is not mad. There's very few of us.

So when the mind goes berserk and it just won't stop thinking no matter what you do, it really is just so empowered and it's just going berserk inside there. So just be patient. Okay, so now that's all firing away on all pistons. So very gently you shoot off and you just come back. Just be patient with it, be patient with it. The important thing is not to make an act of will, a conscious act of will to indulge what the mind is telling you to do. That's the crucial thing.

And you can do a half-conscious will where there's a part of you saying, no, no, just watch, just watch. And the other part is saying, just have a peep, just have a peep. And before you know it, whoop! And then of course it goes really buggered.

So make a clear — these moments of reflection in your sitting, it's very skilful to stop every thought and just ask yourself what you're doing. You know, like, what am I doing now? Why am I going berserk? These little moments of reflection and ask yourself, am I using, what techniques have I been taught? In what ways can I handle this particular problem? There's nothing wrong with thinking about your, reflecting and thinking about your meditation as you're sitting. That's what you're supposed to be doing. If you lose it, you're supposed to save yourself. What's going wrong here?

Doubt, self-doubt, you know, doubting whether you can do it or whether you should be doing it or is this the right time to do it and all that. So, doubt is just, where's it coming from, doubt? Where's the base of doubt? It comes from don't know, doesn't it? If you

know, if you know, there's no doubt, is there? I mean, if you know that lunch is at 12.15 and you've seen it written here, then there's no doubt. It's only if you haven't seen it or somebody said maybe it's at 12.15 that you've got this doubt. So then you run around the place asking everybody, when's lunch? When's lunch? We're going to miss lunch. That sort of sense of doubt comes from this business of not knowing.

It's a place where we really don't like to be. You know, the self likes to know. It likes to be able to control. It likes to know what's going to happen tomorrow. It's got it all planned out. And when I retire, all that. So this business of staying in the don't know, of staying at a place where you are afraid. Where there's anxiety. And not to let it shake you into don't know. And then suddenly, I don't know whether I can, whether I should. Should I, shouldn't I?

Now, when the mind gets locked into those doubts about what you should be doing, whether you should be sitting or not sitting, whether you should be here or not here, in moments of life, whether you should be taking this job or not that job, whether you should be going into a relationship or not a relationship, you know, and all those points where doubt comes up, don't get lost so much in the mentation, but rest with that feeling of anxiety and fear that comes up when you don't know. And just let time, let more information come in before you rush into some decision.

So here, when you're meditating, and the mind goes berserk and all that, you can hear it sometimes, you know. Oh, you can't do this, you're wasting your time. There's the doubt. Normally we say, yeah, it's true, right, let's get up and go. You're fed up with this.

So be careful about doubt, it's very tricky. It's something that we very quickly get into because it's such a relief from having to feel the anxiety that's beneath it. It's much easier to run around like a chicken than it is to sit there with the feelings of fear and anxiety around the decision you know. Lists A and B for and against — should I, shouldn't I. And it's often a case of just staying there with those feelings of anxiety around doubt.

In the spiritual practice, of course, it's really pernicious. Well, it's pernicious in all forms of life to have sceptical doubt because it stops you doing, it stops you committing. So at some point you have to say yes and you have to, as it were, jump and hope for the best. And we can't do that if you see life in terms of success and failure. It's not nice to do something if you think you're going to fail. But if you see life more as an investigation, more as a trial and error, then you lose that fear of failure. So that takes away a lot of that fear of making a decision and thinking you're going to make a prat of yourself. Other people can think you're a prat. That doesn't matter. It shouldn't matter. It should be up to us and ourselves as to why we've done something for a specific purpose.

So, when it comes to doubt, get on it quickly, especially in your meditation. It's a crippling thing.

I think I've covered most of them, I think. Doubt, guilt, restlessness, sleepiness, all those things we love, all those things we hate. And what we're trying to do is to become skilful. And if we can be skilful with it in the sitting, we should be able to take it out into daily life. So that this differentiation we make between sitting and daily life, they should fade into each other. There shouldn't be any distinction.

So, from now to lunchtime, it's up to you really what you want to do. A bit of walking, a bit of sitting. Keep your own time. Lunchtime is a bit more formal. I'll be offered food and then I'll wait for you all to eat. Sorry, to be served. Or to serve yourself. And then I'll do a little chant just to make it a bit more formal. And then we can eat.

And remember, the eating is part of our investigation. The whole process of pleasure. If we can understand how to enjoy food, which is so basic, we have to do it every day. It's so great to have to be with that in a non-indulgent way. And we should be able to translate that into all the pleasures of our life. When the Buddha described what it was like to be in a state of *Nibbāna*, he said he was contented and with it happy. How bad is it? Contented and with it happy.

So with those encouraging words, take advantage of your time, you know. And as I say, today is just being with yourself, letting things burn off.

CHAPTER 59

The Hindrances

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 31 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma provides essential guidance on understanding and working with the mental hindrances that arise during vipassanā (insight) meditation. He explains how the Buddha's awakening revealed that all unwholesome mental states (āsava) can be completely transformed through the meditation process.*
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> *The talk explores the cyclical nature of wanting and aversion that drives human suffering (dukkha), describing how we constantly oscillate between grasping at pleasant experiences and pushing away unpleasant ones. Bhante emphasizes that this reaction pattern stems from wrong view and keeps us trapped in unsatisfactoriness. The key insight is learning to observe this process from the position of the 'witness' or 'observer' - what he calls 'the top of the cone' - rather than being caught up in the reactions themselves.*
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> *Drawing on the Mahasi Sayadaw noting technique, Bhante explains how mental labeling helps maintain objectivity with both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. He addresses the common fear that meditation makes things worse, clarifying that we're simply becoming aware of what was already present in the mind. The talk emphasizes that negative states don't just disappear - they transform into their opposites: hatred becomes love, loneliness becomes solitude, cruelty becomes compassion.*
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> *This practical teaching is essential for anyone beginning vipassanā practice, offering both encouragement and realistic expectations about the purification process that occurs when we develop Right Awareness (sammā sati).*

Just to remind ourselves, and for those of you who are fairly new to this insight meditation *vipassanā,* I want to go over some of the principles and some of the pitfalls—the hindrances that we come across. One of the insights that the Buddha had when he became fully liberated was that all the floods—I don't know how to translate that, the *āsavā*—these unwholesome dispositions within us had been completely transformed.

So there's a process that's going on within our meditation which is beyond our control, beyond our direct control, which is this process of transformation. When we are experiencing directly what's happening within the heart, all these negative states—there are five of them, we split them up into five so that we can see them more clearly—they're not simply dying out, they're also then becoming or turning gently into their opposites.

So when we sit and anything around greed comes up—greed, lust, desire for fame, desire for pleasures of any kind—whenever we feel that searching within us to be happy in some sort of sensual or emotional way, then that searching is coming from the self. And the self is just really trying to be happy. It's sad, really. It just wants to be happy. But it just keeps investing in the wrong stock. That's all. So it invests in food, sex, drugs, rock and roll. And it's alright for a while, as you know. And then it dissipates, it cracks up. And that's the basic problem with the happinesses and joys of life. They're not evil, they're wonderful. It's just we have a wrong relationship with them, that's all. If we can enjoy these things and just let them go, then they don't cause us any problems. But that attachment, unfortunately, is a natural consequence of the self. It's its delusion about the way life is.

And that's why we try to observe these three characteristics, because that undermines that delusion and begins to create a different relationship to the world. So when we talk about suffering, the word *dukkha*—that's what it's translating—the word suffering is sometimes too strong for it. A discontent, a feeling of alienation, a feeling of not fitting, loneliness, all that. It's all included in this word dukkha. And included there also is the inability for the pleasures and joys of life to deliver.

So when we're seeking in the wrong place, then at some point there's going to come some feeling of unsatisfactoriness, dissatisfaction. And when we sit, we can see this vicious circle. So something comes into the mind, some pleasant thing, and there's a movement towards it, to grab it, to hold it, to develop it, to maintain it. And then something unpleasant comes into the mind, and there's a movement to ignore it, to push it away. If it's too strong, of course, one wants to run away. So there you've got your fight-flight syndrome. So these three emotional positions of attachment, grasping, wanting, and pushing and running come out of this wrong view.

And if you watch yourself during the day, you're constantly running around this little vicious circle. You might have got up this morning and saw the rain and immediately there's, "Oh, that's soggy old England." And then you might have come down later or after meditation and then there's breakfast and, "Oh, great." There's a grasping for breakfast. And then there's a work period, "Oh, no." We're constantly emotionally going up and down on this wave, this rather unfortunate wave of wanting, not wanting.

And this wanting-not wanting does have a basis. It has a basis in the way we experience life. So we experience life as pleasant or unpleasant. I mean, that's natural. There are things which the body feels is pleasant, and there are things it feels unpleasant. So a

pleasant taste on the tongue, and when you get a headache, that's not so pleasant. That doesn't create any problems. It's the reaction that we have, the inability to stay calm, equanimous, accepting, with it within our own hearts. That's where the problem lies.

So, what we're trying to become aware of, very keenly, is that movement in the mind of wanting, not wanting, and the vicious circle that it creates. Now, to be aware of that, you have to access a different way of being inside yourself. You can't join in that circle—you get lost. So that whenever desire arises you run for it, go for it, so your whole life becomes impelled by that desire. The better job, the better car, the whole of our economic system is driven on the understanding that you can create people's desires. I think originally when Smith wrote his book about capitalism, I think he thought it would be driven by the consumer but he didn't realize the power of the advertiser and the power of human desire. So as soon as you put a pretty picture up everybody wants it, so the advertisers know what drives us. Just fundamental psychology really about greed.

So that understanding about pleasure, and then the other side about running away, you see, what we're trying to do is to see that process. You can't see it when you're lost in it. You can't see it when you're totally indulgent. You can't see it when you're totally in a rage. So somehow you have to access a position where you can observe that, come to know it, come to see it as unskillful, unwholesome, leading only to more unsatisfactoriness, and then of course you tend to wean yourself off it.

So now that position of looking—if you can think of a cone and at the base of it there's this vicious circle going on and you're sitting on top and you're looking down as it were on this psychology that's wanting not wanting wanting not wanting wanting not wanting—and that position there, that's the *vipassanā* position.

So vipassanā just means to see things clearly. The "vi" is the strengthening and "passanā"—passity—just means to see. So it's exactly the same as English, to see clearly, to see discriminately. Now this seeing, this knowing, you see, is what's actually deluded. It's because we don't see clearly that we get lost in these little traps. And it's only when you turn on what's happening in the mind—you catch it when you see it—that suddenly this intelligence we have pulls itself out of that indulgence. Pulls itself out of its normal reaction to things. Accesses this point and sees, oh, this is what's happening. Wanting, not wanting.

And it's not as though a primary insight, it's not as though just seeing it once is enough, because the habit is so deeply ingrained in us it goes back a long way. We have to believe—Buddhist understanding—goes back lifetimes. So that's a really ingrained habit to indulge and reject, indulge and be averse. So we've got to keep seeing it, keep

seeing it. And we won't pull ourselves off that reaction unless we see the consequence, and the consequence is unsatisfactoriness. So when we indulge in something you can see that the indulgence is growing towards addiction and then you become obsessed with it, so the suffering grows. Now when you come off it you have to go through the pain of renunciation, the pain of letting it go.

Now that's something else that we are beginning to understand, that when you sit in meditation a lot of it is purgatory. That's the way it is. And purgatory is different from hell. Hell is when you know there is no end to suffering. Purgatory, at least, you know there comes an end to it, even if it's the end of the meditation period. So it's a case of recognizing that to purge the heart, to actually cleanse the heart of these very clinging states, uncomfortable states, you have to suffer them. There's no way out of that.

If you don't suffer them, and they're in the mind—it's not as though there's anywhere outside your mind—they remain in the mind as a turbulence. And that's when you get these psychosomatic illnesses, tics. They've nowhere to go. If there's anger in the system, where can it go? It's stuck there within the system. It's only when you let the anger out and feel it, and let it blow itself out, that there's a release of that energy.

But remember, it's not just a simple release and gone. There's still the energy there, and that energy transforms into its opposite. So where there was hatred and anger, there's love. Where there was cruelty, compassion. You don't lose anything by the process of meditations. It's the same as what they say about energy in the universe. There's no energy lost. It always seems to be the same quantity of energy. It's just transforming, it's changing.

One of the pleasant insights of meditation is that you don't have to do anything for your psychology. The psychology will heal itself because all it is is a turbulence, an energy. When we call it something, you see, whenever you give a name to something, it immediately substantiates it. It makes it into some sort of something solid. So you say to yourself, "Oh, I'm depressed." Well, there you are. You are depressed. You just said it. "So I suffer from depression." Well, that's an object, isn't it? Depression. It's hard. How do you get over depressions?

And it's only when you sit quietly with it and begin to investigate these feelings that you realize there's nothing at all. There's no such thing as depression. All there is is just this flow of sensations. That's all. And if you just stay long enough, four or five years, it begins to dissipate. So that's one of the problems of the mind. We need it, of course. We need to have concepts in ordinary daily life. That's not a problem. But it's to believe that they're real. So if I say to myself, "You know, I suffer from depression," it's very difficult

for me to see that that's just a mental concept. When I go into it, what I am actually suffering from are just heavy feelings, heavy sensations. And the mind is in a state of being blocked or unable to move.

And that's fine, you see, if you stay with that. Then there's no pressure on yourself to become not depressed. There's no pressure to try and change anything. And so this turbulence that we have, what can it do? It just expresses itself. And in the expression, it blows itself out. And it's just that being able to be patient with mental states and to see them as just energy forms, forms of energy, you see, that allows them to dissipate.

Now, we're not going to do that unless we are very clear that that's actually what's happening when we're in meditation. Because when you're in meditation, you might be sitting there and feeling these things like great restlessness, or tiredness and dullness in the head, the shaking of doubt—what the hell am I doing here?—and all that. These hatreds, angers, greed, lusts, they all come up, you see.

Now when you sit in meditation and you access this point at the top of the cone, you're not suppressing anything. So it often feels that things are getting worse, much worse. And it's because sometimes for the first time in our lives, we're actually allowing this stuff to express itself fully within our consciousness. And if it does that, then often we get that reaction of fear. "The meditation's making me more depressed." But it's not, honestly. What's happening is that the heart finally has that space and opportunity to express itself to you. So you thought you were sad, but you never thought you were this sad. You knew what grief was, but you didn't know it was painful as this. But if we can just have that courage, just that constancy, and to stay with it—and we won't get that unless we actually see this process as a healing process. That's important.

So all the way during today, you see, for those of you who are new to this, to be aware that emotions are just arising and passing away, and if you don't indulge them, they pass away, and if you don't reject them, they come up a bit stronger, but they pass away. If we can see just in small little emotions that are rising constantly throughout the day, when something big comes up, something that we've suppressed—who knows from what time—then we'll have that knowledge which will give us the courage to just sit with it, to just stay with it, and just let it burn.

Deep loneliness. People are lonely. You might feel yourself isolated. Our families dissipate, don't they? They go all over the place. Friendships, you move in and out of friendships. The society isn't static. So some people can feel terribly lonely. And when they sit with themselves, that loneliness can get really heavy. Because it's an existential

loneliness. It's a feeling of, "Why am I here in the first place? What's the point of being a human being?" So it can dig deep. It can be a despair. It can lead you to a despair. So the meditation would open you up to that, you see.

Now if you think that, well, loneliness leads to despair, leads to the bridge, then obviously there's no point in handling that. You may as well turn the TV on. But if you see that loneliness is just another mental state, and that if you just stay with it, it begins to dissipate, begins to just crack away and finally disappear. And if you can stay to the end point, you'll see that the other side of loneliness isn't despair at all. The other side is solitude, which is to be happy within oneself, just to be with oneself.

So all these negative states, if we stay—even the little ones—if you stay with them long enough, and you see actually that they transform into their opposites, all the unwholesome stuff transforms into a wholesome state, then there grows that growing confidence in the process that's happening within us when we practice vipassanā.

Now, if we were just to do it for the sake of psychological benefit, we'd miss out, you see, on the spiritual side, which is the undoing of that essential delusion in that which knows, in that which is looking. And to do that, just being aware of that process of reaction, wanting, not wanting, you see, is to release the delusion, to release us from the delusion that we can have permanent happiness in indulging in the world.

And coupled with that is seeing that transience. So when we really catch—when we really catch the fact that everything is radically arising and passing away and we can't argue with the Buddha when he says that there's nothing in this world worth holding on to—then you stop holding. Something comes, you win the lottery, great. You lose all your money, great. Be able just to, whatever arises, that's it. It arises, passes away, it's gone.

And as we look at that, you see, then we're undermining this idea of a self, which goes at a much more subtle level. And without worrying about a concept of what does the self mean, rather to be concerned to understand how it manifests—it manifests in control. The self wants to be in control. If it's in control, it's very happy. So if you've got a load of dosh in the bank, you're in control of all your financial needs and you can extend them all the way up to skiing in the Alps and you feel you're in control of your life. If you've got power at work, and you're in charge of people and they're doing what you want and you're in control and you feel you're in control of your life. So it's that sense of control where you can catch the self. That obsessive control. Wanting to be in charge.

So, coming down to our basic practice, we always begin by establishing that sense of calmness. Those seven factors that we went through quickly. And I'll do them again this evening in more detail. I'll explain them in more detail. And it's just getting that position and accessing that level, that point, the top of the cone, you see. And making that as a self-reflection, making that as a recognition. "Oh, now I'm in this position of the observer. I'm in this position of the witness. I'm in the position of the experiencer." To be very clear in our minds that this is the position I want to be in. And every time you lose it, you've wandered off somewhere or you're getting caught up in something, to immediately recognize that, and re-access this position.

This we can do. We can make all sensations in the body quite objective, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. We can actually feel as though they are there. Now, in the system of meditation that I teach, this Mahāsi, we actually use a little noting word, and that noting word is a great help just to distance from the object. So when there's discomfort, say, in the knee or from the posture, rather than moving away from it quickly, which is the usual thing that we do—you're always shifting about, you can't stay in a position of discomfort, you just catch yourself watching TV, you're always moving a bit—

But here in the meditation, if you remain in that position of discomfort and you observe that discomfort, you stay with the discomfort, not to react to it, then you're maintaining and using that noting word - pain, pain, pain, pain. And that helps you to keep yourself at the position on top of the cone.

If you get an emotional state, it could be a happy one, for heaven's sake. Something comes up, something joyful. So you notice it, joy. You don't get caught up in it - joyful, that must be good, let's get into it. See, and that means that you're now invested in a transient emotion. Because next minute you're depressed. One minute you're drunk. So you notice joy, and it's there, oh joy, that's joy. Feel it. What's the texture of joy? What does the mind want to do when it's joyful? You don't get caught up in it.

And as we remain at that position of the observer, the experiencer, we're beginning to develop a taste, a refined taste for equanimity, for peace. And eventually these things like joy and all that, they begin to feel a little gross. In Birmingham once, there was a young man came and it was the first time he'd ever meditated. And he came back the next week and he said, after that meditation period, and a few days meditation he couldn't listen to heavy rock anymore - couldn't handle it, it was too heavy. And that's it, you see, it's that process of refinement.

And when we're at that level, when we're at that level of the observer, all those seven factors that we were experiencing a little bit this morning, they're all there - the calmness, the steadiness of the watching, the essential peace, the silence. There's no words in the observer. And it's just getting, acknowledging that you've got to acknowledge it - oh this is where I am. So okay, that's a reflection, it's a thought, but it's a wise reflection. It's this knowing, coming to know how it got there and how it can maintain it. And that's important because unless we're there, we can't have these insights.

So now, finally, that position isn't the final position. Feeling ourselves to be the observer or the witness, knowing ourselves to be that, the feeler, the knower, isn't the final position because even there, there's somebody. I am feeling this. I know this. I can see this. There's still the I. There's still the knower.

Now, you can't go beyond that by an act of will, because that's the point where the self comes to an end of itself. To come to the end of that, we have to keep doing that *vipassanā*, doing that meditation, drawing ourselves through interest, through wanting to know, into a more refined, a more restricted moment, so that we're really beginning to centre on sensations just as they arise and pass away. And it's doing that that there's not the possibility of that reflection of I'm watching. The I begins to disappear. Well, it just disappears. It's not a process. It just disappears and suddenly there's just the watching, just the feeling, just the knowing.

And that's those little points that there's what we can call true vipassanā. And it's in those little moments that there are insights. The insight is not - it's very, very, very rare for there to be some sort of cataclysmic world changing insight. They're just little incremental insights which slowly build up over a period of time to change our view of things so that you wake up maybe a few years later and realise that hmm, you've changed. Often, often it's so subtle that other people see the change that you don't see it. They say to you oh you've changed. It can be as subtle as that.

So, keeping that in mind today, to turn this day just into that very quiet, gentle process of observing ourselves, inwardly and outwardly. Just to take an interest in ourselves, just to take an interest in our psychology, in our bodies. What do we know of our bodies? Do you have any idea what's happening in your liver now? The clue? You just hope it's all right.

It's just that quiet, gentle, interested investigation of what's happening now, what is this, who am I, and all that sort of stuff. And just to slowly begin to recognise this position of the one who knows. And to do that, to quote Ajahn Tate, who is a very famous Thai teacher: Make it simple. Make it simple. Just watch. Take it easy. Relax.

If you find yourself rushing, if you find yourself taking two steps at a time, stop. Come down the stairs again. Start again. If you find yourself gobbling, put the fork down. If you find yourself rushing everywhere, just stop. And then start again. Just keep bringing the energy down to calm.

If during the day this calmness is slipping into exhaustion and tiredness, then you'll have to judge for yourself whether it's something you have to take a rest with or something you just gently work against. Whether it really is true tiredness or just the good old - our two very good friends, my old teacher used to call them - sloth and torpor. Remember, if you indulge in sloth and torpor you just get more slothful and more torporous, so be careful. But if during the day you just feel that the heaviness is too much then take a rest. But again you have to judge for yourself. You stay longer than 40 minutes you tend to disappear for a few hours. Make sure you put your alarm clock on.

So we can leave it at that and there's a bit of a walking period. So, unfortunately the weather isn't so clement. So, see if you can find a place to do some walking meditation. If you wish, you can also just read, or just reflect on your life, whatever takes your fancy. And we'll meet again for lunch. I think that's what happens, isn't it? Yeah? You're going for lunch?

And at lunch, just to remind you, it'll be a formal lunch. So I'll go for food first and everybody else serves themselves. And we sit at table. And during that period, it's called watching the food go cold. And then I do a little blessing. And then I remind people that we're eating in order to nourish the body and not in order to indulge. And then you have to forgive me for allowing the food to go cold. Okay?

Now, how many of you are new to meditation? Because we can stay here and I'll just take any questions. Especially if you haven't done any walking meditation. Is anybody going to stay behind or am I just going to be on my own? One? Two? Yeah? Good, okay. So feel free.

CHAPTER 60

Practice into Daily Life (Christmas 2006)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this Christmas 2006 talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides practitioners in integrating meditation insights into daily life through the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path. He begins with Right Understanding (sammā diṭṭhi), encouraging awareness of impermanence (anicca) throughout the day—noticing how things constantly arise and pass away rather than focusing only on beginnings. The talk addresses the fear that arises when truly seeing endings and the delusion of continuity we create.*
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> *Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), Bhante discusses contemplation of death and the body's lack of self-control, illustrating anattā (not-self) through simple examples like growing toenails. He emphasizes combining vipassanā insight with metta (loving-kindness) practice—using vipassanā to contact difficult feelings honestly, then transforming them through goodwill rather than suppressing or indulging.*
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> *The teaching covers Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood as expressions of mindful living, suggesting we examine our lifestyle choices—from work attitudes to television watching—ensuring they align with spiritual development. Bhante concludes with the meditation factors of Right Effort, Right Awareness (sammā sati), and Right Concentration, emphasizing gradual progress and the importance of daily reflection to guide our spiritual development.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I just thought this evening I'd try to make some connections between the practice we're doing and daily life, and to somehow do that by going through the Eightfold Noble Path, which some of you will know by heart.

The first is right understanding. So when the Buddha talks about right understanding, he's talking about what we were discussing this morning, beginning to see things as they really are. So that quality of transience, that quality of impermanence — we tend to sit and then we get up and we forget about it and get on with life. And in a sense, that doesn't allow it to seep through. It doesn't allow the small insights we might get when we're sitting to actually dig deep.

One thing that you might try is to set a day in which you keep reminding yourself to be aware that everything is actually passing away. It's easy for us to see the beginning of things. To see the beginning of things for us, the word "new" is something we're quite aware of. But to see the ending of things — like what happened to the old pop stars? Actually, we know they're all coming back, aren't they? It's a bad example. It's like the ending of things isn't something we like to particularly see because, of course, it connects us with our own ending.

But to wake up in the morning and to begin to recognise that something has finished, something has gone. You close the door of the house before you leave and you notice that all that time spent getting up and getting out has gone, it's finished. Where is it? People come in and out of your vision, you have a chat and they go, and then you stop and you think, that's gone, that's finished. What we normally do is, as soon as something's finished, we're off onto something new. We don't recollect, we don't actually notice that something's actually gone, finished, kaput, dead, like Monty Python's parrot is finished.

And it's bringing that consciousness to mind all the time, that things are finishing, finishing, finishing. Because we're always aware of the newness of things, because we always make that quick link into something new, something else, there comes that delusion of continuity. We don't actually see that things are discontinuous, that there is a rising and a passing away, and that that passing away is really a full stop before something else can happen. I mean, without that, presumably, you couldn't get creativity in the universe. But for us, that's a frightening point, because we see things arising, we're always on that little excitement, we're always looking forward to something coming. We're never looking back to see something going.

When you stand at a river and you're on a bridge, just look one way, the way the river's flowing, and just catch how you feel about that, what effect it has on you — flowing away from you — and then turn around and see it coming towards you and just see how you feel about that. They're two very different positions on the same bridge. And if there's a puddle somewhere, just look into that — there's still water — and see how you feel about that. So this quality of *anicca* is called transience, impermanence. You can't just leave it when you get up; it's got to be part of the way we see things.

Now when you do begin to see the ending of things, what comes up? Well, there's a lot of fear. You might panic even. I'm not putting you off. But there's fear there because we've never looked, we've never really accepted that things totally and utterly disappear. Last weekend — middle of the week, Thursday — I was at a funeral for the head monk who was the chief monk at the London Vihara after a very long illness. And look-

ing at the corpse, because they had him lying in state, just looking at the corpse, I could see my mind making that face move. I was putting life back into something which was dead, it was gone. And I can see how it's difficult to accept that what you're looking at is nothing. There's no difference between the coffin it's in and what it is. It's lifeless, it's gone. And that's what the mind's always doing.

Now when we say the mind, we're talking about the way it creates pictures, the way it creates stories, the way it's always creating a future for us. But of course the question is why? Why is it doing that? And then you get down to this idea of a self, this idea of who I am. And this "I am," when you look at it and you begin to define it, you find it is locked into this life form. "I am me." When you start defining that in the way that other people might define you, you're talking about character, personality, your job, your friendships — it's all me, me.

Now once we've taken that position, in a sense we're in a very unfortunate place because this me wants to be happy. That's the drive, isn't it? I don't think anybody would deny that at the deepest level we'd like to just be happy. That's basically accepted by all philosophies, whether they dream of heaven or whatnot. The idea is I want to be happy. Whatever that might mean, I just want to be happy.

So now I'm in this world, I'm in this body, I'm in this world around me, and I've got to make it work. So you can see how quickly the idea of making something work begins to be a collection of things that make me happy. That collection is the attachment to things. It's the gathering of things, the accumulation.

Now, once I've got all these things, well, I've got to watch out for people who might take them away. So immediately, as soon as I hold on to something, I'm in a state of conflict with the world. Even if it's a vase which nobody wants, nobody would ever want, it may break. So I've got to be especially careful that it isn't broken. See, as soon as you hold on to something, whether you like it or not, you're in a state of conflict.

So, recognising that the conflict is there, and the conflict has this two-edge. It's either one where you have to annihilate the opposition or run from it. In the Pali word, this is all included in one word, *taṇhā*. And you can translate it perhaps easily as wanting, not wanting. But it doesn't get the full force of that without recognising that there are these three positions that we take of accumulation, rejection, annihilating something and running for it.

Now, you have to bring that into your daily life. It's all right sitting here and noticing that when a beautiful thought comes up, one wants to begin to develop it, to begin a story around it. When something unpleasant turns up, like anxiety or something, you

can see that you don't look at that. You want to get over here somewhere, constantly pushing away. But you have to bring that into your daily life from the moment you get up to going through — like when you arrive at work, it might be there's just that sickly feeling. Not always. And you have to acknowledge that. Sometimes we just brush it aside, but it's actually being with all the stuff that's coming up, which is manifesting to us this delusion. That's the point. All this negativity, all this attachment, all that, they're the measure of our delusion, how the delusion manifests for us.

And it's by being in contact with that throughout the day, which, as it were, throws you into this other position, a position which you've discovered in your meditation, of just coexisting peacefully with these states of mind, not allowing them to hijack your life, not allowing them to overpower you. So all this business that we're doing here of observing that, we have to find a way of bringing it into our daily life.

And again, you can set yourself a day that this day I'll just notice how greedy I am. This day I'll notice how irritated I've become at the smallest things. Because these things become habitual, we're inured to them. We're not actually in contact with the feelings as they come up in their rawness. We're always just looking askance, looking away from them. And you keep going.

But remember that these things have a life of their own. They're an energy, they're a force within the psyche. And we know from our own blessed Freud that these things creep out in the most unfortunate ways. And the way you say things, slips of the tongue and things like that — very embarrassing. So it's that, it's actually becoming much more aware of that, taking your meditation, taking that awareness into daily life.

This business of *anattā* — not self — what does that mean, not self? Well, the simplest of things. Like you take your socks off and you find that your toenails have grown. Who grew them? Did you have anything to do with it? It was just there. I mean, you cut them a while back and now they're back. You never felt them grow. But you insist, "This is my toenail." But then you cut it off and it's lying there and you forget about it and somebody says, "Is that your toenail?" And you've still got it, even though it's on the piece, it's still "my toenail."

And it's looking into the body and just asking yourself, what do you know? Do you know what your liver's doing now? Have you ever really experienced the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs? And yet we have this peculiar feeling that this is my body. But when you investigate it, you find that you hardly know anything. You hardly experience anything of your body, apart from when it hurts and tickles. That's it.

And when we talk about self, there's an understanding there of some sort of control, an agent. "I'm in charge." And then suddenly you're ill. We didn't decide that. And it's catching the fact that the control we have over the body is minimal. It's like a car. You can take it left, you can go right, you can go fast and forward, but you can't do anything about the wearing of the tyres. If the engine blows up, that's the way it is. If the oil starts leaking out, how do you know? You only know when the engine stops.

So when you look into yourself and you begin to investigate these things, then you get that feeling of being a sort of an alien within your own body. Very strange. And again there might be a little fright comes up.

Now all that fright, all that fear that comes up around this, all that not wanting, that ignoring, is a measure of the delusion. That's how the delusion manifests to us. You might glibly say, "Oh well I'm not afraid of death. I'm afraid of dying, but I'm not afraid of death." But you haven't a clue till you're up against it. It's a horrible thing. Because everything you think you are seems to be coming to an end. Completely. It's like they asked of the old rich woman, how much did she leave? He said, "Everything." And it is grasping that, it is grasping the fact that when you come across death.

Now, if you look at any spiritual tradition, they always have that contemplation. In medieval times, they used to have a little *memento mori*, didn't they? A little skull on the desk, just to remind them that there was an end to things. Now, that contemplation of death is very much part of the practice. The main scripture on how to do this practice, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, there's a whole section there about looking at dead bodies, corrupt and disappear into little bits of dust. A whole section. It says, and the commentary says you have to go to one of these charnel grounds, because in those days they just left the body out in the open and the animals and birds ate it. And you're supposed to just watch this process. And as you're watching it, you're supposed to be saying, "As that body is, this body will be." A bit frightening, eh?

And it gives a nice little direction not to sit upwind. Very detailed description on how to do meditation on a rotting dead body.

So these three characteristics — the sense of impermanence, everything stopping, everything coming to an end, the idea of possession, the idea of me, and this idea of control — and to actually bring it in as a daily practice. And that's how your meditation begins to seep through your life.

Now that's the negative side, that's all the horrible bit. The other side is the right attitude, getting the right attitude. So as we said this morning, whenever we sit in meditation, there is some purification going on. Something is exhausting itself, even if we can only weigh it in nanograms. Now there has to be that little effort to change it, to move it towards the positive side.

I was telling somebody just in the last break that a woman came to me and said that her partner complained that every time she sat, she did a sitting, she was cold and not responsive, poor man. And I asked her, I said, "Well, what do you do?" She said, "I just sit and then get up." I said, "Well, no. You've got to do the *mettā*." See, somehow you've got to reconnect.

So when you sit, you've taken this very special position within yourself of being the observer. To do that, you've got to create this sort of distance. And that distance, if you maintain it, can become slightly calloused. You can sometimes confuse equanimity with a lack of connection with something. But equanimity is a receptivity. It's a complete receptivity. So you are supposed to be connected. But because we take this position within ourselves of pointing and noting things, sometimes we pull back too far. We pull back too far, and we get into this position of not being able to reconnect.

A story that I like to tell around this is that I turned up to visit one monk, and there was a cat playing with a dead mouse. I mean, the cat had already killed it. And I asked him, I said, "Why don't you stop that?" And he said, "Well, it's cat kamma. It's mouse kamma. That's what they do. It's nothing to do with me. I'm just a monk."

I went to another monastery, I was just staying there, and something quite wonderful happened. This cat suddenly leapt out and jumped on this bird. And this monk got up as quick as lightning, gave this cat one hell of a thump, and took the bird out of his mouth and held it up and realised it was killed, the lungs had been punctured. So he held it up in the air and he chanted, "All things arise and pass away" in the Pali. "All compounded things arise and pass away."

So you see, we have a distinction here. What this other monk didn't recognise about the cat and the mouse was that his consciousness, his awareness was also part of that kamma. So he's unable to connect because he's found this place of equanimity, which has actually become very dry, very unconnected.

Now, I'm not suggesting that that would happen when somebody is meditating, say, in the morning and the evening, because daily life drags you into connection, whether you like it or not. But what we can do is, as it were, prepare ourselves for the day of doing this metta practice.

Now, what metta does is it gives us a basic relationship to people. And the best word for it is goodwill. I know it's sometimes translated as loving kindness, but that's a bit sloppy for me. It's more like getting your intentions right. What are your intentions towards people?

Now, supposing you're having difficulty with somebody at work. Normally speaking, what people do is they stir it, don't they? They sort of stir it round and round inside themselves. They sort of boil gently, and then they're ready for a good punch-up when they walk into work.

Now if you see that that's doing nothing apart from just creating a lot of heat and you turn that heat through the *metta* into a way of open-heartedness towards that person... Now you know that we're very sensitive to the way people look at us from quite a distance. You can tell somebody walking down towards you whether they're going to greet you with a smile or not — it's already in their body language.

So when you walk into work and you've already corrected your attitude to this person, if you happen to bump into them in the corridor, you'll see that quite spontaneously you'll smile because you've got that goodwill. And that disarms the person who feels rotten about you, even if they have every right to do so.

It's also with your work. I don't think there's any work, even if it's the work you've always wanted to do, where you don't go through periods of boredom, periods of disillusion with it, periods of feeling not in control of it, the fear of losing it. I mean, all those things will come whether we're doing the exact work we've always wanted to do or not.

If every morning we just reflect on that and we contact those feelings that we have about work, and then just re-establish a right intention, very slowly they're undermined.

So, the ability to contact those sorts of feelings is the gift of *vipassanā*. The ability to turn those feelings around is the gift of *metta*. And if you don't do the one without the other, then mistakes are made.

If you do the *vipassanā* without the *metta*, you can end up being calloused, indifferent, confusing indifference with equanimity. If you do the *metta* without the *vipassanā*, without you knowing it, you can be layering all this horrible stuff with a bit of icing. And you think everything's going fine until somebody does something and suddenly all these guns burst out and they wonder what's wrong with you. Because you've nicely patted it down with all this luscious icing.

So it's the combination of the two which help us to find a relationship to our lives which actually brings about a certain peace about it, an acceptance.

Now, when we're sitting, that's another virtue that we are developing — the sense of acceptance. This is the way it is. Now, acceptance isn't resignation. If something happens to you which is awful, there's that sort of possibility of giving up, of resigning, of being destroyed by it even. But acceptance is more that realistic appraisal of what there is and accepting it with a heart.

Now, because we live in the motion of time, even if this time arises and passes away, at least there's a forward movement — you can't go back on it. That ability to accept always presents us with potential. Every moment has a potential. And that potential is manifested by our decision making.

If you're at the point where you've resigned yourself, where you feel depressed about something, even when somebody says, "Here's a great job," you can't do it. You're stuck. You're stuck in this pit that you've put yourself in. But if it's just an acceptance, no matter how painful it might be, if it's an acceptance of the way things are, then there's always that openness, there's always that ability to see where the potential lies.

So you can see what we're doing here by just opening up to ourselves all the stuff that comes up and just accepting it as it is, not wanting to do anything with it, just allowing it to be, is creating that sense of open acceptance of things, patience, forbearance. These are really important qualities in our lives, aren't they?

So these two first steps — the *vipassanā* or the right understanding and the *metta* — you have to sort of put them together. The other thing that is this business of reflection that I ask you to do after every sit. So at the end of the day, just to reflect upon it, just to bring up incidents that have happened.

I was brought up a Catholic. It was called examination of conscience. And then you beat yourself up. But this business of reflecting, of thinking about one's life, that's part of the whole process of guiding ourselves. Without that reflection, you tend to be blind to the way you are. So if people don't turn up for your party, then you've got to ask yourself, "Well, I wonder why they're not..."

Without reflecting on your life and to do that at the end of every day, it just becomes a habit — your own little private blog for the computers of it.

So now once we've done that as a practice, we now move into an action. So this is right speech, right action and right livelihood.

When we talk about right speech and right action in the tradition, you always get the negative side — not to tell whoppers, not to slander people, not to go around killing things, things like that. But remember, all these have their opposites too. So instead of slandering people, to talk generously about people. Instead of telling whoppers, to be careful about exaggeration — who you're trying to impress — because when they find out, they're not very impressed at all.

Coarse speech — be careful of your language. And I think probably, maybe the worst of all, I don't know, is just useless speech. I mean, how often have you felt that you needed to talk today? You might have surprised yourself and felt that you didn't feel like speaking to anybody. But if you take an ordinary day, we're always chattering. Always going through reams of silly stuff — absolutely immaterial. And it's just chatter.

Now, you have to be careful here. I'm not suggesting that you do away with social pleasantries. Not to say good morning to somebody. But they say in the monastic life, like in the meditation center I was in, you never said good morning. You just glowered at each other. No, you didn't do any of that stuff at all, like good morning and how are you and all that. If you wanted to say something, you went up and you actually said what you wanted to say and that was it. So it just stops that sort of mind chatter.

It so quickly gets into whinging, doesn't it? And you get that special sound with whinging, don't you? It goes with the whinge. And just to catch that in the voice — "Here I go again." So there's your awareness, recognizing that it's a waste of energy just doing that sort of stuff. It doesn't produce any good stuff.

Now when we get to right action, again it's all put in the negative — not to kill, not to steal and all that. But the opposite of that of course is to cherish life, isn't it? Is to take care of life, to be generous with one's wealth and time, instead of always trying to sneak a minute off work early, things like that.

And that whole business around our sexuality and our relationship to people at that level, if you're fortunate to have it. Just to be aware that that's energy and that's all — there's also lots of attachment there. If you happen to end up being a celibate, I like to quote Churchill on this: "There are those who are born celibate, there are those who achieve celibacy, and there are those who have celibacy thrust upon them."

So if you find yourself thrust upon into celibacy, then take it as an occasion to let go of that side of your nature, to let it go. Celibacy is a little bit misunderstood because it's presumed that it's only to do with sexuality. It's only to do with our erotic nature. But it's not. It's to do, at a much deeper level, it's to do with not seeking happiness in another person. Recognizing that there's nobody in the world that's going to make you happy.

Not in any real sense. They might make you happy for a little while. But if your happiness is dependent on that person, then, of course, you may be in for a lot of suffering. They may end up leaving you, hating you. They'll die on you, for God's sake.

So celibacy is really that recognition. And that doesn't stop — once you understand that, it doesn't stop you having a proper relationship with people and it shouldn't stop you having even a romantic or an erotic relationship with somebody. It's just that you know that there's a danger there of seeking happiness, so there's the attachment.

So if you find yourself in periods of celibacy, use it to just let go of those dreams, those fantasies that surround it. And recognize that it's not a need. It's not like food. It's not like sleep. Unfortunately these days we're so saturated with sex that it's become a need. But that's just the advertising.

The next step is this right livelihood. And again, it's always put in a sort of negative sense — not to get into trafficking people, prostitution. It's all on the heavy side. And really if you think about it, our work ideally ought to be an expression of our talents for the benefit of others in society. That's what it ought to be. But it's very rare that we find people who've ended up doing exactly what they want to do, who've had their talents truly developed through their work.

Now, you can get very negative about that, you can get very negative about your work because you've ended up in something that you don't particularly want to do. So now, if you end up just being negative, you just become soured. But if you again accept the situation, then there's always that creativity around it, there's always a possibility.

One little experience I had when I was a schoolboy and used to go for these jobs during the holiday. I ended up in one of these cake factories. Christmas it was too. And they had this machine, a really old 19th century thing. And it used to whizz these cakes around on a belt. And they had a line of all these women all doing something to this cake. And I was at the end of this line. My job was to put the cherry on top. It was most unfortunate. And of course I kept missing. It was a skill. You had to be there with the cake. It came like that. And they were very kind — "Oh, you're only a little boring, I'm giving you a little time." And after a while it got really boring. I mean, talk about boredom. I mean, just picking up a cherry and sticking it on a cake for hours on end. Really, really boring.

And in those days, of course, I really just found that very difficult. And luckily they kept moving me around doing this and that because I tended to be useless at it — all this cake making stuff. But of course now, if I ended up in something like that, for me

that would become a concentration exercise, at least I hope so. That would become a moment — moment — absolute Zen type precision of that cherry landing spot on the middle of that cake.

Did you like... You know, Zen and the art of archery — have you read that book? Well, there's an amazing bit at the end. I mean, you have to believe it because he was there. I mean, why should he tell lies? But in the dark, the master fires an arrow at the target. In the dark. And then he fires again another arrow. When they look, the second arrow pierced through the first arrow, which is spot on bullseye.

So there's me with this cherry. I mean... So it really doesn't matter what you end up doing. It's your attitude to it.

I mean, even in monastic life, a lot of this stuff, like sweeping, you do sweeping every day. The same courtyard, different leaves — sweeping, sweeping, sweeping. That's all you do for one hour a day. And when you finally stop balking against it, and you recognize that A, this has to be done, and then you see it as a concentration exercise, or even as an insight exercise, then it takes on a life of its own.

I used to go — have you been to the Throssel Hole Abbey? Oh, that way. Yeah, well, I used to go up there in the early days. And we used to work these long hours, three hours. And the whole idea of it was to be completely centered on what you were doing. So there was no future. There was just this. There was just the weeding. You pulled out the weed. And it was quite remarkable how the body would get into a sort of dance just pulling out weeds. It would just begin to become balletic pulling out weeds and you are completely wrapped up in these damn weeds.

So it doesn't matter what we do, but our attitude to the way we're doing it.

Now this business of right livelihood — I read a very good book on it. I've been trying to remember the name of it and it failed again. And it would be good actually if we stretched that out a little bit to right lifestyle. To look at the whole of your life as a lifestyle. What decisions are you making about how you eat, when you eat, when you go to bed — two hours before midnight and all that. And to see the whole of your working life, from the moment you get up to the moment you sleep, as a way of living.

Now, what the spiritual life demands is that it all has to make sense to the center. You can't do things which don't make sense to your spiritual life anymore. It's a dissipation of energy — it takes you away from it.

So even for instance, coming home — what's your lifestyle when you come home? What do you do? You just flop in a chair and turn the TV on. So ask yourself, "Why should I be doing that?" Ask yourself what programs you ought to be watching, because remember, every time you attend to something, it's an act of intention. An act of intention is a conditioning — it's a conditioning within us. When you stand there and you're saying, "Intending to walk," you walk — the leg moves. It's an intention. So everything starts with an intention.

So if you put your attention on a program which is, say, a waste of time or which is creating some sort of bad feelings within you about something — most programs are just a waste of time, aren't they? And it's just that — it's just another case of wasted talk, wasted energy. And ask yourself, "Should I be putting this into my system?"

And it's that sort of question where your life, as it were, becomes centered. Now, the more it becomes centered, the more meaningful it becomes. If you're doing things which don't have meaning to this center, to your own spiritual understanding, then there's that feeling of uselessness.

One of the great despairs of the modern age, isn't it, is that people are so enwrapped with the pleasures of life, because it's there at a switch, isn't it, that it becomes this emptiness. They're constantly going to parties, "What's the next thing to do? Where are you going on holiday? What's the next thing to buy?" Going into shops, and they're living on that sort of very ephemeral, superficial plane of immediate gratification. And when it's not there, where do they go? They just drop into boredom. And when they get into boredom, what's there? It's despair.

And that despair is a very horrible place to be, so they zoom up and try and get another fix. Doesn't matter what it is. And that's the psychology of pleasure. Unfortunately, Freud understood the problems of his own age, the problems of suppression, of repressing things. But we still haven't understood the problems of indulgence.

Now, that's where you begin to look at your life and you think, well, why am I indulging in that? Where is it taking me? Why am I watching so much television? Should I be doing something else? Why am I always searching for friendship? Should I be more on my own? Why am I reading that?

Like, for instance, today, just out of habit, I walked into the station. I picked up the Metro, that newspaper. And I'm reading through it and I'm thinking, what am I doing this for? It's a lot of rubbish. A lot of rubbish. And I thought I had to put it away. And it's that sort of reflection about these things that we often do just out of habit and to ques-

tion everything we do so that we start gearing the whole of our lifestyle in the right way. And then the gift of that is this great meaningfulness about our life. It really takes on a real profound meaning for us.

Yeah, this is a question that often comes up. People often say, well, that sort of stuff is easy for monks. It's difficult for lay people. Well, ideally, it is easy for monks. That's the whole idea of an institution. That's what the Buddha set up. He set up this institution to make it easy. He said, leave all that. He said, don't, you know, just get out of all that. Find yourself a little hut out there in a forest and just go for it.

So the problem with lay life, the problem with living in society, especially in this one, is that everybody around you is doing exactly the opposite. I mean, if we were living in a more homogenous society, say like some of these Muslim societies, where if you said, well, I'm going to pray five times a day, they'd all say, fine, they might join in. If you said, well, I'm just going to meditate now half an hour at work, they'd be a nutter. And that's it. In this society, you're right up against the grain of it. Very few people really, you know, they just haven't got it. So, of course, it's very difficult. Very difficult.

But that doesn't mean to say that we can't keep working at it. And also, you know, where there's a difficulty, there is that extra effort. And when you make that extra effort, you do get that extra comeback. It's just like when you sit in meditation. If you can just hang on in there through the restlessness or through the anxiety, then you get that benefit.

So, again, it's a case of being in a situation where you feel it's against your spiritual life, it's actually something the people around you aren't working with you, not to find yourself being aggressive, not to find yourself being in a state of contradiction with them, but finding a way in which you can work with that so that you feel you're still gently progressing. It's very important, that is. And eventually I think you find that people begin to respect you for it actually.

So then there's finally on the Eightfold Path you've got the three which are to do with meditation. So it's right concentration, right effort and right mindfulness. When we're sitting, we have to see that as a training. That isn't an end in itself. That is a place where we are developing this right effort. We're developing a certain type of mindfulness. It's a mindfulness which is geared to seeing these three characteristics. That doesn't negate other types of mindfulness. You want to be mindful of adding up your bills for a start.

Yeah it's not easy but there is this other angle to our awareness, to something within us which has an inkling—there's an inkling there within us that there may be something better than this. So you wouldn't be here if that inkling wasn't there. You wouldn't

be going through this misery a whole day of it if you didn't know that—if there wasn't something in you which was suggesting that there was something other than what we're actually experiencing.

Now, what we're doing in this meditation, remember, is separating out this very bright intelligence. This intelligence confuses itself with apparition. It confuses itself with intellect. It confuses itself with words, with stories, with images, with films, inner films. It confuses itself with emotions and how emotions express themselves in art. It confuses itself with the body and the intelligence of the body. You know, these sports people, tremendous physical intelligence, you know, these gymnasts, I can't believe it.

And those three, when we see intelligence expressing itself through that, we think that's what intelligence is. But it's not you see. What we're discovering is this other place, this knowing that is within us which is very bright, very clear and is able to distance itself from all these apparitions that we call ourselves.

It's recognizing that place, how important that place is, and being able to re-establish it throughout the day which is the trick to slowly progressing in our daily lives and not feeling that we're not getting anywhere. Even when you do this practice well you still get the feeling of not going anywhere, but that's because of expectation that there's going to be some sort of huge leap and I'm going to wake up a completely different animal.

But unfortunately it very rarely happens like that. It's a very slow progress. I mean the Buddha warns us that. He says it's very gradual. We can expect some great change over a period of 25 years if we work at it, a long term project.

So one thing that we can do when we return home is just to write to yourself. Write a little letter to yourself about how you think you ought to spend the next year. Make small resolutions that you know you can keep. Don't make these big ones. For instance, if you don't have a habit of sitting in the morning, you know, don't say to yourself, well, from now on, it's one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. You know, it lasts a day. And then you get fed up with yourself. But if you say to yourself something that you can really handle, like 10 minutes, heavens, you can spare 10 minutes of a morning and 10 minutes of an evening. And then very slowly the effect of that, and just this constant, this constant recollection throughout the day of coming back to that point of being aware.

Even now, just to be aware right now. Now that awareness can be single, can be one-pointed, you could just be listening to my words, it can be spacious, you can be aware of what's happening in your body, you can be aware of your feet on the ground and still

be aware of the words. The object of awareness is not the awareness itself. Sometimes you have to be very single, you know, you have to be right there with what you're doing, like when you're crossing a road or something in busy traffic. And at other times it can be quite spacious. So the situation demands it. But don't confuse the object of awareness with the faculty of the knowing.

And it's that separation which brings us constantly back to this amazing thing that we have, you know, this pure intelligence. And remember that it's within that intelligence that the kink lies. That's where the delusion lies. It doesn't lie outside itself. If it was out there, you could quickly see it. We could probably very quickly become awakened. But it's within the beholding that the problem lies. And that's why we have to keep working at it.

Even when we begin to have insights, we begin to see, oh yes, everything's arising and passing. I can see how I cause all my own suffering. Remember in Buddhism, nobody can cause you psychological pain. If you can't, you've got to get to that point where you realize that. But that doesn't mean to say there isn't going to be any, because there's all this backlog that you've got to work through. And that's all this stuff that keeps coming up throughout the day.

So it's again this ability to stay with it, to be patient, to constantly reestablish ourselves in that position of the observation post. And as I say, this isn't a big effort. This isn't like you're climbing a mountain. This is a lot to do with just self-cajoling, with just talking to yourself in a right way, with persuading yourself to be there, not to get caught up in that. Come back, you know.

So if we just sit quietly for a moment and just let thoughts arise and pass away.

So I suppose the main thing I was trying to get across was the importance of reflection. It's just part of thinking about the way we're living, making the right decisions. Not just keep going on blindly.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance and I can only wish from the depth of my heart that you become fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 61

New Year Reflections

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 31 min

> *In this New Year's Day reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents four spiritual undertakings that can guide our contemplation of the past year and intentions for the year ahead. Drawing from both monastic wisdom and practical lay life experience, he explores sufficiency (recognizing what is truly enough), surrender (yielding to the spiritual path rather than ego demands), celibacy (understanding relationship and attachment), and service (putting others' welfare first).*
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> *Bhante examines how the Buddha himself refined monastic life, moving from extreme asceticism to a middle way that included beauty and orderliness alongside simplicity. He discusses the concept of saṃvega - spiritual urgency arising from contemplating life's brevity - and how this motivates us to examine our activities, friendships, and consumption patterns. The talk addresses the challenging question of how lay practitioners can engage in relationships without falling into dependency and attachment that causes suffering.*
>
> *Using vivid examples from daily life - from having too many garden forks to dealing with train delays - Bhante shows how these four principles can transform ordinary situations into opportunities for spiritual growth. The discussion culminates in exploring how true service involves genuine attention to others' needs rather than our own ideas of what help should look like, illustrated through stories of arahants living in perfect harmony through mutual care.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambuddhasa

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

First, I want to make sure that everybody understands that after this talk, the rest of the day until five o'clock is really for you. It's meant to be a time for doing some reflection about your life, about the past year, trying to make some of those resolutions for the next year which we never keep. But they're there—it's part of our good intentions. I wanted to say a few things and then perhaps contemplate the life of Saddam Hussein as a point of reflection.

First, I want to talk about what are actually monastic vows coming more clearly from the Christian tradition, but I think it might be better to just call them spiritual undertakings or communal undertakings. I've called them S to the power of four.

The first one is sufficiency, sometimes simplicity—what in the old days they used to call poverty. The second one is surrender, what in the old days they used to call obedience, but nobody likes that word these days. It's too hard for the ego. Don't want to be obedient. The third one is celibacy. Say no more. And the fourth one is service. So these are four things that we can contemplate about our lives.

The first one, this sufficiency thing—that's a nice word. What is sufficient? It brings us into this ecological business and the way the world is at this present time. What is sufficient? You just go through your wardrobe and ask yourself, well, what's actually sufficient? That doesn't mean to say you have to be rigorous to the point of self-denial or self-mortification so you end up with one pair of shoes or something. It's more the sense of recognizing that at certain times of our lives we need different shoes.

Even I have a pair of pumps, proper walking shoes. I've got a pair of ordinary shoes. I've got slippers. Now I would say that's sufficient for me. So it's not a case of having some sort of absolute standard, but just to look at what one has. Go around the house, go around your flat, your house, and just keep asking yourself, is this sufficient? Is this enough?

I remember when I sold my house just before I joined the order, I had four garden forks. I don't know how I ended up with four garden forks. But I must have just gone into a shop and thought, that's a nice garden fork, and bought it, and come back and I've got this stock of garden forks. I had lots of knives, massive amount of plates, don't know where they came from. Well, of course, I heaved them all off onto poor friends. I don't know what they've done with them.

So this idea of simplicity, sufficiency. If you look at the monastic order, going back to the Buddha's time himself, taking into consideration the climate—housing was under a tree during the dry season, in a hut during the wet season, and you built it just out of local grass. So that's how simple you can get. In this climate I suppose you need a shed with some cladding.

When you look at your house, most of us have nice houses, nice flats, and when you realize that you've got more than sufficiency, then we should relax into that. We should say, oh yeah, I'm lucky, I've got more than I actually need. If you feel guilty about it, sell your house. But I don't think you should. What I'm saying is that sometimes we get into this consumerism where we're always going for the next thing, for the next big house, the next fashion. But actually, if you keep asking yourself what's sufficient, then contentment arises easily. You're just content with that. And then you're thankful that you've got more than you feel is sufficient. So it's just a nice little reflection on the simplicity of life, sufficiency.

In the early days, the monks and nuns were happy with just rag robes taken off corpses left on the charnel grounds. That's what they did—just the animals would come and eat the corpses, or they'd just corrupt. And they sewed them together. But the Buddha wasn't happy with that. He didn't like when he saw groups of monks just in rag robes, just tied higgledy-piggledy, washed but obviously dirtied. He didn't like that at all, did he? So he ended up by asking them to sew them in a way that reminded them of paddy fields. So these robes are like paddy fields—I've got strips—and then he said to dye them with this particular nut, give them a browny colour so there was a sense of beauty or orderliness about it.

And it's for us to decide individually where that line is for us. It's an interesting question, isn't it? Because he himself probably would have lived like that for quite a long time. And then suddenly there's this idea of getting everybody to dress the same and having some sort of uniformed appearance.

In Plato's understanding, if I get it right, please correct me otherwise, these three come together—wisdom, goodness and beauty. Beauty. It's interesting that in the Abhidhamma, all those mental states that are unwholesome they actually call unskillful, but the ones that are wholesome they use the word beautiful, *sober*. So you have to be careful not to grow yourself into a rigorous prune-like existence, dried prune existence. There has to be a certain levity about the spiritual life. There has to be a certain seasoning to it.

So we can look at that, the idea of sufficiency in our lives, the idea of simplicity, and just check it out. You go back, see what you've got. It's not only with what you have, but how you live. So spiritually speaking, we have this core, we have this aim, this objective, which we call *nibbāna*. Now whether we have an idea of *Nibbāna* or what it is, the fact is that it's a matter of purifying the heart—the purification of the heart that has to go on.

So you look at your activities and ask yourself why am I doing that—to the simplest of things like why am I watching this program? Remembering that anything I attend to is an act of intention and therefore it's conditioning me. So if I attend to a program which is just silly, just nothing—it comes under wrong speech in the sense of *samphappalāpa*. How do you translate that? Gossip, useless speech. So you're watching a program which is basically useless.

And that's time. We talk about this word *saṃvega*, which means a sense of urgency about the spiritual life. When we consider the brevity of our life, sickness, old age and death, to pull ourselves up short and ask ourselves, why am I watching that program? Why am I going to that show? Why am I going to that film? Why am I with these friends? They might not be the right friends anymore.

A lot of people who begin to move spiritually find they leave old friendships. It's not that they blame them or criticize them or anything like that. It's just that they don't draw them anymore and there's a shift over to another type of friend. That can be a conscious thing. Often it's quite unconscious in the spiritual life. You do things not fully aware that in fact you're moving. And then you realize your friends aren't calling you up because they got fed up with you and all your Buddhist stuff.

So there's that simplicity, that sufficiency, drives its flavour into all areas of our lives. All you have to keep saying is, is this sufficient? Is this simplicity? And it just clarifies life. It makes life very simple. Life itself takes a lot of stress away. Because if you're doing things which are against the flow, against the flow of your spiritual life, it's always drawing energy away. Unnecessary energy loss.

The second one is surrender, which in the old days was called obedience. So surrender in the spiritual life is abandoning one's own ideas and lending oneself to the teachings. So every time you feel that resistance to what the spiritual life is calling you to, you see it as something which is negative, drawing you away. So you have to make that act of surrender, yield. I think they have that in the States, don't they? When you go to a crossroad, yield. What a lovely word. So you have to surrender to what the spiritual life is asking you to do.

So we've got these basic rules, these basic precepts like not to kill people. But they always have their opposites. So when the first rule is not to harm any living being, that moves quickly towards to take care of all living beings. Not to take what is not freely given moves very easily into to give what is not being asked for. That's not quite right, is it? To give when asked but to give when you're not asked, where you see a need. So if you take all those negative sides, the way that you don't do things, you've only got to see that actually not doing those things—because we're in time, because we're in time and space and events have to happen—they're always beckoning you to do the opposite.

So at all times, Sunday morning when you wake up and there's that desire just to turn over, roast the other side, and then the call comes, get up and meditate. Resistance. And then just to do as the old sailors did on the hammocks, you show a leg. You shake it out and get a feel of the air out there and then shake it off and say to yourself, God, I've got to surrender to the path. I've got to be obedient to it.

We find ourselves in situations that demand that we follow a certain rule—even coming here, just following the rota, going into a workplace with their rules and regulations, going to see a friend and washing the pots like they wash the pots. Can be enormously annoying, can't it, when somebody comes in and washes the pots in a different way than you wash? And it's just using those little situations where you're going against your own conditioning just to loosen you up a bit.

That's one of the benefits of coming on a retreat, especially a strong retreat, because it snaps some of the old habits. And then you know it gives you strength. You know that you don't have to behave like that. Even not eating after lunch. Then you realize, oh yeah, nothing happens when I don't eat after lunch. Nothing happens. And then to take a day's fast and realize that nothing happens either. And that allows us just to be more easy with life, be able to move and shift with things. Not to get upset—you get on a train and it's late. That's the way it is.

People get very upset about that. Well, I must say, the British aren't so bad. Usually a joke runs around the place. You're used to it, especially when they very truthfully announce to you that the train's been delayed because there's a cow on the line. Great announcements are made—leaves on the line, things like that. I must say, it's all got much better now. But you're driving along and you're in a traffic jam. What are you going to do? So that's when you surrender to the situation. The situation is asking you to let go of what you want and to see the situation as it is. And of course with that surrendering to the situation, yielding to the way it is, all that stress just evaporates. This is it. This is the way it is.

So that sense of surrender, of yielding, once we're in the habit of that, life just becomes a little easier for us. Even our own self-expectations. I remember somebody came to visit me in London and they got lost. Normally it would only take them so much, but for some reason they took a turn off before they knew it. A one-hour journey took something like two or three hours. And when they came, they said to me, it was amazing. In the old days, they'd have got really ratty with themselves. They'd have punched themselves in the nose and butted a wall or something. But this time, they just took it as a different way to come and visit me.

And it's that. That sense of surrendering also to ourselves, just giving up on our own dictates, little dictates that we give to ourselves. So there's that whole area of looking at your life from the point of view of surrendering, yielding to situations. Of course we draw a line—we draw a line at the point of unskillfulness, at the point where we're doing harm. Sometimes that's not such an easy line to see, but as long as we don't mean to

do harm, remember there's that stress in the Buddha's teaching that to do harm which is going to lead away from the awakening, away from the path, is that harm that we intend, not that harm that we end up doing without us knowing.

In fact, the story that goes with the *Dhammapada* verse that I read out last night, the opening about everything is mind made, is a story about if you do evil, it follows you like the wheel of a cart, the hoof of an ox. And the story with that is of this *Arahant* who's doing walking meditation, and he's crunching all these ants, so there's blood all over the place. And the monks say to the Buddha, well, look what he's done. He's done this terrible harm to all these ants. The Buddha says, well, he's blind. He doesn't know what he's doing. He doesn't see where he's going. And then there's always these little add-ons, these bolt-ons that they put about in the past life—he killed so many ants or something that it's all coming back to him.

But that aside, it's a case of recognizing that when we come across those shady areas where we don't quite know if it's right or wrong because of circumstance, not to be afraid to make decisions which you're not clear about, but intend at least to do what's for the benefit of others, benefit of oneself. And that's something the Buddha always says—for the benefit of oneself, for the benefit of the other, both for the benefit of oneself and the other. So there are times that you do things for your own benefit. That's not being selfish, that's self-caring. That's another area where we sometimes become confused.

The third one, celibacy. I always like to coin a phrase from Churchill: some are born celibate, some become celibate, and others have celibacy thrust upon them. So there's always times in our lives where we find that we're not in a relationship. So those are times to see what the role of sexuality and romance and friendship and certain types of friendships play in our lives. And to recognize that that's an option. It's not a necessity. Ever since Freud, sex has taken the role of food. But I mean, it's not. You can live without it.

So when we find ourselves in situations where there isn't that sort of relationship about, well, that's the time to really just open up to that situation and relax into it. If one wants to go there, then one makes the intention to move that way. But if it becomes an obsession, then it creates a lot of suffering, doesn't it?

Now the question is, why is celibacy seen as always part of a direct path in terms of the spiritual life, especially in Buddhism? Was it because the Buddha himself was celibate and he was just bitter about it? He didn't want anybody else to have a good time. Hell, I'm going to not do it, nobody else is going to do it. And it's because, of course, of

the attachment. It's always this business of seeking happiness in the wrong place. So we can see that seeking happiness in just the physicality of a relationship, just the sexual act by itself, is empty, it doesn't go anywhere.

I usually quote Woody Allen when he says sex is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go... So that aside, romance involves a very strong connection with a person, which comes and goes of course, leading to a deeper friendship. There's that mistake of making one's own happiness dependent on that person. That's where the suffering is, because when that person leaves or dies, there's this huge hole in one's heart—grief and all that.

So you know, to see it as a time—if you find yourself not in a relationship and you want a relationship—to see that actual desire for relationship as actually seeking happiness there. So the question is, how can you have that sort of relationship without that sort of dependency? That's the conundrum.

The fact that the Buddha, having attained enlightenment, did not go back to the married life is a bit of a downer, because it then might have suggested that having attained that enlightenment, there was still that sort of re-engagement in life. But there's a suggestion there that in the Buddha's life and within the tradition that that's not possible.

Now in later Buddhism, of course, there was a movement against that, wasn't there? The lay life as being the way that one could also attain full liberation. And I think that in the lay life, one has to look at that and see the possibility. I don't see it as something which necessarily has to be against the spiritual life at all.

I much prefer the Hindus on this one, their way of approaching the whole spiritual life through a total engagement in communal life. So the Brahminical way—I mean, it is a bit patriarchal about the man, but equally so for the woman. The first 25 years, a student, around that. Then you're supposed to marry, and you have children and go through all that. And then round about 60 or so, when all the children have grown up and all that's done, you remove yourself from society with your wife and try to live more separately, letting go of life—a renunciation, post-renunciation. And then when you're 75, you kick your wife out. It happens to your wife. But presumably she's kicked the bloke out as well. But the point is that separation at the end of life—meeting, trying to go beyond that attachment to the world.

So that, I think, is a very fruitful image to have in one's mind about the process of renunciation in the lay life.

And of course, the next bit—the next I'll talk about is service. So that's where this slips into—all these things come out in that outward flow. The sufficiency, the surrender, the celibacy is something which is internal. Of course, it affects our relationships. But then somehow there has to be an outward flowing of that, and that's the sense of service.

So it's just one of these paradoxes that we're most happy when we're giving. As soon as that giving becomes self-conscious and we're doing it in order to feel happy, in order to feel worthy, for fame and all that stuff, then it becomes cancerous. Then demands are put on that service. We only do certain things that make us happy. And you end up being a do-gooder, don't you?

A working definition of a do-gooder is the person who does you the good they want to do you, whether you want it or not. The usual example I give is if you know somebody's sick and you go along with your chicken soup, and they say, "Well, I'm just too sick. I can't have that. I'm terribly sorry." Well, of course, you understand that. You're a bit disappointed, but you understand that. And they say, "But listen, you could do something for me." You say, "Sure, what's that?" "Could you clean my toilet?" You had all these highfalutin ideas about how to help somebody. All you do is clean the toilet.

So that sense of service is giving up one's own desires for the benefit of others, looking at the world from the other's point of view.

Now, there's a scripture in which the Buddha visits these three Arahants. Now, fair enough, they're fully enlightened and haven't got any selfishness left, and they're living together perfectly peacefully. The Buddha's with them, and he asks them, he says, "How do you do it? How do you live peacefully like this?" And of course, living out in the forest, in your hut, I mean, it's very simple. But Anuruddha says, "Well, we get up in the morning, go on Pindapat—we go on our alms round—and whoever's last out prepares the stuff for people coming back. And then we all come back with our food and we share it out, and whoever's last eating clears up." That's it. There's no—once your attention is on the other, what the other wants, life becomes very easy, isn't it? Because people are always looking out for you and you're always looking out for them.

So it becomes a sort of society based on this idea of generosity, on *dana*. As soon as you're playing your part and you're putting the other first, and then you see the other ones actually putting themselves first, then you get that shaking, don't you? So it needs a communal effort for everybody to live on behalf of the other. And because everybody's looking out for the other, then you have this harmony. At least that's the theory.

But as soon as somebody holds a position, you've had it. In the Buddhist order, there are these rules of how to work with disputes. So there are those disputes that have to be put under the mat and just leave it alone because you just get so caught up in what's right, what's wrong.

But keeping that in mind, I suppose the danger of putting the other first, especially with others who aren't doing that, is that they can abuse you. But generosity doesn't demand that you find yourself being abused, being used. You yourself have to be sensitive to that.

So these are four ways that you can look back on the years—on what you have and what you do with your life. The idea of sufficiency, the idea of surrendering to the path, doing what the path asks, that whole area of relationship—what sort of relationships do you want to cultivate—and the idea of service. It's just four points of recollection.

CHAPTER 62

Q&A: Resistance, Rebirth and Moral Justice, What Suffers, Mindfulness Apps, Spiritual Attainments

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this comprehensive Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma responds to questions arising during a meditation retreat, offering practical guidance rooted in traditional Buddhist understanding. He begins by addressing how to work skillfully with resistance to practice, explaining that resistance itself becomes the meditation object—one sits with it without identification until it naturally passes, revealing the impersonal nature of aversion.*
>
> *The discussion turns to rebirth and its relationship to moral justice. Bhante distinguishes the Buddhist concept of rebirth from reincarnation, emphasizing that it is not the same person being reborn. He explores how internal transformation differs from external consequences, noting that when we act harmfully, we primarily harm ourselves through the attitudes we cultivate. This connects to the question of what actually suffers—pointing to something beyond the psychophysical organism, the 'Buddha within' or awareness itself, which is caught in delusion and must gradually liberate itself.*
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> *Bhante also addresses the use of mindfulness apps like Headspace and Insight Timer, acknowledging their usefulness while noting that practitioners eventually gravitate toward real relationships with teachers. The talk concludes with an extensive discussion of stream entry (sotāpatti) and the stages of awakening as described in the Visuddhimagga. He cautions against striving for attainments or overestimating experiences, recommending instead that practitioners focus on purifying the heart and lessening the defilements—a path that reliably leads to greater happiness and virtue regardless of where one stands on the journey.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

There are one or two questions here worth answering since we're in the midst of meditation.

The first concerns how best to deal with resistance towards the practice. The best way is simply to keep practicing. It's as simple as that. When you get that sense of not wanting to do it, you have to be careful not to be overpowered by it, not to associate with it, not to identify with it. Immediately you have to go into that position of "there is

resistance," and then of course you sit, and the very resistance becomes your object of meditation. You sit with it. Everything is screaming to get up and do something else, but you just stay there with it. You wait and wait and wait until it disappears.

Now, you might not have time to do that. No problem. You have to get up and get on with daily life. Then you come back for your next session, your next two-hour evening session, and there's lots of resistance. But you say to yourself, "Now there is resistance." And you sit down and sit with the resistance. Feel it. And of course, when the resistance goes—if you can stay to the very end of it, the very end of the resistance—it disappears, it's gone. Then suddenly arises the opposite, the desire to do the meditation.

I remember on one occasion when I came back from Burma, to my surprise I had this tremendous resistance. I didn't want to sit at all. And that's what I did. I thought, well, this is just another mental state. And eventually it passed.

So with all these negative mental states, it's just making them an object, not identifying with them. Not "I have resistance," but "there is resistance to meditation." And then you just sit with it. If you can only handle five minutes, you've handled five minutes before you get up and run for it. The more you do it, the more you are not reacting to that sense of not wanting to do something. And eventually, as I say, it'll pass like everything else passes.

Why should resistance come? There could be a multitude of reasons. You might have come to a point where you've done lots of meditation and nothing's happened, and you wonder what's the point. But there might just be a sort of transposition of aversion onto the meditation. Remember, aversion is like these negative states—well, even good states—they're not attached to the object they're presenting. They are themselves an attitude that's locked into the heart. So you might say we have a balloon of aversion, and it can get averse to anything at any time for whatever reason it wants. It might just be that as aversion comes up, it grabs hold of meditation and becomes an averse state.

The object of aversion, the object of fear, is a metaphor, a symbol for what you might call the actual attitude that's caught up inside us. Once you've sussed that out, it's not so easy to get caught up in it. If you thought that the meditation itself was making you resistant, then of course you wouldn't meditate. If you thought the meditation itself was creating the sense of aversion, then of course you'd have to stop it because you'd say to yourself, well this is no good, it's making me feel averse. But if you recognize that it's the aversion that's come up first, looking for an object to be averse to, then you don't blame the meditation. You blame the aversion—of course, we're not in the blame game, but even so.

And then you sit with it, and to your surprise, to my surprise, it completely disappears. Now that doesn't mean it never comes back. No, it comes back, but this time you're not fooled by it. You just know there is aversion. It's just part of the course really, aversion to the practice.

The second question asks what it would mean for one's practice if one believes in reincarnation. Would it be different?

Reincarnation, or as Buddhism would have it, rebirth. Rebirth stresses the fact that it's not the same person who's being reincarnated. You see that even in this life. You're not the same as you were when you were three years old. So there's been a rebirthing throughout this life until we've come to this sorry state.

Does it make a difference? Well, it makes a difference in this sense: it would suggest some sort of moral justice. If you thought that this was the only life you had and you could get away with it, then why not? Because there would be no further consequence. Now, what happens to us from the outside is very rarely the direct consequence of an action, because when you do something in the world it reverberates. It goes out into that matrix, and when it comes back to you, it comes back through a person or indeed through nature.

So, for instance, if you're foolish enough to stand under a tree when there's thunder and lightning and you happen to be struck by a thunderbolt, that isn't because in a past life you electrocuted people to death. It's because you happened to be foolish enough to stand under a tree. There's some sort of mismatch there. You think, "Well, I was only stupid. I didn't expect to be blown to bits." You never know the consequence of an action because you're entering into a matrix of relationships.

So it is with people. You might say something which is just mildly making fun of somebody—a mild little sarcastic quip. But the other person is mortally wounded, and goes about trying to destroy your life in order to regain their sense of self-respect. So there's no justice on that level that I can personally see.

And even in a future life, if something were to happen, again you're in a matrix, you're in a fulsome relationship with the world around you. A lot of it we just have to accept. You're born here into this society, and this is the consequence.

However, internally something else is going on—because internally is the way that you are experiencing yourself all the time. You're experiencing yourself physically, emotionally, and mentally: your thoughts and so forth. When we do something, it doesn't matter whether it's an act of speech or whatever, it goes into this internal matrix. And again, you don't know the effect of it. Say a person's past history where they

have a store of shame—I'm thinking of a particular case, though I can't remember the name—a store of shame within the person. It's all been suppressed, all been repressed, all been down there, completely unaware of it. And then something happens where they lose face in close company or publicly, and they can't handle it. They commit suicide. So you don't know the effect of an action.

But in general, we can say that when we do something beneficial, morally good, it has a beneficial, good effect. And if it's the opposite, it will have sorry effects. But at some point there has to be some resolution. And you can't do it in one lifetime, it seems. You can't do it in one. There's so much gunge that you just can't get rid of it in one lifetime.

Even the Buddha is said to have lived many lifetimes in order to build up those qualities that would allow him to come into this life. And when he came into this life, he wouldn't have been completely pure. Māra was still after him. He still had all sorts of naughty thoughts. It was only through the process of purification that he was able to put an end to all those wrong desires.

So from the point of view of this moral justice, there has to be some sort of resolution. What the rebirth process suggests is that as you become aware of the suffering you're causing yourself—and the catalyst that you are to other people's suffering—remember, we don't cause other people to suffer internally. We can make them suffer externally; you can physically hurt somebody. But the reaction going on in the person is always their own specific property.

Now that becomes obvious in Buddhist understanding. If somebody else causes the suffering in me, then obviously my full liberation from suffering will only happen when I've got rid of you. But once you recognize that that isn't what the Buddha's teaching—because he himself was fully liberated, and people continued to upset him, or whether he was upset or not, they definitely did things that weren't pleasant. They shouted at him, called him all sorts of names. One of his own disciples tried to kill him, if we're to believe it—Devadatta. He set the elephant on him and rolled a boulder down, which hurt his big toe, it seems.

So there has to be some sort of resolution, and that takes time. That's the process of rebirth. Every time you are reborn—from day to day, from moment to moment—you carry this baggage, this stuff from the past that you've created. Through meditation, through right understanding, you begin to work at it, undermining it. Not piling more on, or at least not piling so much on that it undoes the work you did yesterday. That's

normally the path we're on: we clear a bit, we clear a lot, and then we dump a little bit back on. So it goes up and down. But eventually, hopefully, we can see a sort of upward movement towards betterment.

So there's a sort of moral justice in the sense that when we do harm, we do harm to ourselves. And we can heal it—we can heal it over a long period of time.

Now it also makes sense from the point of view of the Buddha within. It connects with the whole idea of transcendence. Something in us is not part of this psychophysical organism. It's something that is beyond it and yet within it. In it but not of it, no matter how you express it. And somehow, it's the one that's suffering. When you have something like a pain in the knee—is the knee suffering? No.

Something else is suffering. When you have a foul emotion, some anxiety that comes up, the anxiety isn't suffering. The something that suffers the anxiety is reacting to it. And so there's always something other which is the one who knows, the one who's aware, the one who's in touch with, the one who feels.

This becomes obvious to us when we sit in meditation and we've plonked ourselves up on this observation post within ourselves. Everything becomes something that we're looking at. Normally speaking, in daily life, we dive in straight away. If irritation comes up, you become the irritation. If you're depressed, "I am depressed." But here in meditation, we're learning that there can be all this stuff going on, but somehow you've retreated your sense of self back onto this perch.

Now, it must be this very same thing that is suffering from the delusion and has caused all this problem in the first place. The whole process is for it to decide, or for it to understand how it's done this, and to come out of its own misery. It seems a bit odd, but the Buddha within is what's suffering. It's the one that actually is feeling and knowing and is in a state of delusion.

As we come out of that delusion, obviously we're changing our relationship to this organism, this being, this human beingness. And in that process of changing our relationship, there's an allowing of the organism to heal itself. So there we are—we pull back into ourselves, we find this sacred place, you might call it, this cave, this hideout, and we're looking and we're feeling, and the heart feels it has permission to release its turbulences. And to our surprise, or at least to our benefit, we find that when the heart releases its turbulence, it's actually healing itself. All these inner turbulences are getting less and less and less.

It's only from the point of view of some sort of ethical justice that, in fact, because all this has been created out of a sense of ignorance which was not culpable—it was an understandable mistake—you're born as this little bleating baby, you haven't a clue who you are, and you make the big mistake of thinking, "Well, this is me." And that continues throughout our lives. So it's a delusion for which we're not culpable. We're not to be blamed for it.

Through the process of insight, this very Buddha within, this satipaññā, comes to recognize its own qualities. But by the time it gets to that, it's created this huge mess. So somehow the mess has to have time to liberate itself. The heart has to have time to liberate its problems. All that obviously is going to take a bit more than one lifetime. So the whole idea of rebirth fits in with the idea of transcendence. Otherwise it doesn't make sense.

If you don't believe any of that, or at least if you put a brake on that and say, "Well, no, it's all rubbish," then that's fine, but then you're working for a different reason. You're now really just trying to get rid of the suffering within yourself—trying to, the best you can, over the period of time you've got, find an accommodation with life. And that's fine, you see, but like I said this morning, this would be toning down or descaling the Buddha's teachings to a psychotherapy. There's benefit in that.

And it might be that when you die, you suddenly find yourself standing next to your body and you think, "Oh, that was a mistake. I'll have to get reborn." That may happen, and of course it may not. So it's for every individual really to work out their reasons for practice and to see the benefits of it.

The Buddha is quite clear. He says whether you believe in rebirth or not is immaterial because the Dhamma has its benefits right here in daily practice. Remember, in his day there were people who were also materialists, didn't believe any of that stuff.

I always think it's best to put these things on a sort of back burner, really, just in case. Even if you were a climate change denier, it might be intelligent to behave as if there was climate change. At least then you wouldn't be blamed. I think it was Pascal, wasn't it? Pascal's wager.

He said, well, there may be a God and there may not, but it might be intelligent to work as if there was, just in case. So it might be worth our while, even if there's not that confidence in it, to work as if there were rebirth and as if there were transcendence. That's all. It can't do you any harm.

There's a little question here about mindfulness apps. Headspace and such. They seem to be very useful. We're on one ourselves. Satipanya has one on Insight Timer, which is a way for people doing this practice to connect with each other. I don't quite know exactly how it works, but I think you've got a list of people and it tells you how much meditation you've done. So you're supposed to look at it and think, "He's done two hours, damn it. I'd better up my game here." It's a way of people communicating because the people involved with Satipanya live all over the place. The actual group that's around Satipanya itself, within travelling distance of about fifteen miles, is very small. The population is very low. It would be a bit more substantial if I was closer to a conurbation, closer to Birmingham or something. So how do you get that feeling of being part of something, the support that you might get from that? For us, Insight Timer seems to be one way. About twenty-odd people have joined it now. So feel free.

These other ones, I've had a quick glance at them and they seem to be all right. Headspace was actually created by a man who was a monk for quite a long while and then came back and wondered how he could spread it in more general ways. I think it brings in a hundred million dollars a year, so there's another very good reason for trying to create one of these. I'm not being cynical.

With all these apps, it's up to us, isn't it, to use them to our benefit, to see if they work for us. Is this the way that mindfulness is going to go mainstream? Well, I don't think so, because eventually people gravitate towards a teacher, don't they? They gravitate towards a centre. They might use these things just to keep in contact or to create a virtual group. But there has to be some basis, I think, in some real relationship, some real contact with somebody. At least that's how I would personally feel.

Just going back to this business of believing or putting trust in reincarnation and all that, there was an occasion when I was on a train down to Brighton, and some of you might know this. Some rugby fans got on, and this man sat opposite me. He was a little bit tipsy. He said, "Are you a Buddhist monk?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well, I don't believe in reincarnation." I said, "Do you know by your personal experience whether there is life after death or not?" And he said, "No." I said, "Well, why come to a conclusion?" And his mate said, "Yeah, why come to a conclusion?" Classic conversation. I loved it. I don't know whether he opened the possibility of it, but it was an interesting little conversation.

The rest of the questions we can answer more over the weekend. But there's one here about stream entry. How skillful is it to strive for it?

Well, when the Mahasi Sayadaw actually started teaching, he seems to have had very good results. Even the teenagers were especially open to this sort of practice and were seemingly very successful. Now, we're going back to the fifties, where there wasn't the internet and life was very simple, very pure you might say. Burmese society then, as perhaps not so much recently, was very religious. Incredibly religious, as you might think of the Christian medieval ages. The whole atmosphere of the society was about practice, about doing the practice.

When he began teaching in the fifties, they started the centre in forty-eight or forty-nine, and there was a lot of success. He used to give out certificates. There's a book on this, by the way, *The History of the Mahasi Centre*. It says in the book, and I'm paraphrasing, that those people who had these certificates—of course, they didn't actually stick them on their chests—but they would wander around with that sort of superior air of someone who had achieved stream entry and would look down upon these poor meditators sweating away on the floor.

So I think he stopped that. They don't do that anymore because of the enormous conceit that can arise. Normally speaking, in the monastic life anyway, things like stream entrance and all that sort of stuff are really kept quite between you and the teacher.

The teacher may tell another teacher, but it's never something that's bandied about. A monk or a nun will tell you what they aren't—they're pretty safe that way. But they won't disclose what they are.

I think there's two reasons for this. You've got to be slightly careful according to the monastic rule that you don't claim what you're not if there's some ulterior motive, such as getting good support or finding a following. That would be a very serious mistake. And in fact, although you don't have to make any big confession, there's nothing formal, in your heart of hearts you'd know that you'd actually lost your road. You're no longer in communion, as it's put. So there's always this tremendous wariness about talking about what you've achieved. As I say, it's usually kept between you and the teacher.

For lay people working with a monastic teacher, it would be the same. Sometimes they won't even tell you whether you have attained something or not. This is on the understanding that if you have made a deep insight, you'll continue. That's the whole point of something like stream entry—now the Dharma gates are open. You've got to advance because you've seen the end of the path, even if it's only a flash. There's something in you now which knows which way to go. In the monastic life, you're not supposed to be alone in the forests, in the jungles, until you've achieved that, for the danger is of going mad, for heaven's sake.

But these days it's become a sort of common thing to talk about. There's a whole website where people discuss their experiences and what they've attained. There's a danger there of overestimation, of achieving something they've thought about, that they've imaged. This is the big problem with knowing too much about it. It's alright to know a lot, but the thing is to in a sense forget it, because whatever a spiritual insight is, it's not within our power, not within our willpower to attain it. In fact, that very willpower of trying to get this spiritual insight is going to be the biggest of all barriers.

This definitely happened with people I was involved with in those early days with my own teacher. I remember him at the end of a retreat going through all these vipassana insights and then telling us to decide where we were—which is absolutely mortal danger for Westerners. Either they underestimate themselves, which is good, and they keep working, or they completely overestimate themselves and stop working. And if they find that they're not moving so much, they become very discouraged.

I often think of all those people I used to meditate with in the early and mid-eighties. I don't think I've ever seen them again. They've all fled. There's only one person I remember whom I occasionally meet up with from those days. Maybe they've carried on, maybe not. But you can imagine—if you set yourself a task and you take six months off, a year, some people taking six months off a year, going to Japan to teach English, get a bit of money, then coming back and do six months of practice. You do that year in, year out for five, six, seven years, and you're still in the same place you were seven years ago. There's a sort of blowout, a complete destruction of confidence, and you just give up.

So these four stages of insight are to be taken as a path which we will all eventually make. You can be a universalist at some point—everybody has to go through it because everybody has this Buddha within, and this Buddha within is seeking liberation from suffering. But the paths leading to it are quite varied. This particular format only arises in the commentaries; there's nothing about this sort of stuff in any detail in the scriptures.

At the end of the discourse on how to establish right awareness, the Buddha says that if you do this properly, even within seven years you can be fully liberated or become a non-returner. And then he says, no, my seven years is seven months. And then, no, my seven months is seven weeks. He said if you do this really properly, even within seven days you can be fully liberated or become a non-returner. Now you might think, "Seven days, that's alright, I'll do a retreat." But he's talking about seven days where you don't lose your mindfulness—that's a different kettle of fish altogether. And it's got to be right awareness; you can't just wander about being aware, right?

So there's an inbuilt understanding that progress towards liberation is there within the system. But this stratifying of it in little vipassana jhanas only comes up in the commentary, in the Visuddhimagga, the Path of Purification. It's in an earlier book too, called The Path of Purity. That suggests to me that all this was passed from teacher to student, teacher to student. It wasn't something you spread out on the internet and created all sorts of ideas in people's minds.

Having said that, just to give you the scope of it for those people who don't know about this: when one begins to meditate, you have to put some time away to develop the necessary concentration, the necessary stillness of mind and mindfulness. And when you do that, of course, you get the benefits—and they're called the defilements of vipassana. You can suddenly feel tremendously peaceful, so peaceful as you've never felt before, and you think, "Oh, this is nibbana." Suddenly you can become tremendously insightful in the Dharma and want to write a book.

Because you've suddenly understood everything.

I recall one man—he wasn't a student of mine, but he used to come to the vihara. He came back from a retreat at Amaravati and told me he'd experienced Nibbāna. So I asked him what happened. He said, "Well, I was sitting on the toilet, and this amazing mental state came. I was completely blissed out."

I said, "But you were blissed out. There was a *you* and there was *being blissed out*. That's not Nibbāna, is it?"

"No, no," he insisted, "that's Nibbāna." He was absolutely convinced. He thought that in letting go of stuff, he was letting go of everything else, and this blissed-out state arose, which he then presumed was Nibbāna—because that's what it says, doesn't it? "The bliss of Nibbāna."

So you can see how easy it is to get things wrong, to overestimate because of the words and descriptions that are used. But in actual Nibbāna, one isn't caught up in any of that.

Then one has an insight into impermanence. This is the classical progression. Now, that impermanence shakes a person because it sinks deep at some level—the recognition of their own personal impermanence. It's like coming face to face with death. And then there arise what are known as the dukkha ñāṇas, insights that involve an emotional adjustment to that kind of understanding. The fear, the depression—very much like what you go through when you're told you have only so long to live. It's the same sort of experience.

But you keep going, and then there's another insight which, as it were, reveals the gate you're going to pass through—whether it's through the gate of impermanence, or the gate of suffering, or the gate of not-self. You keep going, and one day it pops, and you've made it.

This popping, this process, can take years. I met one man who had been working with it, and he said it took him five years to get through. What's always mysterious to me is that some people are totally devoted to this, spending enormous amounts of time meditating, living a very moral, ethical life—and apparently, from the outside, you can't understand why, but nothing ever seems to happen for them. People are extremely particular and peculiar in their own little ways.

So there's no way you can write this thing down on a wall and say, "Right, I'll do this, then this will happen, then this"—because it just doesn't seem to work that way.

But one of the consequences of stream entry is that the view of self is broken. And that's not the same as the *sense* of self. That's why often a person who has such an insight doesn't believe it's been an insight at all, because they still feel very much like an ego. They still feel very much "me, about me." But something has cut through and undermined it.

So there's a view of self and a sense of self. The sense of self doesn't go until you're fully liberated. That sense of self always attaches itself to some experience you're having, and that attachment doesn't dissolve until the very end of the process. So it's not as though we're going to get rid of that sense of self very quickly.

The other thing is that you become clear about the practice. Other ideas you had—specifically around rites and rituals—you see that you'd given them too much power. For instance, someone in Buddhism might think that what's really important is to light candles and keep saying, "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dhamma," believing that somehow this recitation is going to create liberation from suffering. What happens instead is you begin to see rituals as something that supports you—you don't have to get rid of them—but you disempower them. They're no longer really going to help you very much to liberate yourself from suffering.

And of course, the third fetter broken is that there's enough insight for a person to lose any doubt in the Buddha's teachings. This opens the gate—opens the gate much more to further practice. You're no longer held back by questions like, "Is this right for me? Is this teacher any good? Should I be doing this anyway?" All of that is gone. Which doesn't mean you might not change your teacher or find something else or even become a Muslim—but at least the way is open.

As we carry on, there's further insight into one of those three characteristics. It's always the same: impermanence, not self, how we create suffering, the role of desire. It's always the same material. The practice at the beginning, when you're told how to sit, how to observe, and what it is you're investigating, never changes. That's the wonderful thing. There's nothing more to learn. Once you've understood it, that's it. That will take you right to the end.

Someone comes on a course and they've done the opening work. Then they come to me and say, "Yes, now what's the next step?" Well, there isn't a next step. This is it. You keep doing the same thing over and over again.

So with another insight, the only thing that really happens is a lessening of your attachment to sensual pleasure. And with it, of course, all those other things that run along with it. We talked about them this morning: frustration when you don't get what you want—you're much more easy with change and such things. Depression, when you really haven't got what you want. Anxiety. A sense of loss. Boredom. All that's diminished, you see, because your relationship to seeking happiness in the sensual world has been attenuated. Some spice has been taken out of it.

But it's only when you get to a non-returner that you're finished with the sensual world as a place to seek happiness. It doesn't mean that you don't enjoy happiness, that you don't enjoy things. It's just that you're no longer confusing that with something that is truly worthwhile. And that's why it's called a non-returner, because such a being is not drawn back into this physical form or into a sensual form, because they're done with it.

But usually—not always, they don't have to, but usually—they've developed very beautiful inner mental states that we call the absorptions. And they become attached to those things. So that has to go too, eventually.

And the final ones are a sense of restlessness. Now, that restlessness, as I understand it, is just the remnants, what's left of all those bad habits we had. So there might be a touch, a little wave of anxiety, or a wave of irritation, but they're no longer these huge things that we used to suffer from. So restlessness is a sort of blanket term for a low-level state of impurity in the heart.

And conceit. Remember there are three conceits: I am better than, I'm worse than (which is often more comfortable), and I'm equal to. The "equal to" often confuses us. But remember that when you gather around you all those people you're equal to, you'll

find that they're either better than or worse than the other group. So it just feels a nicer conceit because you've got lots of friends. But it's still a conceit. It's still a comparison. So even that has to go.

And then finally, just that whole business of ignorance.

The Buddha gives us some images for it. He says people who have a first insight, it's like a flash of lightning. They've seen everything, but it's so quick that it's gone, you might say. But they've seen it as a flash of lightning. And the next one sees it like a full starry night, where there's light and they can see, but it's not so bright. The non-returner is like a full moon. And the full moon in the East is even brighter than here—there's colour, there's colour. But you don't get to see things as they really are, like the midday sun, until you become an Arahant.

Another nice image, which is not in the scriptures, and I often wonder why, is the use of climbing a mountain. I can only presume that the Buddha never climbed a mountain. This was a romantic thing, wasn't it? Nobody climbed mountains. What would you climb a mountain for? It was only when this love of nature came that one began to climb mountains, or to see them as something that had to be conquered. So where he lived on that plain, the Gangetic plain, there were hills. But the mountains, the Himalayas, were there.

In fact, his people would have sat within a few days' distance from them. But it never occurred to them to climb, I think. Why would you go up a mountain? So my feeling is he never uses that image.

But if you think about it, when you start off climbing a hill, what are you looking at? It's just a bit of grass, isn't it? A bit of grass and dirt in front of you. There's no joy in it at all. You're presuming that you'll get to a point where you'll turn around and have a vista, and that's going to be enjoyable.

So off you go, and after a while you get a bit tired and think, well, I'll take a rest. You turn around, and oh, it's just a lovely view. Now, if you stay there too long, you tend to come back down for a cup of tea. But before you get cold, you think, well, better get up again. So off you go a bit further and the scene gets broader. And so it is all the way up. But you never get the 360-degree view until you're right at the top. There's always a piece of dirt in front of you and what's on the other side of the mountain. I always think that's a good image for what we're trying to do here.

Now, this whole business of the insights—you can read about them. There's lots of material on the website, and many people describing them. But I think there's a danger in that, because you can't help but have some idea. You're sitting there, and suddenly

you're feeling all this bubbliness, and you think, oh yes, that's the vipassanā kilesa. And then something flashes across your mind and you say, oh, that's impermanence—I must be a stream-enterer now!

My general advice is: by all means read about them, then forget about them. I think we're on much surer ground when we are actually practicing to purify the heart. That will never disappoint us. The more we purify the heart, the more we find life to be more beautiful, more enjoyable. In fact, you could say that the Buddha equates happiness with virtue. In the Maṅgala Sutta, the discourse on blessings, it's all about being virtuous. It's not about owning things or doing this or doing that. It's about looking after people, having work that serves society, and developing virtues. These, he says, are the highest blessings.

So if we move that way, we can often tell that there's been some movement within us as these defilements begin to lessen their hold. And that means the defilement itself has lost power. I always think that's a better approach.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not created even greater confusion, and that by your practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 63

The Body - The Buddha's World View and the Role of Materiality (Rūpa)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42 min

In this comprehensive teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's systematic deconstruction of material reality through key Pāli terms: āyatana (sense spheres), indriya (faculties), and dhātu (elements). Drawing extensively from the Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta (MN 28), the Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint, he explains how Sāriputta taught that all wholesome states can be included within the Four Noble Truths, using the analysis of rūpa as a gateway to understanding suffering.

The talk guides practitioners through direct experiential investigation of the four great elements (cattāri mahābhūtāni): earth (paṭhavī) as solidity, water (āpo) as fluidity and cohesion, fire (tejo) as heat and transformation, and air (vāyo) as movement. Bhante demonstrates how to contact these elements in immediate experience—feeling bone solidity, sensing saliva's fluidity, noticing bodily warmth, and attending to the breath. He emphasizes that each element should be seen with proper wisdom as 'not mine, not I, not myself,' leading to disenchantment and dispassion.

Practically, this teaching transforms everyday activities—eating, walking, experiencing pain—into opportunities for insight. When we deconstruct a headache into its elemental sensations or taste food without conceptual overlay, we undermine upādāna (clinging) and discover that the aggregates themselves are not suffering; rather, it is our relationship of clinging that creates dukkha. This understanding reveals that liberation is not mystical but immediately accessible through careful attention to direct experience.

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

I want to talk about rūpa, but before we do that, I thought we would try to understand these different words that the Buddha uses to describe our condition. He talks about "the all," and so I coined a term for this: his omniscape. He uses three words to explain this. The first one is āyatana, then there is indriya, and then there is dhātu.

An āyatana is a sphere. There are various spheres cosmologically—all these different realms are all spheres. But for us as human beings, they refer basically to the sense bases. What is significant about these sense bases is that they are unique and discrete; you cannot mix them. For instance, you cannot hear through your eyes. Now, some might say, "What about synesthesia, where people see colour and hear beautiful

sounds?" But that is done by the mind. At the basic level of just that sense base, the retina can only see. It can only be sensitive to photons; it is not sensitive to airwaves. That is what the Buddha means by an āyatana.

There are six of them: the five senses and the mind itself as a sense base. The mind as a sense base is basically for your thoughts and emotions, but it also works as a sort of channel through which information comes from the other five senses, runs through the sense base of manas, and enters the mind, where the mind then creates something. When the Buddha is describing Nibbāna, he uses this word āyatana—the dimension, the sphere.

Remember, the Buddha is always deconstructing, always trying to show us where the problem lies. The problem lies in the āyatanas: in not recognizing that they are discrete, that they do not actually communicate with each other. That communication is all done through the cleverness, the magic of the mind.

The next term is indriya, which means a power, or better still when it comes to the senses, a faculty. These are your faculties, your controlling principles. They direct force. So your cakkhundriya, your eye faculty, is a way into the world through this ability to see. It is a faculty, a power. There are actually twenty-two of them, though we need not go into all of them because it does get rather complex.

Let me run through them so that you see how the idea of faculty expands. The first five are, of course, the sense bases: the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind. Then you have femininity and masculinity—these are two different faculties, two different powers. Then you have vitality. This word jīva appears in other traditions often translated as soul, but here it is simply translated as a sort of vitality. I have never really understood it fully; nobody has ever really been able to explain what this vitality is. I presume it must be something like the chi that we work with.

Then there is the whole business of pleasure and pain. If you think of these as powers, as faculties—the ability to feel pleasant bodily feelings and bodily pain, then mental good feelings and bad feelings. Here these are sometimes translated as gladness and sadness, though I do not think that is quite right. And then there is what is translated as indifference, but it is basically the neutral—when experiences are felt as neither pleasant nor unpleasant. These too are seen as indriyas.

Then you have the five spiritual powers, the five spiritual faculties: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. And the last three indriyas are to do with the process of liberation.

"I shall know what I did not know yet." This represents your determination, the achievement of Magga—the path of stream entry. And that is only matured in the next one, the faculty of highest knowledge, which is the fruit. And then the final one is the faculty of the one who knows. That's where we're heading.

So you can see there's a way of describing the human being from various different angles. Ayatana, these powers, and the final one would be dhatu, or elements. An element is something beyond which you cannot go—it's your basic experience. And that of course brings us to these four Mahabhutas, the four great elements. Bhuta actually means "beings," so these are the four great beings, but it's also translated as the dhatu—the chattara dhatu, the four great elements.

The last term is this word loka. It's another word for ayatana, really. Its original meaning was space, open spaciousness. But it's also used to describe realms—deva loka, the open space where the devas live. And this would be the human loka. But when he's looking at us from a spiritual angle of liberating from suffering, then loka refers to our universe.

So again, it's recognizing that we are entirely dependent upon our senses for our understanding, communication, and relationship to the world. We're constantly creating our own little loka, our own little universe. And we're always right there at the center of it—the sense of self. That's what he's particularly concerned with. Because when you hear the Mahayana talk about samsara is nirvana, or nirvana is samsara, what they mean is this loka, this universe that we're creating, is either going to be suffering for us or not. And that's where the change of relationship to what we're actually experiencing is so important.

So these words just tell us the way that he deconstructed our experience, always pointing us to where the problem was, to where the actual work was to be done.

Going back now to rupa. Rupa is one of the five khandhas—that's another way of looking at our situation. You've got the body, you've got feelings, you've got perception. Sankaras, which are translated quite mystically as "volitional conditionings"—it just means everything that we personally can create through our acts of will. And finally, consciousness. He does this to show us that we're all made up of pieces, little bits and pieces, but specifically where the problem lies, which is with sankara.

So if we go back to rupa, that basic place of contact with the world, there's a discourse here which is worth reading. It's called The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint, and it looks as though it's a teaching actually from Sariputta.

Remember that when somebody spoke something and they would tell the Buddha about it, if he agreed with it, he would say, "Well, if you'd have asked me, I'd have said the same thing."

So he's sitting there now: "Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Savatthi in Jeta's Grove, in Anathapindika's Park, and there the Venerable Sariputta addressed the bhikkhus thus: Friends, bhikkhus—Friends, they replied—and the Venerable Sariputta said this."

Remember that in the commentary where it says bhikkhus, it just means everybody who's listening.

"Friends, just as the footprint of any living being that walks can be placed within the elephant's footprint, and so the elephant's footprint is declared the chief of them because of its great size, so too all wholesome states can be included in the Four Noble Truths. In what four? The noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering."

And then you get the usual definitions. It's always nice to run through them—reminders of exactly what these things mean.

"And what is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Death is suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering." There's a lovely little line: "Not to obtain what one wants is suffering. And in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering."

Now, it's the aggregates affected by clinging that are suffering. The aggregates themselves are not suffering. What makes them suffering is our relationship to them, which is this upadana, this clinging to them.

"And what are the five aggregates affected by clinging? They are the material form aggregate affected by clinging"—that's rupa—"the feeling aggregate affected by clinging."

Perception aggregate, affected by clinging. The formations aggregate, affected by clinging. Here Bhikkhu Bodhi simply translates it as "formations." Consciousness aggregate, affected by clinging. That particular term *sankhara* has produced wonderful offerings from scholars. The best one was "concoctions."

So what is the material form aggregate affected by clinging? It is the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements. And what are the four great elements? They are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.

Now what we're going to do is read through these elements and see if we can actually experience them in their essential way, just while sitting here.

The first is the earth element. The earth element may be either internal or external. If you touch a door handle, it has some solidity. But what is the internal earth element? "Whatever internally belonging to oneself is solid, solidified, and clung to." So that's the relationship, but essentially it has to do with solidity: hairs on the head, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces—whatever else internally belonging to oneself is solid, solidified, and clung to. This is called the internal earth element.

Just for a moment, see if you can get hold of that feeling of solidity. What I personally use is a knuckle. You can feel the bone through it, and it's just so solid. Just feel how solid bone actually is. Get a feel for that. That's what is meant by "solid."

And remember, externally too—even in walking meditation, just the way the foot hits the ground and you feel the solidity of the ground. That's one of these elements, and you can't go beyond that. That's the understanding. You can't break up the earth element into something it's made of. It's a fundamental element. You might think of it like chemical elements before they discovered subatomic particles.

The text then goes on to say: "Now both the internal element and the external element are simply earth element." In other words, there's nothing else there. It's just earth element. It's the clinging that creates something of it. "And it should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom." This is the wisdom factor, and this is what turns it into an insight process: "This is not mine, this I am not, and this is not myself."

"This is not mine" refers to possession. "This I am not" refers to identity. "This is not myself" refers to conceit. Every time you say "I am" and finish the sentence—"I am unhappy"—there's a conceit there. There's a sense of who you are, and you're defining it. Conceit in that broader sense of the term.

"When one sees thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted." So there's your response to it—disenchantment. You become disenchanted. In other words, you undermine that attitude of clinging. You become disenchanted with

whatever is solid and make the mind dispassionate toward the earth element. Dispassionate here means there's no sense of clinging to it, no sense of loss if you lose something that's solid.

Now if we go on to the water element, we do the same thing. What is the water element? The water element may be either internal or external. What is the internal water element? "Whatever internally belonging to oneself is water, watery, and clung to." Here we get a wonderful list: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil in the joints, urine—and whatever else is internally belonging to oneself that is water, watery, and clung to.

Of course, these contemplations can also be used to examine another viewpoint, which is worth a talk on its own: the so-called repulsiveness of the body, which is really about our relationship to it. Especially when it comes to the water element, there's very little there that we jump with delight at.

"Whatever else internally belonging to oneself is water, watery, and clung to. This is called the internal water element."

Just for a moment, allow a bit of saliva to gather in your mouth, and you can feel the water element. That's the water element. The water element also has a sense of elasticity.

Both the internal water element and the external water element are simply just water element. The Buddha is stressing the fact that this is all it is. Don't put anything more on top of it. And then it should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom.

This is seeing things as they are. From a spiritual point of view, it's always about this relationship, this sense of "me" or "mine." So the contemplation proceeds: "This is not mine. This I am not. This is not myself." That's an identity view being released—I'm not that.

When one sees this actually as it is with proper wisdom—which is experiential, it's not thinking about it, it's actually doing it—one becomes disenchanted. In other words, you don't expect anything of the water element anymore, and you become dispassionate towards it. It's neither here nor there. That's the water element.

If we look at the fire element, it's the same thing. The fire element may be either internal or external. But what is the internal fire element? Whatever internally belongs to oneself that is fire, fiery, and clung to. That by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed. That by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets completely digested. And whatever else internally belonging to oneself is fire or fiery.

There was a knowledge here, wasn't there, that the whole digestive system is actually creating our internal heat. I don't know how we're going to experience that directly, but sometimes, if you eat a good curry and just sit there with the heat, you can feel it. Heat, of course, you can experience anywhere—it's just warmth. My cheeks are quite hot at the moment, for instance.

The idea of fire as something that warms is interesting enough, but notice also that it ages. There's a connection between fire and the burning out, the destruction of things. It's something that ages and destroys.

Both the internal fire element and the external fire element are simply just fire element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom: "This is not mine. This is not what I am. This is not myself." When one sees thus with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the fire element and makes the mind dispassionate towards the fire element.

So remember that when you're in your rooms and you're feeling a bit cool—it's just the fire element going down. No one is actually feeling cool. But there is coolness.

The air element is much the same. Sometimes it's translated as "wind" actually. The air element may be either internal or external. And what is the internal air element? Whatever belonging to oneself is air, airy, and clung to: upgoing winds, downgoing winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath—whatever else internally belongs to oneself that is air, airy, and clung to. This is the internal air element.

I don't know about feeling winds going up and winds going down, but we can certainly do the breath. You can feel the breath—that's wind, the wind element, airiness.

Actually, it's just movement, isn't it? It's movement—the wind element. And that should be seen as it properly is. This is not mine, it's not myself, and so forth. What one sees with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted.

So what is it we want from the world of things, the physical world? It's pleasure, isn't it? It's a pleasurable thing. And when we feel pleasurable things, we feel happy. But that happiness can't be real in any sense of duration or solidity, because when the object that's pleasant disappears, the happiness disappears with it. And because it's clung to, you get that desire for more, and so on. We all know that.

This disenchantment is a different way of relating to that which is pleasant in the physical world. We don't expect anything of it. It just is. So when we eat, if it's pleasant, it's pleasant. We don't expect it to make us happy—that's the point. Although happiness may arise. And that allows us to be dispassionate towards it. In other words, when somebody says to you, "Let's go for a pizza," you don't jump up and down too much.

Now, if we go back a little bit to the earth element, we're looking at how there comes a time when the water element is disturbed and then the external element vanishes. This is to do with the cycles of the earth, where the earth is destroyed first by water, then by wind, and then by fire. These are huge cyclic motions, and eastern people would think much more in terms of cycles rather than this idea of progress that we have—starting somewhere back there and going somewhere. One of the great shocks of spiritual practice is to find that we're actually going nowhere.

There are two ways of looking at time: the sort of repetitious turning around—the sun rises, the sun falls—and the idea of time moving forward.

"When even this external earth element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no considering that this is I, mine, or I am."

So there's a connection between the fact that these elements disappear. It's ridiculous to have some sort of relationship with them of identity, possession, or conceit.

Now the Buddha gives an example of how this might actually manifest through personal experience. Here we have a monk who very bravely has gone amongst people who don't like him. And this is what happens to him:

"If others abuse, revile, scold and harass a bhikkhu who has seen this element as it actually is, he understands thus: 'This painful feeling, born of ear contact, has arisen in me. This is dependent, not independent.' Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. Then he sees that contact is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, formations are impermanent, consciousness is impermanent. And his mind, having the element of its object supported, enters into a new objective support and acquires confidence."

That's where we're going.

"Then, if others attack a bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired and disagreeable—by contact with fists, clods, knives, sticks—he understands thus: 'This body is of a nature of contact with fists, clods, sticks and knives.' But this has been said by the Blessed One in his advice on the simile of the saw."

This is a very famous simile: "Because if bandits were to sever you savagely limb from limb by a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards those who would carry this out would not be carrying out my teaching."

Once when I said this in a talk, somebody said, "Well, the Buddha had a great sense of humour."

"So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established. My body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks and knives assail this body, for the teaching of the Buddhas has been practiced by me."

So remember that, yes? The next time you're attacked: this is just a club.

And then finally, when the bhikkhu recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesomeness does not establish in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency—this lovely sense of *saṃvega*, urgency.

"I've got to do something about this. It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me. It is bad for me, it is no good for me—that when I thus recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity supported by wholesomeness is not established in me."

Now we get a little bit of insight into society: "Just as when a daughter-in-law sees a father-in-law, she arouses a sense of urgency to please him, so too when the Bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, he arouses a sense of urgency. But if when he recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, equanimity supported by wholesomeness becomes established in him, then he is satisfied with it." And at that point, much is done by the bhikkhu.

So it's a case of recognizing that there's a practical element to this. People who undergo operations, losing limbs or faculties—this is one way that in the spiritual life they can become not so affected by it, by recognizing this body is just a vehicle. When we've got a headache, you see it's just the thumping in the head, pain. When you go into the pain, this is the whole thing about the vipassana situation—you're deconstructing, going down to these mahabhutas, down to these basic elements.

So remember, when physical pain comes, the clung-to business, the upadana, manifests as your relationship to it. As soon as the pain gets to a point, you want to move. So there's an expression of your clinging, right? "This is my pain and I don't want it." You have to wait until that passes. If you don't, then you're not dealing with the clung-to and it remains as a habit. It's only when you actually wait for that to pass away that dispassion arises towards the feeling of pain in the knee. That's a direct thing.

So there's your dispassion. There's your equanimity with this pain in the knee. And once that's been established, you can then go into that pain and begin to see these mahabhutas. You go in there and the main one may be that sense of pressure, very tight, or it could be fiery, very hot. You go in there and you feel that, and you point to it and you look at it and you feel it. There may come a reflection—you don't have to do it purposefully because just in the doing there is the seeing. But the reflection may come after the practice.

Even while you're doing this, you recognize that there's an observer observing, feeling these sensations, but somehow isn't it. There's a sensitivity towards them, but it's not actually identifying with them. And it's catching that—because that's your release. That's your liberation from suffering right there. It's not something mystical. You're liberating yourself from suffering, first of all, by recognizing the clung-to business, which is the desire to move.

Now, when you get right down to the fire element, it's one of identity. "I am the body. This is me." You might say, well, intellectually we know about the body, but as soon as you fall ill or death approaches, we freak out. The level of freaking out is the measure of that attachment. So these exercises really have a point to them. After the practice, you might reflect upon it. When I'm here, of course, I ring the bell, and there's a half minute's reflection. That's the sort of thing you might reflect upon, just for a moment.

Of course, when I'm not here, everybody jumps up and runs out—which is not quite the practice. I would suggest you might follow that, if only out of respect for the occasional person who actually wants to do it. Because it's quite distracting when you're trying to reflect and you can hear someone running for it.

It's the same with all these physical sensations that we have. When you go outside and you're walking around, and you put your eye on the ground ahead of you and determine that you'll just be aware of what you're hearing—as you're walking around the meadows, you're hearing things. You're hearing birds, the rustle of your feet, whatever it is. You might hear traffic in the distance. So you're hearing, hearing. And what you're trying to do is to begin to recognize that there's a sensation there, a sensation at the eardrum. It's catching something.

So this is prior to actually recognising what the sound is. As soon as you hear the sound, of course, the mind says "bird," so that you know. But the more you put yourself there, right at the ear door, the more you're contacting that very moment when the sound comes in.

Now, frankly, at that point, you don't want to be walking because you'll walk straight into the pond. It's good to do this when you're standing. So if you take a position at the back or somewhere to sit – there's really only one place, I think, and that's in front of the Parinirvana Buddha. I'll try and get more. I'm not going to put seats out there. People don't put a seat – that's just for laziness, isn't it? You want to sit down, for heaven's sake.

But I'm hoping to put what they call in the churches – they call them misericords – at the front where the monks used to sit. You'll see the seats that fold down, but when you fold them up, there's a little ledge. So in the long chantings they used to do, they could have a rest and just sort of sit a little bit on that ledge. That's why they're called misericords – for the poor monks and nuns who had to chant for hours on end. I was thinking something like that, where you can sit and do this sort of exercise.

And you're constantly driving yourself to the point of contact. Point of contact. That's where you begin to experience these sensations. The hearing, for instance – you can actually experience that as a sense of touch on the eardrum. There's no sound there at all. You can get down to that point where all you're experiencing is like a tapping. If you were to tap your finger on the palm of your hand, it's something like that. That's all you get – a drumming. And then it comes in.

Now, that's the only point where you've got the sense base. The sense base is that basic. The next point, it comes through the manas, which is the mental sense base. It's at that point of manas that it's turned into a sound. Then the sound is worked upon and given a meaning – so it's a bell. Then the bell is given meaning – wake-up bell. And right at the end of that process, you get the identity. "Me, I've got to get up." That comes right at the end of the process.

You can actually see this process. You might only see it once in a lifetime, but you can see it. And of course, to catch these things at that level, you've really got to be driven by interest and very, very still. You've got to be really still.

So, without being too critical, I can see that meditators are relaxing – over-relaxing. There's got to be this constant effort. But remember, the effort is never to achieve something. It's always to maintain a certain level of interest and connection with what's actually happening here and now. And then you get these slightly deeper insights.

Is it necessary? I don't think so. They're interesting things to have. They tend to support the Abhidhamma and things like that. But it's not important, is it? Because here in the discourse, you don't get that sort of detailed deconstruction. You get a very straightforward sense-based deconstruction.

So, for instance, as I say, if you've got a headache, the first thing is you just don't want it. But if you relax and relax around it,

and you use that headache—what we call a headache—and you go into it, then you can see this tightness, something that constructs it. It's just that process of disidentifying and deconstructing which is undermining this upādāna, this grasping. There are many opportunities during the day when you can practice that.

And the more difficult one, of course, is when there's something pleasant. Obviously during mealtime, that's the time you've got to bring a certain sense of urgency, knowing that you're not going to indulge. You're not just there to be happy. You're there to investigate the process. So you're trying to get down beyond the idea of what it is that you're actually eating.

I remember once at Kanduboda where often instructions weren't given so well or were misconstrued by the Westerner through the process of translation and whatnot. I asked one young fellow—he came to me with a question, I said, "How are you deconstructing the whole process of eating?" He says, "Well, I eat it and I say, 'Yeah, that's potato, and that's...' and I'm thinking." I said, "No, no—that might make you a good cook, but it couldn't get you liberated."

So it's a case of recognizing that what we're actually looking at are quite specific little sensations, trying to get beyond the concept that comes with the taste, just to the raw tasting experience. And I'm hoping that you don't experience it once, but almost as a regular thing—that there is only taste. It says here, doesn't it? There is only earth element. There is only water element. There is only taste.

So what's the relationship? You might think, "Oh, I should be joyous." In our little verse, we say "appreciative joy." Well, that might turn up, but that's not really where we're heading when it comes to the actual tasting process. The one is dispassion, which is a sense of equanimity. It's just tasting. And it's at that point where we realize that, in fact, this is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. There's a sense of liberation from having to try to squeeze blood out of a stone, having to try to get happiness from a piece of toast. You see the stupidity of it.

And then after you've swallowed and there's a moment of rest and you turn inward, that's when you get that feeling of—not dispassion, what does he call it? Contentment, right? Another word for dispassion is contentment. That's it. You don't need pleasant food to make you happy.

This begins to liberate us from the idea of having to have some sort of connection with food, undermining the connection of food with happiness. It doesn't at all undermine your sense of taste. In fact, it increases your sense of taste. I remember one person said to me after retreat that it was the first time she'd actually ever tasted carrots. That was a revelation—carrots actually have a taste. At least some do.

So it's a case of recognizing that as soon as you are seeking happiness in taste, you're already putting a concept there which is stopping you from actually experiencing the way it is. An obvious example: when you go to get a pizza or something, there's a concept, isn't there? You've had all these pizzas in your life and you know what a pizza should taste like. Then you get this pizza and you say, "Well, this isn't a pizza." Well, it is a pizza—it's just not the pizza you'd conceptualized, not the pizza you're experiencing right now. In that, of course, you're disappointed. "This is not what I expected. The pastry is too thick. It's too floppy," and so on and so forth.

So there's the product of attachment. There's the product of saying, "This is mine. This is the way I want it." Anytime you come across anything physical—whether you're opening a door, closing a door, brushing your teeth, washing your face—all these are little moments of reflection. And that reflection is actually constantly helping us to form a relationship with the physical world which is no longer going to cause us any suffering. That's the point of understanding rūpa, form.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and have not caused even greater confusion. May you, by your sense of urgency, devote yourself to the practice. Liberate yourself sooner rather than later.

Thank you.

CHAPTER 64

The Body - Kāyagatāsati Sutta (MN 119)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

> *In this comprehensive exploration of the Kāyagatāsati Sutta (MN 119), Bhante Bodhidhamma guides practitioners through the Buddha's systematic approach to mindfulness of the body. Beginning with the remarkable scientific facts about our physical form—billions of neurons, millions of cells dying each second—he highlights how disconnected our conscious awareness is from the body's actual processes, setting the stage for understanding why contemplation of the body is so essential.*
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> *The talk progresses through the sutta's key sections: breath meditation (ānāpānasati), the four postures, full awareness (sampajañña) in daily activities, contemplation of the body's anatomical parts, the four great elements (mahābhūta), and the charnel ground contemplations. Bhante offers practical guidance on working with the traditional list of thirty-two body parts, emphasizing that the goal is not to cultivate disgust but to examine our conditioned relationship to the body and arrive at equanimity. He shares the historical context of monks who misunderstood these teachings, leading to tragic consequences, as a caution against imbalanced practice.*
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> *The discourse culminates in eight contemplations on death from the Visuddhimagga, which the Buddha declared the most powerful of all contemplations. Bhante encourages practitioners to integrate these reflections into daily practice—not as morbid exercises but as liberating insights that transform our relationship to embodiment. He suggests balancing these contemplations with gratitude for the body, caring for it wisely while understanding its impermanent nature. The teaching emphasizes that consistent, gentle practice over time gradually shifts our attitudes and helps unwholesome tendencies atrophy naturally.*

So in our last talk, we covered the whole business of how the mind experiences the body. We looked especially at those four great elements and so forth.

But of course there is the body as an organism, and the first thing that always strikes me about this little book called *Human Body* is that whenever I pick it up and read a bit, I'm absolutely gobsmacked. For instance, the brain contains 12 billion neurons and 50 billion supportive glial cells. That's 12 billion neurons. The mind boggles. You can fit all that inside your skull. Twelve billion. It's an amazing figure.

And then there's another fact here that's even slightly more interesting in a way. Every second, two million oxygen-bearing red blood cells die. Every second, two million. I mean, I'm not aware of that—are you? But they are replaced at the same rate by new ones generated in the process of erythropoiesis, something like that anyway. This begins in the kidney cells, which are stimulated by low oxygen levels to release a hormone. The hormone travels to the body's red bone marrow, which stimulates increased production, raising the blood oxygen levels. And these cells have to make their way through the bone into the blood. Well, that's remarkable, isn't it?

When you read books like this and you realise all this stuff is going on and you haven't a clue—absolutely haven't a clue—you do feel a bit like a body snatcher, like you're in this body and somehow you're not really connected. So that's our first contemplation, really: that the mind simply doesn't know this stuff.

There's nothing in the Buddha's teaching about this. I mean, if he'd known, for instance, that malaria was carried by mosquitoes, I think he'd have told us. But he didn't. You probably know that the word malaria comes from the Italian *mal'aria*, bad air, because the Romans thought it was the bad air off the swamp that was giving them the illness. So it's only in very recent times, over the past hundred or fifty years, that we've got these sorts of facts.

What comes across to me is that every one of these little cells produces its own energy and a bit more for us. And each has its own little intelligence. It knows what it's supposed to do—it's supposed to go and pick up oxygen, deposit it, and then die. It's just remarkable.

So we're contemplating the fact that we have this connection with the body which is absolutely intimate. Our identity lies with the body. How do you know that? You know it when serious illness comes along, when death looms you in the face—the fear, the anxiety that comes. Even though everybody, all this science, is telling you that you can't be the body. The body is made up of billions and billions of cells, and they're all dying. They're all dying all the time. The cornea in your eye is changed every week. Every week you've got a new cornea, a new eye. Amazing. And supposedly, the body changes all its cells within a period of seven years. So I mean, I've had ten bodies. Ten completely renovated bodies. It's amazing. I shall leave you with that.

The Buddha knows this, of course. He knows that the body is not him. And there's a whole discourse devoted to the body.

It's called the Kāyagatāsati Sutta. So *kāya* means body, *gati* means "towards the body" or "going" or "about the body," *sati* means awareness of it, and *sutta* means discourse.

I must put you onto this website—it's absolutely wonderful. It's run by a monk called Ānandajoti, who's an English fellow who was with me in the monastery I was at in Burma. He's ended up being quite a good scholar, a very good scholar, and he lives now in Thailand. What he's done with various discourses is put the translation underneath the Pāli, so you can actually see how the words all connect. It's really quite interesting for those of you who want to know a bit of Pāli.

So anyway, the discourse starts off with the monks being in this hall and they're saying, "Wonderful friends, marvelous friends, how it is said that the Gracious One who knows, who sees, the Worthy One, the Perfect Sambuddha—mindfulness related to the body, when it has been developed and made much of, yields great fruit and brings great advantages."

Just then, the Buddha has gotten up from his seat and interrupted them. He says, "What were you talking about before I came in?" So they tell him that they've been talking about this contemplation of the body. He takes the opportunity to go into it in greater detail.

The first thing, of course, he goes into is the breath. He sits cross-legged, setting his body up straight. He goes to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, to an empty place. And that normally means: the wilderness is for the cold season, the root of a tree is for the hot season, and the hut is for the rainy season. That's what it's referring to. So this is the life of those ascetics at the time.

He sits with his legs cross-legged and all that, establishes his mind in front of him, breathes in, breathes out. And while breathing in a long breath, he knows, "I am breathing in a long breath."

Now, the Pāli, you see, is *dīghaṃ assasāmi*. The verb in Pāli is like Italian—it includes the pronoun. So *-mi* means "I," *-ti* means "you," and so on. You can't really say... it's the same in Italian. You can't say—let me think of a word—*amo, ami, ama*. So it's "I love," "you love," and so on. The way you get over it in Italian is by using the pronoun explicitly.

So you've got to be careful about this "I" business. In our noting, we just say "rising" and "falling," but you can't actually say that in Pāli unless you use the infinitive. You have to be a little careful when you read this stuff simply because it seems as though he's noting, but it could also just be a reflection. Then you observe the breath. Remember, the noting technique is specific to the Mahasi Sayadaw, though I also found out it was used by a Zen teacher, Maezumi Roshi, in America. So it's not completely unknown in other traditions.

Now, the word he uses here is *pajānāti*. That *ñā*—"to know"—comes right through to our language as *gn*, so it's "knowledge," *kn*. And the *pa* means to really know, and we translate it as insight—to actually really feel, to realise, *pajānāti*—to actually experience it. He uses that for knowing there's a short breath and a long breath and so on.

Then he says "trains himself." He uses a different word, *sikkhati*—to train himself, experiencing the whole body. "I will breathe in the whole body. I will breathe out. Making the bodily process calm, I will breathe in. Making the bodily process calm, I will breathe out."

So there's your samatha quality. That's the beginning of any of our meditation—just trying to settle the mind on the breath a little bit. And then when you're settled, you open up.

What he doesn't say here, which it says of course in the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse—the discourse on how to establish awareness—is that you train to such a point where the *sati* and the *paññā*, the awareness and the intuitive intelligence, are at such a pitch that insight arises. For some reason, that's not included here.

Okay, so that's the breath. And then there's always this little verse at the end of things. "For one who is living heedful"—it's translated as "heedful" here; this is *appamādo*, one of his last words, which we normally translate as "diligent." *Ātāpino*, which means *ātāpi*—that's very devoted effort. And *pahitatta*, which is "resolute."

So these are the three qualities that he expects us to have: to be diligent with the noting, with the feeling, with the seeing; to put real ardent energy into it. Remember, this is not the energy of trying to gain something. It's just the energy of trying to be aware of what it is.

So it's just enough energy, remember, just to keep the attention steady on the object, and resolute.

I think I've told one or two of you, I had a meditator who I asked how he could stay on the breath for so long. And he says, "Well, I do what they do when they're pumping iron." So: rising, falling, just one more. Rising, falling, just one more. And that way he keeps himself resolute on observing the breath.

And then the Buddha says, "with whatever rushing thoughts that are dependent on the household life." This is normally translated as regrets and planning and all that sort of stuff. But I think I agree with him that translates it as memories and intentions and

other things like that, even Bhikkhu Bodhi. But it depends how you look at the word. And it seems to me that it makes much more sense to call them rushing thoughts, which is what we experience, isn't it? Thoughts constantly coming. So it's putting those aside.

And when it says "dependent on the household life," it means dependent on the sense pleasures. That's what it means by the household life. So it doesn't mean to say that a householder, or in our terms, a lay person, can't also have spiritual aims. It's just that when you see in the scriptures this "household life," he's referring to those who are entirely devoted to sense pleasures.

And these rushing thoughts are given up. With the giving up of these, the mind becomes internally stable, settles down, becomes well-pointed and concentrated. And like this does a monk develop mindfulness related to the body. When you're reading the scriptures, "monk" the commentary always says means whoever's meditating. It's just a part standing for the whole.

So then he goes on to postures. You've got your four postures. And again, he says, the monk while going knows "I am going"—going and coming—so there's your walking meditation. He knows when he's standing. When he's sitting, he knows. When he's lying down, and whatever way his body is disposed, he knows it just that way. So again, it's just this business of being with what you're doing—being what you're doing, actually. And then there's the verse again, which we've just read.

And then there's full awareness. He translates full awareness as sampajāna kārī. Kārī means doing. Pajāna means to really experience it. And sam means with. So basically, it's doing something really mindfully—doing really mindfully what we're doing. Sampajānakārī.

And so here he's got a whole list. Of course it's related to the monastic life, but it's easy to translate it to ordinary daily life. "When looking ahead or looking around, he is one who practices full awareness." Now in the dining hall, I often see people picking up their plate mindfully, looking around and then keeping their eye on the food in the distance, while their legs slowly take them to the counter. And of course, when you get there, you have to watch yourself. You see, you're going to watch these thoughts, let them go.

So when he's looking around, he practices full awareness. When he's bending and stretching, he practices full awareness. When he's bearing his robe and bowl—so for us, when we're clothing ourselves and so forth—he practices full awareness of what he's

actually doing. Eating, drinking, chewing and tasting—see, the accent is on the whole process of eating. And then passing stool and urine, which is nicely put, he practices full awareness.

Often, generally speaking, when it comes to that sort of activity in the lavatory, we try to keep the mind somewhere else—Timbuktu or something. But it's a good practice to actually be with the whole process of evacuation. There's a nice word. We'll keep it Latin. Evacuation, although I do like Anglo-Saxon words for it.

I suppose just as a little aside, you do know where the word "crap" comes from? Well, the nineteenth century was full of wonderful inventions. And there was an invention of the U-pipe, which filled up with water and stopped the smell of the sewer coming up into the room. And the person who did that was called Mr. Crapper. And he's not only left us with this lovely invention, but with a noun, a verb, an adverb, and an adjective. So he's left us quite a legacy. Poor old Mr. Crapper.

Anyway, that's by the by. So this urine business—for a very long time, maybe about five years actually, because I started in that practice quite early on.

Every morning, diligently, I drank a third of my urine according to the yoga practice. You let a third go, you keep the middle third, and you let the rest go, and then you drink it. The great teaching is that it's okay—it's actually fine. It has vitamins, it has antibodies, you've got all sorts of things in there, you see. And I never felt better.

Unfortunately, there was this other monk, an American, and you can read this book called *The Waters of Life*, which is all about maintaining your urine. He was drinking all of it, all day. And he was coming out with great big boils out of his skin. We said to him, you know, your skin is the biggest excretory organ we've got, actually—through the skin. It's all coming out through the skin, you see. And he said, "No, no. I've read this book." I don't know what happened to him. He probably disappeared in one great big sore. Poor man. Well, let's hope somebody told him.

Anyway, that's something you might consider doing yourselves, right? The early morning pee—give a quarter away, keep the middle third in a glass, and the last third you throw away. See if you can get over your disgust. We'll come to that in a minute, of course.

So again, the sutta says: when standing, sitting, in sleeping, in walking, in talking, and in maintaining silence. Now, "in sleeping" is a bit difficult. I think you can either understand that to be from the moment you lie in bed until you fall asleep. But some of you may find that as your concentration grows, you actually wake up in sleep—you know you're asleep and you're just awake in it.

I often talk about this student I had. I haven't seen her for a very long time now, but she did lots of practice on visualizing Chinese deities or Buddhas, I can't remember which. But such was her concentration that she told me she went to bed and she'd wake up in sleep and be awake all night. But the body would be completely asleep, the brain would be asleep, everything's asleep—and she woke up perfectly refreshed. So that tells you something. That's not an aim in order to become fully liberated; I'm just saying that's a consequence.

And in maintaining silence. So he practices full awareness—full awareness. It's just a way of reinforcing the idea that you're actually attending to what you're doing.

Let's have a look now. The next section is actually where I should have talked about my healthy drink, because this is about the repulsiveness of the body. So I'll just give you the background story.

It seems as though the Buddha gave a very detailed talk about this. He talked to the bhikkhus in many ways on the subject of impurity. He spoke in praise of what is impure. He spoke in praise of the contemplation of what is impure. And he spoke again and again in praise of the stage of meditation on what is impure—because you can get to access jhāna, I think, with this.

And they dwelt upon the practice of contemplating what is impure in different ways. They were troubled by their own bodies, ashamed of them, loathing them. It is as if a woman or man when young or delicate and fond of dressing up, having washed their hair, would be troubled, ashamed, and full of loathing because they had the corpse of a snake or of a dog or of a man hung around their neck. So these bhikkhus, being troubled by their own bodies, ashamed of them and loathing them, by themselves deprived themselves of life and deprived each other of life.

Now, when the Buddha hears this, he states: "Bhikkhus, this is not suitable for these bhikkhus. It is not fit. It is not proper. It is not worthy of a disciple. It is not good. It should not be done."

So they obviously got very enthused—he'd obviously given this great talk about the repulsiveness of the body, and they just got into the repulsiveness of it and drove themselves to suicide. It's a bit odd, isn't it?

So then, of course, he makes a rule. This comes out of the Vinaya.

There are four Parājikas, and if you break any of these, you are actually no longer a monk or nun. There is no ceremony for disrobing a monastic. Basically, if a monastic community decides that somebody has committed one of these offenses, they can ask

him to leave the monastery. But so long as he can get laypeople to feed him and provide him a place to stay, there is very little to force him out. He has to do it from his own conscience, really.

So then the Buddha made up this rule: "Should any bhikkhu purposefully deprive a human being of life, or provide him with a life-taking knife, or recommend advantages in death, or encourage him to kill himself—who should in fact recommend advantages in death or encourage him to kill himself in various ways, with such thoughts in mind and such intentions in mind as 'Good man, what good is this miserable life to you? Death is better for you than life'—that bhikkhu is defeated and no more in communion."

So he did not like that at all—that they had encouraged each other to kill each other or in fact kill themselves. This business of the repulsion of the body, you have to be careful. I don't want to hear somebody's committed suicide having drunk their morning pee! So let's take it easier.

Anyway, when he goes through the practice, the idea is that you are not purposefully building up disgust. You are actually trying to find out what your relationship is to these parts of the body. As the images come to mind—hairs on the head—well, that rarely brings up any sense of disgust for people. It's the same with body hairs, or it might do with certain body hairs. Nails, teeth. Some people I know, just looking at a tooth in your mind might bring up a certain feeling. Skin, unless it's old and wrinkled and horrible. Flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys.

So when you go through the list for yourself, you are actually just trying to catch your relationship to it. Heart, liver, spleen, lungs. I don't even know what my spleen looks like. Intestines, undigested food, excrement, bile—now this is more like it—bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, and fat.

When you get in contact with your image, or when you get in contact with that even in ordinary daily life—as we were talking about, going to the toilet—just catch your relationship to it. Because you ask yourself: is it necessary?

Disgust is a natural response of the body to something which it perceives as unhealthy. So if you put rotting food in your mouth, you ought to feel disgusted. But the emotion of disgust, like when we say we are morally disgusted, you've just got to ask yourself: is that necessary? Even though it might be a spontaneous reaction.

So it is with all these parts of the body. We have learnt this, we have been taught that this stuff is to be disgusted. But actually, when you question whether you should feel disgusted or not, as the disgust disappears—well, it's just parts of the body. And of course, people who work in surgery, nurses, those in mortuaries—you get over that.

In the East, if you are a monastic or you go with a monastic, if you are a layperson, you can get easy entrance into the mortuary to see bodies being cut open and have a look. For somebody going into such a place for the first time, there is just a dead body on the table. The doctor, in this case it was a woman, was cutting it. The thing that strikes you about a dead body is that it is actually dead. It is completely lifeless. It really is quite something to stay with. In fact, my companion who had come with me, this other monk, he had to leave. I think mainly because of the smell of substances that they use to keep it antiseptic.

And then when the body is cut and they are investigating what actually caused the death, you see it is all bits and pieces. It is quite remarkable, really, how it all fits together. And then you are supposed to say, "Like this body is, so is mine."

So it really is, if you are going to do this exercise—and these exercises are best done just as a little bit every day, just as a little reminder. You don't have to go through this whole list, but just a little bit every day before your morning meditation or afterwards. You run through the body and just remind yourself that this is the body. This is how it is. And the disgust is not necessary.

The one thing the list misses out, but which was added later, was the brain, the matalunga. I have asked a few people about that. Nobody knows why it was left out in the first place. It became the thirty-second part, I think—isn't it thirty-one? I can only think that they didn't know what it was.

Just to go back to what we were saying before about the senses, about the five senses and the basis of the senses—happily, both in the discourses and in the later work of the Abhidhamma, the mind itself, the mind door, the manodvāra, is not given a sense base. It is not actually given a sense base. But the commentaries then began to think about this and thought, well, it should have one. So they decided that there was a phial of blood in the heart which was the base for the mental, as a mental door—the hadaya vatthu, the base of the heart. And they put it actually in the heart.

I've often wondered whether, in fact, it was misplaced—that what they were connecting was this chakra, the heart chakra, which is in the middle of your chest here, and which, as you might say, is the exchange box for your emotions. You might feel, shall we say, a certain tension in your abdomen, which you intuit as anxiety or some-

thing. But it's only when it rises into consciousness that you feel it in the chest, don't you? You don't feel anxious so much in your abdomen. It comes here and it becomes anxiety—an emotion that you can recognize. Anger, fear—it's all at this level, you see. And I'm wondering whether they mistook it, or whether they were thinking about this, because at the same time, of course, yoga was being developed.

Anyway, this phial of blood. There was one teacher who was asked, "Well, if you have a heart transplant and the blood goes into the machine—your heart's dead, it's stopped, and the blood's being pumped by the machine—where's this phial of blood?" The answer was: it was in the machine. So any excuse, you know!

But I was very relieved to read that in fact the Buddha doesn't say this either in the discourses, and the people who put the Abhidhamma together don't say it either. And I think the reason is that the base of the mind is the whole body. The mind—any information that comes in from the five senses—it's this secondary door, which must be all over the body as it were, sensitive to any of the five sense bases. So that's the only way I can personally understand it.

So yes, those are the impurities. In the monastic life, where of course you take a vow of celibacy, this practice can be quite helpful. When a beautiful image comes to you which is erotic, you then actually just image it doing something which is not very pleasant, and immediately that desire does fade away.

Now, what you don't want to do is make the mistake of growing in disgust completely, so that as soon as a beautiful image arises, you get disgust. Rather, they should cancel each other out, and then you're left with a state of equanimity. But if you keep on with this business of disgust, then you end up, instead of having erotic desires, with just a load of disgusting desires. So it's not—you see what I mean? It's a sort of balance really. That's a skillful way of using the asubha, the unlovely parts of the body.

Now then, it goes into the elements. We went through all the elements and how you can visualize them inside yourself—the four elements. I think there was also the fifth, the space element. Did we do that? Maybe another time.

So there's fire, earth, water, and air, which symbolize density, weight, heat, elasticity, and cohesiveness. You can sometimes feel that in the breath, can't you? A sort of stretching of things. And movement, of course. And there's also space, emptiness—like in the mouth, or in the stomach, or in the ear. The body is also full of spaces. Anyway, we can leave that because I think I covered it last time.

Then we finally come to, on the body side, the charnel grounds. Remember, in those days the bodies were just laid out and the animals ate them. They were wrapped in white cloth and simply left out there. And it was this white cloth that the mendicants—not just the ones of the Buddha—would take to make robes out of.

One day, when the Buddha saw a group of his monks with these ragged robes just joined together as they came, bits and pieces, he thought that didn't look so nice. So he asked them to cut the pieces of cloth in a way that when the cloth was laid out, it looked like a paddy field. If you ever see monastic robes, they've got squares with sort of passageways around them. Then he asked them to boil the cloth with the areca nut, which gives it a light brown color. And on top of that, he asked them to shave their heads. With this, they became quite distinguished from the long-haired ascetics and those wearing other robes—because the Jains, of course, dress in white. If you see a Jain monk, they're dressed in white.

So he goes through this. We don't have to hang around here too much. It's just that he describes the various stages through which a body completely decomposes—dead after one or two days, then the next stage, after being eaten by vultures, eaten by hawks, eaten by crows. All in bits and pieces.

And then the next stage shows a skeleton with flesh and blood, still bound together by tendons. And the next one is a skeleton without flesh, smeared with blood, bound together by tendons. And the next shows a skeleton no longer having flesh or blood, bound together only with tendons. The tendons and the bones are the last to go.

And then the bones become scattered in all directions—a hand bone here, a foot bone there, a knee bone there. They're no longer connected, as in that great song. And then the white bones, bleached by the sun like a conch shell. And then just a heap of bones, a year old—so they're still hanging about. And finally they become like powder. Rotten bones become like powder.

And of course, with all of these stages, with all of those processes, the meditator compares what they observe to their own very body, thinking: this body is also of such a nature, of such a constitution, has not gone beyond this. Remember our evening contemplations? That's the idea—you always connect with the rotting body.

This is very difficult for us in modern times. We could do it with pictures, but unfortunately these days they just burn you up and give you a casket. I was very fortunate when my first teacher died. She was cremated, and the ceremony was led by a nun from Throssel Hole, a Zen Buddhist monastery. We had permission to go down to where the coffins are—there's a man there who manages things, with two ovens. He opens one

oven which is empty, takes half an hour, and shovels the coffin in. But unfortunately, you never get to see the body burning. So you have to go to India for that, to the burning ghats. And that's always something to watch if you're practicing, saying to yourself: just as this body is, mine will also be. That's if you intend to be cremated.

So the idea here, of course, is to really begin to sense the connection we have with the body, which goes deeper, goes real deep. I am the body.

Now, just on that point, there's a whole chapter in the Visuddhimagga on how to contemplate death and the body. Buddhaghosa starts off by saying there are types of death—there's timely death—and the development can be very simple. You can just sit very quietly and keep repeating to yourself: death will take place, the life faculty will be interrupted. Or you can just keep saying the word "death," because the word itself will lead you into your feeling about death. Maybe images come up, maybe fear comes up, and so on.

But there are also contemplations—eight ways, he says, in which we can recollect death, the death of our bodies. The first one is the appearance of a murderer. Just as a murderer appears with a sword saying, "I shall cut this man's head off," so too, as soon as you're born, at some point your life will be cut off. Death is lurking behind us.

You know that medieval tale? I was trying to find it, but I couldn't. Someone meets death and then runs from it. He says, "I won't meet you," and runs off to the market. And when he gets there, death is waiting for him.

So you can't escape it.

The next contemplation is on ruin of success. This is the old teaching about whatever you've achieved, you've simply got to leave behind. All your money, all your great attainments, all your gold medals—they've all got to be left behind. I remember somebody asking a solicitor what the very rich elderly lady had left behind, and he said, "Everything."

Then there's the contemplation that all health ends in sickness. And there's comparing oneself to others—all these people who died. David Bowie, that's a shock, isn't it? You've got all these people who were perhaps icons in our lives, people we knew, and they're all dead. Recently, there was a very good footballer who was taking a plane across the Channel, and unfortunately the plane dropped into the water. He drowned, only about twenty-six or so. A great tragedy.

Then there's the contemplation of sharing the body with many. I thought this was rather good because they must have known this—the body is shared by many, inhabited by the eighty families of worms. Creatures live in dependence on the outer skin, feeding on the outer skin. Creatures live in dependence on the inner skin, feeding on the inner skin. In dependence on flesh, feeding on the flesh. It goes right the way through. All these beings are born, grow, die, evacuate and make water. Even these little creatures that we know live in our bowels, helping us to digest things—they also are born, grow old, die, evacuate and make water. So there's this contemplation of the fact that our body is home to a lot of other little creatures. Not really ours, is it?

Then there's signless death—as Jesus said, we know not the hour nor the day. We just don't know our destiny. We just don't know. And then contemplating the limited extent of human life, how short it is. One who lives long lives a hundred years, more or less, that's all. The life of humankind is short. A wise man holds it in contempt and acts as one whose head is burning. Death will never fail to come. A bit gloomy though, isn't it?

And then to contemplate the shortness of the moment. This brings that momentariness to our minds—that in fact I'm one breath away, one half breath away from death. I breathe in and that's the end of it.

I always like to tell this rather sad tale. Unfortunately, I can't help but think of it as humorous, but for the people involved it was obviously very tragic. There was a woman I knew who met an old love from her early life. They fell in love—they were quite elderly—and they determined to marry and live together. They moved into a beautiful cottage. And one morning, he was just on the way to get the toast and had a heart attack and died. I always think, if I had a piece of toast with marmalade on it, holding it here in front of my very nose, and I was like that—that is suffering, is it not?

So, bringing the talk to an end, this contemplation of death is very powerful. The Buddha says of all the contemplations, this is the most powerful—contemplation on death.

Just a lot of material really to recall. When you call up the body, contemplating that we don't actually experience the body directly—we don't experience these cells, we don't experience what the liver is doing now. I think you might have to have some sort of extraordinary ability to be able to know that. When we're actually looking at the body, much of our contemplation is in the body: the breathing, the posture, the full awareness of what we're doing all the time. And then there's that whole business of relationship to the body. We've talked about repulsiveness, but as you know, I suggest that in the morning with the very first beverage that you have, you take the opportunity to thank the body.

And that sort of thankfulness forms a relationship to the body. See how wonderful it is—and it makes you want to care for it, not put it in danger, not put it where it's going to fall ill, where you're going to fall over, and all that sort of stuff. A sense of gratitude.

And of course, the posture, the full awareness, and then the repulsiveness—to use that in order to find this equanimity with the body. Equanimity.

And then finally, this very strong, powerful contemplation of death. It really is quite something if you just bring it up. And as I say, these exercises, like mettā, are done best every day, just for a little while, just as little reminders. And then it sort of gets through to you. It begins to change your attitude. It begins to actually have an effect on you. It's no good doing it once every year, you see. It's the constant effort to do it. Just a little reminder, that's all.

It does change you. Just the mettā changes you over a period of time. It has to. Because every time you reflect on something, you're developing a certain attitude. And old attitudes that you have, which may be contrary to this, are not being developed. So they atrophy. If you don't use your muscles, they just die away.

So it's the same with these attitudes that we have, which we see as unwholesome. If you just let them come up, feel the desire to act that way, and let it go—they're slowly dying. They're burning out. But you have to replace it with something positive.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion. May you, by your contemplation of the body, arrive at that place of perfect peace and happiness sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 65

Feeling (Vedanā)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46 min

In this exploration of vedanā (feeling), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the second of the five aggregates, tracing how feelings arise from the initial point of contact (phassa) at the sense bases. Drawing extensively from the Pañcakaṅga Sutta, he unfolds the Buddha's detailed classification of feelings—from the basic two-fold division of pleasant and unpleasant, through the traditional three-fold classification, up to 108 different types of feelings when categorized by sense base, time, and spiritual quality.

The talk addresses a fundamental insight: what we truly seek in life is not external objects but the inner feeling of happiness itself. Bhante explores how this understanding transforms our relationship to experience, distinguishing between worldly feelings based on sensual pleasure and renunciation feelings based on seeing impermanence. He clarifies common misconceptions about karma, explaining that not all feelings arise from past actions—many result from present conditions like weather, diet, or current mental states.

The discussion extends to the refined feelings experienced in jhāna states and the ultimate cessation of feeling and perception. Throughout, Bhante emphasizes the practical importance of developing awareness of vedanā in meditation, as feelings form the bridge between sensory contact and the mental proliferation that leads to suffering. This detailed examination provides essential groundwork for understanding how feelings condition our entire experience of existence.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So last week, last couple of talks, we covered *rūpa*. The first one was really about the sense bases, how the mind receives information, how it's then processed. And then the second one, which I should have done first, I suppose, was about the body as body as a contemplation object. So it was about movement, bringing mindfulness to movement, the cemetery contemplations, contemplating death and things like that.

So now the next one is *vedanā*. So of the five aggregates, because that's what we're looking at, the five aggregates. And to start with *vedanā*, we've got to go back to the point of contact, *phassa*. So at *phassa*, what we have is some information coming in at

the sense bases. There has to be a sense base and then there has to be this consciousness. So it must arise on some sort of field, a screen upon which it can be known. So those are your three absolutes.

And whatever comes in at that base is very minimal sensation, but it still comes under just about the idea of feeling. The distinction between that and feeling is that when it comes to feeling, it's defined as being pleasant or unpleasant. And the definitions get even more complicated. But at the point of *phassa*, there's definitely a feeling. So some of them are very difficult to catch, like the feeling of photons on the retina. I'm not so sure that can be felt. But the fact that we can actually perceive light, that it's actually touching, is a sign that something must be being contacted.

With the ear, it's a little bit better because at the eardrum, you can actually experience the sound waves just as pressure. I mean, that's possible. And then you really know that there is a point where at the sense base, you're just getting raw data. And then the next thing is it takes it into the mind, the mind door. And it's at the mind door that we begin to perceive it differently.

So this *vedanā* feeling and perception, they arise together. I'll try and do a bit about perception, but I think there's a lot to be done here. So we'll see. And this point of contact is even there when it comes to the transcendental experiences. There must be some sort of contact that's known. And then after the experience, one reflects upon it, right?

And those three contacts are, first of all, not self. So the contact of being empty of self. *Śūnyatā*, empty of anything there at all. There's also what's known as the signless contact, which is basically that there's no impermanence. That's what they call it, signless. And then there's the freedom from desire. That's the one to do with *dukkha*, the suffering. So each one of these experiences which release us from delusion also have this point of that point of knowing, that point of contact, you see, and then the rest is reflection.

How important is that point of contact just in the order of daily life? Well, there was, I think I mentioned this before, for those of you who've listened to all my talks. When I used to go to work we there were all these billboards and suddenly that appeared these adverts for an Australian perfume and it had a cork with a sort of Australian hat with corks of hanging around it you see and what had happened was that people with this modern advertising had lost faith in these billboards didn't think they're having much in effect.

But the amount of inquiries about this Australian perfume was such that, of course, they began to realise, in fact, it has an enormous effect. So just consider you're sitting on a bus and you're in a half dream. You're thinking about this, you're thinking about that and all that. But, of course, you avert, your eye catches this thing and it goes in. And that's it. It just goes in. And once it's in, you're conditioned. And the next minute, you know, you're craving for this Australian perfume.

So that point of contact is the point of the beginning of conditioning. So that's why the Buddha says, this business of restraint, restraint of the senses, not to look at things that are going to build up old bad habits, to look at those things that are going to build up good habits. Well, that's one of the reasons for statuary and pictures, you see. As soon as you see, I mean, now, as you know, the Buddha statues become a sort of garden gnome. You can buy these things anywhere and stick them in your garden. Oh, there's a Buddha. So you can see it has people, even if they know nothing about Buddhism at all, they see in the statue some sort of expression of peacefulness, I presume, anyway. So that's how important that point of contact is.

So now, this word *vedanā*, interestingly enough, is rooted in the word *vid*, which is similar to our idea of feel, when somebody says, oh, I feel it's wrong. So there's a feeling content, there's a sort of knowledge content with feeling, it arises, right? And that you could put down to knowing whether the feeling was wholesome or unwholesome. And you'll see later on, all sorts of other categories.

Just as an aside, a writer does suggest that this split between the body and mind is a sort of Cartesian duality. You know, the mind is one thing and the body is something else. But they reckon it's a sort of spectrum of energy that moves from the physical energy into mental energy. And I dare say there's a truth in that. But there's also the mental body is actually has its own existence, as it were, which in traditional Buddhist understanding, when you die, that's what comes out, your mental body. And it's the mental body that then seeks rebirth. And if it hangs around where you actually died, that's your hungry ghost.

I have no problem with that sort of understanding because even when I set up this place in London, a little meditation center we're trying to set up a meditation center there, there was definitely somebody in the house and I could hear them moving about, I could hear them rattling around. At that time there was a friend of, actually, she was on the trust, Ramini, and she brought a friend along who was a medium. And we were just talking about this and that. And then I said, you know, I think there's somebody

here who's hanging about. I said, because, you know, I got a feel for it and I can hear it. I can hear him. I didn't know whether it was a him or her. I just said him. I remember saying that.

And she went into a silence, closed her eye and went into a silence. And it was about maybe three, four, five minutes. And when she came out, she said, it's all right. I've helped him find somewhere else to live. And from that time onwards, I didn't hear anything. And there were no mice. There was nobody. There was no dogs, no cats. So anyway.

So the one thing that I think we need to ask ourselves is, when I seek happiness, what am I actually seeking? So, for instance, when I eat lovely food or see a film or have a romance and all that, there's obviously a base of things that I want, the food, the romance, etc, etc. But what is it that, for want of a better word, I really want from those experiences? What does I really want?

Can I suggest that what we really want is a beautiful inner environment. We want to feel happy. We want actually an emotional state, a mental state in which we are happy. In other words, the food is secondary, the romance is secondary, everything's secondary. What I want to do is feel happy, not think happy. That doesn't get me anywhere, does it? And I can think, well, the word happy, it doesn't do much for me. But I want to feel happy. Am I getting regular nods at the back there? The four judges. Sitting on a high plane. Yes.

So if we just take that for a moment, that actually all I want is to feel happy. And then, of course, I'm taught by society, et cetera, et cetera, culture and nurture and all that as to I'm brought up to believe that this type of food makes me happy, this type of music, this type of person, et cetera, et cetera. So I then begin to manipulate the world to try and really feel happy. Yeah. And in meditation, of course, that's what we're all yearning for, isn't it? The end of this continuous suffering and to just get blissed out for a moment or two and hopefully get into *jhānas* and stay there forever.

So it's OK. Once we realize that, then what it does is it turns your attention towards the feeling content of your experience. You see. And then the question is, the question arises, is it worth it? Is it worth it? What I'm doing is the energy that I'm putting out there in order to get this inner feeling. Is that worth it? Now I'm being a bit cynical here because obviously there's a whole business of ethics involved, but we won't get into that just now.

So it's the feeling tone of our existence, isn't it, as living beings, sentient beings. And the Buddha splits them all into different types. And so I just want to go through this particular discourse, which does that for us. It's called the Pañcakaṅga Sutta. And Pañcakaṅga was a carpenter and he went to Venerable Udāyin and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. He was sitting there.

As he was sitting there, he said to Venerable Udāyin, "Venerable Sir, how many feelings has the Blessed One spoken of?"

"Householder, the Blessed One, has spoken of three feelings, the feeling of pleasure, the feeling of pain, and the feeling of neither pleasure or pain. These are the three feelings that the Blessed One has spoken of."

Now when this was said, Pañcakaṅga, the carpenter, said to Venerable Udāyin, "The Blessed One has not spoken of three feelings, he's spoken of two feelings, a feeling of pleasure and a feeling of pain. And as for the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, the Blessed One has spoken of it as a refined pleasure."

The second time, Venerable Udāyin said to Pañcakaṅga the carpenter, "The Blessed One has spoken of three feelings." And the second time, Pañcakaṅga the Carpenter said to Udāyin, "No, the Buddha has not spoken of three feelings, but of two feelings."

The third time, the Venerable Udāyin said to Pañcakaṅga, "Householder, the Blessed One has not spoken of two feelings." And the third time, Pañcakaṅga said, "No, the Blessed One has not spoken of two feelings."

Now the Venerable Ānanda overheard this discussion between Venerable Udāyin and Pañcakaṅga. So he went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed to him, sat to one side. And as he was sitting there, he told the Blessed One the entire discussion between... heck of a discussion. I'm not so sure it was a discussion, but it's often the way we sort of talk to each other. Yes, I am. No, I'm not. Yes, yes.

And then Venerable Ānanda, true was the exposition of Pañcakaṅga the carpenter would not accept from Venerable Udāyin and true was the exposition that Venerable Udāyin would not accept from Pañcakaṅga the carpenter. "There is the exposition by which I've spoken of two feelings."

So now he goes on. We actually get to 108, believe it or not, by the time it's finished. This is this whole business of deconstruction and trying to, through that deconstruction, trying to categorize different types of feelings so that we're clear as to what we want to develop in our own hearts.

So the first two, of course, are a very simple split between pain and pleasure or what is unpleasant and what is pleasant. And in a sense, that at the base is the dual world we live in. You can't escape that. I mean, it's just part of our existence that we either feel happy or unhappy and so on.

But then he goes a little bit more into categorizing. And then he's got the three feelings, which is *dukkha*, *sukha*, *ka* means to bear, *dukha* is hard, *sukha* is easy. So hard to bear, easy to bear. And that which is neither easy to bear nor hard to bear. Now, the reason for that, of course, is to make us in our meditation become much more aware of these more subtle feelings that we tend to ignore.

So we're usually aware of what's painful and what's pleasurable. But there's a whole set of feelings, neutral feelings that we're not particularly interested in. And it's just becoming aware of them. And of course, when there are no strong physical feelings, painful or pleasant feelings around then that's what you have you have that sort of pleasant neither pleasant nor unpleasant and of course the obvious one is the breath that's usually as long as there's no tension around the area that's usually very very neutral it's neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

And then he takes us just a little bit further and he talks about *dukkha*, *sukha*, *domanassa*, *somanassa* and *adukkhamassukham*. So this is trying to distinguish again. So he's always trying to deconstruct what we have. Those pleasures and pains that come from the body and the pleasure and pain has to do with the mind. So mental pleasures, mental happiness, happiness and unhappiness. So I suppose we would translate it as pain and pleasure. Happiness, unhappiness and neither. And that neither covers both types. So those are your three feelings.

Now, again, it's the case of sort of in our meditation, just being aware that some feelings, some sensations are body based and some sensations are heart based. And again, that's that split. And of course, that does affect what we do in our meditation, because if it's something physical, we have to discern whether in fact it is truly just physical pain in the knee or something like that, or whether the physicality, the pain in the chest also has some sort of mental feeling involved in it, some sort of tension.

And it's by investigating that that you might actually discover this separation where the physical feeling actually separates from the mental feeling. And of course, if you have that sort of experience, then the teacher becomes very clear to you that this mental feeling is causing this physical upset. And the physical pain or pleasure is like a sounding board. It makes everything louder. Mental feelings are not so loud but when

they affect the body and then the body comes back as it were so anger is anger but when the body gets heated up and comes back with tension and ferociousness a ferocious sort of tightness then of course it makes it just that much more obvious to us.

So that's the reason for making that sort of distinction.

Then there are the six feelings and they're based on your senses. Some of them are pretty straightforward, like hearing and smelling. Some are more subtle, like the eye. And then again, what comes in through the sense bases may have a physical base, but of course it's taken into the mind base. And that's when we determine it as being pleasant or unpleasant. So those are your six feelings.

Then there are 18 feelings depending on the sense base. So each of these sense bases has an unpleasant and a pleasant and a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling. So you end up with 18 different types of feelings. And the sixth one, don't forget the sixth one, which is, of course, the mind. So our experience of that we call emotions or feeling, emotions or moods. Even feeling covers that in our language. In the Buddha's language, there was this seemingly, was just this one word, *vedanā*, which covered it all and had to be defined.

And then finally, so that leaves you with 18, three types. That's right. Then you can split them all again and get 36 different types of feelings, depending upon whether these feelings, physical, mental, etc., are worldly or non-worldly. Now that, of course, is an important thing because if you remember in one discourse, the Buddha says, one of the things he realized was that these thoughts were wholesome and these thoughts were unwholesome. And that if he followed the unwholesome thoughts, things got worse. And if he followed the wholesome thoughts, things got better.

So this, in a sense, is at the feeling level. So these 18 are dependent on those three types of feelings multiplied by the six sense bases. And the sixth one is the mental one. So it includes all our emotional and mood life. He says, this is another discourse, this is what he actually says.

Seeing a form via the eye, one explores a form that can act as a basis for happiness. One explores a form that can act as the basis for distress. One explores a form that can act as a basis for equanimity. And he goes through the different ones, the ear and so on. And then finally, cognising an idea via the intellect. One explores an idea that can act as a basis for happiness. One explores an idea that can act for the basis of distress. And one explores an idea that can act for the basis of equanimity.

So that's one of the reasons why he split these into 18 different categories. It's what we do with the feeling that either makes it into something that's going to be wholesome or unwholesome. That's the 18.

So we can split these 18 again into what is wholesome and unwholesome, or as he would say, worldly and non-worldly. So now, if I can just read this. What are the six kinds of happiness? It's householder happiness. Here it's using the word householder, *agarika*. But the other word it uses would mean based on the flesh, based on sensual pleasure. Happiness that arises when one regards an acquisition, the acquisition of form cognizable by the eye, agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, connected with worldly baits. And when one recalls the previous acquisition of such forms after they have passed, ceased and changed, this is called householder happiness.

So you've only got to think of times when you decide to go to a restaurant and you go through all the things that you might like. Is it going to be a curry? Is it Chinese? Are you going for a pizza? And you're reliving past experiences, right? Which is based upon our physicality, upon being a householder.

However, we're renunciates. So what kind of six kinds of renunciation happiness? So the happiness that arises when experiencing the inconstancy of those forms, their change, fading and cessation, one sees with right discernment as it actually is, that all forms, past and present, are inconstant, stressful and subject to change. This is called renunciation happiness.

So it's not that I think he's not saying that we shouldn't go to restaurants and have pizzas and all that. It's just recognising that the attachment to that is going to cause distress. But when we see that even pizzas come to an end, then we liberate ourselves from the possibility of terrible depression. And of course, that's the same for all the other senses, for sensations and ideas. So that's to do with happiness.

So the similar formula. What are the six kinds of household distress? So the distress or unhappiness that arises when one regards as a non-acquisition, the non-acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye. The language gets a bit tortuous. Agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, connected with worldly baits. And when one recalls the previous non-acquisition of such forms, after they've passed, ceased and changed. This is called householder distress.

So in other words, you wanted the pizza, but it wasn't open. So now you've got distress. So now you're going to have to have a Chinese, whether you like it or not. So that's what he's saying. If you don't get what you want, then you have this distress.

So then he says, what are the six kinds of renunciation that cause this distress? The distress coming from the longing that arises in one who is filled with the longing for the unexcelled, when experiencing the inconstancy of these, of those very forms, their change, fading and cessation, he sees with right discernment, as it actually is, that all forms, past and present, are inconstant, stressful, subject to change, and he is filled with this longing. Oh, when will I enter and remain in the sphere of the noble ones?

Now, enter and remain in. That's a strange sentence. And when will I enter and remain in the sphere that the noble ones enter, are now in and remain in? So in other words, when we actually discern the distress that comes from not getting what we want, then there's this longing to become liberated, to be with the Buddha. And that longing, if it really takes us, it's known as a *sanvega*, which translates as an urgency, a having to do it.

So then the next one, of course, is what are the six kinds of householder equanimity? The equanimity that arises when a foolish, deluded person, a run of the mill, untaught person who's not conquered his limitations, all the results of actions and who is blind to danger, sees a form with the eye. Such equanimity does not go beyond the form, which is why it is called householder equanimity.

So he's using the word equanimity, but it's a bit of a downer really, isn't it? It's the sort of feeling you get when you don't know the distress or the happiness you're in. You can't see where happiness is because you're too dull-minded. And even though you're in distress, you don't see yourself as being distressed. So people that say, I'm not angry, I'm not depressed, so when you get that deluded attitude which is driven by some wrong understanding then it's a sort of equanimity but obviously it's a poor equanimity. I suppose our word would be indifference.

What's six kinds of renunciation equanimity? So the equanimity that arises when experiencing the inconstancy of the very forms, their change, fading and cessation, one sees with right discernment as it actually is that all forms, past and present, are inconstant, stressful, subject to change. This equanimity goes beyond form, which is why it's called renunciation equanimity. So spiritual renunciation equanimity.

That's the equanimity when we accept the way things are. Things change, things pass, things die away, and so on and so forth. So that equanimity is to be discerned away from the equanimity that comes simply because we can't see. We're dull-minded equanimity.

So, having explained the 36, if we then, through our memory, remember past times of those six particular types, so the six types. And if we then dream or think about future things, like now most of you, I'm sure, are dreaming of the amazingly wonderful things that will happen when you leave this place. And a sense of freedom and liberation that comes with it. So that launching into the future, all that brings us now to 108 different feelings, which can either be pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. They can be worldly or unworldly, spiritual renunciation and all that stuff.

So that's how he split up all these feelings. He does say somewhere that people see feelings differently, categorize in different ways. But all the categorizations that the Buddha does is always to make us see more clearly where the point of delusion lies. So all these are about making us discern feelings. First of all, from just this simple separation of pleasant and unpleasant. And then through to pleasant and neutral and so on and so forth. And how to discern what is good for us and what is not so good for us. To know what to do with it.

Just another discourse, just to read it out. Thus have I taught the Dharma by means of exposition. When I've taught the Dharma by means of exposition, it can be expected that when there are those who do not consent to, assent to or accept what is well spoken and well stated by another, there will be arguing, quarrelling and disputing, and they will dwell wounding one another with the sword of the tongue.

Thus have I taught the Dhamma by means of exposition. When I've taught the Dhamma by means of exposition, it is expected that when those who do consent, assent to and accept what is well said and well stated by another, they will live in harmony, with courtesy, without quarrelling, like milk mixed with water, regarding one another with friendly eyes.

Obviously, it's a little reference to Udayin and Panchakango, seeming like these other's throats.

Okay, there is a whole section then about the different types of refined feeling that come with concentration meditation and the eventual cessation of feeling and perception. So in the process of *jhāna*, they're all beautiful. So there's no negative mental states or anything like that. But the first one, as you might know in our tradition, there's what we call the soft *jhānas*. For which there are seemingly scriptural support for that. And there are other types of *jhāna*, which are deeper, which are known as the *Visuddhi jhānas*. Written by Buddhaghosa. So that's a late text, about 700 years, I suppose, after the Buddha.

But there are these two types of beautiful mental states that we can achieve. But they do have an agreement between them as to what the contents are. So the first one is that there is still some sort of mentation, even like the noting it can be as simple as the noting but the general feel is one of a physical joy, a mental joy, and then have I missed one out? And then equanimity is that right? Yes before I've missed one out there's physical joy and there's mental joy oh dear.

I've lost it. And you ain't worried. I'm just trying to regain it. So you have the first two and then you drop one and you drop the other and then you go to equanimity. I think it's, yes, that's right, I think it's just the four.

So on the first one, there is this mentation going on, but there's also a physical feeling of pleasure, a mental feeling of happiness, and behind it all is equanimity. And then as you go deeper and deeper, as it were, you move away from the mind, then from the body, and then from the happiness in the mind until you reach that state of equanimity. And from there, you can even go into what's known as the *Arupajhānas*, where it's just pure equanimity.

We're talking now about the feeling content of these mental states. There is a point where even the last of the *Arupajhānas*, the ones that are not based on any material base. So, for instance, remember that when you start the *jhāna*, you start on the breath and that becomes your base, you see. But with the *Arupajhāna*, there's no base. There's nothing there as such.

So it says another pleasure, more extreme and refined. What, Ananda, is another pleasure more extreme and refined than that? What is the happiness which is even more refined than even these very refined *jhāna* states?

There is the case where a monk with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, so that's the last of these *jhāna* states, enters and remains in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is another pleasure more extreme and refined than that one.

Now it's possible, Ananda, that some wanderers of other persuasions might say, Gautama the contemplative speaks of the cessation of perception and feeling and yet describes it as a pleasure. What is this? How can this be? When they say that, they are to be told, it is not the case, friends, that the Blessed One describes only pleasant feeling as included under pleasure. Wherever pleasure is found, in whatever terms, the Blessed One describes it as pleasure.

So it's the English here. He describes it as *sukha*. In other words, he describes it as happiness, right? So it's not physically based. So that's a state supposedly that can only be achieved by people who attain the third path and fruit, *anāgāmi*, the cessation of feeling and perception. And there is some dispute as to whether that is *nibbāna* or not. But we won't worry about that. Just for the moment.

Okay. So one of the misunderstandings of *kamma* is of course that everything that happens to us is *kamma*. Any bad feelings we have, physical anyway, is because in the past life we did something terrible, or even in this life we did something terrible. And the Buddha is quite clear about that. That doesn't hold.

So Sivaka, the song to purse called Sivaka. Some feelings arise on account of irregularities in the bile. Some on account of irregularities in the phlegm. Some in account of wind. Some on account of the confluence of numerous factors. Some on account of changes in the weather. Some account of irregular exercise. Some on account of external dangers, some on the account of *kamma* results.

So after all these, there are results from *kamma*. That feelings arise dependent on these different causes is something you can see for yourself and that people everywhere acknowledge. On this account, any recluse or holy man who claims all feelings that arise, be they pleasant or unpleasant, are entirely the result of previous *kamma*, can be rightly said to have spoken in excess of what is obvious to people everywhere. And I say that such views are wrong.

So that confusion is not just in present day Buddhists, but also in that time where everything was seen as fate. There were teachers who taught that everything that happened to you is caused because of past *kamma*. And his argument would be, what about what you do now? What is the effect? If you do something now, it has an effect on you. So it's not just the past coming at you, it's your decisions that you make now which have effect.

Monks, when there is an intentional, fixed and steady deliberation on any theme, that theme becomes an object for sustained consciousness. Where there is an object, consciousness has an abiding object. When consciousness is so firmly established and developed, birth in the new sphere ensues. That's the *bhava*. And when there arises into a new sphere of existence, birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation and pain. This is where the arising of this whole mass of suffering arises. This is where all that suffering arises.

So this is just something else that whatever happens to us now is not entirely dependent upon some past action. In fact, I would say a lot of things, most things aren't. It's just that to be able to distinguish why something has happened to us from some karmic act or from what's happening now. The Buddha said, try and work out your *kamma*, drive you mad.

But in terms of our inner life, you see, where there is an intentional fixed steady deliberation on a theme, where we're thinking about something, especially obsessively, that thing becomes the object of sustained consciousness. And where there is an object, consciousness has an abiding, right? So the consciousness has an abiding in what you're actually thinking about.

Now there is somewhere else where he actually says that the mind has its abiding in the body. If you remember on the earlier talk, we were wondering where was the sense base of the mind, right? So we know that with eyes, it's the retina and so on. So where's the mental sense base? So it becomes pretty clear that it's the whole body.

So when consciousness is so firmly established and developed, then you get that rebirth, right? So that's your dependent origination, that's *bhava*. Now *bhava* here means not only intention, an empowered intention, right? An act of will, right? It is an action and the self recreates itself. So you're constantly recreating that sense of me through time. And it's because of this that all the rest of it happens. A new sphere of existence. Birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. That's quite a list, isn't it? This is the whole mass of suffering.

So just to recap there, *vedanā* has its base in the initial contact. And then from then on, it's all mentation. It's all the mind working with feelings. And our lives are a jumble of these feelings. And the question is, what sort of mental state do I want to develop? What sort of mental state do I want to be in all the time?

So if we look at the Buddha, we can presume that all that negativity had gone. So when he's in contact with somebody, the social virtues, love, compassion, joy, gratitude, they would all arise naturally as beautiful mental states. And when nobody's there, or when other people are there, but they're sitting quietly or whatever, the heart would just slowly come down to that equanimity. And that equanimity is the basis for all the other mental states, because it stops the other mental states falling into their

subtle enemies, near enemies sometimes, it's translated as so. Love towards affection, compassion towards grief and joy towards excitement.

So that's where we want to get to, isn't it? We want to get to that underlying steady line of contentment, contentment and equanimity. And then you get these little pleasant blips that arrive. A bit of love, a bit of compassion, a bit of joy. And then just the silence of equanimity.

So that's where we're heading over the next couple of days, of course. Or we can live in hope. Why not?

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion. May you, by your constant effort to establish the right type of mental state, be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 66

Dependent Origination Leading to Awakening in Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents a practical framework for applying the profound teaching of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) to daily life, drawing from Venerable Payutto's scholarly work on the subject. Rather than viewing dependent origination solely as an abstract philosophical doctrine or a three-lifetime model, Bhante emphasizes how this process unfolds moment-to-moment in our ordinary experience, and crucially, where the escape from suffering can be found.*
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> *The talk centers on a diagram showing three upward-pointing arrows representing the paths out of the wheel of suffering: saddhā (faith/confidence), yoniso manasikāra (wise reflection), and sīla (skillful conduct). Bhante explains how confidence develops through practice and becomes an unshakeable power upon stream-entry, how wise reflection includes contemplating the eight worldly conditions and the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha, and anattā, and how skillful conduct encompasses both restraint through the five precepts and the active cultivation of virtues outlined in the Mahā Maṅgala Sutta.*
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> *Particularly significant is Bhante's explanation of the critical escape point between vedanā (feeling) and taṇhā (craving), where mindful awareness allows us to wait for unwholesome desire to pass, gradually deconditioning ourselves from habitual reactions. He describes the progressive results of this practice—gladness, rapture, calmness, happiness, concentration, and insight—leading ultimately to disenchantment, dispassion, and liberation from the āsavas (mental effluents). This teaching offers practitioners a comprehensive map for transforming everyday moments into opportunities for awakening.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

This book comes from a very good work on Dependent Origination by Venerable Payutto, a senior monk from Sri Lanka and a well-known scholar. He has written two very good books, both very readable—one on karma and one on dependent origination. This diagram comes from his book, and he explains it in his own way. If you get that book, you'll probably get a fuller description than you might get this evening.

The bit at the bottom is very common. That's the wheel of dependent origination. The word "wheel" comes from the Tibetan tradition, and they of course made it into quite a lovely diagram. But in our school, it's simply dependent origination, in the usual prosaic way.

You'll see that it runs the usual sequence: depending on ignorance, there arises sankhara. You see they've got all sorts of translations for sankhara—volitional impulses, volitional conditionings, preparations, concoctions, you name it. Everybody who writes about it finds another word for it. But the thing about sankhara, remember, is that they are conditioned and they're also conditioning. So every time a sankhara comes up, such as a bit of greed, it's coming up because of past action and it's affecting future action. It's both conditioned and conditioning.

Because of that, consciousness comes up. All these things are dependent on each other in a sort of immediacy. Without consciousness, you wouldn't get any sankhara. Without sankhara, you wouldn't get any consciousness. So it's all a sort of interdependency as well.

Then we have the usual flow from consciousness to body and mind. In dependent origination, it really is body and mind because it's about this psychophysical organism. The two words you'll come across, nama-rupa, sometimes refer to materiality and mentality—name and form, which is really a bit confusing.

Anyway, once you've got a body, you've got the six senses. Here again, they refer only to the physical base. It's in the next one, contact, that the mentality comes in. Because at that point, you've got the sense base, you've got the object that it becomes aware of, and you've got consciousness. At that point, you can say the body and mind are actually manifesting, moment after moment.

Once we have contact, of course, we have some level of feeling, some sensations. These sensations are physical—the five physical ones: sense of smell, hearing, and so on. And on the mind, it's that initial arising of a thought or an image. That's your mental sense door. Everything from the senses comes through the sense door of the mind. Basically, what comes in through the physical senses is just original data, very simple data. The ear receives just a tapping, just a feeling of the sound waves. Then it's the mind that takes it in and begins to tell you what it is. It's a bell; it gives you meaning. It's an alarm bell; it tells you what to do. You've got to get up. All that belongs to the mind.

Now, the important thing is vedana, because at vedana, we decide whether what we're experiencing is pleasant or unpleasant. We went through all that last night. Remember, there are 108 of these pleasant and unpleasant feelings. But I think you can

make it very simple: normally we're aware of something that's unpleasant or pleasant, and there's that middle bit of neutrality. But if you look closely enough, it shades into one or the other.

Dependent on that—arising with that, of course—is saññā, which are your concepts, your perceptions. Saññā begins with a sort of photocopy of what's happened. That becomes your memory.

And that photocopy grows and grows, dependent on how many times you have a similar experience. So every time you eat different biscuits, your idea of a biscuit grows forever until it's as big as a supermarket. That's the memory we have.

And it's this memory and imagination, plus these feelings, that we work on to develop our dreams and fantasies—and realistic things too, like planning your holiday or thinking about your career. That's all dependent on those basic components. And those are your sankhara.

Now, not all sankharas are bad, remember. And not everything we do begins from a point of ignorance. Sometimes we begin from a point of wisdom, and then you have proper intentions. Those sankharas become your beneficial habits.

The Buddha, remember, is liberated in the sense that he no longer identifies with this psychophysical organism. But while he's in it, he's conditioned. So as soon as the organism feels hungry, that's when he gets his bowl and nips out for a bit of food. It's not as though he's not conditioned by the situation he's in, nor does he lose his general personality or his language. He says nothing is destroyed apart from this ignorance and what comes out of that wrong understanding—all our acquisition, that sense of always having to acquire something, get something. Greed and aversion and fear. Those are your two aversive qualities.

Dependent on that, of course, we have our reactions, and that's tanha. From that wanting, that original movement towards something you desire, there's then the identity: "I want." This is really crucial—a remarkable discovery by the Buddha—because normally speaking, the "I" comes first in our experience. The first thing you say is, "I want a biscuit"—I don't know why I'm on about biscuits all the time—"I want a coffee." It always begins with "I." "I want." And if it's you, I say "you want." Or "he wants," "she wants," "they want." It's always the person that comes first.

And what he's saying is: no, that's not true. Psychologically, the "I" comes at the end of the line.

Now, if it came at the beginning, you wouldn't find an escape, because that identity completely locks you into your desire. As soon as you say "I want ice cream," you're locked into ice cream. You can't escape it if that "I" is already there. So it's because of this discovery—that the "I," the sense of self, the identity comes at the end of the line—that we have the liberation to see the process of desire and find the escape.

And of course, the next one is bhava. From that identity comes the empowerment. Bhava is the point where the self continues becoming. There's the action that it presumes, and the force that makes the action, which is your will. So these three things—the will, the action (and in fact, the Buddha says will is action), and the sense of self—continue on once you've started that wrong identity.

Now, in the Abhidhamma, it does point out that for somebody who doesn't have the identity anymore, the wheel still turns. There's still that coming out of wisdom—an aspiration or intention, a wholesome intention, which fires off a certain habit, which then produces an action. That action is known as kriya, which is just a way of saying it's not personal in our way. The way they translate it is "functional." So an action can be wholesome or unwholesome, but for somebody who's completely liberated, it's just functional. He gets up and does this and does that. There's no sense of identity with what they're doing.

The identity, as it were, falls back into that sense of mindfulness. Though you have to be careful here, because it's not the same as the self that you feel when you're an observer.

So we've covered the beginning of the action, and then of course the action continues and eventually ends. Birth, aging, and death. The classical way, from the Visuddhimagga and Buddhaghosa, was to see this across three lives. Your past life was based on ignorance and created certain conditions. Then you were born. You have a body and mind and go through this life. When you die, you're born again, grow old, and die, dependent on the conditions you've created through this wheel.

But in the Abhidhamma and even in the scriptures, this is also happening all the time. Every time you fire off something dependent on greed, hatred, and delusion. Remember, we don't always behave like that. Sometimes we actually do good.

Now here they've got the escape at ignorance. That of course digs deep. Every time in your meditation you begin to see more clearly these three characteristics—the impermanence, the role of desire, and this identity business, the ownership, the possessiveness we have, the sense of control over things—the more we see that and let go of it, the more we perceive its consequences. We are undermining ignorance as such.

But the real escape from an ordinary daily life experience position would be between the feeling and the tanha, the desire, the attachment. It's catching that moment and then just hanging on, waiting for that unwholesome desire to pass away completely. That allows us to rid ourselves of these unwholesome sankharas. Once we do that, we've found the escape. Those little arrows pointing upwards show us how we can do that.

The important thing is that awareness we should try to develop all the time—being aware immediately when some desire arises, able to acknowledge whether this is wholesome or not. If it's unwholesome, hang on in there, just wait for that power, that energy, to die away. Every time you do that, remember, you're deconditioning yourself. What was perhaps an obsessive action becomes less and less powerful over time. It's not that we're never caught out, but through that constant effort, we're rubbing away at the stone until it's completely dissolved.

Dependent origination shows us how the first escape comes. You'll see there are three arrows here: skillful conduct, faith, and wise reflection. These are what we must bring into our daily life—these attitudes in order to really change, to strengthen that path out of suffering.

The one in the middle, faith, we begin with that. We know that faith in Buddhism doesn't mean belief as it might in other religions. It's more to do with confidence, and that confidence comes about through practice. It might have begun for us by just hearing something that made sense about Buddhism, or meeting a friend who talked about it. Immediately there's enough confidence to go to a meeting. In the meeting, you have enough confidence to have a go at the meditation. Then you have enough confidence to bring it into your daily life. As you see the benefits of it, your confidence grows.

This confidence or faith, saddha, is known as an indriya. Indriya is translated as a faculty, though that doesn't quite get across the idea that it's actually a power within you. The word actually comes from Indra, who was the main god of the Vedic system, so it means an empowerment, something powerful.

If you think of anything in your life which you've gone for, you've had to have that confidence. It's the basis of virtually everything we do. What confidence does is make us commit ourselves. If the confidence isn't there, we start suffering from doubt. And what doubt does is undermine our confidence in ourselves. By doing that, you never commit. The fact that we are here on this retreat means we have actually committed.

So it's to rejoice in that commitment. It's the basis.

That stupa we have out in the meadow there—see those first three steps? That's what they symbolize. They symbolize confidence in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. And they're polished, nicely shaped, you see. Then, of course, the heavy climb comes to get to the top through the rocky ways.

So that confidence is both a practice, but it's also in time to do with the heart, to do with some sort of heart connection. That heart connection is best held within a sort of thankfulness, a basic gratitude—both in the teaching and the Buddha, and even through the teachers that we have. And it falls back upon them, you see, with that gratitude. It strengthens your commitment because you want to be like the Buddha. You want to follow the path. You want to end up fully liberated like him. And that's why we have these beacons such as Mae Chee Kaew, whom I have on the side there. Having people like that gives you that sort of confidence. Well, if they can do it, I can do it.

It's like anything, isn't it? Nobody had climbed Everest until Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing got up there. And after that? Everybody and his dog gets up there. I mean, you get these ninety-year-old women getting up there. There's a seventy-year-old woman going up there, you know.

So once the gates open—see, that's the rejoicing of the Buddha. "The Dharma gates are open." That's how he puts it. The gates of the Dharma have been opened wide. Once somebody's perceived something, everybody can get through it.

So that sense of confidence, that sense of faith, is absolutely necessary. And when somebody achieves first path and fruit, it's known as a *bala*, as a power. It becomes unshakable. I mean, they might deny it under torture, but in themselves, they know that it's truly correct.

But we're weak.

So then there's the one on wise reflection. These are three levels of understanding. The first one is known as *sutta mayā paññā*—the wisdom that comes from reading or listening or receiving some sort of instruction. And that really doesn't become your own until we've thought about it, until it's becoming our own intellectual property, you might say. And then, of course, it's substantiated through our practice, through vipassanā.

So there are these three ways that we grow in this wise reflection. Now, what would be examples of wise reflection? Well, Buddhism talks about the eight worldly conditions. Gain and loss. Success and failure. How much of our daily life is about gaining something? And how much in the past have we suffered from losing something that we gained?

Then there's honour and dishonour.

How we're viewed by people—honour and dishonour. Things that have made us feel ashamed or guilty, and other things that have made us feel proud, even conceited. Then there's happiness and misery. Well, they happen all the time, don't they? We go through loads of those every day. These are known as the worldly conditions. And finally, praise and blame, which is close, I think, to honour and dishonour.

So it's again just looking at the way we behave, the way we pass through a day. That yoniso manasikāra, that wise reflection—it's good, you see, in the evening, just to sit quietly and go through the day. Reflect upon things that we've done which we should be proud of, and things that we shouldn't be proud of. It's a case of just going through the day and reflecting on that. And then from the reflection, to make some sort of commitment, some sort of decision.

In the morning after chanting, I suggest that you make certain commitments. Something you want to do, something you don't want to do. We all know our habits. We all know what we're good at and what we're not so good at. And it's just this daily commitment. Slowly, it does penetrate. It does get through.

From a more modern point of view, or from a point of view that we might understand more easily, you might call them the four worldly pursuits: sensual pleasure, fame, riches, and power. I think we connect with that much more easily. How much of our time is spent trying to escape suffering by getting into some sort of sensual pleasure? Films, calling people up and telling them how miserable you are, things like that. Then there's doing something for fame, which would come under praise. Riches—everyone wants to be rich, for heaven's sake. And power, being able to make other people do what you want them to do.

So those are reflections throughout the day. You might look back and think, "Oh yes, that was me taking control of the situation and not taking into regard what other people wanted."

There's a lovely little bit in the scriptures where three Arahants are living together, and the Buddha asks them how they live so well together. The chief monk says, "When I get up in the morning, I ask myself: what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?" And presumably they all say that. I mean, that's the problem with that approach—everybody has to agree to that idea. Otherwise you have a fisticuff.

So we've got the three characteristics. Reflecting always on the three characteristics. Impermanence. At the end of the day, another day gone. One day closer to the end. After a meal—that's it, one less lunch in this lifetime. You just keep noting this with a

sense of humour. You don't get yourself miserable. You just note that, in fact, this is one less. Every time I give a talk, this is one less talk I'm going to give. It's just pinpointing little pin pricks on the way, and slowly you let go. The whole point of seeing anicca is to let go, to see: what's the point of holding on to something? It's gone. And so it brings you much more obviously into the present moment. This is lunch—that's it, it's gone, fine. It's being able to let go that anicca teaches us.

And when it comes to dukkha, that's also letting go, seeing these desires. Remember that when we have a desire, if we can stay with it—this is a wrong desire—if we can stay to the very end of that feeling and just feel that sense of release, it's like you've taken a chain off, you've taken a big weight off your back. There's a sense of relief. And then you get this sort of happiness arise, a happiness of release, of relief. "Got out of that one."

Didn't get caught up there. And in a sense, you've got to see that, or else you don't see the benefit of renunciation. If it's only misery every time you renounce—if you never get to the end point of a desire—it just feels like a struggle all the time. But if you just hang on in there, if it's a wholesome renunciation, then you get that release.

Now, that's a little touch of nirvana, because that's what the Buddha says. The taste of nirvana is freedom. Freedom. Freedom *from*. It's not freedom to do what you feel like. If only.

And of course, anatta, which again is about identity. It's about possessiveness. It's about a relationship which causes a lot of problems, a lot of suffering. And just letting go of that. You know when the self is coming in. You know when you're getting angry with somebody. You get fed up with somebody. You want them to do something and they're not doing it. You get bored with something. Anytime you feel negative about somebody or something or your job or your work, you know that the self is seeking something else. It's just not happy with the situation. It wants something. It wants excitement. It wants something else.

So as soon as that comes up, it's a case of recognizing it. That's the effect of identity and possession. And as soon as you drop that, some little connection has gone. You see? So we're leading ourselves towards a life of ease, a sense of ease about life. We're not struggling anymore. We're not in conflict with the way things are. It's like an acceptance: this is the way it is. And that's it. And you work with it. Sometimes—a lot of times—it's not that pleasant, but you work with it.

A similar reflection which helps us here are the ones we do in the evening on sickness, aging, and death. And remember, when you contemplate that, very personally—like "this body may fall ill," and "I am aging," and "I will die"—it's sort of gently, gently saying that into our hearts. It's not going to leave it up in the head. I mean, anybody can do that. It's actually speaking so that you're touching the heart, touching the very—touching your emotional center, your feeling center. And then you get that response. So there may be a sense of relief that you're accepting it, but there may just be a bit of fear. So you've got to keep at it, you see.

And whenever you do that sort of exercise, remember, always remind yourself of the liberation. We're not ending up—the Buddha didn't teach annihilation. There is a good prognosis at the end. It's worth fighting for. So those sorts of things are the wise reflections that you might do.

And then the third one is skillful conduct. So this really breaks into things that we shouldn't do, that we try not to do. Those are your sīla, your five training rules. That's sikkhāpada. Pada means footsteps. Sikkhā means trainings—trainings of footsteps, footsteps of training.

So I think most of us are pretty clear about that. But the other dimension is, of course, to do with the more virtuous side of our nature. And in the evening, we chant this Maha Mangala Sutta, the highest blessings. *Maha* means great, *mangala* means blessing. And you'll note that this always leads to happiness. So virtue equals happiness in the Buddha's mind. It's a true happiness. The more virtuous we are, the more happy we will feel.

When we say happy, remember that there are various levels. You might not be happy on a surface level—not happy with this, not happy with that, not happy with the politics. It's more to do with this deeper level of happiness, a deeper level of contentment, a feeling that your life is worthwhile. That's what gives you that deep happiness.

And this comes out with people who are involved in politics, who end up in prison, end up tortured, things like that. You wonder—you wouldn't really want to do it, but you wonder—how can they endure that? Because on the surface of things, it's absolutely miserable. It's a really terrible experience to have to go through. And some of them die, of course. But it's when you realize that the deep purpose of their lives, some form of political or social liberation, is where their happiness lies. And the giving of their life to that is their deepest happiness. So, you know, no greater gift has man than to give his life for another. We don't understand that unless we redefine what happiness is. It's like a deep sense of commitment to something virtuous. And if you let go of that, you betray yourself. That's very difficult to forgive when you've betrayed yourself.

So you can see he has a whole list of things here. And he does start off with something very straightforward—to reside in a suitable place, and to have done meritorious deeds. And then to have a skill, to have something that you can work with, a master of discipline. And then you've got your social responsibilities, looking after your mother, father, your children and all that. And then there's the basic thing, to not do any harm. And then there's a list of these virtues: reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude, patience, gentleness. It's all there. This obviously is not an exhaustive list. It just gives us some idea as to what we should be developing. And then finally, the spiritual things—to listen to Dharma and to become fully liberated. These are the highest blessings. So it's reflecting on those sorts of things and then seeing how we can bring them into our lives. Every day we have opportunities. Every day.

So that brings us to *mangala*. And then there's livelihood. Our livelihoods are about service. A lot of people end up in work that they were enthusiastic about, and then it gets boring, boring, boring. It's terrible. The way to break through that is to stop asking what the job can give me. If it's always at that level—how much am I earning, what interest is it giving me—then it's very easy to become bored with it. It takes on more meaning when you actually do it for the benefit of others, for the benefit of the firm you're working for. Then it gives it a different layer of commitment. And that's what brings your happiness, no matter what you're doing.

And that leads us to lifestyle—to check out our lifestyle. How are we spending our money? How do we spend our time?

Who do we spend our time with? All these things have an effect on us.

One thing that many of you, I think, will have experienced—I definitely did—is that once you move towards the Dharma, old friends seem to disappear and new ones seem to come. Somehow you sort of move away from what those friendships were offering, which worked at one time, but now they don't have the same meaning. So lifestyle—what you eat, and so forth—there's a whole load of stuff that we can reflect upon there.

Then there's this virtuous circle. It's in the commentaries; I don't think it's made so explicit in the discourses, but this whole thing about gratitude, renunciation, and generosity. When you think about all the things that we've been given, which we couldn't possibly repay—you can't repay your parents for your birth. You can't repay them for all the terrible times they had with you as a kid. Society, what society has given us—its education, its health. None of this would be affordable at an individual level. You would have to earn masses of money to get yourself educated and to get yourself healed. It's because of a communal effort that we're able to have these benefits.

And so if you actually go through all the things you've received that were gratis—nobody's asking you to give back to pay for the education you've had. I mean, now I know they do for university, but I was one of the lucky ones. At least until eighteen, when you've reached legal adulthood, everything's given freely—the national health system, all the social support systems that we have. The police. Where would we be without the police?

It's funny, there's always a certain negativity about the police because of their authority. But in fact, we need them. I know a meditator who's a policeman, and he says he's out on the line every night, sometimes in very dangerous circumstances, laying his life on the line. It's no easy job for them sometimes.

So when you actually recall all of this as a gift, then of course there's a natural desire to repay. And that's where the generosity comes from. Now, every time you give something, whether of your time or of your wealth, you're renouncing something that you could have spent on yourself. You could have been watching a film, or you could have been spending your money on some other rubbish. But now you're actually giving it for the benefit of somebody else. And that means letting go of something that you would have done for yourself. So there's a little bit of discomfort there.

And any offering you make of your time or wealth which doesn't have that little bit of discomfort means it's comfortable—it means you're not really renouncing. There's got to be an edge to giving if you want to actually grow in generosity. I mean, if a person wants to keep at the same level of generosity, that's fine. It's just that the more you give, the more you renounce, the more you are letting go.

So remember, the whole of the spiritual life really is in that word renunciation. And let's not confuse that with self-mortification, which is a completely different philosophy—that's about blaming the body for things. But renunciation, restraint—these words are very big in the Buddha's vocabulary. Restraining. Renouncing.

So those first three basic attitudes or modes, covered very quickly. And the consequence of that—the first consequence—is gladness. Gladness really refers to a feeling of being free from guilt and shame, not having those feelings within us, and a growth in self-esteem and self-confidence. That's what comes with virtue. You feel good about yourself.

And because of that, concentration is easier. And because concentration is easier, then the rapture comes. Rapture here is a big word, actually, but it just means feeling really good. We're talking about everyday life; we're not talking about deep, heavy, profound meditational states. Just feeling really good about ourselves, good about the world, even though we see it's not all brilliant.

And with that sense of happiness, there comes just a natural calmness about things. The calmness and then the happiness—it's just that combination: feeling at ease, feeling good about yourself, feeling good about other people, feeling okay about your situation. It might not be brilliant, you know.

And that brings you to a level of what you might call happiness, just a way of being in the world. And then with that, of course, the concentration comes. And with concentration, the commitment to moment-to-moment mindfulness in daily life, insights arise quite naturally.

In the Mahasi tradition, it's sort of well known that people have insights more off the cushion than on it. Because just for that moment, they've given up trying. But they've come off the cushion with a sense of concentration, calmness, peace. And then, as it were, it liberates the awareness, the intuitive awareness to see things. So that's your knowledge and insight.

And this leads to disenchantment. Disenchantment with what? With the world as a place to seek permanent happiness. That's the disenchantment. It's not as though you can't be happy in the world, but you're not seeking perfect happiness anymore. You're not trying to manipulate the world always to make yourself happy.

And this leads again—these are very close to each other—to dispassion, which is similar. It's just not getting het up about things, being more accepting about things. Dispassion. And then finally, of course, the liberation, the freedom from suffering.

And the āsavas, the outflows—it's funny, they're translated as outflows, influxes, inflows, cankers, floods, effluents. Anybody and any dog wants to translate this word. But basically, it's the four—well, three actually, one was added later—the three platforms upon which everything arises. They won't come to you as a great surprise.

It's desire. Desire is something that floods us. It's coming out of this ignorance and it just floods our whole life. Think of it as a flooding of everything that we do. It's sort of there, or a poisoning, a subtle poisoning. And then there's the desire to become, to constantly recreate ourselves. So that's the self. There's the desire, there's the self, and of

course that fundamental ignorance that's underneath. It's like you don't know, and therefore you keep making the same mistake. When we don't know something, we presume we know. And then that leads us constantly into making the same error.

This perhaps is more obvious in relationships, where somebody might find themselves constantly falling in love. And then, "I don't know what I saw in that person." And that keeps going for a few times. And then they realize it's not the other person's fault—it's them. And those sorts of insights come just by way of this constant reflection.

So this leads us really back to the beginning of this saddhā, this commitment, and seeing that commitment as a necessary starting point. That's the purpose of taking refuges and precepts. They're a point—everybody takes them at their own level of understanding—but it's a point where you commit yourself. This is it.

That commitment, remember, is a moment-to-moment commitment. It doesn't mean you can't become a Muslim. Why not? It just means that so long as this path is making sense to you, you'll keep at it. You'll keep going with it. And it's based upon that confidence which has arisen out of your personal practice, your personal experience.

I remember in my own case, when I started practicing Zen and I used to go up to Throssel Hole, I think it was about one and a half years. It must have been about one and a half years before this feeling arose of really committing myself, of saying, "Right, well, I'm not going to look around anymore. This makes total sense to me." And I went through their ceremony of Jukai, which takes about five days, actually. And by the end of it, you really feel you've committed yourself.

So taking refuge and precepts, even if you don't want to do it on a social level as an actual ceremony—every morning, you know, to have some point where you actually recommit yourself. Like, "Today I'm putting confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. And today, just for today, I'm not going to behave in an immoral way." That sort of continuous commitment every day has its effect.

So there was quite a bit in this little diagram. I'm glad I came across it. In the past I'd seen it but didn't recognize the potential. It can be taken as a meditational thing, but it's because of this right skillful conduct that it turns into a daily life process. That's what I found really interesting.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion and hopelessness, and that by your commitment to the path you will be liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 67

Discourse on the Highest Blessings

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44 min

> *In this Buddha Day talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's extensive descriptions of nibbāna using thirty-two synonyms from the suttas, including "the unconditioned," "the deathless," and "the island." He traces the Buddha's own journey from householder life through ascetic practices to his final awakening under the Bodhi tree, emphasizing how the breakthrough came not from gaining something but from investigating the very process of creating suffering.*
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> *The talk explores the fundamental role of self-identity in generating dukkha, examining how our sense of being a separate self drives the endless cycle of craving, aversion, and delusion. Bhante explains how mindfulness of the body serves as the path to the unconditioned, and how meditation practice works on two levels: purifying the heart by allowing emotional turbulences to exhaust themselves, and developing insight into the constructed nature of the self.*
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> *Drawing connections between ethics and transcendence, the discourse shows how virtuous qualities like generosity, love, and compassion naturally undermine the barriers of selfhood. This accessible yet profound teaching offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners clear guidance on understanding the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice and the practical steps toward liberation from suffering.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

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

Normally today, because we're celebrating the Buddha, I would spend most of the time just describing his life and what set him off on his path and what he eventually achieved. It'll come into what I'm saying. But I thought this time we'd concentrate just a little bit more upon endgame, upon exactly where we're supposed to be going.

I'll read this out. These are synonyms, adjectives for *nibbāna*. So he starts by saying to them: "I will teach you the unconditioned and the path leading to the unconditioned. And what, monks, is the unconditioned? The destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion. This is called the unconditioned. And what, monk, is the path leading to the unconditioned? Mindfulness directed to the body. This is called the path leading to the unconditioned."

And then he talks about... He's describing what this unconditioned is. "I will teach you the uninclined, the taintless, the truth, the far shore, the subtle, the very difficult to see, the unaging, the stable, the undisintegrating, the unmanifest, the unproliferated, the peaceful, the deathless, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure, the destruction of craving, the wonderful, the amazing, the unailing, the unailing state, *nibbāna*, the unafflicted, dispassion, purity, freedom, non-attachment, the island, the shelter, the asylum, the refuge, the destination and the path leading to that destination."

And doesn't that make you want to go? Enough there, isn't there?

"And what, monks, is the destination? The destination is the destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion. This is called the destination." And then he basically repeats himself.

So in order to grasp that in some way, we have to go back to his own particular experience. So remember that he's left a household life. And what's meant by that is that he's not searching for any end of suffering in what we would call the ordinary pleasures and delights of the world. So something there has undermined his confidence that that's possible.

In those days, of course, they would have believed quite easily that there was a process of reincarnation. And although there were materialists, what we would call materialists, that you just had a body and it died and that was the end of that, there would have been many teachers who would have explained how to achieve higher realms of existence and some idea that there was an end to it.

At that time, there were the scriptures written by what we now call Hinduism. And they were beginning to understand that there was something that was unnameable, something that was transcendent. It was that, you know, people, one or two teachers in their scriptures had come to that conclusion through their own practice.

So when the Buddha set out, there was already a ground of understanding and a huge history of practice. How far back? We don't know. Some think it goes back to the Indus Valley civilization, the yoga practice. But it has deep roots.

And what he learned from his teachers is basically how to establish very beautiful states of mind that we now call the *jhānas,* the absorptions. These, of course, you find in all religions, ecstasies. And you get them through the practice of prayer, mantra, watching the breath, anything which calms and steadies you, anything which creates a delight, such as *mettā*, *mettā* practice, loving-kindness practice, that would eventually begin to develop in your very beautiful state, such that you would absorb into it. And there are deep enough states where you even lose contact with the world around you.

So these absorptions were something that he became an expert at, and was invited by his teachers to join them, twice. So such practices seemingly were quite easy for him because it said that he left home when he was 29 and he was already liberated by the time he was 35. That's only six years. And he spent four of those years in practicing these self-mortifications.

So that was on the understanding that the soul, the eternal spirit within us, was locked into the body by its past actions. So the body itself was an expression of past unwholesome deeds. In other words, your unwholesome *kamma*. And for this spirit, this soul to be released back up into an eternal heaven, you have to somehow reduce the body, to let go of the body. And so you've got these mortification exercises, seemingly a lot of them based around not eating. And the Jain leader was one of the teachers of that. And the idea was that eventually, in Jainism, you just, well, you die. And that's your, and you've completely let go of the body.

So when the Buddha tried this... So he would have only been in his 30s, yeah? He just found that he just created more suffering. It didn't help him overcome this internal questioning that he had, which we would now recognize as some sort of existential crisis. What's the meaning of life? Why am I alive? Et cetera, et cetera. So it would have come with a sense of despair, a sense of frustration and so on.

He left that, and he left his companions, who didn't like him for doing that. They thought he was going soft and all that. And then remember that there's this occasion when he remembers something from his childhood, which awakens in him some sort of turnaround upon his practice.

So whereas before, like many of the people around him, the ascetics around him, was about gaining something, getting something, the practices were about achieving something, it made him turn around upon himself and begin to investigate exactly how he was creating suffering. This is what it turned out. Instead of trying to get rid of his mental anguish, he actually began to feel it, to watch it. And in which case, eventually, he saw the whole process whereby he creates suffering for himself. And that's this dependent origination.

You might say that's the core of his teachings, that he was able to define clearly where the problem lay. And in the Four Noble Truths, as you know, he states that the cause of suffering is this desire. It's a specific desire. It's a desire about trying to get happiness from various sources, trying to be happy, but always based on a profound misunderstanding, which he called the self.

And the whole teaching centered at a deeper level about this sense of identity we have. So here we've got a trajectory of going into ourselves, of seeing the psychological mechanisms whereby we create these problems within ourselves. And then, as it were, to go deeper in that and to seek the builder.

So, I forgot to get my little book out here. So we chant in the morning, this is called his victory verse. And that's what it's put down to.

"So I've traveled the round through the round of countless rebirths, seeking but not finding the house builder. How painful is birth over and over again. But oh, house builder, you've now been caught. You shall not build a house again. Your rafters are broken, your ridge pole demolished. The unconditioned consciousness has been attained and every kind of craving has been destroyed."

So you can see here in that short little verse that he's got right down to the core of the problem. And there are many, all these adjectives are pointing to certain qualities about what happens to us when we finally undermine that basic misunderstanding.

So when you look at his teachings, you see that they divide fairly clearly between all those what we would call morality or ethics or how to behave and this transcendence. And to understand that, we have to go back to this sense of self.

So this is not the self of pride or the self of embarrassment. It's that pure sense of being here, which you get when you're sitting. So when you're sitting quietly like this, and you're pulling away from the body, heart and mind within yourself, you might say. And you feel yourself to be this observer, the feeler, the one who knows, the one who's experiencing things. So that sense of self there is the beginning of the problem. It's the first object that we make, the sense of me.

So every time you get up in the morning, you're awakened to this idea, oh, this is me, I'm here, I'm here. Just now I woke up, I must be tired from that travelling yesterday, because I woke up in the middle of the day, just after this little kip, after my little siesta, and had one of those lovely moments of wondering where I was. I suddenly realised it's midday and I've got to get out there and give a talk, oh my God.

So a sense of not knowing who you are or what you are is one of those lovely little moments where we see how that creates within us such a disturbance, such a search for identity.

So now that self is a relationship. It's a relationship that I have with my sense of being here. I am here. I've got this sense of me being here. And of course, me being here is within this psychophysical organism, but it's also in the world. And the natural drive is

to be happy. I mean, you could say that you can see that run through even animals, ordinary animals and the animal kingdom that everybody, all sentient beings just want to be happy. Of course, how you define happiness is entirely idiosyncratic. I mean, it's just up to you. Some people are happy just chewing liquorice all day.

But how you define happiness will be your goal, will be your aim. And what the Buddha is pointing out is that all these aims, all these objectives we have are about relationship. So everything he's talking about is based upon ethics, upon relationship. And he points out that there are some relationships we have, even with biscuits, which can cause us lots of problems. And there are some relationships that are very supportive and help us.

So it's a case of navigating our path through this distinction between, well, what is wholesome for me and what is unwholesome for me? Now, most things are pretty clear. I mean, everybody knows you're not going around murdering people or something like that. But when it gets to just the subtle things about how we relate to various things in our society, which in a sense we've just taken for granted and we never question them.

So just that sense of relationship to our wonderful politicians and this whole business of Brexit, which has overtaken us. And to recognize what is our response to that. And to all the troubles that our society has or the world has, how are we relating to it?

Take the problem of, well not the problem, but take the whole business of compassion. So it's interesting to note that everybody knows about the refugee crisis and the fact that people around the middle belt of the earth are beginning to suffer a bit more than us from climate change. And that there's a natural desire for people to move away, to look after themselves. And for the most part, there's a knowledge of that. And there may be some natural feeling of wanting to help, but sometimes not really accepting our fear of them, that suddenly everybody is pouring into Europe. Why don't we go to China?

So you get this confusion of feelings about the refugees. And then suddenly, as you know, we had this terrible little picture of this little boy who drowned in the ocean and Angela Merkel is inviting a million refugees into Germany. So somewhere along the line that compassion has moved away from just a knowing to a direct experience which is awoken within us, that sense of wanting to do something about a situation.

So this business of ethics, it begins right there with that sense of self. That sense of self is because it identifies so much with the body. You'll notice here in this particular discourse that he says that the mindfulness directed to the body, so how important is the body in our lives? Now you might say well that's pretty obvious, it's straightforward, but can you think of anything that hasn't come through your body?

I mean, it's quite obvious that anything physical comes through your body, what you eat, et cetera, your exercise and your eyes and everything that you see. But everything else, all the information that we get from society, all the information that we get through our relationships to people is all coming through the body, through the ears, through the brain, into the mind. So the body is absolutely, it's our basic sense of being in the world. And we know how desperate that can become when the body falls ill and we find ourselves close up to death. That's when the shaking comes. That's when the horror of our situation arises in our mind.

So this relationship that we have, this sense of self, also mirrors back to us that sense of consciousness or awareness. Be careful with words because they have all sorts of meanings, but that sense of awareness. And that sense of awareness has a sense of itself, of itself being aware. But that sense of itself being aware is a mirror of that awareness within the mind itself.

And so what happens is that seeking happiness, it goes, as it were, through that sense of self into the psychophysical organism and begins to feed itself to make itself feel happy and comfortable. And then, of course, it's up against the world, which is ready to offer all those things to us. We begin to accumulate.

Now, because this awareness wakes up and begins to realize that, in fact, things are impermanent, that sense of impermanence undermines that quality of happiness. So every time it accumulates something, there's always a fear of loss. The fear of loss means that you've got to accumulate more. So a lot of our acquisitiveness is about making ourselves feel safe. It's not just about enjoying things. It's about making ourselves feel secure within a world that we're not certain about what's going to happen next.

And once you're dependent upon what you have for your sense of security, anything that undermines that becomes your enemy and your aversion arises quite naturally. And when that enemy is a bit bigger than you, then you've got to run for it. So those three attitudes arise out of this false sense of self: acquisitiveness, aversion and fear.

And it's from that base when we're feeling agitated or when we're feeling threatened, that's where we work from. Once we behave from that base, then, of course, we produce certain habits within us, certain mental states, certain conditions

that we call *kamma* or consequences. And there's a second tier, you might say, of suffering that comes from that agitation, which is, of course, guilt, shame, and the comeback from other people who see you as selfish and not generous, et cetera. See you as not compassionate enough, see you as not loving enough.

So, all those maladies arise from a mistake, from a mistake that goes so deep that we're not aware of it. And it all comes back down into that sense of self.

So when we're meditating, we're trying to get down to that. We're first of all trying to purify the heart. So remember that the way that the process works in purifying the heart is to allow the heart to express its turbulences. So where we find anxiety, a sense of depression, sadness, grief, overexcitement, a desire to indulge, et cetera, where that comes out of the heart, remember, it's always seeking to satisfy itself.

And one of the insights that we have is that that desire is insatiable. It can never have enough. Partly because it's enjoyable and partly because we want more of it, meaning that there's a lesser chance of losing it. So there's always that sense of safety about things.

So when these things come up in the mind, we have to be very careful. I should say come up in the heart as an emotional mood state. When it comes up in the heart, I have to be very careful not to let it grasp hold of the mind and create a story. Because that's how we begin to recognize that these things develop themselves, even in ordinary daily life, not just sitting.

Just when you find yourself dreaming, where you're not doing very much, you're sitting in a chair or you're traveling somewhere on a bus or something. And the mind's just wandering, wandering, getting hold on its old usual habitual little ways of thinking. And you've got to come off that because we have to wake up to ourselves to realize that every time it does that, I'm just making things worse for myself.

So coming back into the heart, we allow these emotional states, these turbulences to express themselves. And of course, that's the difficult part of our practice. It's not very pleasant. We have to stay with that. We have to wait until they begin to exhaust themselves.

And it's important at least once or twice to wait until it completely ends, to wait till that process of turbulence completely ends. Because when it completely ends, what you get is your present, what you get is the consequence. And what you see clearly is that what you're suffering from moves towards its opposite.

So, whereas once you've got all this agitation, this sort of, shall we say, a lot of anger about something, if you wait until the anger completely disappears, you find your perspective changes completely and you're able to see the other side. In other words, love arises quite naturally. It's the same with any cruel thoughts we have or any selfish thoughts. If you wait until the end of that, you see, then the opposite arises quite naturally. And if you can just do it enough times to convince yourself that that's what actually happens, then you get that inner conviction, that inner determination to actually stay with the turbulence of the heart until they heal themselves. That's an important insight, psychotherapeutic insight, you might say.

But in terms of this deeper malaise, this sense of self, then that comes out in that more inward state when we're sitting. And when he would have been sitting under the tree, when he suddenly saw that that sense of self was completely manufactured. It's manufactured moment after moment. It's not something that is always there. And that's the huge insight for us, because normally speaking, we have a sense of continuity, sense of substantiality of this me all the time. And by seeing that the self arises only within a process, only within a process does the Buddha realize that actually it has no base at all. And that sense of self, remember, is a relationship. It's that sense of me being here, me, that sense of me.

So you can see that our practice has developed both these two sides, it has the side of purifying the heart and the side of insight, the side of actually seeing where this fundamental problem lies. And these adjectives are pointing to what happens when the self completely disappears and there is just that awareness.

So now he's pointing to something which is transcendent. And he's telling us, he's saying that it's a wonderful thing, but he can't describe it. It's beyond description. But his words are the uninclined, which means that it's no longer seeking for something. So that statement, no longer seeking something. That statement that by the nun who was liberated, I've got up there, Meichi Kyao — Meichi just means a nun. Kya is a name. I think I pronounced it right. Expresses, she expresses quite clearly what that state is once you're liberated from that deep delusion.

So this sense, this awareness is no longer inclined to try and seek happiness in the world. It's taintless. So these taints refer to something quite deep, the desire to become, the desire to continue, the desire for sensual pleasure, and that fundamental ignorance that we suffer from of not knowing who or what we really are. So those have gone. The truth by which he means something that is irrefutable. The far shore, that's one of his regular descriptions of it, the island, you're going beyond, over the sea of troubles, to a completely different place. It's transcendent.

The subtle, the very difficult to see. So again, the reason why it's so subtle is because we identify with this sense of self, with being our self. That sense of identity is when you lose your objective view of things. So, for instance, if you're angry, you can be aware of being angry, but then suddenly you can lose it and rage. So that point of raging is a point where you completely identify with that mental state, and then you've lost all objectivity.

The unaging, so there's no — I mean, that's what he found, that there was, in that state there's no birth, there's no death, there's no aging. It's stable, there's nothing moving in it. It's not disintegrating, it is completely substantial. It's the unmanifest. Now that's an interesting thing, that it can't be seen. You cannot see, you cannot hear or feel or know *Nibbāna* as an object. The unproliferated. So it's not one thing or two things. It's just in itself, just pure awareness. It's the peaceful, the deathless, which same as the unaging, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure. So that's this business of always feeling that sense underneath it of our existence, of being insecure, insecure against sickness, aging and death. So all that's completely gone. It's un-ailing in the sense that there's no suffering there from being sick or being ill.

He calls it *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* has two general meanings. That is, you're liberated from that wrong desire. So remember, there's two types of desire. So when the Buddha can see that somebody's come to him with a question which is troubling, there's a desire to help. So compassion, sympathetic joy, love, all those basic wholesome attitudes are still there. All the unwholesome ones have gone. It's the unafflicted, that's just saying there's no more suffering there. Dispassion, meaning here that you don't get caught up in other people's problems. There's not that reactivity. Purity, purity in an ethical sense. There's no more negativity within that state.

Freedom, now that freedom is not the freedom to do something, it's the freedom from. It's the freedom from these wrong desires, from these painful desires. And that's another way of saying non-attachment. And then he says the island, which again links to this other shore. The island, something which is completely separate unto itself, not attached to the land, not attached to anything else. And the shelter, so there's your safety. It's the asylum, the refuge. All these are telling us that once you're there, you simply can't suffer. You've gone beyond the ability to engage in the world that you find yourself in, in a way that is going to cause you suffering. There's a profound liberation. It's the destination, the path leading to the destination.

So his description often of that end game is more negative than positive. This is quite something to come across in the scriptures. I think there's only one other place where so many adjectives are put, about 32 of them or something, put in a way that has both that negative side of what it's not and the positive side of what it is. But when you put all those ideas together, they never sum up to the actual experience of *Nirvāna*.

So how do we get a feel for it? How do we get a sense of what *Nirvāna* might be? So in your practice, when you're sitting there, you might come across this deep sense of stillness, a deep sense of silence within yourself, even if only for a moment. And as that appears within you, that comes to you and you get that sense of you being in the midst of that, a sense of the observer, the feeler, just for a moment there, just become internally aware of that sense of self, of the sense of the feeler, and just ask yourself, what's it made of? And that's when you begin to recognize that the awareness is something quite separate from all the other things that you can experience through the body.

All our emotions and moods are through the body, all our imagination and thought are through the body through the brain, all our physical feelings are through the body. So the body is there as a basic platform upon which we experience things, experience everything that in this world. It comes through the body and it's of the body. And here you are, separated within yourself into this observation post, this platform within yourself where you can see all this. You're separate from it. And in moments of real peacefulness and calm, that sense of self becomes very clear, the observer. And it's just a case of holding that long enough to, as it were, glance inwards and just see what is that awareness made of, what's inside the awareness. And that gives us a clue as to what our destination is.

So when the Buddha had discovered this, of course, he spent something like seven days, seven nights, just going through that whole process and thinking about it, reflecting on it. And from then on, he spent his forty-odd years, forty-five years, teaching, wandering around North India. When you read the scriptures, that wandering really comes out because as he's going from place to place and he's being asked questions by people, this word, how to describe the mind becomes very undefined.

So the word consciousness is used in many ways. It's used as just a screen upon which something happens, but it's also used as a discriminative process, an understanding process. The word *citta*, which is another word for consciousness, is used also as awareness, but it's also used as your emotional base, your mental state. And it's only by really doing the practice that these things begin to clarify themselves.

And why he began to deconstruct our experience into these, what he called these five aggregates. All those things to do with the body, our direct physicality, such as pure tasting, movement, the sense of cold and heat and all that. And then there's a whole section about feeling. And feeling, the one word, covers both the physical feelings and the mental feelings, how we feel inside ourselves with various different emotions or moods. And that was a whole, he separated that out from the actual sensations that come directly from the body. So the body and mind in Buddhist teaching, remember, are two different things, but they work, the one saturates the other. You can't really separate them by way of experience.

And then there's a whole process of mentation, how we're able to create symbols in the mind, images in the mind, which through more and more experience become concepts. So as soon as a child, we would have seen a spider. And then after a lot of seeing of spiders and pictures and all that, we've ended up with a concept of a spider in our mind. So as soon as we see a spider, we'll name it. We'll know what it is, a spider. But we won't actually look at it. And very few of us are capable of actually feeling it. So it's a case of recognizing that there's a mismatch comes through the process of conceptualization. And that's a section of these aggregates.

Then there comes this whole section of habituation, of habits. And this is crucial in the way that he separates that because these are something that we actively create through our will. And that's where the suffering lies, in these *saṅkhāras*, these compounded things that we've created. Well, we call them our habits, volitional activities.

And then there's consciousness. And then beyond that, there's this sense of awareness. And that sometimes you might find confusing in a lot of Buddhist literature because often writers don't make that distinction. And what happens is then the idea of *nibbāna* becomes something so abstract, it's outside our ability to even get a glimpse of it. So long as awareness is confused with consciousness, then it's not possible to see what *nibbāna* might be. It's only when we begin to realize or recognize or open up to the possibility that awareness is not the same as consciousness that then there becomes this insight into what might be transcendent of our psychophysical organism.

So consciousness is really just that screen upon which we're seeing and experiencing everything. But we're right in it. It's like our face is in the monitor. It's not separate from it. It's not outside the monitor. Your face is in the monitor, in the monitor screen. That's what it is. And every time you pull out, every time you sit back into your desk and begin to recognize that you're watching a monitor, that's what you're doing when you're sitting in meditation. You're pulling out.

And that sense of self is, again, a mirror image of awareness on that screen. And the best example was given to me by Noreen, really, when talking about looking into shops when you're doing shopping. So when you look in there and you see all these lovely things, you might catch your own mirror image looking at you looking into the shop. And if you stop for a minute, you can actually comb your hair in the mirror. It's that, well, I used to. So that sense of mirror image is exactly what we mean by this self-awareness at its original apparition. And it's through that consciousness of that screen, of that window on the shop, you see, that you're entering into all this shopping. And I wonder we have, what's it called? Shopping therapy or something. It's all there as you walk down the high street.

So just to try and pull all that together, the Buddha teaches two things. You can categorize them as two major teachings, ethics and transcendence. The transcendence is just a little bit because you can't say that much about it, but you can describe the path leading to it. And he points out that the fundamental problem is one of identity. It goes back to that ancient Greek thing of know yourself or who am I? That's the deepest question we have, really, of who am I?

And this who am I manifests itself outwardly as a connection with the world it finds itself in, in a way which creates suffering for itself. That's the peculiar situation we're in. We're seeking happiness, but because it's not in the right way, it rebounds back to us as a sense of unsatisfactoriness. You just can't get out of life what you would like to get out of life as a constant. You can hold it for a second or two and that's it.

And then we begin to let go of all that, begin to allow it to manifest as turbulences in the heart. And as that purification becomes more and more within us, there's a growth in virtue. And the Buddha equates ordinary mundane happiness with virtue. The more virtuous we are, the more happy we are. So you can always begin to examine. We can always examine our lives by asking ourselves, well, exactly how generous am I? Exactly how loving am I? How compassionate am I? And these are all little telltales to us that we're moving along the path.

So the first part of the path is right understanding. And that's basically the point of this insight business and understanding the teachings. Underneath that, there comes immediately right attitude. And right attitude is normally written as from selfishness to generosity, from hatred to love, from cruelty to compassion. But any negativity you have moves towards its opposite. But you can see that you can undermine this sense of self by going the other way, by practicing, by developing generosity, love, compassion. You're undermining the sense of self. How? Because you're beginning to recognize that we're not an identity, we're not separate from the world around us.

And that undoing of that barrier between me and somebody else is part of undoing this concept of a self, of who I am. And eventually that identification, you might say, with all beings is the manifestation of love. It's what we practice when we say *mettā*. May all beings be happy. It includes me as well. So I'm in there. I'm in the mix. And it's me trying to find a relationship whereby I'm not coming from me all the time. I'm coming from a sense of we and a sense of you. The Buddha put it nicely as that we do things for ourselves, for others, for both ourselves and others.

When we begin to behave in that more virtuous way, that sense of self begins to dissipate. There begins that communication, you might say, between us, between others, between nature. And that is beginning to understand how we can live in the world whereby we're no longer suffering from it.

So that's something to contemplate. The Buddha doesn't actually suffer. Not that he fell ill. As you know, he growled, he died. He went through all the processes that we would go through. But none of it was his suffering. And I would really invite you to read that statement by the nun because she says it so perfectly.

You see? Even the cat understands. Very, very... The peculiar cat is from next door. I blame it on John, he used to greet it. I have a horror of cats.

Mainly because they always leave the field with a mouse in their mouths, or some sort of animal. And it's not as though they're not fed. You can call him Buddy, by the way.

So anyway, I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion, and that you will, by your complete devotion to the practice, liberate yourselves from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu.

CHAPTER 68

The Highest Blessings: A Dharma Talk on the Maṅgala Sutta

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 36 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the Maṅgala Sutta (the Discourse on Highest Blessings) as a template to explore the Buddha's practical guidance for spiritual life. He begins by examining the fundamental human delusion of believing we are separate beings seeking safety through acquisition, leading to the three unwholesome roots of greed, hatred, and delusion.*
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> *The Buddha's teaching addresses this through cultivating supreme blessings - virtues that lead to genuine happiness and liberation. Bhante discusses key blessings including: associating with wise spiritual companions rather than fools, living in suitable places for practice, maintaining right livelihood and speech, practicing generosity and contentment, developing patience as the highest ascetic practice, and cultivating the guardians of society - moral shame and ethical sensitivity.*
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> *Throughout the talk, Bhante emphasizes how these virtues naturally develop alongside right awareness (sammā sati) in meditation practice. He explains how true contentment differs from suppression, noting the Buddha's description of nibbāna as being "content and with it happy." The discourse concludes with reflections on simplicity, insight into the Four Noble Truths, and the ultimate blessing of experiencing nibbāna - freedom from spiritual danger and the ability to remain unshaken by worldly temptations.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhassa

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

In the evening chanting, we go through the discourse on the highest blessings. So I just thought I'd use it as a template and talk around it. It's always good to start from the base of the Buddha's teachings, where he's coming from.

Remember, he's always coming from this position that the human being is in a state of delusion, and that the delusion isn't something culpable. It's just because we come into a situation of don't know, and from that we make this mistake. The mistake is, of course, to believe we're human beings, which is conventionally true, but ultimately not quite.

So the basic delusion is this belief that we are human beings. And in so believing, we form a relationship with the world of wanting to be happy. And that creates a certain morality. If we talk about ethics as being just relationship, then as soon as we're born, we're into some sort of relationship. And because of this inner desire to seek happiness right from the point of being born, there is that growing attitude of trying to acquire something.

Because fundamentally, right down there at the deepest level, we know we're not safe. We know we're not safe. And so everything we're doing is to contain that fear of not being safe. And that becomes more obvious to you as you grow older. It's not so obvious to the child. But, of course, as soon as the child doesn't see where its mother is or father, then there's that fear comes in. So there's that really fundamental level of not being safe.

And so what we do is we acquire. And acquiring things gives us some sort of feeling of safety—your money, friends, anything. Anything you have a lot of makes you feel much more safe. And then, of course, you have to guard it against enemies. And that's where the aversion comes in. And if the enemy's too big, well, you've got to run for it. So those are your three basic attitudes that arise out of this wrong identity: the acquisitiveness, the aversion and the fear.

So when the Buddha's teaching, he's always trying to undermine those delusions. And he's not trying to undermine those delusions so we end up nowhere. He's trying to undermine those delusions in order for us to realise or discover or rediscover perhaps what it is we truly are. And that's the unconditioned.

You've all noticed the new chippings on the stone there, I'm sure. They're a bit loud at the moment, but we're assured that over time the stone will weather and it will fade into the stone. So it'll be rather nice, I think.

And so you could say that his teachings all boil down to the unconditioned and ethics—transcendence and ethics. And this transcendence is not just something completely separate. It's not as though there's a place or somewhere else that is transcendent and then we're here. The transcendence is right here within us now. So when we talk about *nibbāna*, it's not as though we're going to create it. It's already here. It's just that we don't see it.

And our view of life is actually clouding over our real true nature, and that's what we're trying to undermine all the time in our meditation. We're trying to see these three characteristics: the process of desiring—that's the direct psychological manifestation of this delusion—that we're always trying to manipulate the world to make ourselves at

least comfortable or to run away from things. And then there's the impermanence, which we can see quite clearly around us, but it doesn't strike us until we realise actually we are impermanent as well. And then there's the sense of not self, which is to do basically with, through the meditation, recognizing that everything we're observing is an object. And slowly it dawns upon us that the perceiver can't be the perceived. There's a gap there.

And it also comes across when it comes to control. Because if you think of a soul or a self, you would presume that they are in charge of themselves, that they have their own agency, that they can decide how they want to be. But then when we find ourselves within this organism, we find we don't have that control.

So keeping that in mind, the question that the Buddha has asked is: what are the supreme blessings? Now you can see that from the Buddha's point of view, blessings must be virtues. So it's all about ethics. So it's basically trying to develop in us those beautiful virtues that all of us have to some degree or another. But they are layered over by traits that are unwholesome or unskillful.

So here I'd like to just go through the discourse, just putting the accent on what we can develop in order to be beautiful people—heart beautiful, not Hollywood beautiful.

So it starts off by saying many gods and people. So it was a god who had arrived to ask this question to the Buddha, this put in a mythological sense. But this actual discourse belongs to the early strata of the discourses. So it goes back, really, back to his early teachings.

So he says not to associate with fools, but associating with the wise. So if you look at your past life, the question would arise: how many daft relationships have I had? How many? And what has awakened me out of that? And what are my relationships now? So if our purpose is to liberate us from suffering, the Buddha says that good companionship is absolutely crucial. Who you mix with, who you associate with are going to have an effect on you. So he's basically saying those who are wise—stay with the ones who are wise. But here, this wise, you have to read it a little bit. It's not worldly wise. I mean, that's included, but it's more to do with spiritual companions because he's always looking to liberate us from our delusions.

And to honour those who are worthy of honour. And so our heroes, the people whom we see as people who are paragons, the people whom we can measure ourselves against. Now, it's funny, when I was a child, being brought up in a very religious Catholic family—my mother was very religious, and so was my father—the actual reading books we were given were the Book of the Saints. And I'm just wondering, how many

children these days get a Book of the Saints for Christmas? Even if it's on their computer. So very early on, my heroes were these saints, people who'd done these amazing things and were holy. They weren't pop stars or anything like that.

So our question is to ourselves: well, who do I praise? Who are the people in my life whom I see as worthy to praise? And this should bring out a feeling of wanting to be like them. When, as a child, I would read these saints who've done these amazing things, there would be an admiration arise in me, and somewhere within me, I would want to be like them.

And, of course, you would still get that sort of religious approach in the East, especially in places like Burma, which have remained fairly—well, up until fairly recently, maybe—fairly religious in their society. So it would always, children would always be taught about all the saints, the early Buddhist saints and the Buddha himself. And they would be their heroes. So it's good just to contemplate who do we see as our heroes.

Then he goes on to say living in a suitable place. So that's—the Buddha is not just simply up in the air somewhere with all these wonderful virtues. He is grounded and he's talking about living in a suitable place. And again, a suitable place would be somewhere where you can feel you can practice. And that's not always possible, of course, but at least one can do one's best. But it's interesting that he should put that down as a blessing. Remember that all these are meant to be fortunate blessings.

And to have done good deeds in the past. So this is a reminder that we are bearing the fruits or suffering the fruits of things that we've done in the past. And there's no way out of that. You've got to stay with it. But hopefully they've been very good and now we're very happy.

And then he goes on to say, right aspirations. So what are our aspirations? How do we see ourselves guiding towards what future? Because that's a guiding light within our lives. If you don't have somewhere to go, then you might end up anywhere. So spiritually speaking, our aim is quite direct. It's trying to, first of all, purify the heart and to get in touch with this unconditioned nature within us. And not to be caught up with false hopes, false ideas of what we can do. So an aspiration.

The big aspiration, of course, in Buddhism is to become a *Bodhisattva*, which is rather—the big aspiration is to become a fully self-awakened Buddha. And we have a special word for these people. They're called *Bodhisattvas*, you see, *Bodhisattas* in the Pali. So that would be an aspiration.

There was a monk called Ananda Maitreya, very famous in Sri Lanka. And when he died, thousands came out for his funeral. And he had been to Kanduboda, which is where I myself had trained, and had practiced with the Mahasi himself there. And it is said that when somebody goes through the process of insight in order to enter the first path and fruit, just before you go in there, ancient or earlier aspirations arise, come up. And he remembered making this aspiration to become a fully self-awakened Buddha, and he said he could remember the faces of the two main disciples Moggallana and Sariputta, but not of the Buddha, unfortunately.

And it stopped him moving, because what the tradition says is that to become a fully self-awakened Buddha, you have to have all the virtues ready, all the perfections ready. And then when you're born, you go through it in one lifetime. And I presume that's why you end up being a fairly good teacher, because you've actually experienced the whole process in one lifetime, which is not necessary otherwise. So he remembered that and he couldn't go through. And he reinforced his commitment, as far as I know. Reinforced his commitment.

We have another example of that, of Ajahn Mun, whose biography was written by Ajahn Mahabua. It's a great story. And he remembered making this vow to become a fully self-awakened Buddha. And then he realized it was just so difficult that he renounced it. It just meant for being an ordinary, fully enlightened being.

So these are our aspirations. What's your aspiration? What is your aspiration?

And then again, he's grounded. He wants us to have great learning and craft depending on what we do in life. Right livelihood is right there in the Eightfold Path. So right livelihood is where you are sharing your gifts for the benefit of society as a whole. So even if the job is the most menial, it's irrelevant because it's a way in which you share what you have for the benefit of others. And therefore, there's a sense of service to it. And that undermines things like boredom and hopelessness and all the things that might come up in a work situation. So that's there also deep in his teachings.

Can I just suggest you open that back door and the window in the corridor. Just get a bit of air through. It's all right if you fall asleep. It would be terrible if I did, in mid-sentence.

And then to be well disciplined. That's a word we don't particularly like these days, discipline. We usually think of it as being enforced upon us. But it's something, of course, that we have to develop ourselves. So it's just making sure, for instance, that we do do that morning meditation—I'm not going to quiz you—and things like that.

And well-trained. When I was in Burma once, there was this grandfather. He had his little boy with him, his little grandson. And he didn't say, we've taken him to school, we're having him educated. He said, this is my little grandson. He has to be trained. Very different approach.

Speaking—yes, well, speech is the big one because again it's in the eightfold path, right speech. And the Buddha simply asks us to be timely—to say it at the right time, to say what is true or at least not to be purposely false, to be gentle in our speech, and to make sure it's beneficial. So sometimes it's best not to speak. And always coming from the heart of goodwill. The heart of goodwill.

So remember, these are all supreme blessings. They're not only something we develop, but they're also a consequence of good practice. And virtue makes us happy.

And then he's looking at relationships. So attendance on one's mother and father, looking after one's spouse and children. So remember, these are advices giving to lay people. And then he talks about work which is not stressful. You can translate the word as not stressful. So even in those days, seemingly, they had stressful work. So obviously, something that's not new.

Then comes this generosity. Generosity—whenever he was speaking to lay people, he always began with generosity. It's the simplest of virtues to exercise. He pointed out that you can even be generous to a thief who's just stolen your stuff. And there's this virtuous circle of gratitude, generosity and renunciation.

So when you contemplate how much you've been given in this life, I think you very quickly come to the conclusion that there's no way you can repay it. If you go back to your childhood, to your education, to your health system, the whole lot—when you look backwards, you've been given so much that it's impossible to find a way of repaying it.

Now, what this does is it puts a certain desire in you, almost a demand to try and repay at least some of it through a process of generosity. Now, every time you're generous, you're giving away something that belongs to you, which you could have personally enjoyed. It could be your wealth. It could be your time. And you've got to give that away. And there's your renunciation.

So what you are holding on to, you've got to give for the benefit of others. And it's a difficult area because to be truly generous, to know that you're being truly—it has to hurt a bit. You've not given away something that just pinches you. And that's the process of renunciation. And the whole of the spiritual life eventually is renunciation.

Because remember, our problem is acquisition. We're always trying to hold on to things, keep things. So that's an important virtue to consider.

And then living according to the *Dharma*—that's pretty straightforward. And then he recaps. Remember, this is a poem, so it's a bit all over the place. And then looking after one's relatives.

Then he goes on to say, behaving in a way that is blameless. So here you have these qualities of shame and dread. So now in the Buddha's understanding, these two happen to be guardians of society. Because if you do stuff which everybody sees as shameful and you're not ashamed, then obviously there's not much to stop you doing things which are, frankly, could be evil. And not worrying about consequences of doing something.

So if in a society—I mean, this is some of the problems that we're having even now because of the reduction of the police force—that people who are committing crimes, low-level crimes, stealing and all that sort of stuff, are just simply getting away with it and not being followed up. So that means that, generally speaking, the message goes out: you may as well do it because it's a win-win situation.

So again, that loss of dread of consequences and a loss of inner dignity about your own moral stance means that you start doing things which are basically immoral. So those are things that we have to ponder. So if we find ourselves in a situation where we feel there's a moral dilemma there, an ethical question, just ask yourself: well, if I do it, how am I going to feel? How am I going to live with it? And that's one way of seeing that these two mental states, shame and dread, are actually guarding us. They're guarding us from doing something.

So abstaining from what is unwholesome, avoiding immoral actions, and then, of course, a very difficult one: restraint from intoxicants.

So they had problems even in those times. Restraint from intoxicants and being heedful. Heedful, that word is very much one of his favourite words. In fact, it's the one he used on his dying breath. You know, all compounded things are impermanent. Strive diligently for your liberation. That's *appamāda*.

And then respectful, humble. Humble is a word that gets a bit confused for us. It feels like you're doing yourself down or something. But it's really just seeing yourself as you are, being humble. Being content. Now, that's a big one, content, because content suggests no more of those unwholesome desires. And it's a quality of the Buddha, contentment.

When he's asked, or when somebody says to him, this teaching you're giving us, this practice is very difficult. And he said, well, it is, he says, but in the end, you achieve *Nibbāna*. And the questioner says, Nibbāna, so what? He says, well, when you get there, you are happy and with it content. You are content and with it happy. And that contentment means you have no attaching desire, no grasping desire. It's not as though the Buddha doesn't have desire. He has desire to help people, for a start. But he doesn't have that grasping desire, that sticky desire.

And then there's gratitude comes up there. So we've discussed that. Listening to the Dharma at the right time. So there are three levels of understanding that he points out. The first one is the understanding you come to when you hear something or in our case also read something. And then there's the understanding that comes when it becomes your own personal intellectual understanding, your own intellectual property, you might say. And then finally, it's brought about as a real experience through your practice. Daily practice, practice in your daily life, doesn't matter what you're doing, but it's brought into a sense of this is real for me, it's not just an intellectual understanding.

So it is important, I think, to keep feeding ourselves with some Dharma. It doesn't matter how much, it's up to you to decide how much, but as you know, there's masses now on the websites, up on the web there. Listening to a talk, reading a book or something, even if it's only a little bit. And to find something that inspires you. I think that's important. So it's listening to the Dharma, he says, at the right time. I suppose at the right time means not while you're eating. Find a time when you can actually devote your entire attention to it.

Patience. So patience is a big one too. He talks about it being the highest form of ascetic practice, patience. Asceticism has a bad word for itself. It's like you're making yourself suffer to see how much you can bear. But here, of course, it means the asceticism of letting go, of not reacting, of non-reaction. And the big example he gives there, he says, you know, if somebody were to come and saw you apart or machete you apart in bits and pieces, and if at any time hatred should arise in your heart, he says, you're not a disciple of mine. And I once said this to a group and somebody said, yeah, but the Buddha had a great sense of humour. I think he actually meant it.

Anyway, that's patience. So all the time you'll find we're always impatient because the problem with attachment, remember, is a sense of frustration that you get when you're not getting what you want. So even if the train is late or it arrives late or the post hasn't come or you get to the shop and somebody's taken the last piece of bread, there's always that frustration, people who don't do what you want them to do.

So this patience has a real role to play in our lives. Easily spoken to. That's a bit difficult too. We don't like to be told that we're doing something wrong. That's always a bit of a thump to our pride. But just the ability to acknowledge, yeah I shouldn't have done that, and an easy way of asking for forgiveness just saying sorry. Some people find that extraordinarily difficult. But it's a relief to the heart because sometimes you do make mistakes. Sometimes completely unconsciously. And then you're blamed and you just say, fine, I'm sorry.

Seeing spiritual teachers. Yeah, that's part of listening to or seeing people on the web and whatnot. That's also part of our practice, really. But then there's discussing Dharma at the right time. So that's the bit where really you begin to make it your own. Personal knowledge is when you can actually discuss it with somebody, when you actually talk about it, rather than just having it as a passive reception. And that's when you really begin to make it your own understanding.

It's interesting, there was a passage there of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth. But he was an ascetic. He only wore cloth made out of bark, which to us sounds ridiculous. But in those days, with certain trees, you can beat them and they turn into cloth. And it seems as though he'd heard about the Buddha and he came to see him. And he says to the Buddha, look, can you give me the teaching? The Buddha's on alms round. And he says, well, yes, I'll just finish off my alms round and then we can talk, you see. And he says, look, I'm old. I'm really old. I could die any minute. So the Buddha has pity on him.

And right there and then, he gives him this teaching. It's a very famous teaching. It says, in the hearing, there's only the hearing. In the seeing, there's only the seeing. In the knowing, there's only the knowing. There's a bit more to it, but I can't remember. And he becomes fully liberated right there and then. And the Buddha gave titles to people. For instance, Sāriputta was called the general of the Dharma. So the title for Bāhiya was the one who became enlightened the quickest. He made it there and then. Anyway, as fate would have it, he was finally gored to death by a cow. It's a little story. So he was right. He didn't have long to go.

The next one is simplicity. So the old monastic way of talking about that was poverty. Poverty now has a meaning of not having enough to eat, etc. But it's more to do with simplicity. What do you actually need? So that's something we can ask ourselves, especially with all this climate stuff going on. How much do we actually need? How much hot water do we use? It's like drawing ourselves down to a level of sufficiency. What is sufficient?

Living spiritually, that's pretty straightforward. Insight into the noble truths. And finally, the experience of *Nibbāna*. So that's obviously something that would be a great blessing.

And then there's an ending. He said, those whose minds do not wander when tempted by the things of this world, they are without grief. They're without grief. See, no sorrow. One can let things go, you see. Even people who are close to us who die, to be able to just let that go, not to get into the cycle of grief again, confusing grief with love. So every time your grief disappears you feel you're losing their love, you see. Whereas you might be sorry, you might have a certain sorrow especially if they died young or unfortunately, but to just accept their *kamma*. We're heir to our kamma, we own our kamma and so on and so forth.

And we're pure and serene of heart, you see. When the mind doesn't get tempted by the world, it's pure, it's serene. It finds this inner serenity. And those who follow these instructions, they're not overwhelmed. They're not hijacked any time. So it's this effort to develop these virtues which run alongside awareness. The more you're aware in the proper way, right awareness, the more these virtues naturally develop. So wherever they go, they are safe from spiritual danger. You're not safe from being run over, but you're safe from spiritual danger. And so these are the highest blessings.

So that's a discourse. It's not comprehensive, but it gives us some idea of how to reflect upon things. That's all, you know.

And I thought I would finally end off with Brexit. I can't give a talk without the word Brexit in it. I could leave it there. We're all very upset. Just I came across something which might be of interest to you. Edmund Burke, who was a philosopher and an MP, he was the one who expressed his very famous statement, all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing. He's well known for that, you see. But he was an MP for Bristol and he was only one session because they got rid of him after that. And he went into another easy place.

But this is what he says of an MP at Parliament. And I think it's something to reflect on in the context of what's happening today. He says, by the way, he's considered to be the founder of modern conservatism and the founder of the party system and to have established what a Member of Parliament is, right?

So he says here, Parliament is not a Congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain as an agent and an advocate against other agents and advocates. But Parliament is the deliberative assembly of one nation with one interest, that of the whole, where not local purposes, not local prejudices

ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed, but when you've chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a member of Parliament.

Ah, it's a strong statement, huh? So I thought I'd leave it there. Just a clarity, because there's lots of confusion about parliamentary democracy. Yeah, send it to Boris. Well, now you've got to be careful, you see. Some people like Boris. So we're not taking sides here. I was just clarifying what an MP is supposed to be. Send it to them all. Well that might do. I'm sure they know it. It's not that they don't know it. They probably read Edmund Burke. I've only read the statement. Oh I think they know it. They just decide not to behave like that.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion and that by your constant effort you will indeed become liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 69

Ethics, Not-self and Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h06

In this comprehensive dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the deep interconnection between ethical conduct and the Buddhist understanding of not-self (anattā). Beginning with the Buddha's place in the Axial Age alongside figures like Confucius, Socrates, and Moses, he explores how the Buddha's awakening was fundamentally expressed through ethical transformation—the complete elimination of mental defilements (kilesa).

The teaching illuminates how our habitual patterns (saṅkhārā) are empowered through will and intention, creating the conditions for suffering. Bhante explains the feedback loop between sīla (morality), samādhi (concentration), and paññā (wisdom), showing how attention to ethical behavior naturally transforms our attitudes and understanding. He draws on the Buddha's three knowledges attained at enlightenment to demonstrate that liberation is inseparable from ethical purification.

At the heart of the talk lies a profound exploration of identity and delusion. Using the Greek myth of Narcissus as an analogy, Bhante describes how awareness falls in love with its own mirror image in consciousness, creating the fundamental delusion of self. He guides practitioners to investigate the five aggregates (khandha) and to observe the sense of presence itself as an object of meditation, pointing toward the recognition that what is aware cannot be part of the body-mind matrix. The teaching concludes by showing how acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear all arise from this core delusion, and how ethical living and insight practice work together as complementary paths to liberation.

Ethics, Not-self and Liberation

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

This evening I thought to wander around this notion, this understanding of not-self and ethics.

The Buddha belonged to what's known as the Axial Age. It was quite a lift in terms of human consciousness at that time, 2,500 years ago. We have Confucius and Lao Tzu. Confucius turned what was empty ritual into something meaningful, coming from the

heart. Moses got rid of all the mammon worship and established a single god, but most of all, an ethical code which wasn't based on the power of gods or trying to appease them. Then you have Socrates, of course, at the same time, who brought rationality to the fore, undermining superstition. And in the Buddha's own country, people like Mahāvīra and others were really trying to investigate consciousness, which was, I think, more of an Indian concern than the relationship to the world—a peculiar investigation by Indians into what consciousness was as such.

So the Buddha belongs to that rise of understanding in human society. Of course, even today, not many of us have risen to that level, but at least it stands as a standard where we can aim.

In the Buddha's time, the distinction between the world and consciousness wasn't so objective as we might think these days, following our scientific revolution, where the West pulled rationality completely out of its connection with the heart and created this very scientific way of looking at the world. We've gained all our knowledge from it—subatomic physics and the technology that goes with it—but there's been a loss of connection to the heart.

The first people who revolted against that were the romantics: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Schelling, Wordsworth and others. They all rebelled against this hard science which understood the universe as some sort of machine, a car. Everything was like a jigsaw that you simply had to fit together. God became the God outside the machine that he'd created.

The Buddha himself stands within a tradition which is not so technological. Still carts and oxen, all that. His imagery is about agriculture. But there was this huge interest in consciousness and what that meant. In those days, as I think it was for the ancients, even Socrates perhaps, the world as we experience it is the only world that consciousness can offer us. Through the mind and body, whatever we're aware of is, as far as we're concerned, the world.

We might think that the world exists out there, or know through science that planets and galaxies exist light years away. But actually, we don't know that through personal direct experience. Neither do scientists, really. What they get is light from who knows when. They only presume it's carrying on. It might have all finished light years ago.

The Buddha isn't really concerned with that sort of thing. There's a telling passage where somebody asks him, "Where does the world come to an end?" And he says, "That's not rightly put. That's not the right question to ask." The question that should be asked is: "Where does the world not find a footing?"

That's a completely different question. What he's pointing to is a level of awareness, or an attainment of awareness, which doesn't belong to the world. What he means by "the world" is everything that the body, mind and heart can create—everything you see and feel, your thoughts. All of that belongs to the world of present-day consciousness, moment-to-moment consciousness. And he's saying that there's something that transcends that. Not touched by any of it, not touched by any of the senses, including the mind.

And he states this as simply the end of suffering.

So why is it that ethics is so important? That's the question that really begs an answer, because you might think, well, enlightenment—or awakening, rather—is really just a matter of contacting this level and holding it there, and that's about it. That's the end of the job. It's a process of just insight, just sitting, just keep looking and looking, and eventually the penny will drop. But somehow the Buddha interlocks really deeply our whole behavior—our thinking process, how we relate to people, and so on and so forth.

And this goes back to what's known as the three knowledges that came to him when he was awakened. The first one was that all the defilements had gone. He had no more defilements in his heart. So that's also an ethical statement—there was no defilement left in his heart. There was no anger. There was none of all that sort of stuff. And then he said that he saw a series of his past lives, where he saw that they were driven by his ethical decisions. So in the three knowledges, his awakening is not described as some sort of way-out state, blissed out and all that. It's telling you what there isn't there. And what there isn't there are these defilements. And then he says that these defilements were originally created by him through a series of lifetimes. And then the third knowledge was that he saw beings moving from realm to realm dependent on their ethical decisions, their morality. So what was a personal law for him became a universal law. And he even included animals.

Now that might be a bit strange to us, but there are clips on YouTube now where, without any doubt, at least the higher animals do make ethical decisions—but maybe not quite as consciously as we do. Some of you might have got my news bite about the panther, the black panther. Did you get that?

So, where does the problem of relationship begin? And how does it manifest? And how is it we get it wrong? The process that we're going through is twofold. We're actually trying to understand how we create this mess. And we're also going through a process of purification, where we begin to allow these defilements—that's what he calls them, defilements—to arise and pass away. And the process of insight meditation is that

dual process. So it's not a process of developing the heart. That's done by other exercises such as metta practice, and through actions—compassionate, loving, joyful. Don't forget joy! Everybody talks about compassionate love. Forget joy. You can actually be joyful and rejoice in somebody else's joyfulness. That's also part of the Buddha mind that we're trying to develop.

So this opening up to our own hearts in the meditation is part and parcel of allowing these defilements to go. In the Buddha's own experience, even though he was liberated during that moment, there was still what's known as vasana. Vasana are leftover habits within the mind. And so it is said that for seven years, Mara the evil one chased him with his three daughters: sensual desire, sexual desire, and—now those of you who know, you mustn't say. But those of you who don't know, what was the third one? Have a guess. Sensual desire, sexual desire, and... Yes. Did you know? No. Well done. Fantastic. Very rare anybody gets that.

Yes, and boredom. Because as we discussed this morning, boredom is the engine that pushes you to seek more and more excitement, to seek something different to do. And it took seven years for these—for Mara to finally leave him, you see. His daughters insisted on that.

But Mara gave up. And what he says is, "The Buddha sees me." The Buddha sees me.

Now, of course, that's put in a mythological sense. When we, in our meditation, observe our defilements come up—be it anger or something exciting or planning—just the seeing of them releases us from their grasp. Just to be able to see them. This seeing, of course, also means to feel them, to actually experience them as they arise and pass away within that awareness, that consciousness.

So we've got these mental defilements coming up, and they are habits. They are known as sankharas, habits that we have created ourselves. And the essential thing about the sankharas is that they are empowered through will. The Buddha goes as far as to state that an act and the act of will, in his sense, are one and the same thing. Will and an act are one and the same thing.

So when we find ourselves thinking about something unpleasant and we're indulging in it, there's actually an act of will in there. And the same when we speak something or when we act. Even when we do it unwittingly, even when we do it unintentionally as it were, there's actually been a moment of intention.

We talk about habitual unethical actions, and then really empowered ethical action—when you really, really decide to murder your rival. That's a clear decision in time that you are actually going to murder them. Not that you do it sort of unintentionally.

So often a lot of our thoughts that come up and drag us in are just because of these habits. And what we discover in our meditation is that they're incredibly powerful. Even if we struggle against them, they're always there in the background. Even if we become acutely aware of our greed, there's always these sneaky little selfishnesses where we take the biggest slice of cake and things like that. Very sneaky little things.

And so the ability to actually see these things is a liberation. But remember, we're not entirely liberated from them because then there has to be the decision not to engage. And that's what we're learning through our meditation—that no matter what unethical thoughts or habits come up, we can distance from them and refuse to engage.

Of course, the danger there is that in the refusal to engage, you're actually very subtly pushing them away. And we push things away out of aversion and fear. Those are our repressive measures. So one thing we come to be aware of is that there's an internal mechanism whereby we make things worse.

Here comes the old greed, you see, and then there's the empowerment of the greed by way of indulgence. Here comes a hateful thought about somebody and we empower it because we actually enjoy it. Yes, of course we do. We enjoy getting angry with people and biffing them on the nose and things like that. There's a certain enjoyment in it. Otherwise we wouldn't do it.

So when it comes to depression, we don't want to go into that sort of mental state, so we push it away—push it away by distracting ourselves. A lot of the pleasures that we have in life are empowered not only because we enjoy them and indulge them, but because they're ways of not facing up to this other horrible stuff. And that's why addictions are so difficult to get rid of. And I'm not talking about big, heavy addiction. I'm just talking about biscuits and things like that.

When we understand that, then we see where the struggle is. When the Buddha's last words are "strive diligently," he doesn't say hang about and think about things and investigate. It's strive. Sampadeta is a very strong word. It's not "sort of work at it." You've got to work at it.

And you can see from our meditation that the work is not something you can do the once and then you'll never be greedy again. These snakes and crocodiles appear constantly. As soon as we see something that we have a relationship of indulgence with, immediately the greed for it arises.

So these sankharas, our internal habits, are really to be known. That's what the Buddha says. You've got to know how they arise. You've got to know how to let them go and let them disappear. And you've got to know how, in such a way, that they never arise again.

Of course, they never arise again only until the deep fundamental problem is sorted out. And that's to do with identity.

So in one way of looking at the path, it's put in these three different ways: sila, samadhi, and paññā. Sila meaning morality, samadhi meaning concentration, and paññā meaning insight. And it's interesting that as the Buddha describes the Eightfold Path, he comes down from the insight path, and the insight becomes systemic. So once you have insight into, for instance, how indulgence creates suffering, this has to move into an attitude. That's your second on the Eightfold Path: samma sankappa, right attitude. You've got to change your attitude to indulgence.

Noreen, whom some of you know, does an email course. And there was one young fellow there who—the exercise was around seeing greed and whatnot—wrote back and said that once he'd begun to do this practice, he just wasn't enjoying things as he wanted to. So he wasn't ready for that, and he would stop the exercise. It just shows how deep is our commitment to greed. And that commitment manifests also in all the other negative stuff too.

So this sila, this morality in the path, comes after that. It comes after right attitude. Then you get right speech, right action, and right livelihood. But the way that we can also see it is that you can go the other way. You can start looking at our ethical behavior, and that will also begin to change our attitude. The more we change our attitude, of course, it has to come back into the way we understand things. You can't change your attitude and not also change your understanding. So the path is a feedback loop system.

And you lose nothing by really putting the accent of your spiritual life into right relationship, which might be a definition for ethics. Ethics is basically how you relate to human beings, to animals, to nature, and so on. And by putting the accent on that and seeing how we relate to those things, how we're creating suffering for ourselves but also situations where other people might suffer—remember, we don't cause other people to suffer, but we can definitely create situations where it's very difficult for them not to make the decision that they're going to suffer. So it's a case of recognizing that we also have a responsibility to create situations for other people where they may not make these wrong decisions.

By coming back onto that, you immediately change your attitude, and that attitude is one of connection. Another word for connection is love. Love, in its most universal sense, is a sort of sense of interconnectedness—a sense of interconnectedness with the all, as the Buddha would say, which is the all within our consciousness. And to make that connection as the connection demands.

So sometimes, as you know, there can be a certain directness, a certain assertiveness. You can be very assertive and not seem kindly, but it's exactly what was needed in that particular situation. And other times, of course, you can be very warm-hearted, compassionate, and so on. So it's a sensitivity that we have to develop towards any situation we're in. And that means that you've got to launch your attention outwardly into other people around you, into the animals you see, into nature and all that sort of stuff. And not only take this very isolated position of me in the midst of all this. So the "me" has to turn towards a sort of connection which produces a "we," a sort of communion, a community.

All that, of course, is part and parcel of this growing ethical relationship to the world. One other way of perhaps talking about ethics is to try and create situations which are to our own benefit. The Buddha talks about our own benefit, the benefit of somebody else—you might do something which is not to your particular benefit but to somebody else's benefit—and to both myself and to another. And in that sort of relationship, where you have that connection, it's always demanding a certain generosity. And that generosity has the ability to make that connection real, because you're giving. You're giving something of yourself, whether your wealth or your time, for the benefit of others. And at times you're giving it to yourself.

Sometimes you deserve a biscuit. Very rare, of course, but occasionally you might say, well, I deserve a biscuit.

So it's a case of recognizing that ethics is beginning to change our attitude. And as you move outward towards people, move outwards towards nature and animals and all that sort of stuff, of course, you find the opposite—that they're coming towards you. That's the point. They're coming towards you. And that's where the interconnectedness, shall we say, becomes more real for us.

Because we realise that the whole thing is some sort of theatre piece. It's a sort of play that we're in. A serious one. If you want to take a Hindu image of it, a dance, or a Mahayana one, Indra's net. Everything is interconnected, and those interconnections are holographic. They contain everything else within themselves as potential.

So our behaviour in ordinary daily life, the way we act in ordinary daily life, is this constant effort to see the situation more fully, not just myself isolated as an individual. I remember that's very much a Western thing, this individuality business. I do my own thing in my own way in my own time, to hell with you lot. And that sort of individuality causes us to disconnect with people, tremendous loneliness, and with it, of course, anxiety.

Somehow we have to reverse that process and begin to make these connections, to create a sense of community, even if the people whom you're with have no sense of community at all. So you're catching the whole situation where everybody's these individual little pods looking after themselves. And we've somehow got to make that connection with them, to see that they are undermining potential by only turning in towards themselves, only what I want. And by opening up to that, your relationship changes somewhat, and it opens up for them the possibility of changing their relationship.

On the negative side, there's Ayn Rand—Atlas Shrugged. It's funny that she was Russian, coming from presumably a communist background, this arch-individualist where it's up to you. You're the one that has to make the world. You're the one who makes decisions, and the world you live in is completely manufactured by you. You did it. And so all these people in Silicon Valley, one or two of them anyway, believe that the billions they've got is all because of me. I did it. Without me, this would never have happened.

Now, in a sense, of course, there is a touch of truth in that. They probably instigated it. They probably had the first idea, like Steve Jobs. Really a man who had these wonderful little ideas. But to say that all these billions came because of me, to hell with the workforce, to hell with everybody else who's putting in their little contributions—it's just an insanity. You're so isolated they should put you away.

So it's a case of recognizing that the West especially got itself into this corner. The Eastern people don't think like that. I saw a programme on China, and there was a young woman saying that she felt they thought differently. They thought more in terms of community. That sort of bringing in other people in some sort of connection where you don't see yourself as forging ahead, the lone pioneer, creating the world just for yourself. And that's very much, of course, the Buddha's own way of looking at things.

So here we have somebody who has this tremendous insight. And for one moment, as you know, those of you who know the story, he doubts whether anybody would understand it. He discovers something so extraordinary—and there's nothing like it being

taught anywhere else, remember—and he doesn't think people would really grasp it. He says it would be just an annoyance to him to try and do it, constantly trying to make people understand this sort of stuff.

But then, in the myth, this great god appears and tells him that there are some with only a little bit of dust in their eyes, and so off he goes. And there's a lovely little telling tale of how he learns how to be a teacher. Remember, the insight doesn't make you a genius. It doesn't make you a teacher.

It doesn't make you anything else.

So on the way back, on his way to see these old companions of his—that's his first thought, he'd go back to these companions that he'd struggled with—he meets another ascetic. The ascetic sees him and perceives the charisma, perhaps the glow coming from him in terms of this enlightenment he's just experienced. And he says to him, "You're amazing. Who is your teacher? How did you attain this?" And the Buddha says, "I am my own teacher. I am the savior of the world. I am the fully liberated one." And the fellow says, "All right, okay," clicks his head, and off he goes. So the Buddha must have learned pretty quickly that's not quite how you get the message across.

And when he actually meets his old companions, it's completely different, because there he goes back to an old relationship, a friendship with them. There's a whole process of discussing. And while he's discussing with them what he's discovered, which is slowly being formalized in his mind, he constantly asks the questions, "Have you ever heard me speak like this?" So as he's talking to them, he interrupts himself and says, "Have you ever heard me speak like this? Have you ever heard me say anything like this?" And just very slowly, they're attracted to his teachings and actually all become fully liberated in these wonderful stories.

So this whole business of relationship goes right back, in terms of the Buddha's teaching, right back to him. He didn't just sit there with a sign saying "Do not disturb, I'm fully liberated." He actually got up and walked. From Bodh Gaya to where he found his companions over in Sarnath, which is just north of Varanasi—I can't remember exactly, but it's a few hundred miles. India's a big place, you know. So it wasn't as though he thought he'd just nip down to Dublin and have a little chat with his old mates. You've got to walk.

So here we have this teaching about sīla, about morality. And what we're saying is that if we keep our attention on that, this is something we can actually do. You can't make a decision to have an insight. You can't say, "Well, look, I'm going to sit down now and I'm going to have a great insight and liberate myself." It just doesn't work like that.

We can't make ourselves have an insight. Insights come when the conditions are ripe. But what we can do is really correct our behavior and become much more aware of how the delusion is manifesting—the essential delusion to do with the self. And that's pretty easy for us to perceive.

And through the meditation, if we can maintain a certain level of awareness in daily life—not find ourselves rushing and all that sort of stuff, but try to maintain a certain calmness—then we should slowly change these habits, slowly allow habits that we see as unhealthy to die away, and build up the good ones through these practices of mettā, through goodwill practices, and through having right attitude.

So, for instance, work. It may be that work's hard at this time. It may be that it's meaningless to you—it doesn't have any particular meaningfulness. You just ended up doing this work because that's what was on offer. It just brings home the bacon. But you can change your attitude completely and see it as one of service. And then you immediately connect with whomever you're serving.

There was an example of somebody who was collecting coins on these motorways, tolls. And the way she made it meaningful to herself was to greet people meaningfully when they came through. You know, "What a great day! How are you?" Well, that's a sort of connection there. It wasn't just, stick the money in there, looking really glum inside this little box. So she found meaningfulness from it, from just that simple connection. And that, of course, lifts your heart.

So there's all sorts of little parts of our lives. If you keep a diary or keep some sort of log in the morning, you see—

Who are the first people you meet? Have you prepared yourself to meet them? In the morning, you see, if you're going to work and there are people with whom you're upset, if you direct your goodwill towards them, it does change your behavior toward them. And when they see that you're not angry, that you're not about to get your revenge, it opens up a little avenue for them to reestablish a working relationship. Not always, but at least one can try.

So there's a whole process there of ethical behavior which we can actually get hold of, which we can actually do something about. But when we go deeper into that, into ethical behavior, then of course we come across this business of a self. And really that's where the trouble truly lies.

When the Buddha talks about delusion, he talks about these three things: greed, aversion, and delusion—or acquisitiveness, aversion (which also includes fear), and delusion. This delusion is really one of identity. And so the meditation is trying to undermine this wrong identity we have by making everything into an object for ourselves.

That's the importance of really noting, really creating that space between the knowing or the knower—at this point the knower, the feeler, the one who knows—and really holding that point within ourselves where we are actually not so much sometimes aware of what's happening, but aware of the distance between the knower and what's happening.

For instance, now looking at me, you can be aware just of me, but you can also become aware of the space that is between us. So it's becoming aware of the mental space that lies between the knower, the feeler, the one who is experiencing things, and the actual experience that's being had. By doing that, we're actually unwittingly disidentifying with it completely, because it's not me.

The noting can be of great help there, because you're actually pointing to it. You say, "There's pain, there's an emotional state, there's an image in the mind." Thought's a bit more difficult, but that process of disidentifying—all we're doing is relocating our identity.

The basic identity would be physical. When we eat something and we just get lost in that beautiful taste, or when we trap our finger in the door, there's just that one moment where we are the body. Me and the pain—there's no separation. And then of course you jump out of it, get all angry and kick the door.

So it's a case of recognizing that there is a body self. What we mean by identity is a loss of self-awareness into becoming what it is we're experiencing.

Another example would be watching a DVD. You can watch a DVD from the point of view of just an interest in the acting or the directing, in which case it always remains something objective you're looking at. But you can also just fall into it as an enjoyment. You just get lost in the mystery or the criminality or whatever it is, and you lose the sense of me watching the film. Me and watching the film become one. At that point, you're identifying with all the mentation that's going on created by this film. You become the mind. You become the heart, become your emotions. That's what we mean by identity.

So long as there's a sense of self observing something, feeling something, then it's a connection of possession. In other words, what I'm looking at is not me, but is owned by me. I'm talking internally here—I'm talking about pain in the knee. It would be "my knee." Even though I say I feel anxious, the fact that I'm aware of it means that it can't be me, but somehow I own it. Somehow I'm identifying with it as a point of ownership.

Now, ownership of course brings a lot of pain with it, as you know. Even with things that you own, if somebody nips off with your mobile phone or something like that—I mean, it's a horror, isn't it? There's weeping and gnashing of teeth, anger. Call the police. All of this arises negatively because somebody's thieved your phone. For heaven's sake.

We don't know the suffering behind possession until we lose what it is we possess. That's pretty straightforward. And when we actually look at it rationally, the only thing you can do with a thing—like a phone or a TV or a car or whatever—is use it. You can only use things. To own it is a fiction, isn't it? It's a legal fiction which works until the thief takes it. And then it's his.

It's no good you going around saying, "He's got my phone." It's his phone.

I like to make that point because there was an occasion in the Sangha—the Buddhist order in Sri Lanka—where a thief came and stole a monk's little watch, or little clock as I remember it. The monk ran after the thief and got it back. And he was accused by Sangha members of thieving. He actually had to leave the order, the Sangha, yes. It's because it was no longer his, and he took it back. Which is really strange to anybody else in the world. But that's basically it. Strange, yes? So it makes you think about ownership.

We've got this relationship of identity with something. And remember that happiness—real happiness in the sense of an absolute happiness—is when we fall into the emotion of happiness. We become the happiness. When you watch an uproarious film and you're just laughing your head off, great guffaws and all that, you, the guffaw, and the film become one and the same thing. When a comic comes on and you're laughing your head off, you and the comic merge—you lose that sense of me watching television. You're just there within the laughter.

That's one reason why people do these dangerous sports, because in a dangerous sport you've got to give your whole attention and you lose yourself in the sport. Canoeing down rapids and such, activities which are dangerous in themselves, which mean there has to be a heightened sense of awareness. You've got to be right there with the moment, and there's a sheer joy of the adrenaline coming up. You lose yourself into it, and it becomes like an addiction to try and get back into the zone.

These moments of happiness, when we're completely happy, paradoxically is when we don't know it. As soon as you come out of that happy state, you've lost it. There may still be a feeling of happiness, but actually there's something in you which knows that the happiness is on the way out. It's gone. So it's one of these little paradoxes about identity. And it's the same, of course, on the negative side, when you identify with a hellish state, with something just for that one moment. That's what you are.

So we have to take a little step even further back to find out where this sense of identity originates.

In our meditation, when we sit there observing, feeling, and such, we've accessed this observation post. There's a lovely phrase that comes from Nyanaponika—his book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* is still a classic, really worth reading. And there's some body up here somewhere, a couple of centimeters or so behind this point here, which is looking, feeling, and knowing everything from this sort of place. From that place, we've detached from the body. It's no longer us. There's the body. That's why we use these noting words and we don't put the sense of "I feel something." There's just the feeling. We're trying to make it quite objective. Same with emotions, same with images that come to the mind.

So that disengagement, that pulling ourselves—pulling this awareness out of its confusion with this psychophysical organism—just to be able to see it. And it finds itself as being this very objective observer, objective feeler, objective experiencer. But of course, it can't be that either, can it? It can't be what it's aware of. The perceiver can't be the perceived. So this sense of "I am looking," "I am feeling," that sense of self there, right there—that can't be you either. Is that correct? Not vigorously, please.

See, so there's something that is aware of itself. There's something that is aware of itself. Now, the only time that we experience that physically is when you look in the mirror. When you look in the mirror, you're aware that this is your face. But you know it's not your face. It's actually just a mirror image of your face. And of course, it's the wrong way around, isn't it?

It's not how people see you. You've all done the two-mirror trick. I always ask that. Who hasn't done the two-mirror trick? Fancy. Oh, you haven't lived. You've got to do the two-mirror trick. So you've got to look into a mirror, and you've got to take a second mirror that looks into the mirror. And you've got to catch your face in this mirror, because it's turned around again. Well, it's a horror thing, isn't it? It's like listening to your own voice for the first time. Or worse, seeing yourself in a video. So there's something about that sense of self.

Now, I came across this—I remembered this myth of narcissism. And in Greek psychology, of course, it's about a wrong self-love, a sort of pride, I think. Narcissus looks into the pool and falls in love with himself, as you might say. And of course he goes to embrace it and falls into the water. Water is always, remember, an image of creation in mythology. So here we have, from a Greek point of view, somebody who falls in love with themselves through a sense of pride. But it works brilliantly as an image for our essential delusion. And the important thing to grasp is that we actually fall in love. We're actually in love with ourselves. That's the basic platform.

We wake up—I know sometimes, well, sometimes you wake in the morning and you say, "Here I am again," you know. And sometimes you wake up and you say, "Oh, not you again." But prior to that, you see, there must be a moment where this awareness becomes aware of itself. But it can never see itself. The eye cannot see itself. The nose can't smell itself. If the nose had a constant odor of, say, curry, how could you—everything else would be ruined by it. So the sense bases are completely clean of exactly what it is that they are aware of, that they sense. So this awareness, you see, can never know itself as an object. And therefore that sense of self-awareness must be a delusion.

So the mirror image. Now, what technique, what can we do to undermine that very deep delusion? Because that's our primary object. The primary object we make is this awareness coming into the mind and catching its own image. How do we experience that image of the self? It's a presence, isn't it? It's a sense of presence. Whenever you're awake, there's always you. There's always a sense of presence. Now that sense of presence is a feeling image of the awareness in the mind. So it's as though that now has to become the object to observe and to really see whether in fact it's permanent or not.

Now in Buddhist psychology, in the human being, the Buddha talks about these five aggregates. So the first one is the body. But it's not the physical body that you might think of. It's often translated as that, just our physicality. But you have to ask yourself, what is it you actually know of your body? Do you know what your liver is doing? See? Have you any idea what's happening in your brain? Did you know it was mostly fatty substance? That's what they tell me anyway. Did you know that your body has ten trillion individual cells? And they're all screaming for whatever. And you also host a hundred trillion guest cells, which are helping you do things like digest. Did you know that the cornea of your eye changes once every week?

Every week you can look in the mirror and say, "You weren't here last week." And they tell you that every atom in your body has changed every seven years. This is what they say. So it's not as though we know the body. The body has its own little life form. Who knows what? What we can know is how we experience the body. And that's where this business of pain, pleasure, and all that sort of stuff comes in.

So that's the first aggregate—how we experience the body. And the basic experience of the body is the breath. It starts with the breath, and then we have what's known as the four elements, the four great elements: fire, earth, water, and air. These refer to temperature, pressure, elasticity, connectivity, and movement. So whenever you drop down below pain, the image of pain, and you go into the pain, then you're at the level of the body itself. Not the body itself, but how the mind experiences the body. That's your first heap, just an aggregate of sensations and feelings.

And then the next one is feelings. Feelings are physical and mental feelings, not to be confused with mental states. They're what mental states create in the body as a feeling. So when you feel heavy because you're a bit depressed, that's the vedanā, that's the feeling. And according to the Buddha, all these feelings are feelings. There's no need to differentiate them apart from the fact that some of them are coming from the body into the mind and some coming from the mind-heart into the body. So that is the connection there.

Then there's perceptions. These are, remember, your photocopies that you make. And these grow into concepts, concrete concepts, even abstract concepts. What they do is make you look at the world in a certain way.

And then the third one are your saṅkhāras. These are your mental states. These are what we're referring to when we talk about our habits, the way that we can become happy, the way we become sad, and so on and so forth. The mental states that we're in.

And finally, consciousness. Now, the problem is translation. And the Buddha himself has problems trying to find the right word to express what he wants to express. The words change depending on the situation. In the Pāli there are two major words: citta and viññāṇa. Citta refers to what we would normally have called in the old days the soul. Not the everlasting spirit, but the soul meaning this combination of heart and mind, which we split. In our Age of Enlightenment we took rationality and feeling away from each other. So bringing them together as one composite—what you think you feel and what you feel you think. If you look at every time you think of something, you'll see the heart's in there somewhere. And when the heart moves, you'll see there's a thought related to it. So it's not as though they're completely separate. They're working one off the other. But they're obviously two different modes.

And all these things have to be held somewhere. They have to be held somewhere to be known. So that which knows is awareness. But something has to hold it long enough for it to be known. And that's the screen. That's the screen of consciousness. When we talk about consciousness, we're not talking about the process of reasoning. We're not talking about the process of emotions and moods. We're not talking about the process of perceiving.

We're talking about some sort of multidimensional screen that just for a moment holds the totality of that moment for us, as we experience it through this psychophysical organism. So if I stub my toe, on the screen there just comes pain. That's the first. And then that disappears. And then the reason why I stubbed my toe. So I'm getting this chopped up momentary screening of what's happening in the present moment. And so fast is this screening that it's all joined together into a continuum.

That's where we perceive some sort of continuity when it's not there. And the continuity gives us the impression of everlastingness. And that gives us the impression that it's always me—I never change. All these other things are changing, but not me. And that's one of the core insights of the Buddha: that the sense of me, the sense of self, is also arising and passing away. That's what he means when he says that there is a self, but it's not a self. Because in those days, the self would have referred to something that we might refer to now as an everlasting soul or a spirit. But this self that we're talking about is that mirror image which is being held every so often on that screen, and we get a sense of the feeling of presence there.

So in your meditation, when everything's quite calm and you're watching the breath and so forth, in that calmness, turn towards that sense of presence. Make it an object that you're looking at. In that way, you're coming to distance away from the mind at that initial level of contact, becoming more and more aware that what is aware is not part of that matrix—the body, heart, mind matrix. And that's the process of awakening. The awakening is in the awareness. It's not in the mind.

One of the other understandings that we have is that actually it is awareness that's suffering. It's the awareness that is suffering, through that wrong identity. The body doesn't suffer—the body just has pain. The heart doesn't suffer—the heart just has emotions. You can distance from them. Thoughts are hardly suffering; they're usually just flitting little things. So there's something in us which, through its wrong relationship, is actually causing suffering for itself. And that's the Buddha within. That's where the search for the end of suffering is coming from. It's not coming from the body. It's not coming from our emotional or mental state. It's coming from this essential nature seeking its own liberation.

When you actually contemplate that, you can see how subtle it is. The problem is in the seeing. It's not in what is being seen.

I'll give you an example of that from when I went to Sri Lanka. I was standing with one or two monks, and there was this barking going on. I couldn't work out what this barking was. It was monkeys—I didn't know monkeys barked. When they told me those were monkeys, I said, where are they? They pointed to this tree.

For the life of me, I couldn't see any monkeys. I said, "I'm looking up there—where?" I couldn't see. They said, "There's a whole troop of them. There's about twenty or twenty-five of them up there." And I'm looking and looking and looking. Then just suddenly—*whoof*—I can see these monkeys. They're everywhere. It's because my eye wasn't trained to see. And in that delusion, I would have gone away and said, "Well, monkeys are ghosts. Only some people can see them."

There was a case of somebody who was born blind—I read this little article—who was given sight. The psychiatrist helping him would take him to places. One that he mentioned was a zoo, where he took him to a cage with an ape in it. And this man couldn't see it. I mean, an ape in the cage, and he could not see it. So the psychiatrist took him to a statue of an ape, and the man felt it with his eyes closed so that he got a mental picture of it. When he went back to the cage, he could see the ape.

So our search for liberation from suffering—from our own personal suffering—is the sharpening of this internal seeing. And the Buddha gives us these cues, these clues as to which way to approach it. It's impermanence, but radical impermanence. It's not that something is changing; it's that something is arising and passing away.

Now when we say that something is arising and passing away, we're not talking about the physical world as we know it, or as we don't know it. We're talking about consciousness. Consciousness arising and passing away. And consciousness is just a mirror. But it seems so real to us. That's the problem—it seems so real.

And then there's this whole business of relationship that comes up because of this essential delusion, this always trying to protect myself. Remember that our relationship with the world is one of love—so I'm acquiring things so that I can feel safe. I feel so much safer if I have a billion in the bank rather than just a few pounds. And I collect things. I collect friends—it makes me feel safe. I collect objects. That acquisitiveness is really trying to make me feel safe.

Now, when I feel safe, I obviously don't want anybody to disturb me, to disturb the happiness I've got now from this security. And so aversion comes. Anybody who's going to upset me is an enemy, whatever it is. And of course, if the enemy's too big, I've got to run for it.

So there are your three basic attitudes arising out of that delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear. And when we act out of that—by the way we think, the way we speak, and the way we act—we're actually creating our ethical creations in this world, and they have consequences. They not only have consequences outwardly, but they have consequences inwardly. The more you feel fearful, the more you'll hate. The more you hate, the more you fear your enemy. The paranoia is just there within us. The more you have, the more you're afraid of losing.

So it's really going beyond that. And when you look at the spiritual traditions, the people whom we honor—really honor—like Jesus Christ, St. Francis of Assisi, they don't have anything. I mean, I'm a monastic. I'm not supposed to have anything, but I've got a lot. I've got my mobile phone for a start, which I'm very afraid of losing.

So you see, this idea of letting go of something is to be manifest in the way that we actually live. And that brings us back to our ethics. We've really been around the houses this evening, my goodness.

We started off by talking about ethics and the fact that there's a feedback. If you look at your ethics and you begin to behave more beautifully, it has an effect on your general attitude to life, which brings you its insights—that it works. Even if people hate you, at least you yourself are peaceful. You might be the most peaceful person in the world, full of charisma, and somebody out there is still going to want to shoot you. It's just as simple as that.

And there's this other way where we are investigating ourselves, which again brings about a change of attitude and then becomes systemic in the way we think, the way we behave. So that whole process is one of insight and ethics, and you can't separate them. And the original ethical stand was falling in love with ourselves—that's the problem. It's coming back to that level and really investigating that sense of presence, that sense of self, which is really cutting to the core of the problem. And that's exactly what the Buddha found on that wonderful day.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion. May your devotion to insight, practice, and ethical standards liberate you sooner rather than later.

A question arose about enjoyment, and I agreed entirely with the questioner's point. It's not a case of getting rid of enjoyment—it's a case of getting rid of indulgence. Indulgence means that your sense of happiness is now dependent on preparing food, making sure that somebody's going to eat it, making sure that you like it. There's a whole process of attachment whereby you're presuming that when you do this, you're going to feel happy. And that's different from a spontaneous joy that comes up when you are preparing food for preparing's sake—when you're feeding people just for the sake of feeding people, not to make yourself happy.

That's the paradox. The more we do good without thinking of ourselves, the more happiness arises spontaneously and naturally within us. That's the bit about non-attachment.

And in that, which is slightly more difficult, is of course we have to do it for ourselves as well without becoming attached. So preparing food for ourselves, just by ourselves, is to take a joy in that. Now, if there's a sense of loneliness there, that tells you that for you food isn't enjoyable unless somebody else is talking their heads off and eating at the same time. If you can actually sit down and prepare food very carefully for yourself, for the benefit of your body, and the joy comes up in having treated yourself with kindness—that's love.

But as I say, these distinctions are very close together. And we'll never get rid of the attachment until the essential delusion of self disappears. So you've got to work at it. But at least we can undermine it by recognizing when that indulgence comes in.

For instance, in relationships—when does love turn to control? When does love get confused with control? It's a really essential point. Because at the point of control, the other person is no longer a person; they're an object to feed your needs. Every time you're angry with somebody, bored with them—if you're angry, they're not doing what you want; if you're bored with them, they're not making you laugh anymore. You go through the whole thing of all these negativities and it's all coming from the point of view that this person is here to make me happy.

So you can always tell when the indulgence is not being fed. The difficulty is knowing when you're feeding the indulgence, because it's so close to love and enjoyment. What a drag.

So every time you're angry with somebody, bored with them—if you're angry, they're not doing what you want. If you're bored with them, they're not making you laugh anymore. You go through the whole range of these negativities and it's all coming from the point of view that this person is here to make me happy.

So you can always tell when the indulgence is not being fed. The difficulty is knowing when you're feeding the indulgence, because it's so close to love and enjoyment.

What a drag.

CHAPTER 70

Roads to Power: The 37 Bodhipakkhiya Dhammā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the 37 bodhipakkhiya dhammā—the factors conducive to awakening that encapsulate the Buddha's complete teachings. He systematically explores the four satipaṭṭhāna (establishments of awareness), four sammappadhāna (right exertions), five indriya (spiritual faculties), seven bojjhaṅga (factors of awakening), and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The talk includes a detailed examination of the four iddhipāda (bases of spiritual power): chanda (strong desire/intention), vīriya (energy), citta (wholehearted application of mind), and vīmaṃsā (discriminating investigation. Bhante explains how these qualities—when properly developed—lead to extraordinary achievements both worldly and spiritual, touching on the controversial topic of psychic powers while emphasizing their practical application in daily life.

Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) and other canonical sources, he explains how pure vipassanā practice can lead to liberation without deep concentration states. The teaching emphasizes the importance of total commitment, using examples from athletics and humanitarian work to illustrate the level of dedication required for spiritual breakthrough. This talk offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for applying these 37 factors in meditation and ethical living.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

I thought I'd go through the *Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma*. You've all heard of those, I'm sure. There are 37 of them, for heaven's sake. I remember years ago, there was a very good Canadian scholar called Warder. His introduction to Pali is still considered the best, if you want to study a bit of Pali. And what he was saying was that these 37 *bodhipakkhiya dhamma* encapsulate the whole of the Buddha's teachings. And since then, of course, Rupert Gethin has written a big book on this.

And these *bodhipakkhiya dhamma* are found in the other recension of the scriptures by the Sarvāstivādin school. So there are two schools for which we still have the scriptures. The one is this Theravāda school and the other one is the Sarvāstivādin school,

which is only in Chinese. And they both come from the same period, within something like 100 years of the Buddha's death, Parinibbāna. So these 37 encapsulate the fullness of his teachings.

Obviously he didn't start off like this. This was something that developed as he went around teaching. You can see that development in the early scriptures. You get five links to the dependent origination and then it finally ends up with 12. So it's not as though he rose from the seat and knew exactly how to get it across. That was also a learning process for him.

And remember when he actually meets his five companions, he begins to explain this. At first they didn't want to meet him because they thought he'd gone soft. He'd given up the heavy self-mortification life. And when they finally greet him and they feel that something changed about the man, he begins to teach. And one of the questions he asks is, have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say this sort of thing before? And so very slowly, of course, they begin to realise that he'd made some sort of big breakthrough.

So what are these 37? I think you'll know them all. There's one or two that you might not have come across. The first one is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. So that's the discourse on the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, called the *Satipaṭṭhāna* Discourse. And that's the one, remember, he gave to lay people. So he did a lot of travelling on the Gangetic plane there and he ended up at a place called Kuru Sadhamma. And at this place he was taken on his second visit or third visit, who knows, he was taken by the way the people actually were practising, like us. And so he gave them this special teaching.

And so it opens up with that. This talk was given to the people of Kuru Sadhamma, the Kurus of Kuru Sadhamma. So we can take this as a teaching which was specific to the lay situation. Pure *vipassanā*. Remember the other form is with concentration. If you're good at concentration, do it. But if you're not, pure *vipassanā* will get you there.

So remember there are four of these establishments where you place your attention to investigate. So the first one is the body. That, remember, has both a coarse and obvious meaning, but also has a subtle meaning. So it's the body as we know it, as we experience it, doing all its things, eating, sweating and so on. I won't go into details. And there's the more subtle body that we experience through the mind in terms of the four great elements.

So when we're experiencing weight, pressure, that sort of thing, that's called the earth element. If we're experiencing heat and the wonderful warmth of this room... Are you all warm, by the way? Yeah. Then that's the fire element. Something elastic, some-

thing that congeals, that's the water element. And then finally movement is your air element. So when you're actually experiencing that, right at the base where the senses actually touch matter, you're experiencing the body at a more subtle level.

And it is subtle. I saw this program on smelling. Smelling takes place at a subatomic level, would you believe? Absolutely amazing. It's not even a chemical level. We think it's a chemical, but it's not. It's at a subatomic level. I can't go into details, of course, only because I have no time. It's the same with the eye, of course. When you think about it, we're actually experiencing light at that subatomic level. These tiny infinitesimal photons. Anyway, that's the body.

Then there's the whole section on feeling. So remember, he always describes feeling in these two ways. Physical feeling and mental feeling. Pleasant, unpleasant. And an area in between that he calls neutral. So when we talk of emotions, there's no real word for emotions. I don't think so anyway. I think it's more to do with recognising that there's a feeling in the body that we recognise as a mental feeling. I mean, some are pretty obvious, like anger and anxiety. So that would be a feeling in the body. What happens with the mind and all that is another category.

And that's your mental states. That includes all your thinking and your lack of it. *Citta*. The next one, the *citta* is more to do with your mental states, your total mental states. And the fourth category is the *dhamma*, which actually refers to investigating all these three from certain points of view. So when something unwholesome comes up, then we look at them from the point of view of the hindrances.

When we look at the body and the congregation of factors that make up a human being, we look at these aggregates. The aggregates, the physical aggregates, the feeling aggregates, perception aggregates, and so on. So those are ways. Factors of enlightenment, they're the same. And even the Four Noble Truths, you can look at your experience through the Four Noble Truths. This is suffering and so on.

So that's the whole section. There's four of them, remember. I'm adding up to 37, remember. Those are your four where you establish all the foundation of your practice. And we'll come to this. There's three words that are repeated continuously throughout the discourse. *Ātāpī*, *sampajāno*, *satimatā*. *Ātāpī* is real energy, real commitment. It is connected to the word *tapaḥ*, which is mortification exercise. A real commitment. And *sampajāna* is your intuitive faculty, that which grasps and understands. *Sati* is your awareness.

These two, so this place, Satipañña, the word comes from the teachings of Buddhadāsa, who was a very famous teacher in South Thailand. And he used to use this combination, Satipañña, because that's pretty straightforward. So it's your intuitive awareness. They're not two faculties, they're two sides of the same coin. So we say it in English, for instance, first you look and then you see. So it's that sort of, it's the grasping or the understanding comes upon the looking.

So when we're sitting, we're observing, we're observing, we're letting things arise and we're observing them. And every so often we have a little insight. That's the way it works. You can't make that happen. See, if you try to make it happen, then you'll probably distort what you're looking at. So if you say to yourself, oh, that's impermanence. Well, you might have seen impermanence, but you're distorting it by thinking about it. It's more a grasping of it, an actual experience that something has arisen and passed away.

That's not mystical or magical. You just know that the breath has come to an end and there's a stop. It's finished. Then the next breath comes. So you're constantly aware of the beginning and ending of things. That's the radical impermanence that we live with.

So those are your four, we can go over this later, but those are your four establishments or sometimes called foundations of mindfulness, awareness. Then you've got the four right exertions. So these are pretty straightforward too. So preventing an unskillful state to arise. Abandoning what's already arisen which is unskillful. And the arising of skillful states and how to sustain and increase them.

Prevent unskillful states arising. Abandon those that have arisen. And then to make skillful states arise. That's an exertion. To actually make it happen. And to sustain and increase those skillful states.

So just in ordinary daily life, when we see an unskillful state arise in our minds, some sort of anger, some anxiety or whatever, then you actually recognise it's there. And you don't let the mind wander on it, develop it. That's the second exertion. And then you train yourself to be quicker on the mark so that you don't get caught up in it. And then there's ways in which you can undermine certain things by balancing it with its opposite.

So, for instance, if a person has a problem with eating, to balance it with the process of digestion and excretion. So as soon as the idea of food comes up, the idea of going to the toilet comes up. And it has the effect of stopping that. It's the same with lust. If a person has a problem with lust, by actually looking at the disgusting nature of the body, that which disgusts us, then as soon as that comes up, you get this cancelling. Now,

there's a danger here that you go too far on the disgusting side and you can't enjoy anything. So you have to be skillful with this one. These are exercises given to monastics. Not that they practise them.

So I mean, just averting your eyes is sometimes a way of preventing you from, for instance, if all the bad news that we get is just getting you down all the time, don't listen to it. Don't look at the TV. It doesn't mean to say that you cancel out your compassion. It's just that you don't want to get burned out. You don't want to be upset by it all.

On the other hand, you might use it in order to increase, to hear news or to read articles that are painful to read and to bear that pain with it. So that one becomes more empathic. Empathetic. Empathic. Is that right? Empathy. Yes, empathic.

And this constant effort to make skillful states arise. I mean, that's really our practise in daily life. In the morning, when I say, make a resolution for the day. See, put a resolution in your mind for the day. It might be a regular one that you do every day, but certain days might want something other than your regular.

So the basic one is to live with an awareness imbued with loving-kindness. That's the Buddha's phrase. Affectionate awareness. So you're bringing not only a sense of awareness to what you're doing, but also a certain kindliness. And depending on the situation, it can be compassion, a desire to help, not to be confused with pity. Joy, to actually respond to another person's joy with joyfulness. And to be joyful in ourselves, for heaven's sake, don't forget, we also have to be joyful.

So we can make these resolutions and practise it during the day. And of course what we're doing is we are reconditioning ourselves. So the Buddha, remember the Buddha was not liberated from conditioning as a human being. He just wasn't overwhelmed by it. He just wasn't caught up in it. But the body said hunger, so he went out for food. And when somebody asked him a question, he would respond to that question. So it's not as though what we're moving towards is some sort of completely unconditional life here as a human being. That's impossible. Everything's conditioned.

So the unconditioned is referring to a relationship we have with the life we're leading. And that's what we call that unshackling. That's the word *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* means to unshackle. Sometimes it's given other meanings, but that seems to be its root meaning. *Nirvāṇa*. It means unshackled, unchained. And what is it that's unchained, unshackled? It's your awareness. Every time your awareness falls into some sort of identity or possession of something, then suffering is bound to rise. Some sort of unsatisfactoriness arises. Being able to keep that gentle distance.

And yet within that distance not to lose the connection of empathy, compassion and love. And joy. Don't forget joy.

So those are our four exertions. And that's a daily task. I mean that's an ongoing task. You don't stop that. You don't take a holiday from that. You can't take a holiday. Not in this game.

I'll leave the four bases of magical power. We'll come to that in a minute. That's the special teaching for this. Let's just get into the five spiritual faculties. And these of course lock into the seven factors of enlightenment. So the Buddha here is talking about really those basic faculties that you need to progress.

Faith, a sense of trust. Remember this English word belief also means to have faith in something without question. It has that sort of meaning. But here the *saddhā* is not about that sort of thing. It's about trust, conviction. Even conviction is not quite right. It's got here conviction. Trust. You can't do anything without trust, can you? I mean, if you go on a high diving board and if you don't trust yourself to do it, you won't do it, will you? You won't have the confidence. It's a confidence, putting your faith in something. You won't do anything. You won't go anywhere with a friend unless you are confident that they are your friend and so on. So that sort of trust is the base. Without that, you just don't move. And when you don't have that, you suffer from sceptical doubt. And sceptical doubt is based on fear. Fear of what? Fear of failure, for instance. And that can be a real barrier to our lives. It can really mess you up. Because every time you're about to do something, then you have this doubt about yourself. Or doubt about the other. So you never move.

With that, there comes this energy. Once you've got that conviction, once you've got that confidence, then you empower it. You put your energy into what you want to do. And that supports your concentration, which is the third one. So it supports your steadiness of attention. And then there's the mindfulness, of course. Just being mindful. Being aware of what we're doing. It's as simple as that, basically. Being aware of what we're doing.

And that includes the ethical level. It's no good being aware of killing somebody or stabbing somebody to death. I mean, that's not... I mean, you are aware, but it isn't quite the right awareness which is going to get us liberated. So there's always underlying all these things, this basic ethic about no harm. That's your fundamental one. No harm. Sometimes you can't avoid harm. If you're a farmer, for instance, you can't. So you have to accept there's certain limitations to them. But at least you don't do it with cruelty in the heart. That's the difference.

So that concentration and energy go together. And then there's the wisdom, which is here, just a way of looking at things. Basically, remember, that's always referring back to these three characteristics of existence. Just to be constantly reminding ourselves. It doesn't have to become obsessional, but just noticing that things come to an end. Every time we fall into this wrong relationship of identifying, it's me, it's mine, mine, mine, you get into some sort of unsatisfaction. And this sense of not-self, you can see it from the point of view of control.

So remember, our control is minimal. I mean, when you're driving a car, there are times when you are locked into the driving and you have the impression, you have the feeling that you are in control of the car. And of course you are in terms of where it's going and all that. But as you know, the car can suddenly stop for no reason. And that's it. Then you realise you aren't in control. You are not in control of the car in that absolute sense. So it's the same with the body. We can wave our arms about and speak and all that sort of stuff, but ultimately the body itself is not under our direct control. So the question is, if it's not under your control, how can it be you?

So one of the definitions of 'me' is that I am the centre of control. And the other one is through your meditation to begin to objectify things, to see everything as an object. The perceiver can't be the perceived.

And this takes you right back to that primal state of being the observer. Now that sense of self is not the sense of self that you get when you're proud or when you're embarrassed. That's something else. But that cool sort of sense of the observer within yourself. Remember, that's the first object you make. And that's the image on that screen of consciousness which draws you into the world of the mind.

So when you come out and you're seeing, you're seeing images up here and you're feeling your knee down there and your heart's exploding with wonderful joy. All that, you see, remember, because you're the observer, you stepped out of it. You stepped out of it, you become an observer. So that's a magical moment, that is. And it's making that more and more clear to ourselves. That takes us back into this observer, the feeler. So, and then of course you can explore that. There must be something there that knows, eh? Correct?

Note vigorously please. Oh God, I'm falling asleep.

Now to do with that are the seven factors of enlightenment. So mindfulness of course. We've got the energy, you see. We've got the concentration. That's there, you see. We've got this - it's badly translated as joy, right? The best translation is interest. It's a

real interest. It's a driving curiosity. We'll come to that later. You've got to be really interested in what you're investigating. And that's the joy of the practice, yeah? Tranquillity, calmness.

And then there's that sense of investigation. So that's the question mark in the mind. If the question mark's not there in your mind, that's not *vipassanā*. You're doing some concentration exercise or whatever. So there has to be that sense of curiosity. Yeah?

And finally, this quality of equanimity, which some write... Well, Ñāṇaponika, the German monk, wrote 'The Heart of Buddhist Meditation'. Still an absolute classic. Always worth a read. So he points out, he thinks that, or he says, in so many words, that equanimity is the greatest of all virtues. Keeps the balance, you see. Keeps us balanced.

In these seven factors, you don't get love. You don't get compassion. It's interesting, isn't it? Yeah, you see. The presumption is that it's always there. I mean, you wouldn't be doing it were it not that you had a sense of care for yourself. And a sense of understanding that it has an outward flow. You know, that when... As you purify the heart, remember that part of the meditation is purifying the heart. When you're allowing these hindrances to come up - you know, the greed, the hatred, all that sort of stuff - when you're allowing that to come up you see as mental states, that's purification, that is. It's just blowing out. So that's the effort of purification and it's there within the practice. There's your compassion towards yourself. It doesn't have to be stated.

And then there's the... so you've got those seven, yeah? Mindfulness, the sense of investigation, the energy, the commitment, that sense of joy, the tranquillity, the concentration, equanimity.

Now, how can you establish these when the mind is in a complete furore? You know, when it's going berserk or when you're actually falling asleep. Where are the seven factors then, you see?

So this is what we have to understand. In the awareness itself, you get those seven factors. So you've got your five *khandhās*, you see, and normally speaking, we're locked into it and getting all confused by it. So in our meditation, we come out. So this is the inner 'I', yeah? And you've got the five *khandhās* here. All those faculties come back into the awareness.

The awareness has its equanimity. The awareness is calm. The awareness has that sense of question, you see? You're drawing yourself out to this point of observation. When you actually begin, you might feel them as something that you can experience

within the body. Tranquillity, calmness. But don't think that because now you don't feel calm, the quality of tranquillity isn't there. It's there within the awareness. So that's always the effort to pull ourselves out and observe, you see.

And then finally there's the Noble Eightfold Path. So this is an outward flow. So from right understanding you get a right intention. I always think the better word is attitude. Right attitude. And an attitude is a way of relating. A way of relating. Now this right understanding is translating itself into an ethic. And then from that you get the right speech, right action and right livelihood.

It's interesting that he should make a big thing of livelihood because you could put it all in action. The action is normally described as the moral laws. Normally it's negative - what you shouldn't do, not kill and all that - but you can also add in there what we ought to be doing. But livelihood, remember, is... It's very conditioning. I mean, what we do for a great deal of our lives, for eight hours a day, has to have an effect on our characters and on the way we relate to the world. I mean, just compare a nurse to a policeman, or a soldier.

Now, there are virtues in being a soldier. We tend to be, liberals tend to be negative about soldiering. But soldiering has its qualities of courage and all that sort of stuff. St. George, our patron saint. So, right livelihood is put there, recognising that it is a real conditioning factor in our lives.

And then, at the end of that, you've got the energy, the commitment, the mindfulness, and finally the concentration. Normally you get it divided as *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. So *sīla* is your morality. *Samādhi* is your concentration, ability for your... just the steadiness of attention. We're not talking about big heavy *jhānas* here. And the mindfulness is your awareness, which has included in it this sense of grasping, this intuitive faculty.

Now you can see how this revolves around itself because if we develop a right attitude, that's got to feed back into our understanding. So the more that we develop a right attitude, shall we say, to all these refugees, see, some people feel very negative about them, but if they develop a right attitude, then you get the wisdom, which is, of course, that we're all human beings and we're all suffering to one level or another. Things like that.

So with that right attitude, developing right attitude has an effect on the way that we understand life. And just being, just the way we speak, you know, taking, being careful about what we say, the four things, you know, kindly speech, truthful speech, speech at

the right time, suitable time. So, you know, practising that has an effect on our understanding about relationship, about how we relate to each other. So that's the Noble Eightfold Path.

So I just want to go back now to the four bases of magical power. Where's my magical powers? Here we are.

So there are five magical powers, none of which very few people believe in in our society. They just think it's a bit of a joke, really. So the Buddha says that somebody who practises these wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one, he becomes many, and having been many, he becomes one. Appearing or vanishing. He appears unobstructed through walls, ramparts, and mountains as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if on dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies through the air like a winged bird.

Now how many of you are going to believe that? You see, we are deeply sceptical of these things. Deeply sceptical. Reminds me of, oh dear, I've forgotten her name. Dīpamā. Yes, Dīpamā, thank you. Thank you, Trevor. If you read the book on Dīpamā, who was this Indian lady, she was able to do this. I'll give you a few examples afterwards.

Then there's the divine ear to see things which are really beyond the normal range of things. Then there's the awareness of other beings, other individuals. Sorry, that's a bad translation. To be able to read other people's minds.

Have I told you the story of this Jungian psychotherapist? You haven't heard my story, right? Well, I was in the Isle of Man. And we used to go to, when I went over there, a couple of times we were taken, I went over with Pam and, I can't remember, what was the name of the other elderly lady? We used to go over to listen to talks given by this Jungian. Paddy and Pam, wasn't it? Yeah, that's it, Paddy.

So she took me over to listen to the talks given by this Jungian therapist. He was already retired. But after he'd given this talk, he said to me that he'd been to Burma because he'd become very interested in Buddhism, in the teaching of Buddhism. And when he got to Rangoon, he asked, where should he go to really learn about Buddhism? They said, well, you should go to the teaching monasteries up in Mandalay, the big university monasteries.

So he was given an interpreter. And he went up to talk to this very elderly monk. And he said he just sat in a chair surrounded by books. This elderly monk. And they discussed the Dharma for two hours. Thereabouts. And it was only when he was leaving that he realised he hadn't used the interpreter. And there was still that sense of shock on his face when he told me. Figure that out. I won't say any more.

Recollect past lives. People do recollect past lives. Even people who come here. A past life recollection, the telltale is that when that memory comes up, you are a different person. It's not as though you have a conversation, well, you know, I was Napoleon in my past life. And the person you're talking to said, so was I.

There's a lot of research done by Stevenson, so you can read about it. And I've got a video there about this little American boy. Has a tremendous past life experience recall as a pilot downed in the Pacific during the Japanese-American war there, Second World War. And, you know, he goes to see the sister of this particular pilot and they have a conversation. The sister says he knows things about the family that only we know. This guy lives somewhere else.

You also get extraordinary powers which are very hard to explain. There was a programme, I think, on this young girl, about 10 or 12 or something, and she's composed an opera which is being performed in Austria, and she's there directing the orchestra, telling the conductor what to do and what not to do. Somebody told me about it. I saw a little clip about her. I said, how do you explain that? I shall leave that to the scientists. So, past lives.

Divine eye. You can see things that... The divine eye is often also seeing a person as they really are. Remember, you sometimes get in Buddhism, you hear people saying when two people meet, there are six people there. There's you as I see you, and there's you as you see you, and there's you as you really are. And the same applies to me. So how we communicate is a wonder.

And the final one is the spiritual one. The fact that all the mental defilements are completely destroyed. And then one is known to be released from suffering.

Now, the reason I've pulled this up is that the Buddha talks... I mean, that's in the scriptures, all this is in the scriptures. But when we look at the actual faculties, they are, of course, something we have to take into daily life. And being the new year, these give us some idea of those qualities we need to really develop. I believe in Thailand, these, you know, they'll talk about the *iddhi*, these powers. Just in ordinary discourse, like, you know, if you want somebody to do better, they'll say, well, you know, practise these *iddhis*.

So the first one is *chanda*, which translates as sort of desire, but it's a very, very strong desire. Can you think of some time in your life when you really, really, really wanted something? That's the sort of desire you need to become liberated. So you really, really want it.

And then once you've... What that does is empower you to put tremendous energy behind that desire for success. When we say success here, you've got to be careful. You're aiming at something which you think is worthwhile in your life. Right? Now, in the meditation, of course, we don't aim to get *nibbāna*. What we aim is purity of heart and insight into the faculties. The rest happens of itself. But without that real strong commitment, you see.

And the third one is a total application of the mind. Here, *citta* means both mind and heart. It's not just thinking, for heaven's sake. It's just the whole being is devoted to what you're doing.

And to maintain a sense of discrimination. To maintain always that sense of questioning what you're doing. There's always that reflection about what we're doing.

So if you think of those four things now. So you really want something. Yeah, ice cream. You really want something. And then you put your energy behind it. Real energy. Commitment. No holds barred. And with that energy, you're putting the whole of your mental powers into what you're doing. But you maintain always that sense of self-examination, self-reflection, reflecting what you're doing.

Now, when we, according to the Buddha, when we exercise those four things, you will achieve something of what you've aimed out to do. So that's your... Those are your *iddhis*, those are your power, your four bases of power. Sometimes it's just put as the four bases of power. So power is what you can achieve. Influence is what you can get other people to do for you. But power is what you can achieve.

When you for instance want to do something, if you get confused between the edge of your power and the edges of influence then that's where your frustration... that's where your frustration arises. So you're not reflecting and saying well I can't do that or I can do it, see. A lot of that is experimentation as to what you can do, what you can't do.

So take these people who are very much involved in compassionate work, you know. During the bombing of one of those cities in Syria, they interviewed a British doctor who'd gone out there, you see. And... Terrible. What he was saying was pretty awful. You know, one was... There was a little boy who was just screaming all the time. And the rest of his family, six children, mother and father, had been blown to bits. And he was the only one left. And he would stand there and just scream and then go still and then scream again. And...

And he was telling these things and he says, you know, you just do what you can do. And that's, he knows the limit of his power. If he tries to do what he can't do, then you're in a burnout. So there's that sort of reflection in our lives about what we can do and can't do. Yeah?

So you get somebody like Mo Farah, you see? Didn't he get the personality of the... Finally, you see? Finally. So that guy's training 135 miles a week. He's running 135... Every day he runs. And on Sunday, he runs a special sort of marathon. No matter what. Something like five miles an hour.

So now, can you... You know, this is a reflection that you can bring up tomorrow when we... Do a little bit of reflection about our lives. Have you ever been so engaged in your life in anything? Have you ever been so engaged that it's drawn every last ounce of your commitment to it, you see?

Now, you can see that this is not only important in what we do, in anything you want to achieve, but spiritually speaking, it's a must. Can't be half-hearted. So that's why I was bringing up these four magical paths.

And then of course, in the end of course, you might be able to walk through a wall. But you have to have special exercises for that. And I should think for a long time it really hurts. Yes, we're very sceptical unfortunately. We live in a sceptical age. Interestingly enough, we're not very sceptical about science itself. Very good.

So I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even further confusion. May you, by your commitment to the Holy Life, be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 71

New Year Address on the Qualities Needed to Succeed: The Roads to Success

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

> *In this New Year's address, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a comprehensive overview of the 37 Bodhipakkhiyā Dhammā—the qualities conducive to awakening that encapsulate the Buddha's essential teachings. He traces how these teachings developed over time and notes their presence in both Theravāda and Sarvāstivādin traditions, demonstrating their foundational importance across early Buddhist schools.*
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> *The talk covers the Four Satipaṭṭhāna (establishments of mindfulness), explaining how the discourse was given specifically to lay practitioners at Kuru and represents a 'pure vipassanā' approach. Bhante discusses the subtle dimensions of body contemplation through the four great elements, the distinction between physical and mental vedanā (feeling), and how the dhammas section provides frameworks like the khandhas and Four Noble Truths for investigation. He then outlines the Four Sammappadhāna (right exertions), the five spiritual faculties (indriya) of saddhā, viriya, samādhi, sati, and paññā, and the Seven Bojjhaṅga (factors of enlightenment), emphasizing how these qualities arise naturally within awareness itself.*
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> *The heart of the teaching focuses on the Four Iddhipāda—the bases of spiritual power: chanda (strong desire or aspiration), viriya (energy), citta (wholehearted application of mind), and vīmaṃsā (discriminative investigation). Bhante presents these as practical qualities for the new year, urging practitioners to examine whether they have ever applied such total commitment to anything in their lives. He concludes with the Noble Eightfold Path as an outward flow from understanding to ethical conduct, demonstrating how these 37 factors interconnect to support liberation from suffering.*

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

I thought I'd go through the Bodhipakkhiyā Dhamma. You've all heard of those, I'm sure. There are thirty-seven of them, for heaven's sake. I remember years ago, there was a very good Canadian scholar called Warder. His introduction to Pali is still considered the best, if you want to study a bit of Pali. What he was saying was that these thirty-seven bodhipakkhiyā dhamma encapsulate the whole of the Buddha's teachings. And since then, of course, Rupert Gethin has written a substantial book on this.

These bodhipakkhiyā dhamma are found in the other recension of the scriptures by the Sarvāstivādin school. So there are two schools for which we still have the scriptures: one is this Theravāda school, and the other is the Sarvāstivādin school, which survives only in Chinese. They both come from the same period, within something like one hundred years of the Buddha's death, his Parinibbāna. So these thirty-seven encapsulate the fullness of his teachings.

Obviously he didn't start off like this. This was something that developed as he went around teaching. You can see that development in the early scriptures. You get five links to the dependent origination, and then it finally ends up with twelve. So it's not as though he rose from the seat and knew exactly how to get it across. That was also a learning process for him.

Remember when he actually meets his five companions, he begins to explain this. At first, they didn't want to meet him because they thought he'd gone soft—he'd given up the heavy-duty, self-mortification life. When they finally greet him and feel that something has changed about the man, he begins to teach. And one of the questions he asks is: have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say this sort of thing before? Very slowly, of course, they begin to realize that he'd made some sort of big breakthrough.

So what are these thirty-seven? I think you'll know them all. There's one or two that you might not have come across.

The first one is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. This is the discourse on the Satipaṭṭhāna, called the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. And that's the one, remember, he gave to lay people. He did a lot of travelling on the Gangetic plain, and he ended up at a place called Kuru Saddāma. At this place, perhaps on his second or third visit, he was taken by the way the people actually were practicing—like us, you see. So he gave them this special teaching. The discourse opens up with that: this talk was given to the people of Kuru Saddāma, the Kurus of Kuru Saddāma. We can take this as a teaching which was specific to the lay situation. Pure Vipassanā. Remember, the other form is with concentration. If you're good at concentration, do it. But if you're not, pure Vipassanā will get you there.

There are four of these establishments where you place your attention to investigate. The first one is the body. That has both a coarse and obvious sort of meaning, but also a subtle meaning. So it's the body as we know it, as we experience it, doing all its things—eating, sweating, and so on. I won't go into details. And there's the more subtle body that we experience through the mind in terms of the four great elements.

When we're experiencing weight or pressure, that sort of thing, that's called the earth element. If we're experiencing heat and the wonderful warmth of this room—are you all warm, by the way? Good—then that's the fire element. Something elastic, something that congeals, that's the water element. And finally, movement is your air element. When you're actually experiencing that, right at the base where the senses actually touch matter, you're experiencing the body at a more subtle level.

And it is subtle. I saw this program on smelling. Smelling takes place at a subatomic level, would you believe? Absolutely amazing. It's not even a chemical level. We think it's chemical, but it's not. It's at a subatomic level. I can't go into details, of course, only because I have no time. It's the same with the eye.

When you think about it, we're actually experiencing light at that subatomic level—these tiny, infinitesimal photons. Anyway, that's the body.

Then there's the whole section on feeling. Remember, the Buddha always describes feeling in these two ways: physical feeling and mental feeling. Pleasant, unpleasant. And an area in between that he calls neutral.

When we talk of emotions, there's no real word for emotions in the texts. I don't think so anyway. I think it's more to do with recognizing that there's a feeling in the body that we identify as a mental feeling. Some are pretty obvious, you know, like anger and anxiety—there's a feeling in the body that accompanies them. What happens with the mind and all that is another category, and that's your mental states. That includes all your thinking and your lack of it.

Citta, the next one—citta is more to do with your total mental states. And the fourth category is the dhamma, which actually refers to investigating all these three from certain points of view. So when something unwholesome comes up, we look at it from the point of view of the hindrances. When we look at the body and the congregation of factors that make up a human being, we look at the aggregates—the physical aggregates, the feeling aggregates, perception aggregates, and so on. Those are ways of investigating. Factors of enlightenment, they're the same, you see. And even the Four Noble Truths—you can look at your experience through the Four Noble Truths. This is suffering, and so on.

So that's the whole section. There's four of them, you remember, adding up to thirty-seven. These are your four foundations where you establish all the groundwork of your practice.

Now, there's three words that are repeated continuously throughout the discourse: ātāpī, sampajāno, satimā. Ātāpī is real energy, real commitment. It's connected to the word tapos, which means mortification, ascetic exercise—a real commitment. Sampajāna is your intuitive faculty, that which grasps and understands. Sati is your awareness.

This place, Satipanya—the word comes from the teachings of Buddhadāsa, who was a very famous teacher in South Thailand. He used to use this combination, satipañña, because it's pretty straightforward. It's your intuitive awareness. They're not two faculties; they're two sides of the same coin. We say it in English, for instance: first you look and then you see. It's that sort of grasping or understanding that comes upon the looking.

So when we're sitting, we're observing, we're letting things arise and we're observing them. And every so often we have a little insight. That's the way it works. You can't make that happen, you see. If you try to make it happen, you'll probably distort what you're looking at. So if you say to yourself, "Oh, that's impermanence"—well, you might have seen impermanence, but you're distorting it by thinking about it. It's more a grasping of it, an actual experience that something has arisen and passed away.

That's not mystical or magical. You just know that the breath has come to an end and there's a stop. It's finished. Then the next breath comes. So you're constantly aware of the beginning and ending of things. That's the radical impermanence that we live with.

So those are your four—we can go over this later—but those are your four establishments, sometimes called foundations of mindfulness, awareness.

Then you've got the four right exertions.

So these are pretty straightforward too. Preventing an unskillful state from arising. Abandoning what's already arisen which is unskillful. The arising of skillful states. And how to sustain and increase them.

So we've got four right exertions. Prevent unskillful states from arising. Abandon those that have arisen. Make skillful states arise—that's an exertion, right? To actually make it happen. And to sustain and increase those skillful states.

In ordinary daily life, when we see an unskillful state arise in our minds—some sort of anger, some anxiety or whatever—then you actually recognize it's there. And you don't let the mind wander on it, don't develop it. That's the second exertion. Then you

train yourself to be quicker on the mark so that you don't get caught up in it. And there are ways in which you can undermine certain things by balancing them with their opposite.

For instance, if a person has a problem with eating, you balance it with the process of digestion and excretion. So as soon as the idea of food comes up, the idea of going to the toilet comes up, and it has the effect of stopping that. It's the same with lust. If a person has a problem with lust, by actually looking at the disgusting nature of the body, that which disgusts us, then as soon as that comes up, you get this cancelling. Now, there's a danger here that you go too far on the disgusting side and you can't enjoy anything. So you have to be skillful with this one. These are exercises given to monastics. Not that they practice them.

So that's trying to prevent unskillful states. Just averting your eyes is sometimes a way of preventing—like, for instance, if all the bad news that we get is just getting you down all the time, don't listen to it. Don't look at the TV. It doesn't mean you cancel out your compassion. It's just that you don't want to get burned out. You don't want to be upset by it all. On the other hand, you might use it in order to increase empathy—to hear news or to read articles that are painful to read, and to bear that pain with it, so that one becomes more empathic.

And there's this constant effort to make skillful states arise. That's really our practice in daily life. In the morning, when I say make a resolution for the day—put a resolution in your mind for the day. It might be a regular one that you do every day, but certain days might want something other than your regular. The basic one is to live with an awareness imbued with loving-kindness. That's the Buddha's phrase. Affectionate awareness. So you're bringing not only a sense of awareness to what you're doing, but also a certain kindliness. And depending on the situation, it can be compassion, a desire to help—not to be confused with pity. Joy, to actually respond to another person's joy with joyfulness. And to be joyful in ourselves, for heaven's sake—don't forget, we also have to be joyful.

So we can make these resolutions and practice them during the day. And of course what we're doing is reconditioning ourselves. Remember, the Buddha was not liberated from conditioning as a human being. He just wasn't overwhelmed by it, wasn't caught up in it. But the body said hunger, so he went out for food. And when somebody asked him a question, he would respond to that question. So it's not as though what we're moving towards is some sort of completely unconditional life here as a human being. That's impossible. Everything's conditioned.

So the unconditioned is referring to a relationship we have with the life we're leading, and that's what we call that unshackling. That's the word nibbāna. Nibbāna means to unshackle. Sometimes it's given other meanings, but that seems to be its root meaning. Nirvana—it means unshackled, unchained.

And what is it that's unchained, unshackled? It's your awareness. Every time your awareness falls into some sort of identity or possession of something, then suffering is bound to rise, some sort of unsatisfactoriness arises. Being able to keep that sort of gentle distance—and yet within that distance not to lose the connection of empathy, compassion, and love. And joy. Don't forget joy.

So those are our four exertions.

And that's a daily task. That's an ongoing task. You don't stop that. You don't take a holiday from that. You can't take a holiday—not in this game.

I'll leave the four bases of magical power. We'll come to that in a minute. That's the special teaching for this retreat. For now, let's get into the five spiritual faculties. And these of course lock into the seven factors of enlightenment.

So the Buddha here is talking about really those basic faculties that you need to progress. Faith, a sense of trust. Remember, the English word "belief" also means to have faith in something without question—it has that sort of meaning. But here, *saddhā* is not about that sort of thing. It's about trust, conviction. Even conviction is not quite right. Trust.

You can't do anything without trust, can you? I mean, if you go on a high diving board and you don't trust yourself to do it, you won't do it, will you? You won't have the confidence. It's a sort of confidence, putting your faith in something. You won't do anything. You won't go anywhere with a friend unless you are confident that they are your friend. So that sort of trust is the base. Without that, you just don't move.

And when you don't have that, you suffer from sceptical doubt. And sceptical doubt is based on a sort of fear. Fear of what? Fear of failure, for instance. And that can be a real barrier to our lives. It can really mess you up, because every time you're about to do something, you have this doubt about yourself, or doubt about the other. So you never move.

With that trust, there comes this sort of energy. Once you've got that conviction, once you've got that confidence, then you empower it. You put your energy into what you want to do. And that supports your concentration, which is the third one—it supports

your steadiness of attention. And then there's the mindfulness, of course. Just being mindful. Being aware of what we're doing. It's as simple as that, basically. Being aware of what we're doing.

And that includes the ethical level, you see. It's no good being aware of killing somebody or stabbing somebody to death. I mean, you are aware, but it isn't quite the right awareness which is going to get us liberated. So underlying all these things, there's always this basic ethic about no harm. That's your fundamental one. No harm.

Sometimes you can't avoid doing harm. If you're a farmer, for instance, you can't always avoid it. So you have to accept there are certain limitations. But at least you don't do it with cruelty in the heart. That's the difference.

So concentration and energy go together. And then there's the wisdom, which is here just a way of looking at things. Basically, remember, that's always referring back to these three characteristics of existence—just to be constantly reminding ourselves. It doesn't have to become obsessional, but just noticing that things come to an end. Every time we fall into this wrong relationship of identifying—it's me, it's mine, mine, mine—you get into some sort of unsatisfaction. And this sense of not-self, you can see it from the point of view of control.

So remember, our control is minimal. When you're driving a car, there are times when you are locked into the driving and you have the impression, the feeling that you are in control of the car. And of course you are, in terms of where it's going and all that. But as you know, the car can suddenly stop for no reason. And that's it. Then you realise you aren't in control. You are not in control of the car in that absolute sense.

So it's the same with the body. We can wave our arms about and speak and all that sort of stuff, but ultimately the body itself is not under our direct control. So the question is—if it's not under your control, how can it be you? One of the definitions of me is that I am the centre of control. And the other one is through your meditation to begin to objectify things, to see everything as an object. The perceiver can't be the perceived.

And this takes you right back to that primal state of being the observer. Now that sense of self is not the sense of self that you get when you're proud or when you're embarrassed. That's something else. But that cool sort of sense of the observer within yourself—remember, that's the first object you make. And that's the image on that screen of consciousness which draws you into the world of the mind.

So when you come out and you're seeing images up here and you're feeling your knee down there and your heart's exploding with wonderful joy—all that, you see, remember, because you're the observer, you stepped out of it. You stepped out of it, you

become an observer. So that's a magical moment, that is. And it's making that more and more clear to ourselves. That takes us back into this observer, the feeler. And then of course you can explore that. There must be something there that knows, eh? Correct?

Then to do with that is the seven factors of enlightenment. So mindfulness of course. We've got the energy, you see. We've got the concentration. That's there. We've got this—it's badly translated as joy, right? The best translation is interest. It's a real interest. It's a driving curiosity. We'll come to that later. You've got to be really interested in what you're investigating. And that's the joy of the practice, yeah? Tranquility, calmness. And then there's that sense of investigation. So that's the question mark in the mind. If the question mark's not there in your mind, that's not vipassanā. You're doing some concentration exercise or whatever. So there has to be that sense of curiosity.

And finally, this quality of equanimity. Nyanaponika, the German monk, wrote *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Still an absolute classic. Always worth a read.

So he points out—he thinks, or he says in so many words—that equanimity is the greatest of all virtues. It keeps the balance, you see. Keeps us balanced.

In these seven factors, you don't get love. You don't get compassion. It's interesting, isn't it? The presumption is that it's always there. I mean, you wouldn't be doing it were it not that you had a sense of care for yourself, and a sense of understanding that it has an outward flow. As you purify the heart—remember that part of the meditation is purifying the heart—when you're allowing the hindrances to come up, the greed, the hatred, all that sort of stuff, when you're allowing that to come up as mental states, that's a purification. It's just blowing out. So that's the effort of purification, and within the practice there's your compassion towards yourself. It doesn't have to be stated.

So you've got those seven: mindfulness, the sense of investigation, the energy, the commitment, that sense of joy, the tranquility, the concentration, equanimity. Now, how can you establish these when the mind is in complete furore? When it's going berserk, or when you're actually falling asleep—where are the seven factors then?

This is what we have to understand. In the awareness itself, you get those seven factors. You've got your five khandhas, and normally speaking, we're locked into them and getting all confused by them. So in our meditation, we come out. This is the inner I, and you've got the five khandhas here. All those faculties come back into the awareness. The awareness has its equanimity. The awareness is calm. The awareness has that sense of question. You're drawing yourself out to this point of observation.

When you actually begin, you might feel them as something that you can experience within the body—tranquility, calmness. But don't think that because now you don't feel calm, the quality of tranquility isn't there. It's there within the awareness. So that's always the effort: to pull ourselves out and observe.

And then finally there's the Noble Eightfold Path. This is an outward flow. From right understanding you get right intention. I always think the better word is attitude—right attitude. And an attitude is a way of relating. Now this right understanding is translating itself into an ethic. And from that you get right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

It's interesting that he should make a big thing of livelihood, because you could put it all in action. Action is normally described as the moral laws—normally it's negative, what you shouldn't do, not kill and all that—but you can also add in there what we ought to be doing. But livelihood, remember, is very conditioning. What we do for a great deal of our lives, for eight hours a day, has to have an effect on our characters and on the way we relate to the world. Just compare a nurse to a policeman, or a soldier. Now, there are virtues in being a soldier. Liberals tend to be negative about soldiering, but soldiering has its qualities of courage and all that sort of stuff. Saint George, our patron saint. So right livelihood is put there, recognising that it is a real conditioning factor in our lives.

And then at the end of that, you've got the energy, the commitment, the mindfulness, and finally the concentration. Normally you get it divided as sila, samadhi, and paññā. Sila is your morality. Samadhi is your concentration, the steadiness of attention.

We're not talking about deep jhana states here. And mindfulness is your awareness, which has included within it this quality of grasping reality, this intuitive faculty.

Now you can see how this all revolves around itself, because if we develop a right attitude, that's going to feed back into our understanding. So the more we develop a right attitude—shall we say, to all these refugees, as some people feel very negative about them—but if they develop a right attitude, then wisdom arises, which is, of course, the recognition that we're all human beings, and we're all suffering to one degree or another. Things like that. So developing right attitude has an effect on the way we understand life.

And just being careful about the way we speak, you know, attending to the four aspects of speech: kindly speech, truthful speech, speech at the right time, at a suitable moment. Practising that has an effect on our understanding about relationship, about how we relate to each other.

So that's the Noble Eightfold Path.

Now I want to go back to the four bases of magical power. Where are my magical powers? Here we are.

So there are five magical powers, none of which very few people believe in our society. They just think it's a bit of a joke, really. The Buddha says that somebody who practises these wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one, he becomes many, and having been many, he becomes one. He can pass through walls and ramparts and mountains, walk over water, and sitting cross-legged, fly through the air like a winged bird.

Now how many of you are going to believe that? You see, we are deeply sceptical of these things. Deeply sceptical. It reminds me of—oh dear, I've forgotten her name—Deepamar. Yes, Deepamar, thank you. If you read the book on Deepamar, this Indian lady, she was able to do this. I'll give you a few examples afterwards.

Then there's the divine ear, the ability to perceive things beyond the normal range. Then there's the awareness of other beings, other individuals—to be able to read other people's minds.

Have I told you the story of this Jungian psychotherapist? You haven't heard it, right? Well, I was in the Isle of Man, and when I went over there, a couple of times we were taken—I went over with Pam and Paddy, that's it. So she took me over to listen to talks given by this Jungian therapist. He was already retired. But after he'd given this talk, he said to me that he'd been to Burma because he'd become very interested in Buddhism, in the teachings. And when he got to Rangoon, he asked where he should go to really learn about Buddhism. They said, well, you should go to the teaching monasteries up in Mandalay, the big university monasteries.

So he was given an interpreter, and he went up to talk to this very elderly monk who just sat in a chair surrounded by books. And they discussed the Dharma for two hours, thereabouts. And it was only when he was leaving that he realised he hadn't used the interpreter. There was still that sense of shock on his face when he told me. Figure that out. I won't say any more.

Then there's the ability to recollect past lives. People do recollect past lives—even people who come here. With past life recollection, the telltale sign is that when that memory comes up, you are a different person.

It's not as though you have a conversation where you say, "Well, you know, I was Napoleon in my past life," and the person you're talking to says, "So was I." There's a lot of research done by Stevenson, which you can read about. And I've got a video there about this little American boy who has a tremendous past life recall as a pilot downed in the Pacific during the Second World War. He goes to see the sister of this particular pilot and they have a conversation. The sister says, "He knows things about the family that only we know." This boy lives somewhere else entirely.

You also get extraordinary powers which are very hard to explain. There was a programme about this young girl, about ten or twelve years old, and she's composed an opera which is being performed in Austria. She's there directing the orchestra, telling the conductor what to do and what not to do. Somebody told me about it. I saw a little clip about her. I said, "How do you explain that?" I shall leave that to the scientists.

So, past lives. Divine eye. You can see things that... The divine eye is often also seeing a person as they really are. Remember, you sometimes hear people in Buddhism saying that when two people meet, there are six people there. There's you as I see you, and there's you as you see you, and there's you as you really are. And the same applies to me. So how we communicate is a wonder.

And the final one is the spiritual power. The fact that all the mental defilements are completely destroyed. And then one is known to be released from suffering.

Now, the reason I've pulled this up is that the Buddha talks about all this in the scriptures. But when we look at the actual faculties, they are something we have to take into daily life. And being the new year, these give us some idea of those qualities we need to really develop.

I believe in Thailand, they'll talk about the iddhis, these powers, just in ordinary discourse. If you want somebody to do better, they'll say, "Well, you know, practice these iddhis."

So the first one is chanda, which translates as a sort of desire, but it's a very strong desire. Can you think of some time in your life when you really, really wanted something? That's the sort of desire you need to become liberated. You really want it. And then what that does is empower you to put tremendous energy behind that desire for success. When we say success here, you've got to be careful. You're aiming at something which you think is worthwhile in your life.

Now, in the meditation, of course, we don't aim to get nibbāna. What we aim for is purity of heart and insight into the faculties. The rest happens of itself. But without that real strong commitment, you see.

And the third one is a total application of the mind. Here, citta means both mind and heart. It's not just thinking, for heaven's sake. The whole being is devoted to what you're doing.

And finally, to maintain a sense of discrimination. To maintain always that sense of questioning what you're doing. There's always that reflection about what we're doing.

So if you think of those four things now. You really want something. And then you put your energy behind it. Real energy. Commitment. No holds barred. And with that energy, you're putting the whole of your mental powers into what you're doing. But you maintain always that sense of self-examination, self-reflection, reflecting on what you're doing.

Now, according to the Buddha, when we exercise those four things, you will achieve something of what you've aimed to do. Those are your iddhis, your four bases of power.

Power is what you can achieve. Influence is what you can get other people to do for you. But power is what you can achieve.

When you want to do something, if you get confused between the edge of your power and the edges of influence, then that's where your frustration arises. So you're not reflecting and saying, "Well, I can't do that," or "I can do it." A lot of that is experimentation as to what you can do and what you can't do.

Take these people who are very much involved in compassionate work. During the bombing of one of those cities in Syria, they interviewed a British doctor who'd gone out there. Terrible. What he was saying was pretty awful. There was a little boy who was just screaming all the time. The rest of his family—six children, mother and father—had been blown to bits. He was the only one left. And he would stand there and just scream, then go still, then scream again.

The doctor was telling these things, and he said, "You just do what you can do." That's it—he knows the limit of his power. If he tries to do what he can't do, then you're in burnout. So there's that sort of reflection in our lives about what we can do and can't do.

Consider someone like Mo Farah. Didn't he finally get Sports Personality of the Year? So that man trains 135 miles a week. Every day he runs. And on Sunday, he runs a special sort of marathon—something like twenty miles.

Now, here's a reflection you can bring up tomorrow when we do a little bit of contemplation about our lives: Have you ever been so engaged in anything? Have you ever been so engaged that it's drawn every last ounce of your commitment to it?

You can see that this is not only important in what we do, in anything we want to achieve, but spiritually speaking, it's a must. You can't be half-hearted. That's why I was bringing up these four bases of power.

And then, of course, in the end you might be able to walk through walls. But you have to have special exercises for that. And I should think for a long time it really hurts. Yes, we're very sceptical unfortunately. We live in a sceptical age. Interestingly enough, we're not very sceptical about science itself.

Very good. I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even further confusion. May you, by your commitment to the Holy Life, be liberated from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 72

The First Discourse: Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta - Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma takes us through the Buddha's first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11) - the 'Turning of the Wheel of the Dhamma' delivered at the deer park in Sarnath. He begins by contextualizing the Buddha's journey from his training under Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta through the jhānas, his period of extreme asceticism, and finally his Middle Way approach that led to Awakening under the Bodhi tree.*
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> *Bhante vividly describes the Buddha's encounter with his five former companions who initially dismissed him as having 'gone back to luxury.' He then explores the discourse's core teachings: the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification, and the Middle Way that transcends both. The Four Noble Truths are examined in detail - dukkha as the five clinging aggregates (pañcupādānakkhandha), taṇhā (craving) in its three forms, the cessation of suffering in nibbāna, and the Noble Eightfold Path structured through sīla, samādhi, and paññā.*
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> *The talk concludes with the beautiful imagery of the Dhamma spreading through all realms and Venerable Koṇḍañña becoming the first disciple to achieve realization, earning the name Aññāta Koṇḍañña. Throughout, Bhante emphasizes the practical relevance of working with our ethical conduct and negativity as the foundation for wisdom to arise.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa.

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

What I want to do is take the first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the turning of the wheel of the law discourse.

Remember that he'd left his family and he'd trained under two particular teachers. *Āḷāra Kālāma* was first, taking him up through the jhānas and through the higher jhānas, and invited him to be a teacher. So he was quite an adept very quickly, because altogether the training took about six years. And then he goes to another person called *Uddaka Rāmaputta*, who takes him through the eight jhānas, the eight steps of jhānas. This doesn't satisfy him, remember.

So he then goes into these austerity exercises mainly around eating. He talks about himself eating less and less and less till he was down to a grain and he could hold his spine through his stomach, so if you try that you'll see how thin he was. And he gets himself to a point of disappointment really because he doesn't feel he's going anywhere and he thinks he's just creating more suffering. So then he's out on the road. He's left his companions.

And then this woman comes along, Sujātā. We know her name means auspicious birth. And she's carrying some sweetmeats for the local shrine, the local god. And seeing this poor wretch, she offers it to him. Of course, the scripture said he was glowing like a god by the side of the road. So you have to put aside all the hagiography, you know, the stories of saints.

So this revives him. He has this memory of childhood where he's watching his father doing the ploughing ceremony. So this is the point where his whole process changes around upon itself, the way he's looking at his practice. So instead of trying to achieve something, these wonderful mental states that people have talked about that he'd heard in the parks where people would gather to listen to the ascetics. By the way that seems to have been one of the big entertainments of the day. On the full moon people would go to these parks where there were shrines and all the ascetics would turn up and give talks and say how they'd got it and this person had completely got it wrong and there were big debates. So he's coming from that sort of background where there was a lot of fermentation going on spiritually speaking.

So his whole practice now turns around upon itself. Instead of seeking happiness, he now turns inward to try and find out how he's creating suffering. And with that inspiration, he sits under the tree. Within six hours, he cracks it. And one thing, remember, there's a point where it's called the Great Doubt, where Māra approaches him and basically says, look, who are you to try and achieve this? And puts a great doubt in his mind as to what he's trying to do. And there comes this point where the Earth Goddess rises and says he has every right to do this because he has the perfection of generosity, he's perfected the virtue of generosity. In other words, he's not doing it just for himself. He's doing it for all beings. So that gives him that little bit of courage. And he carries on and breaks through all the delusion.

So he said he spent seven weeks just sitting there amazed by what he'd discovered and going through his mind as to the meaning of it. And then there comes that point where he says to himself whether he wants to teach or not. And at first he thinks, no,

this is just too subtle. I'm never going to be able to get this across. And then he thinks of his two teachers and he finds out they've died, and then he thinks of his old companions, and he goes in search of them.

So he's around Bodh Gaya, presumably he's still where he was liberated, and he makes his way to the deer park at Sarnath, which is near modern-day Varanasi, which was an old capital, Benares, of that kingdom around the Ganges plain. And it's about 250km, about 155 miles he's got to walk. And that's by modern roadways. So presumably in those days it was little pathways from village to village. And he finally finds them.

It takes half an hour by plane. Five hours to drive. So it says actually walking 50 hours. So anyway, as he approaches them, they recognise him.

This is a lovely setting here. This actually comes up in the Vinaya, the book on the rule, and the discourses. And the gracious one, that's Ānanda Jyoti, he's well known for his work on poetry. He's got a rather lovely website. And I knew him, he used to come to, he was part of the group of monks at Kanduboda where I was. He now lives in Thailand, can't stand coming back to England, it's too cold he says. So he talks about the gracious one, the Bhagavā, while walking gradually on walking tour approached Bārāṇasī and the group of five at the deer park in Isipatana.

The group of five saw the Bhagavā coming from afar and after seeing him they resolved among themselves: "This ascetic, Gotama, who is coming, friends, is given to luxury. His forsaking the striving has gone back to luxury. He should certainly not be worshipped or stood up for, nor should his bowl and robe be taken. However, we can prepare a seat, and if he wishes to sit down, then he can do so."

But as the Bhagavā approached the group of five, the group of five were unable to continue with their agreement. And after going out to greet the gracious one, one of them took his bowl and robe, one prepared his seat, one placed water for washing his feet, the footstool and the footstand. And the Bhagavā then sat down on the prepared seat and washed his feet.

So you've got this lovely scene where they've determined him to be a waster now. He's lost it, really. But there must have been either old friendship, the connection of old friendship. He might have been, in a way, an unrecognised leader of the group. But something made them drop this rather cold greeting that they were going to give him. And they're finally sitting down.

But anyway, they're not letting him off the hook because they approached him and they called him by name, presumably Siddhattha, it doesn't actually say, but presumably by his ordinary name. They address him as *āvuso*, a friend. So in the order, if somebody is younger than you in years, that's in how many years they've been in the order, you address them as *āvuso*. And if they're older than you, you address them as *bhante*. That's scriptural. Every culture has its own way of distinguishing between younger monks and older monks.

Then the Buddha addresses them. So he now calls Nibbāna the deathless. He's pumping it for them, you see.

And they reply: "But you, friend Gotama, by that ascetic lifestyle, that practice, that difficult way of living, did not arrive" - so the practice that he was doing with them - "did not arrive at the state beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight. So how can you now, given to luxury, forsaking the striving, gone back to luxury, attain a state beyond human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight?"

Ha! So he then repeats this then. He said, the realised one, the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata literally means someone who's gone there. And it's translated in lots of ways. I think Professor Harvey, whom some of you might know, he's written a couple of good books and he used to run the online course, says "one who is attuned to reality." So that's taking it a little bit far.

"The Tathāgata is not given to luxury, is not forsaking the striving, and has not gone back to luxury. The Tathāgata is a worthy one, a perfect sambuddho, lend an ear, monks, I'll instruct you about the attainment of the deathless, and so on and so forth, to be experienced and attained by yourselves in this very life."

So again, in those times, presumably, everything was said three times, and if you didn't get what you wanted after three times, you had to shut up. So they approached him again with the same accusation that he's gone back to luxury. How could he possibly have attained any enlightenment if, while he was doing the real practice of self-mortification, he'd attained nothing at all?

So he goes through the round a second time and the third time they approach him. But this time he answers, "Are you aware of my having spoken to you like this before?" And they say, well, certainly not. And then he goes through it again. And finally, they're ready to be, they're ready to open to the teachings.

So that's a lovely little scene, if you can imagine that for yourselves.

This came up, I did a Skype with the Brighton group. What happens to a lot of people, especially if they've come from a religion which is devotional, like Catholicism, they come into Buddhism with that fervour for the meditation and all that. And then there comes this dryness, this lack of heart connection with the teachings. And I know people who, because of that, will continue their practice, but then will go to church. And I know of one person, for instance, who really doesn't go to the monastery, Amaravati, anymore, but actually just goes to join the Christian group, mainly because of that heart connection.

So the way you would develop that, if you feel that, is by contemplating the life of the Buddha and making that connection to a past personage. So a person might do it for many various things. Like for instance, if somebody now was into civil rights, they might bring to mind people like Nelson Mandela and reading their history, reading their biography, you get that connection and from that connection you get that energy that comes of wanting to be like that person. So that's the devotional thing that some people are drawn to. I mean that's why I've got all these statues around. So there you go, you can make a visual heart connection with the Buddha. So you see my Catholic upbringing.

So anyway, then he begins the teachings, and he starts off: "There are these two extremes amongst that one who's gone forth not to associate with, which is devotion and clinging to the pleasures of the senses, and which is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, and not connected with the goal." It's not leading anywhere, in other words.

Now, that would attune to us as a materialist goal, whereby if you think that this is the only life you have, you may as well enjoy it, for heaven's sake. I mean, what's the point of not enjoying it? So your whole effort is in trying to make this time, to make this life something which is going to deliver at least some level of happiness and as regular as possible. So that's why you get people moving, whether they're entirely conscious of it or not, towards fame, power, riches or just sensual pleasure, or all of them if they can.

So it's a case of, the goal for a materialist has to be to be happy now. But their happiness has to be based upon what this psychophysical organism can give them. So it has to be some mental, emotional, mental state, some emotion, which they generate in themselves by accumulating something outside themselves.

They might be adept, they might get into spiritual practice and get into these beautiful mental states, and there would have been people, even in the Buddha's time, who would have practised those without any real understanding, or without any real faith, shall we say, or belief in some sort of future life, because there were materialists in the Buddha's time. And some who even said that it didn't really matter whether you went

down one side of the Ganges murdering and pillaging and all that, and up the other side, with great acts of compassion, your fate was set. And when you died, that was the end of it. So there was all sorts of understandings in those days, as we have these days.

In fact, this materialism in a sense has entered into Buddhist mainstream as secular Buddhism. Not all secular Buddhists are materialists in that complete way, but definitely it opens up the Buddhist teachings to people who are grounded in science, scientism really. You know, the belief that everything comes out of matter, and that's about it. So at least it gives them some way of creating happiness in this life, which is a bit more lasting, really by seeing this whole process of attachment and desire. So that's where it centres, on desire and attachment. And that, of course, takes them back to the whole business of identity. So you never know. They might become fully liberated and they'll be in a state of shock for eternity.

So that's the business of self-indulgence. And of course he'd left all that. What had awakened him, remember, was seeing these four great signs, these four messengers from the gods, as they said. So he's realising in his late, middle twenties maybe, which is a time when normally you leave youth, and you suddenly realise that what you're looking at is sickness, ageing and death, and that there might be an escape. So those were the four images that are given in the scriptures in a metaphorical way: the sick person, the elderly person, the corpse, and somebody sitting under a tree suggesting that there might be a way out of this problem. So he's left the life.

Now, then he, in a sense, followed a similar trajectory when he did the jhāna. He was trying to attain happiness through this psychophysical organism. And he finds that that also has a problem because when he comes out of those jhānic states, then he just gets neurotic again and depressed and anxious.

So that's one reason, I think, why he then goes into this mortification stuff. Remember that mortification is not the same as renunciation. So this mortification that he was practising, the general understanding was that the soul was trapped in the body. The body was an expression of your *kamma*, your bad *kamma*. You know, else you wouldn't be born here. And so the idea was that through this self-mortification, letting go of the body, the soul would be released into a heavenly place.

This is, the Jains definitely have that idea. That's why they're so careful about not doing anything which harms, even when they don't mean to. Because even when you don't mean to, something suffers. I mean, you stand by accident on an elephant and it suffers and you've got consequences, which you might never have meant, you see, is

the point. So that's why you see Jain monks being very careful, you know, sweeping. Even when they are sleeping, when they want to turn over, they wake up in order to brush away any insects that might be underneath them. I mean, they really are spot on.

So that was the idea anyway, at least one of the main ideas. So the Buddha would have had that in the back of his mind, that he was going to attain this eternal bliss by drawing the body down almost to the point of death.

In the Jain religion, it's considered to be a saintly thing to do, by the way, is to let go of the body through starving yourself. And I actually looked that up for myself, about starvation. There's no suffering, it seems. This idea that we have that if you stop eating, you become ravenous, and you'd eat an animal alive if you caught one, is based on images that we see of people in famine situations where they eat a little starvation. So you're feeding the body and the body wakes up with its hunger. But actually, if you just stop eating, the body goes into this starvation mode. And the passage I read says that the vast majority of animals die just because they can't eat anymore. You know, like the bird gets too old, it can't feed itself, it just dies. And you get these ketones, which I haven't a clue what they are, but...

But what happens is the body seems not to suffer at all. It knows how to just draw on itself, and then one or two of the organs just stop and that's the end of it. I was particularly interested in this because a very close friend of mine died from Crohn's disease.

Anyway, that's the underlying philosophy, should we say, that's driving him to practise these self-mortifications. Renunciation is letting go of attachment to something, so it's not as though you stop eating—you just try to distinguish between the desire which is coming from ordinary appetite from the desire which is seeking happiness in food, which is a completely different idea.

So what he says of that: he says it's painful, *dukkha*; he says it's ignoble, and it's not connected with the goal. So he's trying to get this balanced.

Now, we talk about the middle way, which he then goes on to explain. Just to read it to you: "Not having approached either of these two extremes, monks, the middle practice—the middle way—was awakened to by the Realised One, by the *Tathāgata*, which produces vision, produces knowledge, which leads to peace, deep knowledge, complete awakening and emancipation." *Abhiññāṇa* means knowledge. *Abhi* means very great or very deep—probably could translate it as transcendent knowledge.

"Now, what is this middle way, monks? The awakened to has realised one," etcetera, etcetera, and that's the Eightfold Path.

Now, when we say the middle way, you might think, well, it's a bit of moderation. You do a bit of this and a bit of that, and you're in the middle somewhere. But although it's called the middle way, it's a completely different psychology, a completely different understanding. The middle way doesn't quite—"middle" doesn't quite get to the root of it. It's more, I would have thought, transcendent of those two paths and yet feeding into these two paths.

So on the one side you're still enjoying life, but you're trying not to be attached to it. And on the other side, you're not mortifying yourself, you're not trying to blame the body for anything, but on the other hand, you are renouncing things that you see is not good for you. But it's coming from a different understanding about how we've got into this situation, which goes back to this business of identity and the self.

Anyway, that's just a little side point. So then there's the Eightfold Path, which we'll come to in a bit. And then he goes through the actual Four Noble Truths.

This discourse isn't verbatim, obviously. I mean, he wouldn't have come out with such a formula, such a formulated talk. I mean, you might think, well, he's been there under a tree for seven weeks, so he's got his talk in his head. Because remember, he's illiterate. It's very difficult for us to grasp that, isn't it? He's illiterate. People didn't read, didn't write. It was all memory stuff. But obviously he would have continued in a conversational mode, and then later on the teaching becomes formalised. And so this is a formalised teaching just laying the basis upon which all this teaching is based. And that's why in a sense it can be called the turning of the wheel of the law.

There was a monk who actually suggested they put the symbol of the wheel on one of the doors of the monastery, on the top of the door of the monastery.

So we have to see this discourse not so much as verbatim—in fact it's very difficult to say we have any of the original words of the Buddha. There are parts of the scriptures which are very, very old, but of course they developed as they went through. And what happened was that they would hear a talk. It would be systematised into ways of memory. That's why we've got so many lists. And then groups of monks would take responsibility for remembering certain groups of scriptures. They were called the *bhāṇakas*, the reciters. So it would be very rare if there was ever one monk or nun who knew all the scriptures. So it depended on which group of monks you were with, the flavour of the teachings that you got, because it's quite a collection when you think about it.

So scholars, academics can see that there are different levels in the Pali, in the way the Pali is structured. So Bhikkhu Bodhi has just translated the *Sutta Nipāta*, which is one of the earliest strata. It's a great big book—which isn't such a collection of dis-

courses, it's not such a big collection, but he's added all the commentarial stuff to it. Included in that are the two chants that we do in the evening. The loving-kindness one and the—sorry, the morning loving-kindness one—and the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the blessings. That comes from that stratum too.

So also they would create verse, which would make it easy to remember. So we have to see this discourse as really turning the wheel of the law in the sense that it's the platform upon which all his teaching is based.

So he starts off now by saying: "Look, this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering." Now, birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering. Death is also suffering. Getting what you don't want is suffering, and being separated from what is dear to you is suffering. Not obtaining what one longs for is suffering. In short, the five grasping *khandhas* is suffering.

So now, here in the discourse, we have the first way that he looks at the human being through these five aggregates. And there's a purpose to it, of course. The first one is the body and how the mind experiences the body—so that's the primary sensations that you feel: heat, cold, etcetera. And then there's feeling, where we distinguish between what's pleasant and unpleasant. That's a natural process within us. You can't stop it. As soon as you feel something, we judge it to be either pleasant or unpleasant. This isn't a bad judging—this is just the way we are in the world.

And then there's perception, which moves into memory. And also those feelings, remember, include the feelings caused in the body by mental states. And then we have these volitional conditionings. And then finally consciousness, which is the screen upon which everything happens. It's a multidimensional screen. Everything you experience is flashing on that screen.

So what he's pointing to there is the volitional conditionings which we actually are developing, producing—our habits. That's the best word I've come across for it, just our habits, the way we reinforce certain patterns of behaviour, patterns of thinking, etcetera. And some of them are wholesome, some of them aren't.

But he says it's the clinging nature of these—it's the way we cling to this psychophysical organism. That's what it amounts to. Is what is suffering. The clinging. That's really important. If I give another talk on dependent origination, remember that. There's the feeling, there's the reaction to it of not wanting it or trying to overcome it, and then there's the identity: "I don't want." And what we've got to really grasp is that the suffering doesn't start until the point of identity.

Which is often—it's a difficult point to really grasp because when you're in yourself and something horrible is coming up and you can feel the negativity, it's difficult to realise that actually you've separated out of it. And it's only when that separation becomes more and more obvious that you realise that actually there is this gunk going on, but there is no suffering as such. And that's a different quality when you suddenly say, "I can't handle this," and then you drop into it, as it were. And that's the point of suffering.

So that's why he doesn't say the five desiring *khandhas*. He says the five grasping *khandhas*—the ones that we grasp with a sense of self.

There is, at the same time, in other discourses, a different description of *dukkha*. So this word *dukkha*—that's the root word upon which he builds everything, this *dukkha*, which just means hard to bear.

First of all, there is that *dukkha*—*dukkhatā*—just the pain, the suffering that we engender because of the unsatisfactoriness of the body and mind. Then there's the suffering that arises because of the fact that everything we experience is a compendium. It's a conjunction of things. It's an imminence. It's where all these little bits and pieces come together to create something. And so nothing has any reality. Nothing has any substance to itself. Everything is dependent on something else.

And just contemplating the body—and that it's made up of these billions of cells which can all go their own way if they want, and that's the end of it—you begin to recognise that everything is, it doesn't have that substantiality that we think it has or we experience it as having.

And then of course there's a suffering that comes from change. You can't just stop. You can't say, "Well, this is it, this is what I've always been looking for—stop the world." It doesn't happen.

So those are your three types of suffering: just the ordinary suffering of life and whatnot, which includes sickness, ageing and death; there's a suffering that comes because there's nothing substantial in us—there's nothing we can hold on to and say, "Well, this is truly me" of the psychophysical organism; and everything that we experience is constantly changing.

So that's how he describes the noble truth of suffering. Then there comes the second one: the noble truth of the arising of suffering, *samudaya*, the arising of suffering.

And now he's pointing to this word *taṇhā*. So remember, there's another word in Pali, *chanda*, which means desire. And that can be good or bad—so it's your motivation, it's your intention which makes it good or bad. But the word *taṇhā* is a specific word which refers to desires which just lead to suffering one way or the other. And so you get other translations for it like thirst, lack—a lack. Remember, desire comes out of a state of unsatisfactoriness at some level or other and is itself a state of suffering.

To be in a state of desire is not a pleasant state. It only becomes a pleasant state when we see the end of the desire, that it's going to be satisfied or gratified. If it's not, then it's a state of suffering. So desire comes out of suffering and is itself a state of suffering. Suffering here used in the widest sense—unsatisfactoriness.

That's the other thing too—that *dukkha* used to be translated as suffering. And then of course people said, "Well I don't suffer," meaning that they were having a good life at that time. So they had to find another word for it and they came up with unsatisfactoriness. And that's the other side, remember, that I always keep pumping: this business of how indulgence in pleasure has its comeuppance.

Yes, he says desire is the cause of suffering. The craving for sense pleasure. And he divides it now, this *taṇhā*, into three types: the craving for sense pleasure, *kāma-taṇhā*, *bhava-taṇhā*, *vibhava-taṇhā*—craving for continuation and the craving for discontinuation.

Now, *kāma-taṇhā*, the desire for sense pleasures—that's, well we know that, that's sincere enough. *Bhava-taṇhā* is the desire to make it continue, but it's also the desire to keep becoming. So it both refers to the desire of trying to maintain a certain pleasure as best you can, but it's also referring to the self wanting pleasure. The self wants to continue, wants to keep living.

And the same with *vibhava-taṇhā*. *Vibhava-taṇhā* refers to the fact of wanting to get rid of what you don't want—that's sort of aversion to it. But it also refers to wanting to get rid of yourself. Either you're just fed up and bored and depressed and you dive under the duvet or something, or you actually want to make your way to a bridge or something.

Whenever I say that, I always remind this lovely clip that I had from a comedian—I can't remember his name now, but he's extremely funny, around about the '50s, something like that. And he meets this—he's going to jump off a bridge in London, off the Westminster Bridge. And a copper comes. He says, "Excuse me, sir." He says, "You know, you mustn't do that." And they have this sort of argument about life and all that sort of stuff. And the sketch ends when they both jump off the bridge. It was really funny.

So yes, that's the *taṇhā*, right? Sense pleasures, always wanting to maintain, wanting to continue, wanting to live, wanting to get rid of—*vibhava-taṇhā*. I mean, these are pointing us to actually investigate in our practice—to actually name it and say, "Oh, that's an aversion, and that's me being averse to myself, I want to get rid of myself at this present time." So it's just being aware of these—it's just pointing to certain mental habits that we have.

And then, of course, he makes this great statement: he says that there is a noble truth of the cessation of suffering. He says it's the complete fading away, the cessation without remainder of that craving. It's the liberation, the letting go, the release and non-adherence.

So that's a really very direct statement. There's no pulling back on that statement. It's not as though, say, modern psychotherapies might say, "Well, you can get to a decent accommodation with life, you can sort of be generally content and whatnot," but here he makes—I don't know of any psychotherapist that says that there's a complete end to suffering here and now. Not—I mean, a lot of religions will point to the afterlife, you know, like you're working at it now and then you get to the gates and you're away. But this statement is right here and now. And of course you find the same in Hinduism of course—that liberation is right here and now if we work hard enough for it, or if we want it enough.

So that brings us to now the path itself: the Eightfold Path. Now, the normal way that it's written down is, of course, right view, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. But it's normally taught in the division of *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, which is moral, ethical—ethic life, your development of meditation, and then the wisdom comes from it.

So now this actually brings it, looking at it that way, actually brings it to, I think, a correct view of how to approach our lives. Coming back from the way that the Buddha—that is put here—there is this great misunderstanding that lies within us, this delusion about who we are, or what it is, or however you want to phrase it. And because of that, we make a sort of bargain with life. We say, "Well look, this is it, this is the way it is, so I'm now going to try and make the best I can of this life, seeking happiness there."

So remember, that's our—that's the platform that we're working off. We're not working off—nobody works off, even the most horrible characters in history—they're not working off the platform "I hate." They're working off the platform of "I want to be happy." If that "I want to be happy" moves towards, "Well, for me to be happy, I've got to

hate you," and that's the way it moves. But our basic human nature right down at that basic is we're actually seeking happiness. Everybody's trying to seek happiness one way or the other.

And because of this wrong understanding, of course, we form a wrong relationship with the world, thinking that if I accumulate things, that's going to make me happy. So there's your greed. And then you've got to defend it because somebody else wants your accumulation. And if whoever wants your accumulation is bigger than you, we've got to run for it.

So those three things—acquisitiveness, aversion and fear—are right at the base manifesting this wrong understanding. So the way that we behave from this wrong understanding—we're not always behaving from wrong understanding, but the way we're behaving from wrong understanding is the way back to undermining that wrong understanding. So it's by living ethically, looking at our moral lives, being careful about what we allow the mind to get caught up in—

or what we indulge the mind with that's the way back as it were to the original problem because as you come back you can feel the energies that are based on this delusion you know renouncing something that renunciation gives you an inkling of how much you are attached to what you want to give up yeah when you're with somebody whom there's a natural aversion for then you're with that part of you that doesn't want to be with anything which is upsetting.

And when you're in a frightening situation, a situation that causes anxiety, you're coming back from it. So by working with our ethical life, by working with our moral lives, which manifests in these attitudes, mental states, emotional states, we're actually coming back to the original problems.

Which is the identity and at base the last guard against undoing that delusion is fear. See, the loss of identity. Who are you? And all that sort of stuff. And that we come close to whenever we are struck by a serious illness or eventually our death. That's when we'll hit that point. And the fear and the aversion that arises for that is the measure of this delusion.

So I always think rather than our meditation, always trying to think about attaining something, some sort of insight, some great explosive experience that's going to change my life. You're far better off working with the negativity within us because there you can eventually begin to see some results. And as the heart begins to purify itself, this intelligence, this *satipaññā*, this intuitive awareness is clearer, because remember, the delusion lies in looking, it doesn't lie in the body, the body's not deluded, the body's just

the body, it doesn't lie within the heart, the heart's just feeling, that's all it is, it's only because we personalise it, it's only because I say, I am angry, or I am afraid that it becomes a sense of me, the heart is just feeling, that's all it is, feeling and the head is just thinking imagining so the delusion isn't there they are manifestations of delusion the delusion lies in this *satipaññā* itself, in other words it's the Buddha himself within us which is deluded so it's coming back on that where we can begin to have little insights as to this business of how we create suffering, how we imagine things are going to last when nothing lasts at all.

And how we give things concrete, how we stabilise things, how we conceptualise things into some sort of reality which we presume will continue. So all that begins to be undermined when we actually begin to look at our ethical lives. So that's produced as right speech, of course, right attitude. He's translated right thought here. But it's more right attitude, I think. Right speech, right action, right livelihood. Don't forget our livelihood, what we do for most of the day, has a conditioning effect on us.

Then there's the meditation itself, which is what we're doing here, the *vipassanā*. And then the insights come, the *sammādiṭṭhi*. So if you look at your practice as *sīla samādhi paññā*, I think it moves much more easily. We don't feel so frustrated about not attaining something. Just allow that to happen as the purity grows.

Anyway, once he'd done this, there's this lovely part now. Then he goes into the three modes of each of these noble truths. The first mode is that there is suffering. It's just a bold statement. There is the noble truth of suffering. And then he says that this ought to be known. It ought to be known. It ought to be understood what he means by suffering. And then he tells us that he has fully understood it.

And then he talks about the arising of suffering, the cause of suffering. And he says that this ought to be given up. So this is where academics become, I think, a little silly. Because it says the noble truth of desire has to be given up. So how can you give up a noble truth? But it's shorthand, isn't it? It's shorthand for it is true to say that we ought to give up desire, you know. Never mind so and then he says that he has given it up see it has been given up then there's a cessation of suffering which has which ought to be realised and he has realised it and then finally the path leading to it which ought to be developed and that he has developed it fully so we ought to be moving to those final statements that you know we have overcome desire we have attained Nibbāna and we have practised the path to its end.

So when to me monks in regard to these four noble truths turned like this in three ways. So that's also this idea of a wheel. Wheel within wheels. Especially in the Abhidhamma you'll find this word *vaṭṭa* coming up all the time. There are little wheels within wheels. Little ways like that one in Dependent Origination is an internal wheel, you see. The feeling, the desire, the *taṇhā*, and then the grasping. It revolves around each other.

Knowledge and insight, as it really is, was quite clear. Then, monks, I did declare to the world with its gods, Māra and Brahmā, to this generation with its ascetics and brahmanas, princes and men, that I was the fully and perfect *Asambuddho* with unsurpassed complete awakening. To me, knowledge and insight arose. Sure is my liberation of mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more continuation.

That's a lovely statement, right? You can imagine him saying that, you know, it's just... If you said that here in this room, we'd all go, oh yeah.

So then there's this lovely paean that says, the master sweet of the truth, sorry, hearing these words, the earth deities, all the gods in the universe, Heaven of the Four Kings, the matchless wheel, this was heard say, the matchless wheel of the truth that cannot be set in motion by a recluse, by a Brahmana, a Deva, a God, a Māra, a Brahmā, anyone in this world is set in motion by the Blessed One at the Deer Park at Isipatana near Varanasi.

And these words were heard in the upper Deva realms, in the *Cātumahārājika* realms. in the *Tāvatiṃsa* and it goes all the way through these all these heavens to the *mahābrahma* the *parittābha* the *appamāṇābha* there's a whole load of them and then and and this cry goes up it's a lovely sort of image all the way through these realms from the lowest right up to the heavens and it says the matchless wheel of truth that cannot be set in motion by a recluse or a brahman or a Deva, or a Māra, or a Brahmā, or anyone in this world, is set in motion by the Blessed One and the Deoparkat, Isipatana and Ibn Aris.

Thus, at that very moment, at that instant, the cry that the wheel of truth had been set in motion spread as far as the Brahmā realm, and the system of ten thousand worlds trembled and quaked and shook, and a boundless, a boundless sublime radiance, surpassing the effulgence of the gods, appeared in the world.

And then the Blessed One uttered this paeon of joy. Verily Koṇḍañña has realised. Verily Koṇḍañña has realised. The Venerable Koṇḍañña then receives the name *Aññā* Koṇḍañña. So there was one of his companions who got it.

So that's how this lovely discourse ends with this wonderful sort of image of it rising of the wheel of the teaching rising up through all the heavens and get to the top and then he finally acknowledges that this old companion of his has now become fully liberated so I can only hope this has not confused you or anything but has inspired you to devote yourself entirely to the practice for liberation awaits us

May you be fully liberated from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 73

Scientism, Romanticism, Psychotherapy - and Buddhadhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 59 min

In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the three primary cultural 'avenues' through which Buddhism enters Western society: scientism, romanticism, and psychotherapy. Just as Buddhism was initially filtered through Taoism when it arrived in China, these Western frameworks inevitably colour how we receive and interpret the Dhamma, sometimes obscuring its fundamental teachings.

Bhante examines scientism's materialist reductionism, which struggles to explain how objective physical processes give rise to subjective conscious experience - the 'hard problem of consciousness.' He contrasts the annihilationist view of scientific materialism with the Buddha's clear statements about the transcendent dimension described in the Udāna: 'There is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned.' The talk explores how romanticism's emphasis on peak experiences and 'oceanic feelings' of oneness with nature, while valuable, falls short of the Buddha's teaching on complete liberation. Similarly, psychotherapy's focus on accommodation and mental wellbeing, though beneficial, differs fundamentally from the spiritual goal of transcendence.

Drawing on the Buddha's teaching that both eternalist and annihilationist views are 'thickets of views,' Bhante emphasises the Middle Way understanding of conditioned existence and the possibility of escape through wise discernment. He illustrates how the contemplative life - even one seemingly devoid of worldly 'peak experiences' - can lead to eternal liberation, contrasting sharply with our liberal society's pursuit of experience for its own sake. The talk encourages practitioners to maintain intellectual humility, remaining open to exploration rather than prematurely concluding what cannot be directly known.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Now I'm going to talk about things that I know virtually nothing about. That's a good start. Really I'm just trying to see what some people call the gates—though I prefer to think of them as the avenues down which Buddhism enters into our society. You can't help but filter out what you don't want and see the Buddhadhamma from a particular angle, because that's the way we're conditioned.

For instance, when Buddhism went to China, it became seen through Taoism, and it took quite a long time for people there to realise that Buddhism wasn't quite the same as Taoism, although there were obviously connections. It's the same with us. There are obvious connections, but in a sense these can obscure the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. So there are three areas I'm going to try and point this out in relation to: the first one is science, the second one is romanticism, and the third one is psychotherapy.

Let me begin with science. We have to make a distinction between science, which is the exploration of our physical world, and scientism, which is the philosophy that's drawn from that. These days, scientific materialism is really what takes over most people who are involved in science. Rupert Sheldrake, whom some of you might know, has just written a book about spiritual practices, and he was saying that it was rare to find a group of scientists who weren't materialists.

One of the leading figures is the biologist E.O. Wilson, famed for starting a whole new discipline on the social behavior of animals and humans—the biological aspects of social behavior. He wrote a book called *Consilience*, which means the unity of knowledge. The subtitle is "Unity of Knowledge." It's where all knowledge comes together and forms some sort of whole concept. This is what he says: "From the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, all are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequence, to the laws of physics."

So when you're looking upwards, if you were to create a hierarchy, the first thing you see is physics—stones, the physics of life. From that you get chemistry, from that you get biology, then psychology, sociology, and so on. Everything looks as though it has all arisen from this physical base. That's what Wilson is basically saying. Interestingly enough, he remains agnostic as to whether God exists or not. So that's the basic reductionism of scientism.

One book that I read which was helpful was *Scientism: A Word We Need* by a man called Crowburn. He's written it for people like me who know nothing, so it was quite enlightening. Some of the other books I read became a little bit too technical. There's lots of material on the web, if you care to look it up, with academic criticisms of scientism.

Here we have a couple of problems that have arisen. The first one is this: there's no way of finding out, no way they can tell, how the objective physical world of chemicals and neurons and all those things that we can test translates into the subjective world that we actually experience in terms of emotions, images, moods, and sensations.

There's a special word for those things—they're called qualia, or as we might understand it, phenomenal experiences. And there's no understanding as to how the flow of consciousness arises out of that material base.

So it's a presumption. It's a presumption that everything we experience internally is arising out of matter. That's not, of course, what all the spiritual traditions are saying. All spiritual traditions tell us that the mind is something separate, something other. In Buddhism, it's something other, but of course still falls under the three characteristics—well, the main two: impermanent and insubstantial, not-self.

If you want to read more about this problem, there's a great essay by the philosopher Professor Nagel in which he tries to point this out through the question: what does it feel like to be a bat? Now, a bat sees things through hearing.

It can actually discern what insect it's pursuing and whether to eat it or not—through sound alone. It's quite remarkable, the sensitivity of it. And what Nagel is saying is that it's impossible for him ever to know what it feels like to be a bat, because the inner experience is so different from the way we experience things.

Now, all this has brought about a sort of rethink about the whole problem. On one side, you have philosophers and scientists who talk about reductionism—the view that everything will eventually be proven to arise out of subatomic particles. But there are people beginning to question that. There's a very good talk on TED by a philosopher called David Chalmers, and he's positing that consciousness is actually part and parcel of the universe, just as matter, time, and space are. He's very careful not to move into a sort of pantheism—God is everywhere, anything like that. He doesn't want to overstep the line. But in this way, he's saying that consciousness, being embedded in the whole process of the universe, begins at the very base as a sort of proto-consciousness, and it grows.

This reminds me of another thinker—Teilhard de Chardin. He was a Jesuit, a Christian philosopher, and a paleontologist. Because of his study of skulls and ancient skeletons, his word for this growing consciousness was the "encephalization" of consciousness. As consciousness grew, the brain had to grow bigger. And really, we're looking now down upon what we experience, not from below up, from stones upward, but we're looking down from consciousness. We'll see that this gives us a slightly different view of things.

From the Buddha's perspective, we are definitely made up of three parts. There is our physical nature, which can only be known through the mind at the contact point. When we chant the Dependent Origination in the morning, it's that point of contact

where we are, shall we say, touching on the physical nature of the universe. And when you think about it, it's quite remarkable. The eyes are actually sensitive to subatomic particles—it's just absolutely amazing. And the tongue is sensitive to chemicals and such. So there is this point of contact.

But then from that, it's taken into what's known as the mind door, and it's the mind door which figures it all out, which puts it into some sort of definition. "This is curry," or "I can hear a car." At the ear door, all you're getting is pressure—the airwaves are just pressure. Everything else is taken back into the mind door. And from that point of recognizing what it is, you then give it meaning. A car begins to have meaning: "It's a taxi coming for me," and all that sort of thing. So all of that is mind.

And there is this third quality—the Nibbānic element. That's how it's referred to in our school. In later schools, of course, they tended to personalize it and call it Buddha nature and things like that, because there was a shift of emphasis. The Buddha himself is very wary of saying it's somebody, or something even. He's much more directed to the actual experience and describing the experience of it. We'll come to that in a minute.

So that's the first thing about materialism. It seems to be impossible to connect the physicality of our nature—neurons, chemicals, and all that—to the way we subjectively experience things within ourselves. There seems to be a divide there.

The next thing I want to point out is another book. There's a man called Yuval Harari who's written two books, and they're really fantastic. One is *Sapiens* and the other is *Homo Deus*. *Sapiens* is about how we got to this point, the growth of humans. And *Homo Deus* is about where we're going to go from here. One of his big themes is to point out that people are actually spending a lot of money so that we don't die—there's a great deal of research going on to stop us dying.

One thing I learned from him was this word "algorithm," which I had thought was a very mystical thing. I presumed that Google has this amazing algorithm that can find anything you want in milliseconds, so it must belong to the area of mysticism. But it turns out that an algorithm is actually just a recipe, like baking bread. When you put that recipe into a machine, the machine bakes bread for you. That's its algorithm. So that was an enormous point of enlightenment for me.

Once we've understood that, when biologists look at nature now, they see this process of algorithms. They see recipes just being worked out, from the very seed to the plant and so on. And so the huge question has come up: what purpose in evolution does consciousness serve? There was no purpose for it.

Because now we have artificial intelligence that can do everything we can do—thinking-wise, mathematically-wise—much faster and much better. And they never tire, never get headaches. So you've got all these amazing machines that we've created, which tell us that there's some mismatch there in our thinking about where consciousness is. Does a machine have consciousness when it does all your accounts? This has really created a problem for them.

Of course, this goes back in our history right to the Enlightenment, to the scientific revolution. If you go back a little further, actually, to St. Thomas Aquinas, the Christian theologian, he determined that animals don't have souls. That's when Christianity came to the conclusion that, philosophically speaking, animals don't have souls—only human beings have souls. So when we get to Descartes and science, they don't have sensibility. In the seventeenth century, people were experimenting on live animals without any sense of concern, because even though the animals were screaming, it was believed they really weren't suffering any pain.

I get this magazine, *The Week*, which summarizes the news. It always has a little article about science. And I kid you not—one week, a bunch of scientists from somewhere finally discovered or had proven that fish do not feel pain. The very next week, another bunch of scientists proved that they did. How you can prove anything happening inside us, within our own selves, is a mystery. And all they're looking at is behaviour. You hit a fish on the head and say, "Well, look, he didn't do anything, so he can't be suffering."

I just want to point this out. It came to me as a great surprise that now, in evolutionary theory, they have a problem with where consciousness came from, why consciousness should be necessary, how it evolved from matter, and for what purpose—because in terms of algorithms, it's simply not necessary.

When it comes to these views, on one side you have the eternalist view. I'm quoting here from a commentary, which is sometimes clearer because it defines things precisely. It says: "Therein, what is an eternalist view? That the self and the world are eternal." Now, when the Buddha talks about "the world" or "the all," he's really only talking about the five khandhas. He doesn't go beyond that. The great thing I found about the Buddha is that he doesn't go where there's only inference. That's why there's no supernatural stuff unless you consider things like levitation supernatural. But he doesn't go beyond what you can actually experience. And that's why he never talks about *what* it is that experiences Nibbana, because it's a total experience. In the experience, there's nobody there who can tell you about it. Afterwards you can reflect upon it, but while you're in a state of transcendent Nibbana, all he can do is talk about what it's like, what it doesn't have—and we'll come to that in a little bit.

The commentary goes on. It says that this form of view—and this is actually from the scriptures—is "a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views, a seizure, holding on, inclination, hanging on, false path, wrong way, wrongness, sectarian guide, inverted seizure." This is what is called an eternalist view. I don't know what an inverted seizure is—I just hope I don't have one.

So on one side, you have this idea that something within us—the mind, the heart, emotions, the body, how we experience ourselves phenomenally—that there's something in it which is eternal. And of course the Buddha is pointing out, in that great discourse on anattā, not-self, that he's asking you to see: if what you're experiencing is impermanent, how can you possibly *be* it?

On the other side is what we've just been talking about—this annihilationist view. The self and the world will be annihilated. This again, of course, forms a view, "a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views, a seizure, holding on, inclination, hanging on, false path, wrong way, wrongness, sectarian guide, inverted seizure." This is called the annihilationist view.

Now, to support this teaching, there is of course a very famous quote. Everybody knows this quote, but they usually only quote the opening lines of it. It comes from the Udāna Sutta, which is a collection of the Buddha's inspired verses. It says: "I have heard that on one occasion, the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And on that occasion, the Blessed One was instructing, urging, rousing, and encouraging the monks with Dhamma talk concerned with liberation. And the monks—receptive, attentive, focusing their entire awareness, lending an ear—listened to the Dhamma."

By the way, the commentaries point out that when they use the word "monks," they mean anybody who's listening. It's not just monastics.

"Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed: 'There is, monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned.'"

Now, the way the word is used here is as what we might call a gerund—it's using an adjective as a noun. "There is an unborn"—not *something* unborn. He's very careful not to again solidify it into some sort of idea of a person or a self. So he says: there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned.

Everything in the world is conditioned. In other words, everything in the world is dependent on something else for it to arise. We're dependent on air, for instance. But this is completely unconditioned.

Then he says—and this is the bit that people don't usually quote—"If there were not the unborn, the unbecome, the unmade, the unconditioned, there would be no way of escape from the born, the become, the made, the conditioned. You could not discern that escape." And he says precisely because of this, there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, and unconditioned. And this is the escape. So that's the fullness of the phrase.

It's very difficult to deny, in my mind, that he's talking about something which is transcendent. But people do. That's all you can say. So that's to do with all this business of transcendence, annihilation, and the reductionism of scientism.

But he does present us with a further problem. By the way, in the Buddha's time there were annihilationists. There was a man called Ajita Kesakambali, a Lokayata materialist. His line was the usual thing—that on death, the body's made of earth, you just return to the earth when you die, so you may as well enjoy life while you can. And the opening of the first discourse, where the Buddha says that sensual pleasure, the seeking of sensual pleasure, is one of those extremes that we shouldn't be following—so if you're a real materialist, if you really, really think that you've only got this life, then really you should be heading for as much enjoyment as you can. Get as much sex, drugs, and rock and roll as you can. Why not?

And the other side of scientism, of course, is the ethics. Here's Einstein, believe it or not: "A man's actions are determined by necessity, external and internal, so that in God's eyes he cannot be responsible any more than an inanimate object is responsible for the motions it goes through." This actually had great effect in America during the thirties, where people were acquitted of crimes on such grounds. I'm thinking of one particular case where a murderer was let off on the grounds that he had no choice—the conditions he was in, the way he was brought up. And he walked free and committed murder again. So there's Einstein for you. It's funny he should talk about God's eyes.

Nietzsche says it in his usual rather roundabout way, but he gets the point across too. He says, "If a man finally succeeds in obtaining philosophical conviction of the unconditional necessity of all actions"—in other words, conditioned actions—"and of their complete irresponsibility, and of getting this into his system, any remnants of pricks of conscience disappear." Why would you have shame? Why would you have guilt? You were forced to pull the man's ears off. It just happened.

Now, of course, in the Buddha's time you got this similar sort of thing. You got Makkhali Gosala, who was a fatalist—powerless, life was predestined, completely conditioned. That was his teaching. And of course that isn't the Buddha's.

The Buddha's teaching is not free will exactly, but our growing discernment tells us that certain actions lead towards suffering and certain actions lead towards happiness and eventually towards release. So we are conditioned, but we're able to change our conditioning through our discernment, through wisdom. And the change is brought about by an act of will. So it's a sort of in-between place. We're not obviously completely free, but we are free to change our habits because we've created them through this wrong understanding, through acts of will.

The way I describe it is like when you go on a walk. If you've got a map with you, you get to a point where the road bifurcates and you don't quite know where to go.

So you look at the map and then you see you've got to go right. So that's the same with us. The road is, as it were, towards liberation. Once we're on that road, it's towards liberation. But there are all sorts of little bypasses and forks and things like that where we occasionally get lost. And it's through discernment, through this reflection—*yoniso manasikāra,* wise reflection—and through our internal experiences where we come across things like stuff that we've suppressed, little guilts that come up.

One that came up for me was quite remarkable actually. When I was about eighteen or nineteen, it was winter and I was coming home driving the old man's car—one of these great big Rovers, like a tank. As I came round into the street where we lived, the street before, you come off the main road, turn right, and then the first turn left—the car very gently slid across. I got home, and the next morning my mother said, "Oh, there's been a crash at the road and somebody's knocked the wall over of this neighbour." And I went out and took the brickwork off the mudguard. And I said nothing, you see.

This is when I'm in my middle forties. I'm sitting there in meditation and suddenly this huge sort of horror arises in me—of not having taken responsibility for it, of what might have happened, all of that. So I obviously buried that sense of shock in the system. It's not as though you get away with anything, eventually. Although I don't know, he presumably got it on the insurance.

The Buddha actually talks about shame and guilt as being the guardians of society—not guards, they're not wicked, they're there to tell us. Basically, as we become more and more refined and you do something which you feel is hurtful, both to the other or to yourself or to both, then immediately you get that sense of having done something wrong—guilt. This isn't the great existential guilt that I shouldn't be here anyway because I'm so evil. It's just: I did something wrong. And shame. You feel a bit ashamed about it. So you have to put that right to clear the heart. In that way, shame and guilt become the guardians of society.

So from a Buddhist point of view, scientism, in a sense, leads to a sort of dead end really. One thing that would occur to me—you don't know, of course—but it would occur to me that if I were truly a materialist, thinking that at some point I'll die and that'll be the end of it, I can't imagine myself having put so much energy into the practice, especially when it got incredibly difficult. I would have thought, well, this is ridiculous. I might as well go out and have a pint. Do something useful.

And I think that's a big block. These things are self-reinforcing, aren't they? Because eventually you have to justify the fact that you're not putting a great deal of effort into the practice because, well, life's short and I'm not going to get fully liberated anyway, so what's the point? I may as well be a little liberated and make my way as best I can. So in a sense it undermines the great project for us. It's sort of underselling the Buddha's teachings.

So that's the first area, the first avenue in which Buddhism is being received—through science. And of course we have now this mindfulness movement, which has brought it into medicine and mental health, and it's being used for that purpose. Occasionally somebody actually wants to find out where this comes from, so I do get people very occasionally who come from having done mindfulness-based stress reduction or something, and they've taken it a bit further. Although sometimes people criticise it because it's not taught with morality, the fact is it does people good, so don't knock it.

That's my own personal opinion, of course.

So now we have Romanticism. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, whom some of you might know, has written a very good book on it. And here I just want to pull out one or two things just to show us how this influences our reception of the Dharma.

The Romantic movement was a reaction to the scientific revolution and what we call the Enlightenment, the rise of rationalism. You have Newton telling us that everything is just mechanical and God is *deus ex machina*—the God outside the machine who sort of set it going and let it run. Then you've got Kant telling us we shouldn't really trust our feelings, that we should be rational, that morality is a rational thing. And we've got Descartes telling us that animals don't have any feelings, don't feel anything at all.

Then there's a sort of reaction against all that—a return to the heart. We have it today. Some people say, "Well, I feel," meaning "I know." And some people say, "I think," meaning "I know." So it depends where you center yourself. And hopefully for most of us, it's sort of coming together.

The great philosophers of the Romantic movement were really the German Romantics—Novalis and Schleiermacher. I'm reducing everything to the basics of what they taught. The first thing, of course, was back to nature. Because what the Industrial Revolution did was take people out from nature, stick them in these dreadful factories, satanic mills and all that sort of stuff. There was that loss of connection with nature, and therefore a sense of alienation—alienation brought about, as described by Marx, by doing things that weren't connected to you. You were making things that you couldn't even buy. Life had become very rigid; it wasn't with the seasons anymore.

I remember a woman who came to the Vihara in Birmingham saying that there was a point where they brought electricity to the farm, and they lost time. That's how she expressed what happened to her as a young girl—or perhaps she was a bit older. In the old days, during winter, you'd have this vast amount of darkness and time where you could tell stories and such. Suddenly you've got light and you're back up at five o'clock milking cows. She expressed it as a loss of time.

So you can see that people being pushed out of the countryside into these horrible hovels to work in mills were alienated. They felt separate from the world, a sense of dislocation.

The Romantics tried to get people back to it, and the first thing was the love of nature. Of course I'm just quoting Wordsworth here: "I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills, when all at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils, beside the lake, beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze."

So you see a movement back to nature, and with it the feeling that we begin to understand nature as an organic whole. This is way before James Lovelock and his Gaia theory. And we are part of that organic whole. The interesting thing is that although there's purpose in the universe, there's no specific purpose for human beings. They also accepted a lot of science—they didn't reject it. I think a lot of them were atheists, were what we would call annihilationists.

All they knew was that if you gave yourself to nature, if you went back to nature and meditated, and that sense of awe and wonder came, then you would have this experience of oneness, this oceanic feeling. Freud dismissed that as something coming up from being a baby. But this getting lost in the oceanic feeling was the height of spiritual endeavor. Through practice, you could make it last a bit longer, but it definitely didn't last forever. And eventually you died.

So it was the idea that the individual was mirrored in nature and nature was mirrored in the individual. The purpose of life was to find that connection and be reintegrated, to lose that sense of separateness. And that's what happened when you went into this oceanic feeling of being at one with nature.

I have to say I had a rather strange experience, for me. I was up in the hills of Sri Lanka. I came out of a retreat, a long retreat—I think I was up there for a couple of months. I climbed this hill, and just the beauty of the landscape was such that I couldn't stop crying. I was crying my eyes out. It was almost too painful to be able to see.

This reminds me of a video you can see of Ajaan Maha Boowa, who has told us he doesn't suffer, that he's an Arahant. While he's telling people about that moment where he was completely liberated, he remembers the joy, and he can't stop crying.

And this old man—he must be in his 90s—this old man crying, telling people how wonderful it was. And of course all these critics say, "No Arahant can cry, it's ridiculous," you know what I'm saying. He lambasts them. He's written an essay saying, "How do you know how an Arahant should respond to life?"

So that was it. For the Romantics, the deepest suffering was this feeling of alienation from nature and the evolutionary process. They believed in the evolutionary process, in Darwinism, but they felt that this alienation could be alleviated momentarily. And we can all achieve this. We can all find our way. There's no set way to do it, no particular religion. You just had to find your way to get lost into this feeling.

Now, the other thing was that ethics tended to derive from being part of that organic whole. There was no free will. The idea that you were making choices was a delusion. So again, we go back to this notion of being completely conditioned without any sense of free will.

And I was going to mention—this whole idea that what we get from the Romantics is that life is about experience. That comes right through to our liberal society, that what we're working for is experience: the holiday, visiting Machu Picchu and the Norwegian fjords. And if you haven't seen the Northern Lights up in the Arctic, then frankly, you haven't lived. You've got to display your T-shirts. Life is about these peak experiences—and we'll come to that in a minute.

But one thing I thought to get you to imagine is: what would you feel like now, looking at a different life that you could have led? You're a young boy, a young girl, brought up in a village where the routine is just very regular—going through the various seasons, the cold season, the hot season, the rainy season. Then around about the age of

eight, you decide you'd like to join a monastery. You don't play any games. You have times in the day where you do a bit of study, you chant together, eat together, sleep together. You get up too early and feel tired. And you just go through year after year.

About the age of twenty-one, you become a monk and carry on doing the same things. Sometimes you give a talk, sometimes you don't. The bell goes at three o'clock in the morning and you get up and do a bit of meditation, or you wander about a bit. Then you turn up for breakfast and it's the same old breakfast—it never changes. Sometimes you get something delightful that turns up, but generally speaking... And then you wander out and it's similar conversations about the weather and all that. Then you wander back to your hut and do a bit of meditation. The bell goes for lunch and you get your bowl ready, walk up for your meal, get your lunch, then go back again. You might have a kip in the middle of the day, read a bit, meditate a bit, meet up with people, go for evening chanting. There's a cup of tea or something. Then in the evening you do a bit more meditation, a bit more chanting. Then you go to sleep, ready to get up again next morning at three o'clock. Every day, on and on.

And then suddenly you're very old and you get a cough and you drop dead.

Is that a worthwhile life from a Romantic point of view? They've hardly walked up a mountain. They've never played a game. They've never got drunk. They've never had sex. Oh my God—can you imagine that? Going through life without having had sex.

So you can see, when you contrast that with the way we expect to live in a liberal society, it's just completely different. A different aim altogether. And yet this little boy may become fully liberated and live in eternal bliss. While we will die with tremendous guilt and horror.

So it's something to contemplate: how much of our lives are driven by trying to get some sort of what Maslow calls "peak experience"?

And that's what we come to next, really – psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy turns everything into some sort of medical problem. It's not really a moral problem. Everything becomes a medical or social problem. The idea of morality doesn't really figure very highly in most psychotherapies.

If we go back to Freud, there was this idea that you had a subconscious, this id that you didn't know about, constantly coming into consciousness, your ego. And then this sort of figure above you, which was society, what you'd learned, trying to guide you.

Your job was to try and find a way through that morass coming at you all the time – uncontrollable urges and the voice of society coming down upon you. I'm being flippant, of course. Then you had people like Alfred Adler, who thought it was all about power.

Carl Jung went a little bit deeper, I think, into all this universal consciousness and such. Then you get a break from that with behaviourism, where people like Skinner only looked at your behaviour. The whole idea of an internal life just went by the board. It was all about conditioning, trying to condition people. He had some very horrible ideas about bringing up children and making them do things, conditioning them, definitely not giving them love – that would make them soft.

And then there was the great Dr Spock in the sixties, the American paediatrician, who brought out this book which has sold millions – fifty million, I think – and it's still in print. He actually says parents should trust themselves and they should love their baby, not try to train it. If you read about this history, it's all very strange. There were huge swings within the whole development of psychotherapy.

But the one I want to point out is Maslow, because Maslow is a humanist psychotherapist. Maslow looked at people who were having a good time, rather than people who had issues. The thing I want to point out to you is this peak experience.

When somebody has a peak experience, all these things seemingly happen at the same time. There's a loss of the judgment of time and space – you lose a sense of time and space. There's a feeling of being one whole and harmonious self, free of dissociation or inner conflict. A feeling of using all capacities and capabilities at the highest potential, of being fully functioning, effortlessly and easily, without strain or struggle. Feeling completely responsible for perceptions and behaviour. The use of self-determination to become stronger, more single-minded, fully volitional. Being without inhibition, fear, doubt, or self-criticism. Spontaneous expressiveness, naturally flowing behaviour that is not constrained by conformity. A free mind that is flexible and open to creative thoughts and ideas. Complete mindfulness of the present moment without influence of past or expected future experiences. A physical feeling of warmth along with a sensation of pleasant vibrations emanating from the heart area outwards into the limbs.

Wow. Sounds very much like Arahatship, I think.

So at least there's a movement there to point to something of a higher order. But again, it's all to do with the mind, all to do with feeling, the way you think, the way you function. There's no hint here of anything that might be transcendent of that.

It's not as though psychotherapy is against what we're doing, the vipassanā. It's just that there's a different aim. Psychotherapy, generally speaking, as I understand it, is about finding an accommodation to life, working with difficult situations – like marriage counselling and such – trying to work through mental states that we're suffering from, panic and depression and all that sort of stuff. And in that, of course, it's very successful and very helpful.

In the East, you see, if you get very depressed or you have things like panic attacks, you might go to a monastery and they'll just tell you to practise mettā. There's not much in Buddhist teaching that I've come across which deals with helping people with severe mental problems. It would all be put down to kamma. The thinking would be: well, this life you're bearing the kamma of what you did wrong in the last life, so don't worry, when you die you'll be born somewhere else and you'll be much happier. There's this idea that you're suffering something from some past action.

So it's really looking at the world from a different angle if we're going to look at it spiritually. Instead of looking bottom up through the physical nature and then up and up, thinking that everything arises out of that, if you look down, coming from this transcendent experience, then you get a different thing altogether.

And again, lots of things are inexplicable. For instance, the process of rebirth, how you move from one place to another upon death, is not described in the scriptures. It's talked about, it's said that this is what happens, but the actual process is not described. So there are lots of areas which are just left, probably, to our imaginations.

The first very famous statement by the Buddha – it's considered his clearest statement of the Nibbānic experience, of Nibbāna – is this one, again from the Udāna Sutta, the collection of his inspired verses.

Ānanda says: "I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove" – his favourite monastery – "at Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And on that occasion, the Blessed One was instructing, urging, rousing, and encouraging monks with a Dhamma talk concerned with liberation. And the monks, receptive, attentive, focusing their attention, lending an ear, listened to the Dhamma. And on realising the significance of this, the Buddha on that occasion exclaimed..."

"So there is a dimension, there is a sphere..."

Now remember this word *ayatana* – you chant it every morning in dependent origination. There's *salayatana*, the six sense spheres. And the thing about spheres is that you can't mix them. You can't hear through your eyes, for instance. So they are distinct experiences, the *ayatana*. The word here, "dimension," is rather nice.

What he's saying is that there is this dimension. This isn't something, shall we say, this isn't poetry, this isn't a metaphor. He's actually using the same word that he uses for what we experience through the senses – the six senses, the sixth being the mind.

So there is – and again the word *atthi*. There are two words in Pali for "is," and I should have mentioned that with the earlier quote I gave. One is what you call a copulative. It's like when you say "this is a table" or "this is an electric fire." It's simply something to join two words, and the word for that is *hoti*. But when you say "is" to mean exists, then the word is *atthi*. So when they ask the Buddha, "Does the Tathagata exist?" – *atthi* – after he dies, or does he not exist, the word is *atthi*. So this is the word he uses here. He says there is a dimension.

Now he says where there's neither earth, water, nor fire, nor wind. So again, nothing of the physical world. But he doesn't go beyond what we can sense of the physical world. Remember, these are referring to qualities – to pressure, fluidity, some sort of temperature, and movement.

Then he says it's neither the dimension, neither the same sphere – because that's also called a sphere – of these higher jhanas, the four *arupa* jhanas: the infinitude of space, infinitude of consciousness, the dimension of nothingness, and the place of neither perception nor non-perception. So even the highest level that you can take the mind to in its most refined state – it's not there. That's not what he's talking about.

And he said it's neither of this world nor the next world. And now he's being more physical in the sense by saying there's no sun nor moon. So it's something completely transcendent, other than. And there is, I say, there's neither coming nor going nor staying. So there's no time. There's no space. There's no passing away nor arising. So there's nothing there which is transient. And in fact, there's nothing there from this side of experience. He says it's not fixed, it's not moving, and it's not evolving. Nothing's happening there.

And he says it's without support. In other words, it's not conditioned. It's not dependent on anything else. And he said just this is the end of suffering.

So that's a really clear statement of something which is utterly transcendent of what we normally experience. And of course, that's what we are backing into. Every time you're practicing meditation and you're observing something, you're turning it into an object, which means that the subject, this sense of the observer, is coming back. It's moving backwards towards a cliff. And the cliff happens to be a great place.

And that's the same word *atthi* used for the earlier quote I gave about the unborn, the unmade, the unconditioned.

So we have a theory within Buddhism called the Tathagatagarbha theory, Yogacara – it's called the Yogacara school. Here the idea, or the concept, is that the Tathagata, the Buddha within, finds itself within a psychophysical organism. It doesn't necessarily have to be a human. And it doesn't have any mass, remember. Nibbana doesn't have any mass. There's no earth. So it's as comfortable in a little microbe as it is in an elephant. Or a dinosaur.

It just fills it. It's just there with it.

So this finds itself in there and makes this mistake, of course, of believing itself to be this. And then the urge to seek happiness, the urge to seek liberation—either impelled from within, some sort of intuitive idea that there must be something beyond, or just from living in the world where suffering arises. We're always trying to escape suffering. And then when you realise there are pleasures about, and you're happy when there are pleasures, then of course you seek more pleasure. For me it's a very straightforward psychological dynamic. I don't think there's anything too stressful about understanding that.

But then, because of that process, this garbha, this embryo, begins to grow and eventually ends up as the Tathagata. Tathagata means—the basic words translate as either "thus come" or "thus gone"—but the best understanding is that he's pointing to something beyond. He uses other imagery like "the island." So when he talks about himself, referring to the Tathagata, he's talking about something that has transcended.

How this came about, how the phenomenal universe came about, is never discussed. All the Buddha points to is that we're here and we're in a mess, and he knows how to get us out of the mess. So it's a very restricted teaching. He doesn't go beyond that. He doesn't really talk about physics or biology or anything like that. It's not in his purview. It's not what he's actually on about. He sees clearly through the Four Noble Truths when he states it: this is an unsatisfactory situation. And the problem is, how do we get out of that? Is there an escape from that? And that's what he discovers. So his whole teaching is wedged towards this escape.

Lots of things are not explained. Lots of things are not scientific in the way that we would like them to be. The whole idea of rebirth, the whole idea of Nibbana is unscientific. You're never going to prove it. So eventually it does boil down to a certain confidence that he wasn't having us on, and then to put effort into the practice and just begin to see—even at the level of desire—that there is an escape at the point of desire. That you don't have to follow it, and that you can actually move your whole conditioning towards something more beneficial.

So that's about it, I think. You've got these three ways that we look at something coming towards us, something new from outside our culture. We try to make it fit into our science, we try to make it fit into this background idea—a romantic view of life, of what life's actually about. It has to fit in some way into our psychotherapy.

Once we're clear as to where all these three things are, and where the Buddhist teaching is actually isolated within that—gaining the clarity of the Buddhist teaching—then of course our progress is going to be much better. We won't be sidelined. We'll feel that we don't need to come to conclusions. If we don't know, why come to a conclusion?

I was on a train recently, last year, going down to Brighton, and a rugby crowd got on. These two guys sat opposite me, and one of them said, "You're a Buddhist monk, aren't you?" And I said, "I am." He said, "Well, I don't believe in rebirth or reincarnation." I said, "Do you know whether there's reincarnation or not?" And he said, "No." I said, "Well, why make a conclusion?" And his mate said, "Yeah, why make a conclusion?" He'd just decided there's no such thing as reincarnation. We had a great old conversation. He still didn't believe in it, of course, but at least I might have halted his... Well, it's pride, isn't it? It's all hubris—"I know. It doesn't make sense to me, so it can't be."

So as long as we remain in that humble place, meaning truthful to ourselves—don't know—then we leave open the possibility of exploration, possibility of insight.

So there we are. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. If not, I'm sure you'll leave me a couple of notes. I can only hope that by your devotion to the practice, you may be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 74

Kamma, Rebirth and Transcendence: A Top Down View of the Buddhadhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 52 min

In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a comprehensive exploration of the Buddha's teaching on transcendence, presenting a 'top-down' view that contrasts with modern scientific materialism. Drawing from key passages including the famous Udāna description of the 'not born, not compounded, not created, not conditioned,' he clarifies what the Buddha meant by Nibbāna—a dimension beyond earth, water, fire, and air, without time, space, or the three characteristics of dukkha, anicca, and anattā.

The talk examines the avyākata (undetermined) questions that the Buddha refused to answer, such as whether the world is eternal and what happens to the Tathāgata after death. Bhante explores how the Tathāgatagarbha or Buddha-nature descends into the psychophysical organism, mistaking itself for this body-mind complex, and how through ethical practice and wisdom it gradually returns to its true nature. He draws on the Aggañña Sutta (DN 27) to illustrate how the Buddha satirized Brahmanical creation myths while emphasizing that moral decline leads to societal deterioration.

The discussion extends to rebirth and the six realms of existence, acknowledging that while scientific proof remains impossible, rebirth makes the teaching of kamma intelligible and complete. Bhante presents rational arguments for why rebirth fits within the Buddhist framework of universal liberation, while reassuring practitioners that the Dhamma works regardless of one's beliefs about rebirth. The talk concludes with the Buddha's profound statement that the end of suffering is found within this very body and mind.

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

In my last talk I was speaking about the way our cultural perspectives—whether through science or scientism, through our romantic understanding of life, or through psychotherapy—tend to distort the teaching of the Buddha. I boiled this teaching down to ethics and transcendence.

If you look at what's happening from a scientific point of view, it's easy to understand that you're looking upward through matter. Matter begins to create chemicals, chemicals create some sort of bio-life, and so it all looks very clear—that consciousness

and all the rest appears as part of that upward process of evolution. It's quite understandable that this would make sense to somebody brought up in that scientific tradition.

If you haven't been, of course—if you've been brought up in a religious tradition, one of the Christian traditions or Islam or Judaism or Hinduism—then you're looking at it from a slightly different way. You're looking down and seeing how everything slowly descends to the material base.

So that's what I want to try and do this evening: to give you a different perspective. The first thing is to be clear about what the Buddha means by transcendence, what he's pointing to.

In the last talk I also mentioned some of these quotes. The one where people feel he's been most clear is this: "There is a sphere or a dimension where there's no earth, no water, no fire, no air." Now those, of course, are the four great elements by which the mind contacts matter. So when you're looking at the pain in your knees, it will either be fiery or heavy and thick. Remember that when the Buddha talks about the world, the all, he's not talking about the objective world of science. He's talking about the way we experience it—the world that we're actually manufacturing. He's always talking from that angle. It's not that he denies that the world out there exists, but he's saying that from the point of view of liberation, it's the world that we're actually creating that we've got to be liberated from.

He says there's no base consisting of space, consciousness, nothingness, perception, non-perception. This refers to those higher jhānic states, which is the most refined place that the mind can get to. It's when the mind actually stops producing, and there's just the awareness of that space.

Then he says it's neither this world nor another world, nor both, neither sun nor moon. So he is saying that there isn't a physical world where this transcendent place is. He says there's no coming and going and no staying—so there's no sense of space and there's no sense of time. There's no ceasing, no uprising—so it's without change. This place is without change.

Remember those three characteristics: dukkha, anicca, and anattā. So there's no suffering there—it's adukkha. There's no impermanence there—it's nicca. And of course there's no self there, no sense of a self. It's a non-dual state.

It's not fixed, it's not movable. This comes from our position where everything has a place and you can move most things. Everything changes. But there, there's nothing, so you can't talk about something being fixed or movable. And it has no support. Everything in this world is dependent on something else. Nothing arises of itself. There's no existent. But this is a place where it doesn't need anything at all.

So he's obviously pointing to something which is quite other than what we're experiencing. And that's what we mean by transcendence. He says, "Just this is the end of suffering."

Then, of course, there's the other famous passage that people quote: "There exists"—so the word *atthi*—"there is the not-born, the not-compounded, the not-created, the not-conditioned." But then he goes on to a second verse in which he says, "If there were not this not-born, not-compounded, not-created, not-conditioned, no escape could be discerned from the born, the compounded..."

the created and the conditioned. And then the final verse says, but because there is this not born, then there is obviously an escape.

So again, he's talking about something which is of another nature, you might say, another dimension.

And the other final one which I brought up the last time was this question of where do earth, water, fire and air find no footing? Remember, somebody asks him where the world comes to an end. So this is the world we're creating. And he says, well, that's the wrong question. You should ask where does it find no footing? So there's nothing destroyed in the process. He himself says the only thing that's destroyed in the process of liberation is greed, hatred and delusion. Everything else remains.

Where are long and short, small, fair, foul? Where are the subject and object wholly destroyed, you see? A sense of object. Remember this non-dual place. If you say there's one, there's a presumption that there may be a two, right? So that's why this word of non-dual is coined. But of course each system has a different understanding of non-dual. For the Hindus, the non-dual state is to be at one with Brahman. But in the Buddhist tradition, it's to be in this state of nibbana.

So he says that there is a consciousness which is non-manifestive. Now a consciousness that's manifestive is manifesting through the six senses—the five basic physical senses and the mind. Mind, heart, emotions and thoughts. So he said it's non-manifestive. It's without boundary. Boundaries are created by phenomena, by objects, by things. So there's nothing there. That's what he's saying. And it's all directions full of light. So consciousness. You can take that as either a state of light or a brightness as if you were

inside the bulb, or you can take it as a state of pure awareness. And he says here's where this earth, water, fire and air—so the physical nature, our physical nature—finds no footing. Here's where all these opposites, long and short, small and great and so on, subjects and objects are wholly destroyed. They don't exist there.

Okay, so now we have this, if we keep the idea of something that's transcendent. Now, what doesn't the Buddha talk about? What won't he actually talk about?

There were these ten questions that were, I suppose, the obsessions of the age. The first one is, is the world eternal? Is the world not eternal? Is the world infinite? Is the world finite? Is the soul the same as the body? If it is, then you would be an annihilationist because when the body dies, you go as well. Soul here would be your mind rather than your body. And is the soul different from the body? In which case, the soul would separate from the body and you'd be an eternalist.

So there were these two opposites at the time of the Buddha. You've got the Brahmins and the Jains who said the soul was released, the Jiva was released into a heavenly state or at one with Brahman. And there were the materialists who said, you know, that was it. When you're dead, you're dead.

And then the last four concerned somebody who was fully liberated. Does the Tathagata exist after death or does he not exist? Does he exist and not exist? And then finally, does he neither exist nor not exist? So he's cornered any sort of effort at rational—well, of course, he's silent, you see. And he's silent because the questions are always coming from the point of view of a self. And this is what he says to Vacchagotta.

Then he says his usual thing. He says they regard feeling as self, perception as self, volitional formations as self, consciousness as self—or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. Therefore, when the wanderers of other sects ask such questions, they give such answers: "The world is eternal," and they can be very certain about it. But the thing is, he never actually says anything about it himself. He doesn't make any declaration. He doesn't give any indication as to whether it is or not.

You know, he might sort of say, "Well, for those who don't have a self, there is an eternal," and so forth. But he just goes quiet. He just goes mum. So when it comes to those sorts of questions about the world and things like that, he quite simply doesn't go there. But we'll come to something else in a minute. We'll come back to that.

The next thing that you might ask, that we might ask, but which never seems to occur in the scriptures is: Why does this occur in the first place? Where does this satipaññā—or as the Abhidhamma would put it, this nibbānic element in us, or as the

Mahāyāna would point to it, Buddha nature—where does it come from? Why has it come here? Where did it all begin? These sorts of questions about the relationship of this nibbānadhātu and how it's come here are never broached. I don't know of a question that comes up in the scriptures concerning this.

And it's the same with the relationship that our individual, inverted commas, nibbānadhātus have with each other. Presumably there are lots of Arahants whose nibbānadhātus, this element, this Buddha nature, exist somewhere. Do they communicate? Do they know whether the last perfectly enlightened person is next door or upstairs? All that area just doesn't come up for discussion. It simply doesn't arise, you see.

But of course, others like the Hindus tried to work something out for that. As you become liberated in the Hindu tradition, where you get moksha, freedom, your atta, your self—inverted commas, big self—goes back into Brahman. You become Brahman, you see. So in that sense, you've got this idea that Brahman, who's neuter by the way, neither male nor female, bursts into all these different attas, and then they've got to find their way back to him. They're trying to answer this question, but it never comes up in the scriptures. The Buddha never approaches it. So that's the end of that. It's just knowing that Buddhism doesn't have a monopoly on all truth, that's all.

Now, some would say that these are known as avyākata questions. Avyākata simply means "not determined." He's just not spoken about it. But maybe there's something that is forever unknowable. Perhaps we need to accept that these sorts of questions are actually unknowable. And that may be one reason why the Buddha kept himself strictly to this particular teaching of liberation.

He does say in one place, pointing to the monks he's with, "You see all the leaves in this forest? Well, I know all this, but I've only given you a clump of leaves—which you need in order to be liberated." Though you don't know whether that was put in later, you see. In the Visuddhimagga, thank heavens it doesn't say it in the scriptures, but in this medieval work of Buddhaghosa, they describe the qualities of a Buddha. By that time, of course, he's grown into this superhuman figure, just amazing, beyond human. They say he's omniscient—meaning if he bends his mind towards anything, he'll know the answer. And one thing he knows is that the world is flat. That's a killer, isn't it? So you say, okay, you have to recognize that there's some messing about here.

So that's something he doesn't talk about. And just to go back a step, to the origins of the universe, again there's no effort to address that. There is this peculiar discourse, the Aggañña Sutta, in which he lays out a certain creation myth, but it's obviously a satire. Most people see it now as a satire. It starts with him having a talk with this man called Vāseṭṭha.

Once the Lord was staying at Sāvatthī at the mansion of Migāra's mother in the East Park. At that time, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja were living among monks, hoping to become monks themselves. In the evening, the Lord rose from his secluded meditation and came out of the mansion, starting to walk up and down in the shade. Vāseṭṭha noticed this and said to Bhāradvāja, "Friend Bhāradvāja, the Lord has come out and is walking up and down. Let's approach him. We might be fortunate enough to hear a talk on Dhamma from the Lord himself."

"Yes, indeed," said Bhāradvāja. And they went up to the Lord, saluted him, and fell into step with him.

Then the Lord said to Vāseṭṭha, "Vāseṭṭha, you two are Brahmins born and bred, and you have gone forth from household life to the homeless life from Brahmin families. Do not the Brahmins revile and abuse you?"

"Indeed, Lord, the Brahmins do revile and abuse us."

They don't hold back with their usual flood of reproaches.

"What kind of reproaches do they fling at you?"

"Lord, what the Brahmins say is that the Brahmin caste is the highest caste. Other castes are base. The Brahmin caste is fair. Other castes are dark. Brahmins are purified. Non-Brahmins are not. The Brahmins are the true children of Brahma, born of the mouth of Brahma, created by Brahma, heirs of Brahma. And you—you've deserted the highest caste and gone over to the base caste, these shaveling, petty ascetics, servant, dark fellows, born of Brahma's foot. It's not right, it's not proper that you should mix with such people."

"So this is the way the Brahmins abuse us, Lord."

Then Vasettha told the Brahmins that they have forgotten their ancient tradition when they say that, because we can see Brahmin women, the wives of Brahmins, who menstruate and become pregnant, have babies and give suck, and yet these womb-born Brahmins talk about being born of Brahma's mouth. These Brahmins misrepresent Brahma. They tell lies. They earn much demerit.

And then he goes into exactly what happens at the end of the world. At the end of the world, you can't have all beings destroyed because then that would be the end of karma. And it would suggest that some beings are just not going to make it. So at the end of a world cycle, everybody gets shunted into this highest realm, the Abhassara Brahma, you see. And of course, there were questions asked about this by later com-

mentators. How could this be? Because to get up there you've got to be in the highest of jhanas and be pretty pure. So the explanation was that everybody's been around this samsara so many times that they must have hit one of these jhanic states, and the good karma would come just at that moment and they'd be up in the Abhassara realm.

And this, of course, saved this whole idea of realms from bringing an end to karma. But it also suggests that everybody, all beings, will eventually be liberated, no matter how many world cycles they have to go through.

Anyway, they're all up there now. And they lived there for a very long time. And here they dwell, and having passed away, they were mostly born into this world. And they dwell mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, and glorious.

Now at that time there was just one mass of water and all was darkness. This is often a creation myth—out of the chaos, the Greek chaos, which was this darkness. Out of nothingness, the Christian idea of everything coming out of nothingness. Even science, you know, the Big Bang—where does it come from? So just out of this mass of water and all darkness, blinding darkness, neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars, night and day. There was no male or female, and so on. And sooner or later, after a very long period of time, savoury earth spread itself over the waters where those beings were, and it looked just like the skin that forms over hot milk as it cools. It was endowed with colour, smell, and taste. It was the colour of fine ghee or butter, and it was very sweet, like pure wild honey.

And then some being with a greedy nature said, "Now, what can this be?" And he tasted the savoury earth and of course he gets a craving for it. And everybody else says, "Well, what about that?" And they get into it. And the result was, of course, their self-luminosity disappeared. You see? The greed destroyed their self-luminosity.

And so then as they get more and more greedy, this beautiful skin of earth begins to disappear. And fungus grows up, which is just like that, but it's fungus. And then there's like a mushroom. Then creepers appear, shooting up like bamboo. And all the time, their luminosity diminishes and their heaviness increases. They're moving towards becoming more and more material.

And then finally rice appeared in open places, free from powder, free from husk, fragrant, and clean-grained. And as they collected this, their bodies became coarser still, and their looks became greater. The difference in their looks became greater. And then females developed female sex organs, and males developed male organs, and the wo-

men became excessively preoccupied with men, and the men became preoccupied with the women. And owing to their excessive preoccupation with each other, passion was aroused, and their bodies burnt with lust.

And later, because of this burning, they indulged in sexual activity. And those who saw them indulging threw dust, ashes, and cow dung at them, crying, "Die, you filthy beasts! How can you be doing such things to one another?" And just as today in some districts when a daughter-in-law is led out, some people throw dirt at her, some ashes and some cow dung, without realising they're repeating an ancient observance. So I don't know where that comes from—must have been one of those things you did at a marriage.

So it gets worse and worse.

And then finally, because of all the immorality, they decide to get somebody who would show anger, would censure people, would banish those who deserve to be banished. And so that was the first king, the people's choice, Mahasamhata. And then you get the idea of kingship coming in.

Because of that, a whole level of society was created—the warrior caste, the Khattiya. And he was also called Raja, which means he gladdens others with Dharma. I don't think he does. These are just glosses.

Anyway, evil things appeared, such as taking what is not given, and all that, and then he did the banishments. And then there were people who said, "Enough of this," and they became very pure, and they lived out in the forest, and these were the Brahmins. Others, of course, who couldn't meditate, couldn't handle the meditation and the seclusion, began to adopt various trades. And then finally there were those who, the Sudda, they are base who live by the chase. So slowly but surely the four castes appeared.

But the whole discourse ends with: "The verse was rightly sung," he said, "and this too is true. The warrior caste, the Khattiyas, are best among those who value the clan." So it becomes a sort of expression of how we've got to this place, the four castes and so on, but by way of ethics. We're always coming back to ethics.

As to the question of creation, where we came from and all that, this also is not answered. So again, we have to accept that there are things that maybe are simply unknowable. But one thing we do know is that we are here. We actually are existing or becoming in this very present moment.

If we consider this Nibbana Dhatu descending—now this was later taken up by the Mahayana in the Yogacara school of the Tathagatagarbha, which meant the embryo of the Buddha. The embryo of the Buddha, meaning that within us which is deluded, comes down to find its own true nature, enters into this psychophysical organism, and then through the practice becomes the Tathagata. Tathagata means "come there" or "gone there." This "there" of course is that place of transcendence, so probably the best translation is "the one who has transcended" or "the transcendent one." And this is how the Buddha referred to himself—the Tathagata.

Now, this Nibbana Dhatu finds itself... I'll keep referring to it from now on as just Buddha nature. It's simpler. This Buddha nature finds itself in this psychophysical organism. And in the Buddha's teachings, there are these three bodies.

Again, this was developed out of the basic scriptures, the Pali scriptures, the early scriptures. These different strands of understanding were developed from those bases. My teacher, Dr. Rewata Dhamma in Birmingham, said to me that everything the Mahayana says about their teachings, you'll find the kernel of it, you'll find something of that within the basic scriptures of Pali, the early scriptures.

So these three bodies are the Dharmakaya—that's the Buddha nature. There's the Sambhogakaya, the body of bliss, and that's your mental body. And then there's the Nirmanakaya, the body of apparition, or the body that's made—this physical body that we find ourselves in. Psychophysical.

In Buddhist understanding, these two things are quite separate. Although they're melded together at this level of being, they separate at death. And then you have this rebirth into different realms, which we'll come to towards the end of the talk.

Just to remember that process where the Tathagatagarbha, the embryo of the Buddha, the Buddha nature comes down in a state of not knowing. Remember, it's not a culpable state. Ignorance is not a culpable state. It's just basically not knowing. And the mistake is made of believing itself to be this psychophysical organism it finds itself in. And then it seeks happiness. It's as simple as that.

In seeking happiness, it begins to manipulate the world. The more it has, the happier it feels, the more secure it feels—more money, friends, all that sort of stuff. And of course then you have to protect it, so that's where your aversion comes, your hatred to anybody who undermines what you have. And if the person's bigger, then of course you run for it.

So remember, those are your three basic attitudes that arise from delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear. And from that, because of those attitudes, we act in the world and create habits. And these habits are unwholesome, and they have unwholesome results.

Both inwardly, they create agitation and all the rest of it. And outwardly, of course, they create situations which aren't good for us—war, for a start.

Coupled with that, there is the wisdom factor, which grows as you begin to see how we create suffering for ourselves. Then the other side of our nature begins to manifest—the love, the compassion, the sympathetic joy, courage, gratitude, and all the rest of it.

So you could say that the process we're undergoing is moving away from the effects of that delusion towards the effects of wisdom. We're coming back, shall we say, to that original mistake. And that original mistake we call the self. It's an identity that we manufacture with the psychophysical organism we find ourselves with.

That's our practice. Our practice is to begin to discriminate, to discern those things that bring us suffering and those things that don't, that bring us happiness—real happiness. And as you come back into yourself, you come to this business of the observer. That's where the initial problem lies, because it's through the observer that you enter into the world we're creating.

I want to reinforce this idea that the Buddha only teaches ethics. Ethics, you can translate as relationship—it's how you're relating. Morality tends for us to mean wrongdoing and such, so it has a more restricted meaning in our minds—the Ten Commandments and all that. But ethics is just about relationship.

Now, we are in relationship all the time. We're in relationship with our food, in relationship to the door when we open it, in relationship with people. Our whole lives are an act of relationship. And of course, there's the relationship with ourselves too.

So ethics is really about how we relate—how, if we get it wrong, it can create suffering, and how, if we get it right, it creates happiness. Once we've grasped that the whole of our lives is relationship, then of course we want to do something about it. We want to make sure we get it right.

If you remember, when the Buddha was born, a holy man, a sage, saw him and determined that either he was going to be a world-conquering monarch or a fully self-enlightened being. The sage began to cry, and when they asked him why, he said, "I won't be around to see which one he'll go for." But the sense was that he would actually become fully self-liberated.

Running through the scriptures, you get this alter ego of the world-conquering monarch. In one of the scriptures, the old monarch is dying. The wheel treasure—you have to imagine this wheel in the sky—when it begins to disappear, it's time for the king to move on and leave rule to his son.

Just before the son takes rule, he asks his father, "Sire, what is the duty of the Aryan wheel-turning monarch?"

And his father says: "It is this, my son. Yourself depending on the Dhamma, honouring it, revering it, cherishing it, doing homage to it and venerating it. Having the Dhamma as your badge and banner, acknowledging the Dhamma as your master, you should establish, guard, ward, and protect, according to the Dhamma, for your own household, your troops, your nobles and vassals, for Brahmins and householders, towns and country folk, ascetics and Brahmins, for beasts and birds. Let no crime prevail in your kingdom. And to those who are in need, give property.

"And whatever ascetics and Brahmins in your kingdom have renounced the life of sensual infatuation and are devoted to forbearance and gentleness, each one taming himself, each one calming himself, and each one striving for the end of craving—from time to time you should go to them and consult them as to what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, what is blameworthy and what is blameless, what is to be followed and what is not to be followed, what action will in the long run lead to harm and sorrow, and what to welfare and happiness. Having listened to them, you should avoid evil and do what is good. That is the duty of an Aryan wheel-turning monarch."

So the son says, "Yes, sire." And of course he becomes king.

But then he doesn't follow this counsel. Things went wrong, you see, and the wheel slipped from its position. A man came to the king and said, "Sire, you should know that the sacred wheel treasure has disappeared."

That's bad news.

At this, the king was grieved and felt sad, but he did not go to the royal sage or ask about the duties of a wheel-turning monarch. Instead, he ruled the people according to his own ideas. Being so ruled, the people did not prosper as well as they had under previous kings who performed the duties of a wheel-turning monarch.

Then the ministers, counsellors, treasury officials, guards and doorkeepers, and the chanters came to the king and said: "Sire, as long as you rule the people according to your own ideas, and differently from the way they were ruled before under previous

wheel-turning monarchs, the people do not prosper so well. Sire, there are ministers in the realm, including ourselves, who have preserved knowledge of how a wheel-turning monarch should rule. Ask us, Your Majesty, and we will tell you."

So he asks them and consults them, and having listened to them, the king established a guard of protection—but he did not give property to the needy. As a result, poverty became rife.

With the spread of poverty, a man took what was not given—thus committing what was called theft. They arrested him and brought him to the king, saying, "Your Majesty, this man took what was not given, which we call theft."

The king said to him, "Is it true you took what is not given, which is called theft?"

"It is, Majesty."

"Why?"

"Your Majesty, I have nothing to live on."

Then the king gave him some property, saying, "Look, with this, my good man, you can keep yourself, support your mother and father, keep a wife and children, carry on a business, and make gifts to ascetics and Brahmins, which will promote your spiritual welfare and lead to a happy rebirth with pleasant results in the heavenly sphere."

Very good, Your Majesty, replied the man.

And the exact same thing happens to another man. The people heard the king was giving away property to those who took what was not freely given, and they thought, "Supposing we were to do likewise."

And then another man took what was not given, and they brought him to the king, and the king asked him why he'd done it. He replied, "Man, I've nothing to live on." And the king thought, "If I give property to everybody who takes what is not given, this theft will increase more and more. I'd better make an end of him, finish him off once and for all, and cut his head off."

So he commanded his men, "Bind this man's arms tightly behind him with a strong rope, shave his head closely, lead him to the rough sound of a drum through the streets and squares and out through the southern gate, and there finish by inflicting the capital penalty and cut off his head." And they did so.

And hearing about this, the people thought, "Now let us get sharp swords made for us, and then we can take from anybody what is not given—we will make an end of them, finish them off, cut their heads off." And so, having procured sharp swords, they launched murderous assaults on villages, towns, and cities, and went in for highway robbery, killing their victims by cutting off their heads. So you can see, once the rot sets in, you're just not going to get out of it.

And so it goes on, and then finally, after many generations—five thousand years—a Dharma monarch is re-established. But actually, it gets worse before that, because what happens is that as people get more and more unethical, they lose their lifespan. They get down to the point where a time will come when children of these people have a lifespan of ten years. The girls will be marriageable at five years old. And with them, these flavors will disappear: ghee, butter, sesame oil, molasses, and salt. So it gets worse and worse and worse, you see.

But again, it's just this idea that morality—ethics, really—is what it's all about. And actually, that was the teaching of that Axial Age. If you look across to Lao Tzu and the Dao, and Moses with the Ten Commandments, and Socrates—all the same age. Socrates also said desire was the problem. You'll see there's a sort of awakening of mankind to this idea that you do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That was the big message of what's known as the Axial Age. So anyway, that's the Buddha's teaching. It's about ethics, you see.

So now we come to this knotty problem about rebirth. That's another question the Buddha doesn't answer—he doesn't tell us how the process takes place.

Now, we hear of people with near-death experiences, especially on operating tables, where they come out and can actually tell what happened during the operation. We also know that people have out-of-body experiences and see this whirling tunnel through which they go, sometimes into another realm. But none of that is in the Pāli scriptures. Nobody said to the Buddha, "Yeah, but how does it happen?" It's just that there's a teaching about different realms.

The basic one is, of course, the six realms. First, the purgatorial realm, which is sometimes called the hell realm. But "hell," you know, according to Dante—that's "abandon all hope, ye who enter here." There's nothing eternal in the world according to Buddhism, so it's much better to think of it as purgatory, where you purge your sins and get rid of all your bad kamma. And there are various levels of that, the worst one being the Avīci hell, of course, where those who've been extremely cruel go—which is the opposite of the Buddhist teaching about compassion.

Then there's the animal realm—you see, being born an animal. There's the human realm, which is ours. The hungry ghosts—they're the ones who are driven by greed. There's the angry devas—they're the clever people who are driven by anger, jealousy, all that sort of stuff. And then finally there's the deva realm, which is where beings are happy.

So you've got these six realms. And of course, what tends to happen is that the relationship between what we experience as human beings extends into other realms of existence. If you're in a deep depression and you don't see a way out of it, you're despairing—you're obviously in a hell realm. If you get drunk and do all sorts of daft things, then you're obviously in an animal realm. There's the human realm, of course. When we're craving for stuff and we can't just stop going for those biscuits, then we're hungry ghosts. And when we're getting angry and trying to get the best of somebody, we're in the angry deva realm. And then finally, when we're happy and peaceful and wandering about the meadows here, then we're in the deva realm.

So there's always that connection between what we as human beings can experience and the cosmology that Buddhism talks about. Those are your basic categories, but in the Abhidhamma it gets much more refined, because then they talk about all these various realms to do with the jhānas as well. The whole cosmology is built up into this huge idea of vast different realms—many realms all over the place. Whether they exist or not is a moot point, of course.

So in order to get into these realms, of course, you've got to be reborn.

You can't annihilate. If you annihilate, you don't get reborn, and therefore you'll never experience these realms.

So when it comes to rebirth, which is very difficult for us—because if you've been brought up Christian or Muslim or something like that, then it's easier. But for people who've been brought up in a more secular way, it's very difficult to actually open up to the idea. There have been lots of studies on it. Ian Stevenson wrote *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, and there's also material on our website—I've actually put a clip up there.

But there's no way it's ever going to be proven scientifically. There's not going to be an fMRI scan of somebody being reborn. In the medieval ages, they would weigh a body before it died and then weigh it again afterwards to see how much the soul weighed. And they were always upset because it didn't have any weight—there was no change. We're trying to prove that something which is transcendent actually exists. So we can forget about trying to prove whether there's rebirth or not.

But one thing is for sure: when you start reading the discourses, it comes across all the time. You can't read the discourses without including rebirth. They don't make sense in terms of the whole law of karma without it. Even in the Buddha's awakening, we talk about the three knowledges that came to him, where he remembered his past lives, which showed him how he came to be fully liberated and what had been the driving force of that—his ethics. And then he saw other beings moving from realm to realm, driven again by their ethics. So what had been just a personal law, he saw as a universal law. And then, of course, the third knowledge was that he himself was purified of all his defilements. So it goes right back—in the tradition, it's right there at the awakening—this whole understanding about rebirth.

Bhikkhu Bodhi has written a monograph on it, and I've taken his ideas from there. The question he asks is: well, does it make sense? Is it intelligible? Does it make any sense in terms of the Dharma? You can see that without the idea of rebirth, how do you ever resolve the actions that you've made? This also moves into the idea that the universe has some sort of moral equilibrium, some sort of moral resolution to it.

You might say that's more of an intuitive thing—that eventually whatever harm somebody has done has to be mended in some way, has to be ameliorated, has to be compensated for. So you have to forget the idea of punishment. It's to do with results. You do something wrong and there will be a result within your psychophysical organism. And that result will reverberate back to this Buddha nature when it wakens up and realises, "Oh, I've done something wrong. I'm now in a world—my world, the world I'm creating—which is full of guilt, full of remorse, full of shame."

And of course, the world then mirrors back to you. If you're very sarcastic, you find yourself being a bit lonely sometimes. So the way you behave also affects other people, and they mirror your behaviour back to you by the way they behave towards you.

There's a feeling that there must be some working out, because as we know, in the ordinary world as we see it, people get away with murder, and people who do wonderful things are never acknowledged. They might end up in a bad way too. Remember that poor man who went out to help with humanitarian work in the Middle East, and they caught him and shot him out in the desert somewhere? Jihadi John—one of the ISIS people. Do you remember that awful thing? He'd gone out to help a Muslim charity, and they showed him on YouTube just before he was to be killed. And that makes you think, well, how does that work out?

Some people think that just because you're born or you go through something terrible in this life, it's because you did something terrible in a past life. I think you've heard me talk about this tale which comes up in the Dhammapada, where there's a ship

going across the ocean and it suddenly stops. It doesn't move. And the captain goes and consults these monks who are on board. They sit down in deep contemplation. Then they go to him and say, "Well, it's your wife. In a past life, she killed all these dogs"—I can't remember exactly what it was now. "So the only way it's going to move is to get rid of your wife." So he throws her overboard, and of course, the ship moves on. There's one way to get rid of your wife! So you've got these stories coming from the scriptures of moral retribution.

There's a feeling that perhaps to make sense of the whole karmic law, there has to be some equilibrium, some way in which things are worked out.

So that's an intuitive thing. Either you've got it or you've not.

And of course, in terms of the whole process that we're in, which is about liberation—and about what you might call a sort of categorical imperative in the Buddha's teaching—all beings are heading towards liberation, and they will make it. So there is in us this Buddha nature which is indestructible. That's the point. It's immortal. It doesn't die. It's not born. And so it will keep being reborn until it finds that it doesn't have to be reborn anymore and finds itself in a blissful place which we call Nibbāna.

And of course, there are two descriptions of what that is. In the Theravāda, the Self-Enlightened One just goes into Nibbāna, full stop. Nothing more is said. But in the Mahāyāna, you're drawn out to help other beings, and therefore you reappear in your bliss body in different realms. So the whole idea of karma fits in with that basic notion that all beings are destined to be liberated, one way or the other.

So it's with this sort of rational argument, you see—it's not scientific, it's a rational argument—that one might open up to the idea of rebirth.

But having said all that, of course, it doesn't matter, does it? Because the Dhamma works for us whether we believe it or not. So it's a case of really not coming to a conclusion.

I quote here Bhikkhu Bodhi: "The karmic process functions autonomously, without a supervisor or director, entirely through its own intrinsic power of volitional action." So it's just the law of karma. There's no need for a god, there's no need for punishment—it just works itself out.

There's a quote here from the Buddha which I'll end with: "The end of the world is to be seen, known, and reached by travelling—that I do not say. And yet I do not say that one makes an end of suffering without reaching the end of the world. Rather, in this

fathom-long body, with its consciousness and mind, I declare the world, the arising of the world, the ceasing of the world, and the way leading to the ceasing of the world. Just this is the end of suffering."

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not confused, and that through your practice you may be liberated from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 75

The Discourse to the Kālāmas: Discernment, the Ethical Life and Fake News

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53 min

In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a thorough examination of the Kālāma Sutta (AN 3.65), often cited as the Buddha's charter for free inquiry, while revealing its deeper and more nuanced message. Rather than endorsing complete relativism or uncritical free thinking, the Buddha provides the Kālāmas—who were confused by competing religious teachers—with practical criteria for discerning truth based on direct experience of what is wholesome and unwholesome.

Bhante systematically unpacks the Buddha's ten criteria for what not to blindly accept: repeated hearing, tradition, rumour, scripture, logical conjecture, inferential reasoning, reflection on appearances, agreement with pondered views, the speaker's seeming competence, and reverence for one's teacher. He connects these ancient warnings to contemporary issues of cognitive bias, social proof, authority bias, and the echo chambers of social media that contributed to events like Brexit and recent elections. The talk draws on modern psychology, referencing Rolf Dobelli's work on clear thinking, while grounding everything in the Buddha's practical approach.

The discourse reveals how the Buddha, rather than simply telling the Kālāmas what to believe, guides them to examine greed, hatred, and delusion through their own experience, then offers the practice of the four brahmavihāras—loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—as a foundation for ethical living. Bhante concludes with reflections on free will, the unconditioned nature of Nibbāna, and how genuine spiritual awakening emerges through patient discernment rather than mere intellectual choice.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

I'm going to do something a little bit topical today. It's about fake news. There's a book that's very good on this actually, called *The Art of Clear Thinking* by Rob de Belli, a Swiss author. But I'll come back to that.

The main discourse which tries to give us some basic ideas as to how to judge what is correct or incorrect is called the Kālāma Sutta. I'm going to go through that discourse now. Normally people use this to say that the Buddha allowed complete free thinking and it was completely up to you to decide what was true or not true. You'll see why when we go through it. But actually, when you read the full discourse, it's a slightly dif-

ferent message, because it's not quite complete freedom to do what you want. You know, this post-modern thing: I do my own thing in my own time, in my own way. Everything's relative. What's true for me is true for me. It might not be true for you. Tough. Forget tradition and all that sort of stuff.

Even rationality is undermined in a way, or at least questioned. Remember that the Enlightenment, our wonderful Enlightenment in the 18th century—people like Kant and Hobbes—produced, of course, eventually the United Nations human rights document. But it also produced Nazism and communism. Rationality, remember, is always based on a premise. If the premise is wrong, then that's it. If the premise is right, that's good fortune.

This, of course, is the Buddha's own particular position, because he always talks about wrong view, and he always starts off the path with right view. So if your view is wrong, if your understanding is wrong, then the rest follows through as being unwholesome, and vice versa.

Let's take our time reading through this discourse, and you'll get the feel of it.

"Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was wandering in the Kosala country with a large community of bhikkhus and entered a town of the Kālāma people called Kesaputta. The Kālāmas, who were inhabitants of Kesaputta, said, 'Reverend Gotama, the monk, the son of the Sakyans, has, while wandering in Kosala country, entered Kesaputta. The good repute of the Reverend Gotama has been spread in this way: Indeed, the Blessed One is thus consummate, fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practice sublime, knower of the worlds, peerless, guide of tamable men, teacher of divine and human beings, awakened. That which he by himself has through direct knowledge understood clearly, he sets forth. The Dhamma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, possessing meaning and letter, complete in everything—he proclaims the holy life that is perfectly pure. Seeing such consummate ones is good indeed.'"

Now that last bit is a pat phrase that appears whenever the Buddha arrives somewhere. It's obviously an implant into the text. But the point is that when he gets there, they went to where the Blessed One was, and arriving, paid homage to him.

This is a nice little aside to tell you how people behaved. Some exchanged greetings with him, and after cordial small talk, sat down to one side. Some saluted him, raising their joined palms, and sat down to one side. Some announced their name and family

and sat down to one side. Some, without speaking, sat down to one side. You get this idea of people coming in very slowly. They also had this way of going around somebody three times, paying respects.

So they're all seated there, and this is what they say: "There are some monks and brahmins, Venerable Sir, who visit Kesaputta. They expound and explain only their own doctrines, and the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Some other monks and brahmins too, Venerable Sir, come to Kesaputta. They also expound and explain only their own doctrines, and the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Venerable Sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these venerable monks and brahmins spoke the truth and which falsehood?"

Now, if the Buddha had been like one of these people they just mentioned, these wandering ascetics, you would have expected him to say, "Well, they're all rubbish. Here's the Four Noble Truths." But he doesn't. He answers this way: "It is proper for you, Kālāmas, to doubt, to be uncertain. Uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful."

Come, Kalamas. Now this is the statement that everybody quotes whenever you get a passage on free speech or the freedom of thought that the Buddha allowed. This is usually what they will quote:

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, upon tradition, upon rumor, or upon what is in a scripture, nor upon surmise, upon axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration, "This teacher is our teacher."

So just because someone is your teacher, you believe them, you see.

Now, if we go through that, you'll see it covers virtually everything, although I think there's one point that might be missed.

The first four are to do with tradition. The word is *anusava*, meaning in conformity with what has been heard. Remember, in those times nothing was written down as such. It was all remembered. And that was partly the Brahmins' job, to remember all the discourses, all their Vedas. As Bhikkhu Bodhi writes, this is generally understood to refer to the Vedic system, which according to the Brahmins had originated with the primal deity and had been handed down orderly through successive generations. So here you've got the equivalent of things like the Bible, the Quran, the Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs. The Buddha is saying don't just believe something because it has this

deep history to it, this claim that it was written by God and therefore you have to believe it. You've also got similar things with secular religions like communism and national socialism, but that's slightly different because it comes on to rationality.

The next one is *paramparā*, which has to do with legends, tradition, lineage—signifying tradition in general, an unbroken succession of teachers. It's very similar, referring to this way of just believing something because that's what you were taught. You never question it.

Number three is just by hearsay. They're very close, these—tradition, rumour, sources of confusion. Or by general consensus. That's another problem we have. Just because a lot of people believe something, therefore it must be true. Gandhi was supposed to have said that truth can be in a minority of one.

Using this little point here from the referendum we had, it's interesting what respondents said to certain questions. They were asked separately whether they had enough information about what would happen in the event of a remain vote and a leave vote. Sixty-five percent agreed they had enough information about what would happen in the event of a remain vote, while twenty-six percent disagreed. Forty-five percent agreed they had enough information about what would happen in the event of a leave vote, but forty-six percent disagreed. So there were a whole load of people voting who felt they didn't have enough information to vote. They probably just went along with what was generally in the air, the feeling that was in the air.

It was the same about the conduct of the referendum. Was it fair and balanced? Sixty-three percent of people who voted didn't think it was fair and balanced. Strange, isn't it? The main reasons people thought the conduct of the campaigns was not fair and balanced was because they thought it was one-sided, unbalanced, biased, partial—thirty-one percent thought that. And thirty-one percent said the information was inaccurate and misleading. Remain voters were more likely to say it was due to inaccurate and misleading information. Thirty-eight percent of leave voters thought the campaign was one-sided. The report really just damns the whole referendum as a democratic exercise.

So it's this business of hearsay. Chinese whispers, you know.

There was a case in Sri Lanka which is, well, sort of related. There was a monk who lives up in the forests in a three-sided *kuti*. The tarantulas and snakes are all there. He's very well known, and I believe some other monks have joined him up there. I actually met him. He had gone for his normal morning alms round, and on the way back an elephant jumped out and ran over him. Now, what they say is that if an elephant wants to

kill you, it'll kill you. There's no problem with that. This one obviously didn't want to kill him, he just wanted to run over him. But unfortunately, one of his big feet went and stood on him and really messed his hip up. He was there all night on what would have been a path, and the villagers where he would normally go for alms round were wondering why he hadn't turned up. They went looking for him, and that's when they found him and brought him to hospital.

He didn't do a very good job on his hip, actually, because his leg was still up in the air somewhere when I met him.

Now, I didn't know the full story at first. The first bit of news I got about it was when I'd gone into Colombo for some reason or other, and the Swedish monk there said to me, "Have you heard about Sonsai?" I said no. He said, "It's just an amazing story. He was sat under a tree meditating in posture, and a she-elephant with a calf came along. When they saw him, the calf became really interested and walked up to him, tried to sit in posture, fell over, and broke his hip."

That's only about sixty miles—from Kandy to Colombo is about sixty miles. So it just shows you what can happen to a story.

We used to do little exercises like Chinese whispers when we were doing anti-racist work at the college I was at. You'd tell an initial story about a carriage where somebody stole something, and you would actually point out who stole it. You would say there were certain people in the carriage, and one, of course, was coloured. You would point to somebody and say they stole it. By the time it got round through all the whispered retellings, it was always the coloured person who'd committed the crime. This was in a mainly white class, of course. So you can see how prejudice, how what you want to think, keeps changing the story ever so little towards your bias.

So that was the reflection on hearsay. The final criterion in this group is concerned with scripture. The word actually means much the same—a collection of scriptures, what is contained in scripture. So it's about seeing them as infallible. Even though the study of the Bible, the exegesis of the Bible, is so developed these days—they can tell you what parts of the story came from where, like the whole business of the flood being a Mesopotamian myth, and there being two stories of creation melded together, all pulled apart like that—yet you still get people who believe it is actually the word of God, that the whole of creation happened in six days and so forth. You can see the authority that people give to scripture because of its ancientness.

So what this means for us is that whatever we read in the Buddhist scriptures, we don't just take for granted. That applies to us as students interested in the Dhamma.

The next four criteria are concerned with thinking. The first one is translated as logical reasoning, logical conjecture or surmise—reflection, logic.

Now, regarding rationality, there's a lovely story around Galileo that's informative of this. When Galileo wrote his paper supporting the works of Copernicus—I'll be hazy about all the details—but when the authorities read it, they decided it was heretical. The reasoning was this: God had created the world, and the apex of his creation, the wonder of his creation, was the human being. The idea that we should be floating around the sun rather than the sun floating around us was horrific. And not only that, you could see it—you could see it every morning, the sun rising and falling. So there was a bit of perceptual understanding there. But the reasoning was that it was unreasonable to think that the apex of God's creation would be wandering around the sun, or around the stars, rather than them wandering around us.

Of course, he had to recant. He had to take it back. I think later on he got it out there. But that just shows you how reasoning based on some premise, if the premise is wrong, then you're in trouble. You're messed up.

The second category is inferential reasoning. The Buddha wouldn't venture into this territory at all—reasoning based purely on inference.

If we take, shall we say, a Hindu position as opposed to a Buddhist position—the union with God, with Brahman, or with God in the Christian tradition—when you read the mystics, it's actually a singular experience. To quote Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century mystic: "The I"—that is, the eye of consciousness—"that I see God with is the same consciousness God sees me with." In that experience, there's no duality. That's what they mean by non-dual—there's no otherness.

The reason they say "non-dual" rather than "one" is that if you say "one," you beg the number two. So they get beyond this linguistic problem by saying non-dual. We have the same difficulty with attachment in Buddhism. If you read the earlier Buddhist books, they use the word "detached"—to be detached. But that sounded rather awful to people. You could be detached and yet love somebody? So they had to coin this new term: non-attachment. It's neither detached nor attached; it's non-attached—something that lies above both. You've got the same sort of language problem with duality and oneness, so you say it's non-dual—neither this nor that.

Here you've got Meister Eckhart telling us there's this experience which he claims is an experience of God, but there's no object in it. In other words, he's inferring that this must be an experience of God. From that inference comes a presumption that every-

body's soul has this same experience. And from that, you get the concept of God with all these beings in union with him. You can see that that's an inference—you can't actually experience it.

It's the same with Hinduism. The atta in non-dual Hindu experience is to be at one with Brahman. That's an inference. The Buddha wouldn't go there. That's why there's no teaching about what relationship your Nibbana dhatu, your Nibbanic element, your Buddha nature, has with anybody else's. Or what relationship it has to something that may or may not have created it. There's nothing at all in the Buddhist scriptures about that.

The Buddha is quite clear that all he's teaching is what can actually be experienced. He's clear that Nibbana is, as far as he's concerned, the ultimate happiness—and that's it. Once you've attained that in this life, you're radically changed by it. That's why I put up that quote from the nun earlier.

When you die, the inference is that you either disappear or merge into that state as an eternal reality. But even that's a bit hazy because, as you know, the Mahayana say that the Buddha comes out of that state, called back by compassion towards all beings. But it's all inference. We don't know. So the Buddha advises that when somebody talks to you about these matters, you must be able to distinguish between what's experiential and what's actually being inferred.

The next category concerns specious reasoning—silly reasoning, really. It's reflection on appearances, which refers to theories such as the Big Bang Theory. That is a theory. There can't be any absolute decision about it because it begs the question of why it happened in the first place. It always goes back to this original point: okay, there was this explosion, but why? Where did it come from? Because nothing comes of nothing, to quote Shakespeare. That's the sort of reflection you have to be careful of.

There's also the matter of having thought something through, gone through the whole process, but there's a bias towards a notion that you're not always aware of. These days the word "bias" is used as opposed to "prejudice." A prejudice is something you're quite aware of, but a bias is a way of looking at things. I gave a talk a couple of weeks back on how we as a culture receive Buddhism through our biases, unknown to us. We're not fully aware that we're always judging the Buddha's teachings, always re-framing them in terms of science or the romantic movement.

The whole idea of being at one with nature—you get Buddhist writers talking about how eventually what we want is this beautiful oneness with everything. That's actually a romantic idea. There's nothing I know of in the scriptures about oneness with nature.

The teachings are always about getting your morals right and discovering this transcendent experience of Nibbana. Not that those nature experiences don't arise, but that's definitely not where Buddhism directs its teachings. If they arise, all well and good, but that's not the purpose. Such states are transitory, as the Romantics themselves pointed out. You could be blissed out in nature one day, and then the next day it rained. You can't hold it.

So you've got to be careful of these biases that we're not aware of. How do you become aware of them? That's another good question. It's through really discussing these things with people who have different views.

This came out very clearly in the American election, where on the surface of things it looked as though Clinton had it made. But then there were all these isolated groups—Facebook is especially criticized for this—where people were really only reading their own little circle, cementing their views and opinions as a group, and therefore not listening at all to anybody else. When the election came, of course, it was all a big surprise.

So you have to be careful about agreement after pondering views. Obviously it has to have an appropriate basis.

One thing that seems to be missed in all of this is intuition—that gut feeling, that sense of something being right or being wrong. You get people saying things like "I feel," and it annoys people who say "I think," because people who say "I feel" have an intuitive grasp of something but can't often explain why. And people who say "I think" want to know why. Meanwhile, people who say "I think" annoy people who say "I feel" because often their thinking isn't right according to the way they've intuited something.

I remember little arguments arising out of that separation at Gaia House among the coordinators—what we'd call the managers at the time. "I feel," "I think."

But you can't trust your intuition either, because you don't know where you're coming from. Just because you have an intuition that something is right or wrong, it still has to be tested, you still have to question it. Your intuitions also are based upon a bias, an internal bias with which we're looking at the world.

In terms of the spiritual life, our fundamental biases are that happiness is to be found in this world, in the sensual world; that things have some sort of permanency; that I have a sense of me that is permanent, even though everything else is changing. That's the problem with the self. These deeper biases, these delusions, are actually shaping the way we experience life, creating perhaps expectations that aren't possible.

The final one has to do with the teacher. It's really about having too much faith in the teacher and what seems probable. This is an interesting one because generally you have to have a certain confidence in your teacher. And if anything happens whereby you lose that confidence, the whole thing is actually snapped.

I remember it happened to me. I had a teacher whom I had a lot of admiration for, and then he did something, and something just snapped. I thought, "No, this guy won't do." And I left. I went somewhere else. It wasn't that he was evil or anything—I just lost confidence in him. It's not that I didn't go back later and stay with him and form a good relationship, but it was as though something had snapped my faith in him. Which might have been a good thing.

Sometimes you do over-invest. I don't think you can help giving your teacher an order that they don't actually have, because you're always looking to them for advice. There's always that tendency to see them as slightly more enlightened, better, more ethical than they actually are. And when they trip, you think, "Oh, blood and sand!"

You're probably doing it to me, you see. I'm preparing for you to say, "What the bloody hell's going on?" It's just one of those things—you can't help it. Everybody does it to anybody who leads. That's the whole point of a leader, isn't it? They sort of surround themselves with this charisma, which isn't something they may have particularly developed. People have dumped it on them. They've actually seen them like that. And it's very blinding.

The Buddha wouldn't have any of that either. There's a lovely bit just as he's dying where there's a young monk who's looking upon him with the eyes of adoration, and he sends him off into the forest to go and meditate. It's just a wrong sort of relationship.

So the Buddha is very clear about what the relationship of a teacher and a student should be—that the student should be constantly questioning the teacher. Obviously following the directions as best they can, but then never being completely taken in.

You'll probably all be leaving tomorrow.

So anyway, if we now just read on. He made this statement about what not to believe, but he doesn't leave it there. Remember, these people aren't—this is probably the first time they've seen him. They don't know him very well. They've heard this rumour, this reputation that he has, but they don't actually know him. So he starts right from the beginning. He says: "What do you think, Kalamas? Does greed appear in a man for his benefit or harm?"

It's for his harm, venerable sir. Being given to greed, being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, this man takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies. He prompts another to do likewise. Will that be long for his harm or ill? For his ill, venerable sir.

And then he goes through the same sort of process about hate. So there's greed, there's hate—will that be long for his harm and ill? Well, yes, venerable sir. And what do you think of delusion? You see, overwhelmed by delusion, he takes life, steals, and so forth. So that's also not so very good.

Are these things for good or bad? They're bad, venerable sir. Blameable or not blameable? Blameable, venerable sir. Censured or praised by the wise? Censured, venerable sir.

You see, here he's not saying you can make up your own mind about things, you can have your own thoughts and go your own way. This business of blameable and praised by the wise constantly comes up in his teaching. So you have to actually find out what somebody whom you see as more trustworthy or more advanced than yourself in terms of morals and spiritual life thinks, and to be able to take that advice. Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to harm or ill, or not? And how does it strike you? Undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill. This is how it strikes us. Therefore, I say—and then it repeats that formula—do not just believe somebody because of this and this and that.

And then, of course, he says the opposite. So when there isn't greed, and a person does not take life, does not steal, and so forth, will that be long for his benefit and happiness? Yes, venerable sir. And then he does the same process. Remember, this is the oral tradition, so it's all put in a particular way so you can actually remember it. There are phrases spoken over and over again. So again, hate—will that be long for his benefit? No, no, definitely not. And then the same with delusion.

So these people don't know him, and he's giving them a way to find out whether something is beneficial or not for them. And he's giving them something that they can relate to immediately, which is greed, hatred, aversion, and delusion.

And finally, to sum it all up, he says when these things are undertaken and observed, they lead to benefit and happiness. And this is how it strikes us. Then there's a repetition of that formula: don't believe anybody because of this and that.

But now, having laid down a sort of moral platform by which they can decide whether something is good or bad, he then tells them how to live. So a disciple of the noble ones, Kālāmas, in this way, devoid of coveting—that's the greed—devoid of ill will, un-

deluded, clearly comprehending and mindful, dwells having pervaded with the thought of amity, of love, one quarter, likewise the second, the third, the fourth—like we do in the evening—and so above and below and across, he dwells having pervaded all the existence of all living beings everywhere, the entire world, with the great, exalted, boundless thought of love that is free of hatred and malice. So now he's telling them how to actually practice in their daily life.

And then he says the same thing with compassion, the same thing with joy, and the same thing with equanimity. So there you've got your four illimitables, something that you can actually develop in your ordinary daily life.

Having laid down a moral platform—that we should be doing what is a benefit to ourselves and to others—he then gives a practice whereby you would support that sort of attitude, which is developing love, compassion, joy, and peacefulness.

And he says when you get to this, you gain these four consolations, four solaces. When a disciple of the noble ones has such a hate-free mind, such a malice-free mind, such an undefiled mind, such a purified mind, one of the four consolations or solaces is to be found here.

Suppose there is a hereafter. Suppose there's an afterlife, and there is a fruit, a result of deeds done well or ill. Then it is possible that at the dissolution of the body after death, I shall arise in the heavenly world which is possessed of the state of bliss. This is the first consolation.

Supposing there is no hereafter, supposing there's no afterlife and there is no fruit, no result of deeds well done or ill, yet in this world here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound and happy, I keep myself. This is the second consolation. So even if you drop dead and that's the end of it at the end of life, practicing like this at least brings you a certain level of happiness in this very life.

And in the opposite way: supposing evil befall an evildoer, I, however, think of doing evil to no one. Then how can it affect me who has done no evil? So in other words, there's a sort of presumption there that if you're not committing evil, it's less likely for evil to come towards you. Obviously, if you're a very angry sort of person, you might find somebody who's actually more angry than you, and then you're stuck. This doesn't mean evil doesn't approach us, but there's a consolation there that you won't excite somebody's hatred towards you.

Supposing evil results do not befall an evildoer, then I see myself purified in any case. So because I don't do evil, and there are consequences, because I don't do evil then evil won't come to me. If there is no consequence to evil, then that's fine too, because I don't do evil, no consequences will come to me. Here the Buddha is arguing about fate and about free will, and we'll come to that towards the end.

So these are the four solaces. And of course he says the opposite with doing good. We can expect that we'll have good results from a moral life.

Now at the end they're all absolutely gobsmacked by the Buddha, and they end up saying, "Marvellous, Venerable Sir, marvellous. As if, Venerable Sir, a person were to turn face upwards what is upside down, or to uncover the concealed, or to point the way to one who is lost, or to carry a lamp in the darkness, thinking those who have eyes will see visible objects. So has the Dharma been set forth in many ways by the Blessed One. We, Venerable Sir, go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dharma for refuge, to the community for refuge. Venerable Sir, may the Blessed One regard us as lay followers who have gone for refuge for life from today." So he obviously had a big effect.

To sum up the Discourse to the Kalamas: remember that they don't know the Buddha, or they don't seem to know him, and he's not going to try and convert them. He's going to try and help them discover for themselves what is wholesome for them and what is not.

First of all, remember, he asks these questions about basically the moral life. Is something wholesome or unwholesome? Once he's done that, he then goes on to explain about greed, hatred and delusion—that's part of it really—and then what happens when they're not there. After that he says, once you've got your moral life going, then you've got to develop these four qualities: the four brahma viharas, the illimitables—love, compassion, joy and peacefulness. But you could extend that of course to any virtue.

Then there are the four consolations or solaces regarding how they're behaving. If there is a future life, they'll get the benefit of good behaviour, and even in this life. So even if there isn't a future life, then in this very life they'll get the benefit of a moral life. That's basically the teachings of this particular discourse.

It's only right at the end that they actually accept the Buddha as their teacher. Presumably after that, or shortly after that, at least on the next visit, he would hit them with the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and so on. Skilful teaching. These sorts of things are repeated in various scriptures throughout.

So what does this particular discourse tell us? It tells us to be very discriminative about what we actually hear or read or see. There's not only the use of our own intellect and understanding, but also this accent upon what others think too. There's always that sense of relationship, that you're not isolated. But then, as Gandhi pointed out, the truth can be in a minority of one. So it really is a bit dodgy.

The other thing I wanted to very quickly talk about was this lovely book called *The Art of Thinking Clearly* by Rolf Dobelli, the Swiss author. Just certain things he says in it. I've mentioned one or two here.

How we believe something because of authority bias—that's one of these little phrases that psychologists have conjured up. That's why they put film stars in all these advertisements for products, even though the film stars probably never use them at all. But because this film star ended up using this toothpaste, well, it must be good. The news of certain newspapers too—if you've got a bias towards the left or right, whatever you read, then that newspaper is giving you the correct news.

There's also social proof, another of these phrases. If somebody else believes it, if you've got a crowd of you believing the thing, it must be right. This awful thing that's happening with Buddhists and Muslims, first of all in Burma, in Myanmar, really stoking up a real irrational hatred, seems now to be happening in Sri Lanka, which is absolutely awful. It's just a hard core of nationalists who have this idea that Sri Lanka ought to be Buddhist and all that. There have been race riots, and they've pulled out what they call emergency measures. The army's out on the streets to stop people attacking Muslims, and they're about seven percent of the population. But that's what happens. You have this bias, you look for people who agree with you, you have your rationality, and then off you go. We live in an age of extremes at the moment.

There's also this business of cognitive error, which is what they call this bias. Things like neglect of probability overridden by magnitude. For instance, the bias towards the lottery. The lottery gives you millions if you win, but the national savings only give you a million—yet you get your money back. People pour their money into the lottery because it's big money. It's weird. You lose it—as soon as you hand over your lottery money, that's it, you've lost. But if you were to put it with Ernie, I think everybody's forgotten about Ernie, but in my younger days he was big. That's what you did.

You put your money in national savings and you knew your money was there. They just used the interest. And okay, you don't get millions and millions, but you could get a million. And there were smaller prizes. I won once—a hundred quid. See? I was very fortunate, because I crashed my brother's car. That was actually true, that one. Oh dear me.

So yes, and then there's this lovely gambler's fallacy. That's a nice one, where you think, well, something good's got to happen. I can't be having bad luck all the time. But probability actually says you could be having bad luck all the time.

He also mentions the problems with gut feelings. They're not to be trusted. Our emotions colour ourselves. There's a lovely story I heard about a divorce settlement. This man was being told by somebody who comes here, who's a solicitor, "Look, you'll lose the case. You will lose the money. There is no way you're going to win." But he wanted to do it anyway. Driven, I suppose, by hatred and some sort of twisted revenge. His emotions just wouldn't let him see the sheer impossibility of what he was trying to do.

The other one he points out is too many choices. Well, I'm sure you've all had that when you go along the biscuit racks at the supermarket. You always end up with your favourites anyway—chocolate biscuits or something.

Then there's overconfidence. "My belief's better than yours." That, of course, comes down to what the Buddha called conceit, where you're always comparing yourself. That's the problem with the self. The self is always, remember, unsafe. So it either says it's better than somebody else, or it feels safer by saying, through an inferiority complex, "Well, I'm not as good as you. I know that." And then there's that one about being equal, which is just a very subtle way of saying my group is better than anybody else's, or worse than anybody else's.

There's also things about miracles giving meaning to happenings which don't have any real basis. Now, I don't know if you've heard the story around Constantine, who converted to Christianity just before the big battle where his troops were completely outnumbered by the opposition in front of Rome. He was attacking Rome. He had this dream, it seems, of a cross. So he must have been listening to the Christian preachers who were around at the time—this is the fourth century, right? There were lots of religions in those times, as you know, or at least there was one major understanding about polytheism, and Christianity was battering its way in. It seems as though he had a dream with this cross, some sort of cross with a symbol in the middle of it. He woke up with the presumption that this was going to win him his battle, so he had everybody paint it on their shields, and he won. Then he thought, well, I'm a Christian after all, and that was it. It's a weird story, how the whole of history can be changed by a dream and the empowerment that you give to a dream.

So yes, that brings us to the end of that. And just as a side topic—the whole thing about free will. How free is the will? Well, it's not really exercised the East very much. There are, of course, people who've talked about conditioning and all that. But the West is really caught up in it. And if I'm right—you'd have to do your own little research—it all goes back really to Saint Augustine.

Saint Augustine argued that God created human beings to love him. Now, you can't condition somebody to love you and feel really good about it, right? You feel really good about somebody who out of their free will loves you. So he gave everybody the free will to love him or not. Which in Christian terms is really about morals. That's what Moses brought down from the mountain. He brought down a set of rules whereby people could live peacefully together.

But it's exercised our philosophers a lot. And you get, I think Jean-Paul Sartre said something to the point that you are free to make any decision, but you're either too afraid to do it or too stuck in a rut. But you're actually free to make that decision as a conscious choice. And then you get people who are fatalists who think you've no choice at all.

Similar things were happening in the Buddha's time. There were people who said that it didn't matter whether you went down the Ganges one way with great acts of love and the other way murdering and thieving—eventually it was all just conditioned and there were no consequences. It just happened.

What's been argued by Buddhist writers, or most Buddhist writers, is what they call a compatibilist position, where yes, you are conditioned, but you do have a measure of free will. If you think of the path—people talk about the spiritual path and the Buddha talks about the path and he says it's an ancient path—now, if you go on a walk and you're walking along a path and you come to a fork, you tend to get out your map to make sure you're going the right way. You consult the map and then you go off that way. If as you go along you think you've misread the map, then you come back to the cross-road and you go the other way. So there's a choice. Because of our delusion there's a choice. The choices come up because we're deluded, because we don't actually know the path. But that's all that is.

It's not as though the Buddha was unconditioned as a human being—he still was conditioned. We can see from Mae Chee Kaew that she still sees these leftover traces in the mind of greed, hatred, and delusive thinking. So it's not as though they've gone. And she would have behaved in a conditioned way. She'd have got up in the morning, gone for her alms round, sat down, had talks about the Dhamma with the nuns, and so on

and so forth. So it's not as though you become completely—this psychophysical organism that is working in society becomes unconditioned. That's not the unconditioned bit. That's always going to be conditioned.

Our job, as the Buddha points out in the Kalama discourse, is to get those habits which are going to bring us just a natural happiness, a natural ease with life. The unconditioned is pointing to something else. It's pointing to that which doesn't belong to this order of things. But there's nothing there. The Nibbanic experience is one which is so transcendent of this life that it's completely empty of it. So that's what he means by this suññatā. It's empty of anything that we gain from this psychophysical organism. And it's that which is the unconditioned, and that's why it doesn't have any suffering. That's why it's a perfect blissful state, even though there's no emotions. All these words that we use are anchored in our actual living day-to-day life. But what he's saying is that there is something which is simply not of this order.

And the process of getting there is not the process of free will, of choosing. Yes, there are choices. The main thing is discernment. It's actually looking at what we're doing and questioning everything we do to see whether it's bringing us a natural happiness of this life or unhappiness. And then to begin to start seeing things from these three vantage points of desire, impermanence, not-self. And slowly but surely there's an awakening. That's the best word of all. A slow awakening of something in us which doesn't belong to this phenomenal world.

And that's it, folks. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your devotion to the spiritual life you will relieve yourself of all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 76

Buddha Day Address: What Was the Mindset of the Bodhisatta When He Left His Family and What Made Him Carry On?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 37 min

In this Buddha Day address, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a profound exploration of what might have driven the 29-year-old Bodhisatta to abandon his family, wealth, and comfortable life as a Khattiya prince. Beginning with a poignant email about the apparent futility of life in the face of death, Bhante draws parallels between modern existential despair and the ancient Indian dread of endless rebirth. He examines the spiritual landscape of the Buddha's time—the various teachers offering absorption states (jhāna) as escape routes to heavenly realms, the Jain practice of self-mortification, materialists, and fatalists—contextualizing the Buddha's journey through these insufficient solutions.

The talk pivots to the Buddha's revolutionary insight: rather than chasing happiness externally, he turned inward to investigate how suffering is created moment by moment. Bhante explains how we continuously 'rebirth' ourselves through identification with body, feelings, and thoughts—all of which are impermanent and not-self (anattā). He unpacks the Four Noble Truths (cattāri ariyasaccāni) and the teaching of 'not me, not mine' as practical tools for disidentification rather than metaphysical claims about selfhood.

The discourse concludes with a striking passage from Upāsikā Kee Nanayon (1901-1991), a Thai laywoman teacher, describing the liberated state where body, mind, and 'essence' are known distinctly—where anger, greed, and delusion still arise but hold no power over the heart. This presence, she teaches, is 'forever unborn and undying.' Bhante offers this as the goal toward which practice leads: not elimination of experience, but freedom within it.

I want to start with a quote from an email someone sent me: "I thought I had a pretty good grasp on death, but I can't get a handle on it right now. It all just seems so futile and pointless—all the striving. Whether it's striving to earn enough money, striving to maintain ethics, striving to make good memories, what's the point when you just end up a photograph on someone's computer?"

Now, you might be thinking to yourself, today we're celebrating the Buddha and his life, so why is this monk making me depressed? Well, the reason this caught me was not only because of its poignancy, but also because there's a truthfulness about it, and it gives us a feeling for why the Buddha should leave his family.

So you've got a twenty-nine-year-old—this is the story told around the Buddha—and he leaves his wife, his family (which would have been a long extended family in those days, very close), and a newly born child whom he calls Rahula, meaning "chains." We have these pictures of him having a peek at his sleeping son, and then getting on his horse and shooting off into the homeless life.

Men and women have left their families for various reasons. War, for instance, is a regular one. But he was living in a place which had peace. It was a small group of people—a clan—that was living in the south of present-day Nepal, part of the greater kingdom of Kosala. And his father was the head man. So he would have had a bit of influence, a good future to look forward to. He was a Kshatriya, which meant the warrior caste. The caste system was fairly well established. The Brahmins were still considered second class in his area, though more to the east, towards present-day Bangladesh it seems, they'd become the top of the caste system. They were the mouths of Brahma, and the Kshatriyas were the shoulders, and all the rest were the body and the legs. That sort of image of a caste system, quite rigid.

His life would have been fairly pleasant. He wouldn't have been toiling as such—messing about, I would have thought, most of the time, practicing maybe a couple of the martial arts, generally talking about government and all that was going on, but generally not a stressful life. So something in him drove him. Even around that time there's nothing to suggest that there was a close death or anything like that, although remember his mother had died at childbirth, so I'm sure that hangs somewhere in a person's memory.

And it's just the way this person puts it, you see: "I thought I had a pretty good grasp on death." I think most of us would say that. We've got a pretty good grasp on it. And then somebody close dies, or it's our time, and then you suddenly realize that this grasp hasn't got such a good hold. You can't get a handle on it. Death shocks you.

And the reason is that death is so final. That's it, isn't it? Everything is lost at death. I remember there was a little joke about an elderly lady who died, who was very rich, and they asked the solicitor, "How much did she leave? What did she leave?" And he said, "Everything." That's it—everything.

When death touches upon you, then you get that feeling of ungroundedness, that floatiness, that fear, that anxiety, and that sense of uselessness, desperation, meaninglessness. And that takes us to the existentialists of the middle of the last century. People like Albert Camus, who said that consciousness was absurd. That was the general existential position—that consciousness itself is absurd. In other words, there was no reason

for it, and it was completely absurd to suffer. So Camus' idea was, well, enjoy life while you can, and if you can't, hop off, jump. Get rid of it. What's the point? He'd gotten into this worthlessness, this meaninglessness of life.

So that gives us some idea, maybe, of the Buddha's mental state when he left. Because in those times, the horror wasn't this finishing, wasn't this annihilation. It was this continuous onward going—that you'd be reborn again as a human being, over and over.

And over again, there didn't seem to be an escape from it at all. And although there were teachers who said there was an escape, it was usually into some sort of higher realm, and it was all predicated on a particular person's experience—mainly, from the Buddha's point of view, as he came to find out, based on meditative experiences.

We have these absorption states, these very refined states of mind. If you were to die in that state, or you were an adept at getting into that state, then you would be reborn into this higher realm. That actually still exists in the cosmology of Buddhism, of Theravāda Buddhism.

So we have to capture him at that moment—in a sense, a desperation which comes with meaninglessness, the whole pointlessness of having to come back again and again. It's with that, of course, that he goes on his search, and he goes out with the hope of actually discovering, as he would put it later, the end of suffering. But actually, I think, in his own mind it would have been the escape from rebirthing, from constant reincarnation.

When he practices with the first two teachers, remember, he gets these very deep mental states, and again it's this idea that if you die in that state, you'll be reborn there, and you'll be there forever in this beautiful state. But as he was a human being, he kept falling out of it. So there must have been a suggestion in him that even though he might be born in this heavenly place, the karma, the energy that would keep him there would eventually run out, and he'd fall back into being a human being.

This is basically some of the teaching that we have from the Buddha—that in this rebirthing process, depending upon the energy or the amount of power that there is in that state, you can fall from it when it's been exhausted. You would fall down, or perhaps move up with it, who knows. So he found that to be unsatisfactory. It wasn't giving him some sort of way of putting an end to this constant rebirth.

Then when he practices self-mortification—that's a completely different philosophy. That's the understanding that the soul is trapped in the body, and the body itself is a manifestation of your bad karma. The idea is to try and get rid of your body, especially

the appetites of the body. You deny yourself in order to reduce your appetites for the body, reduce your attachment to this life form. And by doing so, the soul would then untrap itself and rise to heaven and stay there. This would have been an understanding of the Jains, for instance.

So you can see there's a lot going on. There were also materialists who, like Camus, believed that once you die, that was it. And there were people who didn't believe in good works or bad works, that they would have any effect. They would say that if you went down one side of the Ganges full of compassion and love and joy, and came down the other side with hatred, greed, and aversion—it didn't actually matter, because it was all fate, all driven by circumstance.

You can see he's in an area of tremendous fermentation, a bit like today really. If you look at the human race today, we're all over the place. So you get this feeling that there was a lot of investigation going on about the purpose of life.

He goes out, you see, with this sort of despairing state, this feeling about the meaninglessness of life. And when, of course, he becomes fully liberated, what he discerns is how we create this suffering. The whole accent then turns upon who is actually causing, or what is actually causing, this rebirth.

Now, whether we believe in rebirth as something that happens after death, in a sense, doesn't really matter, because all we have is this present moment, and we must be rebirthing now. We must be in a process of recreating ourselves all the time. It's not a case of launching it into an after-death process. That really remains within your own personal belief, your own personal perspective on life. If you've had a past life experience, then you probably have some proof within yourself that you go on. But if you haven't, then you take it on, as we say, confidence for the while and hope for the best.

The fact that there might be annihilation upon death is in itself not that tremendously horrible, because once you're annihilated, well, at least there's no suffering. That's it, it's gone. But the thing is to catch the teaching as a moment-to-moment teaching—that actually here and now we are rebirthing, and to understand what's actually empowering that.

When we talk about rebirth, if we just go through what it is to be a human being from moment to moment, first of all, there's this body. Now we know this body is made up of something like ten trillion cells, and it's got a hundred trillion guest cells. These cells are constantly dying, reproducing themselves. So this body is not the body that we were born with. They tell you it's not the body you had seven years ago.

That's something really quite striking. When you look into a mirror, you can say to your face, "You weren't here seven years ago, and you won't be here in seven years." It's like reminding ourselves that this feeling of being me—this sort of hardness, this constancy, this substantiality that we have a feeling around this body, this "me"—actually doesn't have a basis.

When you look at the body like that, and then you ask yourself things like, "Well, what do I know about my body?"—you might know things theoretically, you might know, for instance, what your liver does, but do you know what it's doing now? Well, it better be doing a good job, because it's supposed to be doing a good job right now.

If you ask yourself things like, "What would I have known about the brain before modern science?"—all I know actually about the brain is that I'm up here somewhere, aren't I? Most times I'm talking to you, I'm up here somewhere, about half an inch or so behind this bone. I feel myself to be up here, and I'm talking to you, and I haven't a clue what's inside there at all. I have no direct experience of it.

And if you look at me now, what do you know of your own face? It's a big hole, isn't it? It's a big hole, and you're looking through it.

It's strange, isn't it? I can see your face, but you can't see yours. What a peculiar situation we find ourselves in.

So if you grasp this fact—that the body itself has its own life form, that it's actually doing its own thing—you begin to understand something important. And as you know, the body can let us down terribly.

Then if you look at your heart life, your emotional life, well, it's all over the place, isn't it? You get up feeling great, and then suddenly everything shifts. There's no control over it, no absolute control. You can push things away, suppress things, put your mind on something that makes you happy and lifts your spirits. But apart from that, you're still going to have to deal with this stuff, because we know it's all under there.

So the heart itself is in this constant process of changing, of moving. And in meditation, if we look closely, what happens is that we put words to it. We say, "Oh, I'm angry," or "I'm depressed," or "I'm happy, I'm joyful now." But actually, when you go into it, when you actually feel what's there, it's just a feeling. Just a feeling, like a sensation, like an itch which you want to scratch and then it disappears. There's nothing substantial about it at all, except that we give it substantiality by saying it's *me*.

Something happens with the body and the heart whenever we turn it into something that I am. And it's impossible to escape. As soon as I say to myself, "Oh, I'm depressed," that's it, isn't it? "I'm depressed"—where do we go from there? It's like being stuck. There's no escape from "I am depressed."

Worse still is "I am happy." Because in the midst of "I am happy," I am happy. And then the happiness goes. Then what am I? You see?

So this process of identifying with emotional states gives them some sort of solidity, some sort of permanency, some sort of reality. But when we distance ourselves and simply look at the feeling, feel it directly, it's just a feeling. Just a feeling. A mental feeling, perhaps, but just a feeling.

And even more fleeting are these thoughts. When we see thoughts come and go, most of the time we're caught up in them—and rightly so. We're having a conversation, we're on the telephone, whatever it may be. But what we notice when we come to meditate is that it goes completely haywire. We have no control over it at all. And then you realize that maybe that's the way it is in daily life too, and I'm just fooling myself.

You realize that no thought ever repeats itself. There's no repetition. Everything is absolutely creative, utterly fresh. And therefore there's no ability to hold on to something. You can't hold on to this body—it's changing. You can't hold on to the heart states, even though they're very similar. One state of depression generally feels very much like the next. But they're all completely different in the sense of what's actually happening in this moment.

So the idea of trying to hold on to something, which is what we habitually do, becomes ridiculous.

And that's one of the drives of our meditation. When I say meditation, I'm not just talking about sitting posture, but even ordinary daily life—just to be aware at the end of a day that the day is gone. That's it. Finished. Complete. At the end of a meal, it's gone. Finished. You can't do anything about it. And you never come back to it. That's it.

And feel the grief. It's just catching that impermanency of things, that absolute annihilation.

So that's where we get the feeling of annihilation—in the present moment. Every moment actually annihilates. Phenomenally speaking, the consciousness that we have, what we experience, even though the stimulus is given to us from the outside world, everything that we have completely comes to an end and it annihilates. That's it. It's gone.

Concentrating on the end of things brings us right face to face with this problem of death. And that's where I think the Buddha must have been when he started on his journey. Something, as we know, changed in him when all these things failed. There was this change of way of looking at things.

We can only imagine that, having been to all these teachers, he was in a bit of a state of despair, really, because there was no answer. Nobody had shown him. He'd been through all the exercises. He knew all the arguments, because later on, after his liberation, he could argue his point with all the other teachers that were around, all the other philosophers. And yet he'd come to this point of desperation.

So there was a flip, there was a turnaround. And the turnaround was basically this: instead of chasing for happiness, instead of trying to find happiness, he now turns inward to see how he creates suffering. And what is his discovery? You might say it is that the world we're experiencing is the one that we are creating.

So even in this room now, we have as many rooms as there are people. When you grasp that—if you grasp that—actually everything that you're experiencing now is being manufactured within here, within this body, the heart process as well, and the feeling of the room. It's all being manufactured through the sense bases of the body and what the brain does with it and the mind does with it.

And we have this consciousness which is only limited by phenomena. I'm only limited to what I can see by these walls. If these walls weren't here, then my consciousness would be able to contain the whole area. If I was stuck in the middle of the universe, I'd be able to contain the whole universe, because my consciousness is as large or as wide as what comes in through my sense bases. But it's all here, it's all me, it's all projections. None of it actually really exists outside me as something I can experience. That's why I can't experience the world you experience.

So there's some sort of disconnection between us. And we can only contact each other through language, through a certain empathy, through a certain feel. But you can't actually be in another person's world. We're trapped in this consciousness. We're trapped within our own world—which is a terrifying idea if you think about it.

When you begin to realize that, then the problem becomes: how do I make this world that I'm manufacturing somewhere where I want to continue living, where I want to actually enjoy life rather than being always in a state of conflict?

And that's when we come back into this process and realize this whole thing about desire and attachment, and aversion, and having a relationship with what we're experiencing—always to do with either wanting, grasping, or pushing away, or running away.

And then, as you come behind that, you find that there's somebody that wants to do this. So your original problem lies deep, deep, deep within our psyche, all around this idea of: who am I? This sense of identity.

In our meditation, when we distance something from us—as those of you in the room this morning, and those who've been meditating anyway—what we're doing is we're finding a kernel of identity within ourselves which is separating out from the psychophysical organism with its sensations and feelings, emotions, moods, thoughts and images. That's a very strange place. Think about it. Because now you are the observer. You're actually saying to yourself, in so many words, "I am the observer of..."

The perceiver can't be the perceived. You can't have the two. And I am—my feeling is that I am this observer, this feeler within, while everything's going on in my mind. So I'm an alien. I mean, I shouldn't be here. I've lost my identity at a certain level with the body, heart and mind. When you think about it, it's a very strange place to be.

Now, the thing is that when you get into that place and you're very quiet, just have a glance back into it and find out what's not there. And that's where you get the teaching of the Buddha about "not me, not mine."

This "not me, not mine" is not a statement that there isn't a self—inverted commas—that there isn't a soul, that there isn't something which is transcendent. There's nowhere in the scriptures where he says there is no self. It's a teaching tool. What he's saying is: everything that becomes an object to your awareness, you should be saying to yourself, "The perceiver can't be the perceived—it can't be me." So that's not me, and it's not mine.

I can't possess something with which I don't have a relationship. And most of our possession, remember, is either some sort of emotional clinging or a legal fiction. I mean, if somebody steals your mobile phone, you might go around saying, "Somebody stole my mobile!" But it's not yours anymore—it's theirs now, like possession. You have to watch the way that the mind works in terms of identifying and possessing something.

So now, as we go down through the layers: here we are, we've looked at the body, and it's just a pile of cells constantly changing, completely out of my control. I can't get into a cell and tell it to divide. I can't do anything with the cellular makeup of my body. When it comes to the heart level, I can allow the heart to manifest, and it will slowly heal itself of its problems. I can build up the heart through the same process of imagination so that I actually have a beautiful heart, a beautiful mind. And I can do something about thinking, so there's some way of influencing it.

If you consider a driver in a car—for those of you who have cars, those who can drive—when you're driving and you're actually in the zone, you and the car are one. There's this feeling of total control. And it's only when the wheel drops off that you realize you're not actually in control, and you freak out. So there's that sense of identifying which gives you a sense of control. This is the problem with identity.

Here we are, constantly disidentifying with things, and in so doing, undermining the relationship that identity creates—which is wanting to control. That wanting to control manifests in terms of desire and attachment. As soon as something is pleasant, you want to control it, maintain it, increase it. As soon as something is unpleasant, you want to get rid of it. So we're in constant conflict with the way things are.

Now, I'm talking within ourselves—a psychology which represents the negative part of us. Don't confuse this with compassion and love, which come from a wisdom center where you're trying to do something but from a very different angle. It emerges from trying to find an honest and skillful relationship. That's what we're moving towards when we develop this goodwill, this compassion and joy. And that, of course, brings a happiness which is not clinging. Love doesn't cling. Love allows.

So this was his discovery. And it's interesting that, as it's put in the mythology of his teaching, the first teaching was centered around these Four Noble Truths—just laying the platform that there is suffering. This is it, you see? There is death. And it's really laying the platform about life as unsatisfactory—that we shouldn't be seeking permanent happiness in life. The joys in life come and go. Simple as that.

And then the second noble truth points to the very kernel which is the problem: desire—which concerns our relationship to things. This English word "desire" is not quite right, because you can have a good desire, an honest desire. I'm translating the word *taṇhā*, which is often translated as thirst or craving. But all it really is, is desire based on wrong understanding, desire based on delusive understanding.

And then the third noble truth: a really clear declaration that there is an end to suffering. You can't get clearer than that. No Western psychotherapist has said that. They all say you can reach an accommodation with life, but nobody has ever stated in the West that you can come to the end of suffering in this very life. Not that I know of, anyway.

And of course, the fourth noble truth tells you how to get there—the Eightfold Path. At the foundation of the Eightfold Path is this right understanding, or right view, which is probably a better way of expressing it. We begin to turn the way we see things around. There's a constant reminder about how things arise and pass away. A constant

reminder that every time suffering arises, there must be something wrong within my relationship to what's happening. There's something in me that's got it wrong. And we look into it and take responsibility for it. And we learn not to substantiate things, not to make this sense of "I" so strong. You do that, of course, by connecting with other people.

One example is the Buddha visiting three monks who are liberated, completely liberated. He calls them the Anuruddhas. And he asks one of them, "How is it that you live so peacefully together?" The kernel statement within the discourse is this: "When I get up in the morning, I say to myself, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?"

Now, how many of you get up in the morning and say that to yourselves? What if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do? Frankly, in a community, that only works if everybody says it. Otherwise, you end up being slightly abused, because everybody will make you do what they want to do. So there has to be that reciprocity.

As we go through this, we can see just the amazing insight that the Buddha had. I couldn't have got there myself without the Buddha. I couldn't have got there without my teachers who told me to look this way. I'd still be a raving lunatic. I would never have been able to grasp this were it not for the direction from my teachers, and they going right back to the Buddha who made that kernel insight.

So that's where he stands within our particular tradition. He's the founder. He's the fountain of all that insight that we have. And he's the exemplar, because he himself went through this whole process. It wasn't something that he thought up. It was something that he himself personally experienced about himself. And in that sense, he's an archetype, because all of us have to go through this process of renunciation.

If you look at any spiritual tradition, it doesn't matter what religion it is, you'll find it's always a process of renunciation. And the renunciation, remember, isn't the denial of the world. It's not a world-negative thing. It's a denial of seeing the world as the place to become perfectly happy in. What we're aiming towards is that when we are in a state of joyfulness, we can actually fully enjoy it without wanting it to be repeated, without holding on to it. And when we're in a state of misery and pain, we're able to be patient with it and just bear with it. That's where we're going.

When the Buddha died, he was praised afterwards for his patience, for his bearing of his illness. He had food poisoning. And even there, just finally, even there before he died, he's able to encourage people: "All compounded things arise and pass away. Strive diligently for your liberation."

Always ask, what will be our last words? "Why me?" I saw a lovely cartoon with all these ladies around an elderly lady who was dying, and she's looking at them and saying, "Why me? Why not one of you?"

So you can see that's where it's leading us anyway. That's what we mean by liberation from suffering. We don't mean liberation from the pains and the emotional stuff around life. We mean a liberation from it.

Just to bring the talk to an end, could you bring me that picture frame, Marion? The one on the window ledge. I didn't think I'd need this, but I said I had it.

It's just that when you start talking, you never know where you'll end up.

So this is an amazing woman. She died in 1991, at ninety years old. And here she's telling us what it's like to be fully liberated. This is a very clear, straightforward statement. She says body, mind, and essence are all distinct and separate realities—the body, the mind, and then she's talked about essence. So just keep that word in mind.

And absolutely everything is known. It's not as though she doesn't experience things as they come up. When she talks about earth, water, fire, and wind, she's talking about her sensual experience—weight, temperature, movement, feeling, memory, thought, and consciousness. They all come up. Sound, sight, smells, taste, touches, emotions, anger, greed, and delusion are all known.

Now note that: anger, greed, and delusion. The enlightened person hasn't gotten rid of all the habitual little tendencies within the mind. They're known when they come up. "I know them all as they exist in their own natural states. But no matter how much I'm exposed to them, I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart."

Notice that word—over my heart. No power over my heart.

"And they arise and cease, they're forever changing, but the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying." And this is the end of suffering.

Presence.

So she uses three words to try and point to something which is indescribable. It's an essence, it's a heart, and it's a presence. Our job in our practice is to actually begin to recognize what that is. And we recognize it more easily by constantly making everything that we experience an object of our experience—by pointing to it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and have not caused even greater confusion. And that you will, by your own deliberate and devoted practice, soon liberate yourself from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.

CHAPTER 77

Spiritual Progress - Stop Trying!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

> *In this New Year's address, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a comprehensive overview of the Buddhist path, examining why our usual approach of 'trying' to achieve enlightenment is fundamentally misguided. He explains how the sense of self—the very entity that wants to attain liberation—is itself the obstacle. Drawing on the three characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) of existence—impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā)—he shows how our deep-seated assumptions about permanence, happiness-seeking, and control create the conditions for suffering.*
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> *The talk illuminates the psychology of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), revealing how desire arises before the sense of 'I' crystallizes around it. Bhante explains that this insight shifts our practice from striving for attainment toward purifying the heart by allowing negativities to arise and pass away naturally. He describes the progressive stages of awakening through the four paths and fruits, noting how each level of insight systematically undermines the fetters (saṃyojana) that bind us to suffering.*
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> *Particularly valuable is Bhante's emphasis on the observer—what he calls satipaññā or 'the one who knows'—and how meditation practice involves recognizing that whatever we can observe cannot be our true self. He concludes with the profound teaching that liberation doesn't eliminate bodily pain but transforms our relationship to experience, ultimately leading us back into the world with greater interconnectedness and love.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

This is my New Year address, so I suppose one thing that is good to do is to revise all the teachings we understand and know and see if we can give ourselves some sort of direction for the next year.

One of the major factors in our progress spiritually is to be able to discern what is unskillful from what is skillful, what is unwholesome from what is wholesome. That discernment—where does it come from? What is making the discerning? Who or what is discerning?

We have to be very clear as to what the human being is made up of, and then see where the problem lies, and then see how we can sharpen our sense of discernment.

In the Buddhist teachings, we're made up of three aspects. First of all, there's our physical nature. Then there's the mind, which includes the heart. Remember, our culture has split them apart from each other, but by mind I mean our emotional thoughts, the mental states that we go through. Don't forget, whenever I talk about mind, I'm always including heart. If I talk about heart, I'm centering on the emotional aspect. And then there's this nibbāna dhātu, this element of nibbāna, which makes it very spiritual. What is it, this nibbāna dhātu?

Our practice is to begin to observe all that's going on inside us. In that observation, we access within ourselves the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. In so doing, we are objectifying everything that we are experiencing. This observer, the one who knows, is satipaññā. That's why I call this place Satipaññā. This is the Buddha within, and the practice is trying to isolate that from everything it's experiencing—which is the process of awakening.

What does this awakening refer to? It's simply awakening to the way things really are. That's the Buddha's little pet phrase: to see things as they really are. In fact, I was going to translate that phrase literally as "to see how things have come to be." In other words, the Buddha wants us to become intimately involved in process. How do we create the world that we live in?

Now, that separation within us when we become the observer, the feeler, the one who knows, the one who's experiencing within ourselves—what it's telling us is that everything I'm aware of, I cannot be. The perceiver cannot be the perceived. In the same way that you perceive me, I can't be you. As soon as you've turned something into an object, you've created a dislocation.

So I'm still inside myself, thinking of myself, feeling myself, knowing myself as the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. Even at that point, there's some sort of reflection coming back to this essential knowing of its own existence. Just like when you look into a mirror—the face that you're seeing is not the face as it is. It's a mirror image. But it's still telling you something. It's still looking in the right direction. It's looking back at you.

Now, the paradox is that we'll never be able to see our own faces. We can see everybody else's face, but I can't see my own. I've got to use a mirror, I've got to use some sort of ploy. And that will never be the face as it really is, although I might get very close to it. The point is, I won't have a direct experience of what my face looks like.

This tells us something about this quality of knowing. The knowing can never know itself. Just as the face can't see itself, the eye can't see itself. The tongue can't taste itself. If the tongue had a taste—say a curry taste—it would ruin the ice cream, wouldn't it?

So it's recognizing that all these sense bases are completely empty. They're empty of what it is they're meant to be sensitive to. And that's also true of this level of awareness, satipaññā—that itself is completely empty, except it has attitude. It definitely has attitude. And this attitude has arisen because of some wrong understanding that what it experiences is itself.

Now, if you go back to birth, our birth into life, that's pretty understandable, isn't it? I mean, we arrived—even in the womb there's some consciousness—but we arrived and we're bombarded with all this sense data. And it's understandable that we presume ourselves to be that. We don't have that self-awareness, we don't even have a sort of understanding. But unfortunately it does create the delusion that I am this body, this mind, this heart. And our process is to undermine that delusion by relocating the sense of self. That's your first step.

So often when we are in pain, if we get lost in the pain, if we're overwhelmed by the pain, then you become the pain. You lose the sense of somebody suffering pain—you're just in pain. You stub your foot on the pavement and just for that little moment of "ouch," you are that pain. So what identity means is a loss of any self-awareness into what it is you're experiencing.

This can happen at a physical level through things like dangerous sports. I mean, that's one of the kicks of dangerous sports—that you get lost in it. Just for that one moment, you are totally in that mental state. And it's great. But it is an identity with our physical form.

At a much more regular level is the identity we have with our emotions. Very quickly we can find ourselves being angry, being depressed. It's very easy for us to fall into that identity. And even more easy is, of course, thought patterns, where you find yourself just daydreaming. Especially when you're sitting—the mind shoots off and you're off. One of my favorite places, Acapulco. And then you suddenly realize that you've been away. What does it mean, you've been away on a daydream? You've actually been the daydream in terms of your experience during that time. That's what you were.

Now, as soon as we come out of that and we diligently note what it is that's driving that thought—some sort of excitement for that, perhaps—and we come into the body and feel the excitement, immediately we've objectified things. As soon as you objectify things, it can't be the subject. So unwittingly, whether you know it or not, we are con-

stantly undermining that sense of self as something other—the body, emotions, or thoughts—by coming back to the position of the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. You're undermining all those identities. That's the negative side. The positive side is you are re-identifying with this observer.

Now, that mistake we make of selfing—the self is always arising and passing away, but the identity is the same. You're still identifying with the body, even though the body is offering you different experiences. You're still identifying with the heart, even though moods change. And the mind. That process of this intuitive awareness becoming what it experiences is the falling into delusion. That's what we mean by delusion.

When we come out of that and there's a doubt about things, when there's a feeling of not knowing and we're in that state of wondering, but there's some sort of fear or anxiety about a loss of identity—this is an extremely good sign. Because the one thing the self knows about itself but can't face is its own mortality. So every time you have a little hiccup of fear, of not knowing who you are, why you are, that's a sign that something is being undermined. That's good fear.

There's bad fear—paranoia. But the sort of little shock that you get, for instance—I'm sure you've all woken up in a friend's house or in a hotel. And just as you wake up, you don't know who you are. And there's that little panic. Have you all had that? Yes, I see. That moment just prior to the panic was a moment of enlightenment, inverted commas. Because just for that one moment, you didn't know who you were and you were okay with it, but you couldn't stay there. You had to reach out and grab some sort of definitions. And so there's this moment of panic and then suddenly you realise, oh, it's me. And then it disappears.

You're happy again.

Now, what then are the definitions of a self? When you say "I am a self," what are the definitions? These boil down to the three characteristics.

The first one is this sense of permanency. Even though we know the body's changing, even though we know the world's changing, we know everything's changing—but there's something in me, this sense of *me*, that doesn't change. I'm always there. Whenever I'm aware, I'm always there. And there's no definition to the "me" apart from feeling that I am here. So there's a constant, yes? Except, of course, when you fall asleep—then it disappears. But when you wake up again, here I am again. Or "not you again," depending on your mood.

So you've got this sense of *me* that continues. And that's where the delusion of permanence is to be really found. This sense of permanency is then displaced onto the world itself.

So how long is a moment? How long do you experience a moment? The mind is very clever—it's pretty long, isn't it? Don't you think? I mean, things are changing, but the mind holds it long enough to give you a sense of permanency. Somewhere, a moment isn't just a flash; it's actually long enough for it to become "real," inverted commas.

So this sense of permanence actually permeates the very way we experience life. And what our practice is doing is making us center as much as we can on this impermanency. That's one of the reasons in this particular technique, the Mahasi technique, that we go very slow. Because the slower you go, the more the mind slows down, the more you can see this process of impermanence.

Now, that process of seeing impermanence can go to the point where you actually do experience a moment of consciousness.

So what then is consciousness? These words, by the way, are all over the place these days because they're being studied—there are hundreds of definitions. Consciousness in the Buddhist teachings, as I understand it, is a screen. It's a multi-dimensional screen that holds emotions, thoughts, and so forth. And it flashes, it catches something, and it holds it long enough for it to be known.

If we were to go to the Abhidhamma, this is actually happening at enormous speeds, and you can only hold one datum of information for every one unit of consciousness. So if you were, for instance, to put your attention on the eardrum and really, really settle it there, you would eventually arrive at a place where you're not hearing anything but feeling the pressure of air on the eardrum. And even that isn't the singularity with which you can experience consciousness.

Consciousness in a flash can come like that. And when we experience this arising and passing away of moments of consciousness, what is interesting is that something was still there when there was no consciousness. So this drive of anicca, this drive of impermanence, takes us right down to an experience of what is there before something arises in consciousness. And that, of course, becomes a little gateway into a different way of seeing the world.

When somebody has such an experience, it needn't be a cataclysmic thing, but it has a systemic effect. Because that insight now begins to change attitude—so that's the second factor on the Noble Eightfold Path. And then it begins to express itself in the way we speak, what we do, how we behave, and in our livelihoods. So it comes down

through the whole path. It's a systemic process which may take time, because an insight of that nature, a deep insight of that nature, has to be matured. It has to be digested, and that can take some time. It depends upon the sharpness or the depth of that seeing, which will affect the person accordingly.

The second process, the second thing that the self does, is presuming itself to be this body. The self—what does the self want? It just wants to be happy. Therefore, it seeks happiness in this form. And in seeking happiness in this form, every time happiness comes up, it tries to maintain it, to hold it. That's what we mean by attachment. It becomes a psychological dependency for establishing happiness. And anything that upsets that, of course, you have to get rid of. You have to destroy immediately, so you can maintain your sense of happiness.

Now, when we ask ourselves—when I say "I'm happy," what am I referring to? Am I referring to a physical sensation? Would that be the ice cream touching my tongue on a very hot day when I really want it? Does the actual sensation of ice cream on the tongue—do we consider that to be happiness, or just a pleasant taste on the tongue?

When I talk about happiness, do I mean the thought of an ice cream, which may bring up certain other qualities? But is the thought itself, the sequence of thoughts—is that happiness? As I'm eating the ice cream and my head is saying, "This is really good Italian ice cream"—if I say that to myself, is that line of thought what I call happiness?

Or is happiness the mental state we're in? Especially the emotional state. In other words, it's a feeling state, isn't it? It's a state of the heart. When my heart feels happy and I experience the heart being happy, whatever might be the proximate cause, such as ice cream, that's when I say I'm happy.

So now I become intoxicated. My whole life becomes a search for things that are going to bring about this mental state, this happiness. And it's beginning to see the aftermath of that. Once I'm attached to something, while I'm enjoying things, fine, what's the problem? It's what happens afterwards. The craving that comes. The dependency, the addiction. At worst, of course, you've got drug addicts. But we're all addicted to some extent. And then there's the grief when you lose what you have. And there's the fear of loss anyway, so you have to take an insurance policy. And then there's the frustration when you don't get what you want. And then there's boredom.

This society refuses to connect boredom with excitement. Refuses to do so. I saw a program on boredom that said nothing about that connection at all. Boredom is that state when you're no longer in that happy state that things give you. So the same thing, like an ice cream, might be absolutely wonderful, and when somebody says, "Would

you like another?" you say, "Well, I've had enough." It might of course be a physical thing, but you've had enough ice cream. The fact is that if you keep eating ice cream all the time, you get fed up with it because it's not giving you the same buzz. So there's an inbuilt obsolescence, an inbuilt process in pleasure whereby it loses its tang.

And that's the same with relationships. You get bored occasionally. I mean, you all know that. You get fed up, you get frustrated. And then when they threaten to leave you, oh god, it's fearful. So the whole gamut of human suffering is all to do with this relationship we have with the world that we experience.

That relationship is one of identity, and that identity, that self, is seeking happiness in the world, and in so doing keeps making these pratfalls. It finds unhappiness. So now what the Buddha is saying is: come back on the process. Come back on that process, and whenever you feel a desire, actually sit with it, feel it. It may be a need—you've got to eat, for instance—and actually feel it and allow it to arise in its fullness, the addiction of it. Recognize that if you just allow it to arise and pass away, some of the energy in that addiction has been lost.

So what we're doing in our meditation when we see these desires, and of course hopefully in daily life, is actually undermining the conditioning that we've produced ourselves. Nobody can condition us. Nobody can condition our hearts. We do it all ourselves. It's all an internal process. And if we can become aware of that, and beware the aftermath when we're engaged in those patterns, then of course you start coming off it. You start coming off it.

And that's what we call renunciation. That's not this process of self-mortification where we're blaming the body and punishing it for daring to have appetite. It's recognizing that appetite is natural and that we're putting something on top of that. We're putting an obligation on it. We're putting an obligation on food to make me happy. And when it doesn't do it, then I get upset one way or the other.

Now that psychology is writ large in paṭicca-samuppāda, dependent origination, the teaching we chant every morning. What the Buddha did there was to clearly delineate where the sense of self comes in. If the sense of self began the process, how could there be a mistake? How could there be an escape? Think about it. If that sense of "I want ice cream" were primary—if the "I" were primary—then there would be no escape from that delusion.

The fact is that's not the psychology that's happening. The psychology that's happening is this: some sort of stimulus, perhaps hearing somebody say "ice cream," and then this memory comes up, which brings with it a pleasant feeling, and then there's the de-

sire to recreate that pleasant feeling, and then there's the sense of "I." So the process that we're actually experiencing psychologically is: ice cream, want, I. Ice cream, want, I. And once the "I" comes in, it's very difficult to stop the rest of that process. You can, of course, if you're aware of that grasping. But as soon as you've said "I want," it's very difficult to stop the enforcement of that desire, the way that we empower it with will. Before you know it, you're getting the ice cream.

It's recognizing that process that is part of liberating ourselves from felt suffering, from dukkha. That's why in the Four Noble Truths the Buddha says that the cause of suffering, number two, is desire. He could have gone deeper. He could have said the real deep, profound cause of suffering is a sense of self. But he doesn't. He says it's desire because that's how it manifests. The self manifests as a process of desiring. So every time you undermine desires—whether it's for something, or you don't want something, a negativity or fear, whatever it is, that attitude that's creating wanting, not wanting—every time you undermine that, you're undermining that false sense of self.

So there's that way of the self arising through its identity with this physical body, wanting to feel happy, using the world in order to create that mental state. And once we start breaking through that delusion—that the world is going to offer us happiness, and that real happiness is an emotion—which is ridiculous, because emotions also rise and pass away.

Once we break through that way of thinking, then of course we start letting go of things easily. We disengage from the heart, so we don't get caught up in it. Now there is happiness—not "I am happy," but "there is happiness." That's what you're doing whenever you're sitting here and some sort of peacefulness comes to the heart. There is peacefulness. It's a nice atmosphere. It's like walking into this room—it's a pleasant room to be in. But then you walk out and this room disappears, and you're in the walking room, which is cold.

So it's a case of recognising that these emotions rise and pass away, and even when they're negative, we actually begin to distance from them. Usually we distance from them with aversion—we try to push them away. But if we maintain the meditator's position of "there is unhappiness," whatever shade of unhappiness it is, then in a sense we've liberated ourselves from it. That disengagement is a liberation. It's a sort of taste of nibbana. It's an indication as to where we might actually get to within this body, heart, and mind.

And of course, one thing that the self does—and that's the third characteristic, so we may as well move on to it—is this sense of control. The sense of self, the Buddha points out, has a major idea about control. So we've talked about it psychologically speaking,

that the self wants to make itself happy. But a definition of self, this is me—"me" must have the idea that I'm in control of whatever I define as me. And when I find that I don't have that control, then of course there's this dislocation, this fear that arises.

Now, we all know intellectually that the body is not under my control. But it still comes as a shock if or when we find out we've got a serious illness, or when we put ourselves in physical danger—it still comes as a shock. That shock, that sense of fear that comes up, is the measure of the delusion in the self. All these emotions that we feel—the aversion and the fear and the excitement—these are all measures of the delusion that we're suffering from.

And again, if we can begin to observe the body as not me but something... I remember one teacher talking about it. It was Ajahn Chah who said it's more like renting the body. You don't own the flat you live in; you're just renting it. So if it does burn down, what's the problem? It's somebody else's problem. It's the same with this body—we're in the body but not of the body. Get it?

So that sense of self has a sense of permanency. It has a sense of seeking its own happiness, and it has a sense of being in control. And when you investigate what it is you're actually directly in control of—directly in control of—it's difficult to find. We're not in full control of the body. We're not in control of the heart; it governs us. We're not in control of the mind; it's all over the place in meditation.

Then the question comes back onto this sense of self. Now, we've talked about the insight into impermanence—actually seeing things arising and passing away. And by the way, that needn't be entirely at the level of moment-to-moment consciousness. The insight can also be at a much grander level. People suddenly wake up to impermanence, for instance, when somebody close dies, or when they themselves have to go. All the emotional impact of death and dying is also a way of coming to terms with impermanence. So it doesn't have to be on this minute Abhidhamma scale. People can wake up when they actually experience death in some way or another.

And the desire—now that is a long process, a sort of long process of emptying the heart of its negativities. And that's why it takes so long, because we're full of it. And not only that, we're not one hundred percent committed to it. So we work hard at our retreat, and then we go out and it's sex, drugs, and rock and roll. We sort of over-relax and the old habits come back to us. So that's a long process of purification.

But if we can see clearly and directly how the process works—dependent origination—that can also be at the level of a change of attitude, which again then becomes systemic. And this is expressed in the second and third of what we call the path and fruit.

In the second path and fruit, what the person loses, or what's attenuated, is the amount of greed and hatred they would normally have. That's how it manifests. And in the third level, the sense of greed and aversion to do with the physicality of life is virtually undermined—it's not supposed to be there. So the attachment the person has is more to these refined mental states, and any irritation that arises, or fear, would be the fear of loss of those states, or irritation when somebody upsets them.

But what's meant to happen is that this Buddha nature within us is no longer seeking happiness in the sensual world. That's the liberation of the third path.

And seeing anattā, this sense of not-self, is about undermining that sense of "I'm in control of my life." This takes us to the whole idea of free will—free will or fate. Free will really is very much a Western idea. I'm pretty sure it doesn't arise in Eastern philosophy. It really arises out of our Christian heritage, where because God has created you so that you could love him—he could love you and you could love him—

That love had to be completely free. It's no good conditioning somebody to love you. It's no good making a robot and conditioning it to love you. There's no joy in that at all. Somehow you've got to give this person a freedom, a freedom of will to decide whether they want to love you or not. So there is this concept of a free will which floats above conditioning. Free will floats above conditioning. This is how I understand it.

On the other scale, you've got fate. And there's a lot of things about life which is fate. Like, for instance, the language that you use. It's fated. You're just born into this situation, and that's a given. For one reason or another, it was fated that it should rain today. It was in the weather system. It's not something that we can particularly control. So there is something in our lives which is determined.

And in Buddhist understanding, there is no free will. Everything is conditioned. But to talk about free will takes us slightly off the point here, because the Buddha's path is one of discernment. It's one of actually recognizing that some things I do are going to make me unhappy, and so I should try to stop them. And some things I do are going to make me happy, and so I should do more of that.

I liken it more to going on a path. We call it the path, the way. When you go on a hike, you take your map. Those are your instructions. And when you come to a place where you don't quite know where you are, you refer to the map. Then you go on the path which you've discerned will take you to the end. Now you might make mistakes, you might go off, but you'll always come back to this central path that you've determined to

be on. So you can see the idea of free will doesn't fit in there. It's to do with discernment and then doing what you think is right, doing what you think will take you to perfect happiness, nirvana, however you want to express it.

These insights take you to different paths and their fruits. All that's saying is, when a person has a first insight into one of these three characteristics at a certain depth, which changes their attitude to life, they experience life differently.

In the first three fetters, as they're called, what goes is this idea of a self—somewhere in the system it's not so strong, it's been undermined. And that will have its effect on how we relate to things. We won't grasp them, won't push them away so hard. We're much more clear about what the path is, so that we don't get caught up in rites and rituals for the wrong reason. Like when we chant here, it's meant to be as a recollection of what the Buddha teaches. When we take refuges and precepts, it's a way of recommitting ourselves to the path. But if we thought that either of those, or lighting candles, would actually achieve nirvanic bliss, then we're up the wall. And because of that clarity, all doubt in the Buddha's teaching goes.

With these three fetters gone, what you have in the second stage is that you're really working with your emotional life, your attachments, where you're clinging. And that is undermined again by some deep insight, some deeper insight into one of these three characteristics. Either the fact that things are impermanent—so what's the point? It's unreliable. Or you recognize that this psychology of seeking happiness in the sensual world is always leading you to some level of dissatisfaction. Or you realize that that very identity is a problem—the identity that we have with this psychophysical organism. So it's actually deepening one of those. You can go through any of those gates.

In the third stage, where we lose this connection with the sensual life as a place where we can create true happiness, again you go through either one of those gates. It's said in the commentaries that you can just keep going through impermanence. Because when you concentrate on impermanence, you begin to realize that the sensual world will not deliver. So you're seeing suffering. When you see impermanence, you realize that the sense of self is not permanent. So you're undermining that concept of self that we have—this inner feeling of a continual me.

See? So impermanence is always put first as the entrance into these insights. But it's also possible that each of these paths and fruits, as they're known, come through these three different gates.

And then in the final one, the person loses any attachment to these very beautiful ecstasies that we can get through various practices—just observing the breath, for instance. There are two levels of that, known as the material level and the non-material. In the material level of these absorptions, known as jhāna, there's always an object in your mind, always an object that you're working on. But in the non-material absorptions, all objects go—you're just in a space of pure consciousness. This is what the Buddha got from his teachers, of course, and he thought it was a good thing to practice, so he didn't get rid of them in his own teachings.

There's also a sense of restlessness that needs to be released. Now, that restlessness for me indicates that there is still some impurity within the heart. There are still little fibres of anger which we're getting attached to, that restlessness there. But when you become an Arahant, when you become someone who's fully liberated, I don't think it's particularly true to say that those old habits completely disappear—and I'll tell you why in a minute—but you're no longer, it's impossible for you to get caught up in them.

And then there's the conceit. That goes completely—the sense of "I am what I'm experiencing through this psychophysical organism. I am that." When that completely goes, that's also a sign that somebody is liberated from that deep delusion. And in so doing, of course, all ignorance disappears, all delusion disappears. That's the last of these fetters, these chains.

Now, in the Vipassanā process, this is commentarial. Funnily enough, you won't find it in the scriptures, so there's a hint there that this was something esoteric, passed on from teacher to teacher. There are hints of it in the scriptures, but they're all filled out through the commentaries. In the Visuddhimagga, which is where it's annotated for the ordinary reader, Buddhaghosa, who wrote that medieval book, takes us through the various stages that you go through in Vipassanā.

These stages don't have to come in a particular set time. I know somebody who went through them, and they told me it took him five years. So it's not a case of sitting down and gritting our teeth and going for it. It's just this slow process of continuing our meditation, continuing our investigation. And then very slowly these things begin to manifest.

That's really the final thing that needs to be said about all these spiritual insights—that they're not there for this sense of self to attain. In fact, if anything, it's this sense of self that's getting in the way. So somehow you have to change the focus. That's what I feel. Instead of wanting or trying to get insight, trying to achieve nibbāna—you see, there's always a self that wants to do that, this essential delusion of "somebody is going to achieve something."

It's much more wise, I think, to center our practice on purifying the heart, because that we can definitely do. And as we allow these negativities to come up—both positive, you know, wanting, wanting, and negative, not wanting—allow them and let them burn away, burn away, burn away, we're actually clearing the field. We can see more clearly. And if we take that into daily life, it has the effect of making us much more content with life, much more at ease with it. Just that process itself is undermining the delusions. It has this sort of back effect on the observer, on the feeler. The way of looking at life is changing.

This change in the way we're looking at life is like a clock, just moving over in little seconds. And when it's done a full turn, there's a kind of seeing which is deep enough to maintain a certain level, a certain attitude to life. This means that the sort of suffering I had before is not possible. I can't go there again.

It happens just in ordinary things. I remember in my own small experience getting so drunk so often, such a pain in the head, that I woke up on a gravestone. And I said to myself, "What if I only get tipsy?" From that time on—apart from when somebody fooled me into drinking too much wine, said there wasn't much alcohol in it—I never got drunk again. It was just recognizing that the pain of getting drunk wasn't worth it. And I thought, what if I only get tipsy? And I only did get tipsy, and it was great. I was fine. I was happy with that.

That's a really bad example of what happens when you lift yourself up to a level of understanding and clarity, and you just can't go there anymore. So that's why it's said that somebody who's obtained the first path and fruit can't go to hell.

It can't go into a hell realm. Now, if you want to think of it as a separate realm, that's fine. But what it's actually saying is that you can't, by your actions, make yourself fall into those desperate states that you once did. That's what it's really pointing to. Do you see? That's how it works.

If I were to put all of this together in a nutshell—my goodness.

What we're looking at essentially is this fundamental misunderstanding. We call it delusion. It's a misunderstanding about who we are and what we are. And that which has made this misunderstanding is not in itself stupid. It's not an ignorance that has come out of stupidity. It's an ignorance that has come out of simply not knowing.

This process of not knowing brings us into suffering. But from the heart's point of view, it's not coming from a position of evil, some sort of disposition inclined toward destruction. No, it's coming from a point of innocence. It doesn't know what harm is. It doesn't know that it is doing harm.

So we start from these two positions: simple not knowing, and innocence. Then, making this mistake, all we're trying to do is make ourselves happy. And in so doing, we create mayhem. We create all this suffering.

And then we come across the Buddha's teachings. Yippee! And he points out that we're looking at things from three different angles, all of which are wrong. We think things are permanent. We think we can really get happiness from them. And we think, "I really am this. This is what I really am. And I can do it."

When we begin to undermine those views, our relationship to life begins to change. And eventually we arrive at a state—hopefully by New Year—when there is no suffering left.

Now, let's not confuse this. It's not that the body doesn't give us pain. Remember, the Buddha died from some sort of gastroenteritis. But there is no way that this essential nature within us, this Buddha within, this nirvanic element, can fall into a relationship where it causes suffering.

Who's suffering? The Buddha suffers. The Buddha is suffering until it realizes where the mistake is. And then it becomes Buddha—which is a very strange thing to say. People don't see the Buddha as suffering, because the word "Buddha" refers to that ultimate state, the awakened one within. But it's the suffering that we're experiencing. When we experience suffering, it's the Buddha within that is suffering.

Remember, the body doesn't suffer. It simply has physical discomfort. It doesn't know it's suffering. The heart doesn't know it's suffering. There may be depression, but the heart isn't saying, "Oh, I'm suffering." It doesn't have consciousness in that way. Thoughts don't think themselves. They don't think about thinking themselves. There's always something behind all of that which is clocking it, which is experiencing it.

And that process of disengagement is the process of liberation. And that process of liberation always takes us—when we're fully present, even in those short little moments of liberation that we have—it always takes us back into the world. It takes us back into the world, but in a growing way of interconnectedness. And that's what we call love.

I can only hope that my words have been of some advantage, that I've not caused even greater confusion, and that by your determined effort, you will become fully liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 78

The Need for Saṅgha: Community and Questions About Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

> *In this wide-ranging talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the essential nature of saṅgha—spiritual community—and its evolution from the Buddha's time to the modern West. He traces how the traditional economy of generosity between monastics and laypeople has shifted, with lay teachers now playing significant roles once reserved for monks and nuns. The talk illuminates the Buddha's teaching that admirable friendship constitutes the entire spiritual life, not merely half of it, drawing on discourses where the Buddha describes the qualities of good friendship: inspiring love and respect, listening deeply, giving what is hard to give, and maintaining patience with harsh speech.*
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> *Bhante explores the concept of a monastery as a 'spiritual hospital' for those experiencing the existential crisis of meaninglessness—the recognition that drives the search for liberation. He discusses how the Buddha pragmatically established the monastic rules (Vinaya) in response to actual situations rather than abstract ideals, and how the order adapted when it spread to China where begging was culturally unacceptable.*
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> *The talk concludes with practical guidance responding to practitioners' questions: establishing daily meditation practice through religious commitment, the circumstantial nature of Buddhist ethics regarding vegetarianism, finding teachers rather than relying solely on texts, and the accessibility of practice to those with various mental states. Throughout, Bhante emphasizes that the Eightfold Path forms an interconnected spiral where wisdom, morality, and meditation continuously feed into one another.*

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

I just want to say a few words about Saṅgha. The word Saṅgha traditionally, or in the East anyway, only refers to the monastic orders—the monks and the nuns. But in the West, it's become a sort of self-referential word, where Buddhists refer to themselves as the Saṅgha. So it has been widened out to include everybody. And that shows the effect of the secularization of Buddhism and the role of lay people.

I want to take you back to the beginning just to show you how it all began. When the Buddha decided that he would teach—there was some doubt in his mind, perhaps over the subtlety of the teaching, who knows—but anyway, he went back to his companions. In the first two talks where he introduces his teaching, it seems all of them became fully liberated.

We have to presume that they'd done a lot of work beforehand, like he had. He'd done all the practices of concentration, practices of self-mortification, which he didn't gain much from apart from suffering. And then, of course, he went off by himself, and his search turned around upon itself. Instead of seeking happiness, he began to investigate how he was causing suffering. It was that which led him to his awakening. And that's why we say he self-awakened.

There was lots of practice at that time—lots of men, mainly men, but also some women, who were leaving society and living as samaṇas, as the homeless ones. So it wasn't that he started a tradition; it had been there long before. Within that society, it was all part of a great movement. Politically, there was a movement away from tribal governance, where you had elders and a chief elder—like the Buddha's father of the Sakya tribe—and it was moving towards monarchy. Actually, the Sakyas, this little group of people just on the edge of Nepal under the Himalayas, were under the local king of Kosala. That would have been Pasenadi at that time. So they were vassals. In other words, the system was becoming what we would recognize as medieval.

When he began to teach, certain people—men at first, but then women—wanted to join him. We call it the first ordination. He just said, "Ehi passiko," which means "come and try."

There's a story about him rejecting women for the order, which I'm sure you've come across, where these court ladies—his stepmother and others—came to join the order. To prove that they were up to the raw life of the monastic order, where you just live out in the forest without any of the commodities of life, they made this journey. When he came to them, he didn't think they'd make it, so he denies entry. It's only when Ānanda says to him, "Do you think women can become liberated?" and he says "Yes," that he accepts them. But there are definitely little tales in the scriptures that he was accepting women long before that. So this is really the growth of patrimony's effect on society, even on the order.

So he was accepting people, and then once he had a group of men and women who were fully liberated, the ordination procedure was to take refuge in him as the teacher, as the living embodiment of the Dhamma—the teaching he was giving—and then the Saṅgha, which were these people who had intuited Nibbāna at some level, some of

them fully liberated. And that's become the lay ordination now. When somebody wants to join the Buddhist religion, the Buddhist faith or whatever, you would go through a little ceremony, and I'll come back to that.

But then of course, after about twenty years, there were men and women who joined who weren't quite at the usual standard and were doing terrible and naughty things. So rules had to be established. It shows that he was very much a pragmatist. He didn't have some sort of ideal as to where he wanted the order to be. The rules came as the monks and nuns did something which was considered to be not right, not correct. Some of them were like thieving, any sexual intercourse—all that was serious. Monks made those mistakes. The first monk who transgressed didn't have the penalty of being kicked out of the order. And then it goes all the way down to having things you shouldn't have. So there are ceremonies where you give things up, where you have to hand them back.

You've got 227 of these rules, and many more, which were created as the order went along. When you look at them, they're sectioned out in order of seriousness. But they're all higgledy-piggledy, and some of them don't pertain anymore—like not to sit on woolen rugs.

So presumably wool in those days was something quite precious.

The ordination then became quite complicated. People were joining because they were in debt to the government, so you couldn't join if you were in debt. There was a physician called Jivaka, who was very famous at the time, who offered his medical services free to order members. So sick men and women joined the order in order to get this free medical care. That sounds pretty straightforward, doesn't it? So you can't join the order if you're sick.

Now that's not an absolute rule. If you join a particular group of monks or nuns, they can decide to accept you if they think your illness is not going to undermine them financially or physically—you have to look after people. But once you're in, then really you have to be looked after. There's no way around it. And of course they didn't always do that at that time. When the Buddha came across somebody who was really sick—it was diarrhea and vomiting and all that—nobody wanted to treat him. So he did it himself. He did it with anger. And then he turned to the monks and said, "You haven't got a mother and father who's going to look after you if you don't look after people." He berated them that way.

So you have the order. Now, the order in the East still fills a real role. Virtually all meditation teachers are monks and nuns. You do get lay people, but it's almost considered an encroachment on the monk's role. The people who know about the Dharma,

who study the Dharma, and who teach the Dharma are, for the most part, monks and nuns. And the ones who live by way of that relationship of alms-taking are the monks and nuns.

Now, the Buddha wanted that relationship—so I'm coming back to this whole idea about relationship, about attitude, about love. He didn't want the monks and nuns to be self-supportive. He wanted them to continue to be alms-takers, to be dependent on lay people for their well-being, for everything they have. And the other side of the gift was that lay people would go to the monks for spiritual advice, for spiritual teachings. So there was that sort of economy of generosity. The one gave to the other as and when was needed.

And of course, there's this whole idea of karma—that by giving, by generosity, you accumulate goodness power. Now, I know that many people in the East do conceptualize it into some sort of bank account so that when you die, you go to a beautiful heaven because you gave all this food to monks. But the basic psychology is correct, because remember, whenever you're generous, you're giving something up that you could have used for yourself. Giving up some of your wealth, giving up some of your time. And to do that is renunciation.

So the process of liberation is the process of renunciation. Don't confuse that with self-mortification. Renunciation means letting go of attachments. So every time you give something, you're making a step towards your own liberation. And in the commentaries, it makes it clear that the process of generosity leads to liberation by way of renouncing what you would have used for your own personal satisfactions and joy, and giving it to somebody else. As you do that, your goodness power—that's the proper translation of puñña—your goodness power grows. And that goodness power manifests in your growing desire to liberate yourself from suffering.

Now, we have a situation in the West where, actually, some of the best teachers are lay people. And most of the monks and nuns either can't teach or don't want to—which is true also in the East. It's not as though just because you become a monastic you're going to be a great teacher. Far from it. And you might not want to. There are other roles you can play within the order. And you might not want to anyway; you'd have to play a role.

When it comes to academics, the understanding of the scriptures and whatnot, there's massive, brilliant work being done by academics. Some of the best books on Buddhism now are written by people who are PhDs. They're not monks at all. They don't belong to a monastic order.

So, two of these major roles that are played by monastics in the East—being the teachers of the actual practice and the teachers of the teaching, of the actual teaching of the Buddha—has been, as it were, taken away by lay people.

So now there comes a real problem. Why do you want to support a monk? Since the economy of generosity has now disappeared. I'm still dependent on you, but you're no longer dependent on me. So there's something undermining that interdependency. There was a fair swap there. You fed me and I told you how to practice vipassana.

Now, let's be careful because this sounds a bit like a business deal. So what would you think might be other reasons why you might support a monastic?

If you take a Christian position, the monastic orders, beginning with the Benedictines, had to look after themselves. So they separated out of society. This meant that there was a cleavage. The monks were way over there up in the hills having a great time, and we were down here. But we didn't have to support them, and they didn't have to teach us. They're fine. They're doing it. But the belief was, of course, that they're doing a lot of prayer, and especially these enclosed orders, they're praying for the world, and there's a belief that that is doing good.

Then you get this amazing saint, Saint Francis. When I saw his patchwork robe made out of sackcloth, that was quite a little moment for me. So here was a man, and the people who followed him, and Saint Clare, who went right back to that absolute poverty and depended upon lay people for their well-being. Although the early friars could work. They could do labor and get money for it. And the connection there between friars and the lay people was immediate.

So, coming back to the Buddhist order in the West, there is this bit of a problem, you see. And especially if Western people haven't really taken on the idea of building up a little piggy bank so you get to a better place when you die. Most people are very iffy about that. First of all, the whole idea of a bank account, and the whole idea that you're going to go anywhere after death, is very iffy. I mean, you know. Supposedly you don't. And I've given all this stuff away. I mean, that's fair.

So there's a whole area here of having to relocate, of having to find some reason as to why a lay person might support a monastic.

Now when the order went to China, you see, beggars were looked down upon. You could not beg. So a famous abbot, whose name I forget of course, said, "No work, no food." So in China, the monks began to grow their own food. And there's a lovely little film called something *White Clouds*, where this American has gone to China and he's gotten to know these Buddhist monks way up in the hills, who knows where they are.

And there they are, they're planting their own little crops and living secluded lives up in the hills. And every so often they come down into the village to collect stuff. I don't know whether they receive it by generosity or not.

So you can see that the order had to change there in terms of looking after itself, really. But in so doing, lost its connection with lay people. There wasn't that exchange anymore of generosity.

So, why would you want to support me if I didn't teach? If you knew that I was just in this little hut in the middle of Wales, messing about, doing a bit of meditation, reading, and I turn up at your doorstep with a bowl. What would you say? What's this about?

And that often happened. It happened to the Buddha. Some Brahmin really berated him and said, "You're useless. You don't do anything. You come here and you're begging for food. Who the hell are you?" And the Buddha said, "Well, thank you for the present. I offer it back to you." So he went on his way.

So it wasn't as though everywhere Buddhist monks went, they were thought to be worthy of donation.

I'd like to offer you one or two examples—well, I'll give you one reason why you should support me in my little hut up in the Brecon Beacons in the middle of winter. If you look upon a monastery as a spiritual hospital: your body can be diseased, and we're very happy to help people overcome physical diseases. We have no problem with that. There are mental illnesses, and we're very happy to help people who we see are mentally disturbed and need help.

But now, there are also spiritual diseases. By which I mean those people who are longing for liberation from suffering—who actually feel their suffering strongly enough that life as we generally know it has become meaningless.

One of the signs of somebody moving towards a spiritual life is to realize the meaninglessness of life. What's the point of living? Here we are, we've been born. We haven't a clue where we're going. We fill our lives with doing. We give ourselves a sense of purpose by doing something for others, because others say how wonderful we are. And looking back, as the old comedian's saying goes, "Life's hard, and then you die."

Meaninglessness. It's an existential crisis that we may come across, where we find there's no reason for living, no reason for our lives—because in the end, you disappear, you die. That's the end of it. So that sense of meaninglessness moves towards despair. It moves towards the existentialist philosophers like Albert Camus, who felt that, well, we've got life—eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die. That's the end of that.

People in the West who normally turn up with a spiritual disease have come across this emptiness—emptiness meaning the meaninglessness of their lives. Yet somehow there's something in them which says, "I don't believe it. I don't believe that life is purposeless, that there is no meaning." Something tells them there must be some purpose in it. And the purpose cannot be out there, because at some point I'm going to have to turn inward and die. So the purpose must be within me somewhere. And that's your spiritual search.

That's the Buddha, you see. The Buddha was living in an age where the obsession was rebirth—constant rebirth, and how to get out of it. If you did something wrong, you might be reborn as a dog. Then the next life you're born as a human being. Then you're born into a happy realm, then you fall from that and come back as a human being. One of the terrors of the age was this idea that you'd be constantly reborn. How could you get out of that in any permanent way?

There were a few people who were materialists—they believed that when you die, that's the end of it. That belief was going on too. But there was also this search for something beyond this constant samsara, this constant onward going.

When the Buddha left on his search, he would have been in that state of meaninglessness. He would have been in a state of existential crisis. And it manifests in the tale, the legend of him seeing somebody sick, somebody old, somebody dying—a corpse—and somebody sitting under a tree, a samana, a mendicant sitting under a tree. In this mythological way, he asks, "What is this?" He's never seen this sort of thing before. "Does it happen to me?" Yes—sickness, aging, and death. And then the possibility of some sort of answer.

That's what a monastery is really about. A collection of people who gather together for spiritual purpose—to find what reason there is for living, for being alive. And what's more, what's the reason for dying? Is there a purpose in our death?

So I hope you continue to put some money in the box, so that eventually I can escape to the Brecon Beacons in my little hut, knowing full well that there's always going to be a plate of spaghetti for me when I get down the hill.

Now, coming back to this, we have this whole idea of Sangha—community. This is weighted in all religious traditions, not only religious traditions but humanistic traditions, any tradition. There's a lovely little saying in the discourse which records the last moments of the Buddha's life before he dies. He says to Ananda that he feels happy be-

cause he's established the four congregations: the monks, the nuns, the lay women, and the lay men. He felt that they were now rooted well enough that they would continue with the teachings after he died.

When Ānanda speaks to the Buddha at this point, he says, "As far as I'm concerned, half the spiritual life is good companionship, admirable friendship, admirable camaraderie." And the Buddha says, "Oh no, Ānanda. It's the whole of the spiritual life. The whole of the spiritual life is this interdependency." It's the understanding that you're not on your own and that you do need other people. It's not just the teacher you need. You need other people to support you in your practice.

That's why we come together here now. We form a sangha and we're helping each other. There's no need to speak. There's no need to talk. It's something that's happening within us. And yet it's so much easier for us when we know that everybody else in the room is also suffering. It's much easier to sit here with all this pain and horror, knowing that somebody else right next door to me, sitting right here, is probably going through worse. Mind you, we normally think that they're having a great time. You come in here and everybody's sitting like this, perfectly still, and you think, "Oh my goodness." So that's the accent the Buddha puts on friendship when it comes to the spiritual life.

Consider this: if you were a Muslim living somewhere like Saudi Arabia and you wanted to follow those five times a day when you pray, and right there in the middle of your coffee break you got your mat out and off you went, everybody would think, "Oh, that's a good idea," and they'd all join you. Can you imagine doing that in London? Or in Dublin? Imagine getting your mat out in the middle of a factory or a workplace and just saying, "Well, I'm just going to do my prayers now." You can see that to live in a society which has lost that general grounding for the spiritual life makes it just that much more difficult for us.

When we want to maintain mindfulness, when we want not to go out and get drunk and party and all that, we're considered unsociable. Part of our behaviour becomes unsociable because we're not actually joining in the regular behaviour of people who don't really have any spiritual vein in their lives. They don't quite know where they're going with that. All their practice is within their work—and it might be good work too. It's not as though good work is undermined because you don't believe in a spiritual life, far from it. But because you don't have that immediate companionship, your practice is constantly undermined by the surroundings you're in. So it means you have to work a bit harder.

Going back to friendship, just to quote another passage where the Buddha says: "With regard to external factors, I don't envisage any other single factor like admirable friendship as doing so much for someone in training who has not attained the heart's goal but remains intent on the unsurpassable safety from bondage. Someone who is a friend with admirable people abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful." That's the point of a friend. They will support you when you're being skillful and not support you when you're being unskillful. And therefore, you receive that support.

When you read the scriptures, by the way, I've translated it as "somebody," but it's always "monk" in the original. However, the commentaries tell us that this stands for anybody who's listening to the Dhamma. It's like the phrase "all hands on deck"—a synecdoche, if you remember your school grammar.

When it comes to lay people, there are a few discourses where the Buddha explains how we ought to live. Here he is talking to lay people about what is meant by admirable friendship: "This is the case where a lay person, in whatever town or village he may dwell, spends time with householders and householders' sons, young or old, who are advanced in virtue. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates consummate conviction in those who are consummate in conviction, consummate virtue in those who are consummate in virtue, consummate generosity in those who are consummate in generosity, and he emulates discernment in those who are consummate in discernment. This is called admirable friendship."

In other words, seeking people out who have these virtues—generosity, faith, virtue, and discernment. Those who have confidence. To be with people who have confidence fills you with confidence. To be with people who are generous makes you want to be generous. To be with people who are virtuous, you naturally want to be virtuous like them. And people who are wise, you tend to listen to them. So there's his description of good friendship.

But then he goes on. In another passage he says what good friendship inspires. Good friendship inspires love. Good friendship inspires respect. Good friendship inspires emulation. A good friend listens. A good friend gives good advice. A good friend is able to enter into deep issues with the other. And a good friend helps you not waste your resources—waste your money, waste your time.

But he goes on even further. He says a friend gives what is hard to give. That's the test, isn't it? A friend gives what is hard to give. So you know your friends immediately. A friend does what is hard to do. A friend has patience with harsh speech and has patience with wrongdoing.

So if you love somebody, you have to presume they're going to hurt you. If you love somebody and you think they're never going to hurt you, then you're going to be very upset when they do. So if you presume that your friend, your family member, at some point will do something which is painful for you at whatever level, then you can easily forgive them and re-establish friendship. But if you think they shouldn't do that, if you think that a friend or a family member should not behave like that towards me, then that's it. You've cut off friendship. That's the end of it. Take them to court.

A good friendship is someone whom you can confide in and someone who keeps your confidences. That's a very deep trust, depending on what it is you're sharing. And often it's very helpful to talk to somebody, to talk out a problem. It can be relieving to the heart to share a burden with someone. But you wouldn't do it if you thought they'd be off and tell the very person whom you're complaining about.

And free of contempt. Somebody who does not despise you. Somebody who may envy you but does not act upon it. Somebody who may feel an occasional jealousy but does not act upon it.

So these are good pointers, aren't they? Don't you think so? I rather like them. They point out the difficulty of friendship.

Sometimes we get the impression that Buddhism is really all about vipassana and meditation, and basically that's what it is. And then we forget that there is a whole eightfold path, that vipassana belongs to the last three—right effort, right concentration, right mindfulness. But that feeds into the first one, which is right understanding. And once you've got right understanding, it has to become systemic.

It has to manifest in our attitudes. And as soon as it begins to manifest in our attitudes, it must express itself: right speech, right action, right livelihood. The whole thing flows around upon itself. One feeds upon the other. So it's a spiral, turning and turning. And in this way, within a small length of time, if we practice with severe dedication, we will no doubt be liberated.

Before I end, I want to look at these questions that I didn't answer yesterday, because they're more to do with the practice. I also want to leave a bit of time for daily practice.

So, is it difficult for me to reconcile that a practicing Buddhist can be a non-vegetarian? I don't know of any Buddhist country where Buddhists don't eat meat—which doesn't tell you very much. It's a special practice of monks and nuns in Burma that they go through the three-month Vasa season, the rainy season, without eating meat.

The essential problem is the suffering of animals, the killing of animals. And it depends upon your connection with that. Obviously when you're eating the meat you're not killing the animal. If anything you're suffering from greed. But you're definitely not suffering from aversion or hatred or anything like that. It's making that connection really—that when you buy something you're going back to support the abattoir, you're going back to support the killer of the animal. So it's up to your own sensibility as to where you feel you can place yourself in that order.

But in Buddhist understanding, all sentient beings suffer one way or another. And so it's up to the individual to decide. Now, there are some people who actually have to eat meat. I know somebody who has, I think, something like half a kidney or something, and the only way they're going to survive—the body won't accept pulses and such—is by eating chicken. So there is this view that if it's for health reasons, then you should feel okay about that.

And there, of course, are situations in the world. If you live in the Arctic, you're hardly going to grow wheat, are you? If you live in the desert, you're going to eat a goat. What are you going to do? If you live in Wales, it's bad enough. Somebody wants you to keep sheep. What can you grow in Wales? If you're up on the Brecon Beacons, it's pretty deserted up there.

So remember that the Buddha is very pragmatic. There's no ism. He wouldn't have agreed with vegetarian-*ism*, because idealism doesn't fit in a world which is obviously relative. All our morality is relative, it's circumstantial. You can make a declaration not to kill anybody, but I'm sure you can think of occasions when you'd have felt quite justified in killing somebody. Not to take what is not freely given—you remember the old thing you get at school about, if you're dead hungry, can you steal a loaf?

Once you realize that morality is circumstantial, that it's all to do with the situation you're in, you know that one about the... if I can remember it right now. You might have heard this. It's one of these silly thought experiments. You're on a bridge with a very, very big fat man. And there's a train coming along. There are people working on the tracks, and you can see that this train is going to hit these people—about five or six people. But if you push the man off, it'll derail the train and save five people. Now, will you push him off? It's a dilemma, I hope. None of us have to face it. But it's examples like that which show you that morality can be quite circumstantial.

So yes, it's up to each person to decide. I have a meditator who comes quite often, and she simply cannot eat pulses and beans—her body won't tolerate them. So she normally brings sardines or something similar when she's on a week-long retreat. There are health reasons to consider as well.

And of course, there is the understanding that nature feeds off itself. There's a wonderful YouTube video—if you type in "Yellowstone" and "Monbiot," you'll find it. George Monbiot is this writer who's very much into rewilding, returning old places to their natural state. The video shows how the introduction of about twenty or thirty wolves completely changed the ecology of Yellowstone Park. Now, what's he introducing? He's introducing an animal that eats another animal. So you have to understand that nature feeds off itself. It really just comes back to us and our particular situation in this society, where vegetarianism is very easy to access. You can be a vegan without any problem if you want to.

Does it ever get easier with the meditation?

That's an easy question. If you keep practicing over years, guess what happens? For many people, it seemed easier to meditate when they started. Now, after a few retreats, it seems harder. This is precisely because you're digging deeper. When you come to meditation, you come with beginner's mind—you sit there full of vigor and interest. Then, like anything else, it gets boring. Who wants to watch their breath? What a daft thing to do anyway. And then the stuff starts coming up.

This purification process—you simply cannot get anywhere without going through it. Full stop. It's part and parcel of the course.

But generally speaking, you look back and think, "Well, life has changed, my attitude has changed, life's just a little bit easier." That doesn't mean it will always be like that, because you've got more layers to uncover. Spiritual life is like that. Sometimes you think you're getting nowhere, and then when that crisis passes, you find you've moved to a slightly different level. So don't give up hope. Not yet, anyway.

How do you establish a daily meditation practice?

I think it's really important to meditate a little in the morning. And if you can, do one in the evening as well—especially when you come back from a day out or a day's work, before you eat. After you eat, you fall asleep.

The beginning of the day is when you set your weather vane, when you actually remind yourself that you want to maintain this level of awareness—affectionate awareness—to be awake to what's happening. And when you come back from your day, just let whatever you've accumulated arise: little aversions, little irritations, little anxieties. Let them come up and clear themselves out. Then you have a much more restful evening.

On top of that, stop everything a little bit before you go to sleep. There's no point launching yourself into bed after two hours on Facebook or having watched the latest crime drama, then thinking you're going to have deep sleep. You may, of course, but generally speaking it's best to calm down. Play some music, read poetry, do something that brings the whole system down. When you fall asleep, you're taking that beautiful mental state with you. That's how you feel more refreshed.

There's no easy way to establish a daily practice. You've got to establish a real religious commitment. You have to say to yourself, "Right, I can definitely do twenty minutes every morning. There's no reason why I can't." If you can't manage that, then five minutes. And then you make an absolute determination that for the next six months, that's what you're going to do. That's how you establish the practice.

If you succeed, promise yourself something like a celebratory meal. And if you don't—well, promise yourself something terribly wild and terrible that would keep you at your commitment.

Really, the key is to do it religiously for that length of time. Then it becomes an internal habit. You might miss a day, you might miss two days, but you don't want to miss more than that.

I remember Nureyev, the great ballet dancer of the sixties and seventies, said something similar: if he didn't practice one day, it was fine. Two days, he felt it. Three days, everybody else did.

If you take that as your standard for practice, just keep at it. If you do miss it and have to start again, don't go into this self-hate syndrome—"I'm useless, this is all rubbish." Just start again. It's important. Because that's where you accumulate, you see. This is your goodness.

You accumulate the practice. It accumulates slowly.

With so many varied Buddhist practices, is it best to self-teach using the original texts, or through a combination of available books and audio?

In the first place—well, absolutely not. I think it's important to get hold of a teacher. When I think of my own introduction, I wouldn't recommend the path I took.

What happened to me was I read a book on Zen Buddhism. I was impressed by it, right? So I thought, I'm going to practice this. I was on the way to the shops, which would have taken about five or seven minutes. So I'm walking up the road, observing myself walking up the road. By the time I got to the top, I thought, this is going to drive me crazy. So I abandoned Zen Buddhism.

Later on, through crisis and all sorts of difficulties, I ended up with a Zen teacher in Birmingham. She came in and sat me on the bench facing a wall, told me to keep my eyes slightly open—dead man's eyes—gave me a punch in the back so I sat up properly. And then her instruction was simply: watch whatever comes up. That was it. Watch whatever comes up.

And that was forty minutes of sheer horror and pain and all that. But for some reason, at the end of it, I just knew this was going to get me out of the state I'd gotten myself into. Without that experience, I wouldn't have continued. You've got to go somewhere. You need that personal contact, even if it's only once in a while. It doesn't have to be constant, but you need personal contact from somebody whom you feel has been there.

It's like climbing a mountain—who are you going to get advice from, a geologist or a mountaineer?

Buddhism involves considerable self-awareness and concentrated practice that many, for various reasons, are not in a position to do—their mindset, mental health issues, and so on. Is it only for the select few?

It's true to say that Vipassana isn't good for somebody who's mentally ill. In the East, if you turn up at a monastery with obvious signs of mental illness or depression, they just give you metta practice. They don't give you vipassana. But anybody who's in an ordinary state of madness can practice vipassana. And really, we're all, at one level or another, crazy.

That's why mindfulness has been so successful, really. It's used as a psychotherapeutic intervention and therefore takes away its spiritual purpose. But for the occasional person, just those simple introductions—understanding how suffering is caused—may very well open the spiritual gates for them. Just because it's being taught as a psychotherapeutic intervention doesn't mean it might not have a spiritual effect. It's not taught with any moral instructions, generally speaking, but of course there is a presumed morality in it of compassion.

Some Buddhist teachers are a bit negative about secular mindfulness, but I don't see a problem really. It's a bit like yoga for body beautiful. What's wrong with that? You miss out on all the rest of it, but at least you've got a beautiful body. That'll do.

Is Buddhism like the major religions of the world who see women as inferior? Please say no.

Well, according to the teachings of the Buddha, women seem to be able to become fully liberated like men. What society does with that is something else. But I think if you look across the Asian world—Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—where you find Buddhism, you find much more equality. Women in Buddhist countries are equally doctors and professionals. The first female prime minister in the world was the prime minister of Sri Lanka.

Bandaranaike.

But I mean, this is ancient stuff. Patriarchy is embedded... come the revolution.

It comes through the scriptures, which is unfortunate. But I don't see the Buddha himself as promoting this. If you read, for instance, the verses left by the elders—both the men and the women, the monks and the nuns, and also lay people—you can see that some of the women were just as fully liberated as the men, and just as much praised and seen as teachers as the monks. The monks sought them out.

So yes, we're stuck with history, I'm afraid.

These days, if you look across the Vipassana teacher scene, women are probably in the majority. Is that a good sign? Are we returning to matriarchy? Heavens above.

I shall leave you with that thought.

I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance. That by your severe devotion to the practice, you may be liberated from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 79

Mae Chee Kaew and Resolutions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

> *Drawing from the autobiography of Mae Chee Kaew, a Thai forest nun acknowledged as an Arahant, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents her powerful description of complete liberation: "Body, mind and essence are all distinct and separate realities... This is the end of all suffering." The talk unpacks her profound statement through the lens of traditional Buddhist analysis, exploring how the Buddha deconstructed human experience through the four elements (earth, water, fire, wind), the five khandhas (aggregates), and the six āyatanas (sense spheres).*
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> *Bhante explains the distinction between body and mind as separate realities, showing how vipassanā practice reveals their interdependent yet distinct nature. He discusses the Buddha's awakening under the Bodhi tree, the role of purification in liberation, and how even an Arahant may experience traces of greed, hatred and delusion without being controlled by them. The teaching emphasizes that complete awakening—the end of all suffering—remains possible in our time.*
>
> *Offered as a New Year reflection, this talk provides both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for spiritual resolutions, emphasizing the importance of daily renewal of commitment and the gradual transformation of heart through sustained practice.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

So it's New Year tomorrow, and traditionally we look back over the past year, give ourselves a good kicking, and then try and make a resolution for a better year to come. There are various areas that we can reflect on—social, economic, and so on. But of course, what we're particularly interested in here at Satipanya is our spiritual progress.

I want to start with a quote from Mae Chee Kaew. I'm sure I've not pronounced that right, but anyway, she's a Thai forest nun who died late last century—80s maybe, something like that. She wrote an autobiography, and she was acknowledged as an Arahant, fully awakened. This is one of the core quotes from her autobiography:

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

I shall read that again. I think it's worth reading a few times, actually. "Body, mind and essence are all distinct and separate realities. Absolutely everything is known. Earth, water, fire and wind. Body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. Sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches and emotions. Anger, greed and delusion all are known. I know them all as they exist in their own natural states. But no matter how much I'm exposed to them, I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart. They arise and cease, they are forever changing, but the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of all suffering."

Now we have to unpack this so that we can use it as a guide to our own practice. First of all, she says body, mind and essence are all distinct and separate realities. Now when the Buddha finally sat under that tree, he was driven by the question about suffering, which up until then he had tried to answer through achieving happiness. In those days there were two methodologies. One was either through the practice of *jhāna*—these absorptions which produce ecstatic states of mind. I'm sure all of you have touched upon these states, but unfortunately they arise and pass away. That's what he discovered, even though teachers of his time would have said that this is the highest and there's nowhere beyond it.

The other way was self-mortification. The idea there was to liberate the soul, the eternal soul, from the body. The body being a manifestation of attachment to this form, this realm. So one went into mortification exercise. One gave up the world, but gave up the world in a sense that was to destroy the body. Eventually, in the Jain sects and I'm sure others, the idea was to starve oneself to death. That was the final act of renunciation, the final act of self-mortification, which would then release the soul into heaven.

Remember the Buddha tried that and found it just to be more suffering. When he came to sit under the tree, the whole process had turned around upon itself. Instead of seeking happiness, he began to question how he creates suffering. And that's what led him to his insights.

But there we have this moment of doubt, self-doubt. It's something that we'll all come across, self-doubt. Who am I to sit here under the tree and work out this question which everybody else has been trying to do? There's nothing special about me. It's put in that mythological way that Mara attacked him with all sorts of sensual pleasures, boredom, all the usual stuff, but mostly this sense of self-doubt.

It was when he touched the ground—again, in the mythology of it—and up rose the goddess, the earth goddess. She stated clearly that the reason he had a right to sit there and crack this problem was because of his past past lives through which he had exercised the perfection of generosity. That's the beginning of the bodhisattva vow. In other words, he wasn't doing it just for himself but for others. With that there came the strength to sit through the process of liberation, which includes, remember, a process of purification.

When Mara attacked him, that was part of the purification, of letting go of all these desires and of coming to terms with whatever impurities were in his heart. In our tradition, the Theravada tradition, the Bodhisattva vow is one who determines to become a fully self-awakened Buddha in order to liberate others. This was then extended to mean the idea was to liberate oneself in order to help others. Then finally, you wouldn't yourself become liberated until everybody else was liberated, which is the Mahayana vow. This always seems to me a little improbable, because you'd be hanging around for a long time. It's definitely not a determination that Siddhartha Gautama made.

So I think it's best just to get on with it and become liberated with the intention that you will share it with others. It's impossible not to. It's impossible to follow the path and not cultivate generosity.

When he sits under this tree, again we have it in the mythology, that he broke through the delusions. Three knowledges came to him. The first was that he was completely clear of these impurities. The second one was that through recalling all his past lives, he saw that the key to that process was in ethics.

Just making a quick distinction between morality and ethics—most people look upon morality as "thou shalt not." So it is a bit of a loaded word. But ethics just means relationship. What is your relationship to the world, including people, animals, etc.? So through these past decisions, he moved from life to life until completely purified, or should we say ready to make this big breakthrough.

He also notices that other beings are moving from realm to realm according to the same conditioning. So what was a personal understanding of him, a personal law, became universal. In this process of liberation, there is both the process of insight and the process of purification.

Now, when he then begins to teach, he makes this distinction between the body and the mind. So this is it. Our separate realities, body and mind. This doesn't sound very materialistic, scientifically speaking, correct, because everything, as you know, from a material scientist's point of view, arises out of subatomic particles. Consciousness arises out of subatomic particles. So in Buddhist understanding, these two are different forms of energy, but they're not the same.

One of the distinctions we make in our practice, which is a *vipassanā* insight, is to clearly see that the body is one thing and the mind is something else. So there's desire and the body moves. Somebody stands on your toe and anger arises. It's being able to separate these two processes that is your first *vipassanā* insight. The second one is to see that the one is always dependent on the other. So that's the beginning of this whole process of deconstructing our experience.

It's in that process of deconstruction that we come across what she calls the essence. Now I don't know whether essence actually translates her Thai word, but it'll do. Essence meaning something which is at the core of our existence. Something which is essential. The rest is not essential, but this is essential. If we take it at that meaning, that is also a separate reality. In later Buddhist understanding—the Abhidhamma—they would talk about conventional realities, which is the body and mind, and ultimate reality, which is *Nibbāna*.

In the Buddha's own way of expressing things, he was much more interested in the experience of *Nibbāna*. He was much more careful not to move into the area of, well, what is it that experiences *Nibbāna*? It was more the sense of experiencing it and then a person deciding what its qualities were. In later Buddhism, the accent changed. It changed to, well, if there is this *Nibbāna*, something must know it. So we get words coming up such as Buddha-nature. A change of accent.

That was the first thing in our practice, in the *vipassanā* practice, which comes down to us through the dependent origination. So this is the psychology that the Buddha teaches as to how we cause suffering for ourselves. Right there, he's stating that there's two different realities, *nāma* and *rūpa*.

Then she goes on to say, everything is absolutely known. Now, when she says that, it's only what arises in consciousness at this present moment is known, meaning understood. It's not a case of just knowing it like it's there, like there are lights in the ceiling. It's a case of understanding what lights are. So in this sense, absolutely everything is understood. Absolutely everything is understood, not in themselves in a scientific way, but understood from a spiritual angle as to what they are in relationship to this essence. That's what's being understood.

So this process that we're going through of deconstructing our experience, which means just unpacking it, just separating the bits, just seeing how it all coheres, how it all comes together into this experience of being a human being, that whole process leads us to discovering this essence. The delusion lies in thinking that we are this process, that we are this human being with body and mind.

In other words, the whole of spiritual life ranges around a crisis of identity. The "who am I" or "what am I" is the fundamental question beneath all of spirituality. It's a question of who am I? Or perhaps a little bit more accurate, what am I?

Then she describes the body. So the body is earth, water, fire and wind. Not wind in the sense of flatulence, but wind in the sense of motion. So here we have these four characteristics. Now, this is where the separation of the body and mind become more obvious to us. When we talk about the body, we're normally talking about something physical, something that we can feel and touch like my hand. But when I ask what is it that I know about my hand, rather than what I think I know about my hand, then we come to realize that actually what we know about the hand is only possible through the mind.

Blood, for instance—there's blood coursing through my hand. I don't feel it. It's creating a certain colour of pink and red and all that, but I'm not aware of it. I'll only be aware of my bones when I knock them. When we're talking about the body in Buddhism, yes, there is a physical body, but it's how the mind experiences the body which is where the problem lies. The mind experiences the body at a feeling level through these four characteristics. It's either through some form of heat, through some form of movement, some form of pressure or heaviness, lightness, or some form of cohesion, stickiness.

All of the senses have some combination of those four. So seeing, for instance, would be mainly fire. Hearing is definitely—at the point where the sound comes into the ear is pressure. Remember, everything else is interpreted within the brain-mind complex, but

actually there at the eardrum all there is are pressure waves. At a more subtle level, we have sense of smell and tasting. But when we get down to that, you'll see that it's some form of these four characteristics.

So the reality that she talks about of the body is, in a sense, not contactable by us except through the mind. Except how the mind actually senses and feels the body. So for instance, your toenails. Every so often you cut them off. I mean think about that. You just cut off a bit of your body. There's no grief. In fact, if anything, there's probably relief if they've grown too big. You haven't a clue that at this moment they're actually growing. There's nothing, there's no way in which you can tell that your toenails are actually growing at this present moment. But we presume they are.

When you actually investigate what is it that you directly know or experience of your body, it really is quite minimal. It's like being in a car. You're in a car and you feel yourself in control of it and you can feel the movement of the car and you can direct the car and put little lights on all over the place. But actually, you know, you have an image of the motor but you haven't a clue what's going on inside the engine at that time. If the piston blows, that's the end of it. You've no control over it.

It's the same with the body. So long as it's motoring along, everything's fine. But then when your leg drops off, then you think what the hell. So the distinction here is the body is one thing and the way the mind knows it and contacts it is something else. They are completely distinct, but they're obviously not the same. But she is clear that there is earth, water, fire and wind, which is movement, and that this is the way we know the body through these basic sensations.

Then she uses a different form of categories, which are the khandhas, the five aggregates: the body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. So here now, the Buddha is deconstructing the mind itself. We've talked about the body and how the mind contacts the body.

Feeling are those sensations in your body which are caused both by the body, such as when you stub your toe and it hurts, and those feelings that are coming from the mind, emotional states. Those are your feelings. They're all feelings. Even though we might have different words for them, like sensations, feelings, emotions and all that, actually, they're all just feeling. The fact is that they're either pleasant or unpleasant. Even neutral ones, when we go close to them and really investigate, you'll see that they side onto either being ever so slightly unpleasant or ever so slightly pleasant. That's our feeling life.

Memory—it's interesting that she translates, or the word *saññā* is being translated as memory, because the direct translation normally is perception. But of course our perceptions are like photocopies in our minds of things that we've experienced. These photocopies grow the more that we experience the similar sort of event. So the more I eat apples, the more my idea of an apple grows, depending on all my experiences with apples. So what might begin initially as a simple perception then becomes a concrete concept of what an apple is. So I can distinguish between an apple and a pear.

All that becomes your memory. It also includes all your words, all your understanding about various abstract concepts—art, freedom, democracy, all that sort of stuff. All that becomes part of your memory bank and words are a way of holding that understanding for us. So when we say a word like Buddhism, it comes up with a whole presumed set of understandings that we've conjured up for ourselves through our reading, etc.

Now here it's translated as thought, but that isn't really a good translation for *saṅkhāra*. *Saṅkhāra* are those habits that we've created through acts of will. There's a very clear understanding as to why the Buddha has deconstructed our experience in this way. There are other ways of deconstructing a human experience, such as Freud with his superego, his ego, and his id. There are different ways of looking at a human being. But this way is a way which is meant to help us liberate ourselves from suffering.

These particular *saṅkhāra* are where we actually have the power to change our relationships to the world. This ethics. The ethics is within these *saṅkhāra*. Every time we've had an intention which is wholesome, and we have empowered it into a good continuous habit, we're creating these conditionings, volitional conditionings. In the same way, something unwholesome, we develop that too.

What we discover is, by recognizing something as unwholesome, and allowing the power of that desire to arise and manifest as desire, not indulging it through our thoughts, through our language and through our deeds, allows that energy to exhaust itself and we undermine that particular habit. Eventually, it should be completely destroyed. In the same way, when we see something wholesome and we actually empower it...

it grows and the mind is illimitable when we talk about these four great attitudes you might say compassion love compassion joy and peace these are known as illimitable because the growth of the mind is indefinite it's not limited by space it's not limited by time any moment now in this present moment we can be completely full of love completely full of joy

There's nothing limiting us but ourselves. And the ability to create that as an attitude in the heart is with us all the time. All this comes under these *saṅkhāras*, rather unfortunately translated here as thought.

Consciousness is the ability of the mind to hold a present moment, and it's multidimensional. It has both what we can see depending on the circumstance, what we can hear, what we can feel, what our emotional state is. It's like a multidimensional monitor screen or television screen. It holds in this moment what this moment offers us, and it's known. Without that ability to hold perceptions arising, images arising, emotions arising, it could not be known. Something has to manifest from moment to moment, and these are these moments of consciousness.

Unfortunately, even in the Buddha's language, the word *vijñāna*, which he uses here, is also used in other ways. So he actually sometimes refers to the essence as a *vijñāna*. So even he is struggling, using the language of his day in order to express his understandings, because they were radically different. They were based on a different experience. And these days, as you know, consciousness is heavily investigated, and I have a book on it, and confusion reigns. From consciousness being something ethereal to consciousness and its objects being the same, et cetera, et cetera.

But in Buddhist understanding, I think we're close to understanding it if we see it more like a multidimensional screen, and it holds this moment for us, and then it collapses, and then new information comes in, and it holds the next moment for us. And it's moving at such a speed that we get the sense of continuity. And one of the insights of our practice is to get down to that very infinitesimal moment to see the collapse of consciousness. And that is seeing *anicca* at its most subtle, direct level. And it's in these sorts of insights that we break through the delusion of, well, this is me. But it's just disappeared.

The next section she talks of sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches and emotions. These are another way that the Buddha deconstructs our experience by talking about consciousness and the way consciousness works. And he points out that the various senses that we've got can't be mixed. You can't smell through your eyes, and you can't see through your ears. So each consciousness is a specific avenue of experience. And again, if we are to understand the Abhidhamma, this whole process is happening in minute little pixels, you might say, picking up on all these little bits of information coming in from all the senses, which are held just long enough in consciousness for it to be known. But it's another way of deconstructing our experience.

So we say, again, in the Dependent Origination, it's the *salāyatana*, it's the six spheres of experience, *āyatana*. And this word, again, he uses to describe *Nibbāna*. It is an *āyatana*, it is a sphere of experience which has no connection with these six spheres of experience. The sixth one, of course, being the mind, here translated by emotion, which is a bit odd. I don't know who translated this. But it's normally just put as the mind.

So remember, when sensations come in, they come in as just raw information, and it's the internal processes of the mind that's actually involved creating something that we recognize and acknowledge. So in other words, all that's coming from these light bulbs in the ceiling is just photons, and the retina is picking it up, and it's going in there, and it's going through a process of being recognized and acknowledged. By which I mean, first of all, there's a recognition that it is light, and then it's there for a purpose, so I put it all in a context of what that ceiling light means. All that belongs to the sixth sense base.

So we've had these deconstructions, first of all, of the body, more accurately how the mind experiences the body: earth, water, fire and wind. We've had a deconstruction by way of the different *khandhas*, the different heaps, just like a heap of sand. They're all little bits, but they're separate heaps: the body itself, feelings, memory, perceptions, concepts, these volitional conditionings, our habits, and consciousness. And now we've had this other way of looking at the human being, which is through the *āyatana*, through the spheres of experience. So she's listed those for us. There's a whole load of Buddhist teaching around them.

Then she says, anger, greed and delusion. So now, here we're talking about an Arahant: anger, greed and delusion. So now this presents us with a question. How is it that an Arahant can still have anger, greed and delusion arise? Well, it might be that she's here perhaps talking about what she sees in other people. I can't imagine that she is deluded, because the whole process of becoming fully liberated is the undermining and complete destruction of the delusion of who I am.

But on the other hand, there can be traces, or should we say there can be traces of how delusion manifests in the mind itself, left over. And going back to the Buddha's own experience, after he was fully liberated, Māra still tempted him. Māra sent his three daughters, which were sensual desire, sexual desire, and boredom. And they hunted him down, it seems, for seven years. And it was only after seven years that they said to Māra that Māra gave up. And what Māra says is, "The Buddha sees me. The Buddha sees me." And at that point, those temptations came to an end.

Now, without going into a different way of looking at this process of what we call entering the path and fruit, you know, the stream entrant, the once returner, the non-returner, and finally the one who's fully liberated, what we get from that particular story, which again is put mythologically, is that even after he was fully liberated, the Buddha still went through a further purification process to finally banish the consequences of his past delusion. So it may be that this is what Mae Chee is actually referring to.

Mae Chee means none, but the thing is, and this is the point, "all are known," meaning all are understood. "And I know them all as they exist." In other words, she's quite clear as to what they are. They fall into one of these categories. She's no longer deluded by any of it. And they're all in their own natural states, meaning this is the way saṃsāra is. This is the way the world is. So she knows that. She's very clear about it.

Now, then she says, "No matter how much I'm exposed to them, I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart." Now, the word heart here is translating the word *citta*, which translates as mind normally. But here, over my heart, is the *citta* of *Nibbāna*. So again, this is one of those words that the Buddha has to play around with because there just isn't the language for it. So just as he uses *vijñāna*, consciousness, also to refer to the nirvanic consciousness, he uses *citta*. And in that victory verse that we chant every morning, he says *cittaṃ asaṅkhataṃ*, the *citta* which is non-conditioned.

So in other words, this isn't the consciousness that we've been talking about, this screen that holds something. This is something other than. And all these things that are happening within this screen of consciousness never touch that essence. Remember, that's the other word she uses: essence, which she calls here the heart.

"They arise and cease. They are forever changing. But the presence that knows them never changes for an instance." So again, she's using a different word to point to this *Nibbāna*: the sense of presence.

Now in your meditations, when you are the observer, when you are the feeler, the one who knows, when you feel yourself to be quite separate from sensations in the body, from feelings and emotions in the heart, from your thoughts and images, when you get that sense of true separation and you experience yourself as the one who knows, that is the sense of presence. But remember, that's not the end point. That's also a delusion, because we're aware of it. If you're aware of something, you can't be it. The perceiver can't be the perceived. It's very simple. But when you get to that point, sometimes in your meditation, afterwards reflect upon it, because that's what she's referring to.

"But the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of all suffering."

So there we have it. Here we have somebody not born 2,500 years ago. Here we have somebody of our own lifetime who is actually stating that she became fully liberated: "This is the end of all suffering." So it's important to understand that it's possible. That it isn't something mythical that only belongs to some sort of past age, some sort of Shangri-La. It's up to us really. It's within our grasp to at least move directly towards that sort of goal.

And although it demands a certain effort, demands that we pass through periods which are difficult and all that, the fact of that purification is that it always gives you a gift at the end, because it's like getting over an illness. If you've got an illness, no matter whether it's just a simple cold or something quite serious, when it's gone, there is just that sense of relief and a release from it. So it's the same with all these agitations and turbulences that are within us. When we see them passing, when we see that they're actually not so strong, that they don't control us as much as they used to do, that they don't last as long, when we reflect on that over time, there comes to us a sense of relief, a sense of being slowly released from our own suffering.

So this is an opportunity really tomorrow when we have time to reflect and whatnot, and on the day itself, New Year's Day, when we go up to the stupa and put our resolutions, we burn our resolutions as offerings, burnt offerings. It's just an opportunity to really make that commitment. And remember that vows last as long as you say them. Even a minute after you've made the vow, the strength of the vow begins to disappear. So it's not as though you say, "Right, well, this year I'm going to practice two hours every morning." You've got to say every morning, and you've got to keep yourself at it until it becomes habitual. Even when it's habitual, there's always the danger of fallback. So the New Year's resolution is to be repeated day after day after day after day. And that's the way it has an effect on us.

And when you repeat a resolution to yourself, you have to speak it very gently into your heart. And you have to keep saying it and keep saying it and keep saying it until you feel a sort of digestion. You can almost feel it; there's a physical change in the heart. I don't mean the physical heart, I mean the centre of your chest where the heart chakra is. And you can almost feel it being digested. That's when it's beginning to get a hold on you. And that's the point, that's the real purpose of repetitive prayer or repetitive well-wishings. You have to keep saying these things, saying these things into the heart. And then very slowly you can feel that it's actually beginning to have an effect. Then it be-

gins to manifest through what you think and what you say and what you do. And in that way, the feedback comes back to the heart and reinforces that resolution. And it does even more so when you see the benefits of it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that you are not thrown into deeper confusion, but that you feel that some clarification has taken part, and that through your eternal devotion to the practice, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 80

The Three Characteristics of Existence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana) that form the foundation of Buddhist understanding. Beginning with the Four Noble Truths and the meaning of dukkha as 'hard to bear' or 'unsatisfactoriness,' he explains how these characteristics reveal our fundamental delusions about reality.*
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> *The talk explores why anicca (impermanence) comes first in practice, examining both momentary and long-term impermanence through death contemplation. Bhante discusses how recognizing impermanence naturally leads to understanding dukkha through paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), showing how our wrong view of self creates taṇhā (craving) and psychological suffering.*
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> *The final characteristic, anattā (not-self), is explored through the practice of disidentification - learning to observe rather than become our experiences. Using noting techniques with 'there is...' rather than 'I am...', practitioners gradually separate awareness from the psychophysical process. Bhante emphasizes that as delusions are undermined through seeing these three characteristics, wisdom and the brahmavihāra (loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity) arise naturally. This profound teaching offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for insight meditation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, this evening, for some of you, just a recap, maybe an introduction to these three characteristics of existence. That's what they're called, three characteristics of existence. And the place to start really is with the Four Noble Truths, because that's where he delineates, that's where he starts to express his understanding.

And the operative word is *dukkha*, so we have to really get a hold of that word, *dukkha*. It just means hard to bear. If you were to translate it directly, it's hard to bear. It used to be translated as suffering. So when people were told that the Buddha's teaching was there is suffering and this is the cause of suffering, everybody thought it was very pessimistic.

In fact, the first book I read on Buddhism that I remember was one by Dr. Schweitzer, who was a humanist. Well, he's a Christian, but very late in life he trained as a doctor and went to work in Africa and he was known for his humanitarian work and he wrote

this book which contrasted Christianity to Buddhism and he declared without a shadow of a doubt that Christianity was life affirmative and Buddhism was life negative, life negative. So I don't know how I overcame that prejudice but somehow I did.

And a lot of it goes back to these early translations. These days, the most common is unsatisfactoriness. And then in that first noble truth, he tells us why it's unsatisfactory. And he talks about *dukkha-dukkhatā* and *viparināma-dukkha* and *saṅkhāra-dukkha*. So it's the unsatisfactoriness of pain, suffering etc. It's the unsatisfactoriness that is caused through impermanence and it's the unsatisfactoriness caused by things being compounded, having no substance.

And when he then goes into the second noble truth, that the cause of this is this *taṇhā*, this attachment, is not just our attachment to pleasure, it's our attachment to these wrong views, that in fact things do have a certain permanency, that things are truly real, and have some substance.

I was with a friend of mine and we were talking about something and I happened to say, but the body's unreal. And his father who was standing next to him blurted out, yes it is! And that was it. He died within a few weeks of that. But it was such a punch in the air that the conversation came to an end. You couldn't go anywhere with that statement. So, of course, it depends what he meant by real, but definitely it has no ultimate reality.

So, these three characteristics are telling us where our delusions lie. Delusion, remember, the definition of delusion is you don't know where you're deluded. If you knew you were deluded, if you knew where you were deluded, you wouldn't be deluded. You might still suffer from the consequence of delusion, but you wouldn't actually realize that you were deluded, because that's the whole definition of being deluded.

And these three definitions, of course, are defining, trying to define delusion, or trying to counter-define what in those days they were arguing about was what is substantial, what is ultimate reality. And the Brahmins opted, or generally speaking, the word was the self, the *attā*. This *attā*, this self, became more and more refined as time came on. And eventually, both the Brahmins, Brahmanism, which we now call Hinduism, came to the same understanding as Buddhism, but that's another story as to how it was filched. We won't go into that.

Anyway, what the Buddha is saying is, if there is something substantial, if there is this self, and we would say in our language a spirit or a soul or something which is eternal, if there is that, how can we discover it? Or how can we find out what it is? And

it's the process of negation, which is again the same as in Brahmanism. So it's not this, not that. So that process of looking at things and saying not this, not that, is part of the process of wakening up to the way things really are, what we might call reality.

So these three avenues of investigation are really trying to clarify for us what it is that can't be ultimate truth, that can't be, shall we say, a real soul or spirit or self. And the first one, he starts off with, in the Four Noble Truths, he starts off with the *dukkha-dukkhatā*. So it's the suffering of ordinary pain and the sorrows of life. And then the next one is this, the suffering caused by change, and the last one, the cause by insubstantiality.

But when it comes to the practice, it's always *anicca* which comes first, *anicca, dukkha, anattā*. And we chant that in the morning, *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā, sabbe dhammā anattā*. So all compounded things are impermanent, all compounded things are unsatisfactory, all things don't constitute anything substantial or a self.

So why is it that in our practice we actually start with the *anicca*, with the impermanence? So if you were to say to anybody in the street, everything changes, nothing is permanent in the universe, and this is the deep teaching of the Buddha, they'd look at you and say, yeah. I mean, it's not as though people are not aware of change. But it doesn't change their behaviour. It doesn't motivate them to look more deeply into their lives. They just accept it. Things change and sometimes it's for the better and sometimes it's for the worse. They don't go deeply into the problems that arise when we don't actually change our lives through the insight into impermanence.

So when we see something is impermanent, the natural thing is not to get attached to it. So immediately, every time you have something which you treasure, it might be a ring, it might be a precious vase or whatever it is, or it might be something of a deeper value, a relationship, something like your work that you treasure, it's good practice to say, well, this too will come to an end. This too will come to an end.

Now, you might think that would send you into a depression. Well, it might. But the point is to be ready for what is inevitably going to happen because all things come to an end. So seeing *anicca* as something which is impermanent is about forming a different relationship to the world. It's about really recognizing that whatever we have or possess is going to change. It's going to disappear at some point. It's not going to be there for us. So that's the first thing.

And because we see that when we attach to something and we don't see impermanence, then we also see that in fact this is the cause of suffering. So *anicca* there, this impermanence, guides us into seeing suffering from the angle of impermanence. So that's one way of looking at things.

And the way we undermine that is by constantly reminding ourselves that things arise and pass away. And the biggest arising and passing away, of course, is being born and then having to die. So the actual contemplation of death is really a very strong contemplation, which at first might seem a bit lugubrious. It might drive you into jumping off a bridge. But actually what it does is it puts your life into a certain balance.

Because recognizing that life comes to an end, because of our aim in life, which is to become liberated, it makes this present moment that much more precious. If you think that death's going to happen sometime in the vast future, then of course there's no sense of immediacy. There's no sense of *saṁvega*, that sense of urgency in our practice.

So by reminding ourselves that we are one breath away from death, we are one heartbeat away from death. It's not very far, is it? One heartbeat. Boom, boom. That's it. Finished. Gone. By reminding ourselves that we're on this knife edge, that life can end at any time, we begin to experience life as much more bright, much more alert, because we're actually making it, we actually try to make it more meaningful for ourselves. And that's, of course, where the spiritual practice comes in.

So really looking at impermanence in all its different facets, both in the sense that in the minutest moments, I mean, how long does a moment last? How long can you hold a moment? It's like, how long is it? Gone, isn't it? And yet the mind is able to create this continuity for us.

I mean, think about music. You only hear one note, but somehow we can hear the whole tune. Somehow we capture the whole tune as it's going along and think that we're actually hearing the whole piece. But actually it's only one note at a time. So there's the ability of the mind to contain some idea of continuity, without which you couldn't live in the world, for heaven's sake. You'd be waking up everywhere you were. So there has to be that quality of continuity in our ordinary lives. But we're fooled by it into thinking that's the way things are. That's the problem.

So even in the minute, even in the minuscule layer of each moment arising and passing away, we can begin to catch the insecurity of our lives. And it's living with that insecurity which sharpens the present moment. And then in the long term, that con-

templation every so often, that the end of life is this full stop at the end. And to know that that's going to come, that also puts a pressure on us to make sense of this present moment, not to waste it, not to get lazy.

Don't be lazy now and be remorseful afterwards, says the Buddha. And remember that I mentioned, I think, earlier in the week, Sunlun, this fierce Arahant, who when asked, why is it people don't become liberated as quick as him, he said, because they're lazy.

And we're lazy because we think that our lives are just going to carry on. I mean, what's the problem? In the East, where the idea of rebirth is very easy for people, it's just part and parcel of their culture, then you do get this laziness. When you ask them, are you working to become liberated? No, I'm building up my bank account of good deeds and virtue and all that. And I'll be there when the next Buddha comes. Like, when's that? And of course, when the next Buddha comes, they'll be there still getting in their virtue and building up their good deeds. So sometimes to believe that life goes on in this rebirthing process really makes a person lazy.

So to bring about this sense of urgency that the Buddha talks about, that recollection of death is a very strong practice. And it's right there in the discourse on how to establish right awareness. I mean, there he describes, I think it's 13 states of a corpse rotting on the charnel ground. So in those days, they would leave the corpse out to be eaten by vultures and wild animals. And monks were instructed, it was the general practice of the day, it was part of the self-mortification, to go out there and watch corpses slowly corrupt and disappear into dust.

The commentaries are very helpful. They tell you not to sit windward. Unfortunately we can't do that these days but interestingly enough if you're a monastic and you go to the east, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, the hospitals will let you in to see an autopsy and that's always quite an interesting thing to see because if you haven't, most people haven't seen a dead body, most people haven't felt a dead body, and it's quite an experience to actually see one and to catch its lifelessness, and how the mind wants to give it life. You look at the face of a corpse, and it's as though the mind wants to give it some expression, some movement, but it just won't. It's dead.

So there was a lovely story, while I'm on about it, about this, he's a Westerner. And he went to Sri Lanka, became a monastic. And he wanted to do this death meditation as the Buddha described it. So somehow he got the permission to get the body of a corpse of a convict, somebody in prison who died in prison. Somehow he got permission to do

this. And he carried this corpse on his back to where he was living in this cave. And there he built a cage, a glass cage with a funnel. And he put the body in it. And he observed the rotting of the body.

Well, when the newspapers heard about this, they declaimed, finally, a real monk. Finally, we've got somebody who can really look at this. Anyway, as the story ends, he finally left the order and went off to help Mother Teresa in Calcutta, I think. So I think it must have done something for him.

That's a bit extreme, of course. We needn't do that. Just contemplating our own death is often enough. And every so often when you wake up with a pain that you haven't had before, or during the day with a pain, just watch that fear that comes, the fear of death. So it's just something that you can bring in just as a small daily practice.

These practices, the *vipassanā*, the *mettā*, the contemplations that we do in the evening about sickness, aging and death, it's just this constant little reminder every day that works. And it doesn't take a second, it doesn't take any time, it's just that little reminder every day. And it very slowly changes our attitude to the way we're living.

Now the other side of *anicca*, so one part of *anicca* guides us into the *dukkha*, the suffering, and the other side, of course, is because it's impermanent, it takes away any sense of substantiality. So it takes us into the *anattā* teaching about not-self. So starting with *anicca*, it's a perspective into the other two, into the suffering or the unsatisfactoriness and into the not-self.

But each of these, of course, have their own particular viewpoints. And when it comes to *dukkha*, the Buddha then expresses that through dependent origination. And in dependent origination, he points very clearly at two places where this whole *dukkha* rests, the whole problem of unsatisfactoriness rests. And he starts off by that *avijjā*, that not knowing, not knowing.

So it's through not knowing that we make a mistake and we form a wrong relationship with this psychophysical organism, this human being. And if you think about it, it's understandable. Because when we're born, what do we know? And you just find yourself in this body. You are this body. And it's quite understandable that we should think that this is what we are. And we end up living with that delusion.

Now, because of that, we try to seek happiness in this form. Now, that's the driving force, is it not, of our life? To seek happiness. Isn't that the driving force? Happiness in however you wish to define it. So some people might define it as a wonderful relationship, others riches, others fame, others lots of money, others all of that. So it depends on how you define your happiness. That's what you're chasing.

And seeking some permanent happy state in the human form always lets us down. It lets us down, A, because it's impermanent, but the attachment itself has its own consequence of suffering, which we've been through, especially around pleasure. So remember, what happens is we form our happinesses around things that we collect. These things can be the money, it can be fame, it can be power, it can be people. It doesn't matter what it is, we collect them.

And the more we collect of these happinesses, the more we feel safe, the more we feel secure, and the more we feel happy. A person feels much more happy if they have a billion pounds in the bank than if they have one million pounds in the bank. Your happiness grows with the amount of money you've got.

So these happinesses are an accumulation of things. This accumulation now has to be guarded. Other people want what you have. Other people want your billion pounds for a start. And anybody that undermines this happiness must be annihilated as quickly as possible. So there you've got your aversion, which is pushing away anything which is undermining you. And if what is undermining you is too big to handle, then you've got to run for it. So there you have your three basic attitudes that arise out of this wrong relationship. Acquisitiveness, aversion and fear.

And once we've got those attitudes, we start acting upon them. That produces unwholesome actions, which themselves have unwholesome consequences. Because it all demands that the world be moved and shifted in order to satisfy my happiness. So from a delusive point of view, I'm constantly manipulating the world so that I can feel comfortable, I can feel happy. So I'm in constant conflict with the world, except in those small moments when I've finally got it. And then it lasts, what, a couple of seconds, a few days at most, and it's gone.

And then I'm back on the trail again of trying to get this happiness. This manifests as *tanha*, this special word that the Buddha uses, which we translate as craving, which is far too strong because it doesn't include the little small attachments, the little small attachments that we have, the small little selfishness. I'm just taking that big piece of cake. Everybody else takes the little one. And so it's that whole area of grasping, wanting, needing in that psychological sense. That's the attachment.

So wherever there's attachment, there's a psychological dependency on it for happiness. When we describe that happiness, when we say, well, what do I mean when I say I am happy? I think you'll agree with me when I say we're talking about a mental state. If I put pleasant food in my mouth but it doesn't make me happy, then I just spit it out and try another dish. I'm looking to food to make me happy. I'm looking to a relationship to make me happy. And this happiness always defines a mental state, mainly the emotion-

al content of that mental state. It's never the object itself which is happiness. It may be the proximate cause of the happiness, in other words, something that I'm dependent on, but what I'm really trying to do is to create a happy state within myself.

Now, that's when the seeing of *anicca* comes in, because when you realize that these happiness states are not under your control, that you can bring them up under certain circumstances, but that they just change whether you want them to or not, and sometimes the same circumstance that made you happy then doesn't make you happy now. So we're constantly, as drug addicts say, chasing the dragon. And that's the point of *tanha*.

So what the Buddha's pointing to is, A, there's a profound misunderstanding underneath our lives, and it manifests as this form of greed, aversion and fear. And the consequence of that is, of course, guilt, shame, remorse, etc., etc. And if you don't have guilt, shame or remorse, then you end up being callous, hard, unfeeling, unforgiving. So here, what he's describing is the psychology which is causing us problems: this fundamental misunderstanding as to who we are, and therefore we seek happiness in the phenomenal world, that is the world of the psychophysical organism, we'll come to that in a minute, and that manifests through this word, this *tanha*.

So in our meditation, what we're trying to do is constantly to separate out the given from the reaction. And that's the process of seeing how we create suffering for ourselves. So the given might be a pleasant mental state, some sort of memory. This is in our meditation here and now. It could be something that we went out in nature and it gives us pleasure and it gives us a certain pleasurable feeling. And what we are catching is how we're relating to that. How we're relating to that. And how when it doesn't satisfy us there's a feeling of disappointment or a feeling of boredom. So there's a whole psychology around the relationship we have with the world that we experience. And it's catching that and then of course the practice of not joining in, not actually identifying with it, to be able to name it and to know it and not to identify with it.

And very slowly this relationship changes, away from that wanting to manipulate the world, moving towards this is the way it is, that radical, straightforward acceptance of each and every moment as it arises. There's an undermining of wanting to push away the unpleasant, but of accepting it.

When I was at Kandaboda in the monastery there, I was in the back end of the monastery in my own kuti, my own hut. And there was a block of rooms not so far from me. I could see them through the trees. Maybe about, I don't know, 30 metres or so. And foreigners would come into that. Not singles. It was actually built for foreigners. And so

there'd be this constant change of people coming in and coming out. Some of them, of course, were very serious meditators, utterly committed. But some of them were absolute... Well, prats, for want of a better word.

They used to complain to the abbot, you know, and say, well, you know, he's doing this. This was the male section. The female section, I didn't know anything about because there's a wall around it. And they would go to the abbot and say, he's doing this and he's doing that. And the abbot would never do anything.

And there was one point where we had this self-professed schizophrenic. And he would sit out there in the nude, and sometimes he'd jump up and jump around and dance. It was an absolute riot. And eventually, I felt that this was just... You know, a bit beyond the pale, you know what I mean? A little bit of disturbance, fine, you accept this and all that. So I went to see the abbot thinking that I would have this great authority as a monk rather than a layperson. And I explained to him that, you know, this was very injurious to the whole practice and it was messing people up. But he did nothing, you see. He did nothing at all, you see.

And I went back and I thought, hmm, it's very interesting. And then I realised, of course, that that's what we're constantly doing. Whenever something which disturbs us comes, especially when something is, shall we say... evil, perhaps that's too strong a word, when we see something as dangerous or we find somebody who threatens us, our attitude is to move away. And that, of course, allows the person to have full reign of the situation. Whereas what the teaching was to me was, yes, there is this disturbance and at some point or other it will go and you stay with it. And that's what happened. He disappeared. He went one day and he never came back.

And if you take that on a political level, you see how important it is that when something happens in a country where there's some manifestation of some real wrong thinking, some evil. The good people tend to shy away, tend to go away, instead of staying there and working with it and eventually undermining it.

So this whole idea about delusion manifests in many, many subtle ways in our lives. Always remember trying to manipulate the present moment or doing something about the present moment to make ourselves feel comfortable or at best happy. And it's catching that, it's catching that, you see, and then allowing the wisdom to arise, which is, given this situation, what ought to be done from a truly ethical point of view. And that undermines this wrong understanding, you see. As it were, it drops downwards through the process to the whole idea of me.

In those happy hippie days, people used to go around saying, I do my own thing in my own way, in my own time. That was the greatest expression of Western individualism you could get. To hell with the world. I will do my own thing in my own way, in my own time. Forget the rest of you. I'm the one who's important here.

And that process of constantly letting go of attachment, of constantly working with the unpleasant, of constantly not trying to manipulate the present, you see, is undermining this sense of an isolated self. And that's when you begin to make connections with the world around you. That's when you begin to begin to establish a different relationship, not based on this very solid idea of a self or an ego.

So for instance, when the Buddha visits these three monks who happen to be fully liberated, he calls them the Anurudas, I think. He says to the chief monk, he says, how is it you live peacefully together? He said, well, every morning we say to ourselves, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do? That's not quite, I do my own thing in my own way in my own time. And in any group of people, of course, everybody has to say that or else it doesn't work because you just get abused. But if that was our attitude, you can see how we begin to feel much more at ease with life, by asking the people around us, what do they want to do? And not just going into a situation and saying, well, this is the way I want it to be.

So this whole area of *dukkha*, of unsatisfactoriness, has to do with both the acquisitiveness, which we've been looking at through the eating process, through trying to enjoy life with that override of indulgence, which simply means attachment and trying to create a beautiful mental state by stuffing ourselves. And the other side of it is the actual suffering, the bit where we become averse, where we become fearful, anxious, where it gets on top of us and we get depressed, etc., etc. All that belongs to this deep, profound, wrong relationship we have with this psychophysical organism.

So now, when we begin to understand this, we move to that slightly deeper level of not-self, not-me, not-mine. And what we're doing here is we are beginning to disidentify with this psychophysical organism. So when we're sitting in meditation and we're using these little noting words, and especially if you preface them with 'there', so there's pain, there's unhappiness, there's sadness, there's joy, whatever it is, what we're doing is we're pushing it away from ourselves. We're disidentifying.

Just very quickly, if we go back to when we were born, there's a woman called Margaret Mahler who was a student of Freud and she studied babies up to about the age of three. And what she discovered was that for the first three or four months all there is is this blanket of sensation, an undifferentiated sensation, except that some were painful and some were pleasant. And then slowly out of four months there looms your first ob-

ject, usually your carer, your mother. And very slowly the baby pushes the world out, creates a 3D world. That seems to be what's happening when they're reaching out for rattles and stuff. They're actually creating that world. So it's not as though we're born with that. We're born with the potential of creating that phenomenal world, but it has to be developed. And it's not until the age of three, thereabouts, two and a half, three, that the child says, I am a boy, I am a girl, and everything else isn't me. It's taken three years.

Now, what we're doing is, we are taking that process inwardly. We're separating out of this person that we've made, you see, and what constitutes the person. The person is made up of the body, the image of the body, of the pleasures and the pain that the body gives us. The person is made of these emotions and our habits and our thought patterns and all our conditioning. All that is then put into this concept of a person. This is me. And by sitting and finding this observation post within ourselves, this place where we can observe and feel things, what we're actually doing is exactly what the baby did with that two-dimensional world, creating a three-dimensional world, creating itself away from there. We are beginning to isolate this awareness from everything that it's aware of. And that is the process of liberation.

The process of liberation is both this liberating ourselves from the wrong desire of things, the wrong attachment to things, but at this deep level it's disidentification. So we relocate ourselves backwards until we reach this self-awareness, this observer, the feeler, the witness, the one who knows. And every time we fall into the old habit of becoming this other self, right, then that's the point where we have to jump out and recognize the mistake we've made.

So when you have a pain, a headache, and you say, oh, I've got a headache, so you stop and say, hold on, no, no, there is a headache. Every time you have an emotion, you say, oh, I feel so depressed, I feel so anxious, you say, ah, no, there's depression, there's anxiety. So that's a constant practice that we have to take in our daily lives, constantly separating out.

But remember that that's also a false position because here we have this new self it's another self who is disidentifying with everything and there's a danger there that you become so disidentified with it that you're no longer engaged so that itself is not a pleasant place to be so you still have to go into the psychophysical organism but you go in with right intention.

And it's that ability to go in with right intention that reinforces the wisdom that you get from that disidentifying in other words through disidentifying you're undermining all those consequences of delusion which is the greed, the fear, the aversion and by go-

ing in with right intention and becoming your action, being your actions, your thoughts, your wholesome thoughts, your wholesome speech, your skillful actions, you're actually reinforcing and manifesting and reinforcing your right understanding of the way things are. And that manifests always as some shade of the four illimitables. Love, which is that basic connection, compassion, joy and peacefulness or equanimity.

Now remember that that position of the self in the observer is also a false position. Because there's two people there, there's two things there rather. There's the observing and there's the observing of the self. Self-awareness. So you can't be that either. You can't be the object that you're aware of. But unfortunately, you can't get beyond that state by an act of will.

You can get beyond the body. As soon as we know that, as soon as I look at something or feel something as an object, I've disidentified with it. And you can do it with an emotion rather than just becoming it. Rather than just being angry, you can say, there is anger. And we can do it with images. Thoughts are more difficult because they're so fast. But when we're highly concentrated, well, when we've got a decent, steady concentration, you can catch thoughts coming. Sometimes they're like neon lights in front of you. And that's this constant pulling away, re-establishing an inner sense of self, this self-observer.

But you can't get rid of that image. You can't get rid of the self. Because that's an image of the knowing in the mirror of the mind. It's like when you look in a mirror, you can't get rid of that face. Every time you look in a mirror, it's there. See?

Now, the unfortunate thing is, I think most people think, that when they look in the mirror and they see their face, they think that's the way people see them. But it's a great horror and shock when they actually use the second mirror to see this mirror image. Because remember, it's turned round. That's why if you put writing up in the mirror, you can't read it. It's the other way round, you see? And it comes as a great shock to know how big your nose really is. See? And it's the same when you hear your voice first recorded. You know, God, I don't sound like that. Or worse, when you're videoed. I didn't think you were behaving like that.

Anyway, so it's beginning to recognize that that is an image, you see. So now, when everything is absolutely quiet, when everything is really, really still, and I've been saying this to a few of you, you know, turn that gaze inward towards the knowing. Turn the gaze inwards towards the knowing and ask yourself afterwards, what is the knowing made of? What's constituted? What constitutes it?

So for instance, when we go into pain and we go into what constitutes pain, we might find tightness or heat and all those sorts of things. So now we know that that's the reality of the situation, inverted commas. That there is sensation. Pain is a mental construct. So this sense of self, you see, it is telling us something about our true nature. And it's that investigation that begins to undermine this really, really deep and basic mistake we've made about identity.

And in that vein, the Buddha states quite clearly that mind is foremost. Mind is there right at the beginning and it's there right at the end. It's the most important thing. Now just consider for a minute, you see. Photons are coming into our eyes. Pressure waves are hitting the ear. But these are actually quite minimal information. When you see diagrams of what happens to a person's eye when they look at a picture, it's going all over the place. But the actual viewer of the picture still sees the picture as a whole.

But the eye is actually moving at this tremendous speed, picking up little pixels here and there. So we have these sense bases which are sensitive to certain data, to certain information, but the information is quite minimal. And what the mind does is it takes it into what's known as, in Buddhism, the inner sense door, the mind door, and there it's filled out. And I read somewhere that actually what happens in the eye is that this filling out is then put back onto the retina. So it gives us a real picture, inverted commas.

So there's a whole thing going on inside this complex of the brain and mind. And what we end up with is the world that we've actually created. That is the phenomenal world. And it's beginning to recognize that that isn't an objective thing. That is something that we are actually creating all the time. So that even though we would all agree that this room exists, in the sense that when we all leave, it doesn't disappear, the fact is there are as many rooms here as there are people, in terms of experience of it.

So now, grasping that, the world I'm living in is being manufactured by me, part of it is given, both the pleasant part and the unpleasant part. And that we have to accept with this radical acceptance. But what I do with it afterwards, the misery and horror that I create afterwards, is totally my own doing. Nobody can make me angry, nobody can make me sad. If that was so, if it was so that people could make me angry, could make me sad, could make me depressed, could make me happy, then to become fully liberated, I'd have to get rid of you all. Because full liberation is perfect happiness.

It is because we create our own happiness, our sadness, that we can become, each of us, individually liberated before other people. So that is also part of understanding of this not self, not substance. Nothing is substantial.

So that's what our practice is doing. It's guiding us to see impermanence in a much more direct way, in a much more experiential way, that things actually do come to an end. And these exercises that we've mentioned around death and around, especially that other one about saying goodbye. See, constantly saying goodbye. Thank you, goodbye. Thank you, goodbye. You have a pleasant meal with somebody and then when it's finished you say thank you, goodbye. You don't say that to them. You're saying it internally. Say that internally to yourself.

And every time you see a good DVD or any time you've had some degree of happiness, actually be grateful for it. Really accept that there was a time when I was happy and then goodbye. And that allows us to keep finishing, to keep bringing to an end because we don't like to see endings.

And that's something you could do tomorrow, is to put more accent on seeing the ending of things. The seeing of beginning of things we're habituated to, because beginning for us means new, and new usually means good. But end usually means bad. And although we see the rising star, the great pop star, nobody ever knows what happens to them. They just disappear.

This seeing of *anicca*, the *dukkha* is much more psychological, it's much more felt. You can grasp it much more quickly because you can see, you can feel the unsatisfactoriness and the way that we're attaching to things. And the *anattā* is slightly more difficult to see, but it's there to be seen by constantly pointing to our experiences. There is, there.

And that business of no control. The whole idea of a self is that it's in control. If it's not in control of something, the control center must be in somewhere else. If I am my body, I should be able to say, right, from now on you're never going to get ill and you're not going to grow old. Full stop. But it's the fact that the control center of the body is within the body and not in that which wants the body to not grow old, etc. Shows me that it can't be me.

And then finally, just cutting down to the quick about that relationship. Constantly questioning it. And remember that although the talk has been mainly about undermining what is delusive, remember that as we do that, the opposite arises quite naturally. As soon as we cut through a delusion, wisdom arises naturally. Whereas delusion manifests in self-centeredness, selfishness, in aversion and in cruelty. The opposites just happen naturally. They just arise naturally. Generosity, love, and compassion.

It's not as though you can't help them on a bit through exercise and practice, but it's not as though there's an intermediate state where there's nothing. Either you're cruel or you're compassionate. Either you're hateful or you're loving. There's no intermediate state between those two. So the gift of practicing like this is a movement of our characters and personalities towards the beautiful. It just happens naturally.

So there's hope. I can only hope my words of being of some assistance have not created further confusion and despair. And that through your devotion to practice and careful investigation of these three characteristics of existence, you will become liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 81

Buddha Day Address — The Life, Teaching, and Path to Nibbāna

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44 min

> *In this Buddha Day address, Bhante Bodhidhamma reflects on the profound significance of the Buddha's life and revolutionary teaching. He traces the Buddha's journey from leaving household life through his failed attempts at extreme asceticism to his breakthrough under the Bodhi tree, emphasizing how the Buddha's compassionate motivation — seeking liberation not just for himself but for all beings — provided the courage needed for Awakening.*
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> *The talk examines the Buddha's systematic teaching approach to laypeople: beginning with generosity (dāna) to undermine selfishness, progressing through moral virtue (sīla) to purify relationships, discussing the heavenly realms as reflections of wholesome mental states, and warning of the dangers of sensual indulgence before finally presenting the Four Noble Truths. Bhante explores dukkha as the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence, explaining the three types of craving (taṇhā) that perpetuate suffering.*
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> *The discourse culminates in a detailed exploration of Nibbāna — described through the Buddha's various metaphors as an island, an unconditioned sphere (āyatana), and boundaryless consciousness full of light. Through the analogy of child development and the practice of vipassanā meditation, Bhante explains the progressive stages of letting go: first separating from the external world, then from the internal world of thoughts and sensations, and finally transcending even the observer itself to realize the deathless element of Nibbāna.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa - Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully Self-Enlightened One.

We are gathered here today to commemorate the life and work of the Buddha himself, our founder. I'm going to talk more about his teaching, but remember this was a pivotal event in the life of humanity. There's no reason to believe that he was the first one to experience Nibbāna - he talked of it as an ancient path. But he was definitely one who came along and began to teach it in a way that was very open to even different cultures.

In terms of world religions, complete world religions that have spread through different cultures, really you've only got the three: Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Remember that his discovery was such that he was able to step out of the culture of his

time. So he stepped out of the Brahminical tradition of the Vedas and was able to establish his own teaching. The Jain leader also was able to do that, so it wasn't as though he was unique in that. But definitely the manner of his teaching and the perception of his insight was such that we don't find anything deeper than that in any other religious form.

So we've come to really celebrate that, the fact that we are receivers of that teaching. And remember that he himself had to discover it. It's not as though he was born with that innate understanding - he went through the whole process of the purification of the heart and the insights necessary for liberation.

Most of us know the story. The pivotal points were leaving the homely life, the household life. So this must have been quite a break for him, especially since his only child had just been born. But that shows you the manner of his state of mind at the time, which we have to be compassionate with. These days we can't understand why anybody should leave their family like that. But then, of course, it was an extended family. It wasn't as though she was left high and dry. And he must have been in a state of severe inner turmoil, what we would call an existential crisis. And it was that that really drove him.

Remember that he tries all the forms that the age was able to offer him, all the yoga forms that were there, the development of mental states that we call absorptions. And he found that wanting only because they came to an end. So these are still belonging to the phenomenal world, the world of the mind.

And then he tried self-mortification. So this was based on that basic understanding that the body itself was a manifestation of bad karma, manifestation of unwholesome actions that we'd done in the past, in the past lives, and that it was holding the soul down. So the whole process was letting go of the body, by which we mean letting go of the appetites of the body. In a sense, blaming the body for the problems that we have. So if we had no appetite, then we wouldn't be suffering from greed. It was that mentality.

The Buddha tried that, especially severe mortification in terms of food. He said he could hold his spine through his stomach. So if you try that, you'll see how thin he was. And then he gave that up because he discovered it simply to be more suffering. It didn't seem to be getting him anywhere.

And with that, of course, he leaves his companions. And we find him on the roadside, feeling, I should think, pretty miserable for himself. And along comes a woman, gives him some sweetmeats. And this revives him. And he has that memory from childhood

where he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. And that memory gives him an inkling as it turns his whole practice around. Instead of trying to achieve happiness, he then turns upon himself and tries to investigate the cause of his suffering. And it's with that inspiration that he sits under the tree.

But even then, under the tree, there's this huge doubt about whether he, in fact, has any right to continue this, to achieve anything beyond the human state, whether there is anything beyond the human state. And in the mythology that surrounds it, he touches the earth to ground himself, and the earth goddess arises and says that he's every right to do this because he has the perfection of generosity. So in other words, he's not doing it just for himself. And it was with that feeling that he was doing it not just for himself, but for everybody he knew, perhaps for the whole of humanity and all beings, that he found the courage to break through that delusion, and then he experiences Nibbāna bliss.

In that process, we say he has three knowledges. The first knowledge was that he has completely transcended, well, completely purified the heart. So there's no more aversion and all the aspects of aversion, fear, etc. There's no depression or anything like that. There's no greed whatsoever. And there's no more delusion about who he actually really is or what that is beyond this phenomenal form, this form of a human being. There's no doubt in his mind after that.

Shortly after that, he then thinks about teaching and he gets this doubt as to whether anybody can understand the subtlety of what he's just discovered. And then again, it's put mythologically that this great god, Sahampati, came down and said, "Look, there are some people with only a little dust in their eyes." So he reflected on it and he thought, "Well, I'll give it a go."

And then he thought of his six companions, whom he then goes in search of. But on the way, he meets Upaka, another ascetic, and Upaka says, "Oh, you look very bright, you've got this lovely serene feeling about you. Who is your teacher?" And the Buddha announces himself as the fully liberated one, the fully enlightened one, "I don't have a teacher," etc. And Upaka shakes his head and says, "Oh, very good, okay," and then moves on. So I think he learns very quickly that's not quite how you get the Dharma across.

Remember that just because he's fully liberated doesn't mean that he actually can teach. It's something that evolves. And you can see it in his teaching. The first teachings are not so rigidly formulated into four of these and five of those. In the scriptures you can see very early on it's coming out spontaneously. And then over time it becomes very formalized: Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, and so on and so forth.

And then he spends the rest of his life, as you know, wandering around North India teaching the Dharma.

Now the reading today begins with the way that he used to teach lay people, which may be of interest to you. And it was said that he always gave them a step-by-step discourse. And the first thing he talked about was giving, was generosity. So I'll go back to his particular experience. His whole courage, you might say, was based upon the fact that he wasn't just doing it for himself. He found that extra energy that he needed to stay under that tree and continue his investigation.

Now, although it doesn't say this in the scriptures, in the commentary it points out that giving itself is a path to liberation. Just giving itself, just generosity itself is a path to liberation. Now, why is that? When you give something, you necessarily have to renounce it. Something that you might have used for yourself - so much money that you might give to a charity, you could have given to yourself for your own benefit, for your own enjoyment. Time. You could have spent the time on something that you particularly like, but you're giving it up in order to help somebody. So that process of renunciation is also a way of undermining this selfishness, this constantly looking after ourselves, which is a product of that basic delusion that we have about who we are.

And this giving is always easier when we have it on a base of gratitude. So when you consider all the gifts and blessings that you've received in this life, and that some of them have come without your asking - just the very fact of being born was a gift. How our mothers and fathers looked after us, this was all a gift. We never paid for it. Perhaps we should, but anyway, we never paid. It was just given to us and we received it. And when you consider the education system and friends and all these people who at times have come to help, that sense of gratitude allows us to let go of things.

And in letting go of our wealth - not all of it, of course - and in letting go of our time for the benefit of others, we're undermining the way that we tend always to think about me, me, me, instead of we, instead of actually joining the community at some level or other.

So giving, that was the first thing he said. And he said everybody could be generous, even a thief. So a thief can steal something from you and then very generously give it to somebody else. So it was a universal virtue that anybody and everybody could actually practice. So that's where he began.

And he began there because, of course, the development of giving is already undermining that hard sense of self. The sense of self creates barriers. It likes to enclose itself with safety. Remember the self at its deepest level is very fearful, it's very unsafe. For a

start it knows it's going to die, which isn't a very happy thought. And therefore it feels safe, it feels grounded, it feels strong, it feels solid when it has lots of money and lots of friends and lots of power. And that's why we collect these things around us as best we can.

And in letting go of that, we're undermining that sense of solidity about ourselves. And of course the advantage of that is letting go of all the problems that come with holding on to things. So remember there's a consequence to indulgence in life. While we are very rich and very powerful and very famous and all that, that's fine. But, of course, it's afterwards when the things begin to decrease, whether just naturally by aging. Then we feel those consequences, the frustration that we feel when we can't get what we want and the grief at loss, the fear of loss anyway, that underlying anxiety.

And in our society, which is so separate, so lifted away, you might say, from the ground of nature - I mean, this whole place is dependent on electricity. It's nothing to do with ordinary nature. And during winter, occasionally, the lights will go out. Everything just blows out for some reason. And suddenly you realize that you couldn't run this plant. In fact, I don't think I could live without electricity. So there's that point where we've created a certain safety, but we know that underneath it, it's a very shallow safety. It can suddenly disappear from us.

And of course, if you live in certain parts of the world, such as now in Nepal, there you are, you're on that tower, perhaps a tourist, and you're enjoying the view, and the whole thing starts to collapse around you. So it's not as though we're not aware of that somewhere within the psyche. And that is an underlying pressure in our lives. And to undermine that, you begin to let go, begin to let go. So that's where he would begin. He'd begin by expressing the importance of generosity.

And then he would talk about moral virtue. So in Buddhist psychology, all our unwholesomeness is based upon a wrong understanding. And we have to have a certain compassion for ourselves there because we're born into the human state and we presume ourselves to be human beings. I mean, that's pretty straightforward. And in that presumption, we are depending upon this physical form in order to gain happiness. Because that's all we want. We just want to be happy.

But in so doing, we are creating that basis of unreliability. And because of that, we have this relationship to life of gathering things around us to make us feel solid, getting rid of anything which is going to undermine that. That's the aversion. And when something is too big, you run for it. So there's your fear. So there's your three basic attitudes to life because of this wrong understanding: acquisitiveness, aversion and fear.

And this immediately leads us into wrong actions, wrong relationships. And that's where the problem comes, because then, of course, we're building up habits which are unwholesome. And when we act upon unwholesome habits, we get that second tier of unwholesomeness, which is to do with shame, guilt, remorse, etc. So it all tumbles upon itself.

And what he's saying is if you begin to really look at your moral life, your ethical life, and begin to chip away at that, you're also undermining this wrong understanding as to who we are. So that would be his second point to get across to people, the importance of *sīla*.

Now, I've talked about the negative side. It's the opposite too. The better word is ethics, really, rather than morality. Morality we tend to limit to avoiding what is unwholesome. But ethics is just about relationships. So our relationship has its negative side, but remember that we've also got to develop its positive side. And that's these illimitables: love in all its facets, compassion, sympathetic joy, and so on. So that's what he would be talking about.

And then he would tell them that, in fact, in so doing, they would be entering the heavenly worlds. Now the heavenly worlds are simply mirrors of what we experience as human beings. So in actually developing love within ourselves, in developing joy within ourselves, that's mirrored in some cosmological heavenly state.

These days, for a lot of people, rebirth and being born in other states is a bit difficult to understand. And it's not necessary, of course, to believe it. But generally speaking, I think the better position is not to come to a conclusion. Because if there happens to be other worlds, then we're in for a bit of a surprise or a shock one way or the other. So it's best just to leave that on the back burner, as they say. And it may or may not happen.

And the Buddha, of course, came across the same skepticism. And that's exactly what he says. He says, "Look, if you practice the Dharma now, you'll get the benefits now. If there is a future life, then you'll get the benefits also." So it's not as though you have to believe these things. But it's good to know that the Buddha himself definitely did know about them because that was the other two knowledges that came to him at his liberation.

The first was being able to go back to all his past lives and see very clearly that it was the ethical decisions he made which had the greatest effect on his future life. Now that's a breakthrough for the age, I'll explain that in a minute. And secondly, he saw other beings moving from one realm to the other according to the same law.

So remember that at the time of the Buddha, the old Brahminical system, which was widespread in places like Rome, Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, it was this polytheism. It was this idea that there was a whole realm of gods that ruled the world. And that your job as a human being was to appease the gods, was to pray to them, to ask them for favours, etc. And so in the Vedas and the Brahmins, even the Brahmins of that time, you would do these massive sacrifices to get what you wanted from the gods. And the sacrifices became really very refined rituals and you had to get everything right or else the god wouldn't respond. And of course these rituals weren't really delivering everything that they were expected to deliver. So there was a general losing of confidence in that whole process of polytheism.

So it's to do with power. It wasn't to do with being good or bad. It was to do with you making the sacrifice to a particular god and getting what you wanted. So you can see the whole shift towards ethical life was quite a revolution. Where the Buddha's saying, "No, if you want to get reborn in a happier place, it's to do with your ethics. It's not to do with these gods. It's not to do with the power of other deities."

And then he would talk about the dangers of sensual indulgence.

So we've mentioned that really, every time we indulge, what we're actually doing is creating a psychological dependency on something for our happiness. That's the problem, you see. If you just indulge and then you could let it go, that'd be fine. But when we indulge, we're actually placing a certain commitment to whatever it is that makes us happy at a psychological level. That's why it's so painful when it disappears. It doesn't matter what it is.

So he's pointing out the dangers of that and the advantage of renouncing them. Here there's sometimes a confusion about what this renunciation means because it's not the same as what he was practicing when he was doing the self-mortification business because that was based on a completely different understanding. The idea of the soul being trapped in the body and letting go of the body meant that the soul could escape and rise to heaven. This was more in the sense of renouncing in order to undermine that psychological dependency that grows with our indulgence.

Remember that if you look at even the basic things, like on retreat here, we often look at this whole process around eating. That attachment to porridge, for instance, I'm very attached, is translated. You see, it's the same psychology. That's the point. It's the same psychology no matter where you become attached, whether it's to art or nature or to a person.

So when we undermine that, we think that we're actually also undermining our ability to enjoy pleasure and our ability to love. Because that's how it feels. Losing excitement feels like a loss. And we won't want to lose it unless we see the aftermath. See, that's our problem. In a society where pleasure is just there at hand, you just turn the TV on for heaven's sake. We don't make the connection between the aftermath of indulgence with the actual process of indulging. So when we're indulging, what's the problem? We're enjoying life. It's the business that comes afterwards that we've mentioned, the frustration, and also the sense of boredom because the happiness that an object gives us, whether it's a person or food or whatever, has an inbuilt obsolescence. It begins to lose its flavour, you know, like chewing on the bedpost. And it just loses its flavour. So you can't keep scraping the chewing gum off and chewing it.

So what you have to do is begin to accept that there's a loss of excitement and you have to wait for the letting go. And when you've let go of something, you really do have to experience that moment of liberation. And it's catching the moment of liberation when you let go of something where you'll catch the deeper joy. See, what we do is we tend to let go of something, but we don't hang on and wait for it to completely drop out of the system. And then you get that moment of liberation.

Now, that moment of liberation is a taste of Nibbāna. That doesn't mean to say that the old habit doesn't come back. Of course it does. It's not that easy. But it's just letting go of something. Just try it. Anything that you are attached to at some level, just keep not feeding it and just wait for that moment when you feel it's just left the psyche, just gone like that. And it's that moment of liberation which has to be tasted. And once we begin to get a taste for that, you see, then it becomes easier and easier and easier to just let go of all the rest of it. But if it's always this struggle for letting go and then you fall back into the old habit, then it just becomes miserable. So make sure that if you are going to practice renunciation at any time, and you can do it at any time, just wait for that moment when you feel the release, the relief of it. That's very important.

So that's the advantage of renouncing them. And then it says, when he felt that the mind was ready, open, without hindrances, inspired and confident, then he expounded to the listener the elevated Dharma teaching of the Buddhas: *dukkha*, its origin, its cessation and the path.

So in other words, this teaching that he had to give, he felt he had to prepare. He couldn't just go bang on in and say, look, life's suffering. You need to do something about it. He just slowly prepares it. And he prepares it by pointing out that the path of liberation also has its joys. See, so we've talked about the joy of generosity, that very subtle joy of letting go. And the consequence of the ethical life, the feeling of the beauti-

ful heart within us and the possibility of future beautiful rebirths. So with all that, you see, he's got the person, he's whetted their appetite, and then he tells them the truth. Life is suffering and horrible. Life is unsatisfactory. There is unsatisfactoriness.

And so we'll also be reading the opening discourse that he gives about dukkha. Dukkha, remember, is that essential concept upon which the whole of his teaching is built. Dukkha. It means hard to bear in its basic meaning. Unsatisfactoriness. So it's always recognising that life itself, although it brings its joys and pleasures, life itself holds its own level of suffering – aging and death. We can't escape that. And to make the distinction between the given, which is pain, and our reaction to it, our relationship to it, which is the suffering.

So the Buddha always talks about two darts. See, the first dart is given. So you have a headache. That's given, you see. Now, how you react to your headache is an option. So you can either be very patient with it, or you can get angry with yourself for having a headache. So he tries to make that distinction. And he talks about, he begins by first of all pointing out these two extremes, by not falling into the error of these two extremes. So we've explained that. The one is to do with indulgence of pleasure and the other one is self-mortification. So he's pointed that, the middle way. The middle way is actually not in between these two, it's transcendent of it. It's something that rises up above and is showing a particular path. And that, of course, is the Eightfold Path.

He then goes on to the dukkha, this is painful, it'll be read out, but I'm sure most of you have read it. Birth is painful, aging is painful, separation from what is liked is painful, not to get what one wants is painful, and so on. Then the reason for it, the unsatisfactoriness, is this craving. Now the craving is both for these sensual pleasures that we've been talking about, but it's also a craving to keep rebirthing ourselves.

So when people ask me about rebirth, I say, well, if you actually see what's happening now in this present moment, from moment to moment, you won't have that much problem with the process of rebirth after death, because it's happening now. For instance, this body seems to us very solid, seems to us the same body that I woke up with this morning, for instance. But we all know that every seven years, every atom is completely changed. So next time you look at your face in the mirror, just remind yourself you weren't there seven years ago. You know what I mean? It's like recognising that the body is constantly dying. It's constantly dying and being reborn.

The mind, thoughts are constantly dying and being reborn. You get new thoughts every time. No thought is ever the same. Even if you were to say the same thing twice, it's not the same. If I said banana, banana. The second banana is not the first banana. It's completely different. It's another word, even though it means the same. Our emo-

tions never stop. They're constantly gurgling up from the depths. They can't be the same. You can't repeat anything in nature. Even though they might feel the same from a perceptual point of view, they're always different. This whole form is constantly rebirthing, moment after moment. And what keeps pushing that whole process is this attachment to this form. It's the belief that I am this human being. I am Bodhidhamma. And anything that undermines that just makes me crazy.

And then there's this craving for annihilation. Now, that's a completely different – that's the other process. That's the aversion side. That's when things get too much, you want to just get rid of yourself. When you've had a hard day or something, when you've been depressed, what do you do? You launch yourself onto the couch and disappear for a while. And that's a process of self-annihilation. The worst, of course, is suicide. So this whole process of getting rid of ourselves because we're fed up with ourselves at one level or another is the self trying to get rid of itself. Unfortunately, you always wake up. It's just one of those things. And remember that the seeking of oblivion is there because in oblivion there's no suffering. That's the relief of being in a deep sleep.

So this craving is on these three levels. The level of sensual pleasure, the level of constantly becoming me in one form or another, constantly taking on different roles throughout the day, throughout my life, and at times just not wanting to be me one way or the other. So these are the cravings.

And Nibbāna, he doesn't actually say Jesus is the end of suffering, is exactly the end of that craving. The complete fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and the relinquishing of it, freedom from it, no longer any reliance on it, this craving. But remember, what sustains the craving is that sense of self, is a sense of me.

Now when it comes to Nibbāna, he has various ways of explaining it, various images that he gives us. One is of an island, completely separate. One is of an island. So Nibbāna is the island that we're making towards. He talks about an āyatana which is a sphere. A sphere in his language is a level of experience which is entire and complete unto itself. So for instance, there are six spheres dependent on our senses. So the eye, our visual capacity, is a sphere of experience. And you can't hear through it. You can't hear through your eyes and you can't taste through them. So all these senses are quite separate and they create certain levels of experience. And he says there is a level where none of this happens. There's no tasting, seeing. There's no earth, there's no moon, there's no coming, there's no going, there's no staying still. You can only stay still if you're coming and going. So it's a place which is completely transcendent. He talks about it as the unborn, the undying, the unconditioned.

And the word he uses there is ati. Ati means, when they ask him this quadrilemma, this is the big logical positions of the age, does the Buddha exist after he dies? Or does he not exist? Or does he exist and not exist? Or does he neither exist nor not exist? That's a killer. You can't go beyond those four. That's your logical proposition. Now the word in Pali which is used for that is ati. There is another word for is which is hoti. And hoti is like a joining word like when we say this is a clock. But he actually says ati, so there exists that which is not born nor died.

But his most clear statement arises in one of the discourses when somebody approaches him and asks him, where is the end of the world? In other words, where is the end of the phenomenal world? Now, in those days, which is different from us, the world and consciousness were both the same thing. We are under the illusion that when we look at the world, we're actually seeing it as it is. That's to do with our upbringing and our so-called enlightenment and science, that we think that when we're looking at a tree, that's the way the tree really looks. But actually, it's totally dependent upon our eyes, our perceptual faculties, what our brain and minds do with it. And so if we were all to look at the same tree, we'd all be looking at a different tree. In this room, we're all in this room. Nobody would deny the room exists, but we all experience this room in our own particular way. So the world and consciousness were the same thing.

Now what this man is asking is where does the world come to an end? Where does consciousness come to an end? And the Buddha says this question is not put properly. The question should be where does this world not find a footing? So our process is not the destruction of the world. It's to find this island. And then he says there is a consciousness which is not coloured by any of the senses. So in Buddhism there are six senses. There's the five that we normally count and also the mind, the process within the mind. None of those can be found in this consciousness. He says that it is without boundary consciousness. Now, a boundary can only be created by phenomena, can only be created by objects, by things. So there's nothing there. And in all directions full of light, awakenedness, just this is the end of suffering.

So this Nibbāna is not something which is some sort of idea. It's something to be personally experienced by us. And so how do we get to that experience? And this is the process of *vipassanā,* you see.

Now, so when you're sitting, when you're sitting and you're feeling and you're observing what's happening within you, unwittingly, we're making the inner world an object. I don't know whether you know this, but there was a woman called Margaret Mahler. She was a student of Freud. And she studied babies, babies until the age of three. And she made these wonderful discoveries, which have been all reinforced since

her. For the first four months, there's no objects. All it is is a bath of information coming in, and the baby lives seemingly in a two-dimensional world. It doesn't have any depth. And that's why you get babies reaching out for rattles. They're actually creating a 3D world in doing so. And then round about four months, the first object looms out of all this information. And it's usually your carer, your mother. And then very slowly, all this information coming in is turned into this outer world. And it takes to the age of three. It takes three years for that child to come to know themselves as an individual separate from the world around them. That's why they're very clear about whether they're a boy or a girl and all that. It's like, that's it.

Now, what we do then is we fall into that error of saying, well, look, that's the world out there and I'm me the way I experience the world. What we're doing is we are finding a position in ourselves to observe the inner world with all its information, which is the sensations in the body, all the emotions coming out from the heart, all the thoughts that are coming out. All of this we're actually pushing out just like that baby did with all the actual outer world. The inner world we're also pushing away from us. It's becoming an object to observe, to feel, to understand. And in so doing, again unwittingly, what is it that's pulling out? What is it that's pulling out? And that's when we begin to experience the observer within us very clearly. The one who knows. The observer, the feeler.

And the observer is a mirror image. Because when you're in that state of clear observing, you're aware of yourself being the observer. Am I correct? So, if you're aware of yourself being the observer, you see, you can't be that, can you?

Now, that's when you have to keep looking with an eagle eye, because at some point, whatever is in us, that is this Nibbanic element, to use the language of the scripture, of the Abhidhamma, the element of Nibbāna, to get that, to have it, to that experience, is being able to go beyond even the sense of the observer, the feeler.

So there's these three, shall we say, backward movements which take us into a Nibbanic experience. The first one is, as a child, we separate out from the world and become this individuated little being. Through our meditation, we're separating out from the inner world to become this individuated sense of the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. And it's just one step beyond that. Even now, we could just step behind and that'd be it.

So that's the process of liberation. The process of liberation is simply letting go of these three worlds.

And remember that when the Buddha was fully liberated, he didn't disappear. He didn't sit by the roadside there with a sign saying, "Fully liberated, do not disturb." He re-entered the world. He re-entered the world, the phenomenal world, and was able to pass on his message to others.

So what do we lose in the end through this process? When the Buddha, because of the negative way he would talk about *Nibbāna*, was often accused of being an annihilationist, he insisted, "No, the only thing that's annihilated is greed, hatred and delusion. All the rest is given back purified."

Now that, I think, is a joyful message.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your fierce determination to achieve liberation, finally arrive at that heavenly place sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 82

Deconstruction: The Five Khandhas and Dependent Origination

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h12

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's systematic deconstruction of human experience to identify where suffering arises. He begins by examining the five khandhas (aggregates): rūpa (body/form), vedanā (feeling), saññā (perception), saṅkhāra (volitional formations), and viññāṇa (consciousness). Through careful analysis, he shows how these heaps of experience are impermanent, insubstantial, and not-self.*
>
> *The talk then moves to the six sense bases and how consciousness arises at tremendous speed, creating the illusion of continuity. Bhante emphasizes that true freedom lies in recognizing the sankharic processes - our habitual reactions - as the point where we still have choice.*
>
> *The second half explores paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), the Buddha's revolutionary insight into how suffering is created moment by moment. Starting from avijjā (ignorance/not-knowing), he traces the twelve links that lead to dukkha, highlighting that the critical point of escape lies between vedanā (feeling) and taṇhā (craving). Through mindful awareness, practitioners can break this chain and gradually empty the saṅkhāras that perpetuate the illusion of selfhood.*
>
> *This teaching offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners a clear framework for understanding how liberation occurs through the systematic observation and objectification of all inner experiences.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhu Dasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhu Dasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhu Dasa

Homage to the fully self-enlightened one.

I've observed that laziness or sloth and torpor is a state closely related to one's intentions. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. There's a distinction between sloth and torpor and laziness to be made. It's a vocabulary distinction. Sloth and torpor are products of past laziness. Laziness as I see it is where you make a decision not to put energy into something, being lazy. That could come from just not caring or just because you're fed up or whatever, but laziness is more to do with an attitude. Rather than when we're talking about defilement, sloth and torpor, they're referring to the con-

sequences of laziness. So that heaviness in the head and the heaviness in the body and all that. So when it comes to laziness it's definitely to do with your intentions. Don't be lazy.

Could you please say a little about developing equanimity? I find I can't let go and not react to things. Equanimity comes with an attitude from a position of not knowing, not wanting to engage. So when something comes up and you find yourself unable not to be drawn into it, try and sit back within yourself to see that resistance or the desire to engage. It's one of the two - it's either a desire to indulge or a desire to push away. Just try to get in contact with that. As soon as that becomes an object to you, it's more like an energy more like an energy than an emotion or anything.

As long as you can keep that there, you must have moved back into an equanimous position. It arises naturally. You don't have to worry too much about equanimity as such. What you have to be concerned about is being able to make that compulsive wanting, that compulsive indulgence, or compulsive rejection, the object. You've got to come back on yourself.

A couple of times I've said the body becomes extremely heavy while the mind remains completely wide and awake. Can you say something about this? These conditions just arise, that's it. So sometimes the body, that heaviness is in the body, which means that the mental state is in the body. And yet you're bright and awake. Now, you may find that even in the head, when you feel really dull, and it's like porridge in there, and you can feel yourself constantly falling into that sleepiness, and you don't feel you're awake within it. If you really make the effort to keep moving around and feeling it and feeling it and experiencing it, you'd be surprised. You'd wake up like a light bulb in the midst of that fog. But it does take that effort. Very good.

So, this evening I just wanted to talk about the way the Buddha deconstructs our experience. So I'm especially aware of people who are new to Buddhism, so I'll try and keep it fairly straightforward. The first thing is he talks about - the first thing he gives us cross-sections, so you take a moment and split the human being into various parts, and then he does that in two ways, and he does it in terms of a process. The process we call dependent origination, and the cross-sections are the *khandhas*, the aggregates, and the six consciousnesses. So these are three that we can look at.

When it comes to the *khanda*, which means a heap or an aggregate, or a mountain - see, a mountain is just a collection of stuff. So if you can imagine, there are these five collections. The first one is to do with the body. Now, at a gross level, it's the physical body that we've got. But at the more subtle level, it's how the mind contacts the body.

And when the mind contacts the body, if you go right down into a feeling, you'll find some combination of these four great elements. So that's your earth element, fire, water, and air.

The earth element is the weight, the heaviness of it, or the lightness. The fire element is the temperature you feel. Cool all the way to boiling hot. The water element is the elasticity that you feel. Sometimes when you're watching the breath, perhaps you can feel an elasticity in it, a cohesion. So that's the water element. And the air element, of course, is movement. And when you go into something like a pain in the knee, for instance, when you go in there, you may begin to see that actually what you're experiencing are movements, little movements, fire elements, some heat. When you change your posture and you keep your attention in the knee, you might just find that stretching, that elasticity.

So any combination of these brings you a feeling. And it's understood that whatever combination it is, we then perceive it as pleasant and unpleasant. We give it a name. It gets a bit more subtle with the eyes, which would be seen as more of the fire element. The ear, of course, as you know, is just pressure. It's just the earth element. A movement. When it comes to taste, of course, it gets even more subtle in terms of trying to describe it with these four elements, but you can obviously feel the toughness of the food, the heat of it, the coldness of it, and so on.

So that's the body element, the body heap. And all that is a given. You're entirely dependent upon your body for what comes in through the senses. There's virtually no control over that process. I mean, you can guard yourself, you needn't put yourself too close to the fire, but the fact is you can't stop the body feeling heat as you approach the fire. It's just a given. That's not under our control. Now that's to be contemplated.

So think about your body. Do you know now what your liver's doing? Can you feel red corpuscles being made in the marrow of your bones? Do you guide them through your bones into the bloodstream? Have you any idea that as you grow older, the grizzle on the end of your nose is growing? I doubt you might. There's a whole load of stuff. When you look at your body, you presume that you are the body, that this is you. But actually when you investigate your relationship to the body, you find you know nothing. And you can't do anything about it. Not after a certain age, anyway. I'd have loved to have been tall, lots of hair. You're just given it, you may as well be happy.

So that relationship is to be - and what it does, of course, if you suddenly realize that, there is this consciousness, there's this awareness, and it's an alien within this body. Weird. So that contemplation around the body is well worth it. And of course, that takes

you into the sickness of the body, how the body falls sick, whether you like it or not. And eventually it's death. Eventually it's collapse. So all that contemplation is all around the heap that we call the body, *rupa*.

The next is to do with feeling. So from the body we get these feelings. And feeling is a point where we determine something to be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. And there are two types of feelings that we've experienced. The first one is coming from the body. So obviously, pain in the knees. And the other one is coming from our mind, the heart. In Buddhism, the body and mind are not the same. They suffer from the same qualities. They are impermanent. They're insubstantial. You can pull it all apart. They're just energy forms. But they're two different energies. And although it doesn't fit in with our modern materialist science, at death they separate. And whatever is separated out as the mental part, that is the bit that goes on to be reborn into the next moment, whatever it is. Luckily you don't have to believe this to become fully liberated. So don't make it a clause.

So, feeling, when we experience feeling, that also is a given. You know power over changing a feeling as it arises. You can make yourself feel things, you can stick a pin in your hand if you like doing things like that. But it's not as though you can stop feelings and sensations arising. That's also a given. And it creates a heap, you can say, a heap of all sorts of different types of feelings and sensations. Some coming from the body, some coming from the heart.

When I say heart-mind, unfortunately in English we've lost this word which connects them. The old word was soul. The old split, the old way that we looked at human beings was soul. Body, soul and spirit. But now soul has become spirit. And since our wonderful enlightenment. And we moved into the mind. And we lost in a sense contact with the heart. We now have to say heart mind. But when you go to the east. And often when they talk to you. And they say what do they think. They point actually to here. They don't point up here. Whereas for us the heart is something else. But I am here. I think, therefore I am. That's a bit of a problem for us.

So we've lost that, I mean it's good to have lost that connection in a sense because it allowed us to make all our discoveries and technologies all come from that objectivity. But unfortunately we've lost contact with the fact that the heart and mind are actually one and the same thing. The one is firing off the other all the time. So the feelings that we experience are determined by the body itself, over which we have no control. The body will give us these feelings when we do these sorts of things. And the heart will give us these feelings when we act in a certain way.

The next one is all to do with perception. Now, perception is this amazing ability of the mind to make photocopies. And what we do is we see something, like an apple for the first time, and it registers. It registers as a perception. And then, as we eat more and more apples, our definition of apples grows. So some are red, some are green, some are soft, some are hard, some are sweet, some are not so sweet, etc. So that by the end we end up with a concrete definition, concept of an apple. And all these belong to our memory. And these perceptions, of course, become very fine in terms of our freedom and democracy and all that. All these are perceptions which have grown into conceptions, our concepts. And all that is another heap, another collection of bits which are all to be separated. They don't all form one composite. One thought comes. It disappears. Another thought comes. It disappears. That's another heap. And they're not the same as feelings. And they're not the same as the body. These are three quite distinct heaps.

Now the fourth one is *Sankhara*. Which translates as volitional conditioning. That would be the old regular way of translating it. Other people have tried various things like concoctions and stuff like that. But I think we get close to what we mean by that when we talk about habits. Now this is where - the Buddha's trying to separate out for us where the problem lies. Remember he's only - his only concern is to teach suffering and the end of suffering. That's it. When he's asked what does he teach? Does he teach about God? Does he teach about the universe? He says, no, he says, I only teach about suffering and the end of suffering. Unsatisfactoriness and the end of unsatisfactoriness.

So, the reason why we are deconstructing ourselves is not just for the fun of it, it's to find out where the problem lies. The problem lies right here in *Sankhara*. *Sankhara* means volitional conditioning. So, it's the volitional bit which is the important bit. It's the bit where we're making decisions based upon wrong understandings that are causing *Sankhara's* habits. Causing certain habits which include both the emotional feelings and the thought feelings. And it creates a habit. A way of expressing ourselves. And some habits that we have are beautiful and some are not so beautiful.

But the important thing about this particular heap that's in us is that it is being created by our will. This is what we can take control of. When we say we can take control of it, the bit that's already been created, you can't do anything about. That's what we're suffering when we sit here. All the sadness and the anger and occasionally a bit of joy. So all that stuff that's come up, that's a consequence of past decision making and all we can do with that is bear with it and make sure we don't indulge it because every time we indulge it we empower it again and that's the process of will.

So when you're doing your standing meditation for instance and you're standing still and you're saying to yourself intending to walk intending to walk - stay there for a while with that intending which is another way of saying desiring. So intending to just feel the energy there. Feel the energy and how the body wants to move. And then suddenly there's a decision and the foot moves. What is it that's brought something out of potential into an actual? That's the will. And you can't separate the will from the action. So the Buddha says, what I call *kamma*, an act, is the will. It's a bit like, as far as I know, and I stand to be corrected of course, it's when you throw a stone into the air, you can't separate the force from the stone. And what is it anyway? You can't separate force from the object that is moving. Interesting. Am I right? Is there a scientist amongst us? If I've made it up, forgive me. I read it somewhere years ago. The thing is in science it changes so much you don't know where you're at.

So you've got that *sankhara*, that heap, that aggregate. The last one is consciousness and consciousness is the ability of the mind to hold an image for us. That's what consciousness is, like a screen and it holds the image and that image is multi-dimensional and that image holds feelings, it holds everything and it holds it long enough for it to be registered. If it's not registered, we hardly know it, we hardly see it, we're hardly aware of it. But when it registers, it's there for the moment, and then it passes away. And consciousness is arising at tremendous speed, and it's giving us the impression of continuity.

So, for instance, when we are watching, say, a film or something, we can hear the conversation, we can see what's going on. We're drinking coffee and tea, or popcorn, or whatever it is, and we can taste it. All that seems to us to be happening at the same time. But in Buddhist psychology, what's happening is, moment after moment, consciousnesses are arising at some tremendous speed, and it gives us an experience of continuity and the closest we can as a good image for that is the old film where it was 26 frames or something or 25 frames a minute and it gave us the impression of continuity. And as soon as it slowed down you realise actually it was just these moments of flashing images on a screen and that's how consciousness works.

Now, when you pull yourself out into the position of the observer, all that is becoming an object. Before we came to meditation, before we came to this, we would have just presumed ourselves to be this human being. You wouldn't have made an object of yourself. You'd have been aware that, for instance, you've got a pain in the knee or a pain in the head, but there wouldn't have been that separation of the knowing from what's being known. And there would have been a real attachment to your body in terms of its illness and whatnot.

Now, in the meditation, what we're doing is, we are pulling something out of these five aggregates. And we're making these five aggregates objects to observe. That which is pulling out is your intuitive awareness. Now that doesn't mean to say that once we've begun to practice this and see this that suddenly we become totally equanimous and content and you can stab me in the back and I'll be fine. No it's not. But at least there is within us this inkling of a knowledge that there is something which doesn't belong to the five *khandhas*. That is this human being. So that's one way that the Buddha deconstructs our experience.

I'm going to connect all this to Dependent Origination. Oh heavens, it's ten past seven. I've only just started. I might have to... I'll finish with this because I hate going on and on. And then tomorrow I'll sort of go into dependent origination. Yes, that's what I'll do.

The next way that he deconstructs our experience is looking at our sense bases. And the sense bases in Buddhism are six. The five that we obviously know, and the sixth is the mind.

In the psychology of Buddhism, when you hear something, actually what is being received at the sense door is pressure. There is no sound, right? There's no sound in the universe, okay? And there's no light in the universe, right? You have to have these senses to hear something. And you have to have these senses to see something.

So when the air waves begin to touch upon the eardrum, they are little messages, little stimulus going in. And that's all the ear actually does. From then on, it's taken into the mind, and there's a process of recognition. So, bell. Yeah, bell. Just the sound of a bell. Then when the process of the bell is completed, there's the understanding of what a bell means. Right? Then the bell is put into a time slot where you understand that it's an awakening bell. And then, only then, at the end of that process, does the mind come in and say, I've got to get up. Right?

That whole process is one after the other. And believe it or not, you can actually experience that. That can be experienced, but you've got to... you've got to really get down to your meditation today. You've got to be really on the ball. But that's how deep you can go. You can actually see these momentary consciousnesses and how the mind actually creates everything from this original, very simple stimulus.

Now it's the same with seeing. I'm sure you've seen these diagrams which show you that when we look at a picture, the eye is darting all over the place. It's never still. It's quite amazing to see how the eye is just moving. But we don't experience that. What we

experience is the picture. And of course we can focus on different parts of the picture. And we still are not aware of the fact that even then the eye is moving at tremendous speeds all over it, picking up little pixels.

And even that can be seen. Even that, you can actually be looking at something and it all frazzles up into a sort of... you know these pointillist paintings? You know these where they paint with little dots? Shimmering like that in front of you. And then it congeals into a picture. And that means that this mind, the actual perceiving mind, is right up against the sense door.

Now, the purpose that the Buddha again points this out is that each sense door is individual and discrete. You simply cannot smell through your eyes. And therefore, the way that we experience the world is in these discrete moments: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching. And somehow the mind, at a deeper level of its processing, can put it all together into an experiencing.

Here we go. Say your prayers. It's just pressure. Just pressure. Yes. It's just pressure waves.

So that's a specific way that the Buddha also deconstructs our experience. So here we have two ways of deconstructing. And what's the purpose of it? It's to take away the sense of substance. It's to take away the sense of me. Me.

And again, in that process of observing what's coming in, of actually being at the process of hearing. So when you're outside, just to stand there with that spacious awareness, putting your attention entirely upon one of the ears. You see? And just hearing, hearing. And just keep it there, steady. When you're looking, just keep your eyes steady on the flower and just watch the perceptual process. Watch the eye doing.

So you're always, as it were, standing one step behind yourself to see process. Nothing remains. Remember that. Everything's in a process. Everything's changing. And it's to be able to stand still enough to be able to see that. And in our meditation, we're trying to constantly access that point of stillness within us. The observation post, the observer, the knower. See, so that constant effort to come off the thinking mind and to bring ourselves back to the direct experience at the sense bases of this particular moment. Always feeling, always in the body. Ground yourself in the body.

And in this way, the sharpness, the discriminative faculty of this intuitive awareness becomes finer and finer. So, in a sense, if you really want to deepen your practice, you've got to make that effort of continuity. So you can't be... you have to give up cups of

tea for a start. You've got to make the effort to, from here to the walking place, right? There's your objective. Your objective is the walking place. You bring yourself back here and every footstep is known. Every footstep is felt.

And then you stop and you do your walking meditation, right? And you might start with a bit of an exercise, just going up and down quite rapidly to get the energy up and just to relax. And then slower and slower and slower, you see? Very, very slow, watching every movement, you see? And then when the bell goes, to come in at a speed where you don't lose that collectedness.

Now there's the true meditator. This afternoon I walked out there and there were two meditators sunbathing. I thought, well that's the pits. They're obviously not suffering enough. Because if you're suffering enough, you want to get rid of it.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. I will, of course, carry on deconstructing tomorrow. And by your fierce and determined effort, I'm sure you will make plenty of insights that will bring you to your liberation sooner rather than later. So if you'd like to take a break.

I have to apologise. Yesterday, when I looked at the clock, it was ten past seven. And I should have gone on, it was nearly quarter past, and I should have gone on until half past. But I was working on the time that we keep at Sati Panya, where everything's half an hour early, and where we rise at 3:30, which is the proper time. So, I've got... I got confused, so maybe I'll just extend a little bit if I don't finish what I need to say.

So we were talking about this whole process of deconstructing. Remember that even in objects, you take a car. When you're driving, for those of you who drive, there are times when you and the car are one. You don't experience yourself as separate from the car because you're totally involved or absorbed into the action of driving. Especially when there's a tricky corner or somebody's doing something nasty to you. And then you wake up and there you are in the car. And you still think you have control over the car. And then suddenly it stops. And then you realise that actually your control is superficial. You can move it this way and that way. You can back it up and back it into somebody. But you can't actually do anything about the inner workings of the car.

So that's the situation that we find ourselves within this body. We can move our arms about and wave them and all that. You can't make your arm grow any longer. You can't do much with the body as it is. And when we look into the workings of a car, especially a modern car, it's quite mystifying, at least to me. I once thought of myself as a bit of a mechanic because I pulled engines apart. And about four or five years ago, a friend of

mine stopped. The car just stopped. And I was with him. And we opened the bonnet. And I said, oh, it sounds to me like it's the distributor. And I pointed to the distributor, you see. I said, you know, we'd better call the RAC.

So the RAC came over, and he looked in, and it was just a fan belt. And mysteriously, the distributor had moved to the other side of the engine. So I don't quite know how that happened. Anyway, so you see how delusional he is.

So it's that business of recognising that we're in this very strange situation of being in the body, but not of the body. And what is it that's in the body that's not of the body?

So through the process of deconstruction, the Buddha's trying to make us investigate the way it really is, not the way we presume it to be, through our delusion. The delusion is, I am this person, I am this body. Now, as I think I've mentioned before, you know how deluded you are about your body when the doctor tells you you've got six weeks to live. Then there's freak out. And that level of paranoia and fear around death is the measure of our identification with the body. See?

So, in these five aggregates, these five heaps, he's trying to separate out, and he's telling us, in a sense, what's the given. The body's the given. Perceptions are given. It's part of that whole psychological process. Feelings are given. But in the *saṅkhāra*, these conditions, here we have a measure of control.

Saṅkhāra are conditions, and they are conditioning. So when you have, shall we say, the habit of getting really excited about something, as soon as that something that you get excited about comes up, the excitement will come, because that's how you've trained yourself. You've trained yourself to be excited. But in the coming up of the excitement, the excitement itself is developing itself.

So all these habits that we have, whether it's the fear of things, anxiety, depression, joy, falling in love, all that is something that we've conditioned ourselves and when it becomes active, it is conditioning. So conditions are not stable. And our understanding is to catch where the intentionality is because it's at that point we still have a choice. We can either indulge it or let it go. Or, in some cases of course, develop it. If it's something beautiful, then we should develop it.

So he points to the *saṅkhāra* as the place where we have to really look as to where suffering arises. Pain arises in the body. Pain arises from the *saṅkhāra* in the body. That's where you get emotional disturbances within us. That's a given. But what do we mean by suffering? Suffering is our relationship to what's happening. And that's all within the *saṅkhāra*.

When these *saṅkhāra* go into the memory, *saññā*, that's when they produce this lovely word, *papañca*, proliferation. The Buddha points out when these *saṅkhāra* arise, they go into your memory and they start producing a story. And it's through the story that they develop themselves. That's why in *vipassanā* we're constantly coming off the mind. Coming back into the body.

And the final one of course is this consciousness. So there's your five *khandhas*. And then we talked about the five sense bases. And how each consciousness is confined to a sense base. In Buddhist understanding, an eye consciousness arises. And that's all. And then a hearing consciousness arises. And that's all.

So although we... because of the speed of these consciousnesses, we get the sense of it all being one. And all being continuous. That's the delusion. So in our practice, we're constantly moving down deeper and deeper. What we mean by deeper here is less and less time slot.

How long is a moment in time? How long do you experience a moment? Interesting question, no? I mean, how long is it? Is it half a second? Is it a second? How long is a moment, you see?

And what we're doing is, we are bringing our attention slowly and slowly. See, there's a noting and the attention. The noting of the attention. And then we're locked into the moment. The noting stops. That's if you develop that concentration well enough. And then in that moment, it's as though time collapses into that actual present moment. And that's when you realise that actually these moments are infinitesimally small.

Even there, even there, will have some measure because you're not actually seeing the arising and passing away of individual consciousnesses, see. So that's our practice is to... the Theravāda approach you might say is not so much the spaciousness but the minuscule, you know. What is it? The universe in a grain of sand. It's actually going down to the minuscule moment. And that's where we're constantly driving the attention. Okay?

Now, those two ways of looking at this deconstruction process are cross-sections. You can take any moment in a human being's life, draw a line, and you'll find the five heaps, the five aggregates, and the five consciousnesses. One or the other, I mean.

Now, when he tries to deconstruct the timeline of how we create suffering, that's what he's interested in, remember, just suffering, we have Dependent Origination. And this seems to have been completely new to the age. There's nothing like it, seemingly, before the Buddha. This is what the academics tell you. So it's a real deep insight into how we create the world that we're living in and where the mistakes come.

Now, if you look at that chanting sheet, you'll be able to follow me because I'm just going to go through the Dependent Origination. So that's in the middle of the *pūjā*, middle of the *pūjā* sheet, the morning *pūjā* sheet, that's what you want. And it's in the middle of it. And you'll notice that it starts off with the Buddha's victory verse.

Victory verse, you see, he says, let me get my goggles on. Can't wait for summer when I get my other operation. I'll be able to see anything.

Now then, he says, "Seeking but not finding the house builder. Okay, so this house builder is this I, this self. I have travelled through the round of countless births. How painful is birth over and over again. Oh house builder, I have now caught you. I shall not build a house again. Your rafters have been broken. Your ridge pole demolished."

Okay. So there he's talking about this self, this construct of a person. And what does he come up with? What does he attain through that? He attains a consciousness which is unconditioned. We should go into that a bit later. And all craving, all the defilements have gone. So that's the process that we're into now. We're into this process of finding out who the house builder is, what the house builder is, getting rid of it, destroying the house, and ending up perfectly happy and wonderful. It's worth it, isn't it? All this suffering.

So it begins with this word *avidyā* and it's often translated as ignorance. But it's not a culpable ignorance. We've just landed into a place of not knowing. So if you think of a baby, you see, when we're born, there we are, we scream a little bundle of cells. What do we know?

So go back to that moment of being born, you see. We don't know anything. From then on, the information starts coming in, and we start building up the world.

As you know, well, some of you might know, the wonderful worker Margaret Mahler, who was a student of Freud, studied children up to the age of three. And later studies, of course, confirmed her findings. For up to the age of four months, all we experience is a bath of sensations. There's no depth to it. There's no 3D. That's why you see children reaching out for things. They're actually creating a 3D world.

And then from four months onwards, it seems, the first object, something looms out of this... this... I mean, there's no concept of me, this me that I'm experiencing, and it's usually your carer, your mother, usually. And slowly, that outer world gets pushed out. And it's not until the age of three that you're actually clear that I am me and everything else is not me. I'm a boy, I'm a girl. You know, that's the moment, round about three. That's how long it takes to separate the outside world.

Now, all we're doing is the same inwardly. We're just pushing the inner world out to make it an object. Now, the ignorance is to think that we are this inner world with its emotions, thoughts, etc., etc.

Now, that *avidyā*, be careful, it's not a culpable ignorance, right? We're not guilty, right? Which is a relief, I think, for all of us. We're not existentially guilty, right? We never did nothing wrong before becoming ignorant. We just didn't know. I did find a word which means not knowing. The word is nescience, but nobody knows it, so I don't... I only point out that there is a word for not knowing.

So this *avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārā paccayā* — so all he's saying is: be out of this, out of this position of not knowing, we've created these conditions. These habits, right? That's all he's saying.

And then, *saṅkhārā paccayā viññāṇaṁ*. Now, it's out of the body-mind complex — remember — there arises this ability to hold things on a screen. Now, if there was nothing there to be held on a screen, there'd be no screen. So, for instance, when in deep sleep, there's no obvious consciousness because there's nothing coming up, awakening, as it were, on that screen. But it's because of these *saṅkhāra* that the screen is, shall we say, brightened up. And this screen is consciousness.

And consciousness — remember — English words don't really catch it because these days academics and scientists are studying consciousness. I mean, that's the end of clarity for about a hundred years. So it's basically... in Buddhist understanding, if you think of consciousness like a three-dimensional hologram which you can see, and in it there are feelings, images, thoughts, the whole damn thing is there, can be held within that consciousness.

So it's not to be confused with *sati*. See, this is the important thing. That there is something which can see what's on the screen of consciousness. And that's what you're experiencing every time you see a pain in the knee and you say, "There's a pain." The pain must be held somewhere for us to be able to acknowledge it, to see it. And there's something that acknowledges it. See, that's separation.

So there you've got your *avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*. So dependent on these *saṅkhāra*, this consciousness arises. And depending on consciousness, the body and mind. So here he's, as it were, taken consciousness out of those five aggregates that we talked about. So *nāma-rūpa* — body-mind — he's taken it out and he's pointed out that these two things are like — in those days — two sheaves of wheat leaning against each other. You can't have consciousness — you can't have that ability of consciousness — without the body-mind complex, and without consciousness you wouldn't know that there was a body-mind complex.

So the two come together. But what he's saying here is that these are two different processes. That's the point. Constantly deconstructing. Constantly deconstructing.

Now when it comes to the — where are we now? So now we've been through the five heaps, which is the consciousness and the body-mind. The next step is to see that actually the way we contact the world is through the six senses. And that's your next thing. Dependent on this body-mind complex, the six sense bases arise. So that's the five that we obviously know. And the other one is where the brain and mind contact to create the inner percepts and then eventually concepts. See? So that's the point where the ability to contact the world out there and the world in here arises at the six sense bases.

So when an image comes, it's on the sixth sense base. When an emotion comes in the mind, it's on the sixth sense base. And then dependent on the *saḷāyatana*, we have this *phassa*, we have this contact.

Now, contact is the moment where we experience something. What has to be there? There has to be a sense base. There has to be some sense base. Either the five or the mind. Emotions, thoughts, okay? There has to be an object which is being sensed. And there has to be this consciousness. That's the moment of contact.

Now, when I describe to you what to do with pain in the knee, and your first noting is "pain, pain," and all that, and "aversion, aversion," and then you get that equanimity with it. I say go into the pain. And that's when you go beyond the concept of pain. Into where the mind and the body meet. And that's when you're noting changes to things like heat. Pressure. Stinging. All that — which is the four great elements that we talked about. The fire, earth, water and air. Which stand for pressure, temperature, elasticity, cohesion and movement. So you're right there at the point of contact. When you get down there, you can't go beyond that. That's it. And it's upon those sensations that we're building the world. See?

Now dependent on *phassa*, *vedanā* arises. So what's *vedanā*? *Vedanā* is the five feelings. The five feelings of painful, pleasant — painful and pleasant physical feelings, and painful and pleasant mental feelings, which we would call emotions. And neutral. Neutral feelings, both physical and mental.

Now what's happened there? We have defined what we're experiencing as either pleasant or unpleasant. And that's when you get the concept of pain. See? Now the world lives — we have to live in that dual world. Because everything we experience will either decide it's pleasant or unpleasant. Right?

Now at that point, something happens. Something happens which is arising from this fundamental base of ignorance. Now, that not knowing, it's produced a delusion. What is the delusion? The delusion is, "I am a human being." What a terrible delusion. I am a human being. And therefore, we are seeking happiness in the form of a human being.

Seeking happiness in the form of a human being manifests as acquisitiveness, because I want to feel safe. Greed, acquisitiveness. The more I have, the safer I feel. It manifests as aversion. Anything that threatens what I have, I want to push away and destroy. Murder. And if it's too big, I run for it. At worst, suicide.

So there's my relationship to the world from the position of delusion. The delusion is, "I am this human being. I want to be happy. This is what makes me happy." And I collect all the money, all the friends, all the whatever. And anybody who takes anything from that is my enemy, is my rival, and must be destroyed. And if the rival and the enemy is too big, I've got to run.

So those are my attitudes that are arising from this delusion of thinking, believing, identifying with this psychophysical organism. That fundamental delusion is running underneath every moment we live. Okay?

And when something comes into consciousness which we perceive as pleasant, we'll immediately go up and grab it and try to hold on to it and try to develop it. And if in consciousness something unpleasant comes — that arises from this delusion — the desire to get rid of it, to destroy it, or to run for it.

That's the point of *taṇhā*. That's what we're doing every time we fall into the error of — it's translated as craving, but you can see that word doesn't capture the meaning of it. It's the desire, it's the greed, it's the hatred, it's the aversion, etcetera. And the anxiety — that's coming from the pressure of not being able to handle a situation. And that's when it arises.

So everything up to now has been a given. Even the Buddha experiences that. He experiences sensations coming in. He experiences them as pleasant or unpleasant. He experiences emotions. He experiences the four great *brahmavihāra*. Love, compassion, joy and peacefulness. He's not a callous and cold heart and pure wisdom. I mean, it's like the wisdom and compassion arises naturally, is it? He's huggy-wuggy. Out of compassion. "Whatever a teacher can do out of compassion for his students, I have done for you." He doesn't say out of wisdom, he says out of compassion.

So up until then, it's natural to all human beings. But from an enlightened point of view, there's not this other relationship because that fundamental delusion about who we are has disappeared.

Now, every time we make in our meditation an object of what we are experiencing, we're undermining that delusion of a self. Because this self is saying, "I am this body." So when you get a pain in the knee and you say, "There's pain," you're undermining that delusion that I am this knee, or this knee is mine. Every time you have an emotion — anxiety, depression — every time you push it away inside, creating an outer world of the inner world, and you say "There's depression," you're undermining this fundamental delusion about who you are.

And that's the release. That's the process of liberation. That's the process of awakening. Same with thoughts. Thoughts are a bit quick, but definitely with images. You can hold an image and say, "Well, there's an image." And in that way, that objectification of the inner world is the process of liberation.

But whenever we fall into this *taṇhā*, we've lost it. We're back into the delusion. Now, that's the point of desire. And that's what we're doing all the time in terms of noting intentions. Some intentions of course are powered not by ignorance but by wisdom, so they're obviously ones to be developed. But when it's coming from this centre of a self, then, of course, you have to be careful. Then it becomes something which is negative, undermining.

But at that point, remember, nothing's happened. That's what we're trying to really grasp by noting intentions. Nothing happens at the point of intention. Now, the next step, as you'll see, is... what is it? Where am I? Oh, dear me. *Upādāna*. *Upādāna* is the actual holding of the grasping. And that's the point where you say, "This is me." That's the identification.

Now, you can catch it in your meditation. You can be there, holding that pain separate. And you're noting "pain, pain, pain." And then it just gets a bit too much. And then you say, "I can't stand it." At that point, you see, the identification's gone in. And that's the point of suffering.

So long as you can hold in your attention pleasant, unpleasant feelings as objects, you're not suffering. Make sure you can clearly see that. The separation of the consciousness, of that awareness from what it's being aware of, should be clearly acknowledged. There's pain — fine — but there's not suffering. Then this aversion comes. "I don't want it. I don't want it." Making that your object, making it very clear, you're still not actually suffering. It's not a pleasant place, but you're not suffering. And as soon as you say, "I can't take it," that's it. You're in there, and you're suffering. See?

So the point of suffering, as the Buddha points out, as opposed to pain, is at the point of identification. Now, the next step is the bit where the horror begins. Because *upādāna paccayā bhava*. Now, *bhava* is the point where you act. That's the point where the will goes in. And you create an act dependent on the delusion.

Now, he uses the word *bhava* because *bhava* means becoming. What's becoming? The self is recreating itself all the time. The self isn't static. It feels static. You know, you wake up in the morning and you say, "Oh, it's me again." Or, "Oh, not me again." It's one or the other. So it's like you wake up and you suddenly realise, "Oh, it's me." You wake up to yourself. That me, that me, you see, is the essential delusion that's underlying all this. And as it comes up and identifies, it empowers that intention.

And so the *bhava* is referring to a few things. It's referring, A, to this self reproducing itself as the one who's doing the action. It refers to the act of will that has gone into that process to take it from an intention into an action. And it's produced an act. See?

And that's the next bit where he says, from that point of becoming, that's the point of the birth of your action. And from the birth of your action, you complete the action and it comes to the end. So that birth and death refer to the process of the action that you've determined. And you can't stop the consequence once you've put that out into the universe and into the inner universe. You can't stop what's going to happen. You can ameliorate it, you can mitigate its effects, but you can't actually stop that energy from flowing outwards and inwards.

So for instance, if you're sharp with somebody, you can't stop the effect of that. You might have lost a friend forever, even though you might apologise. Inwardly, you've developed more of that nastiness.

So that's a run-through — dependent origination. The underlying ignorance about who we are, creating certain attitudes — the acquisition, the aversion, the fear — and how it manifests in a process, which is completely opposite to our language. So, "I want, and I scream, and I buy it." But the psychological process is, "I scream, want, I buy."

Now, if the I was first, there'd be no escape, would there? If the identity came first, you'd never be able to break through the process of desiring. It's the very fact that it comes after the process and therefore you can see the process of desiring that you can break the chain. You can see how amazingly deep the Buddha's insight was into our psychology. He saw exactly where the problem was.

And it's like anything... when somebody climbs Everest... like it's done... it's possible... up until then it's not possible... and then somebody climbs Everest... and every man and his dog can get up there... you see what I mean? It's like he's opened the gates of the deathless.

So that's dependent origination. Now... on the way back... whenever you stop... that process of wrong desire... unwholesome desire... the end of that process doesn't happen. It just fizzles out right there at *taṇhā*, at desire. And that's the cure. That's the emptying of those *saṅkhāra*, those conditionings which are running underneath every day of our lives. And underneath that is the ignorance.

So you've got this underlying energy of the not knowing, the essential delusions and all the habits that we've created by it, just running underneath every moment. Every moment there's some stimulus — a greed, something that we greed for, or hate, or afraid of — and it comes into our consciousness, and something from below rises up to grasp it. If we can catch that rising, it'll just go and then plop, and that's the end of it. It just disappears. And that way we empty these *saṅkhāra*, that way we undermine this fundamental delusion.

That's the point of escape between *taṇhā* and *vedanā*. *Vedanā* and *taṇhā*. That's the point of escape. And every time we're pushing something away to make it an object, we're actually cutting deep down into that sense of self. And there will come a time, be assured, when that sense of self is completely cut and the whole house of cards completely tumbles. And that's the point of total liberation. Maybe by Saturday noon. We'll have a bit of luck.

So that's the process that he's pointing out when he goes backwards on it. It's not so much backwards, it's more like the negative qualities. Undermining that *avijjā*, undermining that wrong understanding, the whole thing starts to collapse.

And do remember that often because of the way he would explain things, it came out quite negatively. And so he was accused of annihilationism. So there's the not born, the not dying, the unconditioned. We say some of these things in one of our pūjās. But he said, no, he said the only thing that's annihilated is this — is this acquisitiveness, aversion and fear. Everything else is given back, renewed.

So remember, once he was fully liberated, there immediately arose within him that desire to help other people. It's not possible for wisdom to arise without that connection, the connection with other people. And as he is teaching, his teaching grows. There are early parts of the scriptures — some of you might know the Nipāta Sutta — where he's getting his thoughts together, because it's conversations with people. Then the middle part, it's all been formalised. Four of these, ten of those, twelve of them. He goes on like lists upon lists. And it's like he has to learn how to teach.

I think I mentioned it on Saturday, where he rises from his seat with the idea of offering people this teaching, and he meets an ascetic on the road who says that, you know, "You really look brilliant, you look absolutely shining." He says, "Who's your teacher?" And he makes this amazing declaration: "I need no teacher, I am the fully liberated one," and all that, you see. And the fellow says, "Very good," and walks off.

Which you would do, wouldn't you? Somebody stood here and said, "I am the great guru, I am the cosmic Buddha." So I think he learned that you don't quite approach the process that way.

So the last thing I want to add to it is *kamma*. *Kamma*. By the way, I've done the dependent origination as a moment-to-moment process. Remember that there's also the teaching that this refers also to lifetimes. So that when we come into this life, we bring with us our past delusion and bad habits, our potentialities, and depending on the situation we're in, they'll be somehow developed.

So we know this from children, that early childhood, often a child will react to things which are completely innocuous, but because of the delusion or unresolved feelings in them, they'll see it in a certain way, and it becomes possibly a trauma. And then there's this business of false memory syndrome, where you get false memory and all that.

Well, just to reinforce that, I had one myself. Because in the early part of my meditation, when I was practising Zen, I was just resting and I lay on the bed and this huge fear came up. Every cell of my body was electric with this fear. And a very clear image that I walked into the room to my grandfather. And I mustn't have been more than two years old because he died shortly after that. And I shook him and I said to myself, he's dead, they've killed him. They happen to be my parents.

I went to my father, luckily he was still alive, and I said to him, "Dad, I found grandfather dead in the front room." He says, "No, he died in bed, I was with him." Now, if he wasn't there, I'd go around telling everybody, you know, I had this terrible trauma, caught my grandfather dead in the chair. Now, the point is, it's true, in the sense of that's how I interpreted what I saw, but it wasn't true historically.

Now, the interesting thing about that particular experience was that when it came up, I had a backflow, a forward flow of all my relationships to show me how that particular trauma had cancered every relationship. And from that moment on, my relationships changed. That's how deep our delusion can lie. Not everybody has these things, by the way. It's not necessary to have a trauma.

So that for me was a great teaching about karma. So somehow, I put credence in the whole idea of past lives, but even if you don't, just the idea of a young child who is feeling vulnerable. So you know children react. They think that if the parents are arguing, they're the problem, etcetera, etcetera. So whatever that decision was, remember the child is filled with that complete delusion that I am the body. And so that remains in the system. And you can see the karmic flow of it.

So karma, in terms of—I'm using karma in the more common sense of, you know, your comeuppance. Karma is to do with your inner world. It's not to do with your outer world when it comes to the process of liberation. And when something happens to us, there can be a multitude of reasons for it.

In Buddhist understanding, there are five laws. Most of them equate to our own modern laws. The first one is known as the law of heat or energy—that's all the physical laws. So these poor people in Nepal, I mean they've had another terrible earthquake up there—that's not because in their past lives they crushed a hundred thousand ants to death. I mean, it just happens because you happen to be on the earth. So you can't say that an earthquake or a flooding is your personal karma. It's ridiculous.

So it's the same with *bija*, the seeds. That's our genetics. You can't say the body, you know, you deserve the body you've got. It's a given through that whole genetic line. So that's not your personal karma. It's not the karma that you're looking at when you want to be liberated.

Then there's the whole law of psychology, the *citta*. The whole psychology, which includes our perceptual process, etcetera, etcetera. And a lot of that is dependent upon the brain that you were given. And then number four is karma, which is to do just that point of willing things and creating habits. There's your karma. And it's that karma that

will make you do things which then reverberate back on you. Like just getting angry with somebody, then you find they're getting angry with you for heaven's sake. So it's that understanding that it's really only around ethics that we have personal karma.

And go back to the original experience of the Buddha there upon enlightenment—those three knowledges that we talk about. The knowledge that he has no more defilements in him, that he sees all his past lives driven by his ethical decisions. And he sees beings being born from one realm to another also driven by their ethical decisions. So it's ethics.

And then finally, of course, there are the spiritual laws, which include the Four Noble Truths, etcetera, etcetera.

So karma, dependent origination and karma, are to be seen as one and the same thing. He's actually describing how we create karma for ourselves and how we can overcome it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and it has not brought more confusion. And that by your careful investigation, discrimination of all your experiences, you may finally reach that pure liberation from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 83

Love and All That... The Ten Pāramī

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the ten perfections (pāramī) - literally meaning 'the other shore' - with particular attention to mettā (loving-kindness) and its subtle enemy, attachment. He distinguishes between mature love and psychological dependency, exploring how attachment manifests as control, anger, grief, and fear in relationships. Drawing on practical psychology alongside Buddhist teachings, Bhante discusses the maturation process from childhood attachment to adult love, the difference between sorrow and grief, and how to recognize when we're using others as objects for our happiness.*
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> *The talk covers several pāramī including dāna (generosity), sīla (ethics), nekkhamma (renunciation), paññā (wisdom), and upekkha (equanimity). Bhante emphasizes how genuine generosity involves renunciation - letting go of attachments to wealth, time, and expectations of return. He explores the role of gratitude in developing wholesome mental states and discusses how equanimity serves as the foundation that prevents the other perfections from falling into their 'near enemies.' The session concludes with reflections on taking refuge in the Triple Gem and the five precepts as training rules for spiritual development.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

I just thought we'd bring the week to an end by going through the ten perfections, or at least some of them. The *pāramī*. *Pāramī* actually means the other shore. Buddha always talks about Nibbāna or that final place as something transcendent. So it's an island. He talks about it as an island. And I want to start off with our ever topic of love.

So this word love, it goes from the sublime to the ridiculous. We love ice cream and we love God. So it's really just trying to look at human beings, relationship between human beings. Jean-Paul Sartre, in one of his plays, which is about hell, he says, I think somewhere he says, "Hell is the other people." It's the others. And in his play, if I remember rightly, I should have looked it up, he has a homosexual, a heterosexual, and a lesbian, stuck in this room forever. And their sexual orientations really tell you that they just simply cannot communicate on any level.

So our task really is to form relationships with human beings that are wholesome, skillful and all that. And this whole business about attachment and what it means and how it manifests. So if we define attachment as a psychological dependency on someone, in this case human beings, for our happiness, then we have all the same problems that we had with porridge, with attachment to porridge. And if we just think about that then you'll see that it's very easy to pick up when we're using the other person as an object. Remember that as soon as the other person is there to please you, then they become an object. They become something that is pleasing you. That doesn't mean to say they can't please you. It's the reason why you're doing something is for them to please you. There's a difference.

So if you have a friend or a partner or somebody who's funny, then they make you laugh. But if that's what you want from them, if you ask them for that, then they become a comedian. They become somebody whom you expect to make you laugh. So this whole business about how we relate to people, our definitions of them, and just to see if we can recognise certain things.

Now, when we're children, of course, and we're little babies and stuff, attachment is absolutely necessary. Because in order to have true love, you have to be a mature human being. And in Freudian understanding anyway, you don't get to full maturity of ego until you're 21. That's why, whatever. But the thing is that there's a maturation process. And the child's attachment to its mother and father is just part and parcel of their beginning relationship with the other. Because at that time, the other's all for them. I mean, it's all demanding and all-consuming. Because from their point of view, they're the only important person in the world.

So the relationship that we start off with is one of attachment. It's just part and parcel. But it's through that that we form this relationship. And as we pass through various stages and the scruffiness of teenage, and then you end up at the end of the process, 18, 19, 20, 21, slowly beginning to feel that you are entire, you're grown up, as they say, an adult. And at this point, of course, if your relationship hasn't changed to human beings as it was when you were 15 and 14 and 3 and 4, then life can get difficult.

Although it's necessary for the child to have that attachment, it's not necessary for the mother or the father. And of course that's difficult to understand. And before we go any further, do make a distinction between unwholesome, just unwholesome states, and immorality in the sense of defined by the five precepts. We're not talking about murder and thieving and all that. We're talking about just unwholesomeness that

comes into a relationship which begins to move away from love and towards control. So that's your movement. Whenever there's attachment you want to control the person because you want them to please you.

And recognising that when we're in relationship with somebody whether it's an intimate relationship or a friendship or anything like that, I mean that's the marker. And depending on the other person and their relationship to human beings, their feeling of being demanded upon may actually satisfy their feelings of attachment, of feeling needed and that sort of stuff. So it's not always the case that although we are aware that we are behaving from a control point of view, the other person might not experience that. They might actually like to be controlled. So there's a whole dynamic which gets very complicated. But at least we ourselves can wake up every time we are imposing upon the other.

So as usual, if your friend, your partner, your child or whatever, if you're angry with them, then that's coming from a place where you expected them or wanted them to do something. Now, it's not as though the other person, especially children, shouldn't do what you tell them to do. But it's the anger which is not necessary. Now, I know some people argue that anger's good, if you take the energy and transform it. Yeah, if you can take the energy and transform it. That's good. But as just anger, just being angry with somebody, that's obviously a confrontation. So either you diminish the person, they actually have to be humbled and shamed, or they fight, and then one of you has to escape.

So frustration with somebody, frustration, whenever frustration arises. Grief. I mean, that's a regular one. The loss of a friend, whether they just got upset with you and ran off and turned away, or a partner, a partner who's died, whatever. There's always that grief. And again, you have to separate out the sorrow from grief. So sorrow is what you might call just a natural feeling which arises when you contact somebody else's suffering. When you contact somebody else's suffering. It can be just at the sight of them, the feel of them. It can almost sometimes be quite visceral, that you actually feel their suffering. And what that ought to do, of course, is bring out the compassion, a wanting to help.

But the grief, of course, is turning inwards. It's a form of self-pity. And if we confuse grief with sorrow, then it's very difficult to stop grieving because a person measures their love by their grief. The sense of loss, the sense of emptiness, the loss of a person. You're left with this grief which you feel is, or the person says to themselves, well, that's an expression of my love. But actually it's an expression of attachment. And what happens is, as soon as a person begins to grieve less, they get guilty. It means they're not loving them as much as they used to. So they've got to bring up the grief again.

This came home to me as a very stark example when a late middle-aged woman came in and said that she'd been grieving her son for five years, couldn't stop. And I pointed this out to her. And she seemed to click. And she came back the next week and said that her grief had completely gone. And what she'd done is to go to the grave to accept the death of her son, and then to wish him all the best, in whatever future life. In other words, that letting go. There may still be a certain sorrow at the cause of death, the person died young, there's that, but that again is a contact with the person and their suffering. It's not actually turning inward towards ourselves and saying, oh, poor me. We don't like to say that. We don't like to see grief as, oh, poor me. But that's actually what it is. Again, it's one of these distinctions. It's very difficult. It's like indulgence and enjoyment. And you've just got to work at it, really.

Then, of course, there's this fear. And that, of course, that's when the control of the other becomes quite obvious. My dear mother was a wonderful Italian mother but my God she had us all and you had to fight to get out of the door especially at certain times just in case somebody would attack you or murder you. It was just unbelievable. We all did escape and she couldn't handle three boys so it was a case of really feeding on her fear of what might happen to her children. And that, of course, again, is understandable. It's not as though you can't understand that. But what it does is, of course, it creates a control around the child which can stymie that child's development, depending.

And just the fear which moves into, the fear of loss which slips into jealousy, wondering whether your partner is nipping off with somebody else in the dark. It manifests in various ways, this fear of loss that's underlying the attachment. And remember the attachment is because there's a part of us, a part of our happiness which is dependent upon that person.

And then there's the addictive behaviour. The having to have the same person. It's another way of controlling that the person can't change. So often throughout life, of course, we change. And it's often the case that in midlife, people change so much that they separate. And that change produces a real clash within one of them if one of them changes the other one doesn't. It becomes a real clash and they find it very difficult because they can't control the other person's change. You often hear stories of people who have moved towards Buddhism and the partners have gone absolutely berserk, partly wrong understanding about becoming part of a sect or something and all that. But it's also sometimes just this business of, that isn't the person I married, that isn't the person I formed a relationship with. And so, again, it's a cramping thing, a holding on. And again, always based on this control and the fact that we're dependent on them for a certain level of our happiness. And then all the other stuff that comes up, general boredom with friends and partners, so all that rubbish that arises between people.

Now, the cure isn't to try and kill this stuff, because as soon as you try and kill it, so you notice one of these attitudes coming up and you try and kill it, you try and bury it, well all it does is, it just comes round the back and feeds into little unresolved grudges and all this sort of stuff and in the end it all explodes and it's all very terrible. So one of the things that one of the purposes of meditation is to perhaps even bring up a memory where that's arisen and just get in contact with it. When you're actually in a situation to be aware of it arising, that's very difficult when you're in process to be aware of it arising and just to be able to keep it to one side, not to push it away but to actually just park it there and produce that different attitude.

So as soon as you find yourself getting irritated with somebody, it could be anything, it could be on a phone, it could be a person at work, as soon as you find that irritation, it's just to be if you can catch it at the arising, it's within your control. Once it's risen too far it's beginning to affect the way you're talking, the way you're looking, your blood pressure. But if you catch it just as it's coming, and you park it, and you put your entire attention on what the person is saying, rather than what your reaction is to what the person is saying, then there's that effort to communicate. And of course that often, to the other person, often feels like they're being listened to. Remember often when we're talking, we've got our answers prepared before they finish saying the first few words.

And that, if we're really in conversation with somebody, ideally speaking, our attention is completely on listening. And then there's a moment where you have to switch gear and you have to think, oh, right, my response. And then the response comes. There's always a little moment, a gap as you move from one mode of receiving to the next mode of responding. But of course, when you hear people speaking, they often speak over each other. Politicians, they don't listen to you when they get three different parties on the radio or TV and they're just talking over each other. So all these little indications are for us to work on and just keep bringing ourselves back to that *mettā* which is just an openness, a kindness, a gentleness, and all the qualities that you would expect of a friend.

It goes much deeper than that of course. It's about trust. It's about a friend who may also, I mean your partner, your spouse, your brothers, your sisters, all these people can become confidants. And part of that is the ability to trust that the person isn't going to put it on the social media. That's bad news, isn't it? Which unfortunately happens.

There's a case, this silly case, of typical Western tourists. They walk up this holy mountain in Malaysia. It's not a Muslim holy mountain. It's one of the ethnic groups there. It's a holy mountain. And they think that their ancestors live up there. And so they have a whole ritual about going up this holy mountain. They take chickens up and

stuff like that. And they went up there and posed in the nude, about six or seven of them. And they stuck it on social media. Well, of course, within seconds, it was into the Malaysian authorities' hands. They came down. They were arrested. And luckily, one of the women said it was all very foolish and stupid. Probably the thin air. And they've been put in jail for three days and fined. It's just that you have to be very careful. I eschew all social media.

So, some indications anyway about *mettā*. And it's a subtle enemy. That's what it's known as, attachment.

Similarly, when it comes to these other forms like compassion. So, compassion. The subtle enemy is grief or pity for somebody and often again the person is using their compassionate acts in order to feel good. So the definition of a do-gooder is that they do you the good they want to do you because it makes them feel good.

So I mean if a friend turns up when you're sick and has made this special chicken soup, and you... Oh, vegetable soup, excuse me. I'm talking to a vegetarian. Vegetable soup. I'm not saying I want chicken soup. Let's get that clear, please. Clear boards. Vegetable soup. And you say well, I just can't eat it. So that's all I said but you could do something for me. So what's that? Clean the toilet. Well, I didn't come to clean your toilet. I came to give you some soup. So you get all upset about it. And then of course they start doing things that you don't want them to do and you throw them out and they go away and say I can't understand it. I just went there to help, that's all I did. And they threw me out. So very strange mental states that people get into.

And not being appreciated. They didn't say thank you. They didn't buy me a present after all I did for them and all that sort of stuff. So the whole thing about generosity is of course if it's a real act from the heart, then of course it's given without presumption of any return from it. People do it quite easily for things like these appeals, for earthquakes and stuff like that. They're very happy to give knowing they're not going to get a penny from it themselves, apart from that feeling of goodness that they try to help the situation. But that's not always true between human beings. And I think you've got to be careful. You haven't got to be silly about it like for instance, there's the ritual swapping of gifts at Christmas. You get a lump of cheese and they get socks. That's fine.

That's just a sort of ritual, you know, like two warring tribes come together and offer each other gifts. They won't fight anymore. That's all right. But when you actually want to be generous in the sense of giving something—your time, your wealth—then you really have to set your mind to it. It's not, if you do it spontaneously, in inverted commas, the old habits will be underneath it because they're there. So you have to make it quite a self-conscious act. You've got to have real determination. I mean, it's very easy—

most of us say yes too easily. Like one of the families says, "We're redecorating—you've got time to come over?" "Oh yeah, want to come over Saturday?" "Oh yeah, yeah, come on, yeah." And then when they've gone you think, "Oh God, I don't want to go over there." And then the phone call: "Got terrible headache. I'm not well." Anything not to go. And all you had to do was just stop for a minute and say, "Well, I don't think I can come this Saturday," and so on and so forth, and make sort of sober excuses.

So the idea of compassion comes under this whole business of generosity. And it's coming from the heart of wanting to help. And when you give, whatever you're giving, in the scriptures it says there are three parts: one part, what you are giving has been attained in a wholesome way, so your money has been earned through a wholesome job or whatever, and you're giving it without any hope of return, without any consequence, and you're giving it to somebody who is worthy of the gift.

And this brings up the old question about people on the streets. Well, if you know somebody is going to use your money for drugs and whatnot, then it's up to you whether you want to give it or not. But you can give it and make sure that they know what your intention is: "This is to help you get night lodgings or food." What they do with it is their problem. Otherwise, you get yourself into all sorts of silly states.

And generosity in the commentaries—this is not in the scriptures as such, as far as I know—but they point out that generosity itself is actually a path to liberation. Because every time you're generous, every time you're giving something without hope of return, you're actually renouncing something. Now the whole of the spiritual life is renunciation. The whole of it. The whole of the spiritual life is renunciation. And this renunciation, remember, isn't some sort of self-mortification. We don't have to end up in rags on the streets or something. It's letting go of these attachments, letting go of these relationships we have to things, to our money, to our possessions, and to people, and to our time. "My time is for me."

And when you offer that, when you offer some of your wealth and some of your time for the benefit of somebody else, what you're actually doing is saying, "Well, I'm not going to use this amount of money to make me happy. I'm going to have to give up going to the Costa del Sol this summer. Or worse. And I could use this time to listen to heavy rock, but I'm going to help you paint the walls." So that sense of giving something also has this basic thing about renunciation, and all this is quite easy when you come from the position of gratitude.

So this gratitude is such a lovely mental state to develop, and just at any time, at any time of the day, whatever you're experiencing, having had that experience, to say thank you. Whether you've just eaten a cup of coffee at one of the coffee houses, or whether

you've just had a meeting with a friend, or whether you've just been caught in the rain and you're soaking wet, say thank you. And it's this business of just recognising the little gifts that are given to us every day. Every day something happens which is just given without your asking. Even if it's only the level of the air that you breathe. It doesn't have to be there, does it? You can actually go down even to basic physical things to raise that sense of gratitude. And then the rest of it follows quite simply, quite easily, usually.

So you have to be careful with this business of compassion. And again it's always to do with intention. So as soon as you want to move, make sure your conscious intention is wholesome. Sometimes we're not aware of subliminal stuff—it pops up later. One example I always give is here, when you make an offering here, this is for the benefit of other meditators who come here, because everything you've received has already been paid for by past donations. So this is for the benefit of others. And then when that's really filled your heart, that's when you let go of it. That's the point.

Now that action is a habit. You're creating the habit of just giving. Remember there's that distinction between a desire and the empowerment of the desire. So it depends on the desire. And then of course once you've given it, you always get this little voice saying, "You are truly a very generous person." Oh, you know, "Too much. Get some back." So as soon as you see that, you say, "Well, that's old martyr." That wasn't me. That's just the old habits coming through. And so you've got to be careful not to be judgmental about that. "I must be a horrible, terrible person because I can't give something purely." Because you did. You did give something purely. So these things are constant in our lives. People ask us for little favours here and there.

I got on a bus a while back and I must have looked terrible or something because this person actually got up and gave me their seat. Well, I expected that in the fifties or the sixties. You don't expect anybody to get up for some old crock. I thought, "Thank you very much." So, these little gifts.

Now, the other ones, perfections—where are we? So it starts off with the perfection of giving, the perfection of morality. So remember that our ethics is the measure of our delusion or enlightenment. All these five training rules that we keep—not to kill living beings and not to take what is not freely given—remember those are really gross things. And our job is to really move towards a refinement of our conscience, a refinement of our behaviour. And in a sense, that's what the Buddha was trying to do with this *Vinaya* for monks. He was trying to make it so that the behaviour of his monastics were refined. He's got masses of rules, even on how to eat. We can't chapu-chapu or suru-suru. Chapu-chapu, and suru, so when you take a drink. All these little rules about a certain dignified way of behaving.

So *sīla* here is better translated not as morality—they always do that. It's more like ethics, which is to do with relationship. And this relationship also is to do with things. That's why I keep going on about doors. I mean, poor doors. They've suffered a lot in this place, I can tell you. So it's a case of recognising that if we're gentle with doors, we're probably a bit more gentle with people. When you go home, just watch how you kick the French door shut. Just catch yourself doing it. As you're leaving it with your hands full, you give it a kick. Or put your pan down on top of the stove—bang! As though you've got a grudge. So that's morality.

Renunciation we've talked about. And this renunciation, remember, that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to see where our attachments are and slowly undermine them completely until we get to the end where our relationship to life is just radically different. When I say radically different, it's not as though we don't have right relationship now. It's just that it begins to corrupt. We override it. We override it. So we take, for instance, our little grace before meals. And that gives us the right attitude. And we're eating the food. And there's always this little bit of override of wanting to indulge in the taste. I noticed today that a few people—many more than usual—went up for seconds. I won't say any more.

Wisdom. Wisdom is mainly to do with what we've been talking about all week, the dependent origination, the three characteristics of existence. And remember, there's three levels of wisdom. There's the wisdom that you receive from listening and seeing, and then it becomes your own wisdom, it becomes your own, when you can actually express it to another, when you can explain Buddhist principles to other people. It's become your own intellectual property, you might say. But if somebody says to you, "Well, what is this dependent origination?" you say, "Well, you better go and ask Bodhidhamma." And it's still—it's not as though you've not understood it, but it's not been absorbed. It's not been actually masticated and turned into your own particular property. So that's where you want to get to really, at an intellectual level: to be able to explain to yourself *kamma*, dependent origination, these characteristics of existence and so on. And then of course they become real because you actually experience them. And then they're coming right from the heart of experience.

Energy. Energy. Right energy. It's right there also in the Eightfold Path—energy, effort, commitment, stability, diligence. We've got masses of words for this sort of right effort. Zeal. Not giving up. Committed. That's what this means. It doesn't mean the energy to run around a bit. It's a sort of—it's the energy you need for that commitment to the path. Resolution. So this is part of it, the resolution bit, the *adhiṭṭhāna*. And that energy shades into these resolutions that we make. And resolutions only last just about for as long as you say them. So you've got to keep resolving. Every day you've got to resolve,

even in relationships. This taking refuge in precepts, for instance—people who've committed themselves to the path, sometimes for a short time, a year, other times for life. And it's like you get the feeling, "Well, I've done it now, and that's it." No, it has to be constant.

It's like a marriage or a relationship, but especially a marriage. Once you've committed yourself at the marriage ceremony, that's it. You can forget it now. And of course, what happens is the little destructive things that happen in relationships and all that build up and there's nowhere where it can be resolved. So for me, like the anniversary for somebody who's married is an occasion of forgiveness and re-establishing the sort of right relationship. If you don't do that, it just gets... wanders off the path.

And I remember saying this when I was asked to give a little talk and do little ceremonies for a friend at his marriage, and I said I pointed out that the love we're talking about is an emotion. I said, "Sometimes you have a romantic emotion towards your partner, sometimes you don't. And sometimes you love them and sometimes you don't." But that's not the love which we're talking about when we're talking about a relationship—whether it's between married people, a friendship, between parents and their child. It's a sort of commitment to the person. And the commitment is defined by the relationship you've made. So obviously for a parent it's that commitment of parenting and so on. And you've got to separate that out. And that's the resolution. That's your commitment.

Then there's loving kindness. And finally, equanimity. So equanimity, as I think I pointed out when you first came, was arguably the most important of these qualities. Because what equanimity does is it stops all these things falling into their what's known as their near enemy, or better still, their subtle enemy. How love slips into attachment, compassion into grief, and so on and so forth. How, for instance, even courage can move into foolhardiness. That's his near enemy. His obvious one is cowardice, but his near enemy is foolhardiness. So you can see in that particular case a lack of wisdom, being a bit stupid about what you can do.

So equanimity is meant to keep you at that—it's meant to be a sort of base underneath us, which is calm, steadiness of attention, a sort of recognition of what's happening, so that as soon as we come off into the near enemy, we're sort of aware of it. But if you're caught up in it, if there's a sort of excitement, a sort of over-excitement into something, then the equanimity is lost. You're always coming from a deeper base of calmness. That's the idea of equanimity. And again, it's something we can develop. And it's obviously not easy. It's something that comes with just the practice of it.

And the important thing is this stopping. I keep talking about stopping. I keep trying to do it myself, frankly. Just stop for a moment and just see the momentum. What's in that momentum? Some of it's wholesome, some of it isn't. Some of it you have to wait until it passes. As the momentum drops, it begins to lose energy. That calm base arises just quite naturally. And out of that you get your next intention and off you go. So it really is this effort to just keep stopping as much as you can throughout in your daily life.

So tomorrow we have this little celebration. It's really celebrating the anniversary of the founding of this place. But it also, I would like to point out, you'll hear me point out the Mahāsī Sayādaw as well. So I'll offer an occasion for those people who have taken refuge in precepts to re-establish that commitment. And just in case somebody might be thinking of doing that, it's just very quickly: it really is finding your reference point. What is the fount which is giving meaning to the rest of your life, even to death? Is there something that you already have which is giving that a complete meaning to your life, from birth until death?

And everything you're doing, day after day. And all the things in your spiritual portfolio. Are they all just disparate elements? Like in a roundabout. You're sort of jumping from a horse onto a camel. Or is it—or are you actually right in the centre of that roundabout? And these things just come up. And you're always moving from the centre. You're not on the periphery just jumping from one to the other. So the idea of the spiritual path is that you do have this grounding. You know yourself. Who is your basic contact point, your reference point.

And in Buddhism we have these three. The first one is the Buddha himself. So the Buddha is both the historical figure, who is a teacher—he's taught us this particular path—he's the exemplar, he actually travelled it, he's not teaching it as some intellectual understanding that he's got through life, and he's an archetype in the sense that that path is true for all human beings. If you look at any spiritual tradition, it's always about renunciation. Look at all the saints, from the Desert Fathers to St. Francis, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, all these people, Gandhi, all these people are renunciates. I mean, that's the spiritual path.

And also, the more lay people, like, who's the South African president? I forget his name. Mandala. Mandala, yeah, Mandela. Mandela, got it, Mandela. I mean, he gave his life to this whole thing. I mean, he's a secular saint, you might say. So, in that sense, he's the archetype. But, of course, what we're really taking refuge in from a spiritual point of view is the Buddha within.

We're putting a certain confidence that there is something in us which is seeking liberation and will be liberated. Although the Buddha would not, I think, make such an outlandish statement as I'm going to make, but I can't imagine it not being a spiritual, psychological imperative that everybody, in the end, must become fully liberated, because that's the trajectory everybody's on, even when they seem to be going the opposite way, even when they're getting into murky waters and doing terrible things. They're always, if you ask them, they're always doing it for what they think is a good reason. I mean, these ISIL people. And it's always a twisted love. It's always a love for something, but it's just off.

And the *dhamma* is the teaching, which is also this practice. The teaching and the practice. And that's really where the foundation is, because it's the practice itself, which is realising the path for us from moment after moment. And then the sangha is again traditionally those people who've experienced *nibbāna*, so they're witnesses to the Buddha.

But it's companionship. When the Buddha's asked what does he mean by right livelihood, he says good companionship. It's interesting that he doesn't say making money or going out and helping lepers. He doesn't define it in those terms. He just says it's good companionship. That's where you find your right livelihood. So in other words, when you want to do something and you find the right companions, then you have this momentum that forms. And in the doing, that becomes your livelihood. Perhaps it could be translated as lifestyle.

So that's what the three refuges are. And they become your reference point. That's what it means. And of course the training rules are just basically a platform where you just don't want to go. And of course we usually have problems with the last one. I'll take drinks and drugs that cloud of mind. What's wrong with that? Glass of wine and all that.

And really they are training rules. They're not commandments. They're not absolute statements. Thou shalt not. It's just, if you want to go on the path, this is the way you train yourself. So it's up to the individual how they want to define these things for themselves. But ultimately, knowing the effect of alcohol on the body anyway, you generally wouldn't want to do it.

So we've covered a bit of ground there. And I can only hope that you will continue with your practice, that you will devote yourself to your self-betterment, that my words have been an encouragement and not a discouragement, and that you will attain full liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 84

Ethics, Not-Self and Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h06

> *In this comprehensive Dhamma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma weaves together the essential threads of Buddhist teaching: ethics (sīla), the understanding of not-self (anattā), and the path to liberation. He situates the Buddha within the Axial Age alongside other great teachers like Confucius, Socrates, and Moses, highlighting how the Buddha's unique contribution was his investigation of consciousness and the nature of suffering.*
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> *The talk illuminates how ethical behavior forms an inseparable feedback loop with insight practice. Bhante explains that while we cannot force insights to arise, we can actively work on our ethical conduct—how we think, speak, and act in relationship with others. This attention to sīla naturally transforms our attitudes and understanding. He explores the three root defilements (kilesa)—greed, aversion, and delusion—showing how they arise from the fundamental delusion of self-identity. Using the Greek myth of Narcissus as an illustration, he describes how awareness falls in love with its own reflection, creating the primordial attachment that underlies all suffering.*
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> *Drawing on the Buddha's three knowledges at awakening, the five aggregates (khandha), and the Eightfold Path, Bhante guides practitioners toward recognizing that the sense of self—that feeling of presence—is itself arising and passing away. The talk offers practical guidance for meditation: observing the sense of presence as an object, creating distance between the knower and the known, and understanding that liberation lies not in the mind but in awareness itself recognizing its own nature.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

I thought this evening to wander around this notion, this understanding of not-self and ethics.

The Buddha belonged to what's known as the Axial Age—quite a lift in terms of human consciousness at the time, 2,500 years ago. We have Confucius and Lao Tzu. Confucius turned what was empty ritual into something meaningful, coming from the heart. Moses got rid of all these mammon and such, established a single god, but most of all, an ethical code which wasn't based on the power of gods or trying to appease gods. And then you have Socrates, of course, at the same time, who brought rationality

to the fore, undermining superstition. In the Buddha's own country, people like Mahāvīra and others were really trying to investigate consciousness, which was, I think, more of an Indian thing—rather than concerning relationship to the world, it was a peculiar investigation by Indians into what consciousness was as such. The Buddha belongs to that sort of rise of understanding in human society. Of course, even today, not many of us have risen to that, but at least it stands as a standard where we can aim.

In the Buddha's time, the distinction between the world and consciousness wasn't so objective as we might think these days through our scientific revolution, where the West pulled rationality completely out of its connection with the heart and created this very scientific way of looking at the world. We've got all our knowledge from it—subatomic physics and the technology that goes with it—but there's a loss of connection to the heart. The first people who revolted against that were the romantics: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Schelling, Wordsworth. They all rebelled against this hard science which really understood the universe as some sort of machine. Everything was like a jigsaw; all you had to do was fit it out. God became the God outside the machine that he'd created.

The Buddha himself stands within a tradition which is not so technological. Carts and oxen, you know—all his imagery is about agriculture. But there was this huge interest in consciousness and what that meant. In those days, as I think it was for the ancients, even Socrates perhaps, the world as we experience it is the only world that consciousness can offer us. Through the mind and body, whatever we're aware of is, as far as we're concerned, the world. We might think that the world exists out there, or know through science that the world exists out there—light years away, all these planets, galaxies and solar systems. But actually, we don't know that by our personal direct experience. Neither do scientists, really. What they get is light from who knows when. They only presume that it's carrying on; it might have all finished light years ago.

The Buddha's not really concerned with that sort of thing. There's a telling passage where somebody asks him, "Where does the world come to an end?" And he said, "That's not rightly put. That's not the right question to ask." He says the question that should be asked is, "Where does the world not find a footing?" That's a completely different question. What he's pointing to is a level of awareness, or an attainment of an awareness, which doesn't belong to the world. What he means by the world is everything that the body, mind and heart can create—everything you see and feel, your thoughts. All that belongs to the world of present-day consciousness, moment-to-moment consciousness. And he's saying that there's something that transcends that, not touched by any of it, not touched by any of the senses, including the mind.

And he states this as simply the end of suffering.

So why is it that ethics is so important? That's the question that really begs an answer, because you might think, well, enlightenment—or awakening rather—is really just a matter of contacting this level, making it stable, holding it there, and that's about it. That's the end of the job. It's a process of just insight, just sitting, just keep looking and looking, and eventually the penny will drop.

But somehow the Buddha interlocks really deeply our whole behavior—our thinking process, how we relate to people, and so on. And this goes back to what's known as the three knowledges that came to him when he was awakened.

The first one was that all the defilements had gone. He had no more defilements in his heart. So that's also an ethical statement. There was no defilement left in his heart. There was no anger. There was none of all that sort of stuff.

And then he said that he saw a series of his past lives, where he saw that they were driven by his ethical decisions. So in the three knowledges, his awakening is not described as some sort of way-out state, blissed out and all that. It's telling you what there isn't there. And what there isn't there are these defilements.

And then he says that these defilements were originally created by him through a series of lifetimes. And the third knowledge was that he saw beings moving from realm to realm dependent on their ethical decisions, their morality. So what was a personal law for him became a universal law. And he even included animals.

Now that might be a bit strange to us, but there are clips on YouTube now where, without any doubt, at least the higher animals do make ethical decisions—though perhaps not quite as consciously as we do.

So where does the problem of relationship begin? And how does it manifest? And how is it we get it wrong?

The process that we're going through is twofold. We're actually trying to understand how we create this mess. And we're also going through a process of purification, where we begin to allow these defilements—that's what he calls them, defilements—to arise and pass away. The process of insight meditation is that dual process.

So it's not a process of developing the heart. That's done by other exercises such as metta practice. And through action—through compassionate, loving, joyful actions. Don't forget joy. Everybody talks about compassionate love but forgets joy. You can actually be joyful and rejoice in somebody else's joyfulness. That's also part of the Buddha mind that we're trying to develop.

So this opening up to our own hearts in meditation is part and parcel of allowing these defilements to go. In the Buddha's own experience, even though he was liberated during that moment, there was still what's known as vasana. Vasana are leftover habits within the mind. And so it is said that for seven years, Mara the evil one chased him with his three daughters: sensual desire, sexual desire, and—those of you who know, you mustn't say—but those of you who don't know, what was the third one? Have a guess.

Yes. Did you know? No. Well done. Fantastic. Very rare anybody gets that.

Yes, boredom. Because as we discussed this morning, boredom is the engine that pushes you to seek more and more excitement, to seek something different to do. And it took seven years for Mara to finally leave him. His daughters insisted on that.

But he gave up. And what he says is, the Buddha sees me. See, the Buddha sees me. Now, of course, that's put in a mythological sense. When we, in our meditation, observe our defilements come up—be it anger or something exciting or planning—just the seeing of them releases us from their grasp. Just to be able to see them. This seeing, of course, also means to feel them, to actually experience them as they arise and pass away within that awareness, that consciousness.

So we've got these mental defilements coming up, and they are habits. They are known as sankhāras, habits that we have created ourselves. And the essential thing about the sankhāras is that they are empowered through will. So the Buddha goes as far as to state that an act and the act of will, in his sense, are one and the same thing. Will and an act are one and the same thing.

So when we find ourselves thinking about something which is unpleasant and we're indulging in it, there's actually an act of will in there. The same when we speak something or when we act. And even when we do it unwittingly, even when we do it unintentionally as it were, there's actually been a moment of intention.

We talk about habitual unethical actions, and then really empowered ethical action—when you really, really decide to murder your rival. That's a clear decision in time that you are actually going to murder them, not that you do it sort of unintentionally. So often a lot of our thoughts that come up and we get dragged into are just because of

these habits. And what we discover in our meditation, of course, is that they're incredibly powerful. Even if we struggle against them, they're always there in the background. Even if we become acutely aware of our greed, there are always these sneaky little selfishnesses where we take the biggest slice of cake and things like that. These are very sneaky little things.

And so the ability to actually see these things is a liberation. But remember, we're not entirely liberated from them because then there has to be the decision not to engage. And that's what we're learning through our meditation—that no matter what unethical thoughts or habits come up, we can distance from them and refuse to engage.

Of course, the danger there is that in the refusal to engage, you're actually very subtly pushing them away. And we push things away out of aversion and fear. Those are our repressive measures. So one thing we come to be aware of is that there's an internal mechanism whereby we make things worse.

Here comes the old greed, you see, and then there's the empowerment of the greed by way of indulgence. Here comes a little hateful thought about somebody and we empower it because we actually enjoy it. Yes, of course we do. We enjoy getting angry with people and biffing them on the nose and things like that. There's a certain enjoyment in it. Otherwise we wouldn't do it.

So when it comes to depression, we don't want to go into that sort of mental state, so we push it away, push it away by distracting ourselves. A lot of the pleasures that we have in life are empowered not only because we enjoy them and indulge them, but because they're ways of not facing up to this other horrible stuff. And that's why addictions are so difficult to get rid of. And I'm not talking about big, heavy addiction. I'm just talking about, you know, biscuits and things like that.

So in a sense, when we understand that, then we see where the struggle is. When the Buddha's last words are, "Strive diligently," he doesn't say hang about and think about things and investigate. It's strive. Sampadeta is a very strong word. It's not sort of work at it. You've got to work at it.

And you can see from our meditation that the work is not only something that you can do the once and then you'll never be greedy again. These snakes and crocodiles appear constantly. As soon as we see something that we have a relationship of indulgence with, immediately the greed for it arises.

So these sankhāras, our internal habits, are really to be known. That's what the Buddha says. You've got to know how they arise. You've got to know how to let them go and let them disappear. And you've got to know how, in such a way, that they never arise again.

Of course, they never arise again only once the deep, fundamental problem is sorted out. And that has to do with identity.

So in one way of looking at the path, it's put in these three different ways: sīla, samādhi, and paññā. Sīla meaning morality, samādhi concentration, and paññā insight. And it's interesting that as the Buddha describes the Eightfold Path, he comes down from the insight path, and the insight becomes systemic. So once you have insight into, for instance, how indulgence creates suffering, this has to move into an attitude. That's your second factor on the Eightfold Path—sammāsaṅkappa, right attitude. You've got to change your attitude to indulgence.

Noreen, whom some of you know, does an email course. And there was one young fellow there—the exercise was around seeing greed and whatnot. And this young fellow wrote back and said that once he'd begun to do this practice, he just wasn't enjoying things as he wanted to. So he wasn't ready for that, and he would stop the exercise. It just shows how deep is our commitment to greed. And that commitment manifests also in all the other negative stuff too.

So this sīla, this morality in the path, comes after that. It comes after right attitude. Then you get right speech, right action, and right livelihood. But the way that we can also see it is that you can go the other way. So you can start looking at our ethical behavior, and that will also begin to change our attitude. The more we change our attitude, of course, it has to come back into the way we understand things. You can't change your attitude and not also change your understanding. So the path is a feedback loop, a sort of feedback loop system.

And you lose nothing by really putting the accent of your spiritual life into right relationship—which might be a definition for ethics. Ethics is basically how you relate to human beings, to animals, to nature, and so on. And by putting the accent on that and seeing how we relate to those things, how we're creating suffering for ourselves but also situations where other people might suffer—remember, we don't cause other people to suffer, but we can definitely create situations where it's very difficult for them not to make the decision that they're going to suffer. So it's a case of recognizing that we also have a responsibility to create situations for other people where they may not make these wrong decisions.

By coming back onto that, you see, you immediately change your attitude. And that attitude is one of connection, isn't it? So another word for connection is love. That's all. Love, in its most universal sense, is a sort of sense of interconnectedness, a sense of an interconnectedness with the all, as the Buddha would say—which is the all within our consciousness. And to make that connection as the connection demands.

So sometimes, as you know, there can be a certain directness, a certain assertiveness. You can be very assertive and not seem kindly, but it's exactly what was needed in that particular situation. And other times, of course, you can be very warm-hearted, compassionate, and so on. So it's a sort of sensitivity that we have to develop towards any situation we're in. And that means that you've got to launch your attention outwardly into other people around you, into the animals you see, into nature and all that sort of stuff. And not only take this very isolated position of me in the midst of all this. The me has to turn towards a sort of connection which produces a we, a sort of communion, a community.

So all of that, of course, is part and parcel of this growing ethical relationship to the world. One other way of perhaps talking about ethics is to try and create situations which are to our own benefit. The Buddha talks about our own benefit, the benefit of somebody else—you might do something which is not to your particular benefit but to somebody else's benefit—and to both myself and to another. And in that sort of relationship where you have that connection, it's always demanding a certain generosity. And that generosity has the ability to make that connection real, because you're giving. You're giving something of yourself, whether your wealth or your time, for the benefit of others. And at times you're giving it to yourself.

Sometimes you deserve a biscuit. Very rare, of course, but occasionally you might say, well, I deserve a biscuit.

So it's a case of recognizing that ethics is beginning to change our attitude. And as you move outward towards people, move outwards towards nature and animals and all that sort of stuff, of course, you find the opposite—that they're coming towards you. That's the point. They're coming towards you. And that's where the interconnectedness, shall we say, becomes more real for us.

Because we realise that the whole thing is some sort of theatre piece. It's a sort of play that we're in. A serious one. If you want to take a Hindu image of it, a dance, or a Mahayana one, Indra's net. Everything is interconnected and those interconnections are holographic. They contain everything else within themselves as potential.

So our behaviour in ordinary daily life, the way we act in ordinary daily life, is this constant effort to see the situation more fully, not just myself isolated as an individual. That's very much a Western thing, this individuality business. I do my own thing in my own way in my own time, to hell with you lot. And that sort of individuality causes us to disconnect with people, tremendous loneliness, and with it, of course, anxiety.

Somehow we have to reverse that process and begin to make these connections, to create a sense of community, even if the people whom you're with have no sense of community at all. So you're catching the whole situation where everybody's these individual little pods looking after themselves. And we've somehow got to make that connection with them, to see that they are undermining potential by only turning in towards themselves, only what I want. And that by opening up to that, your relationship changes somewhat, and it opens up for them the possibility of changing their relationship.

On the negative side, there's that Russian-American author—Ayn Rand with Atlas Shrugged. So the arch-individualist, and it's funny that she was Russian, coming from presumably a communist background. This sort of arch-individualist position where it's up to you. You're the one that has to make the world. You're the one who makes decisions, and the world you live in is completely manufactured by you. You did it.

And so all these people in Silicon Valley, one or two of them anyway, believe that the billions they've got is all because of me. I did it. Without me, this would never have happened. Now, in a sense, of course, there is a touch of truth in that. They probably instigated it. They probably had the first idea, like Steve Jobs. Really a man of wonderful little ideas. But to say that all these billions came because of me, to hell with the workforce, to hell with everybody else who's putting in their little contributions—it's just an insanity. You're so isolated, they should put you away.

So it's a case of recognizing that the West especially got itself into this corner. Eastern people don't think like that. I saw a program on China, and there was a young woman there saying that she felt they thought differently. They thought more in terms of community. That sort of bringing in other people in some sort of connection where you don't see yourself as forging ahead, the lone pioneer, creating the world just for yourself. And that's very much, of course, the Buddha's own way of looking at things.

So here we have somebody who has this tremendous insight. And for one moment, as you know, those of you who know the story, he doubts whether anybody would understand it. He discovers something which is so extraordinary. And there's nothing like

it being taught anywhere else, remember. He doesn't think people would really grasp it. And he says, it would be just an annoyance to me to try and do it, constantly trying to make people understand this sort of stuff.

But then, in the myth, this great god appears and tells him that there are some with only a little bit of dust in their eyes, and so off he goes. And there's a lovely little telling tale of how he learns how to be a teacher. So remember, the insight doesn't make you a genius. It doesn't make you a teacher.

It doesn't make you anything else.

So on his way back to see these old companions of his—that was his first thought, to return to these companions with whom he had struggled—he meets another ascetic. The ascetic sees him and perceives the charisma, perhaps the glow emanating from this enlightenment he has just experienced. And he says to him, "You're amazing. Who is your teacher? How did you attain this?"

And the Buddha replies, "I am my own teacher. I am the savior of the world. I am the fully liberated one."

And the fellow says, "All right, okay," clicks his head, and off he goes.

So the Buddha must have learned pretty quickly that's not quite how you get the message across.

When he actually meets his old companions, it's completely different, because there he returns to an old relationship, a friendship with them. And there's a whole process of discussing. While he's talking with them about what he's discovered, which is slowly being formalized in his mind, he constantly asks the question, "Have you ever heard me speak like this?" As he's talking to them, he interrupts himself: "Have you ever heard me speak like this? Have you ever heard me say anything like this?" And very slowly, they're drawn to his teachings, and actually all become fully liberated in these wonderful stories.

So this whole business of relationship goes right back, in terms of the Buddha's teaching, right back to him. He didn't just sit there with a sign saying "Do not disturb, I'm fully liberated." He actually got up and walked. From Bodh Gaya to where he found his companions over in Sarnath, just north of Varanasi—I can't remember exactly, but it's perhaps three or four hundred miles. India's a big place, you know. It wasn't as though he thought he'd just nip down to Dublin and have a little chat with his old mates. You've got to walk.

So here we have this teaching about sīla, about morality. What we're saying is that if we keep our attention on that, this is something we can actually do. You can't make a decision to have an insight. You can't say, "Well, look, I'm going to sit down now and I'm going to have a great insight and liberate myself." It just doesn't work. It doesn't work like that.

We cannot make ourselves have an insight. Insights come when the conditions are ripe. But what we can do is genuinely correct our behavior and become much more aware of how the delusion is manifesting—the essential delusion concerning the self. And that's something we can perceive. Through the meditation, if we can maintain a certain level of awareness in daily life, if we don't find ourselves rushing and so forth but try to maintain a certain calmness, then we should slowly change these habits. We slowly allow habits we see as unhealthy to die away, and we build up the good ones through these practices of mettā, through goodwill practices, and through having right attitude.

Take work, for instance. It may be that work is hard at this time. It may be meaningless to you—it doesn't have any particular significance. You just ended up doing this work because that's what was on offer. It simply brings home the bacon. But you can change your attitude completely and see it as one of service. And then you immediately connect with whomever you're serving.

There was an example of somebody who worked at the toll booths on motorways. The way she made it meaningful to herself was to greet people when they came through—genuinely. "What a great day! How are you?" There was a sort of connection there. It wasn't just "stick the money in there" while looking really glum inside this little box. She found meaningfulness from it, from just that simple connection. And that, of course, lifts your heart.

So there are all sorts of little parts of our lives. If you keep a diary or some sort of log in the morning, you see...

Who are the first people you meet? Have you prepared yourself to meet them?

In the morning, if you're going to work and there are people whom you're upset with, if you direct your goodwill towards them, it does change your behavior toward them. And when they see that you're not angry, that you're not about to get your revenge, it opens up a little avenue for them to reestablish a working relationship. Not always, but at least one can try. So there's a whole process of ethical behavior which we can actually get hold of, which we can actually do something about.

But when we go deeper into ethical behavior, we come across this business of a self. And really, that's where the trouble lies. When the Buddha talks about delusion—these three things: greed, aversion, and delusion, or acquisitiveness, aversion which also includes fear, and delusion—this delusion is really one of identity. The meditation is trying to undermine this wrong identity we have by making everything into an object for ourselves.

That's the importance of really noting, really creating that space between the knowing—at this point the knower, the feeler, the one who knows—and really holding that point within ourselves where we are actually not so much aware of what's happening, but aware of the distance between the knower and what's happening. For instance, looking at me now, you can be aware just of me, but you can also become aware of the space that is between us. It's becoming aware of the mental space that lies between the knower, the feeler, the one who is experiencing things, and the actual experience being had. By doing that, we're actually unwittingly disidentifying completely, because it's not me. The noting can be of great help here, because you're actually pointing to it: there's pain, there's an emotional state, there's an image in the mind. Thought is a bit more difficult, but the principle holds.

This process of disidentifying—all we're doing is relocating our identity. The basic identity would be physical. When we eat something and get lost in that beautiful taste, or when we trap our finger in the door, there's just that one moment where we are the body. Me and the pain—there's no separation. And then of course you jump out of it, get all angry and kick the door. It's a case of recognizing that there is a body self. What we mean by identity is a loss of self-awareness into becoming what it is we're experiencing.

Another example would be watching a DVD. You can watch from the point of view of an interest in the acting or the directing, in which case it always remains something objective you're looking at. But you can also just fall into it as an enjoyment, get lost in the mystery or the criminality or whatever it is, and lose the sense of me watching the film. Me and watching the film become one. At that point, you're identifying with all the mentation created by this film. You become the mind, the heart, your emotions. That's what we mean by identity.

So long as there's a sense of self observing something, feeling something, then it's a connection of possession. What I'm looking at is not me, but is owned by me. I'm talking internally here—pain in the knee would be "my knee." Even though I say "I feel anxious," the fact that I'm aware of it means it can't be me, but somehow I own it. Somehow I'm identifying with it as a point of ownership.

Ownership, of course, brings a lot of pain with it, as you know. Even with things you own, if somebody nips off with your mobile or something like that—it's a horror, isn't it? Weeping and gnashing of teeth, anger, calling the police. All of this arises negatively because somebody's thieved your phone. For heaven's sake.

We don't know the suffering behind possession until we lose what it is we possess. That's pretty straightforward. And when we look at it rationally, the only thing you can do with a thing—a phone or a TV or a car—is use it. You can only use things. To own it is a fiction, isn't it? A legal fiction, which works until the thief takes it. And then it's his.

It's no good you going around saying, "He's got my phone." It's his phone now.

I like to make this point because there was an occasion in the Sangha—the Buddhist order in Sri Lanka—where a thief came and stole a monk's little watch, or little clock as I remember it. The monk ran after the thief and got it back. And he was accused by Sangha members of thieving. He actually had to leave the order. Because it was no longer his, and he took it back. Which is really strange to anybody else in the world. But that's basically how it works. Strange, yes? So it makes you think about ownership.

We've got this relationship of identity with something. And remember that happiness—real happiness in the sense of an absolute happiness—is when we fall into the emotion of happiness. We become the happiness. When you watch an uproarious film and you're just laughing your head off, great guffaws and all that, you and the guffaw and the film become one and the same thing. When a comic comes on and you're laughing your head off, you and the comic—you lose that sense of "me watching television." You're just there within the laughter.

And that's one reason why people do these dangerous sports, because in a dangerous sport you've got to give your whole attention and you lose yourself in the sport. Canoeing down rapids and such, activities which are dangerous in themselves and which demand a heightened sense of awareness. You've got to be right there with the moment, and there's a sheer joy of the adrenaline coming up. You lose yourself into it, and it becomes like an addiction to try and get back into the zone.

These moments of happiness, when we're completely happy, paradoxically occur when we don't know it. As soon as you come out of that happy state, you've lost it. There may still be a feeling of happiness, but actually there's something in you which knows that the happiness is on the way out. It's gone. So it's one of these little paradoxes about identity. And it's the same, of course, on the negative side, when you identify with a hellish state, with something—just for that one moment, that's what you are.

So we have to take a little step even further back to find out where this sense of identity originates.

In our meditation, when we sit there observing, feeling, there's something like an observation post we've accessed. There's a lovely phrase that comes from Nyanaponika—his book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* is still a classic, really worth reading. There's some body up here somewhere, a couple of centimeters or so behind this point here, which is looking, feeling, and knowing everything from this sort of place. And from that place, we've detached from the body. It's no longer us. There's the body. That's why we use these noting words and we don't put in the sense of "I feel something." There's just the feeling. We're trying to make it quite objective. Same with emotions, same with images that come to the mind. That sort of disengagement, pulling this awareness out of its confusion with this psychophysical organism, just to be able to see it. And it finds itself as being this very objective observer, objective feeler, objective experiencer.

But of course, it can't be that either, can it? It can't be what it's aware of. The perceiver can't be the perceived. So this sense of "I am looking, I am feeling"—that sense of self there, right there—that can't be you either. Is that correct? Nod vigorously, please.

So there's something that is aware of itself. There's something that is aware of itself. Now, the only time we experience that, physically speaking, is when you look in the mirror. When you look in the mirror, you're aware that this is your face. But you know it's not your face. It's actually just a mirror image of your face. And of course, it's the wrong way around, isn't it?

It's not how people see you. You've all done the two mirror trick. I always ask that. Who hasn't done the two mirror trick? Fancy. Oh, you haven't lived. You've got to do the two-mirror trick. You look into a mirror, and you take a second mirror that looks into the mirror, and you've got to catch your face in this mirror because it's turned around again. Well, it's a horror thing, isn't it? It's like listening to your own voice for the first time. Or worse, seeing yourself in a video. There's something about that sense of self.

Now, I came across this. I remembered this myth of Narcissus. And in Greek psychology, of course, it's about a wrong self-love, a sort of pride, I think. He looks into the pool and falls in love with himself, as you might say. And of course, he goes to embrace it and falls into the water. Water is always, remember, an image of creation in mythology. So here we have, from a Greek point of view, somebody who falls in love with themselves through a sense of pride and whatnot. But it works brilliantly as an image for our essential delusion.

And the important thing to grasp is that we actually fall in love. We're actually in love with ourselves. That's the basic platform. We wake up, sometimes you wake in the morning and you say, "Here I am again," and sometimes you wake up and say, "Oh, not you again." But prior to that, you see, there must be a moment where this awareness becomes aware of itself. But it can never see itself. The eye cannot see itself. The nose can't smell itself. If the nose had a constant odor of, say, curry, how could you—everything else would be ruined by it. So the sense bases are completely clean of exactly what it is that they are aware of, that they sense.

So this awareness, you see, can never know itself as an object. And therefore that sense of self-awareness must be a delusion. The mirror image.

So now, what technique, what can we do to undermine that very deep delusion? Because that's our primary object. The primary object we make is this awareness coming into the mind and catching its own image. How do we experience that image of the self? It's a presence, isn't it? It's a sense of presence. Whenever you're awake, there's always you. There's always a sense of presence. Now that sense of presence is a feeling image of the awareness in the mind. So it's as though that now has to become the object to observe and to really see whether in fact it's permanent or not.

Now in Buddhist psychology, there are in the human being—the Buddha talks about these five aggregates. So the first one is the body. But it's not the physical body that you might think of. It's often translated as that, just our physicality. But you have to ask yourself, what is it you actually know of your body? Do you know what your liver is doing? Now, see? Have you any idea what's happening in your brain? Did you know it was mostly fatty substance? That's what they tell me anyway. Did you know that your body has ten trillion individual cells? And they're all screaming for whatever. And you also host one hundred trillion guest cells, which are helping you do things like digest. Did you know that the cornea of your eye changes once every week?

Every week, you can look in the mirror and say, "You weren't here last week." And they tell you that every atom in your body changes every seven years. This is what they say.

So it's not as though we know the body. The body has its own little life form. Who knows what? What we can know is how we experience the body. And that's where this business of pain, pleasure, and all that sort of stuff comes in.

So that's the first aggregate—how we experience the body. And the basic experience of the body is the breath. It starts with the breath, and then we have what's known as the four elements, the four great elements: fire, earth, water, and air. These refer to temperature, pressure, elasticity, cohesion, and movement.

Whenever you drop down below pain, below the image of pain, and you go into the pain, then you're at the level of the body itself. Not the body itself, but how the mind experiences the body. That's your first heap—just an aggregate of sensations and feelings.

The next one is feelings. Feelings are physical and mental, not to be confused with mental states. They're what mental states create in the body as a feeling. So when you feel heavy because you're a bit depressed, that's the vedanā, that's the feeling. According to the Buddha, all these feelings are feelings. There's no need to differentiate them apart from the fact that some are coming from the body into the mind, and some are coming from the mind-heart into the body. So that is the connection there.

Then there's perceptions. These are, remember, your photocopies that you make. They grow into concepts—concrete concepts, even abstract concepts. What they do is make you look at the world in a certain way.

The third one is your saṅkhāras. These are your mental states, what we're referring to when we talk about our habits, the way we become happy, the way we become sad, and so on. The mental states that we're in.

And finally, consciousness. Now, the problem here is translation. The Buddha himself has difficulties trying to find the right word to express what he wants to express, and the words change depending on the situation.

In Pāli there are two major words: citta and viññāṇa. Citta refers to what we would normally have called in the old days the soul—not the everlasting spirit, but the soul meaning this combination of heart and mind, which we split. In our Age of Enlightenment, we took rationality and feeling away from each other. Citta brings them together as one composite. What you think, you feel, and what you feel, you think. If you look at every time you think of something, you'll see the heart's in there somewhere. And when the heart moves, you'll see there's a thought related to it. So it's not as though they're completely separate. They're working one off the other. But they're obviously two different modes.

All these things have to be held somewhere. They have to be held somewhere to be known. That which knows is awareness. But something has to hold it long enough for it to be known. And that's the screen—that's the screen of consciousness.

When we talk about consciousness, we're not talking about the process of reasoning. We're not talking about the process of emotions and moods. We're not talking about the process of perceiving.

We're talking about some sort of multidimensional screen that just for a moment holds the totality of that moment for us, as we experience it through this psychophysical organism. So if I stub my toe, on the screen there just comes pain. That's the first moment. And then that disappears. And then comes the reason why I stubbed my toe.

So I'm getting this chopped up, momentary screening of what's happening in the present moment. And so fast is this screening that it's all joined together into a continuum. That's where we perceive some sort of continuity when it's not there. And the continuity gives us the impression of everlastingness. And that gives us the impression that it's always me—I never change. All these other things are changing, but not me.

This is one of the core insights of the Buddha: that the sense of me, the sense of self, is also arising and passing away. That's what he means when he says there is a self, but it's not a self. Because in those days, the self would have referred to something that we might now call an everlasting soul or a spirit. The self we're talking about is that mirror image being held every so often on that screen, and we get a sense of the feeling of presence there.

So in your meditation, when everything's quite calm and you're watching the breath, in that calmness, turn towards that sense of presence. Make it an object that you're looking at. In that way, you're coming to distance away from the mind at that initial level of contact, becoming more and more aware that what is aware is not part of that matrix—the body, heart, mind matrix. And that's the process of awakening. The awakening is in the awareness. It's not in the mind.

One of the other understandings that we have is that it's actually awareness that's suffering. The awareness is suffering through that wrong identity. The body doesn't suffer—the body just has pain. The heart doesn't suffer—the heart just has emotions. You can distance from them. Thoughts are hardly suffering; they're usually just flitting little things. So there's something in us which, through its wrong relationship, is actually causing suffering for itself.

And that's the Buddha within. That's where the search for the end of suffering is coming from. It's not coming from the body. It's not coming from our emotional or mental state. It's coming from this essential nature seeking its own liberation.

When you actually contemplate that, you can see how subtle it is. The problem is in the seeing. It's not in what is being seen.

I'll give you an example of that from when I went to Sri Lanka. I was standing with one or two monks and there was this barking going on. I couldn't work out what the barking was. It was monkeys—I didn't know monkeys barked. When they said, "Those are monkeys," I asked, "Where are they?" They pointed to this tree.

And for the life of me, I couldn't see any monkeys. I said, "I'm looking up there. Where?" I couldn't see them. They said, "There's a whole troop of them—about twenty, twenty-five of them up there." And I'm looking and looking and looking. And then just suddenly—whoosh—I can see these monkeys. They're everywhere. It's because my eye wasn't trained to see.

In that delusion, I would have gone away and said, "Well, monkeys are ghosts. Only some people can see them."

There was a case of somebody who was born blind—I read this little article—who was given sight. And the psychiatrist who was helping him would take him to places. The one that he mentioned was a zoo, and he took him to a cage where there was an ape. And this man couldn't see it. I mean, an ape in the cage, and he could not see it. So the psychiatrist took him to a statue of an ape, and the man felt it with his eyes closed so that he got a mental picture of it. And when he went back to the cage, he could see the ape.

So our search for liberation from suffering, from our own personal suffering, is the sharpening of this internal seeing. And the Buddha gives us these cues, he gives us these clues as to which way to approach it. It's impermanence—but radical impermanence. It's not that something is changing; it's that something is arising and passing away. Now when we say that something is arising and passing away, we're not talking about the physical world as we know it, or as we don't know it. We're talking about consciousness. Consciousness arising and passing away. And consciousness is just a mirror. But it seems so real to us. That's the problem. It seems so real.

And then there's this whole business of relationship that comes up because of this essential delusion—this constant effort of trying to protect myself. Remember that our fundamental relationship is one of love. So I'm acquiring things so that I can feel safe. I feel so much safer if I have a billion in the bank rather than just a few pounds. And I collect things. I collect friends. It makes me feel safe. I collect objects. That acquisitiveness is really trying to make me feel safe.

Now, when I feel safe, I obviously don't want anybody to disturb me, to disturb this happiness that I've got now from this security. And so the aversion comes. Anybody who's going to upset me is an enemy, whatever it is. And of course, if the enemy's too big, I've got to run for it. So there are your three basic attitudes arising out of that delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear.

And from then, when we act out of that—by the way we think, by the way we speak, and by the way we act—we're actually creating our ethical creations in this world, and they, of course, have consequences. They not only have consequences outwardly, but they have consequences inwardly. So the more you feel fearful, the more you'll hate. The more you hate, the more you fear your enemy. The paranoia is just there within us. The more you have, the more you're afraid of losing.

So it's really about going beyond that and recognizing that when you look at the spiritual traditions, the people whom we honor, really honor—like Jesus Christ, St. Francis of Assisi—they don't have anything. I mean, I'm a monastic. I'm not supposed to have anything, but I've got a lot. I've got my mobile phone for a start, which I'm very afraid of losing.

So you see, this idea of letting go of something is to be manifest in the way that we actually live. And that brings us back to our ethics.

We've really been around the houses this evening, my goodness. We started off by talking about ethics and the fact that there's a feedback. If you look at your ethics and you begin to behave more beautifully, it has an effect on your general attitude to life, which brings you its insights—that it works. Even if people hate you, at least you yourself are peaceful. I mean, you might be the most peaceful person in the world, full of charisma. Somebody out there is going to want to shoot you. It's just as simple as that.

And there's this other way where we are investigating ourselves, which again brings about a change of attitude and then becomes systemic in the way we think, the way we behave. So that whole process is one of insight and ethics, and you can't separate them. And the original ethical stand was falling in love with ourselves. That's the problem. And it's coming back to that level and really investigating that sense of presence, a sense of self, which is really cutting to the core of the problem. And that's exactly what the Buddha found on that wonderful day.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion. And that by your devotion to insight, practice, and ethical standards, you may be liberated sooner rather than later.

Someone asks a question about enjoyment.

I agree with you entirely. It's not a case of getting rid of enjoyment. It's a case of getting rid of indulgence. Indulgence means that your sense of happiness is now dependent on preparing food, making sure that somebody's going to eat it, making sure that you like it. You see what I mean? There's a whole process of attachment to it whereby you're presuming that when you do this, you're going to feel happy. And that's different from a spontaneous joy that comes up when you are preparing food for preparing's sake.

When you're feeding people just for the sake of feeding people, not to make yourself happy—that's the paradox. The more we do good without thinking of ourselves, the more happiness arises spontaneously and naturally within us. That's the bit about non-attachment.

And in that, which is slightly more difficult, is of course we have to do it for ourselves as well without becoming attached. So preparing food for ourselves, just by ourselves, is to take a joy in that. Now, if there's a sense of loneliness there, that tells you that for you food isn't enjoyable unless somebody else is talking their heads off and eating at the same time. If you can actually sit down and in the same way prepare food very carefully for yourself, for the benefit of your body, and the joy comes up in having treated yourself with kindness—that's love.

But as I say, these distinctions are very close together. And we'll never get rid of the attachment until the essential delusion of self disappears. So you've got to work at it. But at least we can undermine it by recognizing when that indulgence comes in.

For instance, in relationships—when does love turn to control? When does love get confused with control? It's a really essential point. Because at the point of control, the other person is no longer a person; they're an object to feed your needs. So every time you're angry with somebody, bored with them—if they're angry, they're not doing what you want. If you're bored with them, they're not making you laugh anymore. And you go through the whole thing of all these negativities and it's all coming from the point of view of "this person is here to make me happy."

So you can always tell when the indulgence is not being fed. The difficulty is knowing when you're feeding the indulgence, because it's so close to love and enjoyment.

What a drag.

So you can always tell when the indulgence is not being fed. The difficulty is knowing when you're feeding the indulgence because it's so close to love and enjoyment.

What a drag.

Very good.

CHAPTER 85

Control and Loss of Power

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this New Year dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the fundamental human drive for control and power, examining how our attempts to manipulate circumstances for happiness inevitably lead to suffering. Drawing from the Buddha's own spiritual journey—from sensual pleasures through jhānic absorptions to severe asceticism—he illustrates how each path that seeks to 'steal from heaven' through personal control ultimately proves unsatisfactory.*
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> *The talk explores the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana)—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā)—showing how our identification with the psychophysical organism creates the illusion of a controlling self. Through vipassana meditation, we can access the position of 'the observer' that temporarily liberates us from identification with body, emotions, and thoughts.*
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> *Bhante emphasizes the importance of accepting 'this is the way it is' without resignation, distinguishing between hope (which arises from practice) and expectation (which creates frustration). He concludes with practical guidance for sustainable practice, encouraging patience and consistent effort while avoiding the trap of putting timelines on spiritual progress.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa—homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-enlightened one.

So I'm slightly aware that my New Year address is directed at what is known in language teaching as false beginners. They are the ones who used to practice, stopped, and have now returned to the fold. So I have to make a special effort to enthuse you all, especially those, so that this will never happen again. And from this day on, until you slip into the warmth of the grave, you will continue to practice.

As you know, many people come to meditation for various reasons, especially these days with this mindfulness movement. But the spiritual search, I think, begins when there is some sort of existential crisis, whether it's a very small sea or an earth-shattering one. And I think that's really where in spiritual practice you have to put your attention, and the questions come up in various forms such as: Why am I here? Why is this here? This whole universe—what is it here for? Why am I conscious? Why am I con-

scious of it? All these questions, and worst of all, why am I conscious of it and then I have to die just when I'm getting used to it, just when I start getting old and things happen.

So these questions bring up in us all sorts of emotional reactions. And it's the investigation of that question, really, which is the spiritual quest. So in the Buddha's own terms, in his day, it was this awful idea that he kept coming back. Kept coming back. There's rounds of rebirths. And there seemed to be no escape from it—it was a constant being born and then depending on your karma you ended up either as a dog or worse, and sometimes as a king, but those opportunities were very rare of course. So it was the horror really of this rebirth which was seemingly one of the obsessions of the age.

And in a sense, if you're an annihilationist, that's a fate worse than death. You have to keep coming back. Sisyphus—I can't remember what he did. Does anybody remember what he did? He did something terrible. And his punishment was to roll this boulder up to the top of a hill and then to see it roll back down and then go back down and start again. And that was it. That was his life, you might say, in hell.

So when we think of the spiritual quest, we're really trying to answer these deeper questions. And the Buddha's own quest led him to a particular answer, a particular experience that we call awakening or enlightenment. And from that moment onwards, he said, he didn't suffer. And then, of course, you have to define what he meant by this word *dukkha*. But as far as he was concerned, he always lived in a state of some joyous heart state, whether it was just pure equanimity, contentment. And when he was in relationship, it was either love, compassion, or joy. And remember that compassion is not a sad thing. Compassion is a joyful state. If compassion leads you to some sort of morose state, then something else has slipped in—perhaps pity or grief—but compassion is the joy that you get when you're helping people, just knowing your limitations, and that help might only be offering them goodwill. You can only do so much.

Today in some of the interviews this whole idea of what can you do—the modern Western koan of: After you've done everything you can do, what can you do? It's very difficult for us to accept that, the limitation of doing. So I always describe it as a ring of power around us. And that's all you can do. You can't go beyond what you can do. And then, of course, you can get other people to do things. That's your influence. Then after that, trying to get beyond that is just frustration and depression and all sorts of things. Burnout.

The whole idea of power, if you consider Tolkien, Lord of the Rings. See if I've got the names right. Frodo, that's right. Frodo has this ring and Sauron—Sauron—he wants this ring. And this is the ring of power. I mean, you can have all sorts of interpretations to

Tolkien's story. But for me, this ring of power—and once Sauron had it, he would rule the whole of Middle-earth, which is a horrible idea, as you know. So Frodo doesn't take on the power of that ring. He actually takes it to be destroyed. And in destroying all that sense of power and the sense of control and domination, wins him eternal life. Only because, not because he's upset Sauron and destroyed that potential, but because he himself has let go of all power and all desire for power. See? This is perhaps my own interpretation, you understand, but that's as I see it.

One of the things that the Buddha talks about is this whole idea of a self and what it means and how it comes to be. And when we talk about an existential crisis and we talk about why am I here, what consciousness is, what is it we're talking about? We always talk about me. The sense of me being conscious and me dying. The whole idea of power in its bad sense is to be able to control the world, control our situation, so that me always feels safe. Me is always in charge, in control. And whenever that control slips from us, it's a horror story. And unless you're ready to let go of that desire for power, the wrong desire for power, or rather the desire for wrong power, it just becomes a battle.

People who fight the idea of growing old, fight their situation, their loss. I always think of that—this is years ago now—of the policeman who was paralysed by a criminal. And he couldn't hack it; eventually he committed suicide. He was only paralysed from the waist downwards. He wasn't totally paralysed. But being a sports person and very active, he couldn't let go of that. And therefore it drove him to really seeing his life as useless, meaningless.

So this idea of power, of control, is very much tied up with the self. Now, what does the Buddha do? He makes the mistake of so many of his age—he tries to be happy. And he must have tried at home to be happy and found that the sensual pleasure was somewhat wanting. It became vapid. It didn't have any depth to it. So you have a good meal and that's the end of it. Sex, drugs and rock and roll—they're vapid. And it's that weariness, the weariness which is trying to seek happiness and sensual pleasure. The weariness of it. Just the sheer exhaustion of clubbing every night. You just can't take it anymore.

And then there was this other offering of the age, which was the *jhāna*, the absorption stuff, which you find in all religions. These beautiful states. Ecstatic. We can get that sort of ecstatic state by doing something extreme. By getting extreme sports and stuff like that. Or getting lost in music. Just for that moment there where we lose a sense of self. And we're totally absorbed into the extremely joyous state. That sort of happi-

ness is again very—it's very fulfilling if it's wholesome, it's very fulfilling, but it passes. So in the end again there's a sort of weariness, and if we compare that to the *jhāna* then we find ourselves in a similar situation.

The *jhāna*, the absorptions are self-generated. You don't need anything outside you. The *mettā* that we do, if you just keep practicing that, you'll see slowly but surely this beautiful state arises in you. I'm sure you've experienced it. And the more you do it, the stronger that state is. And it gets so strong that, as it were, you fall into it and you lose the sense of somebody doing the *mettā*. There is just the lovely state that you're in. It's an absorption. That's why they call it an absorption.

We do it on a much, shall we say, obvious level when you're watching a film. So when you're watching a good film, for that two hours, you're lost. There's not somebody watching the film. There's a loss of that somebody, that self, that self-awareness—there's just the film. And then when you come out, you arrive again. You arise. You say, oh, that was fantastic. And that absorption is a type of happiness and it can become more and more refined as you practice these other more religious forms—prayer, mantra, even coloured circles in Theravāda they have 40 of these particular subjects which can lead you to various depths. But again, it's a happiness which is dependent on conditions. It's a happiness which is dependent on your body, your mind, whatever you're using. It's dependent on somebody giving you food, things like that. It's always dependent. And therefore, you don't have total control. And worse, it comes to an end. You can't sit there forever.

So there was always something which didn't satisfy you. And as you know, he got very good at it. He was invited to teach. But he just didn't hack it. And I presume, although he doesn't say this, one has to interpret it a little bit, that after a while, he had that same sort of weariness. You know, not another *jhāna*. There must have been something unsatisfying about it. Because for the others, for the ones who were following that path, they didn't leave. They didn't say, you know, I'm fed up with this. They were really into it. Just developing these beautiful mental heart states.

And then he goes into another form of practice which was prevalent at the time, which was this self-mortification. And I presume that even then he's practicing *jhāna*, but here the problem was the body itself because it was understood by some at that time, the Jains for instance, that your karma expressed itself in your physicality. Your body was your karma. It was like a physical thing which held on to your soul. And if you could let go of the body, then the soul would rise. Of course you had to work out all the karma that you'd accumulated through past births.

I met a Jain actually the other day. I'd heard about this, but he confirmed it for me. That the Jain saint is the one who finally determines to stop eating. And he says when somebody does that in the Jain community, he's like divine. I mean, he's suddenly become somebody of enormous importance. And he actually has the courage to let go of this life form and then rise into—his soul to rise into heaven. I don't know, we don't know whether the Buddha believed that particular theory, although the Jain leader was his contemporary, elder contemporary. We can presume it, but at some point he found it also just more suffering. That's what he said—just more suffering. It somehow didn't work for him. Again, we don't know the mental processes that he went through, but he definitely found it wearisome and useless, that's what he calls it—useless. He doesn't say it's unprofitable, he says it's useless. Profitless.

And so that's when he leaves, remember. That's when he leaves. So up until now, we could say that he's trying to steal from heaven, like us all. We're trying to grab something from the eternal life through our own personal effort, through a personal effort of gaining, attaining, controlling. And as you know, he's despairing. He's by the roadside. He wonders what to do. And then he gets this wonderful gift from Sujātā. You remember the rice pudding? Which has amazing effects, as you know. So this vivifies him. And he has this memory, remember, of a childhood where he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, and he recognises that state as a child as being the same as the jhānic states that he was in with an extra component which was that sense of curiosity.

That's the point where he actually becomes self-enlightened. Before that he's just following the paths that the society were offering him and finding them weren't satisfactory. And now he has this insight—instead of trying to grab happiness and trying to hold it, find it, keep it, he now turns upon the suffering and asks the question, why do I suffer? His whole meditation, as it were, turns around on itself. And it's with that new inspiration that he sits. And he seems to have been so inspired by that and seems to have thought of it as, well, there's nothing else but this now. And he makes this great determination not to rise either to crack the problem or die.

So, I mean, I always say, very lucky for him, lucky for us, he cracked it. And in a sense, he opened up the gates, the gate of the deathless, that's what it's called. He opened up the gates to the deathless. And if you think of anything that people do in the world, there's always somebody, there's always somebody who makes it first. You know, somebody climbs Everest and everybody gets up there. Nobody wants to get up there. As soon as it's made available by one human being, it's made available to everybody. So when he opened this gate to the deathless, he opened it for everybody. Anybody who wants to liberate themselves from suffering—it's there to be taken. And fortunately, he had this great ability to teach, which meant that he laid down a very clear path as to

how we actually make it. So it wasn't just a theory, it wasn't just an idea, a philosophy. In fact, he wouldn't really rate it as a philosopher at all. He was more of a psychologist, an ethical psychologist. And he laid down a real specific practice, which we term right awareness or *vipassanā* and words like that.

So there's this path that he's laid out. And he centres on a particular mental quality. This quality of desire, which is where—which he calls the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering. Desire is the cause of suffering. He talks about the three avenues—the three perspectives, the three characteristics of existence. That there is impermanence, everything is impermanent. That there is nothing in the world which is going to ultimately, completely and fully satisfy us. That's the *dukkha*. And that the idea of a self is an illusion. It's not that you don't need the illusion of a self, but it is knowing what the illusion, or better still, the delusion is. So these are the three gates, you might say, or the three avenues of investigation, but the fundamental cause is desire. The psychological fundamental cause is desire.

And this desire, when you think about it, is about power. It's about us wanting those things that are going to make me happy. And having control over them. Whether it's by money or just naked power. And it's about getting rid of all those things that are undermining my happiness. Just annihilating enemies. Anybody whom I don't like. I like to annihilate. Get rid of completely. And then surely I'll be completely happy.

So that's—if you look at desire from the point of view of controlling the environment, controlling our environment, in order to make it something that is making me happy. I'm always seeking this happiness. And of course people define happiness in all sorts of ways. It can be riches, it can be hanging about, it can be sleeping. It doesn't matter how you define happiness, but we're always trying to manipulate the situation in order to make ourselves comfortable and at best, happy. It's about power.

Now that's what he points out as the cause. The cause of suffering is desire. This wrong desire. It's not a wrong desire to want to escape suffering, let's be right in it. The desire is to seek happiness in the sensual world. By which we mean a permanent happiness. The fleeting happinesses of sensual pleasure, the joys of relationship, the joys of nature—fine. But even there, we twist it, trying to hold it, trying to maintain it, trying to squeeze the last pip out of the orange, the last little drop of juice. So it's that, and that's the attachment. Attachment.

So what is attachment? Attachment is this very desire, this very psychological dependency on something over which we're trying to control but which we can't for happiness. It's a really wrong, it's a really painful investment of our energy, a useless in-

vestment of our energy. Then you might ask well okay, because I'm still on this existential business. Why am I here? Why am I doing that? Why am I trying to manipulate the world and trying to seek some sort of permanent happiness?

Now when I dig deeper, I find that we come to this essential delusion about the self. The self is an identity. It's an identity. There's no such thing as a self because the identity keeps shifting. So when I was a child, my identity was very much with the body. Three, four, well, up until teenage, I suppose.

I am the body. Then maybe around about teenage, you start being emotion. I am my emotions. I'm identifying with emotions as separate from the body and thought. I am the thinker. I am thought. Who am I if I can't think? And the identity shifts from moment to moment depending on what you're experiencing. So if you happen to be having a cup of tea, then you're a physical self. If you happen to be sitting there musing about your existential crisis, then you're a thought self. If it's emotional, emotional self.

So this self isn't something that exists outside your experience. It is a relationship you're having with the experience. And that relationship is being defined as me. And me.

Now when we sit in meditation, when we sit in *vipassanā*, we bounce out of, we pull ourselves out of that enmeshment and we discover a different me within ourselves that we call the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. And suddenly all those things that before I thought were me become objects to observe, to feel. I'm distancing, I'm pushing out of, I'm lifting into a different orbit within myself.

And it may be that in so doing that, you suddenly realise actually, in that position of the observer, at least for a few moments during every sitting, you are in fact liberated from the body, heart and mind. You are liberated from painful emotions because you're looking at them. It doesn't make them any less painful in themselves, it's just that you're no longer entrapped by them. And you're no longer caught up in all the mentation, the stories that they make the mind develop.

And in that position, you realise that you don't have the power that you thought you had. So the body, the knee begins to hurt. Whether you want it to or not, it just hurts. And if you say, stop hurting, nothing happens. It gets worse. And if you fight it, it gets even worse.

And emotion comes up. You didn't ask for it. It just arose. And there you have it. It might be anxiety. It might be joy for it. It could be something lovely for a change. And it just arises. And you're there. You're watching it. And it's come. And you're feeling it. You know it's there. And if you say, go away, it won't. It'll keep on coming. You can avert

your attention, you can leave the meditation room and go for a run or something, but you can't while you're in that state and something arises. You've pulled out of it, you're in a different orbit for want of a better word, but you're actually releasing control. Actually releasing control. You're actually beginning to drop this dreadful ring into the furnace of destruction.

And it's being comfortable with that. It's being able to realise or to see or to experience that actually there is a place where we can find within ourselves that is temporarily liberated from all the stuff that goes on within us. And then you realise that when you re-enter into the psychophysical organism, that it is this very knowing which is, it's within the very knowing that the distortion is to be found.

There's a way of seeing. We're seeing things. We are understanding things in a wrong way. And that's what the problem is. The problem isn't the body. The problem isn't the heart. The problem isn't the mind. It's somehow our engagement in this psychophysical organism which isn't right. Which is warped. There's something wrong with it. And that something wrong with it is the identity with this very psychophysical organism. Because when I say to myself I am Bodhidhamma. I am that, you see. Then it's in this form that I'm trying to seek happiness. See.

And that's what we're always seeking at all times. We're always at all times seeking happiness. Even if it's the happiness of oblivion. Even if you get so fed up with things you launch yourself into the bed and disappear. You're still seeking happiness. You know.

So the process of awakening, the process of enlightening ourselves, is to catch where the warp is, to catch where the distortion is coming. The *vipallāsa* as it's put. *Vipallāsa* means to see things as permanent or to think they can be permanent when they're not, or at least they'll stay similar and they never do. To find, to try and seek happiness in something which is not going to deliver. And to see something substantial which doesn't have any substance. Especially internally, the sense of self. The sense of me.

So when we practise *vipassanā*, which is the core practice, and it's from there that we take awareness into daily life, etc., etc., there's your core practice. In the morning, when you enter into that state, even if it's only for a short time, you're reminding yourself of this higher way of being in the world, which is the observer, the feeler, the knower, the one who knows.

And even though there is even then a distortion because that's also a false sense of self, at least we're telling ourselves every time we do that, we're somehow getting the message across that we're not this physical, this psychophysical organism. That's the message we're constantly telling ourselves. And when we're in the state of the observer, something very strange is happening because there is a knowing that there's a knower.

Now, what's that telling us? It's telling us that this self, this self-awareness is somehow pointing in the right direction. Just like in a mirror, it's pointing in the right direction. It's a sense of that knowing within the mind. But just as the mirror distorts our image, so this sense of the observer is also a distortion. But it's a much better place to be than a physical self, or an emotional self, or a thought self. It's a much wiser place to be.

And what we hope is that in accessing that in the morning, we remind ourselves of this position. It can be a reflection, but actually the doing of it, the doing of it is an experience which stays with us. And the more we do it, the more we become aware of that position of being the observer. This liberates us from entering into delusions which are offered by the body, heart and mind. Or better expressed, which arise because of our identity with the body, heart and mind.

So here in meditation when pain comes, and you see the reaction. You want to move. Why should I suffer this? All that sort of stuff. And you stay with that reaction. The reaction is coming from this self that wants to manipulate the world to make it always comfortable or happy. But if you stay with that, two things are happening. First of all, this reaction begins to die away, so the old habit of trying to control is being undermined. And secondly, you are reinforcing a new identity of being that which is not the body, heart and mind.

And in the same way, when an emotion comes up, it's a nasty one, we don't want to feel it. See, somebody's emailed me about toxic shame. I mean, real heavy shame that goes back to childhood or something. And how destructive it is, you know. And he was saying to me that it was a good job that he did get into drugs, otherwise he would have killed himself. It was so painful. And it's only now that slowly but surely he's able to turn toward this dreadful feeling of shame. Every time he's in company, he feels people can penetrate him, can see the way he really is, which is, you know.

And to be able to stay with that, you see. So that's undermining this reaction of not wanting. Having control. Trying to manipulate things. It's the growth of patience, the being able to bear, to bear with. And it's also the ability, or should we say, the growing realisation that there is something above the shame. There's something beyond the shame. The observer, the feeler, the knower.

And as an aside to that, something which happens as a consequence, quite naturally, unwittingly you might say, the heart's healing itself. So two things we realise through our meditation practice is that when an emotion catches the mind and creates a story, it's developing itself. I mean you know that. Every time you get angry, somebody says something nasty to you, you repeat it a hundred thousand times to make yourself even more and more angry. And seek true revenge. See? So we know that we have to stop the mind creating stories.

And when an emotion is releasing itself as a physical sensation, as a felt state, it's actually expending its energy. It needs an active act of will to develop. And even when the mind slips away in one of these little stories, there's been a little empowerment there. Even though it's habitual, there's been little empowerment. And if you're not careful, that's why we can spend hours in meditation thinking about how we're going to kill somebody. Or worse. Or worse.

So when you realise that, you come back, you see. And then if we can just stay with an emotional state long enough to see it dissipate, no matter how painful that is, that's when we get the confidence of being able to stay with this stuff. Because then we begin to realise that actually that's the process of healing. That's the setup.

So now we have to return to this essential question as to, you know, why am I here in the first place? I mean, this is the new year, if I can say. So I should be making new resolutions and lifting up my heart of courage and all that, you know, shield and sword and into the fray and all that sort of stuff.

So returning to our question, you know, why are we here? Well, in terms of some sort of theology, in terms of some sort of grand philosophy, the Buddha is characteristically quiet. And I think there are two reasons for this. First of all, once you go beyond personal experience, you're into inference. But secondly, the experience of *Nibbāna* is total and complete. It doesn't have a reason beyond itself.

When we were doing the standing meditation, just being, just drawing our attention into the present moment. And just for one moment letting go of a reason for being, a reason beyond itself. And a future that we have to plan. Planning is also a form of control. I mean, there's good control, remember. I mean, if you've got to go to the dentist, you have to control events to get there on time. You don't want to miss a dental appointment. But just for a moment there, every so often, to just stop. And just be with the moment. Just be with the sensuality of the moment. Bury yourself into the body. Just being here.

And that's where you get this sense of timelessness. So it's the mind that creates time. It's the mind which creates this idea of movement in time. It's a mental construct. Actually, as we all know, you only exist in this present moment. Which doesn't deny the fact that you've got to plan and all that sort of stuff. But it's just every so often during the day to stop and remind ourselves that there is a different mode that we can enter. Just this pure being.

Just because we're self-aware in that moment, it's still getting the message across. Still getting the message across. That there are two modes. One of being and one of doing. They don't cancel each other out. But if you're always doing, you're missing out on the being. And that's our problem. We're always doing something.

Now when you're just being, there's no control. Because there's nothing to control. You're in the present moment. It arises and passes away. That's it. So there, we're getting a hint of the Buddha mind.

And coming back to the position of the observer, when you're in that state in your meditation, and it's pretty clear to you that you are orbiting, that you've pulled yourself out of the body with its sensations, the heart with its emotions, and the mind with its thoughts and images. When you've been in that state for a while, and you come out of it, and you reflect upon it, just ask yourself, what is inside the observer? What's it made of? Are there any sensations there? Are there any emotions there? Any emotional states at all? Is there any thought there? Thought patterns.

So we're obviously beginning to experience something which is not phenomenal. It's not something which is arising and passing away. And when you've come out of that state, and it's been very clear to you, ask yourself, was it satisfying?

Because the Buddha says, and I shall leave you with this. Those who are mindful are in the presence of *Nibbāna*. In the presence, in the vicinity of it. That's how close we are. It's as though we are looking into it and not being aware of that state. And then you realise why all spiritual practice anyway, in all these traditions, always moves towards silence. It always moves towards some sort of silence.

So another approach is to just develop that taste for calmness, a taste for silence, a taste for non-doing, without letting the mind just go off on its own. Now that position has also got some relationship to what it is that you're experiencing. Whether it's physical, emotional or mental. It has the relationship of non-attachment. Of not grasping, of not wanting to have power. That's the relationship. Because you're watching it, you're investigating it. See?

So now, when we re-enter into the psychophysical organism, you see, and through that into the world of action, we find very slowly that we're actually undermining that whole idea of controlling. We're undermining the idea of trying to manipulate things. And that brings us round to that sense of contentment which is wanting what one has, not always trying to get what one wants.

And you start from there, you see. You start from this is the way it is. Which doesn't undermine potential. It's just that you're starting off from a realistic base before you would have normally tried to manipulate things. This is the way it is.

So a neighbour of ours, he fell out of bed. And slipped his disc really badly. He was in a wheelchair. And I met his wife, who's a delightful, lively woman. And she's moaning about him. She's saying, you know, I've got to do this and I've got to do that. And then she says this lovely phrase, she says, it shouldn't be like this. And I said, ah. I said, yeah, there we are, you see, that's where the suffering is. That it shouldn't be like this.

I think it's in the film, what's his name, Clint Eastwood, Unforgiven. Yeah? Yeah. And at the end, Clint, he kills them all. And as he dies, this terrible, nasty, sadistic sheriff, can't remember his name, he's a great actor, remember his name? He says, just before he goes, he says, it shouldn't have been like this. How many times do we, you know, in the day say, it shouldn't be like this. It shouldn't rain. I mean, damn it, I've come here on retreat. It should be nice. And she shouldn't cough like that. And what's the meaning of that? Why is the door clicking like that? It's all this business of trying to manipulate, control.

Now, it's not as though understanding this, that it's all going to stop. Oh, if heaven did, only it would. But at least now we're not fooled by it. That's the point, not to be fooled by it. So we know as soon as we hear the phrase, it shouldn't be like this. Aha! So you say, Māra, I see you. That's it. No longer does it have the power to upset our contentment. This is the way it is. It's a lovely little phrase to repeat to ourselves.

And remember that's not the same as resignation. Resignation is a despair. This is the way it is, I can't do anything. This is the way it is, what can be done? It's grounding ourselves in the way it is without coming to a situation, coming to a moment, coming to a relationship with prejudice, expectation. Expectation. Preference. Preference. Preference.

So I've bumped around here and there and all over the place, but I hope that you get this idea of a central control panel called the self that really just wants to be happy. That's all. Just want to be happy. And it's trying to constantly manipulate the situation. Holding on to, grabbing what makes it happy. And pushing away, annihilating. And if it

gets too much, run for it. So those are your three main attitudes that arise out of the self. Aggrandisement. Accumulation. Aversion. And fear. Those are your basics. And from out of these three snakes, yes, arise all our miseries.

So it really is beginning to see that in our daily life. Slowly but surely, cutting away, cutting away, cutting away.

Roshi Kennett, who started the Zen order in the West at Throssel Hole Abbey—some of you might know it, lovely place—she talked about the practice of being like a huge granite mountain which you had to shift, and all you had was a little teaspoon.

So, getting across that this is not easy, but we should contemplate on the benefits of our practice and how it's helped us in our lives. And that, in a way, is a sort of self-encouragement, and it makes you want to give a bit more, do a bit more. And this doing is always arising out of that lovely sense of calmness, one of the factors of enlightenment.

Don't put a time slot on it. An expectation. So remember there's a distinction to be made between hope and expectation. The hope that arises from the practice is something which comes to us because we begin to see, we can perceive that there is an end to suffering. I mean that's what the practice is about. It's about actually perceiving how we can actually become fully liberated. That's the hope.

The expectation is when we put a date on it. Then we've had it. Then there's sheer frustration and despair. So it's not good to think of practice too much in terms of progress, because it's very much up and down.

So this year we might start off with a firm commitment to up the practice a bit. Get up to Satipanya to do a four-week retreat. Why are you all laughing? To get up there and do some extra work, you see. And then next weekend you're drunk. And you wake up and, oh, come on, don't do that. What is it? So it goes up and down. But it's keeping the nose in the right direction. Keeping your nose in the right direction. And very slowly over time one sees the effect of the practice.

But don't put milestones on it. Oh boy, that's wicked. Putting milestones on your practice. "I should be here now. Why have I not been doing this? I've been doing this for thirty years. Why am I not aware all the time?" Thirty-seven years, let me say. "My mind's still going all over the place." See? See? I mean I should be in a state of despair. Anybody should be in this room anyway. But it's a case of just keep, just keep, just keep taking the next step. Taking the next step.

So hopefully tomorrow I'll give you some template that you can work on to reflect upon your life, which you may or may not want to use, and try and build up some sort of resolutions for the year. One, two, not too many. And I've got to work out a little ritual which I would normally do at the stupa at the centre. A burnt offering. So I'll try and work something out with Mark. He'll be the carrier of the flame. And we'll try and organise just a little ritual. Putting little bits of paper into a bowl and setting fire to it. Burnt offerings, burnt offerings.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your renewed commitment and invigoration of the path, reach the end of suffering sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

CHAPTER 86

Q&A: Detachment, Engagement, Motivation, Devotion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h04

> *In this engaging Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma responds to practitioner questions about common challenges on the meditative path. He addresses concerns about practice becoming 'dulling' rather than expansive, clarifying the two distinct functions of vipassanā: purification of the heart and insight. The purification process involves allowing suppressed emotional material to arise and pass away naturally, while insight practice investigates the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self.*
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> *Bhante offers crucial guidance on distinguishing skillful equanimity from its 'near enemy' of indifference, illustrating this with a memorable story contrasting two monks' responses to a cat catching prey. He emphasizes that vipassanā alone is incomplete—it must be balanced with the brahmavihāras (mettā, karuṇā, muditā) to transform released energy into wholesome qualities. The discussion explores how motivation and action change as practice deepens, with Bhante explaining the concept of 'functional kamma'—action that arises spontaneously from wisdom without self-serving intent.*
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> *The session concludes with a thoughtful exploration of devotional practice in Buddhism, addressing why Western practitioners often experience the tradition as emotionally 'dry' compared to Christianity. Bhante discusses how gratitude, awe, and heart connection to the Buddha and Dhamma can develop over time, noting that the devotional aspects common in Asian Buddhism were historically integrated into Theravāda practice. Throughout, he encourages practitioners to find balance between analytical investigation and emotional nourishment on the path.*

I sometimes wonder if the practice is dulling rather than expanding my openness and appreciative joy. And one concern in this regard relates to creating an unskillful kind of detachment.

I think it's just really being clear as to what the different practices are so that you yourself can balance your practice. Vipassana has two functions. The first one is to purify the heart and the second one is to have insight.

The purification of the heart just happens naturally as you sit, and all the stuff that we've suppressed or repressed or we're working with in daily life, all that just comes up. The turbulence comes up first. It's as simple as that. The lower depths of the ocean are nice and calm, you see, but what we're on is this horrible boat that keeps bobbing up and down on the storms of life.

So it is a case of recognising that a lot of our practice is allowing the heart to manifest its problems and recognising that so long as it doesn't slip into thought patterns, especially purposefully, they are actually dying out. And in time, they do give up.

The other thing to recognize is that when you have, say, anger come up, it has an object. You're angry about something. But that's not the cause of it, remember. The cause is an internal decision to respond or react to a situation with anger. So the anger we have is really a sort of internal attitude. I often use the image of a balloon of anger. And we let little bits of it out whenever something irritates. So it's not actually attached to the object. We can make it attached to the object. When you get thumping music come through the wall, it's us that decides it's annoying. And the more we decide that, the more annoying the music is.

So when we sit in meditation, when any negative state attaches to something, the idea is to come off the attachment that it's holding on to and go into the actual feel of it and to stay with the burn, whatever it is, exhausting its energy. It's not going anywhere; it's just coming out through the body, through feeling. That part of it is the purification. And the really joyous thing about that is that although it is difficult, we don't have to do anything apart from attend. If you think of the word attend to mean more in the sense of how a nurse might attend to a patient—that's when you would bring a certain affection towards what it is that you are having to bear up with.

You're not trying to get rid of it with affection. You're not trying to change it with affection. You're just trying to regard it with affection. That's all. An affectionate regard.

What this does is it undermines the reaction of fear and irritation towards what it is that you're experiencing. You get something come up like anger and it comes up so much you're afraid of it, and you pull off it. But when you actually approach the lion...

So, the way he struggles with his tiger. It's funny that it should disappear once he landed, but we won't talk about that.

If you get that idea clear in your mind as to the mechanics, as to just the way the heart manifests its turbulence—it's we who put words on it. It's we who call it anger, fear, and all that, which then moves it into an area of conceptual understanding about our relationship to things. But actually, in the body, it's just feeling. And when it comes out as just feeling, it's healing. That's poetry.

So that's the first part. Let me be very clear about it. The other part is insight. And the insights are always to do with these three avenues of investigation. When we say investigation, you can actually say to yourself, "Well, in this sitting I'm going to try and be much more aware of how things come to an end—the impermanence of things." Or you can say, "This sitting I'm going to make a special effort just to see how desire arises and how it attaches." Or you can say, "Just in this period I'm going to find that observation post within myself where I feel that everything is happening outside me as an object." These are your three avenues of investigation which liberate the knowing, liberate the Buddha within.

Remember, it's the way we're looking which is the delusion. Delusion doesn't arise in the mind itself. The delusion isn't in the mind itself as thought patterns and emotions, and outside in ordinary life as our relationships—those are the manifestation of delusion. They are manifesting that we're looking at a situation in a wrong way. So that's your vipassana.

Now, you'll note that in vipassana, the seven factors of enlightenment do not include love, compassion, or sympathetic joy. And there's a purpose to that. We don't want mental states—because they're only mental states; they're not permanent; they arise and pass away—we don't want mental states to colour the way we're looking. We need this very clear, equanimous position in order to do the investigation, which would be, say, quite not strange to a scientist. I mean, that's what they're supposed to be doing. You're not supposed to be getting involved emotionally in anything that you're investigating.

So then we recognize: how do you get to the pure—how do you get to love, compassion, and sympathetic joy? Remember that the purification going on in the meditation is releasing energy. The energy is not lost. In Zen they would say that with wisdom, compassion arises naturally—you don't have to work at it. But generally speaking, in Buddhist practice, you do have these practices: the practice of metta, sympathetic joy, and compassion, which are extending or reusing that energy which has now been released from its hold in anger and fear and all that. You're using it to develop these better qualities.

And the understanding is that there's no limit to how much of this energy you can actually create. Either way, I mean—we call them the illimitables: love, compassion, joy—but it's illimitable too how much fear and anger and horror we can develop. So you've got to balance the practice with metta, that's the thing, and you've got to balance the practice with sympathetic joy.

It's taken me a long time to actually bring that into the routine of a vipassana meditation. It was only last year that I finally got round to including sympathetic joy late in the evening, so that we begin in the morning with the practice of compassion, where we bring to mind people who are sick and so on and so forth, and then in the evening we develop metta and then sympathetic joy. So there is this transformation going on.

In other words, the vipassana isn't everything. Vipassana is a specific technique to deal with specific questions. And again, that mental state of mindfulness that we are developing in vipassana—which is, shall we say then, coloured with love, compassion, with an attitude—is something we're supposed to take into daily life, so that there's a continuity of this mindful awareness.

So that's it. And how do we get through this unskillful kind of detachment? The unskillful kind of detachment is when equanimity falls into its near enemy—it's called its subtle enemy—of indifference.

I've told this tale a hundred times, but maybe one of you hasn't heard it, which gives me an excuse to say it all over again. Have you heard about my encounter with a monk and a mouse and a cat? Ah, right, good—there you go, I can tell my tale again, for fear of boring everybody else. So I went to visit this monk. I was in the monastery, so I had a chat with him. And there was a cat playing around with a mouse. So I said to him...

Did you stop that? Because the cat was fat—it wasn't skinny. Often you get animals not being kept very well, but this cat was a fat cat. And I said, did you stop? He said, no. He said, it's cat karma, mouse karma. So he saw the whole thing happening. He was sat there and he saw the cat catch the mouse and then kill it and then just play around with it—the cat wasn't eating it.

Then not so long after that, I was in another monastery. There were four or five of us sitting on a bench in the cool part of the afternoon, chatting. And a cat suddenly jumped out and jumped on this bird. One of the monks, as quick as lightning, got up and gave this cat one hell of a kick, then picked up the bird. Realising it was dead, he held it up and beautifully chanted: "All compounded things arise and pass away."

So of course his idea of what he should do when he sees something which is suffering was completely different from this other fellow, you see. For me that was such a stark contrast. It has always remained in my mind as a distinction between those people who get into this quietism—I think that's what it might be called in the West—a sort of rejection of the world, a non-involvement, and considering that to be equanimity.

But of course we have the Buddha himself as an example. He didn't just sit under a tree once. He didn't just sit there in the bliss of his liberation. He got up and walked—I think it's about three hundred miles from where he was, Bodh Gaya, all the way to Sarnath—seemingly looking out for his old companions. They must have told him where they were going, or he must have heard where they were going, or it was a regular thing that every year they turned up at Sarnath at this particular time of year, because the ascetics at that time would do their rounds.

That's a great example. He spent his time really cleaning out, cleaning himself up, and then out he went. And it's difficult—if you look at the history of spiritual leaders, it's always the same, really. Myself and Mike were doing this St. Francis thing. St. Francis, you see, one of his great moments of metanoia—his conversion—was when he hugged a leper, which in those days was horrific. You just didn't do that; you kept them well away, you see. But somehow it reminds you of the story of Milarepa. What was it? Can somebody remind me? Milarepa—he had a mangy dog or something and it turned into a bodhisattva. Do you remember that story?

There you see. It's always this: you can't separate the world we're actually living in from the meditation itself, the inner world. You can't separate the inner from the outer world. You can't do that. Or if you do, then you end up in the error of creating this little island where there's just you being happy, and everybody else—well, it's their problem, it's their karma.

So I don't know whether anybody wants to make a comment on that, or add to it. Is the questioner happy with the answer? Oh, he's impressed.

A participant mentioned they were going to buy a friend a book called *A Thousand and One Ideas That Will Change Your Life*, and they read a few entries about things they knew something about, just to test it. The one on Buddhism was interesting, and they asked what I thought about it.

Burn the book! Burn the book! It really is awful. Well, I'm now just reading a book by a Burmese author—it's the Burmese really, through the Abhidhamma, who've tended to describe Nibbana as a sort of oblivion. The early Christian missionaries didn't make

much headway because they just saw it as annihilation, as a very subtle form of annihilation. I don't know how you can make annihilation subtle—you're either here or you're not.

No, it's quite clear in the scriptures that there are two states. There's the one in which the Buddha nature, for want of a better word, is within itself. And that is described as boundaryless and full of light. It's a complete awakeness, but it is a totally enclosed thing—like, for instance, if you were inside a light bulb without the glass. That's the sort of thing.

But when that comes into the phenomenal world, which is through the psychophysical organism, it mirrors back to itself, through that organism, its view or its way of being with life. And therefore, the Buddha says—for instance, one person asks him, and this is a regular quote, "This training is very hard." He says, "Yes, it's very hard, but then you reach Nibbana." So the person says, "Nibbana, so what?" He says, "Well, when you get there, you are contented and with it happy." And that's the direct translation: *tutti suco aharati*—contented. That's one of the big signs of somebody. Contentment just means this is the way it is. Whether it's painful or unpainful, one is at peace with it, one is at one with it, you might say.

So yes, you must give them that book, but write something in there that says, "This is a lie."

As to the greater understanding of what happens to somebody who's fully liberated when they are reborn, Theravada tends to just say, well, it's Nibbana. But the Mahayana point out that that nature can re-manifest in the world in a beautiful form. One thing that the book I'm reading actually points to is that there's no overall clear definition of Nibbana which would bring all the different sects together. They've all got their own little nuance on what Nibbana is.

But in Theravada, it's described both in a negative form. For instance, it wouldn't be right, or it would be difficult, to say that Nibbana is happiness. Because as soon as you say happiness, you have an idea of what happiness is. And it's beyond ideation. It's not an emotion—there are no emotions in Nibbana. It's not a thought—there's no thinking. It's not a feeling—there's no sensation. So as soon as you say happiness, you're stuck.

So the Buddha prefers the negative. It's *adukkha*—there's no suffering. Which sounds really dry. And when he talks about the actual experience in itself, then he talks about this consciousness which is boundaryless. Boundaries are only created by phenomena.

Without boundary, not touched by any of the senses. So there's nothing phenomenal at all in there. There's nothing that arises and passes away. There's nothing that has any substance in our sense of the word. And in all directions, full of light.

Someone asked, "Is that what people refer to as emptiness?"

Yes. Well, emptiness—in our scriptures, there are two words: *anatta* and *sunyata*. And in our scriptures, the Buddha remains very, very centered on the individual, on you as a person who's suffering and how to get out of suffering. So there's no philosophy as such.

There's no extension of that into any great philosophical concept, you might say. And the anatta draws you into yourself to ask: what is in me that is unchanging? What is it in me that is not suffering? And is there something in me which I don't experience as a self, as something which is objective? If I look at my hand, my hand becomes an object. It becomes *my* hand.

The word sunyata simply means that it's empty of all phenomena. Now, later on in Buddhism, as it got more philosophical, this concept was extended to all things. Everything is sunyata, everything is empty. Empty of substance—it arises and passes away, it has no existence as such. Although again, some schools say it exists at least for a moment. But I don't think that would be correct in our scriptures. It would be this constant swirl of energy which never substantiates, never holds. It's only the mind with its cognitive faculties that can actually hold an image long enough for us to see it as something which has some sort of substance to it.

Our understanding of the brain and of the mind is so superficial. It's beginning, exactly. So that's the level at which we're at at the moment. I'm sure there's more to it.

You remember how Dr. Atadama was so keen on these little particles? Kalapas, yes. That's right. In Abhidhamma, there are seventeen mental moments in one physical moment. So when, for instance, a photon hits the back of the eye, for that to actually go to the first position of a percept, a single percept of that one photon takes seventeen thought moments. And these thought moments build up and build up on each other until finally you see a flower. So these little moments are called kalapas. They're these infinitesimal time slots.

And what I'm insistent on saying these days is this: when you're very clearly in the position of the observer, of the feel of the experiencer, when you're actually there and that position is very clear to you—that everything you're experiencing is out there, outside the observer—when you come out of that position, just ask yourself: what was inside the observer? Because the observer, the feeling of self there, is a mirror image com-

ing back into the knowing. We're very close to it. That's why the Buddha says, you know, those who are aware are in the presence of nibbana. He's actually pointing in the right way. Looking back at it.

The example I usually use is of a mirror.

So when you look in the mirror, it's your face you're looking at. But remember, it's the other way around. It's not actually how people see us. In a way, when we get that feeling of the observer within ourselves, there is a feeling of somebody watching, somebody feeling. Now that somebody is the face looking back at us. But it isn't what's looking.

What I'm saying is, just observe. Be in that position. Afterwards, reflect on what were the inner constituents of the knower. I think that is the biggest conundrum, isn't it? The whole not-self.

I have written an essay which I will post on my e-reminder, which I hope makes things just a little bit clearer. All the Buddha's saying is, if there is something in us which has the quality of what we would recognize as the spirit, it doesn't change. It is alive. It is awake. What is it?

So all he says is, observe your experience at a physical level, at an emotional level, at a mental level, and ask yourself, is that it? And invariably you come up with the answer, no, it's not it. And then you begin to realise that there must be something that knows, that can see something changing, which can't be changing in itself at certain rates. So it's a case of stepping back, not knowing where you're heading for. And you're heading for a cliff. And when you drop off, that's it.

So you don't know what it is you're looking for, you're simply investigating what it is you're not. That's the usual thing, *neti, neti*, not this, not this. Does that make a bit more sense?

If you start looking at the observer, then you create another observer looking at the observer. It's a trick of the mind. You can't do that, you see. It's just being in the position of the observer that one begins to realise that, for instance, there's pain in my knee and there's somebody that knows it. Right? Okay. That's enough.

Now, you can actually go for the feeling of the observer. That won't create another observer. You have to go into the feel of the observer.

Someone asks: In the past years, I've felt that an increased awareness of sensations of fear and sadness and disgust has somehow reduced my engagement with life, reducing my willingness to undertake challenge. Not where I expected the path to take me.

Well, it depends what the original challenge was, you see. Often when we suffer from fear, we'll create challenges, you might say, in order to prove that we're above fear. It leads us to a sort of foolhardiness. Do you know what I mean? We create false challenges, really motivated from a wrong attitude.

When all those attitudes begin to calm, then our challenges are more realistic. And if no challenges come to us, what are we complaining about?

You know, sometimes—for instance, many people who become involved with the crisis unfolding around climate change—on the surface of things, they're putting out compassion for the world and spreading that gospel. Compassion for the world. This is the world we owe to our children. All that sort of thing.

But underneath it, they themselves might be suffering from tremendous fear that they will be caught up in the catastrophe. Yet they're not recognising that. It just stays there, unexamined. And what it does is fuel their activity. It comes out in this peculiar way of overplaying your cards. One manifestation is frustration and anger.

"Yes, there are things in my own practice where concern for the self turns into such preoccupation that it becomes a hindrance in itself. It's not self-mettā—it just gets muddled. And it's all fear."

Exactly. I mean, if you talk to a jihadist or somebody like that, they would tell you that their motivations are perfectly wholesome. They would quote scripture and justify their anger. And then they justify their incredible cruelty to other human beings. Some of the reports are absolutely horrific. And it all comes from this underlying anger which is based on fear.

Karen Armstrong—she's very good, wrote *A History of God*—she did a study of fundamentalists in America. What motivates them is fear. They genuinely fear that modern society is undermining them.

Recently I noticed that Google now gives seasonal greetings—a "seasonal festive greeting"—it doesn't call it Christmas anymore. So I clicked on that, and there was an article saying they'd done a survey in America where society is split almost in half between those who don't believe at all and those across all shades of belief. But the underlying trend is that among young people, from about sixteen to thirty, non-belief

moves up to about sixty or seventy percent. So if you're a fundamentalist and you're seeing all these young people not coming to church, that fear turns, doesn't it? You attack the enemy.

I don't know where we're going with this.

I think if we look back at our lives and notice that normally we would really go for a particular challenge, but now we're not, that might actually be progress. A person would have to reflect upon it, to see the situation as clearly as they could, and ask oneself: what does this situation demand of me? There's more wisdom in that approach—that you're not being driven by unconscious motives, unconscious motivation. We know all about that from Freud. He had quite an insight into these things. *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life.*

I suppose a tell-tale point might be when something is asked of us which is testing, as you might say, and we find ourselves able to rise to the challenge. That might be a sign of progress. Whatever it might be—it could be something out there in the world, it could be personal illness. I just don't know.

Any comments?

As the drives fueled by attachment dissolve, as the things that used to drive and motivate us fall away, where does action come from? How does one choose to do anything at all?

There are three types of kamma, which remember in Buddhist terminology simply means action. So you have wholesome, unwholesome, and then what they call functional kamma.

Normally speaking, so long as we have a self, there's always somebody doing something which is unwholesome or wholesome. And so long as we have a self, what we're trying to do is move over to the wholesome side. Remember that the Buddha also has a psychology, an inbuilt understanding of our psychology, which is not so much to do with nibbāna as such but to actually make us happy within ourselves by working with these emotional states and developing the opposites. We're actually supposed to be getting happier in ourselves through the practice. You can't tell it on a direct line—it goes up and down, up and down—but generally over a period of five or ten years, one might look back and think, "Well, I am generally more happy."

Now, you've got to be careful here. It might not be happy in an emotional sense, but more in a meaningful sense. Your life is more directed. It's a subtle thing.

So there is that, you see. As long as we have a self, we have to act. Just as soon as you get up in the morning, you're acting. There's always an intention in everything you do. We're trying to develop our wholesomeness and let go of our unwholesomeness.

Now when you're fully liberated and there's no self, the Buddha still gets up and acts. He still gets up, he feels hungry, he puts his robe on, he picks up his bowl, and he goes off for alms. Or he teaches. He's always acting. In fact, occasionally he would go off by himself—he says for his own delight and as an example to others. But he seems to have led a very active life. He was on call, on tap, always walking everywhere. We know where he spent his rainy seasons—they tended to be between the two main kingdoms of Magadha and Kosala.

So he was acting, but somehow these actions weren't wholesome or unwholesome. All that's saying is that there's no self; it's not self-serving. Even when we do something wholesome, there's a bit of self-service. But when there's no sense of serving this imaginary self, and you are, as it were, in direct, spontaneous communication with the people and nature and the world around you, you see yourself as simply part of the flow of energies moving from one person to another. All you're doing through your understanding is helping the flow of goodness along.

There's nothing there which attaches and says, "Oh, this is me, or this is not. I am teaching, I am this and that." There's just that interconnection, a contingency which happens spontaneously to somebody who's liberated. For us, what we do is create little barriers, that's all, and stop the flow of energy. We draw it back into ourselves, for "me."

The whole thing about taking on the form of a human being is that it becomes a vehicle of expression—whether negative or positive, or in this sense neither negative nor positive. The process of liberation doesn't stop you from acting; it just makes the acts more and more in direct communication with the way things really are, not being perverted by self-regard.

Having said that, it's not as though the Buddha didn't take care of his body. Brushing your teeth doesn't mean you're serving the self. No, you're taking care of your teeth. And considering they're the last lot we're going to have.

So it is.

I was also thinking about how, conventionally in our day-to-day lives, we tend to think about meaning in terms of "I'm dedicating myself to X." But if that sense of meaning is dissolving... I think Adyashanti says that meaning is just another thing that the ego looks for, which is a very shocking statement in a way.

It depends. It's all to do with who the meaning is for. If it makes me feel bigger and better, makes me feel stronger and more powerful, then it's obviously a meaning which is corrupting me. But if the meaning of my life is for the benefit of others, flowing outwards, then I'm at service. To give oneself to service, you must let go of yourself because you're at the demands of other people. It's not that you forget your own needs, but you're out there for other people. That's the whole point of seeing service as a way of completely getting rid of the self.

In Zen understanding, the best place to be is in the kitchen as a cook, because there you have to feed all these different monastics and be aware of their little peculiar diets and whatnot, making sure the food is right. And it's always for them, for them, for them. You eat, but you're actually doing it for them. There's that sense of service, and that completely undermines the self—which is always thinking about itself.

If somebody wants an interview when I'm happily engaged in this book, and I think "oh bloody hell," I've lost my sense of service. My sense of service should be spontaneous—as soon as somebody asks, I'm out, because that's what I've said I'm doing. I'm teaching now. That doesn't mean to say that when I go on a personal retreat I have to respond, because then I'm looking after myself. But as soon as I feel I've put myself out into the arena as a Dharma teacher, then if any negativity comes up when I'm being asked to respond, that shows my sense of service is not yet purified.

Now, the peculiar thing is that the more you give yourself to others—not forgetting one's needs as it were—the more the sense of self disappears. And the more the sense of meaningfulness grows. That's your paradox. Our sense of meaningfulness, the measure of our meaningfulness, is the measure of our commitment to something greater than ourselves.

It's interesting that the Buddha would say things like, "Who sees the Dharma sees me; who sees me sees the Dharma." He had this tremendous respect for the Dharma, for the way things are, and he serviced it completely—so that he could actually make that connection. Who sees me sees the Dharma in action. And who sees the Dharma also sees me. In other words, Buddha nature. How it ought to be.

So I don't know, Adyashanti might have been thinking of it in a more egotistic sense, or more storytelling-like.

A student shares: "What you just said about authorship maybe helped me, because I had a very hard time when my book was published. Up to that point it was all about service, and then suddenly it became about me, my name. And it was devastating because some of the interviews were about me and my skills, and it was just awful."

You've got to be careful, because remember there are three conceits. "I am better than"—which is of course the usual one we think of. But "I'm worse than"—that's a conceit too.

It's an inverted conceit, isn't it? An inverted pride. And the subtle one is "I am the same as" – because we group with people who are the same as us, and other groups are perceived as either better or worse than us.

What I mean is, in my work it was all about being a vehicle, being a servant to the subject. And then suddenly the world puts the spotlight on you, and you think, "No, why are you looking at me? Look at *it*." So that was a big disappointment.

Well, we live in a society of celebrities. In the old days, you never put your name on work, did you?

A question came up: In the introductory talk, I used the words "abiding in the present moment." Someone pointed out that this doesn't have the emotional punch of the Christian hymn "Abide With Me." How will Theravāda ever make up the levels of emotional support that Christianity seems to offer?

That reminds me of someone who would describe herself as a Buddhist. She was a good meditator and went to Amaravati regularly. But it was just too dry for her. She had to go along to a Christian church to get a bit of emotional sustenance.

I think there's a deficit in the way Buddhism comes to the West and in the way it's taught. When you go to the East, you see there's no deficit on the emotional side. It has to do with why we come to the practice. We come really to sort out our problems, to understand the world, and unwittingly we're not enriching it with religious emotions.

That was one of the purposes behind the carol service – to try and access these emotional supports. And as you point out, Christianity is excellent at doing that. The music is so moving.

When my father died, I was in Sri Lanka at the time. On hearing the news, I cried a little bit. But by the time I got back to my kuṭi, all that had passed, because I had a very good relationship with him, and he lived a good life. I really was quite at peace, you know. He died very quickly; there was no lingering. So I was fairly okay with it all. Then I was with my mother at the church ceremony, and there was this hymn – I can't quite bring it to mind, something about the love of Jesus – but as soon as it started, the tears were flowing down my face. It really opened everything up, just the music.

So music, as you know, has this tremendous power to elevate. And there's not much of it in Theravāda Buddhism. You're just chanting.

Now, an interesting aside: there was an Orthodox monk in London, years and years ago, who led a choir. He said it was so difficult to stop the choir singing emotionally. And if you listen to plainchant, it's not emotional in that sense – it comes out of silence, it returns to silence. In my humble opinion, ever since plainchant, there's been nothing but corruption.

So if you consider what spiritual emotions actually are, they're actually available in Theravāda if you want to do the exercises.

The first one is a sense of gratitude. By gratitude I mean just going through the Buddha's life, what he went through, and what we've received from it. Then every time you look at a Buddha statue, you feel this enormous gratitude. That comes easily to Easterners.

There's also a sense of awe – when you realise what he achieved, when you realise the ineffability of the Dhamma.

The whole thing—why we're here—is never really explained. How is it that we're here in the first place? Where does this Buddha nature arise from? There's a whole range of metaphysics which is just completely dark, and the Buddha never went into it because, from his point of view, it would just be inference. All we can know is what's within this bubble of awareness that we have.

And then there's praise. That's where you get the joy, the wonderful joy. If anybody goes to one of the main shrines in Sri Lanka—or anywhere really, but I'm thinking of a particular one in Sri Lanka—and you go along on a puja day, which is the full moon day of the month, that's the main one. You can slice the emotions like butter. You can see people are completely in that seventh heaven of emotional bliss.

In a sense, that's something perhaps instilled in you as a child. As you move into adulthood and you haven't got that—which a lot of young people now don't have. I mean, they've got all the music stuff, but they don't have these subtle religious emotions.

In my own case, I didn't really get into the emotional side of Buddhism until quite late. I would have been already fifteen years or so practicing. Then slowly I began to see that I hadn't developed a heart relationship to the religion I had chosen. As that came

along, I realized that's what I needed to do. That's why I've got all these statues and Kuan Yin and a stupa. A stupa is really a tombstone—that's what it is. It's representative of the Buddha's life.

I try to share that, but not with too much avail, I'm afraid, because most people who come to meditation really just want to sort themselves out. I think that emotional value, that feeling of a heart connection with a religion we're in, grows in time.

Having said that, you know, being brought up a Catholic, when I walk into a Catholic church, I'm in a certain event. I'm just back there—it's just beautiful, the feeling.

Student: I went to what I think was a Tibetan Buddhist service with a friend of mine in Seattle. They were doing singing, using translated Tibetan texts but set to very westernized melodies. That struck me as so artificial. For me, it was not a pleasing solution. No sense of profundity.

Yes, it didn't have the profundity of the chant. Or even the profundity of the Western traditional music.

It's very difficult, isn't it? I think Amaravati have done a decent job. If you listen to their chant, they still chant in Pali and in English, and it's still a chant. I think they do it nicely. People ask me why I don't do it here, but that takes—I would need to know a musician, and I need to... I mean, I'm happy with the Pali.

Student: Well, it's lovely. I thought the chant this morning—I really enjoyed it.

That's right. It just has a quality to it. It's a Burmese-type chant.

Student: For about ten days after I left the retreat back in the summer, every night it kept ringing in my ears. It turned into a lullaby, and it was incredibly soothing and comforting. So I do think that's part of the process at some point. There has to be—I don't know about an emotional punch—but some heart connection. Otherwise it becomes very dry.

The other way people do it is through the practice of metta, of course. That's another way.

Student: There's a reason it's making me think. I can't remember who she is—a contemporary Christian mystic.

I just read a quote from her sometime this year, where she was saying that yes, her own path is difficult, but she has a hard time imagining the faith required to have faith in the present moment, if you will, like the Buddhists do, rather than faith in the judgment of Christ.

I think that's in part why religious Buddhism, as you're saying, in Southeast Asia, still does focus very much on the person of the Buddha. That is the human connection—definitely. It is a very personal connection, and we're not very good in the West when it comes to complete devotion.

I'm remembering the Herzog documentary about the pilgrimage to the biggest Dalai Lama gathering—the Kalachakra, with hundreds of thousands of people. Some people, it took them three and a half years to make the journey, not walking but doing full prostrations the entire way, bowing and rising, bowing and rising. They're all physically damaged now. They have measured the earth with their bodies. That's a kind of devotion and commitment you rarely see in the West.

Of course, that's also connected to karma—either creating good karma to counterbalance bad karma, or generating good karma in itself. But you're right, it is driven by this incredible devotion. It's lovely when you see it.

I suppose the unfortunate thing with the devotional approach is that it moves rather easily into superstition. That's the problem with it. There has to be a balance. The Buddha himself didn't like being the object of adoration. Right there on his deathbed, while he was dying, there was a young monk who looked at him with those glistening eyes—"Bhagawan, Bhagawan"—and he sends him off into the forest. "I don't want that, thank you very much." He wasn't personally into that, and of course he didn't leave himself; he left the Dharma. He was very clear about that.

As you know, for a very long time he wasn't represented physically—it was always symbolic. The Greeks undermined all that, and I think later on too, because of the very devotional aspect of Hinduism. Buddhism and Hinduism fenced with each other for fifteen hundred years in India. Then there was this apparition of further Buddhas—all the Buddhas of the Mahayana, which were really aspects of the Buddha turned into separate Buddhas: the Buddha of compassion, the Buddha of healing, things like that. I think that was all part of trying to reach the ordinary person, not just the intellectual.

That was one of the criticisms of early Buddhism which began the split, as early as three hundred years after the Buddha's death—that it had become far too focused on the Arahant ideal, that you were just in it for yourself, expecting people to support you while you lived in your monastery like at Nalanda with thousands of monks, com-

pletely disconnected from ordinary people. When they realized they were losing people to a more emotional, devotional approach, they started coming up with these innovations.

Interestingly enough, in the history of Sri Lanka, when there was an attempt by a certain person to convert the island to the Mahayana, he wrote a particular discourse called the Lankavatara Sutta—"Going to Sri Lanka." The monks from Anuradhapura, from the two big monasteries there which had created two different lineages, left the capital and went south. They told the king's close advisor, "Look, if you don't watch it, you're going to lose everything to the Mahayana." There were Mahayana monks and Mahayana temples there; the Mahayana sculptures remain to this day. These Theravadins, you see, they prevailed. So the king decided on Theravada and kicked all the Mahayana monks out of the monasteries. But the practices of Mahayana—this devotion to the Buddha—

Offering flowers and all that sort of devotional practice was absorbed into Theravada. That's where scholars think all the devotional practices of Theravada came from. In my understanding, it's quite late—maybe three or four or five centuries on. There's an article written about this in the Middle Way journal if you're interested. I think it was the last issue we received. It surprised me actually. So the Mahayana still had an effect on Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka. And I think throughout Burma and Thailand and all those countries as well, because you find lots of devotional practices there.

Just as a final thing, I was in Sri Lanka and I came across a group of women who were living as a community dressed in white—in other words, observing the eight precepts. They bunched their hair up into a bun, all of them, and they had a teacher guiding them.

In the shrine room, they had the Buddha statue, but every day they also had a chair. Every day they offered slippers to the chair, to the Buddha, and water, and a pot of tea, and all that. They sort of set him up for the day. Incredibly sweet. I'd never seen that before. They were very, very committed. My goodness. Very good.

CHAPTER 87

Basics for Meditation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma weaves together the Buddha's life story with practical meditation instruction for both newcomers and experienced practitioners. He explores the historical context of the Buddha's spiritual quest, from his privileged upbringing through his experiments with blissful absorptions and severe asceticism, to his breakthrough under the Bodhi tree when he turned investigation inward upon suffering itself.*
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> *The talk elucidates the Buddha's distinctive teaching of Right Awareness (sammā sati) - that childlike, non-conceptual attention free from thinking and comparison. Bhante explains how the Mahasi method uses noting practice and slow, mindful movement to cultivate this original mind, helping practitioners return to direct sensory experience beyond conceptual overlay.*
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> *Practical guidance covers working skillfully with the five hindrances - desire, aversion, restlessness, drowsiness, and doubt - emphasizing the importance of acknowledging mental states without engaging their storylines. The discussion introduces the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana): impermanence (anicca), suffering/unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā), showing how investigation of these qualities leads to liberation from the delusion of a substantial, permanent self.*
>
> *The teaching concludes with specific instruction in the Mahasi technique's two key elements: noting practice to reduce thinking to simple acknowledgment, and slow, deliberate movement to develop penetrating awareness of moment-to-moment experience.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm mindful of the fact that one or two people here know very little about Buddhism, and some who know quite a lot, so I'll try to weave a story that encompasses both, and also talk about the Mahāsi and the technique that we're using for *vipassanā*.

When we practice meditation, I think we have to be clear about three things. First of all, what does the Buddha mean by right awareness? And then, how do we maintain that awareness against all the hindrances, how the mind wanders off all the time? And what is it we're investigating? What is the process of liberation? What do we mean by that? What does the Buddha mean by delusion?

So it's always good to start the story with the Buddha himself. He lived in what you might call an upper middle class—well, I suppose almost nobility. His father was a head man of a group of people, a tribe called the Sakyas, and they were under the local king of Kosala. So all the stories about him being a very rich prince and all that is all later stuff. But he was brought up as a Kshatriya, which is the warrior caste, so he would have spent a lot of time learning how to use swords and spears and also governance.

But it's interesting to remember that he would have been illiterate. Writing as such was coming in, but it was coming in much like it happened in Europe, I believe, in accounts—business people keeping their accounts. But that didn't mean, of course, that the language wasn't highly developed. It was passed on through memory. So even today in Hinduism, the Rig Veda would be learnt off by heart by the Brahmins. And it's interesting how they do it. They first of all teach the child how to pronounce the syllables. Even before they know what it means, they pronounce the syllables. And then when they've got it off pat, then they tell them what it means. And only after they know what it means can they begin to philosophise. It's completely the opposite to what we do. We expect people to be philosophers and creative before they've got the basics. So that's the sort of society he lived in.

And of course there were pleasures. There were lots of pleasures. And he would have had lots of free time as opposed to the labourers and the lower caste. The caste system wasn't so rigid in his day. It was becoming so, but not so rigid. And it was to the east of him, out in present-day Calcutta—that area, present day Bihar—that the Brahmins were getting ascendancy. Before that the ruling caste, the warrior caste would have been considered higher than the Brahmins. And there would seem to be some disaffection with society going on, much like the hippies of the 70s. And there were lots of men—mainly men but often their wives and occasionally women—who would leave the homely life, who would leave household life, and live very basic lives out in the forests, and come in for alms round.

So all that was established before the Buddha himself set out. There was an established custom of how to live the ascetic life. And it's thought to go back right back to the Mahinda Dharo civilisation in the Indus Valley which somehow disappeared and we can't read any of their stuff. But when the Aryans came down from the north and conquered all that area, it seems as though some of their yogic practices passed into their culture. So it has a very long history, this idea of ascetic practice and building up the powers that the mind has as opposed to the body.

Now at some point he gets fed up with the pleasures and joys of life. They become insipid, vapid. And because of that emptiness, that's one of the underlying reasons for him leaving his household life. But at a deeper level, it was what we would call an existential crisis. He came to realise that there was in fact sickness, ageing and death and that's where he was moving towards. And it's something I think that comes to all of us at the end of youth at some point. That's part of growing up. And normally speaking people start taking life a bit more seriously in their mid-twenties. Career, marriage, partnership, all that takes on a more serious quality as they move towards a real involvement in social life, in the life of society. So at that time these things are on his mind and it comes to a crisis point.

So he gets permission from his family, his wife, to shoot off and spend some time as an ascetic. I can only presume—this is just a personal presumption—that it was a bit like myself when I left, when I joined the Order. I said to my mother, who wept bitterly, can't understand why, that I would just go for three years. It was just trying it out. I just needed a bit of space, a bit of time. And then, of course, you get habituated, I suppose. So anyway, he left with this deep psychological questioning about life.

And it was something that was in the air. In that time, one thing that they were trying to escape was rebirth. So it was taken for granted. And not everybody—there were materialists—but it was taken for granted that you basically got reborn. And you could be reborn in any realm. You could be reborn as an animal. And the idea of being reborn wasn't all that happy an idea, especially back onto the earth, because it just meant going through the same old routine: work, sickness, aging and death. So there was an existential fear that ran through the society at that time, which fueled this idea of trying to seek something which was beyond that.

And so when the Buddha left, he left already into a set system, a set way of being an ascetic, set customs—can't call them rules, more like customs. There were regular teachers, very well-known teachers of the time. It was one of the pastimes of the age to turn up at the park, these lovely parks that they had—bamboo park and so on—especially on a full moon. When in the east, for those of you who have been, as you know, you can actually see colour, it's that bright. And on the full moon they would all go to these parks and listen to the great debates and arguments of these ascetics between each other, and that was one of their entertainments. That was before videos.

So he left the home life to join that life and the first thing he tries is teachers who teach him how to attain blissful states. All religions have these blissful states. They're attained through prayer, through mantra. And what we discover in that technique, such as the *mettā* we did, we can build up a very tremendous ecstasy within ourselves. The

heart—although I was saying to you that when we practice *mettā*, we don't worry about the emotions. It may be not feeling so good. It may be a bit depressed and whatnot. But eventually, the heart does begin to resonate with the will. And as you keep making these very gentle... the heart resonates more and more and they become quite internal ecstasies.

Now, one of the benefits of being able to develop that is that you're happy. You're happy while you're in the absorption and when you come out of it, it stays with you. It's not as though that mood suddenly disappears. And when you become an adept at such a thing, you can move in and out of that at will. And so you can understand how if you're going to find a way of being blissed out all the time, what do you worry about sex, drugs and rock and roll for? Or food or anything like that? You're quite happy under a tree with your loin cloth and you nip around for a bit of food every day and you don't mind what you eat. It's immaterial because all you want to do is just sustain the body so you can get back under your tree.

So that blissful practice was already well developed, and he brought it into his teaching, and we call them the *jhānic* states, the absorptions. And one of those practices is the *mettā* we were doing this morning. But the problem is that these things do die out, and that underlying them, because they don't deal with problems, they don't deal with psychological problems, they definitely don't deal with the fears and the aversion of sickness, aging, and death. And so whenever these things passed away, whenever the old thoughts returned, he realized that actually that wasn't an escape from suffering. It was like icing over dung, if I'll excuse the expression.

So with that, he left his teachers, who taught him these absorptions. And then he tried—this is the normal chronology that you get taught, but it's not absolutely clear which came first—but anyway, he then tried what's known as the ascetic practices. The main one was starvation, really drawing the body down to its limit.

So there were two major philosophies which you can see even these days. The first was a materialist philosophy, which basically meant that you die and that's it. That's the end of it. You may as well enjoy life as much as you can. And that was the idea of just enjoying the ordinary pleasures of life, but also these absorptions. At least you enjoyed life. Some thought that you had these absorptions, and then you went from rebirth to rebirth, right into higher and higher and more subtle levels of peacefulness and joy, and that was it. Then you disappeared. So there were all sorts of theories about how our life progressed.

And on the other side, as opposed to that annihilationist idea, there were those of course who believed in an eternal soul and the soul was trapped in the body. It was trapped by its *kamma*. *Kamma* had become physical. It was your body and it was your attraction to the senses that kept you down at this level. And therefore if one could let go of this through ascetic practices, then the soul would be released from the body, or the desire to be reborn in this realm, and it would rise into eternal bliss. So the Jains were very much into that philosophy. And it's understood that the Buddha actually worked with them. He was his elder contemporary, the Jain leader, the Nigantha.

And so the idea was, of course, the main thing was to not give any pleasure to the sense bases. And he seems to have practiced this quite severely. He talks about holding his spine through his stomach. If you have a go at that, you'll see how thin he was. And at some point, he wakes up and he realizes, actually, this is getting him nowhere either. And in fact, all it is, is more suffering.

So he leaves his companions and they're quite disgusted with him because they think he's gone soft or he's lost his courage. Remember that the Jain saints, the ones that they really praise, are the ones who finally stop eating. I mean, that's the way they would express their saintliness, just to finally stop eating and die, let go.

So we have this rather dejected young man by the roadside, and somebody comes along—we actually know her name, Sujata, means happy birth—with some offerings for the local god. Although it's a sweet rice thing, but I much prefer rice pudding. And when she sees this poor wretch... in the scriptures, of course, they talk about her being bowled over by this god-like figure by the roadside. But I mean, if he's almost starving himself to death, it can hardly look like that. Anyway, he eats. He has this rice pudding, which of course is a break away from all that ascetic practice. And it revivifies him.

And something happens at that point, which then brings about a turnaround in his practice. And it's because of this that we say he is self-enlightened. Up until now, there's no direction. He remembers his father doing a ploughing ceremony. And he's a child. And he remembers the state that he was in when he's watching his father doing this ploughing ceremony. It's to open the sowing season. And he recognizes in that state the same attentiveness, the same concentration that he's been able to gain through his practice of the absorptions, the concentration practice.

But there is within that also a question mark. So there's the child observing his father, completely absorbed in what's happening, and with the wonder, like, what is this all about? What's going to happen in his mind? And it's because of that little memory that

he turns the whole process of meditation around upon itself. So instead of trying to find an escape from suffering, trying to find a place where there's no suffering, he turns around upon suffering to ask how suffering is caused in the first place.

And it's with that inspiration that he sits under the Bodhi tree, which is the fig tree. It's a great big tree. It's lovely. On a hot day, you definitely want to sit under it. And it's there that he sits and makes this what we call the great determination. So there's the great renunciation when he leaves home—everything's greater. And there's the great determination when he sits under the tree. And he determines because he sees no other way of dealing with this existential crisis within himself, that he will sit and either he'll crack this problem or he'll die.

Now, I always say, lucky for him and lucky for us, it only took six hours, according to the legends around him. And he makes this break, he makes this real breakthrough, and with it there comes this release from what he termed delusion.

So let's go back a bit and just talk about this right awareness. So it's the image of a child. I usually have a picture hanging up, but I've not had time yet to put it up. If you bring the image of a child, usually even up to the age of 10 sometimes, 10, 11, and they become absorbed in something, you notice what their face is like. Their eyes are fixated. If they see a bug or something they've never seen before, they just become completely absorbed. They lose a sense of all their surroundings. You can shout at them, but they're completely absorbed. And their mouth drops. They look gormless. So their parents usually tell them to close their mouths or a fly will go in or something. Give them a clip on the back of their head to tell them to wake up. And in so doing, of course, ruin that moment, its potential for full liberation.

So just think of that face. So the fixation of the eyes, the complete absorption, the wonder, the wonder, and the jaw dropping. When the jaw drops—and this is why we say lips together, teeth apart, the jaw's relaxed—this is connected to your thinking. So the thinking stops. The thinking stops and there's just the watching, just the observing. And then when, of course, the child has absorbed what it is they're looking at, the question arises, what is it? And, of course, they're told that's a beetle or something.

And as soon as the beetle is known, the word beetle, it attaches itself to an image in the mind that we call a perception. Every time that child from now on sees a beetle, it just says there's a beetle. It never really looks again. And that's where we are. We never get down to the direct experience of things because we presume the concept we have of it is a direct perception. So even when you look across at the meadows here and you see a tree, you'll know it's a tree. We see it's a tree, but we don't actually look at the tree in that same original way, the original mind, the beginner's mind of a child.

The whole process of *vipassanā* is to get back to that original mind, to get back to that non-conceptual way, non-thinking way, non-emergetic way of looking, feeling and experiencing things. And of course very difficult for us because ever since we were children we've been taught the opposite. The more literate, the more visual, the more we depend upon images, TV, all that, the less actually we're in contact with the sense bases as the sense base itself directly experiences something.

So, for instance, if you go to a restaurant and you decide you can have a pizza or something, and you have a pizza, you already have an idea of a pizza. So the pizza turns up and it's not so good, it's a very good pizza. It's immediately compared with all the past pizzas. But this pizza itself is completely original in itself. And there's an inability to accept it as it is. It's always in a state of comparison, which either makes us happy or unhappy.

So you can see how the mind with its concepts and perceptions and history distorts our present experience. Now it's not as though we want to get rid of it. We do need to know when we see something that it is a car, that this is a pizza. It's a case of knowing that there's another way of experiencing things, and that's this direct contact with our sense bases.

So that's what he means by right awareness. Now when we say sense bases, don't forget there's the inner sense base. The mind in Buddhism is also a sense base, and that's when we experience images, it's when we experience our emotions, the inner feelings of the body. All those are internal sense bases, and the mind itself with its perceptions just to be able to look at an image, not get involved in it, but just to observe it. So that's also perceiving the mind as it's working.

So this right awareness is quite specific in trying to get us back to this original mind. So if you're robbing a bank, for instance, you're fully aware and alert, but it's difficult to see you becoming fully liberated. So it's a very specific thing that the Buddha is talking about, this right awareness.

And of course we use the body to get back to that mind. So the breath, the sensation caused by the breath. Even though we use noting words, and we'll come to this a bit later, the noting is trying to reduce thought to a simple concrete word. But our attention isn't on the word, it's not on what we're saying, as I'm doing now. I'm concentrating on what I'm saying. The attention is on what the feeling is, the sensations which are arising in the body. I'm trying to abstract, I'm trying to pull this intuitive intelligence out of its confusion with thought and images.

Now then we come across all these things that mess us about, and I'll be talking about that a bit more in depth tomorrow. But you can split them quite quickly into two different. One of them excites us and one of them sends us asleep. So all those that excite us, things that we want, that bring up a certain sense of joy in the heart, holidays and all the rest of it. There's all the aversions and the little petty irritations and hatreds and plannings of murder and all that sort of stuff. Then there's all this just general restlessness, the mind just full of energy thinking about this and that. Sometimes it feels that you're going mad because the mind just won't stop. So this is just the energy in the whole process of thinking. There's all this stuff around guilt and shame, remorse, all that sort of stuff. And there's doubt, doubt in the sense of doubting whether the teaching is really for me and all that sort of stuff. Doubt in the teacher, heaven forbid. And there's a deeper doubt in myself.

Especially, you might look around sometimes, but if you're sitting there in an absolutely wonderful posture, you think, oh, God, I can't do this. And that doubt is quite pernicious. Be careful with doubt. I'll talk about that in more detail tomorrow. It comes from often a fear of failure. It's often driven by fear.

So when we find ourselves, the mind is caught up in that. We find ourselves caught up in it. And there's this language going on and these emotions are growing. So make sure that you're very clear. You pull out of it as it were and you point to it. You say, well that's aversion. That's planning, and that's doubt and that's guilt and all that sort of stuff. And what you're doing is you are acknowledging the mental state that's driving it, the attitude that's underneath it. So don't be concerned with the story at all. It might be here you might actually have a real problem back at home, and it's no good figuring it out here, because while you're here, everything's changing out there. The problem might have disappeared.

If you really convince yourself that you can't do anything about your present life while you're here, then it stops the mind wandering. And it stops the mind attaching to something, thinking that you can work something out. It's much better to use this time to let those thoughts disappear, and to enter a clarity. Often when things that are disturbing us or upsetting us, we don't realise that we're getting our thinking process being clouded, it's being distorted by the emotional value that we put on it, the fear, the anxiety, the anger, all that sort of stuff. When all that dies down, we can normally see quite clearly how to bring an end to the problem. Not always, sometimes these things have their own way of working out.

So the storyline is just to be let go. Don't concern yourself with the story at all, and you won't concern yourself with the story when you realise that it's through the stories that these emotions build themselves up. So if you want to get depressed, really start thinking depressing thoughts purposefully. Sit there thinking how depressing life is and then don't be surprised that you end up feeling really suicidal. So once you realise that that thinking, when it's attached to a negative emotion, is pernicious, so then you make the effort, you come off it, and you sit within the heart, you sit within the emotional state.

And the other one is of course sleepiness and doziness. We've already said that there's probably some real imbalance in sleep when you come. It might take two or three days to work that out. But then afterwards, remember that doneness and lethargy are conditionings within us that we've developed. Often, for instance, when you're fed up, you just sit in a chair and fall asleep. Hopefully you wake up feeling a bit better. And then there's all that dozing away in bed, Sunday morning, that subliminal state for hours on end. Can't be bothered to get up. So all those things are developing within us, this idea that oblivion is a beautiful place to be in. And in a sense it is. There's no suffering in oblivion. It's just that unfortunately we keep waking up. And then we find that actually we're dozy and muzzy-headed even when we don't want to be.

So again it's this case of making determined not to fall into that state, but to make that state something to investigate. So you're investigating. Remember, this is not a historical investigation, it's not a psychotherapeutic investigation. Right, there's nothing to do with psychotherapy. This is a direct contact with your mental state. And of course what you realise is that by allowing these mental states to manifest, these conditionings to manifest, they're actually burning themselves out. And there's your therapy. It's much cheaper. It's much harder because you've got to sit with this stuff. But if you can spend the time, then you'll find it quite purifying. Purification of the heart is part of the process.

So don't be afraid if, don't be surprised, especially those who are new to this, that emotions come up quite strongly because often we know that we're anxious, but we've never really felt it. We've always put our attention somewhere else. We're trying to find a solution. We're sort of gently running away from it. It's the fear of fear that's causing this underlying panic. But actually, when you turn round upon the anxiety and sit with it, well, it can come up with quite a really heavy force. Same with all these things. Some old grief, some anger, depression. All these have quite a lot of power behind them. And often when we come to sit for the first time, but even all the way through the spiritual life, you'll find that you're opening up to it. So don't be surprised to find that it's stronger than you thought it was.

But if you just stay with it, just stay with it. And this idea, this affectionate awareness, affectionate awareness, to embrace it with loving kindness. So, ah, there's my lovely depression again. See? And that undermines your reaction to it. And it's the reaction which is causing the problem. So again, we'll talk about that a little later when we come to discuss dependent origination, which is the Buddha's teaching on our psychology. That's what we chant in the morning.

So that's just in brief. When it comes to physical pain, remember we're not trying to defeat pain. For the most part, you won't get the better of it. Pain will get the better of us. That's not the point. The point is to recognise our relationship to pain. So physical pain in the knees or some feelings of nausea or headache or backache or stomachache, the whole gamut of human misery. Our job is to recognise how we're relating to it. And how when we're averse to it and pushing it away, that's where the suffering starts. And we're trying to find a way of being equanimous with it, of being at ease with it, being calm with it. And that means opening up to it too.

And of course when it gets too much, when it just becomes a point where you're struggling against it, where it's just silly, then you change posture. But when you do change posture, or you stand up or do anything, really note, really be aware of that transition. How one minute there's pain, and there's this reaction to it, the aversion to it, and how once you make an intention, intending to move, and you move slowly, how the physical part of that experience begins to soften off and almost disappear into a neutral position, a neutral state, and how the heart responds also, how it becomes calm again.

So what we're seeing there is this connection between the body and mind, how the one is intimately connected to the other, how one reacts off the other. When you're angry, the body gets hot, gets restless, it feels awful sometimes. When there's pain in the body, the mind reacts. When we say mind, by the way, it's just our language. Heart-mind. We've sort of split them up, really, ever since the so-called Enlightenment, which has had its benefits. But in the East, you'll still see people pointing to their hearts when they say, I think. Not up into their heads.

So the heart responds when I say heart I mean just the emotional life, how the heart responds to pain. So you can see this connection that there are two different systems going on here. There's a system within the body itself, the cellular life and the way that we experience life through the body. And there's the heart which is an emotional mental thing going on. And then there's these much finer things going on, these thoughts and images. And it's catching that process and seeing that it is interconnected, but there are three different things going on all the time. And how they relate, interrelate.

So these are beginning to deconstruct our experience. And that's really the basic technique the Buddha uses. To deconstruct, and to keep asking the question, well, who am I? Or what am I? Am I just made up of these parts? Is there anything within all these parts that is solid, that is stable, that doesn't move, doesn't change? And of course that brings us now to the point of what is it we're investigating.

So we're investigating these three characteristics of existence, as they're called. The first one is impermanence. And, I mean, if you ask anybody in the street, if you say to somebody, oh, everything changes, well, they wouldn't be surprised by that. I mean, everybody's aware that things change. But at a more subtle level, are we aware of I am changing? This I, this sense of self, how it arises and passes away. Do we think it's permanent? I mean, where's it gone when you're asleep? And in the morning you wake up and, here I am again. So it's not always there, is it? So that can't be permanent. The sense of self.

So, this impermanence, the mind is very good at creating continuity. When we listen to music, we're actually only hearing one note at a time, or one section of note at a time. And yet, the mind gives us the impression of hearing music as a flow. It's a bit like the old films with the, what do you call them? With the frames. If you play it, if there's a speed of something like twenty-five per second or something, it gives us the idea of continuity. But when we slow the film, when we slow that down, of course, it's just one section after the other. And that's what the Buddha's talking about now.

In fact, although we have this impression of living in a continuous form, actually, as you look more and more closely, you'll see it's stroboscopic. It's actually this and then nothing, and this and then nothing. The mind is very clever at creating continuity for us. And this continuity gives us a feeling of substance, that I am real. This sense of me is actually something which sustains. It's an entity and somehow independent of the universe. The sense of I detaches itself from everything around itself, even parts of the body at times, and gets the feeling that, well, I can do my own thing in my own way in my own time. And that feeling of something substantial depends upon this sense of continuity.

That's why people have nervous breakdowns when their idea of themselves suddenly slips from under their feet. It could be a loss of their work. I am, you finish that sentence, you put the finish on that, then you'll see where your delusion is. I am a nurse, I am a decorator. When you can't finish it off, when the job's gone, who am I? And that leads some people to real despair. And that's on top of the real, what you call the real suffering of loss of income, etcetera, etcetera. It's compounded by that loss of identity. And then all these other identities that we have, our political identity, our so-

cial identity, our family identity. So when you complete that, every time you complete that I am something, you'll know that in there there's going to be the potential of suffering because the identity doesn't have any reality in it, doesn't have any substance.

When the Buddha, nowhere in the scriptures by the way does the Buddha say there is no self, but you have to understand what the Buddha meant by a self. The self, the *attā*, could be translated into our language as a soul, but then you've got to be careful because when we use words that come from the Western tradition, it gives us all sorts of ideas. But generally speaking, most people who were eternalists, that's what they were called, would have some idea of a soul which was eternal, which was completely happy, and so on and so forth, whatever constitutes a soul. So all the Buddha's saying is, well, if this soul exists, where is it? If it's eternal then it obviously can't change. If it's changing then whatever it was is now gone. So there's obviously some sort of process whereby it may disappear.

So looking at change, looking at impermanence, we're always questioning well is that, if that's impermanence, not me. So the connection between continuity and a feeling of substance. The connection between things being impermanent, unreliable, and the sense of self being undermined are intimately connected. Now, it's because of the sense of self that we define ourselves as human beings. Now, conventionally, of course, that's perfectly true.

But what it does is, it makes us seek happiness in this form. And that manifests as acquisitiveness, greed in its more moral thing, but the more you have the more you feel substantial. You feel far more safe if you have a million pounds in the bank than if you only have ten. If you have lots of friends you feel much more substantial than being on your own, being lonely. You feel much more substantial if you have power and you can do things, and then you find yourself powerless.

So all these things, all this feeling of substantiality, of something, of me, something real, is based upon what I've accumulated. Now, of course, what I've accumulated other people want. And therefore anybody who undermines my accumulation has to be my enemy. So aversion arises naturally. And if the enemy is a bit bigger than me, then of course I've got to run for it. So fear arises naturally.

So these three attitudes is the undercurrent of our lives because of a delusion as to who we are. Acquisitiveness, greed, aversion and fear. And from that all the gamut of human misery arises. All the future unethical actions that we commit and the guilt and the remorse. Misery, misery all the way.

So our process is twofold, and again I'll try to speak more about that at some future time. It's both this understanding, this investigation of who we really are, or what we really are, and a process of purification. Because our relationship, our relationship to each other, to the world, to anything—our relationship is our ethics. The way we relate is the way we are either ethical or unethical. So it's all connected. It's all connected. And so the process of purification is part and parcel of the path. And that's the hard bit of the practice.

I just wanted to say something about the Mahasi. So the Mahasi was a teacher last century, which was a great revival of Buddhist practice. It had gone dead by the end of the 19th century, so it's said anyway. But during the last century, many teachers arose, really very great teachers. And both in the Tibetan and in the Chinese, and in Japanese tradition, all these traditions, suddenly these very great teachers arose. And in the Theravāda tradition, the Mahasi was definitely one of those.

There's a book written by Jack Cornfield, which used to be called Living Buddhist Masters, but they're all dead now, apart from one. So it's been retitled. And in it, there are, I think, about ten or eleven masters whom he interviewed, all of whom had a system through which they would get across the teachings of the Buddha. Two of them have become, maybe three, have become very regular in the West.

The one is taught more famously by Goenkaji, who died recently, which is one system of vipassanā. The more generalised system is very simple. Just watch the breath and whatever arises and passes away. And in that sense, it's very close to Zen. But the other system is by the Mahasi. And whichever Buddhist meditation centre you go to, if you see people walking slowly, then they've been infected with the Mahasi technique. And most, virtually all the teachers in the Theravāda tradition would have practised in the Mahasi tradition and probably mixed it with other things.

Here, I try to keep it fairly close to its original form. And there are two parts to the system without going into great detail. First of all, this noting that we've practised. And the idea there, as we've said, is to reduce the thinking mind to a single point. It also has the ability to make us recognise what's going on. To really acknowledge what it is that's happening in the body, heart and mind. And it has this added addition, added benefit that in pointing at something, you're actually recognising it's not you. If it's an object, how can it be the subject? How can the perceiver be the perceived? How can the knower be the known? And that separation is part of the process of liberation from this deep delusion as to who we are, or what we are.

So it's something that you might want to really develop while you're here. And in a classic Mahasi meditation, which we do for the rest of the year, it's done all the time. You don't have a break from it. As soon as you wake up, you're noting, and you keep on noting until you fall asleep.

The other thing is going slow, stopping and going slow. So going back to the old films, but we know from these nature programs when they take pictures of, say, I mean, the one I always remember is the frog and the way it catches a fly. And because they can speed up the action of the camera these days, they can really slow it all down and you can see the action perfectly, how it does it. You may be surprised to know that the fly is caught underneath the tongue. Did you really know that? And was it necessary to know it? But the important thing is that that could not be seen unless the whole process had been slowed down.

So it's the same with us. The slower we go, the more we'll see. Just in the same way as either driving through the countryside, cycling through it, or walking through it. The slower you go, the more you see. So really get this feeling that there's plenty of time to do things.

Opening a door. So this is the last little example I'll leave to you. Closing doors here is part of the fire regulations. But for us, it's a much deeper practice. It's about our existentialist, our existential understandings. Remember that the person who stands on one side of the room, by the time they've gone out to the door, have changed. Even in that small moment, whoever was standing there and now is standing here has changed. It might not be particularly perceptible, but there must have been a change.

So as you approach the door, stand for a moment. You can just stop for a moment and then intending to open. And as your arm stretches out, stretching, stretching, as your fingers touch the handles, you get the feel of it. The feel of the metal. Touching, touching. And as you press the handle, be in communication with the spring. Neither too much, nor too little. In perfect communication with the spring. And then pulling as you open the door. And then stepping, and so on and so forth. And then when you've closed the door, one moment of stopping. And then the next intention.

Now sometimes you can't do it because people are waiting, but whenever you can really get into that habit of stopping as many times as you can during the day and just get into that state of just being and seeing the next intention. And remember that the importance of intentions in Buddhism is that all our conditionings begin with an intention. It's when we empower an intention that we produce a habit, and when we have a compendium of habits we have a personality. Once you have a personality your destiny is before you because your habits drive you in a certain way.

So becoming aware of our habits and knowing which habits we want to develop and which habits we want to get rid of is also part of our practice. And one important spiritual practice is to stop and be in that state of just being for a change.

So we've had a quick look through the Buddha's life and came to see that because of the memory the child's face, if you can image that before you sit, can be a powerful reminder. And that his liberation from suffering brought about these understandings. And lucky for us, a way of teaching it. We talk about *Paccekabuddhas*, Buddhas, private Buddhas, people who've become liberated, but don't leave a dispensation. Either they don't teach or the opportunity wasn't there. Who knows?

So one of the gifts of this particular person, the Siddhartha Gotama, was that he left a systematic way of achieving the end of suffering. And then we talked about the hindrances, which we'll go into more deeply tomorrow, and how, generally speaking, how to approach them. And the basic instruction, of course, is to come off the story and stay in the body, stay with the feelings.

And then we talk about the three characteristics, a sense of impermanence, a sense of not-self, and the process of desire. We didn't say much about that but we'll cover it in more detail tomorrow.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you by your fierce determination achieve full liberation sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.

CHAPTER 88

Kamma Revisited

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses widespread confusion about kamma by examining the Buddha's comprehensive understanding of causality through the five niyāma (natural laws). He clarifies that not everything we experience results from personal kamma—distinguishing between physical laws, hereditary factors, psychological conditions, spiritual laws, and ethical kamma proper.*
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> *Drawing from practical examples and the principle of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante explains how the Buddha avoided both fatalism and chaos theory through understanding that past actions meet present conditions in creative, unpredictable ways. He emphasizes that kamma specifically concerns our ethical intentions and responses—how we relate to all phenomena, including ourselves.*
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> *The talk explores the relationship between intention (cetanā), action, and habit formation in creating our character and destiny. Bhante demonstrates how every action, however small, carries ethical significance and shows how negative kamma can be interrupted through practices like apology and right speech. Essential listening for understanding the Buddha's nuanced view of personal responsibility within the broader matrix of conditioned existence.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhudassa

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

Following on from the talk on dependent origination, there's usually a need to talk about *kamma* and what the Buddha says about *kamma*, because obviously there's sometimes a lot of confusion about it. The Buddha was quite clear that what we experience isn't always our personal *kamma*. So we have to be pretty clear what we mean by *kamma*, or else we're going to get into all sorts of silliness.

To give you a rather strange example of that, we had an elderly man who used to look after us at the monastery. He swept the paths and things like that, and I said to him one day, "Why do you think Jesus Christ ended up being crucified? He must have done something terrible in his past life." There was no concept that one might suffer out of

compassion. One might, for instance, like these people who undergo torture and terrible things for political freedom. It's like they must have done something bad in their past lives.

It's funny, Noreen, whom some of you know, she's had this operation to take away the larynx so she can't speak. And somebody said to her, "You must have done something terrible in your past life." That didn't make her feel very well, and I said, "Yeah, something that we've done in our past lives does come through, but what about something done to us in our past lives that has also been worked out?" So supposing you're stuck in, say, Syria at the moment and you're just an innocent kid and you get blown up. That's in your system—that has to be worked out. And in your next life somehow you're going to have to process that so that it clears out of your system. So all this business about things that happened to us—it must have been something that I did that was terrible—just doesn't hold.

Now of course when we talk about *kamma* there's a presumption of future lives, future births, which presents a problem of how that process happens. And there are Buddhists—they call themselves Buddhists, secular Buddhists—many of whom don't believe in that at all. They just think you die and that's the end of it. So really, that's just something that you put on the back burner.

The Buddha was also up against that sort of scepticism. He said, "Look, if you follow the Dhamma, follow the good life, then you'll get the benefits in this life. If there is a future life, then you'll get the benefits there as well." So it's like we practise just for practice's sake because it does better our lives.

We talk about the five *niyāma*, the five laws, and many of them approximate to what we understand. They are the physical laws, the laws of heredity, the psychological laws, then the law of *kamma*, and then spiritual laws. And so you can see there it's one of five that might happen to us.

When this terrible tsunami happened, quite a while back now, it really killed a lot of people on the seaboard of Sri Lanka and of course other places—Indonesia and places like that. And there would have been many who would have been at ease with that on the grounds that they'd done something terrible in their past lives. It's a very Eastern way of looking at things, and the fact that we live in a world that's impermanent and all that. Many good-hearted therapists, Western therapists, went out to help them and found they really didn't need that much help. It's only Westerners who can't handle the way things really are that need therapy, it seems.

As soon as you are born into this world, of course, you're part of a matrix. And if you happen to be born in an earthquake area and you're walking on the street and suddenly you're swallowed up and crushed to death, that's just part and parcel of the contract and it's nothing to do with you personally. Once we can see that when you get these strong winds, somebody dies because of these strong winds, or they're carried out to sea and drowned—all that belongs to the fact that we're on this earth. It's just a simple fact.

The *kamma* which is to do with liberation is how the person reacts when they're in that situation. Years ago there was an earthquake in Brazil, and I remember it because of this little story. Days on—can't have been that many days, but days on—they found this woman with her young child, to my memory under three, a very young child, completely locked into this little space. And to feed the child, she'd cut her finger so that the child could suck the blood and survive beyond her.

Now when you read that story, you can see that that woman is—what can we say?—because she's with her child and her love goes out to her child, she's able to transcend the situation. Whereas others might have died in absolute abject fear, slowly, horribly. So you can see in a case like that that it's how the person reacts. It's always this *taṇhā*—what we talked about yesterday or the day before about the way that we react to things coming from this delusive place. So that would be your *kamma*.

If you found yourself in a road accident or a tree blows over and hits you on the head for some such reason, how you react to that—that's your suffering. The actual what happens to your body is just pain. So we learn that here on the cushion. We sit in a position and there's pain in the knees. That's just pain. And what we discover is by taking this attitude of investigation, objectifying it, then there's no suffering. There's not that secondary arrow that the Buddha talks about, those secondary darts. So there's a real distinction to be made there.

Then there's this business of heredity. So the bodies we end up with are the product of who knows how many generations, and if you happen to be born with some birth defect or a disability, now that isn't your personal *kamma* either. It's how you deal with it.

There's always an example I point to when I talk about this. I stayed at Amaravati, the Buddhist monastery just north of London, for a while, and a young man came who had a hereditary illness which really distorted all his limbs and he virtually couldn't do anything for himself. It was like that, and he was bedridden mainly. And very lighthearted, very interested in spiritual matters, very much at ease, and seemingly accommodated to his situation, to his condition.

But the story went that when he began to develop this in early childhood, the parents had asked the doctor whether this would happen again, and they all said, "Oh, it's a million, a hundred million to one." Unfortunately, the daughter they had also began to develop this very same thing. And the story goes that she was very embittered by it, very distraught and had not really come to terms with it.

So you can see there again, you have the body and then you have the reaction to it. And that was her *kamma*. That's the *kamma* which is creating suffering. *Kamma* here means actions. Not the product of your action. So it's a case of recognising that what we have from heredity is a given. And again, that's the way it is.

When I was a teenager, I did lots of exercises to grow taller. Lots of suffering. Nothing happened. Terrible. It was worse when my hair fell out. Suffering. God, there was suffering. Spent pounds on special lotions. I don't know, somebody made a lot of money out of me, that's obvious. If I'd have known I was going to become a monk, I wouldn't have worried so much.

So that's just one of those things. I should have missed it, by the way, because my father was as bald as a coot. So I should have missed it, my generation should have missed it, but my mother's family also had baldness. So I got stricken.

The next one is the laws of psychology, which is what we studied, what we talked about the other night. The *citta*, the mind. In this language the word *citta* refers to both the mind and the heart. Remember we split these two in our great Enlightenment. But in the old, in the old pre-Enlightenment days, pre-17th century or something, it was understood in Christianity you had a body, a soul, and a spirit. And the soul, really, was your body and mind. And this goes back to the Greeks, and it was just understood that we're made up of these three things. Body, heart, mind, and the spirit.

So this word *citta* actually is that, and often in the East when people talk to you and they say "I think," they point to the heart—they don't point to the head. They're still coming from how they feel about things as well.

So the important thing there is to recognise that your *kamma*—if the brain, for instance, begins to go sick, you'll end up with Alzheimer's or dementia. That's not your personal *kamma*, it's just what you're ending up with. If you haven't got a very good memory, you haven't got a great intelligence because you haven't got a good memory, all these sorts of things—they're not your personal *kamma*. I mean we'd all wish to be geniuses, but unfortunately they're few and far between.

So there is that law going on, there's the law of perception that comes in. You can't see anything else but what your eyes will give you. It's a full stop. You can't hear beyond what your ears will offer you. You're trapped in this sensory bubble. And that's it. Not to say that we can't extend our hearing through various devices and stuff like that, but it's a case of recognising that the whole psychology of perception, of memory, of understanding, of intellectual thought—all that belongs to the mind, the body-mind complex, the brain-mind. In Buddhism the mind is separate from the body. The Buddha talks about it as the subtle body or the mental body, and that's what separates at death and takes rebirth.

And then we come to *kamma*, which I'll come to in a minute. And then there's the spiritual laws. So the spiritual laws are all those things concerning the teachings of the Buddha basically. So it would be the Four Noble Truths, the hindrances, how to deal with them, the fact of enlightenment which we've touched upon—all those things come under the spiritual laws.

And as soon as you meditate, as soon as you meditate and you put yourself into that position of awareness, the spiritual laws begin to manifest. You don't have to do anything. So with awareness, with this right awareness, the other factors just arise naturally to support it. So there has to be concentration there, there has to be the effort to maintain it, there has to be the interest which is driving the investigation, there has to be the equanimity. Even though as you become more skilful you can see that some of these things can be a bit out of balance—too much effort especially, that's the usual one—the fact is when you have right awareness all the factors are there.

And just on that point, because this is often confusing, when we begin meditation we start with calmness usually. That calmness is a body feeling and it's also a mental thing—calm, still, silent. There might be just moments of it. Now it begins like that as a mirror in the body, heart and mind of the quality of calmness. But as you pull out of that into the observer, all these factors are within the observer. The observer is calm even though the body is restless. That's why in that inner eye, that inner looking of the awareness, once it's positioned itself, once it's found this observation post, all the factors must be there. They can't not be there.

Then of course we make mistakes because we perhaps over-effort. We start looking for something rather than looking at something. Or we get a bit lazy and then you fall asleep. But when it's right awareness, all the factors are there. They arise naturally.

And the whole business that we're talking about with hindrances, all these unwholesome mental states and stuff like that—just observing them allows them to dissipate. That's a spiritual law, how to purify the heart.

So remember, part of the process, there's two processes going on. There's the purification of the heart from all this negativity and its growth in beauty, *mettā*, all that. And on the other side, there are these insights going on which is fundamentally changing our relationship to the world so that we don't keep making the same mistakes.

So these things happen quite naturally, and this is the magic of it, quite naturally once you're in that state of awareness. That's why the Buddha's always on about awareness. And if you were to choose one word which encapsulates the whole of the Buddha's practical teaching, it would have to be *sati*, this one word. It all hangs on this one word, *sati*.

So now we've talked about *kamma* in terms of what it isn't. So I suppose we should say what it is. It's important, I think it's also important to understand how the Buddha saw things happening. Because one of the mistakes that we can also make is the idea of fate. That things just happen to us and we've no control. That it was fated that the tree fell on top of me. It was just fate that I ended up being brought up an English person. You see what I mean? Everything happens to me because I can get the feeling that I don't really have a choice. The feeling is that things just happen to me. Or that when I do make a choice, the choice is conditioned anyway.

And this arises in Christianity with this whole idea of God knows everything. So he knows you're going to be saved or not from all times. You get Calvinism. Predestination. So it doesn't matter what you do in this life. You're going to be saved or not saved. Sounds a bit wicked to me, but there we are.

So this idea of how do you get beyond that idea of fate, and on the other hand there's this idea of some sort of chaos that things just happen—there doesn't seem to be any order whatsoever. So the Buddha's understanding around causality was that yes, because of something in the past, something happens now. Because something happened in the past, something happens now.

You know, if you buy a lottery ticket and you win some money, that's because you bought the lottery ticket. Of course, I'm not suggesting you buy a lottery ticket. It's terrible, terrible. And on the other hand, if you didn't buy it, you can't win. So there's also this omission as well. Something that you didn't do will also have its effect. So that would be a progression in time.

And you can see that if that was the fullness of why things happen, then you would be into fate, because it's already predestined from the past. You did this, and now this has happened.

But the other thing the Buddha points out is that because something happens now, something is happening. And to understand that, it's a case of recognising that when you do something, it doesn't go into a vacuum, it goes into a matrix. So you never know the consequence of what you've done.

So here, for instance, all of you had this idea to come to Satipaña, from all sorts of different places. And the arrival here, now, is a consequence of all that. And this wouldn't have happened were it not for those decisions made in the past. And you were coming here not knowing, anyway, not knowing what the hell was going to happen. See what I mean? It's like you don't know. And when you get here, there are all these strangers, all these horrible people.

So it's a case of recognising that what happens now also is having an effect in the now. So, if you can imagine all these strands of past actions, the physical world, the biological world, the psychological world, personal decisions, all meeting every moment. Now, if it were just that, then you could see, well, where would there be any order? It would be quite chaotic. And it's the conjoining of these two that's a sort of paradox.

That some things are ordained from the past and yet come into the present and meet things that they didn't expect. And therefore every moment has this creativeness about it. This creativeness about it. So that we never know what's going to happen next. Absolutely. You never know absolutely what's going to happen next.

So you can see there how the Buddha explains the fact that things are ordered and yet we have creativity. And that undermines the idea of fate. Because if you're aware of this present moment and its constituents, then the decision you make is dependent upon what's in the now, not what's in the past. And then that affects your future. So there's always a possibility of change, changing personally as an individual, of changing the path, of changing what you're doing. And you get that feedback loop comes back to you, keeps coming back to you, and then you wake up.

Take, for instance, somebody who goes through multiple relationships. And at first the other person is absolutely glorious – I'm so lucky and all that. A couple of months, two or three months down the line, I don't know what the hell I saw. And this keeps going on – they're horrible, people are absolutely horrible. And then suddenly they wake up one morning and they suddenly grasp, maybe it's me. And just a little small insight that maybe I'm also part of the cause of these multiple relationships – that helps them to correct their, make decisions, correct their path, and then hopefully find something a little more lasting.

So that's the idea of how things come to be, the law of causality. So *kamma* then becomes really what you do, your actions. And remember that we come back now to intention. Everything that happens, we have a reaction towards because of past history towards what's happening. So if you hear beautiful music, there's a tendency to want to listen to it and to really enjoy it, and sometimes to indulge in it – keep playing over and over and over. That's conditioning. This is what we mean by conditioning, or this word *saṅkhāra* that we chant, and that's all been conditioned in the past. And in this present moment when it arises again, it always comes up with an intention. And that's your *taṇhā*.

So *taṇhā* is wrong intention. I'm only speaking now about unwholesome *kamma*, but there is, remember, wholesome *kamma*. So you've got *kamma* which comes out of love, compassion, sympathetic joy, reciprocal joy. And that, of course, would develop the better side of us. So always comes this intention.

Now one of the things that I haven't particularly pushed on this retreat, but I would do so on a full Mahāsi, is really noting intentions. So there's the noting, but it's the noting of intention which is so crucial. Intending to open the door. Intending to eat. The fact that you're saying it is the intention. And what we're trying to understand is that even the smallest action, even me doing this business, shaking my hands about, even that has some intention in it. Even if it's only subliminal, there must have been some intention.

There's a lovely example of that given in the Visuddhimagga, which is a later work, but it's seen as Theravāda Buddhism. It's written by a monk that was called Buddhaghosa. And in it he talks about, there was a teacher giving a talk, and suddenly he raised his hand and stopped talking, and then in silence he put his hand back. So the student said, what happened? He said, I didn't note the intention of moving my hand. That's how, you see? So you can see how advanced he was compared to me. I haven't a clue what I'm doing, mate.

So it's catching this intention. Now, every intention, once it's empowered, becomes an action. Okay? So if you intend to open the door, you open the door. Now, there's nothing particularly ethical about that. It's just opening the door. But every action produces a habit, so that after a while you definitely know how to open doors. And remember that opening a door here should have an existential quality about it. It's not the case of just opening the door, it's the case of doing it very slowly and recognising that you've actually moved out of a different space. You've become somebody else on the other side of the door, even though it's not so obvious.

So it's actually recognizing that from an intention comes an action, and then you create a habit. Okay? So if you decide that you come home and you're going to watch the news on the TV, then once you've done it and you enjoy it, the next day you come back and do it. And then after a while it's just something you do. It becomes habitual. If you put all these habits together, the *saṅkhāra*, then what you have is your personality. In Buddhism, that's your personality and character. It's a set of habits. That's all it is.

And once that's set, as it were, your destiny is ahead of you. And it's only when we keep falling over that we might wake up and think, well, what about these habits I've got? Maybe I should change a few of them. And that's of course the practice we're in – trying to move away from those habits which cause problems to those which are beautiful.

So that's the process of *kamma* in the sense of an action. Now the other thing that we have to remember is that it's those actions which have an ethical value which are important. So if we remember the story of the Buddha again, there were three knowledges. The first one was that he was purified. There were no more unwholesome mental qualities in him. And that he saw how he came to this position through a series of past lives driven by his ethical decisions. And then he saw other beings moving around in the same way.

So ethics is, in other words, our whole relationship to human beings, to buildings, to trees, everything else – that is our ethics. That's what Buddha meant by ethics. It's not just a simple case of morality. It's not just a simple case of doing right and wrong. It's a case of how do we relate to everything that we meet. And of course that includes ourselves. How do I relate to myself?

So when I said that it's only opening a door, it can be done gently and then it becomes an ethical opening of the door. It can be done angrily and then it becomes an unethical opening of the door. So then you realise that everything you do, everything you do really has an ethical value to it. And that's when you get worried, because that's our conditioning, and the conditioning is driving us to a certain destiny, either to happiness or unhappiness.

So that gives us some idea of the thrust of *kamma*. It's the ethics. So if the first law was about just the physics of the universe, the chemistry of it, and the second one is hereditary, and the third one all to do with our psychology, and the fifth one to do with the spiritual practices, the spiritual laws, this fourth one, *kamma*, is specific around ethics. It's about ethics. It's about how and why we behave the way we do.

So this means that it's impossible to grow in wisdom and behave unethically. It can't be that jarring. Can you imagine catching the Buddha shoplifting? It wouldn't work, would it? You'd have to think, well, hold on, he said he was enlightened. It's just there are certain things that just don't fit once we have this image, this archetype of a Buddha, of somebody who's completely purified.

And then the last thing really is to understand that nothing is set. So that when we do an action and we can see it wasn't particularly good, we can always stop the consequences of it. So remember, an action will have its consequences. As soon as you act, you're putting an energy of force into a matrix and you don't know how it's going to happen. I think I mentioned it before, I couldn't remember the physics for it, but I'm sure you've heard of the theory of chaos, where one small action with supporting conditions can just go out of proportion.

So the thing you're always given is always dramatic – a butterfly wing in South America, huge storm in North America because of the surrounding conditions. But I think we can also see it in a slightly more optimistic light – that one small act of kindness done somewhere could bring peace in some other part of the world, because you don't know what the effect of that will be. Just like, again, on the negative side, the straw that broke the camel's back. Just a little small act of goodwill put into a particular situation can have these wondrous effects.

So, on the positive side, that's why we should obviously do good things. On the negative side, when you do something, you know it's going to have an effect. Something negative, you know it's going to have an effect. So just very simply, often with friends at work or in other situations, we might say something which has been taken wrongly. We might not even have meant it to be an insult. It doesn't have to be that you actually mean to do something. It could have been something that wasn't quite meant, or wasn't the right thing to say at that time.

So remember that when the Buddha talks about right speech, he talks about it being kindly, being honest, but also a suitable time. You have to choose your time to say certain things. And of course that can create a lot of upset, a lot of animosity, even worse, and it can reverberate back on you. So it's a case of as soon as we know we've done something, is to do something to bring that process to an end. Often a simple apology will do.

We had a wonderful case here, so I'll come towards an end on this. We had an oak tree, and it used to overhang the back of the garden here. And we had to get rid of it, unfortunately, because of the oil tank. There were all sorts of health and safety reasons around oil tanks. And I had this expert come, who used to be in competitions in Colombia, chopping trees down. And he really was quite an expert.

Anyway, one of our neighbours saw this and he came over. I was in the kitchen, I was just coming into the kitchen, and sounded this awesome row – I mean really a lot of anger. So I go out there, and of course I'm terribly peaceful and equanimous, because I'm not involved. So I can play the peacemaker. And I'm saying, what's going on?

And basically, he'd come over and had questioned the fact as to whether we could take down an oak tree, because some of them are guarded. There was a neighbour here who knocked an oak tree down – he was fined 2,000 quid. And he somehow got it wrong in his head that it wasn't our oak tree. It was all a bit funny.

But anyway, the lumberjack, who was okay, by the way, he said something that was really upsetting. And he came out with this stunning phrase, which must go into the annals of great phrases. He says, "I'm from Liverpool and I'll have you shot." So I thought, that is absolutely brilliant.

So anyway, as it happened, I was able to calm him down to some spot. This lumberjack, by the way, who wasn't a particularly big man, but he had a couple of big young fellas with him. So the neighbour's still raging. And eventually the lumberjack said to him, "Look," he said, "you just threatened me, you just threatened my life, and I've got witnesses." So he said, "So finally," he said, "look, just a simple apology will do."

And finally, the neighbour, when he'd all calmed down, he said, "Sorry," and went out with his tail between his legs. It was a wonderful occasion. I wish it had been filmed.

So, in that case, you've got a neighbour who knows nothing about Buddhism. He was a million miles away from it. But he recognised that at some point he'd gone overboard. He'd lost his equanimity, we can say. And just by that simple, very simple apology, that was it. I'm sure they don't meet for a drink now and again, but at least the consequences of that were just brought to an end.

So, just to summarise there, just so that we're clear about what the Buddha's teaching about *kamma*. Not everything that happens to us is to do with our personal *kamma*. And even if something happens to us, it may only be a part of that which is our personal *kamma*. It may only be a small part of it.

So, I mean, in terms of our neighbour, the fact that he got involved in that was part of his original goodness – trying to save trees, for heaven's sake. I mean, that's where he was coming from. But it got him into this embroilment. And the fact that the lumberjack didn't take huge offense and cut his legs off with his chainsaw was good. Could have got pretty nasty.

There are different laws which we're accustomed to – the physical and the hereditary and the psychological and the spiritual laws. All these things are almost in every moment of our lives. If you take any moment, you'll see that there's a physicality to it, there's a mentality to it, there's a hereditary part of it. It's not as though these things are either not there – they're always there. These laws are always there. And even if we're not aware of the spiritual laws, we're probably going against them and creating havoc because of it. And one of them is this law of *kamma*. It's just brought out of the spiritual laws because it's a very specific avenue of teaching.

And then the idea that we don't live in a predestined universe. Nobody knows what happens. The Buddha said if you try to work out your *kamma*, you'll drive you mad. So we don't know what's going to happen next in any absolute sense. But that gives us creativity. It gives us destruction. Everything is destroyed and then created.

It's interesting that in Hinduism you have Brahmā the creator. But then you have Śiva the destroyer. And Viṣṇu, the one who creates. I think that's it. I'm not sure now. But anyway, it's that business of there's always an ending and then there's a beginning. An ending and a beginning. Something has to be destroyed for something to be born. And that's just part and parcel of it.

And our process, our spiritual process, is this process of purification. And you can come... The Eightfold Path starts off with right understanding, which affects our attitudes, which affects the way we speak and what we do and our livelihood. But remember, it can also come back on itself as feedback.

So there are many livelihoods which have in themselves the potential for compassion. In fact, all livelihood, apart from those which are obviously unwholesome, have the quality of service about them. And I'll probably say more about that tomorrow. And it's this quality of service that's coming through the heart, through the attitude, which then becomes a wisdom.

So the distinction between compassion, love and wisdom is just they're two sides of the same coin. You can't have wisdom without the expression of compassion. And you can't have compassion unless you've got the wisdom. So compassion is wisdom in action.

So everything in that sense is connected. So there's a part of us which is investigating, but also the part of us which is doing things is crucially important to this whole process of purification, liberation, and the awakening, the process of awakening.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you by your severe practice attain full liberation from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 89

Daily Life Reinforced: Bringing the Pāramīs into Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this concluding talk from a retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the crucial question of how to maintain Buddhist practice in daily life. He begins by contrasting the Buddha's approach with Western religious and psychological models, emphasizing that Buddhism focuses on investigating the fundamental delusion of selfhood rather than simply battling good and evil. The heart of the talk explores the ten pāramīs (perfections): dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), nekkhamma (renunciation), paññā (wisdom), viriya (energy), khanti (patience), sacca (truthfulness), adhiṭṭhāna (resolution), mettā (loving-kindness), and upekkhā (equanimity). Bhante explains how these virtues interconnect, particularly highlighting the relationship between gratitude, generosity, and renunciation. He offers practical guidance for establishing daily practice routines, including morning and evening meditation, using transitional moments for mindfulness, and the importance of 'stopping' throughout the day to maintain awareness. The talk concludes with reflections on how ethical conduct and wisdom develop together, distinguishing traditional Buddhist practice from modern secular mindfulness approaches while acknowledging their benefits.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa

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

So this evening, let me tell you what happens tomorrow. We carry on till lunchtime, and then because the weather should be fine tomorrow, though it gets darkish and cold, we might do just a small sit at two o'clock. Then hopefully we will assault the mountain behind us. Not this one, that one. It's only 300 metres, nothing. Mark ran up and down it and said no problem. Then we come back and in the evening, just questions and answers really, whatever discussion comes up. On Sunday morning, I do a little finishing ceremony, breakfast, and then you can escape.

This evening really it's just tackling this whole problem of daily life. How do we take into daily life and just use various ways that the Buddha talked about it? First of all, just to get a clear idea of what the Buddha's position is when we compare it to other systems.

If we look at Christianity, it really centres upon the morality of things. The basic myth about Adam and the apple, and then because of that initial mistake, everybody suffers and whatnot. We've all got this original sin, this thing that has to be wiped. Then it's a very complicated story about the role of Jesus and stuff like that. But the basic thing is that we're caught between the devil and God. There's a lovely story of Job, which all of you have read of course, in which the devil says to God, "This fellow Job, of course he loves you. You've given him everything he's got. All these wives and kids and all this land and cattle. You've got to test him."

So God thought, hmm. He began to test Job and killed all his wives and all his kids and took away all his cattle. Job is absolutely devastated and can't understand why this has happened to him. Then we have these Job's comforters who all come and basically tell him he must have done something wrong. But he hasn't, and he can't think what he's done to deserve this catastrophe. But the one thing he doesn't lose is faith in God, faith in the goodness of God. Eventually God recognises this trust and gives everything back, a hundredfold and all that. If you like the Coen brothers, their film A Serious Man is based on Job and it's extraordinarily funny.

Freud simply took that on to a psychological or psychoanalytic level. For a Christian it's this trying to know what is good and evil, this battle between the temptations of the devil and the invitations of God, that's the battle between good and evil. In Freud you get a slightly different model where you've got this poor little ego, for one minute dragged down by this animal id and constantly castigated by the super ego. The poor ego has to weave a little way between these two opposites and try to find some sort of stability.

From the Buddha's point of view, it's a slightly different problem. Yes, all those things come up in his teaching. The decision about what is wholesome and unwholesome, what is skillful. The id, these basic desires, our animal nature drawn to sex and lust and greed and avarice, all these things are in the Buddha's teachings. The desire to seek happiness in doing something good, that's all there too. So it's not as though the Buddha would deny any of that.

In fact, he would say that those who've understood that there is consequence for doing good and doing evil, in other words, the law of *kamma*, they're actually on the path. That's the basic understanding. There were people in his time who would have said it doesn't matter what you do. You can go down one side of the Ganges and do tremendous compassionate acts and come up the other side murdering and pillaging, and it won't make a blind bit of difference because your life is set, it's conditioned, it's fated. That would not be his understanding.

From the Buddha's point of view, the problem is at a slightly deeper level, as to why do we do these things in the first place. There he came across this fundamental delusion about who we are. Remember that, having decided, believing that we are human beings, and heaven's sake, all we want is to be happy. No matter how you might define it, if you ask any human being what they want they say I want to be happy. They might define it in all sorts of different ways but that's what they want to be. They want to be happy.

That search for happiness leads to this acquisitiveness. Remember gathering things, because the more you have of what you like the happier you seem to be. The more money in the bank you feel safer. Anything that undermines any of that, of course, you want to get rid of. So there's your aversion. If it's bigger than you, then you run for it. There's your fear. So there's your three basic attitudes of acquisitiveness, aversion and fear arising from the idea that as a human being, I can achieve happiness, permanent happiness. You can achieve it in little bits, but then it always lets you down, doesn't it?

Although there is at that level of working with what is unwholesome and wholesome, virtuous and otherwise, at a deeper level it's cutting through the very delusion that's causing it. That's a slightly different model. So the accent is on an investigation as to how these things happen, as to how we behave the way we do.

He wouldn't deny the role of guilt and shame. He would deny the existential guilt that might be felt within the Christian, Judaic and Muslim tradition where you are fundamentally evil and you can only be saved by God or Jesus or whatever. That wouldn't work from his point of view. But what does work is that when you do something harmful, then you dread consequences. And there's your dread. There's your guilt. Fear of being caught. And the shame. Shame is just not living up to your own standards. Feeling belittled by your own behaviour. And seeing yourself belittled in other people's eyes because of your behaviour. So those two things the Buddha actually calls guardians, guardians of society. He's not saying they're wholesome, but it does stop you doing things.

So you've got this model where on the one part it's an investigation as to our true nature and what should our relationship be to the world. And on the other part, it's dealing with habits that we've accumulated, developed because of past wrong understanding. And even present wrong understanding. And we're still deluded. Remember that the definition of deluded or delusion is that you don't know where the delusion is. If you knew where it was, you wouldn't be deluded. So we've talked a lot about the hindrances and all that.

Maybe it's also time now to talk about these *pāramī*. *Pāramī* means to the other shore. It's translated as perfections, but basically it's the virtues that we need to take us across the water to this island. The island the Buddha often uses as an image for *Nibbāna*. It's something beyond this present life form.

Let me read through them first, and then afterwards I just want to talk a little bit about commitment. So we have ten qualities. Now, in the Mahāyāna they have six, but in Theravāda they have ten, which proves that we're better. Actually, these were compiled later out of the scriptures. I think as a challenge to Madhyama.

These are the purifications, ten leading ones. There's the giving, or liberality, generosity. There's morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity. Obviously it doesn't include every virtue there is, but at least it gives us a platform.

Giving is really the basic virtue the Buddha points to as a starting point because he points out that even thieves can be generous with what they've just taken from you. They can be very generous to their friends and family. So generosity is probably one of the easiest things that you can do because it's a matter of giving. He always starts his talk to lay people with *dāna*, with this idea of giving. Then he talks about the good life, and he talks about being reborn in heavenly realms and all that. When he's got his audience, then he hits them with the Four Noble Truths. He wheedles his way in.

So I want to latch together these three great virtues: gratitude, generosity and renunciation. When we consider what we've received, gratitude arises. It's a lovely feeling, isn't it, gratitude, thankfulness. If you go through your life and instead of thinking of how horrible everybody's been to you, terrible society and all that, and instead you go through and make a list of all the things that you've been given, even this life by our mothers, then very slowly the balance moves, generally speaking, towards gratitude rather than grudge.

What gratitude does, of course, it fills a heart with the desire to repay, to do something in return. Often you can't do it to the people who've done you good because either they've moved on or you've lost contacts. So therefore you move it towards an attitude of giving. It might not be giving what you received, but it's just knowing that gratitude impels you to be generous one way or the other.

Generosity is either of our wealth or our time. The interesting thing is that every time you give something, you're giving something up. Because you could have used it for yourself. So when you make a donation to a cause, you could have used it to have a

good time. Every time you give your time for the benefit of somebody else, well, you could have used it to have a good time. You might have had a good time helping them, but it wasn't for you. So there's that renunciation.

Sometimes, when you give, you can sometimes push the giving just a little bit so that it hurts a little. Because that little bit of hurt means you're stretching your idea of renunciation. I think parents with children obviously have a wonderful opportunity because it's just like you've got to keep stretching. They demand and you've got to keep stretching out towards them, giving more. So these three virtues are intimately connected: gratitude, generosity and renunciation.

Now, renunciation mustn't be confused with self-mortification. In self-mortification, what we mean by that in Buddhist terms is that you believe the body is at fault. You're almost denying the body its desires because the body is leading you into wrongdoing. So you blame the body. For instance, if you had a problem with alcohol, you're blaming the body. So, it's a case of recognising that that's not what renunciation is. Renunciation, in Buddhist understanding, is to give something up to see your attachment. You don't know how attached you are to something until what you have is gone. And then there comes all these things that we've talked about with attachment, the grief and all that.

Whenever we're generous, that's an opportunity to reflect on, to actually make it a pure act of generosity. Sometimes there are all sorts of reasons for giving. You might give for a business reason. You buy somebody a drink so that they will sign the contract. Well, what's the problem with that? But it's not generosity in a spiritual sense.

We buy presents at Christmas for each other. A bottle of wine and somebody buys you cheese, a pair of socks for everything. So... And it's just an exchange of goods. This goes back to ancient times. Kings exchanged goods as a way of just creating a certain friendship. But that's not generosity in the spiritual sense. But there's nothing wrong with it. It has its purpose in our relationships.

The generosity we're talking about is giving for the sake of the other. Not for any reason. Not for any purpose of return. So we have to be careful. When we give something, and this is why this reflection is important. So when you give something, you give it for the benefit of the other. When that suffuses your heart, when that suffuses your intention, your intention is complete and whole. That's what's in your mind, you're giving it for their benefit, that's when you give. So that the action supports the intention and that's your conditioning. And we're conditioning ourselves to just give, to just give.

Now you have to be careful because after you've done that you see these little voices come up. "Yeah, you're truly a generous person." So you point to that and you say, "Ah, no, no, no, Māra, no, you weren't there, you weren't there." Or one of these little underlying things, "There's too much, get some back." Or sometimes you don't reflect upon somebody asking you. Like, you had all this decoration, it went on for days and days. And if somebody comes along and says, "Oh, yeah, I'll come along," and then they go and think, "I don't want to decorate." And then they phone up and say they're not feeling very well. You can't blame people, it's not bad to blame people. But it just shows that often we give without a certain reflection.

But often, and we're coming to truthfulness, it's defined as doing what you say you're going to do. Even if it hurts, because when you do something that you said you were going to do, and then you didn't want to do it, and you make yourself do it, it teaches you, next time you'll be just a bit more careful to say yes. You don't want to make the same mistake again.

So this whole area of giving, it's reflecting on it when you give it. And of course, you can do that with Christmas presents. Even though at the back of your mind you know that if you didn't give it that would be the end of your friendship, the fact is that you can put that to the side and give something for the person's benefit. So remember that intention is crucial. Your intention is crucial and the purer it is the better. And of course don't forget you can be generous to yourself. We have to also learn that I am also worthy of generosity. And sometimes you have to look after yourselves.

So the Buddha did. Here he is, he's liberated from suffering, he says he doesn't suffer, and yet he goes off into the forest to meditate. So they ask him, "Why do you do that? You're liberated now." He says, "No, I do it for my own quiet abiding and as a good example to others." But notice, the first thing is my quiet abiding. Like he's had enough of all these questions and grabbing his potty. So he's off and he's, "Oh God, a bit of peace and quiet." He does it also to show, to be an example to others.

When you feed yourself, when you eat yourself, really say, really acknowledge that this is for our benefit. I'm eating this for my benefit so that I can continue to live and live the spiritual life. So you've got to be careful that you don't get into this thing about helping others and leave yourself out. Because eventually it works against you. You get this burnout business. And giving somebody who's a do-gooder.

See, that's the other side of it. A do-gooder, in my definition, is somebody who does you the good they want to do you. Whether you want it or not. People like that come from a good heart. But they're not really standing in your shoes. They're not really looking at the world from what you want to do. They think, well, this is what's good for you. And it can be a real pain.

So the example I give is that somebody's ill, so you take them grapes and soup or something, and they say, thank you very much, but I really couldn't eat the soup, you see. And inside your mind you say, I've just spent two hours making this bloody soup. They say, you could do something for me. Oh, yeah, very good. Could you clean my toilet? I think I'd better clean your toilet. I came here to offer you soup.

So you can always catch yourself when you're doing this good and then you find actually you're being a do-gooder. So, how do we get beyond that? It's very simple. You ask the person what they want. You don't presume on anything at all.

Giving itself is really... Generosity is really crucial in our practice. And it's a form of love, of course. Generosity is just there. And it's lovely when you see these... What do they call it? Sports for... Sport relief. Yeah, sport relief and comic relief. They raise masses of money and it's really quite... Well, it's quite uplifting to know that people were prepared to give for these causes. Really wonderful.

So that covers three of them anyway. So it's the giving and the... I mean, gratitude isn't mentioned here, but it's definitely something. Meister Eckhart, whom some of you might know, the 13th century mystic, who's very close to Buddhism. If you read his stuff, it's very, very close to the Buddha's understanding. He says, if you were to say thank you all the time, that would be enough. That's how important he thought gratitude was. Brian does it, doesn't he? Just for today, I will be thankful. Even he's caught on to it. So, it's something to reflect on.

So, we've done the renunciation. Renunciation is... You know, and it's just catching yourself these sneaky little selfishnesses. Where you take just the bigger piece of cake. You know what I mean? You take that extra toffee. And then you just catch yourself. And then you hate the person who gets it, of course. So, renunciation.

Morality, well, we've talked a lot about that. It's again, morality here, the Buddha's actually meaning just the basic things that you determine, not to go there, that's all. Wisdom, well, we've talked about that. So this is more of a mental, of a mind. So a lot of these are heart things, like giving and renunciation and patience. But wisdom is coming from this wisdom within us. This understanding. The faculty of wisdom. Which is not to be confused with intellect. Remember.

There's a lovely story. I always forget the name of the monk. But in those days remember, they didn't write things down. They remembered them. And this poor monk he said, when he learnt a new stanza of the Buddha's teachings, it would knock the one he's just learnt out of his head. So his brothers advised him to leave the monastic life. Said you know you're not going to get anywhere. So the Buddha hearing this went to see him and he gave him a very simple exercise of rubbing a piece of cloth and wiping his face with a clean cloth and just saying impermanence impermanence impermanence. And he became fully liberated just like that. It didn't work for everybody. It didn't work for me.

But it's a different faculty. It's not the intellect. It's not about understanding something. There's one man called Puttika. What's his name? Empty Puttika. There's another monk and he can explain the Dharma wonderfully. But the Buddha calls him Empty Puttika. Empty. Because he's not coming from experience. He's coming from his intellect. He's coming from understanding. And people like that really have a big problem because they really believe that because they've really understood something that therefore they've actually truly experienced it. So that's a lot to do with our honesty as well, you see.

There's another little story about a teacher and all his students become fully liberated. And he isn't. And he thinks, oh, I can't understand this. And so he goes off and he asks them, do you think you could help me? And what the student realises is that his teacher's very conceited. So he says, well, I can't really help you. Why don't you go and see somebody else? Eventually, one of his students tells him to go and see this little boy. So you can imagine that's a bit humiliating, how to become liberated.

So the little boy takes him off to an anthill. Now, in the east, when the ants have left, it's often the abode of a snake. And so the little boy says, if a snake lives in that anthill and there are six holes, how do you get him to come out? He said, well, you just stop up five holes and he'll come out through the sixth. He said, that's what you've got to do. In other words, through the senses, the six senses, by stopping five senses and just watching the mind, then you begin to understand, you see. Well, of course, as all these stories go, in no length of time, the teacher was fully liberated.

So, don't get confused with understanding. The Buddha actually talks about three levels of understanding. The level of just hearing something, being inspired by it, understanding it, but unable really to repeat it because it's not become your own. Intellectual knowledge. And then once it has become your own understanding you can talk

about it. But then at a deeper level it has to be realized. So you can talk about impermanence till the cows come home, but have we actually experienced it at the level of me arising and passing away? So that's the wisdom bit.

Energy. Energy... What's the other word? Effort. Yeah, you've got to be careful with this effort business. Remember that, normally speaking, our effort is in trying to do something, trying to achieve something, which is perfectly all right in the world. But when we come to our meditation... It's important to realize that the effort is just to be aware. Once you start looking for something or trying to attain something, then you normally end up in a hole. Because even if you're not fully aware of it, there is some concept at the back of the mind driving this sense of wanting to achieve something. So be careful with effort. Just keep reminding yourself. My teacher used to say, your job is just to watch. Your job is just to be aware.

Patience. The Buddha says this is the highest form of ascetic practice. So if you think of ascetic practice as, fasting for long times, or in certain practices, you've seen these ascetics in the East, even the early Christian desert ascetics, like for instance, just holding up their arm in the air till it withers. You've seen that one? Have you seen that one? Yeah. So these sort of heavy ascetic practices. He says actually the greatest of all ascetic practices is patience. So patience is just a willingness to bear, forbearance. Not only just our own internal pains and stuff, just not to get angry with things, not to be irritated, but of course with situations and other people. So that patience is one of his great virtues. And he gives the example of someone who says, if bandits came along and cut you from limb to limb, if at any time you felt hatred, or a grudge against them, you would be no disciple of mine. That's a bit tough, isn't it? When I told this one, somebody said, yeah, the Buddha had a great sense of humour. But patience is just a great virtue, isn't it? Patience.

Truthfulness. Here it's defined as, if you say you're going to do something, do it. But I mean you can stretch that also to being careful as to what you say. Even exaggeration is a small level of untruthfulness. It's not being absolutely correct. Exaggerating both negatively and positively.

And then there's resolution. So that's what we were doing today, resolution. Resolution is just that real commitment. In the Buddha's life it manifested in his resolution to sit under the tree and sort of work the problem out either to the point of death or you actually work it out. So you have to be pretty resolved to do something like that. What I normally say is that say a course, you come on a course that you commit yourself to that course completely, right? Acceptance. You've always got to put a little ex-clause in because you might go overboard. Accept in emergency or extraordinary circumstance.

Of course, you're going to define extraordinary circumstance in all sorts of ways. But the problem with making too hard a decision is that even when all the signs are you should stop, you don't. And then you do yourself damage, you see.

I know somebody who kept sitting and sitting with knees... you know, with these knees business. And the teachers, my teacher actually, the Burmese would just say, watch the breath. Sit, just watch the pain, see. Unfortunately, she damaged her knees. So you have to be slightly careful. You have to go, you have to really suffer if you want to damage your knees, by the way. It doesn't come with just a little bit of pain. You've got to work at it.

Then there's loving kindness, *metta*. The Buddha often uses *metta* to mean all forms of love, which includes compassion and sympathetic joy. Remember, rejoicing in someone, others, good fortune or success as our own. Don't forget, all these things have to be also directed towards ourselves.

And then equanimity. Equanimity. All these virtues do have their obvious enemy, their straight enemy and their subtle enemy. So with love the obvious enemy is hatred but the more subtle enemy is attachment. And you can always tell when you're coming from attachment because you tend to be not listening to the other person or not taking their view or their desire on. And then you tend to get upset because they're not doing what you want to do. You get irritated, you get bored with them, all that sort of stuff. Whenever you feel negative about somebody, especially if you have a close relation to them, then you know that's a sign of attachment. It's always coming from me rather than them or us. It doesn't mean to say that... You've got to be careful with that because you don't want to get abused. You've also got to take yourself into account. Anyway, it's a tricky area. I haven't got time. I'm going on and on about that one.

But equanimity, of course, is confusion, just to get lost in something. But its most subtle enemy is this indifference. Where you're standing away too much. You're standing away too much. There was a woman came to see me. She said that every time she came out of meditation at home, her partner accused her of being cold, you see. So I said to her, well, do you do any *metta* when you finish your practice? She said no. I said, well, that's what you've got to do. I said, when you sit, you want to be cool. You want to be equanimous. You want to be distant. You want to be able to investigate. But somehow you've got to re-engage. You've got to re-engage with the world. And you do that through the practice of *metta*. Anyway, she didn't come back. Either he gave up on her or she practiced a bit of *metta*.

So let me read out the way that it says in the commentaries. As a great being, so that's often a synonym for somebody who is attempting to become fully liberated, or an enlightened being. Are concerned with the welfare of living beings, not tolerating the suffering of beings, wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings, and being impartial and just to all beings. Therefore, they give alms to all beings so that they may be happy without investigating whether they are worthy or not. By avoiding to do them any harm, they observe morality. In order to bring morality to perfection, they train themselves in renunciation. And in order to understand clearly what is beneficial or injurious to beings, they purify their wisdom. For the sake of the welfare and happiness of others, they constantly exert their energy. Though having become heroes through utmost energy, they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings. And once they have promised to give or do something, they do not break their promise. With unshakable resolution, they work for the will and welfare of beings. And with unshakable kindness, they are helpful to all, And by reason of their equanimity, they do not expect anything in return. There we are. That's a nice little standard for us.

So that's the reflections on these *paramis*, these virtues or perfections that we ought to develop. And the other thing is commitment.

So it really is a case of committing yourself to a daily practice. Morning. It's important because that sets the weather vane. It sort of reminds you the level of awareness and consciousness you want to try and maintain throughout the day. And then to practice that loving kindness to re-engage with the world straight after that, you see. So that's important.

And then in the evening, that's the other time, really. Specifically when you come back from work or definitely before you eat. After you eat, you just fall asleep. And the reason there is really to just sit. And remember, you don't always have to sit in posture. It is a good thing to sit in posture because it does help the awakeness. But there, you're just letting the day come through. So irritations and anxieties and all these things that have been happening during the day, just let them arise and pass away. So let them pass. There's all the cleansing, you see.

And then preparing for sleep, that's also important. Rather than just coming straight off Facebook and launching yourself onto the pillow. Or some exciting horror movie. I mean, you've got to prepare for sleep. I always think you need a half an hour where you just slow down, you can listen to beautiful music, you can practice *metta*. It's just something just to bring everything down so that when you sleep you actually have deep sleep.

And then of course there's many times during the day when there's nothing to do, you're not doing anything. In the sense of you're walking upstairs, or you're waiting for some transport, the bus or the tube, or you're hanging around waiting for a friend, or there's nothing to do, you're just sitting there. And often what we do is we just let the mind wander, it's a kind of wasted time, whereas there are beautiful little opportunities to practice *metta*. Or to, some positive thought or thinking around the dharma or a particular issue or something. But not to let the mind wander. That's the awful thing. Letting the mind wander. It's alright when you're in a daydream. But when you come out, we have to say to ourselves, now what have I been developing there? What horrible state of mind have I been developing in that ten minutes, half an hour? When I first began sitting, I'd sit for a whole hour going through one fantasy after another. It's unbelievable. It hasn't got that much better. But I mean at least it's recognising that the mind when you let it go it just is messing you up, that's all.

And at Plum Village which is a monastery in France, it's the main center for Thich Nhat Hanh, who's a very famous teacher in the Zen tradition, Vietnamese. They have this practice of having someone ring a bell anytime. Absolutely, just out of the blue, just ring a bell. And even when the phone goes. As soon as you hear the bell, you have to stop. And you have to wait for the sound of the bell to disappear. It's a really interesting little practice. And it's just bringing somehow that into our lives. If you do work on a computer, you can get the mindfulness bell. You can download the mindfulness bell. And you can set it for every 20 minutes, half an hour. We can also set it for at random. It annoys me terribly, but I keep on doing it all.

There is a great old teacher anyway. So this idea of stopping. You'd be surprised. I mean that was one of the great effects that meditation had on me when I first started. So I used to be a teacher and you know you'd go out of one classroom, I was in FE, you got one classroom and you take whatever you've had in that classroom into the next one and by the end of the day you just felt ragged.

Once I began this meditation, I'd used the passage from one classroom to another as a way of just letting everything subside. It was quite amazing. And during lunchtime, instead of hanging around with staff just chatting away about nothing — I mean, obviously, I did a little bit of it — but then I used to find a quiet corner. And it was amazing. The amount of energy I ended up with at the end of the day was just — well, it was just different. My understanding of work changed completely in terms of draining energy. And in fact all I realised was that it was me draining energy. The work wasn't draining energy; it was just me not behaving in a wise way.

So this constant stopping after everything — after a phone call, so you just reflect on what the phone call was. You see, it only takes — it doesn't take long at all, you just stop. And then you see, was the heart brightened by it? Which is a good thing. Did you become irritated? Were you anxious? You just stay there, just wait for that to fade a little. You don't have to wait for it to go entirely, but at least just to acknowledge it and let it fade away. So it's the same with meetings. Meet somebody. After a piece of work, you just stop. After a meal, just stop. And I think you'll be surprised what an effect it has.

So with this constant reminder just to be back into the present moment. And how do you do that, remember? The body. Just go back into the body. Come off the computer, come off the mind, come off the texts. Just start coming back into it. What are you feeling? How do your feet feel? What can you see? What can you hear? And that immediately brings you back into this — into a groundedness, you see. And then from there, you note your next intention. And what you do feel is just a greater control over your life. Especially your inner life. Not so much the outer life — that's to do with being in that matrix of relationship. But definitely your inner life can be quite radicalised by it.

So we've just recognised the Buddha is coming from a slightly different place than our Western traditions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and psychoanalysis. He's coming from a position of really that we're deluded and it's a mistake we're making. And therefore our effort really is to understand what our true nature is. And that's really the purpose of *vipassanā*, to see ourselves as we really are.

And then to see the consequence of delusion — even if we can't see the core of delusion, this idea of a self — at least we can see the consequences of it, which manifest in these attitudes of acquisitiveness and aversion and fear and then all the rest of them. And on the positive side to really develop the good heart. That's very clear. Don't forget that the ethical life runs in conjunction with wisdom. You can't separate them both.

And that's one of the criticisms of the mindfulness movement which I'm sure you all know about — is that mindfulness is, you know, mindfulness and depression, mindfulness eating. But nobody ever talks about morality. It's all about mindfulness. And I mean, sure, it helps. Sure, it helps. But, you know, it's like — and they won't go anywhere near self, not-self. I mean, that's taboo. So it's basically pulling something out of its — it's like yoga, you know, body beautiful — and forgetting that it actually belongs to a very deep and profound spiritual tradition.

It doesn't mean to say that mindfulness won't help. It will. But eventually, the person will, if they want to move, they're going to have to seek something a little more deeper than just mindfulness, you might say. Unless they have real insight. That's possible. Remember that a lot of the mindfulness movement is about suffering. It's about physical

pain, dealing with pain. It's about depression. It's about anxiety and panic and things like that. Well, you know, there's no reason why they couldn't click in the midst of superficially, shall we say, dealing with an obvious problem and then suddenly realising where the real problem lies. I wouldn't want to damn the whole process. But it's obviously doing an enormous amount of good. Mindfulness and CBT, cognitive behavioural therapy — about ninety-seven percent don't have panic again because they've seen that panic is the reaction to fear, fear of fear. That's an enormous success, isn't it? And sixty percent — that's the figure I remember — don't go back into clinical depression. That's fabulous.

And then, so, developing the virtues. To be actively involved in developing virtues. And then to organise our day around this whole idea of mindfulness and how we can bring that to bear. Bring it to a point where it feels that we're pretty mindful most of the time. That's a nice place to be. You must try it.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you by your commitment to the practice soon attain the wonderful end of *Nibbāna*. Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.

CHAPTER 90

Refinement, Sublimation and the Eightfold Path

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 49 min

> *In this retreat conclusion talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how the Buddha's emphasis on both Dharma and Vinaya reflects the understanding that behavioral refinement is a natural expression of wisdom. Drawing from monastic codes and the four requisites teaching, he explores how moving from gross to subtle ethical conduct represents the beautification of mind that accompanies spiritual development.*
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> *The talk traces the cycle from ignorance through craving to suffering, showing how meditation allows mental turbulences to sublimate into their opposites - loneliness becoming solitude, hatred transforming into love. This process of sublimation extends naturally into right speech, right action, and right livelihood as expressions of inner transformation.*
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> *Bhante discusses practical approaches to work as service, the distinction between force and violence, and maintaining mindfulness in daily activities. He emphasizes that while meditation is crucial as a springboard for insight, the ultimate goal is continuous awareness that integrates wisdom into all aspects of life, creating a refined way of being that manifests the Dharma through our conduct and relationships.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

So, we've come to the end of our three-week retreat. Some of you have been here for three weeks. Some joined a couple of weeks back and one or two of you came this week. So as usual at the end of a retreat, there's this translation of what we've come to understand in our practice into our daily life.

One of the things the Buddha did was he left — I want to start with the monastic order so you have some idea — he said that he had left the Dharma and the Vinaya. He didn't just leave the Dharma, which would be the teaching, the practice of meditation and all that. He also left the Vinaya. The Vinaya is the rule of the monks. And he considered that of equal importance, the Dharma and the Vinaya. And he obviously saw that the institution that had developed around him was of importance, maybe not so much to maintain the teaching — I'm sure that was on his mind — but as exemplars.

So as the order grew, especially after the first 20 years, when it seems people joined who were not of the same caliber as the first intake, these rules began to appear, all sorts of rules. So there were serious ones for which you lose the robe, such as stealing, any — if you'll excuse me — any sexual penetration to the depth of a mustard seed. Very precise, very precise. In any aperture, by the way. So you can see he's got it really taped — there's no way out of it.

And then there's all sorts of rules about behaviour between monks and especially women and for nuns with men. And there's what you might call institutional rules, which define the institution and those rules which are really to do with morality. And they're all mixed together, which is rather interesting. It's actually a very illogical code. It's really to do with the punishments — that's not quite the right word in Buddhism — the consequences of what happens if you break these rules. So the rules come in the measure of their consequence.

So the ones I've just mentioned, you lose your robe. There's no ceremony for leaving. You don't have to go and make this great confession in front of thousands of people. You just disrobe, you just disappear. That's if you can handle the shame and the horror of being a monk having broken these rules. Of course, you carry on being a monk. But that would be very hard, I think.

But there's others which demand a meeting that you have to tell what you've done. Like, for instance, an obvious one: touching a woman in a lustful way. You have to confess to five and you have to be separated for at least six nights. And then you have to get 20 monks to get you back into the order to reestablish you, unless you're out in the cold.

There's others where you have something which you shouldn't have and you have to give it up. So, I don't know, for instance, sometimes monks will buy something — but it'll be, say, the scriptures. But because they bought it with money, it's not to be had. So often you have to give that up. But often that's given back to the person. It's just like a reminder, really, that they shouldn't be doing that.

Then there's all sorts of little rules. And then we get down to — and I'll just show you how nitty gritty it is. And the Buddha said to Ananda, "Look, these lesser rules, you can get rid of them." Well, of course, Ananda didn't ask what he actually meant by these little rules. So he was heavily blamed at the council. So nobody's ever had the gumption to say, "Well, look, we can get rid of this rule."

But he gets down to this. And just note the difference, even though they're all just put in any old order, not making a distinction between what is moral and what is institutional. So you get one which is, for instance, "I shall not look enviously at another's

bowl." So when you're sitting there at table, have you peeked over and thought, "Look at that, how could he take so much?" So it's looking, the envy of looking at somebody's food.

But then you've got things like what you might call just etiquette. "I shall not eat stuffing out the cheeks like a monkey." "I shall not make a *chapu chapu* sound." And "I shall not eat making a *suru suru* sound."

So there's all these bands of rules about behaviour, which all really have to do with a certain etiquette. And I suppose you've got to ask yourself, why? Why such a finickity-ness about things?

So the only way you can explain that is the way the Buddha talked about himself. He said, "Who sees the Buddha sees the Dharma, and who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha." So in other words, your behaviour is a manifestation of your wisdom. And there's something about somebody who is awakened or liberated, however you wish to name it, that there's a certain dignity about the person, a certain way of behaving which suggests a refinement.

So this whole business of ethics, and we'll talk about why it's so important, is moving from the gross — finally we've come to the end of killing people, thieving from the next door neighbour, and swearing at them. And we've come away from all that. But there's a whole section of behaviour which is a refinement to do with the beautiful mind. So we're moving towards beautifying the mind and this naturally expresses itself in the way we behave.

Now, to go back a step and wonder why ethics is so important, remember the sequence of events in daily life. There is always this underground ignorance, right? Now, remember, that's the wrong word, really. We should say not knowing. In fact, I did find the right word, nescience, but nobody knows it. So I thought, there's no point in using it. Every time I say translate *avidya*, I've always got to do this double take on it and say, well, it's not culpable ignorance. It's just, you don't know.

And then there's the mistake we make. What is the mistake we make? The mistake is to think we're human beings. Once you realize that, that is a conventional reality, right? I mean, we're not apes, right? But in an ultimate reality, we're not human beings. We're not this body, heart, mind. That's what I mean when I say human being.

So having made the mistake of wanting to be this, believing ourselves to be this human being, what is it that we really, really deep down in the most deepest recesses of our — what do we want? To be happy, isn't it? You just want to be happy. And you can define that in any way you want. For some people, it's money. For some people, it's love. But basically, we're all searching for this happiness.

Now, our mistake, of course, is to seek happiness in the sensual world. And that leads us into three relationships which are undermining our sensuality, even though sometimes it doesn't seem like that or feel like that.

So the first one is, of course, that you generally feel more happy the more you have. And more is a noun, just more. So more friends, more money, better job. And it just goes more, more, more. And what we don't realize is that the more you have, the more vulnerable you are. Because the more you have, the more you have to lose. And the more you have to lose puts you into a state of fear, a state of anxiety. And this anxiety, of course, is underlying all our pleasures in life, because we know that it could all disappear in a trice. In fact, the news is now that the world is going to dip again into a huge recession, it seems. So a lot of people are going to lose work. There's going to be misery out there. Hopefully it doesn't affect you, of course.

And on top of that, of course, there's this aversion, there's this defense mechanism where anybody that is undermining your possessions is to be seen as an enemy and must be annihilated at all costs.

So you can see that these three dispositions relate to show us our relationship to the world. We're either acquiring something or we are defending something or we're running away from something, hiding from something. So from these three dispositions all our unwholesome actions arise — you know, the greed, all the hatred and the spite and the revenge and all the other side too, the anxiety and the depression.

It's difficult to define depression these days. People seem to have various definitions. But when I personally talk about depression, I just mean those feelings that you have when you get in contact with something in your makeup which is trying to come up but you don't let it out. So you're having a clue what it is. It could be suppressed grief. It could be suppressed fear. Whatever it is but as it comes up as it tries to surface there's an unwillingness to go there and there's a fear of it because you just don't know what turbulence that is in the heart. I mean that's one of our big problems in meditation is to be able to go into the bonfires and to feel comfortable there, not to feel burnt up with them.

These three dispositions lead us then into these negative actions. And because of that, we have the consequences that come of it. Technically, it's called *vipaka*, *karma*. *Karma* is the act, *vipaka* is the product. But these days, of course, it's become in our language to talk about your karma. Anything that happens to you is your karma.

Just on an aside there, we need to be clear about what personal karma is. Your personal, by which I mean that karma which is preventing us from achieving liberation, are these dispositions within us, which every time we act upon them get worse. That's our personal karma. What happens to us from the outside could be caused by a myriad reasons. The Buddha is quite clear about that. Just because you catch a cold doesn't mean that's because you pushed somebody out in the snow many years ago. It just means somebody sneezed at you and you got mad. I mean, it's not — that's not your personal karma. How you deal with it and how you feel about the person who sneezed in your face is your personal karma. That's what your personal karma is.

So, okay, so here we have this idea that we started off with this wrong understanding. We've created this mayhem and now we have to go back on it. And our first attempt through the meditation is to let the heart manifest all its turbulences. And we find that just by allowing it to do that, these turbulences just die away. They begin to evaporate, you might say. And that, of course, is not a short process. That's going to be — I mean, restlessness doesn't go to the very end. Not until that moment when we are fully liberated does restlessness leave us. And it depends how you want to define restlessness. The way I see it is that it's all these defilements, but now at such a low level that it's experienced by the person as a discomfort.

And of course, conceit, which is at the base of this relationship, the I am, I am me, doesn't go either. So it's not as though we're ever going to be able to say, "Well, that's done. I'm finished with worrying about my dark side," because it's always going to be there in some little way to the very end.

Now, our passage now is, first of all, to undermine that. But then, of course, it's to develop the good heart. It's to develop ourselves as beautiful people. And the reason for that is because this is a manifestation of the Buddha within. This is what we mean by the Dharma, by wisdom, by wisdom in action. We mean, how does it manifest in the person? And it manifests, of course, in all the virtues, and we can go through the perfections, as they're known. But it also manifests in this refinement of behaviour.

And that's why there are all these little finickety rules in the monastic orders.

Now, on another tack... We have to question what this more is. And here's the Buddha telling us what we actually need in order to live the spiritual life. So don't confuse this with what we need in order to live the social life. You need money for a bus, et cetera. But right at the base of our needs in order to live the spiritual life, we have these four requisites.

So I'll read them out as they come. So wisely reflecting, I use the robe, so clothes, to ward off the cold, ward off the heat, ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, burning and creeping things, and only for the sake of modesty. So there's no mention here of fashion shows. I mean, what is the monk about town wearing at this moment? It doesn't come into the definition. It's just straightforward. You're wearing clothes to protect yourself.

Unfortunately, we've lost that connection with nature, which allows us to go around naked. Every other animal that we see here, they found ways of bearing with nature. They can live in nature. When we had that minus 21 up here during that very cold winter — we never had minus 21 — there were horses out in the field just standing like statues close to each other, not against each other. They bear — I mean at night all day long and there was hardly any fodder though the farmer was bringing bales of fodder during the day — but day after day. I can't remember how long it lasted but it was a long time, wasn't it? At least a month, wasn't it? I remember that terrible winter and they didn't die. They just stood in the cold and of course we have to — well, we need hot water bottles.

So you can see there's a certain disconnect being a human being with nature. But you can see here, that's all you actually need. You only need the clothes to protect yourself from nature, however that might manifest. In the East, it's mosquitoes and stuff.

When it comes to alms food, you see, I use the alms food not for fun. That kills it immediately, doesn't it? Not for pleasure, not for indulgence — I mean it's in a sense that's a wrong translation — not for fattening and not for beautification, but only for the maintenance and nourishment of the body, for keeping it healthy, for helping with the holy life. Thinking thus — and this is what we say in a slightly different way at our meal times — I will allay hunger without overeating so that I may continue to live blamelessly and at ease.

So when you're taking food, get down to that. Remind yourself of what you actually need. So it doesn't need to be really, really tasty. It doesn't need to be particularly varied. I mean, here, I think we go through every vegetable that is on earth by the end of the week. And so many types of beans and so many types of pulses. And I often think, well, I'm not so sure that's particularly good for us because the body has to work at

thinking, "Hold on, this is cauliflower. This is broad beans, what am I going to do?" So the body has to keep manufacturing different enzymes to compete with the amount of food, all these different foods. Whereas in the old days, it was just a chop and two veg. And that was it. And you had that every week. You had fish with boiled potatoes, and that was it. I remember that. And all these drinks, millions of drinks. Well, in the old days, it was just tea, wasn't it? "You want some tea?" "You're not bothering." That was the welcome, wasn't it? "Do you want a cup of tea?" "You're not bothering." I'd say, "Yeah, all right."

So it's good to remind ourselves about this refinement, about getting back to the basics of what we actually need. And then we come to reflecting our lodgings where we live. So again, the Buddha is only concerned with warding off the cold.

And to purposefully develop those in your spare time.

So the question you ask is: what is my work doing to me? What kind of person is it making me? And then, what kind of person do I want to become? And then you arrange your leisure time and your spiritual practices to develop those qualities that your work isn't developing.

So if your work is making you very competitive and aggressive, then in your spiritual life you cultivate cooperation and gentleness. If your work is making you very analytical and mental, then you cultivate the heart qualities. If your work is very solitary, then you cultivate community. You see what I mean? So you're using your spiritual life to balance what your work is doing to you.

And this brings us to right effort. Right effort is about energy management. It's about recognizing that we have limited energy, and how are we going to use it? So the Buddha talks about four kinds of right effort. The first is to prevent unwholesome states from arising. The second is to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen. The third is to cultivate wholesome states that haven't yet arisen. And the fourth is to maintain wholesome states that have already arisen.

Now, this might sound a bit mechanical, but actually it's very practical psychology. Because if you think about it, most of our energy goes into either fighting with things that have already gone wrong, or worrying about things that might go wrong. And very little energy goes into actually cultivating what we want to cultivate.

So the first one, preventing unwholesome states from arising - that's about being wise about the conditions you put yourself in. If you know that certain situations trigger anger in you, then you either avoid those situations or you go into them prepared. If you know that certain people bring out the worst in you, then you either avoid them or you go to meet them having done some meditation first.

The second one, abandoning unwholesome states that have arisen - that's what we do in meditation. When we sit and we watch anger arising, and we just stay with it until it fades away. Or when we notice we're being selfish, and we just acknowledge it and let it go.

The third one, cultivating wholesome states - this is about deliberately developing generosity, loving-kindness, patience, all those beautiful qualities. Not just waiting for them to happen, but actually doing exercises to develop them.

And the fourth one, maintaining wholesome states - this is about recognizing when you're in a good state and not throwing it away carelessly. You know how sometimes you wake up feeling wonderful, and then by lunchtime you've managed to get yourself into a complete state? Well, this is about preserving those good states when they arise.

And this leads us naturally to right mindfulness. Now, mindfulness has become a bit of a buzzword these days, hasn't it? Everybody's talking about mindfulness. But what the Buddha meant by *sati* was quite specific. It means remembering to pay attention. It's not just paying attention - it's remembering to pay attention.

Because the problem isn't that we can't pay attention. The problem is that we forget to pay attention. We get caught up in our thoughts, in our reactions, in our habits, and we forget to be present. So mindfulness is that quality of mind that remembers to come back to the present moment.

And the Buddha gave us four foundations of mindfulness. Mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of *dhamma* - which means the way things actually are, the laws of nature.

Mindfulness of the body is about being present in your physical experience. Not living up in your head all the time, but actually feeling your body, feeling your breath, feeling your posture, feeling the sensations. This is tremendously grounding. Because the body is always in the present moment. The body never goes off into fantasies about the future or regrets about the past. So when you come into the body, you come into the present.

Mindfulness of feelings - this is about recognizing the feeling tone of your experience. Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? This is crucial, because this is where all our reactions begin. We have a pleasant feeling, we want more of it. We have an unpleasant feeling, we want to get rid of it. We have a neutral feeling, we ignore it or we try to make it more interesting. So if you can catch the feeling tone before the reaction kicks in, you have much more choice about how you respond.

Mindfulness of mind is about watching the mind itself. Watching how thoughts arise and pass away. Watching how emotions come and go. Watching how the mind creates stories about everything. This gives you a very different relationship to your mental activity. Instead of being caught up in every thought and emotion, you begin to see them as just events that come and go.

And mindfulness of *dhamma* is about seeing the universal patterns - impermanence, suffering, and non-self. Seeing how everything is constantly changing. Seeing how our attachments create suffering. Seeing how this sense of self is just a construction.

And finally, we come to right concentration. This is about developing the ability to focus the mind, to calm the mind, to unify the mind. This is where the *jhānas* come in - those deep states of meditative absorption that the Buddha taught.

Now, some people think that concentration is just about sitting still and focusing on one thing. But actually, it's much more than that. Concentration is about developing a mind that is stable, unified, flexible, and workable. A mind that you can direct where you want it to go, and that stays where you put it.

This kind of concentration doesn't just happen on the meditation cushion. It affects everything you do. When you have good concentration, you can listen to people properly. You can work without getting distracted. You can be present in conversations. You can make decisions from a place of clarity rather than confusion.

And here's the beautiful thing about the Eightfold Path - it's a spiral. Each factor supports all the others. As your wisdom develops, your ethical conduct becomes more refined. As your ethical conduct becomes more refined, your concentration becomes stronger. As your concentration becomes stronger, your wisdom deepens. And round and round it goes, each revolution taking you deeper into freedom.

This is what the Buddha meant by the Middle Way. It's not just avoiding extremes of luxury and asceticism. It's finding the path that leads to the end of suffering through this careful balance of wisdom, ethics, and mental cultivation. Each supporting the others, each being refined by the others, until eventually the whole thing becomes effortless and natural.

And that's what we're working towards in our practice - not just temporary states of calm or insight, but a fundamental transformation of how we relate to life. A way of being that is wise, compassionate, and free.

But no job can develop all qualities. And to make sure that somehow you either balance it or find some ways of developing those qualities. Or indeed, there are certain qualities in a job which are overdeveloped. Like I mentioned, my brother-in-law is a policeman, so I know he's very suspicious. So it's a case of recognizing that and using it for our benefit.

So here we have this sense of refinement of our behaviour, undermining our unwholesome qualities and moving towards wholesome qualities, the beautiful mind, the beautiful heart, and using our daily situations in order to do it. And that's what the two things that we've been doing here relate directly to what we're doing in the world out there. For instance, when we're working, it's care and attention. It's making sure that we just stop for a moment to get the attitude right and we enter into the work with that attitude. But we've got to keep mindful because these defilements can slip in, you know.

So we start off being calm and with right attitude. Before we know it, we're getting irritated. In this case of stopping then and recognizing that and putting our attention on what we're doing. When it comes to all the things that we enjoy in life – relationships, art, food, it doesn't matter what it is – but at the end of it, to express our gratitude. And then, once we've said thank you, you know, goodbye. That's it. It's gone. Finished. It's never to be repeated. And that's the letting go of it.

When we are with people to remember that we're actually opening up to them. We talked before about this sense of 'I' being a barrier between me and you, and what we need to do is to turn it into a boundary, and a boundary which is malleable. It moves. It's not stiff, it's not rock. There's a lovely image I picked up from Ken Wilber, actually, if I remember rightly, where he talks about the beach. So the beach sometimes is the sea and sometimes it's the land.

And it's just being in that relationship where you're coming from your position, but you're also seeing where the others are coming from. And that gets rid of this idea of my view, my opinion. And it moves us towards an idea of perspective. And when you have your perspective, you can still maintain your perspective, but it includes them. And so you don't get these violent opposites and you get a sense of ability to compromise because you're not creating these harsh definitions.

So there's lots of stuff around which you can read on daily life. There's books aplenty, you know. *Catastrophe Living* by Kabat-Zinn. There's a lovely one by Joko Beck, who's a Zen teacher. There's lots of them. And it's worth picking them up and reading the occasional chapters and whatnot. Because they do guide us in our practice.

But the important thing that we have to grasp is that the meditation is only really just part of the path. It really is an important part. It's the springboard. I would say it's necessary. But if I were talking a bit more subtly, I would say meditation isn't necessary. What's necessary is mindfulness. And that mindfulness, that being aware of what we're doing, is something we should try to maintain all the time. It's very difficult, very difficult.

But meditation is a wonderful practice to ground us and to get us to begin to work with all this subterranean stuff, and to get us to see these qualities of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. And all this feeds in. And not to be concerned about progress. A lot of people, well, I think we all get upset that, you know, "I've been doing this for years and nothing's happened." I think there's always a general feeling about that. And it's often always to do with some expectation about the rate of progress and expecting it to be much quicker than it is.

And why is it so slow? Well, it's because we're lazy. Sun Lun, the great Arahant in Burma, he had this very fierce meditation practice of breathing like an engine. And you would breathe and breathe and breathe like that until you were exploding with pain, and then the breath would stop, and it was as though the breath had pushed out all these defilements. And that's the way he – I don't think he explains it like that, but that's the way I can only understand it working.

Six weeks! Oh my goodness. So that was from his first breakthrough. He was just an ordinary farmer, uneducated really, and somebody told him how to do breathing meditation. They must have told him this fast breathing, which sounds more Hindu than Buddhist, but no, they tested him, the big monastic Sangha bosses tested him, and he himself declared himself didn't suffer. I mean, nobody ever says that an Arahant – you're in for people throwing stones and tomatoes at you if you say that. But he said he didn't suffer.

And he was asked, he said, "You know, you've made it so quickly, why is it that we can't?" He said, "You're lazy. You come here, you work hard for so much, then you give up, then you go back to the old life, get off, not the TV, get into it." So it's up and down, up and down. But hopefully we do see improvements, and I think rather than seeing

our improvement in terms of insights and stages, it's much better to think about how we're relating to people and how we're relating to the world and just finding a greater sense of contentment about our lives.

Wanting what we get and always getting what we want. It's like turning things round and just getting that sense of feeling of contentment in your reality.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your fierce determination and continual practice, achieve liberation from suffering sooner rather than later. It's always very weak, you know. I never get the real punchy stuff. I don't know whether you know this, but... Oh, what am I doing? Heavens. Hold on.

CHAPTER 91

No Inherent Being

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the fundamental Buddhist teaching that nothing possesses inherent existence - everything arises through interdependence and conditionality. He explores how our deeply held sense of individual selfhood creates the root delusion that leads to suffering, examining the psychological process outlined in paṭicca samuppāda (Dependent Origination) that begins with avijjā (not-knowing). The talk demonstrates how our identity with the psychophysical organism drives us to seek security through accumulation and aversion, creating the very insecurity we're trying to escape.*
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> *Bhante explains how vipassanā meditation practice helps us distinguish between the observer and the observed, gradually revealing the constructed nature of our experience and pointing toward the unconditioned state of nibbāna. He emphasizes that liberation requires both ethical development (sīla) - cultivating the brahmavihāras of loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy - and wisdom cultivation through insight practice. The teaching includes practical guidance on working with desires through mindful awareness rather than suppression, and concludes with compassionate advice on maintaining spiritual practice while responding skillfully to world events.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (three times)
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm just wondering whether there's a question somebody has which I can hinge my talk on. It always produces a sort of dead silence. There might be something on somebody's mind that they're wondering about the Buddha's teachings.

Could you possibly speak a little bit about things not having an inherent existence?

Ah, the old inherent existence. This is very much a Mahayana way of expressing things. It's basically saying that everything is contingent, everything is dependent on everything else, or on something else, which is dependent on something else, dependent on something else, so that you end up with a world which is just completely interconnected. And therefore, nothing has its own being. Nothing can exist completely on its own. So you can't take anything out of this universe and expect it to exist. It'll just disappear.

And when we take that into ourselves, that's where it begins to undermine this idea of who I am. So just consider all your thoughts. Have you ever had an original thought, a thought which has never been thought before? I mean, occasionally you do get a human being who comes up with an original thought. Somebody must have discovered the wheel, I suppose, at some point. But most of our thoughts are just rehashing of thoughts that have been given to us. They do have, of course, a twist of our own personality and experience. But all our thinking is dependent on the language we've been taught. And through the language, whatever information has come to us.

So one of the conceits we can suffer from is that, you know, I've had this amazing thought and it's absolutely original. Nobody else thinks like me. And then you write your book and you find that lots of other people have written similar things. So there's nothing which isn't dependent on something else, which hasn't arisen because of some other influence.

Our emotional life is always dependent on something, isn't it? You're always happy about something or sad about something else. You can't have an emotion which isn't about something. Can you? It's difficult anyway. It's always dependent on some sort of stimulus, something out there, or some history within ourselves. We have a history within ourselves of experience. So when it comes back to us as a memory, it will bring up some sort of emotional sense.

The body, of course, is even more obvious. The body is entirely dependent on carrots, cabbage, and the air we breathe. We're one breath away from death. So that sense of interdependency gets away from the idea that we often feel that I'm a very individual, distinct person, and I do my own thing in my own way, in my own time. Now that very sort of more American and European, I think, idea of that, the success that I've had in this world is all due to me. Mind all the workers and everybody who's put that input in. If it weren't for me, I wouldn't be a multimillionaire. I wouldn't be a billionaire. I did it all, all by myself.

What's the name of that woman that wrote something about that? She was into that sort of ideology. She was a Russian emigre in America. Ayn Rand! Because I saw a program, they interviewed people who had these big, very successful businesses, IT businesses in California. And there was one man who just felt completely empowered. And he was of the opinion that this whole empire that he built was entirely due to him. He'd done it.

So there's that sort of egotistical, very self-centered idea that we can suffer from when we don't see our interdependency. Another way of saying that we're interdependent is this business of inherent. We're not inherently independent. We can't exist on our own, full stop.

Now, all that is around the teaching of not-self. How does it happen that we end up with these sorts of delusions? Eastern people are still much more community-based. The Chinese, the Burmese, they still have a sense of me being part of a community, me being just part of something bigger than me. There isn't that severe individual separation between me and the rest.

Now this deep delusion as to who we are is the core of our problem in the Buddha's understanding. It's to do with identity, to do with really beginning to investigate this sense of I. In a sense you have to understand that what the I does mean is it creates a relationship to the world. So the desire for happiness is coming from the Buddha within. It's the Buddha within that wants to be happy. It's not a mental thing. It expresses itself as a mental thing because we express that desire for happiness in wanting things, in wanting fame and relationships and all that. But the deep desire for happiness is coming from this Buddha within. I say Buddha within because it's not quite the Buddha yet, it's the Bodhisattva, it's still deluded. And it's found itself in this psychophysical organism.

Now the Buddha doesn't go into the whys of that. He's not interested in why should that happen. He's not interested in some sort of metaphysics. He's only interested in how. How does it happen that we're unhappy? How does it happen that we are chasing these dragons that don't actually exist or at least won't deliver the happiness that we want? And it all comes back to this fundamental basic position of not knowing, not knowing.

Now, in Dependent Origination, which is the psychological teaching of the Buddha, it begins with that word, *avijjā*, not knowing. It's often translated as ignorance, which gives it a sort of culpability, like you're ignorant. But that's not the meaning of it. It's just simply don't know. And we're born into this form. When I say we, I mean that Buddha within is born into this form. And it's not surprising that it should completely identify with it.

So here it is, a screaming little baby, and it hurts, and sometimes it's happy, and there's an unexpressed and unreflective identity with it, and that stays with us for most people until they die. I am this body. If we understood, if we really, really understood

that I am not this body, then we wouldn't be shaken by sickness or by death. So the fear of death and the anger around it and the grief around it are measures of this identity that we have with the body.

So once we have this identity of the self, once we have this body, this person that I am, which includes the body, the mind, the heart, the whole psychophysical organism, once I've identified that and I'm seeking happiness, then what is it that makes me happy? It's the accumulation of things. The more I accumulate, the happier I am. So to have lots of money makes me happy. But to have billions of it, really, that makes me feel very safe. I'd have to do something terrible to lose billions. I might not spend it. That's irrelevant. I can do anything I want with all my billions. But the fact is that makes me feel safe.

Now, that's the underlying psychology that subsists underneath all our gathering and acquisitiveness, our greed and lust and all that sort of stuff, is the fact that there's a deep sense of insecurity. That deep sense of insecurity manifests every time the body falls ill or somebody we know dies, and it cuts into us.

Now we have to cover that insecurity up because it's not a pleasant place to be. And we do it by accumulating wealth, accumulating friendships, accumulating spiritual highs. It's very comforting to think that I'm an amazingly good meditator. So any way that we can cushion ourselves against this whole business of insecurity becomes that acquisitiveness.

Now, once you've got something, you have to protect it. You have to protect it against enemies. Enemies who want what you've got. So we do it through aversion. We try to get rid of things that are threatening us. At worst, murder, of course. But simple things like jealousies. Jealousies, envies. Those little ways that we see that our fame or what we are, what we've accumulated isn't as good as somebody else's. So we're constantly trying to make myself feel more and more safe. And anything that threatens me, anything that threatens my accumulations, I see them as enemies and I have to get rid of them one way or the other.

If, of course, it all gets too heavy, if the enemy is right on top of me and I can't escape the enemy, then my escape route is to turn inward with the hatred and I end up committing suicide. So these two poles of the enemy create both the aversion and the fear.

So there we have it. That's the basic platform of our delusive relationship to the world, coming from a wrong identity of who I am. I'm trying to accumulate things to make myself feel safe. I'm averse to anything that threatens that sense of safety, which is created by these accumulations. And when it gets too much, I'm going to run for it. I'm going to hide. I'm going to find a cave, somewhere to disappear into.

Now, that basis then, what it does is it begins to manifest in the way we think, in the way we speak, in the way we act. And that's when the ethical life comes into existence. So just to separate out morality from ethics, morality meaning these basic rules that presumably most of us in this room now generally keep, like not murdering and stealing. Ethics is a much broader concept of relationship. So what is our relationship to other human beings? What is our relationship to the animal world? What is our relationship to the world of plants, even to the world of minerals? That was the old medieval, wasn't it? Minerals, plants, animals and human beings. There's your four kingdoms, as they were called.

So what's our relationship to that? And when we begin to investigate that, we find that it's really all there to serve me. Because I'm constantly trying to feel safe. And I feel safe by making myself happy. And it's me who defines what makes me happy. So it might be riches. It might be fame. It might be anything which draws me into my happiness and makes me feel safe. So that's what happens when this sense of I, this sense of me being a person, an individual in the world. That's how we begin to relate to it.

Now, our personalities and characters are not all like that. Part of it, of course, is driven by love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and all the rest of it. And it's beginning to realize that actually that's where our true safety lies. Our true safety lies in really facing up to the reality of life, which is about growing old and sick and dying and all that, and to begin to relate to people in a slightly different way. And that different way is this business of interconnectedness.

So when we talk about interconnectedness at a heart level, all we talk about is love. Love, which is friendship. Compassion, which is that movement in the heart which wants to help somebody who's in some sort of difficulty or pain. And compassion itself is not a painful state. I was at this center and they came up to me and they said, we've decided that the Buddha couldn't be compassionate. I said, oh, I said, why is that? Because he'd be suffering. If he was compassionate, he'd be suffering.

That's a complete confusion between compassion and grief. Grief is when we have pity on somebody. Grief is what we feel when we've lost something personal, when it's some attachment that goes. But compassion is a joyful thing. Compassion raises great joy in the heart when you're helping somebody. So when you're helping somebody and you feel some sort of grief for them, that's coming from that sense of pity.

So all these beautiful states like love, compassion, sympathetic joy, they're in us too. And as we move along the spiritual path, part of it is the happiness, the ordinary human happiness. So the Buddha talks about going from darkness to light. And part of the training, half of the training, is to do with ethics, is to do with developing the beautiful side of our personalities. And in so doing, we find ourselves much more at home in the world, much more connected. And in that, of course, the safety. The safety, the lack of the fear of insecurity comes because we accept the insecurity of life. But once you accept the insecurity of life, you undermine the fear of insecurity. There is insecurity. There's not much you can do about it.

So part of our spiritual life is the cleansing of that, the purification of the heart, based on the wrong understanding of habits that we've developed because of these wrong understandings. Unwholesome habits. So this word *akusala* translated as unskillful, unwholesome. But the other side is the development of the beautiful heart. And it's slowly moving in that direction which is part and parcel of the process.

Now when it comes to this identity, the self, it's much easier to drop the self when the heart is pure than when it's not pure. If you're very angry with somebody, it's very difficult to say, well, I'm not angry, there is anger. But when you're actually moving from the position of love, it's easier to let go of this self-centeredness because the other is your center of attention. It's much easier to let go of me, me, me all the time when you're in a compassionate relationship with somebody who's suffering because they are the focus of your attention, not you.

So that whole movement away from what is negative within us to what is positive is something that we can actually do, that we can actually practice. And by simply every day just giving ourselves a little task. For instance, there was an occasion when the Buddha visited his monks. There were three arahats, mind you. There were three fully liberated people. And he asks the chief monk there, how do you live in harmony with each other? And he said, well, every day when we wake up, when we get up, we say to ourselves, why don't I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?

Now, frankly, that only works if everybody says that. Otherwise, you tend to be abused. But you can see how that attitude to go to work, for instance, and to have more of an attitude of service, not like, what does the company owe me? But more in the sense

of, what can I offer to the company? That doesn't undermine your rights. It doesn't allow you to be abused, but it's your attitude of service which undermines a lot of negativity you might have around work. It's the same with relationships.

Love is putting the other one first, but it's not forgetting oneself. That's the important point. I'm often asked that about, well, if somebody is being abused either at work or in a personal relationship, should one stay there? Well, it's up to the person to decide, but at some point, when the abuse becomes to a level which makes no sense, and you can't get through it, and you can't get the other to see what they're doing, then often it's the best ploy just to move out. Or murder them.

So we've got this basic position of what the Buddha called delusion. The delusion lies in an identity. The identity is this body, heart and mind, this psychophysical, this human being, conventionally a human being, and we're trying to seek happiness. And we're seeking happiness in the world. And it can't deliver. It can't deliver because it's impermanent. Every time you get something which you really want and you've always wanted, the thing begins to corrode, corrupt, disappear, or somebody else nicks it. So we're forever chasing a dragon that doesn't actually exist.

And what it leads us into is frustration. All those things that we talked about this morning, the pleasure, the frustration, the grief of loss, the fear of loss, and boredom, boredom that arises, and addictive behavior. So our practice is now to go back on that, to go back on that process. And the way we do it is both by developing what is beautiful in us through the practice of *mettā* meditation, through actually looking at our lives and what we do, and beginning to see it as a service.

And on the negative side, to begin to undermine it through this process of not indulging those desires, which we see at the present moment. And we've learned the trick. The trick is to be fully aware, to let the desire come up with all its energy, and just to stay with it and wait for it to exhaust itself. It's as simple as that. But of course the difficulty is that you have to keep doing it, and that's the meaning of renunciation in Buddhism.

So again we make this distinction between self-mortification and renunciation. Remember when the Buddha joined, he practised seemingly as the Jains do. It was more a matter of getting rid of this physical world, getting rid of this body in order that the soul might be released. He didn't find that particularly helpful. But he didn't give up on the idea of renunciation.

So renunciation is giving something up to see how attached to it we are, to see how we become emotionally attached to something. The normal thing I say to people is, everybody has a favourite programme on telly and you get your mug of coffee and your biscuit and you sit in the chair, and you don't turn the TV on. You just look at the screen. And you know it's the last of the series. That's a good one. It really is a fantastic one to try on yourself. You don't want to get too masochistic. But what it does, what it manifests for us is this incredible attachment. And remember that we don't actually know the strength of these attachments until we lose them.

So this whole business of identity is undermined through beginning to understand that we are constantly in relationship, we're constantly moving in relationship with the world around us. The practice of *vipassanā* is really to dig deep down into that point of identity, and that's what I was saying this morning about making everything an object. So when physical pain comes, when any emotional state comes—happiness, unhappiness, physical state of pleasantness, pleasure—it is to actually begin to look at it closely.

And to begin to sense that there's a separation there between the knowing, between that which is doing the investigation, investigating, and that which is being investigated. And to recognize that the perceiver, that which is perceiving, can't be that which is being perceived.

Now, as that gap becomes much more clear to us, as we begin to feel that gap more, the separation between the knowing and what is being experienced, it's as though the knowing is beginning to understand its own quality, its own peculiar being, you might say.

Now, for those of you for whom that's clear, remember, the sense of self-awareness, the sense of the observer, the feeler, is still something that you're perceiving. You can't be that either. And it's turning towards the feeling of the observer. The feeling of it. The feeling of presence.

And the peculiar thing is that it's pointing in the right direction. It's just like when you look into a mirror. You're looking at your face in the mirror. And we delude ourselves in thinking that's how people see us. You've all done the two-mirror trick, haven't you? No, you've not done that? You get a mirror and you look into the mirror that you're holding to see which is giving you back the image from the original mirror. So when you look at the mirror, you're looking at your face the other way around. So to turn it round and to see how people really see you is a real shock. You didn't think your nose was quite so bent. So it's really worth doing.

And what that's telling us is, in this observer, that the feeling of the observer is a sense of presence, but it's a mirror image of the Buddha within. And so it's actually looking in the right direction. So that sense of presence is telling us that there is something which is permanent, which is not born, not dying, doesn't die, and all the rest of it.

Now, it's a bit unfortunate these days because, especially with neuroscience—I'm sure you've come across, some of you know what's happening in Buddhism—there's this whole movement of secular Buddhism. A lot of it is based on neurobiology, which in a sense reduces everything to the brain, reduces everything to neurons and ultimately to subatomic particles, I presume. And as you see the brain working, even though the neurobiologists can't feel what you're feeling, so if you feel angry, certain parts of the brain light up, there's a presumption there, which is a leap of faith, that actually what you're measuring or what you're seeing is an emotion. Whereas in Buddhist psychology, what you're seeing is the effect of the mind on matter. The mind in the Buddhist teaching is something separate from, but still has the quality of impermanence, but can actually exist outside this physical frame.

And that is, what you get is a disbelief in that completely, and the body and mind are all based upon the brain and that therefore consciousness itself is just an emergent property. So there's a lot of people who are now in Buddhism who take that as their basic understanding, but it's very difficult to hold that position if you read the scriptures.

And one book that you might like to get, you can get a PDF of it—you might be able to get a copy. So you get a PDF of it and put it on your e-reader. It's a book called *The Island*, which is a collection of quotes from the scriptures put together by Venerable Ajahn Amaro, who's the chief monk now at Amaravati, and Pasanno, who's the chief monk in America, at Abhayagiri in California. And they were tackling this problem of really, from one point of view, of undermining the teaching of the Buddha about there is something which is not conditioned. And I can't see how they get themselves into that position, frankly, even in my lack of knowledge about the scriptures.

So, in that process of *vipassanā*, we are beginning to distinguish between that which is arising and passing away, that which is moving constantly within that inner vision, and something which is observing it.

Now, there comes a point when you are close enough to that process, where what you begin to see is that consciousness itself, the process of being conscious, is not continuous. It arises and passes away, just like that. So then you realize that the world we're living in is completely being manufactured by us on minimal data coming in from the world.

So if you've seen these pictures, if you've seen how the eye moves around the picture that we're looking at, how it picks up, how it's constantly moving, and we're completely unaware of it. Because as the eye moves quite automatically around, picking up this, it's coming into this brain-mind complex. And what we're seeing is put on a screen. That screen is consciousness. All this information is, to me, it's virtually like a television or a monitor. All that information is coming through the electrics. And what we're aware of only is not all the stuff that's going on behind there, but only what's actually on the screen in front of us.

And when you begin to recognize that, then you realize that the world that we're actually living in is the world I'm manufacturing. When I say I, I mean this psychophysical organism.

So in the universe, there's no light. There are photons, but there's no light. You have to have a retina, you have to have a sense base in order to perceive light. There's no sounds in the universe, completely silent. You have to have the mechanism of hearing in order to hear. And that's our sensing body. And our sensing body is limited. We don't have the sense of smell of a dog. We don't have that clarity of hearing that some of the animals have. Our range of perception is limited by our sensibility. We can't see ultraviolet rays. But some animals can. Some animals have that magnetism in their head that they can actually feel where they are. In fact, some human beings have that.

I met a man who came to help us. Just out of the blue, he came to help us put up a kuti, this hut that we have. And no matter which way you twisted him, you could turn him in any way you wanted to, eventually he would point to north, magnetic north, within a degree. Figure that. Now I know that when I go out walking, it's always the opposite to what I'm thinking I'm doing. Pathetic.

So these sensibilities are entirely dependent upon this body, heart and mind. And when we begin to realize that, then, of course, you take an interest in yourself. You take an interest in your psychology. You begin to realize that, actually, you're the only one who's going to take any real interest in your psychology. And that you're the one who's creating the mess, and you're the one who can get out of it.

Remember that the Buddha said that he was completely liberated from suffering. He wasn't liberated from the body. He had a body and he suffered. And he died of gastroenteritis or something. So because he did it, he then, as it were, in the phrase of the scriptures, opened the gates, the gates of the Dhamma wide open. And so it means that we ourselves now are in the process of reaching that particular liberation, that Nibbāna.

Now, Nirvana, in the East, you don't get much talked about Nirvana. It's presumed. Nobody really talks about it. You only talk about the path, about the practice, about the teaching. You never talked about the ultimate. In a sense, because in the culture, it's just presumed. But for us, it can be a very strange understanding that there is a level of being which has nothing at all to do with this phenomenal world, completely outside it. It is completely unconditioned. It is inherent. It has its own inherent, to go back to the original question, it has its own inherent existence and is not dependent on the world. That's the teaching.

Now the Buddha wouldn't go beyond that particular statement. He wouldn't get into metaphysics. He wouldn't infer that therefore there must be some sort of big being. So there's no creator God. There's nobody who's judging us. All that's done within us. And the process of liberation is entirely up to us. Not that people can't guide us and help us, but eventually it's us that has to sit on the cushion. We have to do the work. And the process of liberation comes about through our own particular effort. That's all. Nobody can do it for us. So, like they say in Zen, the Buddha can only point to the moon. He can't get you over there.

So, this Nirvana that we're moving towards is described in various ways. Now, the usual way that he expresses it is negative. It's not born, doesn't die. And the word he uses there is a Pali word which translates as exists. There's another Pali word which is like our "is", like "this is a statue." So the "is" there has virtually no meaning. But if you say that statue exists, that gives it a different twist. There exists that which is not born, doesn't die. And he says, if it did not exist, there'd be no escape from what is born, dies, is created, is conditioned. It's quite clear.

He talks about an *āyatana*. Āyatana here is the word that means a sphere of experience. So we have six āyatana. The sphere of seeing. Can't be confused with the sphere of hearing. They're two different ways of experiencing the universe. Then there's tasting, smelling, and all the mental formations that go on. Then he says that there is a sphere where there's none of it, where there's no moon, there's no sun, there's no coming, there's no going, there's no staying, there's no time. Very clear statements.

And then when it comes to a more positive way, he's got something like 32 adjectives trying to point to it, such as refuge, a home, an island, an island that you cannot go beyond. So the island is something completely separate from the landmass. And that's it. You can't go beyond it.

How can we get a glimpse of that in our practice? How can we begin to see it? Because this is what we're supposed to be. Not becoming. The I is always becoming some other person. Even during the day, you might change from being a mother, a father, to a

workmate, and so on and so forth. So your personality, your person, your personhood is constantly shifting and changing. But here's something which doesn't do that. It's beyond change.

So, in our practice, when you're observing things and you get more and more a distinct sense of being the self, being the observer, being the feeler, and making that clear to yourself, and sometimes perhaps turning into that sense of presence that's there. Especially when everything's calm, everything's peaceful. That's the time to do it. You can't do it when you're raging. So when you're calm, when you're peaceful.

This is what I mean. The more beautiful we become in our ethical life, the more beautiful our hearts become, the easier it is to drop the self. So when everything is peaceful, it doesn't have to be in a sitting posture. You could be sitting in an armchair at home. You could be walking in nature. But as soon as you get that sense of being within yourself, being the observer, the one who knows, just stop for a moment and just feel that sense of presence because it's a mirror image. It's a mirror image. And just see if you can—what's the knowing made of?

Now as far as we're concerned as human beings, we're made of three things. We're made of the mind which expresses itself in thoughts and images. We're made of a heart which is expressed in emotions and moods—I'm using it as an emotional heart—and we're made of the body, and the only thing we know of the body is sensations and feelings.

Can you find any of that within the observer?

So these are things that you can actually begin to question when you're in that very clear state of the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. And what that's beginning to do for us is to clarify, is to begin to clarify for us where this state that the Buddha's talking about, this nirvanic state is to be found. And the more we'll be drawn there, the more that we'll be drawn there. And the more you're drawn there, the more you're drawn to silence. The more you're drawn to peacefulness.

Of course, you have to be careful that you then don't get into a quietism where you just want to sit there, anonymous under a tree or something. It also has to be that outflow of wisdom. And that's exactly what happened to the Buddha. So he attained this state, and it must have been quite amazing to him. He must have thought, what is this? I mean, he had to investigate the state that he'd actually found himself in, this liberation. He hadn't come across it. Nobody had talked about it. He didn't know anything about it. He had to actually investigate this state of being in Nirvana.

And it's when he investigates that, and he investigates how he used to suffer, and how he overcame that suffering. And that's the psychology that we call dependent origination. And as soon as that happened, as soon as he gathered that, the desire to share it was quite natural. Because it's no longer about him.

So then he thinks, the memory of his two teachers come up. And they both died. So there's a sense of sorrow about that. Do not confuse sorrow with grief. Sorrow is a very pure state where you're resonating with somebody else's suffering. And the sorrow has to express itself in some compassionate way, even if it's only sending a good wish.

Otherwise it remains unrequited and can slip into a sense of grief, a sense of unworthiness because you didn't do anything. So you have to be quite careful about that.

So in that sort of investigation, we're getting close, we're beginning to perceive what the Buddha means by it. And when you're in that state, you begin to perceive it as a better state to be in. A better state to be in awareness than to be in non-aware. Even though it's creating an enormous pain in the back, in the knees, in the neck. All this stuff's coming up. There's a sort of feeling that, well, even in this horror, it's better to be aware than to go around like a monkey.

Let me just see. Can you turn the lights on? I'm beginning to talk to the darkness.

I just like to end by pointing out something that's been happening, I think, to a lot of people. All this business around ISIS and the Islamic thing and all the horror stories that are coming out today and how people can feel overwhelmed by the horrors of it. Remember, you have to be careful with yourself. Not go beyond what's possible.

Remember that there's two rings of power around us. The first one is what I can do. Very little anybody can do about what's happening in the Middle East, either around Palestine or around what's happening to ISIS. Very little that you can actually do. The next part is the influence, what you can get other people to do. And it might be writing letters, whatever. There might be something that can be done there. But beyond that, if you try and get beyond that, all you're going to do is exhaust yourself. You're just going to get yourself into an absolute state of feeling disempowered and all that sort of stuff.

And the fact is that you think that that's false, but you are disempowered. You can only do certain things. So the final thing you can do is at least send good wishes. Now, it might be that you don't believe that your thought patterns can actually help other people in other places. But at least it's doing something within you to create a proper relationship to the situation that you find yourself in.

Just on that note, I have a friend in Alabama who teaches dowsing. And one of the things he does is he gets two people on both sides of the room to send a thought to each other, a blessing or something like that. And they all douse that line, that energy line. And he says they can douse it for six weeks. They can feel that energy in the line for six weeks. It's an Aboriginal song line.

So without getting too mystical about it, there is a point where you can say to yourself, well, I know enough about this situation. I don't have to keep feeding it with these images. Sometimes you can turn the news off. Just keep feeding the same old bad story. Well, we know what's going on, and what can we do? Well, at least I might be able to write a letter or send goodwill or do something. But just to find ourselves completely disempowered is just overreaching what we can do. And in a sense, it's a lack of humility, isn't it? You can do more than you can. There's a sort of pride in it.

So just in case you found yourself being quite upset about things that are happening around the world. The Pope's called it Third World War. He's close on the beginning of a Third World War. It's pretty miserable.

So on that happy note, remember that there's two sides to our practice. There's the side which is to do with ethics, which is to do with relationships, which is to do with letting go of all that selfishness and anger, and really a positive effort to develop goodwill, compassion, joy. And as we're doing that, we're doing this investigation into impermanence, into the process of this wrong desire, really begin to see that. And the fact that when it remains only as a desire, nothing's happened. It has to be willed. There has to be an action which takes it into a pattern of thought, or a pattern of speech, or an action. And this business of not me, not mine. So that's not a negativity. There is nothing. It's actually a way of investigating this whole problem of identity.

So I'll leave a piece of paper there. Might be time to ask some questions, clarifications tomorrow afternoon. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your fierce commitment to the practice and devotion to love, compassion, joy and peace and all the rest of it, attain full liberation sooner rather than later.

So use this, just see what your state is, whether it's just a matter of relaxing and breathing in the night air and doing something like that, or doing some walking meditation. And then we'll come back and do the last session of the evening. But the important thing is to get in the habit of not allowing the mind to wander. There's no rest. You can't take a holiday in the spiritual life. You can't say, well, today I'm just going to go berserk. Sex, drugs and rock and roll. It's like once you're in there, you're in, you're locked in.

And not to expect big things, not to expect some huge out-of-this-world bomb that's going to break and suddenly become floating angels or something. The process is very slow, and the Buddha's call is about gradual, a gradual training.

It ruins the sex, drugs, and rock and roll, doesn't it? It sort of ruins the sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Well, this is it. It takes the joy out of life. Very good.

CHAPTER 92

Kamma and Free Will

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how the Buddha's teachings differ fundamentally from Western religious and psychological frameworks regarding moral action and spiritual development. While Christianity focuses on good versus evil and Freudian psychology on the conflict between ego, id, and superego, the Buddha addresses the deeper delusion of selfhood that drives our acquisitive, aversive, and fearful behaviors.*
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> *The talk explores the ten pāramīs (perfections) as practical virtues for crossing to the 'other shore' of Nibbāna: dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), nekkhamma (renunciation), paññā (wisdom), viriya (energy), khanti (patience), sacca (truthfulness), adhiṭṭhāna (resolution), mettā (loving-kindness), and upekkhā (equanimity). Bhante emphasizes how gratitude naturally leads to generosity and renunciation, while distinguishing true spiritual generosity from mere social exchange.*
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> *Practical guidance is offered for integrating these teachings into daily life through committed morning and evening practice, mindful transitions between activities, and developing the 'good heart' alongside wisdom. The discussion addresses common pitfalls in spiritual practice and offers concrete methods for maintaining awareness throughout the day, making this essential listening for anyone seeking to live the Dhamma beyond formal meditation sessions.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this evening, well, let me tell you what happens tomorrow, and it makes sense. Tomorrow we carry on till lunchtime, and then because the weather should be fine enough tomorrow, by the way, it gets darkish and cold, we might do just a small sit at two o'clock, but then hopefully we will assault the mountain behind us. Not this one. That one. It's only 300 metres. It's nothing. Mark ran up and down it. He said, no problem. And then we come back and then in the evening, just questions and answers really, whatever discussion comes up. And then on Sunday morning, I do a little finishing ceremony, breakfast and then you can escape.

So this evening really it's just tackling this whole problem of daily life. How do we take this into daily life and just use various ways that the Buddha talks about it? First of all just to get a clear idea of what the Buddha's position is when we compare it to other systems.

If we look at Christianity it really centres upon the morality of things. The basic myth about Adam and the apple, and then because of that initial mistake everybody suffers and we've all got this original sin, this thing that has to be wiped. And then it's a very complicated story about the role of Jesus and all that. But the basic thing is that we're caught between the devil and God, and there's a lovely story of Job which all of you have read, of course, in which the devil says to God, this fellow Job, of course he loves you. You've given him everything he's got. All these wives and kids and all this land and cattle. He says, you've got to test him.

So God thought, hmm. So he began to test Job. And he killed all his wives and all his kids. Took away all his cattle. And he's absolutely devastated. And he can't understand why this has happened to him. So then we have these Job's comforters. They all come basically tell him he must have done something wrong. But he hasn't. And he can't think what he's done to deserve this catastrophe. But the one thing he doesn't lose is faith in God. The one thing he doesn't lose is faith in the goodness of God. And eventually God, of course, recognises this trust and gives everything back, a hundredfold and all that. If you like the Coen brothers, their film A Serious Man is based on Job and it's extraordinarily funny. Anyway, that's by the way.

Freud simply took that on to a psychological or psychoanalytic level. So for a Christian it's this trying to know what is good and evil, and this battle between the temptations of the devil and the invitations of God, that's the battle between good and evil. In Freud, you get a slightly different model where you've got this poor little ego, but one minute is dragged down by this animal id and constantly castigated by the superego. And the poor ego has to weave a little way between these two opposites and try to find some sort of stability.

From the Buddha's point of view, it's a slightly different problem. Yes, all those things come up in his teaching. The decision about what is wholesome and unwholesome, what is skillful, etc. The id, these basic desires, not particularly basic, but our animal nature drawn to sex and lust and greed and then avarice and all that. All these things are in the Buddha's teachings. And the desire to seek happiness in doing something good, that's all there too. So it's not as though the Buddha would deny any of that. In

fact, he would say that those who've understood that there is consequence for doing good and doing evil, in other words, the law of *kamma*, they're actually on the path. They're actually on the path. That's the basic understanding.

There were people in his time who would have said, it doesn't matter what you do, you can go down one side of the Ganges and do tremendous compassionate acts and come up the other side murdering and pillaging, won't make a blind bit of difference because your life is set, it's conditioned, it's fated. That would not be his understanding.

From the Buddha's point of view, the problem is at a slightly deeper level, you might say, as to why do we do these things in the first place. And there he came across this fundamental delusion about who we are. Remember that having decided, having believed that we are human beings, and heaven saying all want us to be happy, no matter how you might define it, if you ask any human being what they want they say I want to be happy, and they might define it in all sorts of different ways but that's what they want to be, they want to be happy. And that search for happiness leads to this acquisitiveness, remember, gathering things because the more you have of what you like the happier you seem to be. The more money in the bank you feel safer, etc. And anything that undermines any of that of course you want to get rid of, so there's your aversion. And if it's bigger than you then you run for it, there's your fear.

So there's your three basic attitudes of acquisitiveness, aversion and fear arising from the idea that as a human being I can achieve happiness, permanent happiness. You can achieve it in little bits but then it always lets you down, doesn't it? So although there is at that level of working with what is unwholesome and wholesome, virtuous and otherwise, at a deeper level it's cutting through the very delusion that's causing it. That's a slightly different model. So the accent is on an investigation as to how these things happen, as to how we behave the way we do.

He wouldn't deny the role of guilt and shame. He would deny the existential guilt that might be felt within the Christian, Judaic and Muslim tradition where you are fundamentally evil and you can only be saved by God or Jesus or whatever. That wouldn't work from his point of view. But what does work is that when you do something harmful, then you dread consequences. And there's your dread. There's your guilt. Fear of being caught. And the shame. Shame is just not living up to your own standards, feeling belittled by your own behaviour. And seeing yourself belittled in other people's eyes because of your behaviour. So those two things the Buddha actually calls guardians, guardians of society. He's not saying they're wholesome, but it does stop you doing things.

So you've got this model where on the one part it's an investigation as to our true nature and what should our relationship be to the world. And on the other part, it's dealing with habits that we've accumulated, developed because of past wrong understanding. And even present wrong understanding. And we're still deluded. Remember that the definition of deluded or delusion is that you don't know where the delusion is. If you knew where it was, you wouldn't be deluded. So we've talked a lot about the hindrances and all that.

So maybe it's also time now to talk about these *pāramī*. *Pāramī* means to be on the shore. It's translated as perfections, but basically it's the virtues that we need to take us across the water to this island. The island the Buddha often uses as an image for *Nibbāna*. It's something beyond this present life form.

So let me read through them first, and then afterwards I just want to talk a little bit about commitment. So we have ten qualities. Now, in the Mahāyāna they have five, but in Theravāda they have ten, which proves that we're better. Actually, these were compiled later out of the scriptures. I think as a challenge to Madhyamaka. Anyway, these are the purifications, ten leading ones. So there's the giving, or liberality, generosity. There's morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving kindness, and equanimity. So obviously it doesn't include every virtue there is, but at least it gives us some sort of platform.

Giving is really the basic virtue the Buddha points to as a starting point because he points out that even thieves can be generous with what they've just taken from you. They can be very generous to their friends and family. So generosity is probably one of the easiest things that you can do because it's a matter of giving. And he always starts his talk to lay people with *dāna*, with this idea of giving. And then he talks about the good life, and he talks about being reborn in the heavenly realms and all that. And when he's got his audience, then he hits them with the Four Noble Truths. He wheedles his way in.

So I want to latch together these three great virtues: gratitude, generosity and renunciation. When we consider what we've received, gratitude arises. And it's a lovely feeling, isn't it, gratitude, thankfulness? And if you go through your life and instead of thinking of how horrible everybody's been to you, a terrible society and all that, and instead you go through and make a list of all the things that you've been given, even this life by our mothers, then very slowly the balance moves, generally speaking, towards gratitude rather than grudge.

And what gratitude does, of course, it fills a heart with the desire to repay, to do something in return. And often you can't do it to the people who've done you good because either they've moved on or you've lost contact, etc. So therefore you move it towards an attitude of giving. And it might not be giving what you received, but it's just knowing that gratitude impels you to be generous one way or the other.

And generosity is either of our wealth or our time. Now, the interesting thing is that every time you give something, you're giving something up. Because you could have used it for yourself. So when you make a donation to a cause, you could have used it to have a good time. And every time you give your time for the benefit of somebody else, well, you could have used it to have a good time. You might have had a good time helping them, but it wasn't for you. So there's that renunciation.

And sometimes when you give, you can sometimes push the giving just a little bit so that it hurts a little. Because that little bit of hurt means you're stretching your idea of renunciation. I think parents with children obviously have a wonderful opportunity because it's just like you've got to keep stretching, they demand and you've got to keep stretching out towards them, giving more. So these three virtues are intimately connected: gratitude, generosity and renunciation.

Now, renunciation mustn't be confused with self-mortification. In self-mortification, what we mean by that, in Buddhist terms, is that you believe the body is at fault. And you're almost denying the body its desires because the body is leading you into wrongdoing. So you blame the body. So, for instance, if you had a problem with alcohol, you're blaming the body. So, it's a case of recognising that that's not what renunciation is. Renunciation, in Buddhist understanding, is to give something up to see your attachment. And you don't know how attached you are to something until what you have is gone. And then there comes all these things that we've talked about with attachment, the grief and all that.

So whenever we're generous, that's an opportunity to reflect on, you know, to actually make it a pure act of generosity. So sometimes we, there are all sorts of reasons for giving. You might give, I mean, you might do something for a business reason. That's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. You buy somebody a drink so that they will sign the contract. Well, what's the problem with that? But it's not generosity in a spiritual sense.

We buy presents at Christmas for each other. A bottle of wine and somebody buys you cheese. Or a pair of socks for heaven's sake. And it's just an exchange of goods. I mean, this goes back to ancient times. Kings exchanged goods as a way of just creating a certain friendship. But that's not generosity in the spiritual sense. But there's nothing wrong with it. It has its purpose in our relationships.

The generosity we're talking about is giving for the sake of the other, not for any reason, not for any purpose of return. So we have to be careful when we give something, and this is why this reflection is important. So when you give something, you give it for the benefit of the other. And when that suffuses your heart, when that suffuses your intention, your intention is complete and whole. That's what's in your mind, you're giving it for their benefit. That's when you give. So that the action supports the intention and that's your conditioning. And we're conditioning ourselves to just give, to just give.

Now you have to be careful because after you've done that you see these little voices come up: "You're truly a generous person." So you point to that and you say, ah, no, no, no, Māra, no, you weren't there, you weren't there. Or one of these little underlying things, it's too much, give me some back. All this, sometimes you don't reflect upon somebody asking you, like, you know, decorations, you had all this decoration, it went on forever. Days and days. And if somebody comes along and says, we'd like to, oh, yeah, I'll come along. And then they go and think, I don't want to decorate. And then they phone up and say they're not feeling very well. And, I mean, you can't blame people. But it just shows that often we give without a certain reflection.

But often, and we're coming to truthfulness, it's defined as doing what you say you're going to do even if it hurts, because when you do something that you said you were going to do, and then you didn't want to do it, and you make yourself do it, it teaches you. Next time you'll be just a bit more careful before saying yes. You'll make the same mistake again.

So this whole area of giving, it's reflecting on it, and you give it. And of course, you can do that with Christmas presents. Even though at the back of your mind you know that if you didn't give it, that would be the end of your friendship. The fact is that you can put that to the side and give something for the person's benefit. So remember that intention is crucial. Your intention is crucial. And the purer it is, the better.

And of course, don't forget, you can be generous to yourself. We have to also learn that I am also worthy of generosity. And sometimes you have to look after yourselves. So the Buddha did. I mean, here he is. He's liberated from suffering. He says he doesn't suffer. And yet he goes off into the forest to meditate. And so they ask him, why do you

do that? You're liberated now. He says, no, I do it with my own quiet abiding and as a good example to others. But notice, the first thing is my quiet abiding. Like he's had enough of all these questions and driving in potty. So he's going, so he's offering a bit of peace and quiet. And he does it also to show, to be an example to others.

When you feed yourself, when you eat yourself, really acknowledge that this is for our benefit. I'm eating this for my benefit so that I can continue to live and live the spiritual life. So you've got to be careful that you don't get into this thing about helping others and leave yourself out. Because eventually it works against you. I mean, you get this burnout business. And giving somebody who's a do-gooder. See, that's the other side of it. So a do-gooder, in my definition, is somebody who does you the good they want to do you. Whether you want it or not. And people like that come from a good heart. But they're not really standing in your shoes. They're not really looking at the world from what you want to do. They think, well, this is what's good for you.

And it can be a real pain. So the example I give is that somebody's ill, so you take them grapes and soup or something, and they say, thank you very much, but I really couldn't eat this soup, you see. And inside your mind you say, I've just spent two hours making this bloody soup. They say, you could do something for me. Oh, yeah, very good. Could you clean my toilet? I think I'd better clean your toilet. I came here to offer you soup. So you can always catch yourself when you're doing this good and then you find actually you're being a do-gooder.

So how do we get beyond that? It's very simple. You ask the person what they want. You don't presume on anything at all. So giving itself is really... Generosity is really crucial in our practice. And it's a form of love, of course. Generosity is just there. And it's lovely when you see these... What do they call it? Sports for... Sport relief. Yeah, sport relief and comic relief. They raise masses of money. And it's really quite... Well, it's quite uplifting to know that people are prepared to give for these causes. Really wonderful.

So that covers three of them anyway. So it's the giving and the... I mean, gratitude isn't mentioned here, but it's definitely something. Meister Eckhart, whom some of you might know, the thirteenth century mystic, who's very close to Buddhism. If you read his stuff, it's very, very close to the Buddha's understanding. He says, if you were to say thank you all the time, that would be enough. That's how important he thought gratitude was. Brian does it, doesn't he? Just for today I will be thankful. Even he's caught on to it. So it's something to reflect on.

So we've done the renunciation. Renunciation is just catching yourself these sneaky little selfishnesses. Where you take just the bigger piece of cake. You know what I mean? You take that extra toffee and just catch yourself. And then you hate the person who gets it, of course. So, renunciation.

Morality, well, we've talked a lot about that. It's again, morality here, the Buddha's actually meaning just the basic things that you determine not to go there, that's all.

Wisdom, well, we've talked about that. So this is more of a mental, of a mind. So a lot of these are heart things, like giving. And renunciation and patience. But wisdom is coming from this wisdom within us. This understanding. The faculty of wisdom. Which is not to be confused with intellect. Remember.

There's a lovely story. I always forget the name of the monk. But in those days remember, they didn't write things down. They remembered them. And this poor monk he said, when he learnt a new stanza of the Buddha's teachings, it would knock the one he'd just learnt out of his head. So his brothers advised him to leave the monastic life said you know you're not going to get anywhere. So the Buddha hearing this went to see him and he gave him a very simple exercise of rubbing a piece of cloth and wiping his face with a clean cloth and just saying impermanence, impermanence, impermanence. And he became fully liberated just like that. It didn't work for everybody. It didn't work for me.

But it's a different faculty. It's not the intellect. It's not about understanding something. There's one man called Puttaka. What's his name? Empty Puttaka. There's another monk and he can explain the Dharma wonderfully. But the Buddha calls him Empty Puttaka. Empty. Because he's not coming from experience. He's coming from his intellect. He's coming from understandings. And people like that really have a big problem because they really believe that because they've really understood something that therefore they've actually truly experienced it. So that's a lot to do with our honesty as well, you see.

There's another little story about a teacher and all his students become fully liberated. And he isn't. And he thinks, oh, I can't understand this. And so he goes off and he asks them, do you think you could help me? And what the student realises is that his teacher's very conceited. So he says, well, I can't really help you. Why don't you go and see somebody else? Eventually, one of his students tells him to go and see this little boy. So you can imagine that's a bit humiliating, how to become liberated.

So the little boy takes him off to an anthill. Now, in the east, when the ants have left, it's often the abode of a snake. And so the little boy says, if a snake lives in that anthill and there are six holes, how do you get him to come out? And he said, well, you just stop up five holes and he'll come out through the sixth. He said, that's what you've got to do. In other words, through the senses, the six senses, by stopping five senses and just watching the mind, then you begin to understand, you see. Well, of course, as all these stories go, in no length of time, the teacher was fully liberated.

So, don't get confused with understanding. The Buddha actually talks about three levels of understanding. The level of just hearing something, being inspired by it, understanding it, but unable really to repeat it because it's not become your own. Intellectual knowledge and then once it has become your own understanding you can talk about it. But then at a deeper level it has to be realised. So you can talk about impermanence till the cows come home, but have we actually experienced it at the level of me arising and passing away? So that's the wisdom bit.

Energy, energy, what's the other word, effort. Yeah, you've got to be careful with this effort business. Remember that, normally speaking, our effort is in trying to do something, trying to achieve something, which is perfectly alright in the world. But when we come to our meditation it's important to realize that the effort is just to be aware. Once you start looking for something or trying to attain something then you normally end up in a hole, because even if you're not fully aware of it there is some concept at the back of the mind driving this sense of wanting to achieve something. So be careful with effort. Just keep reminding yourself. My teacher used to say, your job is just to watch. Your job is just to be aware.

Patience. The Buddha says this is the highest form of ascetic practice. So if you think of ascetic practice as fasting for long times, or in certain practices, you've seen these ascetics in the east, even the early christian desert ascetics, like for instance just holding up their arm in the air till it withers. You've seen that one have you? Yeah. So these heavy ascetic practices. He says actually the greatest of all ascetic practices is patience. So patience is just a willingness to bear forbearance, not only just our own internal pains and stuff, just not to get angry with things, not to be irritated, but of course with situations and other people. So that patience is one of his great virtues.

And he gives the example of someone who says, if bandits came along and cut you from limb to limb, if at any time you felt hatred or a grudge against them, you would be no disciple of mine. That's a bit tough, isn't it? When I told this one, somebody said, yeah, the Buddha had a great sense of humour. But patience is just a great virtue, isn't it? Patience.

Truthfulness. Here it's defined as, if you say you're going to do something, do it. But I mean you can stretch that also to being careful as to what you say. Even exaggeration is a small level of untruthfulness. It's not being absolutely correct. Exaggerating both negatively and positively.

And then there's resolution. So that's what we were doing today, resolution. Resolution is just that real commitment. In the Buddha's life, it manifested in his resolution to sit under the tree and work the problem out, either to the point of death or he'd actually work it out. So you have to be pretty resolved to do something like that.

What I normally say is that, say a course, you come on a course, that you commit yourself to that course completely, right? Accept in emergency or extraordinary circumstance. And of course you're going to define extraordinary circumstance in all sorts of ways. But the problem with making too hard a decision is that even when all the signs are you should stop, you don't. And then you do yourself damage, you see. I know somebody who kept sitting and sitting with knees, you know, with these knees business, you know. And the teachers, my teacher actually, the Burmese would just say watch the breath, you know, sit, just watch this, you know, watch the pain. Unfortunately she damaged her knees. So you have to be slightly careful. You have to really suffer if you want to damage your knees by the way. It doesn't come with just a little bit of pain. You've got to work at it.

Then there's loving kindness, *metta*. The Buddha often uses *metta* to mean all forms of love, which includes compassion and sympathetic joy. Remember, rejoicing in someone, others, good fortune or success as our own. Don't forget, all these things have to be also directed towards ourselves.

And then equanimity. All these virtues do have their obvious enemy, their straight enemy, and their subtle enemy. So with love the obvious enemy is hatred, but the more subtle enemy is attachment. And you can always tell when you're coming from attachment because you tend to be not listening to the other person or not taking their view or their desire on. And then you tend to get upset because they're not doing what you want to do. You get irritated, you get bored with them, all that. Or whenever you feel negative about somebody whom, especially if you have a close relation to them, then you know that's a sign of our attachment. It's always coming from me rather than them or us. It doesn't mean to say that... You've got to be careful with that because you don't want to get abused. You've also got to take yourself into account. Anyway, it's a tricky area. I haven't got time. I can go on and on about that one.

But equanimity, of course, its obvious enemy is confusion, just to get lost in something. But its more subtle enemy is this indifference, where you're standing away too much. You're standing away too much. There was a woman came to see me. She said that every time she came out of meditation at home, her partner accused her of being cold, you see. So I said to her, well, do you do any *metta* when you finish your practice? She said no. I said, well, that's what you've got to do. I said, you know, when you sit, you want to be cool. You want to be equanimous. You want to be distant. You want to be able to investigate. But somehow you've got to re-engage. You've got to re-engage with the world. And you do that through the practice of *metta*. Anyway, she didn't come back. Either he gave up on her or she practiced a bit of *metta*.

So let me read out the way that it says in the commentaries. As a great being, so that's often a synonym for somebody who is attempting to become fully liberated. Or an enlightened being, yeah. Are concerned with the welfare of living beings, not tolerating the suffering of beings, wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings, and being impartial and just to all beings. Therefore, they give alms to all beings so that they may be happy without investigating whether they are worthy or not. By avoiding to do them any harm, they observe morality. In order to bring morality to perfection, they train themselves in renunciation. And in order to understand clearly what is beneficial or injurious to beings, they purify their wisdom. For the sake of the welfare and happiness of others, they constantly exert their energy. Though having become heroes through utmost energy, they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings. And once they have promised to give or do something, they do not break their promise. With unshakable resolution, they work for the welfare of beings. And with unshakable kindness, they are helpful to all, and by reason of their equanimity they do not expect anything in return. There we are. That's a nice little standard for us.

So that's just the little reflections on these *paramis*, these virtues or perfections that we ought to develop. And the other thing is commitment. It really is a case of committing yourself to a daily practice. Morning. It's important because that sets the weather vane. It reminds you the level of awareness and consciousness you want to try and maintain throughout the day. And then to practice that loving kindness to re-engage with the world straight after that, you see. So that's important.

And then in the evening, that's the other time, really. Specifically when you come back from work or definitely before you eat. After you eat, you just fall asleep. And the reason there is really to just sit. And remember, you don't always have to sit in posture. It is a good thing to sit in posture because it does help the awakeness. But there, you're just letting the day come through. So irritations and anxieties and all this stuff. Things

that have been happening during the day just let them arise and pass away. So let them pass there's all the cleansing you see. And then preparing for sleep, that's also important. Rather than just coming straight off Facebook, launching yourself onto the pillow or some exciting horror movie and then...

I mean, you've got to prepare for sleep. I always think you need a half an hour where you just slow down, you can listen to beautiful music, you can practice *metta*. It's just something just to bring everything down so that when you sleep you actually have deep sleep.

And then of course there's many times during the day when there's nothing to do, you're not doing anything in the sense of you're walking upstairs or you're waiting for some transport, the bus or the tube, or you're hanging around waiting for a friend or there's nothing to do, you're just sitting there. And often what we do is we just let the mind wander. It's wasted time, whereas there are beautiful little opportunities to practice *metta* or to have some positive thought or thinking around the dharma or a particular issue or something. But not to let the mind wander. That's the awful thing. Letting the mind wander. It's alright when you're in a daydream. But when you come out, we have to say to ourselves, now what have I been developing there? What horrible state of mind have I been developing in that ten minutes, half an hour? When I first began sitting, I'd sit for a whole hour going through one fantasy after another. It's unbelievable. It hasn't got that much better, but I mean at least it's recognizing that the mind when you let it go, it just is messing you up, that's all.

And um that Plum Village, which is a monastery in France. It's the main center for Thich Nhat Hanh, who's a very famous teacher in the Zen tradition, Vietnamese. They have this practice of having someone ring a bell anytime. Absolutely, just out of the blue, just ring a bell. And even when the phone goes. As soon as you hear a bell, you have to stop. And you have to wait for the sound of the bell to disappear. It's a really interesting little practice. And it's just bringing somehow that into our lives. If you do work on a computer, you can get the mindfulness bell. You can download the mindfulness bell. And you can set it for every twenty minutes, half an hour. We can also set it at random. It annoys me terribly, but I keep on doing it.

When I was a teacher, there was this great old teacher who taught me about stopping. You'd be surprised - that was one of the great effects that meditation had on me when I first started. I used to be a teacher, and you know, you'd go out of one classroom - I was in further education - you'd go out of one classroom and you'd take whatever you'd had in that classroom into the next one. By the end of the day you just felt ragged.

Once I began this meditation, I used the passage from one classroom to another as a way of just letting everything sort of subside. It was quite amazing. During lunchtime, instead of hanging around with staff just chatting away about nothing - I mean, obviously I did a little bit of it - but then I used to find a quiet corner. It was amazing. The amount of energy I ended up with at the end of the day was just... well, it was just different. My understanding of work changed completely in terms of draining energy. In fact, all I realised was that it was me draining energy. The work wasn't draining energy - it was just me not behaving in a wise way.

So this constant stopping after everything - after a phone call, so you just reflect on what the phone call was. You see, it only takes... It doesn't take long at all, you just stop. Then you see: was the heart brightened by it, which is a good thing? Did it become irritated? Were you anxious? You just stay there, just wait for that to fade a little. You don't have to wait for it to go entirely, but at least just acknowledge it and let it fade away.

So it's the same with meetings. Meet somebody. After a piece of work, so you just stop. After a meal, just stop. I think you'll be surprised what an effect it has - this constant reminder just to be back into the present moment.

How do you do that, remember? The body. Just go back into the body. Come off the computer, come off the mind, come off the texts. Just start coming back. What are you feeling? How do your feet feel? What can you see? What can you hear? That immediately brings you back into groundedness, you see. Then from there, you note your next intention. What you do feel is just... you know, you've got greater control over your life. Especially your inner life. Not so much the outer life - that's to do with being in that matrix of relationship. But definitely your inner life can be quite radicalised by it.

So we've just recognised the Buddha's coming from a slightly different place than our Western traditions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and psychoanalysis. He's coming from a position that we're deluded and it's a mistake we're making. Therefore our effort really is to understand what our true nature is, and that's really the purpose of *vipassanā* - to see ourselves as we really are, and then to see the consequence of delusion. Even if we can't see the core of delusion - this idea of a self - at least we can see the consequences of it, which manifest in these attitudes of acquisitiveness and aversion and fear and all the rest of them.

On the positive side, to really develop the good heart - that's very clear. Don't forget that the ethical life runs in conjunction with wisdom. You can't separate them. That's one of the criticisms of the mindfulness movement, which I'm sure you all know about. Mindfulness is... you know, mindfulness and depression, mindfulness eating. But

nobody ever talks about morality. It's all about mindfulness. I mean, sure, it helps. Sure, it helps. But it's like... and they won't go anywhere near self, not-self. I mean, that's taboo.

So it's basically pulling something out of its... it's like yoga - body beautiful - and forgetting that it actually belongs to a very deep and profound spiritual tradition. It doesn't mean to say that mindfulness won't help. It will. But eventually, the person will, if they want to move, they're going to have to seek something a little deeper than just mindfulness, you might say. Unless they have real insight. That's possible.

Remember that a lot of the mindfulness movement is about suffering. It's about physical pain, dealing with pain. It's about depression. It's about anxiety and panic and things like that. Well, there's no reason why they couldn't click in the midst of superficially, shall we say, dealing with an obvious problem, and then suddenly realising where the real problem lies. I wouldn't want to damn the whole process. It's obviously doing an enormous amount of good.

Mindfulness and CBT - cognitive behavioural therapy - about ninety-seven percent don't have panic again because they've seen that panic is the reaction to fear: fear of fear. That's an enormous success, isn't it? And sixty percent - that's the figure I remember - don't go back into clinical depression. That's fabulous.

And then, so, developing the virtues. To be actively involved in developing virtues. And then to organise our day around this whole idea of mindfulness and how we can bring that to bear. Bring it to a point where it feels that we're pretty mindful most of the time. That's a nice place to be. You must try it.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your commitment to the practice, soon attain the wonderful end of Nibbāna.

CHAPTER 93

Comments on a Statement by Mae Chee Kaew

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 45 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a powerful statement by Mae Chee Kaew, a recognized Thai forest nun: "The presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of suffering." Using this as a foundation, he provides a comprehensive exploration of the Buddha's core teachings on dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) and its cessation.*
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> *The talk delves deeply into the Four Noble Truths, examining how our fundamental delusion about selfhood creates suffering through the process of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination). Bhante explains how we create our experiential world through the six āyatana (sense spheres) and how attachment arises through vedanā (feeling-tone). He emphasizes the crucial distinction between experiencing pleasant and unpleasant sensations versus becoming identified with our reactions to them.*
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> *Drawing from the Mahāsi Sayādaw tradition, Bhante highlights the importance of observing intentions as they arise, explaining how this awareness allows unwholesome sankharas to exhaust themselves naturally. He explores the Eightfold Path as a systematic approach to liberation, showing how right awareness (sammā sati) serves as the foundation for all spiritual development. The talk concludes with reflections on the transcendent "presence that knows" – the unchanging awareness that remains unaffected by all arising and passing phenomena.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambudassa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened.

Noreen keeps up her group of Skype — about four or five of them who discuss the Dharma. They take a book or they take something, and this was something that came up for them. She sent it to me because there was a question about something which we will come to later.

So Mae Chee Kaew is a Thai forest nun who is recognised as a fully liberated being, and this is one of her statements. We'll use it to find out how we can get there, even this week:

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

That's pretty clear. So how do we get to this point, I wonder? The end of suffering.

We'll come back to this in a moment, because if we want to teach people the Dharma, then we've got to be pretty clear ourselves about the basic position the Buddha took. To actually be able to feel that you have the internal logic of his teaching, the internal rationality of his teaching, to make that bold statement — there is an end of suffering. I don't think there's a single Western psychologist or school that says there's an end to suffering. Maybe if they were Christians, they would have thought so. But in the sense of there being an end of suffering right here in this very life, I think that's quite a bold statement to make.

So for us to revise, really, just to go through our minds, the four basic truths that the Buddha taught. The truth of *dukkha*. Remember, *dukkha* means something hard to bear — that's its translation. Hard to bear. It's not only referring to the pains and aches of the body and the emotional upsets, the pressures and the stress of life. It always boils down to these three characteristics. That our deep suffering, the deeper level of existential suffering, comes about because we're not actually seeing things as they really are. That's his normal statement.

Now that statement, which is a translation of the Pali, isn't actually absolutely correct. The translation is "to see and understand how things have come to be." So this is the Buddha — he's interested in process. He's interested in process. So when we, today for instance, when we're observing the process of eating — it's the whole process that we are trying to engage with, trying to understand. How is it that we create this world within this psychophysical organism, this body and mind, this fathom-length body, as the Buddha puts it? Within this fathom-length body is the world, the creation of the world.

It's really beginning to understand that we are limited by the body as to what we can experience anyway. And then whatever information the body gives us is always taken inward and fixed into our concepts about things. And these concepts about things are built up from past perceptions.

Very simply, today we had chilli beans. Well, we've probably made our own chilli beans and had chilli beans elsewhere. So as soon as we tasted these chilli beans, we knew whether they were the real chilli beans or not — because either they're not the proper chilli beans, or they are the proper chilli beans, or they're almost the proper chilli beans. So it's this judging mind. And that's something else — remember, judging — there's a distinction between judging and judgmental, but putting that aside, this whole process of creating the world within ourselves, having this memory of past events, re-living really the world through our particular memory patterns. And that's the *saṅkhāras* — that's our habits.

So when the Buddha talks about this *dukkha*, he's digging deep at the level of our perception, how we perceive things. And one of them is that we perceive continuity, and we actually really do believe that the person — me — who got up this morning, well, I'm pretty well the same person now. I don't see, I don't experience myself arising and passing away. I experience myself as absolutely constant within a mass of change. It's me always that's doing stuff. And getting down to that *anicca*, getting down to this real deep level of impermanence, is to see that the actual self is arising and passing away — the sense of me arises with every momentary experience I'm having.

So this again digs even deeper to the point of identity. Now here in this statement, she says, "I am unable to detect, even for an instant, when they have any power over my heart." To have power is to have control — it's the self. Whenever you say, "This is me," and then you define it. If you say "I am" and you put something at the end of that sentence — "I am angry," "I am happy," "I am an engineer," "I am a nurse" — whatever you say after that, you're locked into that definition, even if only for that moment, for that time. And that's how we define ourselves. When that definition disappears, then of course at times it can send us into a process of not knowing who we are. So you get this crisis, an identity crisis.

I remember that I used to have a Tai Chi teacher. He was a lovely man. And I stopped going, and I met him years on — well, not that far on, maybe two or three years on — and he was half the man I remember him. And I said, "What's happened?" I thought he'd had an illness. He said no, he just lost his job. So with his job, lost his identity. It wasn't only the pain of loss of the income, but the whole self-definition of who he was and what his position was in the world — it was just taken away from him. And he had the usual depression and all that sort of stuff that comes with that loss of identity. And of course, the final loss of identity is when they lay us out in the morgue. I mean, that's when we know we've lost our identity.

So the way the Buddha digs really deep — and it's a place, of course, that most therapies don't want to go; it's a bit frightening to get down to that level — but that's where we want to get to. We want to get down to this business of who am I before I describe myself, before there's something coming after the "am" — "I am" whatever. And it's because — remember — because of this deep delusion as to who I am, meaning this body, this heart, this mind, this person. Which exists, by the way. The person exists in the sense that it's momentary. It's a momentary total conception of me. There are experiences in meditation where you can step out of the self. It's a bit strange, but you can step out of it and you see, oh, there's the self. And that self — but it's not permanent. That's the problem.

Now because of this identity thing, of this identity of being this person, then remember that I have this relationship with the world now. And when we ask ourselves, "How do I want to be? What do I want to be?" I think we've come to this word: happy. "I just want to be happy, for heaven's sake." Everybody will define their happiness in their own way, but that "I want to be happy" is just — that's all I want to be.

You want to be happy, and because of this delusion though, remember, we seek the happiness in just these wrong places. And that's where we form attachments. And attachments are simply our psychological dependency on something. And then we find we don't have control over it, and so the whole gamut of human misery starts — the frustration, grief. And of course, once you've gained something, you've got to protect it one way or the other, whether it's against some nasty person or a government — you've got to protect what you have. And so there's that aversion and the fear of loss.

So you can see from this deep delusion that arises a more tangible *dukkha*. I mean, if you were to say to somebody, "Are you suffering?" they'd probably point to these sorts of things — like "I'm depressed, my job's not going well, my relationship's collapsing," all that sort of stuff. So they're pointing to something actually concrete and something they can actually feel and explain. But at a deeper level we have this inexplicable sense of identity.

You can see from her statement that something's missing there, isn't it? Because no matter what's happening to her at any level, it doesn't have any power over her heart. In other words, she cannot be grasped by it. She cannot be lost in it. Deluded by it. So that's where the Buddha stakes out his cause: there is *dukkha*, and there's no way — there can't be *dukkha*. That's the point. There's no way for us, with the idea of a self, there can be anything but *dukkha* in the end. And even when we are totally happy,

when things are going perfectly right and the world is full of gold and shining, there is always that awful feeling underneath that things are passing, that you don't have control over it. So nothing can give us absolute total satisfaction.

Again, it's usually expressed in the negative: "The presence that knows them never changes for an instant." This is the end of suffering. So in terms of how we would normally define our happiness, normally define a state of *adukkha* — not suffering — we would normally define it in a very positive way, such as feeling happy, going on holiday, having a good job, all that sort of stuff. We would actually define it as some sort of existing experience. But this can't be that, can it? Because she's opted out of all experiences. This is a presence that knows. Never changes for an instant. It's forever unborn and undying. In other words, it's not part of the process of the phenomenal world that we're experiencing, which is arising and passing away. Complete distinct from it. This is the end of suffering.

So our question is then — what is the next position that the Buddha takes? What's the cause of it? Now he doesn't — having stated these three delusions of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* — he doesn't drive at the cause — this is an important point — he doesn't drive at the cause of being; the problem is identity. That's not where he's positioning us, because that would be impossible to work with directly. He's pointing to how this delusion and this wrong identity manifests. And it manifests in our desires.

So then he gives us this dependent origination, which is in the second noble truth. He tries to point out to us where the weak link is in this whole process of creating suffering for ourselves. And you'll notice that at the base you've got this sense of ignorance. Now remember that ignorance is not culpable. It's not as though we should have known better. It's a state of not knowing. And just like we don't know some things, we then presume to know, or we think we know, or we make a guess, or we take a leap — and it's usually into some sort of pit.

So it's accepting that at the base of us, the fundamental part of us, is a state of not knowing. And this, remember, translates into the heart as a sense of innocence. So from a moral heart point of view — compassion, joy and peace — we start from the point of innocence, which means not doing harm. It's the Latin: no harm. So there's "no harm" and "not knowing" are combined to form what she's referring to here as body-mind — mind especially. I don't know what words she's referring to in the Pali.

The Buddha uses words contextually. Sometimes they seem to contradict each other if you're going just for a word. So take the word *citta*. *Citta* could be translated in our language as the combination of mind and heart, the old word "soul" as opposed to "spirit" — psyche. We split those in our enlightenment period, in the great 18th century en-

lightenment, so that we think of ourselves as rational beings or feeling beings. So you get people say "I think," and then others say "I feel." So this split is something that we have, which has, of course, had its brighter side — it's brought about science and technology and all that. But in the Buddha's understanding, that would all be just one faculty, and that's known as *citta*.

And yet in his victory verse, the one that we chant in the morning, he says he's achieved the *asaṅkhataṃ cittaṃ*. So he's achieved something which is not conditioned. That obviously can't be the body, the mind-heart matrix. So we have to be careful about — I don't know what words she's referring to here.

So we have this dependent origination, and we need to be clear about why the Buddha taught it. So he's teaching us how we create the world, and it's the creation in time, because these links don't always come at the same time. The first few are always there at any given time. So there's always that not knowing beneath everything we do, a sense which express themselves as a lack of wisdom. And because of that, we've created these delusions, these *saṅkhāras*. And they're running underneath every moment as a potential, like a program in a computer.

And then you have a moment of action, a moment that drops into this flow, you might say. Of course, they're momentary, arising and passing away and all that. But even so, you've got this drop into the moment, and that's when you get the body, mind and consciousness. And he separates them. The body and mind are one matrix — the body and the mind working off each other. So that's what we do when we're eating — we're seeing that there's the body taste, the heart responds with a bit of joy and so on. So that matrix is always happening, and there's the consciousness of it.

So consciousness here — you have to be careful — it's a discriminative consciousness. There is included in there a certain knowing, a certain habitual way of discriminating things, just even at a very simple perceptual level. You know that when Cook arrived in Australia, the Aborigines didn't see the ships because they didn't have a context in which to see them. It's the same with me. When I was in Sri Lanka, I heard this barking. For some reason, I hadn't associated that sort of noise, barking, with monkeys. And when they told me it was monkeys and they were up there, for the life of me, I couldn't see them. And they were just amazed that I couldn't see these monkeys. And then suddenly I saw them, because I had a picture of a monkey in my eye. They go, "Surrounded by blooming monkeys." I didn't see this — it's astonishing really.

So that whole process has to be put onto a screen, and that's your *vijñāna*. But it also includes all the knowledge and the intelligence — all the knowledge and the understanding that we have is on that screen. Now once that's happened — remember, so

you've got the body, you've got the splitting up of that into the six *āyatana*. Now *āyatana* are spheres, and what the Buddha is saying is that each sphere is distinct and discrete. So you can't hear through your eyes and you can't see through your ears. It's just one of those things. I know there's this thing about synesthesia, but I think that's just in the mind — that's the mind itself working on it inside; that's the sixth sense.

The fact is that you're never going to hear through your eyes whether you like it or not. So it's recognising that we experience the world through very different avenues, which we have to collect onto this screen. So even here, you can hear me, you can see me, you can feel the atmosphere of this room. All of that is happening in little blips and blobs, but somehow it's held on this screen. And that's what the *vijñāna* is referring to.

Now when that's held there, we have our moment-to-moment contacts. So there has to be those three things there.

An object, the sense base, and that consciousness, that holding on a screen for us. Now it's the next point which turns this world into likeable or unlikable. And that's the *vedanā*. And once we've experienced something like that, remember, there's always a reaction to it, of always wanting to make the world pleasant for myself and get rid of anything that's unpleasant. And it's at that point that we see the escape.

The escape is between experiencing things as pleasant and unpleasant and seeing how we're reacting to it, which is then creating a relationship to it. Now, if we see that, we also become aware that actually even at this point there's no suffering. Have you grasped that in your meditation? Have you seen that when you're aware of, say, pain in the knee, and you're aware of aversion to the pain, not wanting it, if those two become clear objects in your mind, you're not actually suffering. Even at that point, you're not actually suffering.

It's only at the next point when, as it were, you dive into, you lose yourself in that reaction, and you become, "I don't want." So the point of real suffering is always at the point of identity. Now, the question is, who's suffering? It's the Buddha who's suffering. The Buddha's suffering, and that's why he wants to get out of suffering.

See, there's no suffering as such in the body and mind. All there is, is what is pleasant and unpleasant. The point of suffering is when this very thing, this very thing, I am unable to detect, even instant, when they have power over my heart. This knowing. As soon as this heart or this knowing falls into that wrong identity, it's that which is suffering. It's the Buddha's suffering, and the Buddha wants to get out of suffering.

So grasping that, what's happening at the point of identity is that this Buddha within us is actually losing itself through the delusion, that initial delusion of believing that true happiness is to be found in the sensual world. Sensual here means the whole phenomenal world, the world that's being created by the mind out of quite minimal data, I believe.

So then, of course, having said that this is the cause, he then tells us how to do it, just missing that third step about *Nibbāna*, the end of suffering. He then tells us how we're actually going to achieve this. And you'll notice that it's completely systemic. The fact that just because we understand something or see something doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to become systemic.

So just seeing, for instance, how desire arises when we're eating and we know that there's an overlay of greed, there's an overlay of attachment to the food, an overlay of wanting to seek happiness there, just the seeing of that clearly, clearly, clearly, even though we see it absolutely clear, it's clearly not enough because we keep being greedy. So there's something else that has a problem here.

And then when we look down into the lie, we find attitude. Now, attitude refers to these conditionings within us, what our attitude is. And when we look at one of them, this selfishness, which manifests as anything we do for our own good, for our own benefit, driven by the idea that this is happiness. That's always the internal delusion there. When we see that, in fact, it has to be hit at an attitudinal level.

Now, how do you change at an attitudinal level? It's by seeing these intentions. By seeing these intentions, and that's why this is such a strong teaching within the Mahāsi tradition, the Mahāsi Sayādaw's tradition. To see an intention is to see the manifestation, the initial manifestation of a delusion, an initial manifestation of a habit that we've created which is unwholesome for us.

So as soon as I see this desire for scones, for instance, arise tomorrow, as soon as that desire hits me, I say, "Oh, that's the old greed. I'm hoping it's as good as last." So it's actually catching that moment. Now, if we have this mindfulness, this awareness, this alertness to actually be with that, then we'll allow it to exhaust itself. And every time we do that, we're drawing energy from that old habit.

So that this compact energy that we've got now directed just towards this object that we call a scone is now being drawn out. So tomorrow, when the scone is there, you'll be able to say, "I'm going to renounce the scone and sit with the pain of renunciation." Knowing that this pain is a healing pain. Because it's drawing the poison out of the sys-

tem. When all that's gone. And you feel perfectly equanimous. Then of course you can have your scone. But not without clearly seeing any arising of greed for the scone after that.

So on the opposite of course, is that when the intention is seen as wholesome, then we empower it. And in this sense, the heart's growing. So when we look at right attitude, it's normally put in those three ways, isn't it? Selfishness to generosity, hatred to love, cruelty to compassion.

Now you'll notice that there's no in-between state. You're either greedy or you're not greedy. There's not an in-between state there. So I've tended these days to use the word sublimate rather than transform because it immediately changes. So as soon as you let out this greedy feeling and you just let it burn itself out, that energy is not lost. It's there as potential and it'll be used for the right intention. And in this way, the growth toward light, from darkness to light as the Buddha says, becomes a natural process through this process of renunciation.

And that's what we mean by renunciation remember. It's not we're not trying to beat ourselves up, we're just trying to really feel those initial intentions and to stay steady amongst them and wait for it to just die away. And then of course the intention there of course doesn't finish there, does it? Because then it has to translate into the way we speak, to what we do, and into our livelihood. So in other words, it has to manifest.

Now, remember that an intention, unless it's empowered, hasn't done anything. It's not what we call a *kamma*, an act. So just my feeling greedy is, shall we say, an energy coming out of a past habit, but it's not been potentialized. Nothing's happened.

Have you heard about the rule about stealing from monks? Have I explained that to you? All the different levels of stealing that a monk can get up to when he's really bad. Have you heard it? I think you have. What it points out is very clearly the distinction between these processes.

For instance, if I pass this gong and I like it, I can feel the draw to it of wanting it, and if I just let that go then it'll disappear. But if I don't and my mind works on it, then I might get a real greed for it. And at some point passing it again, my hand might stretch out to it. Now and then I pull it back, think what are you doing you fool, but I've already committed what's known as a *dukkaṭa*. This is a small offence against the *Vinaya*. And if I'm lazy minded and I don't watch my thoughts and next time I really go for it and I think yeah I do want it and I put my finger on it, that's *āgāro*, that's a very heavy offence.

However, if I then under a point of weakness, because I'm so entranced by this gong, I reach out and I move it a nano centimetre and then pull my hand back, that's it. I've done it. That's the theft. It's completed. I can't, I lose my robe. There's no way you can get beyond that. Even if, and I don't even get the gong. I left it there. It's absolutely useless. But the act was done.

So you can see through these, this lovely way that the *Vinaya* splits up the way that we create a bad act by not seeing that initial intention. So in the same way, of course, we sometimes have initial good intentions, but we don't act upon them. But it's actually catching a good intention and then making that effort so that it translates. So in other words, an attitude is potential. And it manifests its potential in an intention. And the intention still remains potential until it's intentioned. An intention has to be intentioned. It's this peculiar language we've got. And then you commit an act.

And that act can be of an internal thought. So you're creating a thought which is malevolent. It can be an act of speech. It can be an act of something that we've done. And it's our livelihood. And when you think of livelihood, you think, well, why would he put that in? Because it comes under action, really. That's what we do. But he's pointing out that what we do for the best part of our lives, in a sense, our work in society, it's where we put a tremendous amount of our energy, is conditioning us.

So if you work in a pub, that's one place. And if you work in a nursery, that's another place, as an effect. It's not as though these places are essentially, pubs are essentially evil, but it'd be difficult not to have an occasional drink. So if you look back on your life and the work you've done, and just consider the effect it had on you as a personality, as a character-forming thing.

And then, of course, subsisting all that is this mindfulness, right concentration, right mindfulness, and right effort. And that's, of course, always to do with a certain level of awareness, a certain being here. And that's, of course, very difficult for us because we're constantly forgetting to do that. And so this idea of stopping as often as we can during the day and just reestablishing that sense of presence.

Look what she says. But the presence that knows. The presence that knows. We have to reestablish that every moment. Even though the presence that knows may still be a little off, may still have a chink in the eye, it's still a presence that knows. And it's constantly going back to that presence that knows. That is the reminder. And then, once we're in that presence that knows, to make sure that the intention that we're going to actually act out and go into and absorb into, this is the point, absorb into, is going to help us to maintain that presence.

Now, remember that when we're in action, well, no, let's go back to the sitting meditation. In the sitting meditation, we're always trying to get this presence that knows, to be the presence that knows, to find that place within us of the observer, that observation post, where we can see things that are happening within this body, heart, and mind. Now, when we're in that position, to really recognize it as something transcendent. It's no longer caught up in what's happening.

So there may be pain in the knee and there may be a reaction to it of aversion, but there's no doing. There's just that happening. Within what? Within that presence. Within that awareness. When you hear a bird or a song of a bird, there is the sound of the eardrum and you can clearly see it. It's there in the ear and then you can feel that your heart might lift, unless it's one of these raucous crows, but if it's a nice little bird, then your heart lifts and you can see that, but you don't get lost in it, you're observing it.

Now, even though we want to get to that position and stabilize it in our meditation, remember that's only a first position in terms of what we want to do. The second position is to become so curious about what's happening within this body our mind that we center in on something and as we do that we absorb into it. Now because we've absorbed into that, whatever's happening within us, some emotional state some feeling, we've gone into it with the right intention to understand the dhamma. When we come out of that and we're back to being the observer, we've actually developed that sense of curiosity.

And with it we've developed an understanding because we've gone into the subject in a more intimate way. Now in the opposite side, when we absorb into something with a bad intention, you come out the other side with that being developed. So that's why this process of right awareness is paramount in our practice. To be aware, to keep bringing ourselves back into the present moment, is the practice, that's all it is. You can file it down, you can put all the Buddha's teachings in terms of the practice into that one word, *sati, samasati*.

So, how can we now understand what she's saying here? So the body, mind and essence are all distinct and separate realities. Now, I'm presuming that what she means by the essence is this very sense of presence. Because all there is is body and mind and essence. Remember this is translating the Thai. It's all second hand.

Absolutely everything is known. So within that field of awareness nothing is blocked out. Nothing is separated out or put to one side or given special attention. It's just the stuff that arises through this psychophysical organism. So earth, water, fire and wind. So these are the four elements. Remember those four elements don't exist out there. I

mean I know it's put as earth, water, fire and wind. What they're telling us is how the mind contacts matter. The mind contacts matter by way of this sensibility to heat, to elasticity, to pressure and to movement.

And then there's the body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. So you remember that you can actually when you're observing something, you're observing something on that screen of consciousness so it's there. There's nothing behind it. There's nothing behind it. You can't get behind it. You can't get through it. That's it. That's the world we're living in. Whatever we're conscious of.

Now here's a funny statement. This is why Noreen emailed me. "Anger, greed and delusion are all known." Now here I'm presuming that she's actually meaning that she sees anger, greed and delusion in other people. And that it's not affecting her. It's not coming into her. I'm presuming that she hasn't got that within her, because it wouldn't make sense for her to have that within her as such, because she's undercut the whole process by destroying that wrong identity from which it all arises.

But I did suggest to Noreen something else. You'll know that there are these four levels of sanctity, of spiritual attainment, the stream-enterer, and then the once-returner, the non-returner, and the *arahat*. Now, normally speaking, the way it's normally understood, the way the commentaries would normally put it, is that there's a *magga* and a *phala*, the path and the fruit. And it's normally said that when a person becomes a *sotāpanna*, there is a moment, that initial moment, is the path. And then all the other moments of their lives, as a *sotāpanna*, is the fruit of that insight.

Now, and that's the same for them all, but there's definitely evidence in the scriptures to say that actually these are two paths and this makes great sense to me personally. The first one is to do with the right understanding where a person sees quite clearly one of these three characteristics. And the seeing of these characteristics now has to become systemic. It has to run through right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood. It has to manifest outwards that way. And until it's done that totally, we can't talk about the fruit of it.

So one of the arguments for that is the experience the Buddha himself had where it's said in the scriptures he has this moment of enlightenment but then Māra chases him, remember, for seven years with his three daughters, sensual pleasure, eroticism and boredom. We can see that that's where his problems lay. He wasn't so much in power. If you remember, Jesus was tempted by power. He's saying to the top of the mountain about the devil, "You can have all this." So there's always power, riches and sensuality. So that was where you might say he'd been stuck.

So seven years, Māra finally gives up on it. Says, he sees me, Māra sees me. But the purity had not become systemic. There's a suggestion there.

Whether it was seven years or not, who knows? But there's an understanding there that it took time for this huge insight, for this new liberation to find its way through all his habits. And because his habits were still there, he would have seen them as unwholesome. So it may be that that's also what she's referring to, and she's not yet reached the fruit of her insight.

But I prefer to see it the other way, that she has actually, and that she's quite aware when somebody's being greedy, deluded, she's not fooled by it. But what a wonderful thing to be able to say: I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have power. Any power over my heart. I want to be able to say that.

Yes, they arise and cease. They are forever changing. But the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. Never changes for an instant.

And we can get a hint of that in ourselves because when you finally, when you've isolated the sense of the observer very clearly in yourself, and then you reflect at the end of your sitting, what was it like to be there? What's inside the observer? What's it made of? And that's where we're getting a hint that where the Buddha says, those who are mindful in this way are in the presence of *Nibbāna*. He's not actually saying that we can't get a taste for it, we can't get a feel for it.

And it's important because the more we get that feel for it, the silence of it, the lack of excitement. Our happiness is always gauged by how happy we are emotionally, how excited we are, what the future has to offer us. And yet here there's a pointing to some sort of stasis, some sort of peacefulness that never changes. An internal position of silence.

And when we begin to sense that it's also begin to realize that it's not part of this process of arising and passing away. It is forever there. Now that's very difficult for us to grasp because for us there is time. We can't imagine something not being in time, not being caught up in some sort of changing process.

But she's pointing to that. She's forever unborn and undying. It's not part of this process of the phenomenal world.

And then finally, just this is the end of suffering. May it be that Mae Chee Kaew has inspired us, driven us to greater efforts. May we all be fully realized and free from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu.

CHAPTER 94

Reiki Practice Session - Energy Cultivation and Healing

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *This guided Reiki practice session offers a complete approach to energy cultivation and compassionate healing. Bhante Bodhidhamma leads participants through foundational relaxation techniques, beginning with a body scan from feet to head, followed by the recitation of Reiki precepts focused on gratitude, freedom from anger and fear, and cultivating honesty and kindness.*
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> *The session includes detailed instruction in body energizing exercises and the 'Three Diamonds' set - sensing earth ki (drawing energy from the earth), sensing heaven ki (connecting with celestial energy), and sensing heart ki (blending earthly and heavenly energies). Participants learn to work with life force energy (ki/chi/prana) through breath awareness and visualization techniques.*
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> *The practical healing portion guides students through hand positions for self-treatment, including eye, temple, throat, chest, and heart positions, with emphasis on developing sensitivity to energy sensations such as heat and tingling. The session incorporates 'inner cleansing' visualization techniques and concludes with gratitude practice, making it suitable for both beginners and those developing their Reiki practice.*

Now, we're going to begin this Reiki session by, first of all, relaxing. You can use your own technique, if you like, or you can follow the technique we last used, which is just to scan the body up from the soles of the feet, up the legs, and then the front of the body up to the neck and across the shoulders, down the arms and hands, and then from the back of the bottom going up the spine to the neck, over the head, down to the forehead and the mask of the face. Just take a few seconds to do that.

And now we lay the foundation for good practice by reciting the precepts. So hands in gassho. Together.

Just for today I will be thankful. Just for today I will be free from anger and fear. Just for today I will be honest and kind.

Just for today I will be thankful. Just for today, I will be free from anger and fear. Just for today, I will be honest and kind.

Just for today, I will be thankful. Just for today, I will be free from anger and fear. Just for today, I will be honest and kind.

And now we're going to do an exercise which we know is body drying. So if we could start with the feet pointing straight forward, shoulder width apart, hands to the side slightly away from the body, and we breathe in and lift the right hand towards the left shoulder, sweep across the body to the right hip and down. Now do the same with the left hand. Now repeat the first movement: right hand to the left shoulder, breathing in, and as you breathe out, drop the tongue down, breathe out through the mouth and sweep it across. Now the left hand is presented with the palm outwards, right hand breathe in, bring it to the shoulder, the left shoulder, and sweep down as you breathe out, turn the hand. Now bring the left hand to the right shoulder and down, turn the hand. Repeat the first motion: right hand to the left shoulder, sweep down as we breathe out, turn both hands down.

Now the left hand presented in front of the body with the palm facing upwards. Right hand to the left shoulder. Now stay with the left hand. Right hand again. Left hand raised to the front with the palm facing upwards. Right hand to the left shoulder.

The hands are placed on the thighs with the palms facing upward. We draw the Reiki energy through the crown. Just imagine it being drawn through the crown as you breathe in, down to the hara just below the navel. Hold it for a few seconds and imagine it beginning to spread, permeate the body slowly, and then breathe out and focus on it coming out of the extremities and every pore really of the body. But if you focus on the hands and the feet, that's usually quite effective.

And now we visualize an oval. We are inside the oval and as we exhale, try to feel the energy going into that oval and gradually the oval just expands a little, a little more.

This exercise now: we stand and do the three diamonds set of exercises. Feet hip width apart or whatever is comfortable, hands to the sides. As we breathe in we make contact with the energy deep in the earth and bring it up into the hara. As we breathe out we maintain that connection. So that is sensing earth ki.

The second exercise in this set is sensing heaven ki. And for this we visualize a sphere of a color that you're happy with. It could be blue or whatever you feel comfortable with. White. We visualize the sphere above the head. As we breathe in, draw it down into the heart and then into the hara. And as we breathe out, we return it to the sky.

And the final section of this set is sensing heart ki, the blending of earth energy with the energy of heaven and sky. So we bring the hands into a position above, level with the chest, as though embracing a tree. Lower the hands, scoop up the energy from the earth, feel the rushing energy from the sky coming down, down into the center of the chest and breathe out. Continue raising the arms, feeling the energy coming down to meet the energy of the earth. Breathe out back to the heart where they blend, lower the arms, breathing out.

So to this point we've been exercising in receptivity, being receptive of the energy that is all around us, the chi, the ki, the prana that holds everything together, the life force. And now we're going to receive the energy of Reiki, the compassionate healing energy of Reiki, through the crown, down into the body, into the palms.

So first we raise our hands in gassho, high on the forehead, and ask for the Reiki energy to flow freely for our highest and greatest good. May the energy of Reiki flow freely for our highest and greatest good. May the energy of Reiki flow freely for our highest and greatest good.

The hands over the eyes. Be aware of sensations. You can let the palms float away from the eyes, occasionally, just to get a feel of whatever is coming from the surface of the skin. Even if it's just heat, get a feel for it. So the focus is there. Imagine an attitude of acceptance, the arms out, welcoming this wonderful healing energy coming down, down from above, flowing freely through the crown, down along the shoulders, along the arms and into the palms.

Now bring the hands to the side, the temples or the ears. Then we reinforce the flow of energy by doing, for this particular position, the inner cleansing again. So just imagine the energy coming through the crown. Draw it down to the hara, hold it a while letting it spread, imagine it spreading, and as you breathe out fully going out through the hands and the feet this time.

As you exhale, imagine an oval around the body. Exhale into that oval.

Now move the hands to the back of the head. It's all around us, the Reiki energy. You can feel it in the air, you can feel it in the trees. There's no doubt about it. It's very powerful. And it can be channeled into compassionate healing energy in the practice of Reiki. So feel it coming through the crown. Or just let it come, let it come.

Now bring the hands to the throat: one hand with the palm over the top of the sternum and the other one underneath the lower jaw very gently. Note any heat, any sensations in the hands. It helps to keep the attention in the area where the hands are.

Now move the hands to the first position, top of the chest. And go straight into inner cleansing at this point. It's a good focal point to do that to remind us to clear the avenues for the energy of Reiki to flow down, down into the arms and palms. Keep the focus on the palms. Note any tingling sensations or sensations of heat.

Now to the lower ribcage. Be sure to keep the fingers and the thumbs together in contact and the two hands touching at the point where the fingers meet each other. Focus on the palms.

I'll move the hands into the inguinal fold and we'll again practice the inner cleansing. The hara position would have come there, which is also a good place, a very good place, practicing that, but we'll do it now. Focus on the palms, note any sensations. As you breathe out, feel the oval expand.

Right, now lift the hands, we'll just put the hands over the heart for a little bit there. So for some reason that was missed out, so we'll just spend a few seconds there. Note the sensations around the fingers and along the palm, the heel of the hand, the hollow of the palm, the length of the fingers. Note any difference of sensation, any distinction in the sensation of heat between the hands. Feel that acceptance in the powerful ki, the Reiki flowing from above.

Now choose a place that you feel you would love to give attention to and again imagine this acceptance, this welcoming of a free flowing powerful energy.

Now place one hand on the forehead and one hand on the heart. We have two polarities here. Move from one palm to the other. We welcome the flow of energy travelling through the crown, moving along the arm. Can we feel both palms at the same time? We move from one palm to the other. Feel the nourishing power.

Bring the hand down from the forehead. Finally cross the arms across the chest and mentally ask the Reiki to continue working for our highest and greatest good. Still feel the heat.

Now we bring the hands together in gassho, raising them high on the forehead. And mentally give thanks for the healing.

CHAPTER 95

Introduction to Body Awareness and Vipassanā Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this introductory talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma weaves together the Buddha's life story with practical guidance for Vipassanā meditation. He explores how Siddhartha Gautama's existential crisis led to his revolutionary insight under the Bodhi tree, where instead of seeking escape from suffering, he turned to investigate its very origins.*
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> *Bhante explains Right Awareness (sammā sati) as returning to the "original mind" of a child - that state of non-conceptual, wonder-filled attention before thoughts and labels intervene. He introduces the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition's distinctive noting practice and slow walking meditation, explaining how these techniques help practitioners observe the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā).*
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> *The talk addresses the five hindrances that arise during meditation - desire, aversion, restlessness, dullness, and doubt - offering practical guidance on working with these mental states through loving awareness rather than avoidance. Bhante emphasizes investigating our direct experience rather than getting caught in mental stories, showing how this process naturally leads to purification of heart and understanding of our true nature.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm mindful of the fact that one or two people here know very little about Buddhism, and some who know quite a lot. So I'll try and weave a story that encompasses both, and also talk about the Mahāsi and the technique that we're using for the *vipassanā*.

When we practice meditation, I think we have to be clear about three things. First of all, what does the Buddha mean by right awareness? And then, how do we maintain that sort of awareness against all the hindrances, how the mind wanders off all the time? And what is it we're investigating? What is the process of liberation? What do we mean by that? What does the Buddha mean by delusion?

It's always good to start the story with the Buddha himself. He lived in what you might call an upper middle class - well, I suppose almost nobility. His father was a head man of a group of people, a tribe called the Sakyans, and they were under the local king of Kosala. So all the stories about him being a very rich prince and all that is all later stuff. But he was brought up as a Kshatriya, which is the warrior caste, so he would have spent a lot of time learning how to use swords and spears and also governance. But it's interesting to remember that he would have been illiterate.

Writing as such was coming in, but it was coming in much like it happened in Europe, I believe, in accounts - business people keeping their accounts. But that didn't mean, of course, that the language wasn't highly developed. It was passed on through memory. So even today in Hinduism, the Rig Veda would be learnt off by heart by the Brahmins. And it's interesting how they do it. They first of all teach the child how to pronounce the syllables, even before they know what it means. They pronounce the syllables. And then when they've got it off pat, then they tell them what it means. And only after they know what it means can they begin to philosophize. It's completely the opposite to what we do. We expect people to be philosophers and creative before they've got the basics.

So that's the sort of society he lived in. And of course there were pleasures, there were lots of pleasures. And he would have had lots of free time as opposed to, say, the labourers and the lower castes. The caste system wasn't so rigid in his day. It was becoming so, but not so rigid. And it was to the east of him, out in present-day Calcutta, that sort of area, present-day Bihar, that the Brahmins were getting ascendancy. Before that, the ruling caste, the warrior caste, would have been considered higher than the Brahmins.

And there would seem to be some sort of disaffection with society going on, much like the hippies of the 70s. And there were lots of men, mainly men, but often their wives and occasionally women, who would leave the homely life, who would leave household life, and live very very basic lives out in the forests and come in for alms round. So all that was established before the Buddha himself set out. There was an established custom of how to live the ascetic life, and it's thought to go back right back to the Mohenjo-daro civilization in the Indus Valley, which somehow disappeared and we can't read any of their stuff.

But when the Aryans came down from the north and conquered all that area, it seems as though some of their yogic practices and whatnot passed into their culture. So it has a very long history, this idea of ascetic practice and building up the powers that the mind has as opposed to the body.

Now at some point he gets fed up with the pleasures and joys of life. They become insipid, vapid, you might say. And because of that emptiness, that's one of the underlying reasons for him leaving his household life. But at a deeper level, it was what we would call an existential crisis. He came to realize that there was, in fact, sickness, ageing and death, and that's where he was headed too. And it's something I think that comes to all of us at the end of youth at some point - that's part of growing up. And normally speaking, people start taking life a bit more seriously in their late twenties. Career, marriage, partnership, all that sort of stuff takes on a more serious quality as they move towards a real involvement in social life, in their life, in the life of society.

So at that time, these things are on his mind, and it comes to a crisis point. So he gets permission from his family, his wife, to shoot off and spend some time as an ascetic. And if - I don't know, I can only presume, this is just a personal presumption, that he was a bit like myself when I left, when I joined the Order. I said to my mother, who wept bitterly - I don't understand why - that I would just go for three years. I was just trying it out. I just needed a bit of space, a bit of time. And then, of course, you get habituated, I suppose.

So anyway, he left with this, shall we say, this deep psychological questioning about life. And it was something that was in the air. In that time, one thing they were trying to escape was rebirth. So it was taken for granted - not everybody, there were materialists - but it was taken for granted that you basically got reborn. And you could be reborn in any realm. You could be reborn as an animal. And the idea of being reborn wasn't all that happy an idea, especially back onto the earth, because it just meant going through the same old routine: work, sickness, ageing and death. So there was a sort of existential fear that ran through the society at that time which fueled this idea of trying to seek something which was beyond that.

And so when the Buddha left, he left already into a set system, a set way of being an ascetic, set customs. Can't call them rules - more like customs. There were regular teachers, very well-known teachers of the time. It was one of the pastimes of the age to turn up at the park, at these lovely parks that they had - Bamboo Park and so on - especially on a full moon. When in the east, for those of you who have been, as you know, you can actually see colour, it's that bright. And on the full moon they would all go to these parks and listen to the great debates and arguments of these ascetics between each other. And that was one of their entertainments. This is before videos and stuff like that. So he left the home life to join that sort of life.

And the first thing he tries is teachers who teach him how to attain blissful states. All religions have these blissful states. They're attained through prayer, through mantra. And what we discover in that sort of technique, such as the *metta* we did, we can build up a very tremendous ecstasy within ourselves. The heart, although I was saying to you that when we practice *metta*, we don't worry about the emotions. It may be not feeling so good. It may be a bit depressed and whatnot. But eventually, the heart does begin to resonate with the will. And as you keep making these very gentle intentions, the heart resonates more and more. And they become quite internal ecstasies.

Now one of the benefits of being able to develop that sort of thing is that you're happy. You're happy while you're in the absorption and when you come out of it it stays with you. It's not as though that mood suddenly disappears. And when you become an adept at such a thing you can move in and out of that at will. And so you can understand how if you're going to find a way of being blissed out all the time, what do you worry about sex, drugs and rock and roll for? Or food or anything like that? You're quite happy under a tree with your loincloth and you nip around for a bit of food every day and you don't mind what you eat. It's immaterial because all you want to do is just sustain the body so you can get back under your tree.

So that sort of blissful practice was already well developed, and he brought it into his teaching, and we call them the *jhānic* states, the absorptions. And one of those practices is the *metta* we were doing this morning. But the problem is that these things do die out, and that underlying them, because they don't deal with problems, they don't deal with psychological problems, they definitely don't deal with the fears and the aversion of sickness, ageing, and death. And so whenever these things passed away, whenever the old thoughts returned, he realized that actually that wasn't an escape from suffering. It was like icing over dung, you might say, if you'll excuse the expression.

So with that, he left his teachers, who taught him these absorptions. And then he tried, this is the normal chronology that you get taught, but it's not actually absolutely clear which came first. But anyway, he then tried what's known as the ascetic practices. The main one was starvation, was really drawing the body down to its limit, you might say.

So there were two major philosophies which you can see even these days. The first was a materialist philosophy, which basically meant that you die, and that's it, that's the end of it, and you may as well enjoy life as much as you can. And that was the idea of just enjoying the ordinary pleasures of life, but also these absorptions. At least you enjoyed life. Some thought that you had these absorptions, and then you went from re-

birth to rebirth, right into higher and higher life, and more subtle levels of peacefulness and joy, and that was it. Then you disappeared. So there were all sorts of theories about how life progressed.

And on the other side, as opposed to that sort of nihilistic idea, annihilationist idea, so that everybody just annihilated at one point or another, there were those, of course, who believed in an eternal soul. And the soul was trapped in the body. It was trapped by its *kamma*. *Kamma* had become physical. It was your body and it was your attraction to the senses that kept you down at this level. And therefore, if one could let go of this through ascetic practices, then the soul would be released from the body or the desire to be reborn in this realm and it would rise into eternal bliss.

So the Jains were very much into that sort of philosophy. And it's understood that the Buddha actually worked with them. He was his elder contemporary, the Jain leader, the Nigantha. And so the idea was, of course, the main thing was to not give any pleasure to the sense bases, you see. And he seems to have practiced this quite severely. He talks about holding his spine through his stomach. If you have a go at that, you'll see how thin he was.

And at some point, he wakes up and he realizes, actually, this is getting him nowhere either. And in fact, all it is, is more suffering. So he leaves his companions and they're quite disgusted with him because they think he's gone soft or he's lost his courage. Remember that the Jains, the ones that they really praise are the ones who finally stop eating. That's the way they would express their saintliness, just to finally stop eating and die, let go.

So we have this rather dejected young man by the roadside and somebody comes along - we actually know her name, Sujata. It means happy birth - with some offerings for the local god. Although it's a sweet rice thing, but I much prefer to think of it as rice pudding. And when she sees this poor wretch - in the scriptures, of course, they talk about her being bowled over by this god-like figure by the roadside. But, I mean, if he's almost starved himself to death, it can hardly look like that. Anyway, he eats. He has this rice pudding, you see, which of course is a break away from all that ascetic practice. And it revivifies him.

And something happens at that point, which then brings about a turnaround in his practice. And it's because of this that we say he is self-enlightened. Up until now, there's no direction. He remembers his father doing a ploughing ceremony. And he's a child. And he remembers the state that he was in when he's watching his father doing this ploughing ceremony. It's to open the sowing season. And he recognizes in that state the same attentiveness, the same concentration that he's been able to gain through his

practice of the absorption, the concentration practice. But there is within that also a question mark. So there's the child observing his father, completely absorbed in what's happening and with the wonder, what is this all about, what's going to happen in his mind.

And it's because of that little memory that he turns the whole process of meditation around upon itself. So instead of trying to find an escape from suffering, trying to find a place where there's no suffering, he turns around upon suffering to ask how suffering is caused in the first place. And it's with that inspiration that he sits under the Bodhi tree, which is the fig tree. It's a great big tree. It's lovely. On a hot day, you definitely want to sit under it. And it's there that he sits and makes this what we call the great determination.

So there's the great renunciation when he leaves home - everything's greater. And there's the great determination when he sits under the tree. And he determines because he sees no other way of dealing with this existential crisis within himself that he will sit and either he'll crack this problem or he'll die. Now I always say lucky for him and lucky for us it only took six hours according to the legends. And he makes this break, he makes this real breakthrough. And with it there comes this release from what he termed delusion, you see.

So let's go back a bit and just talk about this right awareness. So it's the image of a child. I usually have a picture hanging up, but I've not had time yet to put it up. If you bring the image of a child, usually even up to the age of 10 sometimes, 10, 11, and they become absorbed in something, you notice what their face is like. Their eyes are fixated. If they see a bug or something they've never seen before, they just become completely absorbed. They lose a sense of all their surroundings. You can shout at them, but they're completely absorbed. And their mouth drops. They look gormless. So parents usually tell them to close their mouths or a fly will go in or something. Give them a clip on the back of the head to tell them to wake up. And in so doing, of course, ruin that moment, its potential for full liberation, you see.

So just think of that face, you see. So the fixation of the eyes, the complete absorption, the wonder, the wonder, and the jaw dropping. When the jaw drops, and this is why we say lips together, teeth apart, the jaw's relaxed, this is connected to your thinking. So the thinking stops, see. The thinking stops and there's just the watching, just the observing.

And then when, of course, the child has absorbed what it is they're looking at, the question arises, what is it? And of course they're told that's a beetle or something. And as soon as the beetle is known, the word beetle, it attaches itself to an image in the

mind that we call a perception. Every time that child from now on sees a beetle, it just says there's a beetle. It never really looks again. And that's where we are. We never get down to the direct experience of things because we presume the concept we have of it is a direct perception.

So even when you look across at the meadows here and you see a tree, you'll know it's a tree. We see it's a tree, but we don't actually look at the tree in that same original way, the original mind, the beginner's mind of a child. The whole process of *vipassanā* is to get back to that original mind, to get back to that non-conceptual way, non-thinking way, non-energetic way of looking, feeling and experiencing things. And of course very difficult for us because ever since we were children we've been taught the opposite. The more literate, the more visual, the more we depend upon images, TV, all that sort of stuff, the less actually we're in contact with the sense bases as the sense base itself directly experiences something.

So, for instance, if you go to a restaurant and you decide you're going to have a pizza or something, and you have a pizza, you already have an idea of a pizza. So the pizza turns up and it's not so good, it's a very good pizza. It's immediately compared with all the past pizzas. But this pizza itself is completely original in itself. And there's an inability to accept it as it is. It's always in a state of comparison, which either makes us happy or unhappy.

So you can see how the mind with its concepts and perceptions and history distorts our present experience. Now it's not as though we want to get rid of it. We do need to know when we see something that it is a car, that this is a pizza. It's a case of knowing that there's another way of experiencing things, and that's this direct contact with our sense bases.

So that's what he means by right awareness. Now when we say sense bases, don't forget there's the inner sense base. The mind in Buddhism is also a sense base, and that's when we experience images, it's when we experience our emotions, the inner feelings of the body. All those are internal sense bases, and the mind itself with its perceptions. Just to be able to look at an image, not get involved in it, but just to observe it. So that's also perceiving the mind as it's working.

So this right awareness is quite specific in trying to get us back to this original mind. So you can't, you know, if you're robbing a bank, for instance, you're fully aware and alert, but it's difficult to see you becoming fully liberated. So it's a very specific thing that the Buddha is talking about, this right awareness.

And of course we use the body to get back to that mind. So the breath, the sensation caused by the breath. Even though we use noting words, and we'll come to this a bit later, the noting is trying to reduce thought to a simple concrete word. But our attention isn't on the word, it's not on what we're saying, as I'm doing now. I'm concentrating on what I'm saying. The attention is on what the feeling is, the sensations which are arising in the body. I'm trying to abstract, I'm trying to pull this intuitive intelligence out of its confusion with thoughts and images.

Now then we come across all these things that mess us about, and I'll be talking about that a bit more in depth tomorrow. But you can split them quite quickly into two different. One of them excites us. And one of them sends us asleep.

So all those that excite us. Things that we want. That bring up a certain sense of joy in the heart. Holidays. And all the rest of it. There's all the aversions. And the little petty irritations. And hatreds. And plannings of murder. And all that sort of stuff. Then there's all this general restlessness, the mind just full of energy thinking about this and that. Sometimes it feels that you're going mad because the mind just won't stop. So this is just the energy in the whole process of thinking.

There's all this stuff around guilt and shame, remorse, all that sort of stuff. And there's doubt too. Doubt in the sense of doubting whether the teaching is really for me and all that sort of stuff. Doubt in the teacher, heaven forbid. And there's a deeper doubt in myself. Especially you might look around sometimes, but if you're sitting there in an absolutely wonderful posture, you think oh I can't do this. And that doubt is quite pernicious. Be careful with doubt. I'll talk about that in more detail tomorrow. It comes from often a fear of failure. It's often driven by fear.

So when we find ourselves, the mind is caught up in that, we find ourselves caught up in it, and there's this language going on, and these emotions are growing. So make sure that you're very clear. If you pull out of it, as it were, and you point to it, you say, well, that's aversion. That's planning. And that's doubt and that's guilt and all that sort of stuff. And what you're doing is you are acknowledging the mental state that's driving it, the attitude that's underneath it.

So don't be concerned with the story at all. It might be here you might actually have a real problem back at home, and it's no good figuring it out here because while you're here everything's changing out there. The problem might have disappeared. If you really convince yourself that you can't do anything about your present life while you're here, then it stops the mind wandering and it stops the mind attaching to something thinking that you can work something out. It's much better to use this time to let those thoughts disappear and to enter a clarity.

Often when things that are disturbing us or upsetting us, we don't realise that our thinking process is being clouded, it's being distorted by the emotional value that we put on it, the fear, the anxiety, the anger, all that sort of stuff. When all that dies down, we can normally see quite clearly how to bring an end to the problem. Not always. Sometimes these things have their own way of working out.

So the storyline is just to be let go. Don't concern yourself with the story at all. And you won't concern yourself with the story when you realize that it's through the stories that these emotions build themselves up. So if you want to get depressed, really start thinking depressing thoughts. Purposefully sit there thinking how depressing life is. And then don't be surprised that you end up feeling really suicidal.

So once you realise that, that thinking, when it's attached to a negative emotion, is pernicious. So then you make the effort, you come off it, come off it, and you sit within the heart, you sit within the emotional state.

And the other one is, of course, sleepiness and doziness. So, I mean, we've already said that. There's probably some real imbalance in sleep when you come. It might take two or three days to work that out. But then afterwards, remember that dullness and lethargy are conditionings within us that we've developed. Often, for instance, when you're fed up, you just sit in a chair and fall asleep. Hopefully you wake up feeling a bit better. And then there's all that dozing away in bed, Sunday morning, that subliminal state for hours on end. Can't be bothered to get up.

So all those things are developing within us, this idea that oblivion is a beautiful place to be in. And in a sense it is. There's no suffering in oblivion. It's just that unfortunately we keep waking up. And then we find that actually we're dozy and muzzy headed even when we don't want to be. So again, it's this case of making it determined not to fall into that state, but to make that state something to investigate.

So you're investigating. Remember, this is not a historical investigation. It's not a psychotherapeutic investigation. It has nothing to do with psychotherapy. This is a direct contact with your mental state. And of course, what you realize is that by allowing these mental states to manifest, these conditionings to manifest, they're actually burning themselves out. And there's your therapy. It's much cheaper. It's much harder because you've got to sit with this stuff. But if you can spend the time, then you'll find it quite purifying. Purification of the heart is part of the process.

So don't be afraid. Don't be surprised, especially those who are new to this, that emotions come up quite strongly because often we know that we're anxious, but we've never really felt it. We've always put our attention somewhere else. We're trying to find a

solution. We're gently running away from it. It's the fear of fear that's causing this underlying panic. But actually, when you turn round upon the anxiety and sit with it, well, it can come up with quite a really heavy force.

Same with all these things. Some old grief, some anger, depression. All these have quite a lot of power behind them. And often when we come to sit for the first time, but even all the way through the spiritual life, you'll find that you're opening up to it. So don't be surprised to find that it's much stronger than you thought it was. But if you just stay with it, just stay with it. And this idea, this affectionate awareness, affectionate awareness, to embrace it with loving kindness. So, ah, there's my lovely depression again. And that undermines your reaction to it. And it's the reaction which is causing the problem.

So again, we'll talk about that a little later when we come to discuss dependent origination, which is the Buddha's teaching on our psychology. That's what we chant in the morning.

So that's just in brief. When it comes to physical pain, remember we're not trying to defeat pain. For the most part, you won't get the better of it. Pain will get the better of us. That's not the point. The point is to recognize our relationship to pain. So physical pain in the knees or some feelings of nausea or headache or backache or stomachache, the whole gamut of human misery. Our job is to recognize how we're relating to it. And how when we're averse to it and pushing it away, that's where the suffering starts. And we're trying to find a way of being equanimous with it, of being at ease with it, being calm with it.

And that means opening up to it too. And of course when it gets too much. When it just becomes a point where you're struggling against it. Where it's just silly. Then you change posture. But when you do change posture. Or you stand up or do anything. Really note. Really be aware of that transition. How one minute there's pain. And there's this reaction to it. The aversion to it. And how once you make an intention. Intending to move. And you move slowly. How the physical part of that experience begins to soften off and almost disappear into a neutral position, a neutral state, and how the heart responds also. How it becomes calm again.

So what we're seeing there is this connection between the body and mind, how the one is intimately connected to the other, how one reacts off the other. When you're angry, the body gets hot, gets restless, it feels awful sometimes. When there's pain in the body, the mind reacts. When we say mind, by the way, it's just our language. Heart-

mind. We've split them up, really, ever since the so-called enlightenment, which has had its benefits. But in the East, you'll still see people pointing to their hearts when they say, I think. Not looking into their heads.

So the heart responds when I say heart I mean just the emotional life, how the heart responds to pain. So you can see this connection that there are two different systems going on here. There's a system within the body itself, the cellular life and the way that we experience life through the body, and there's the heart which is an emotional mental thing going on, and then there's these much finer things going on, these thoughts and images.

And it's catching that process and seeing that it is interconnected, but there are three different things going on all the time. And how they relate, interrelate. These are beginning to deconstruct our experience. And that's really the basic technique the Buddha uses. To deconstruct, and to keep asking the question, well, who am I? Or what am I? Am I just made up of these parts? Is there anything within all these parts that is solid, that is stable, that doesn't move, doesn't change?

And of course that brings us now to the point of what is it we're investigating. So we're investigating these three characteristics of existence, as they're called. The first one is impermanence. And, I mean, if you ask anybody in the street, you know, if you say to somebody, oh, everything changes, well, they wouldn't be surprised by that. I mean, everybody's aware that things change. But at a more subtle level, are we aware of I am changing? This I, this sense of self, how it arises and passes away. Do we think it's permanent?

I mean, where's it gone when you're asleep? And in the morning you wake up and here I am again. So it's not always there, is it? So that can't be permanent. The sense of self.

So, this impermanence. The mind is very good at creating continuity. When we listen to music, we're actually only hearing one note at a time. Or one section of note at a time. And yet the mind gives us the impression of hearing music as a flow. It's a bit like the old films with the, what do you call them, what do you call those things? You know the old films with the, what's the word? Zoe Troops? Sorry? Zoe Troops. No, I don't know. No, the projector. What's the word for it? With the frames. What is it called? Anyway, if you play it, if there's a speed of something like 25 per second or something, it gives us the idea of continuity. But when we slow that down, of course, it's just one section after the other.

And that's what the Buddha's talking about. In fact, we're although we have this impression of living in a continuous form, actually, as you look more and more closely, more and more closely, you'll see it's stroboscopic. It's actually this and then nothing, and this and then nothing. The mind is very clever at creating continuity for us. And this continuity gives us a feeling of substance, that I am real. This sense of me is actually real, something which sustains, it's an entity, and somehow independent of the universe.

The sense of I detaches itself from everything around itself, even parts of the body at times, and gets the feeling that, well, I can do my own thing in my own way in my own time. And that feeling of something substantial depends upon this sense of continuity.

That's why people have nervous breakdowns when their idea of themselves suddenly slips from under their feet. It could be a loss of their work. I am, you finish that sentence. You put the finish on that, then you'll see where your delusion is. I am a nurse. I am a decorator. When you can't finish it off, when the job's gone, who am I? And that leads some people to real despair. And that's on top of the real, what we call the real suffering of loss of income, etc, etc. It's compounded by that loss of identity. And then all these other identities that we have, our political identity, our social identity, our family identity.

So when you complete that, every time you complete that I am something, you'll know that in there there's going to be the potential of suffering because the identity doesn't have any substance.

When the Buddha, nowhere in the scriptures by the way does the Buddha say there is no self, but you have to understand what the Buddha meant by a self. The self, the *attā* could be translated into our language as a soul, but then you've got to be careful because when we use words that come from a Western tradition, it gives us all sorts of ideas. But generally speaking, most people who were eternalists, that's what they were called, would have some idea of a soul which was eternal, which was completely happy, and so on and so forth, whatever constitutes a soul.

So all the Buddha's saying is, well, if this soul exists, where is it?

If it's eternal then it obviously can't change. If it's changing then whatever it was is now gone, so there's obviously some sort of process whereby it may disappear. So looking at change, looking at impermanence, we're always questioning: well, is that, if that's impermanent, not me? So the connection between continuity and a feeling of substance.

The connection between things being impermanent, unreliable, and the sense of self being undermined are intimately connected. Now, it's because of the sense of self that we define ourselves as human beings. Now, conventionally, of course, that's perfectly true. But what it does is it makes us seek happiness in this form.

And that manifests as acquisitiveness, greed in its more moral form. But the more you have, the more you feel substantial. You feel far more safe if you have a million pounds in the bank than if you only have ten. If you have lots of friends, you feel much more substantial than being on your own, being lonely. You feel much more substantial if you have power and you can do things, and then you find yourself powerless.

So all these things, all this feeling of substantiality, of something, of me, me, something real, is based upon what I've accumulated. Now, of course, what I've accumulated other people want. And therefore anybody who undermines my accumulation has to be my enemy. So aversion arises naturally. And if the enemy is a bit bigger than me, then of course I've got to run for it. So fear arises naturally.

So these three attitudes are the undercurrent of our lives because of a delusion as to who we are: acquisitiveness, greed, aversion and fear. And from that all the gamut of human misery arises. All the future unethical actions that we commit and the guilt and the remorse. Misery, misery all the way.

So our process is twofold, and again I'll try to speak more about that at some future time. It's both this understanding, this investigation of who we really are, or what we really are, and a process of purification. Because our relationship, our relationship to each other, to the world, to anything—our relationship is our ethics. The way we relate is the way we are either ethical or unethical. So it's all connected. It's all connected. And so the process of purification is part and parcel of the path. And that's the hard bit of the practice.

I just wanted to say something just about the Mahasi. So the Mahasi was a teacher last century, which was a great revival of Buddhist practice. It had gone sort of dead by the end of the 19th century, so it's said anyway. But during the last century, many teachers arose, really very great teachers. And both in the Tibetan and in the Chinese and in Japanese tradition, all these traditions, suddenly these very great teachers arose. And in the Theravada tradition, the Mahasi was definitely one of those.

There's a book written by Jack Cornfield, which used to be called Living Buddhist Masters, but they're all dead now, apart from one. So it's been retitled. And in it, there are, I think, about 10 or 11 masters whom he interviewed, all of whom had a system through which they would get across the teachings of the Buddha. Two of them have become, maybe three, have become very regular in the West.

The one is taught more famously by Goenkaji, who died recently, which is one system of vipassanā. The more generalized system is very simple: just watch the breath and whatever arises and passes away. And in that sense it's very close to Zen. But the other system is by the Mahasi. And whichever Buddhist meditation center you go to, if you see people walking slowly then they've been infected with the Mahasi technique. And virtually all the teachers in the Theravada tradition would have practiced in the Mahasi tradition and probably mixed it with other things. Here I try to keep it fairly close to its original form.

And there are two parts to the system without going into great detail. First of all, this noting that we've practiced. And the idea there, as we've said, is to reduce the thinking mind to a single point. It also has the ability to make us recognize what's going on—to really acknowledge what it is that's happening in the body, heart and mind. And it has this added addition, added benefit that in pointing at something, you're actually recognizing it's not you. If it's an object, how can it be the subject? How can the perceiver be the perceived? How can the knower be the known? And that separation is part of the process of liberation from this deep delusion as to who we are, or what we are.

So it's something that you might want to really develop while you're here. And in a classic Mahasi meditation, which we do for the rest of the year, it's done all the time. You don't have a break from it. As soon as you wake up, you're noting, and you keep on noting until you fall asleep.

The other thing is going slow, stopping, stopping and going slow. So going back to the old films, but we know from these nature programs when they take pictures of, say, I mean, the one I always remember is the frog and the way it catches a fly. And because they can speed up the action of the camera these days, they can really slow it all down and you can see the action perfectly, how it does it. You may be surprised to know that the fly is caught underneath the tongue. Did you really know that? And was it necessary to know it? But the important thing is that that could not be seen unless the whole process had been slowed down.

So it's the same with us. The slower we go, the more we'll see. Just in the same way as either driving through the countryside, cycling through it, or walking through it. The slower you go, the more you see. So really get this feeling that there's plenty of time to do things.

Opening a door. So this is the last little example I'll leave you with. Closing doors here is part of the fire regulations. But for us, it's a much deeper practice. It's about our existential understandings.

Remember that the person who stands on one side of the room, by the time they've gone out to the door, have changed. Even in that small moment, whoever was standing there and now is standing here has changed. It might not be particularly perceptible, but there must have been a change.

So as you approach the door, stand for a moment. You can just stop for a moment and then intending to open. And as your arm stretches out, stretching, stretching, as your fingers touch the handle, you get the feel of it. The feel of the metal. Touching, touching. And as you press the handle, be in communication with the spring. Neither too much nor too little. In perfect communication with the spring. And then pulling as you open the door. And then stepping and so on and so forth. And then when you've closed the door, one moment of stopping. And then the next intention.

Now sometimes you can't do it because people are waiting. But whenever you can, really get into that habit of stopping as many times as you can during the day and just get into that state of just being and seeing the next intention. And remember that the importance of intentions in Buddhism is that all our conditionings begin with an intention. It's when we empower an intention that we produce a habit. And when we have a compendium of habits, we have a personality. Once you have a personality, your destiny is before you, because your habits drive you in a certain way.

So becoming aware of our habits and knowing which habits we want to develop and which habits we want to get rid of is also part of our practice. And one important spiritual practice is to stop and be in that state of just being for a change.

So we've had a quick look through the Buddha's life and came to see that because of the memory, the child's face—see if you can image that before you sit—can be a powerful reminder. And that his liberation from suffering brought about these understandings. And, lucky for us, a way of teaching it. We talk about Paccheka Buddhas, Buddhas, private Buddhas, people who've become liberated, but don't leave a dispensation.

Either they don't teach or the opportunity wasn't there, who knows? So one of the gifts of this particular person, the Siddhartha Gautama, was that he left a systematic way of achieving the end of suffering.

And then we talked about the hindrances, which we'll go into more deeply tomorrow, and how, generally speaking, how to approach them. And the basic instruction, of course, is to come off the story and stay in the body, stay with the feelings. And then we talked about the three characteristics: sense of impermanence, sense of not self, and the process of desire. We didn't say much about that but we'll cover it in more detail tomorrow.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you by your fierce determination achieve full liberation sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.

CHAPTER 96

Dependent Origination and the Quality of Right Awareness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma takes us through the Buddha's teaching of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), exploring how ignorance (avijjā) creates the fundamental delusion of identity that underlies all suffering. He explains how this process unfolds moment-to-moment: from ignorance and saṅkhāras (mental formations) through consciousness (viññāṇa), mind-body (nāma-rūpa), the six sense bases, contact (phassa), feeling (vedanā), craving (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna), becoming (bhava), birth, aging and death.*
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> *The talk addresses crucial questions about karma, free will, and rebirth through the lens of Buddhist psychology. Bhante emphasizes that desire arises before identity formation, which creates the crucial gap where Right Awareness can interrupt the chain of conditioning. Through vipassanā practice, we learn to observe this process without identifying with it, gradually undermining the delusion of selfhood.*
>
> *Using practical examples from meditation and daily life, including analogies about vision and consumer choices, Bhante shows how spiritual development is less about 'free will' and more about right discernment and ethical living. He concludes by explaining how understanding this moment-to-moment process naturally leads to comprehension of rebirth and the path to nibbāna.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arhato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arhato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arhato Sama Sambuddhasa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one

There were some questions that came up during the interview, so I'm going to wander around one or two of the questions that arise around the Buddha's teachings—the ones about *kamma*, maybe a little touch on rebirth, the problem of free will or the lack of it.

The easiest place to start really is dependent origination, which we chant in the morning. The Buddha there starts with this word *avijjā*, which they translate as ignorance, which really has a feeling that we shouldn't know. But it's a pure not knowing. And that not knowing, when it comes across information, presumes that the information belongs to it, or that it is that information. That's just modern speak for identity.

What I'm saying is that when we're born, we don't know anything. We have potential, but we don't know anything. And as the information comes in, we experience it as me. So there's no separation between the information coming in and the me. It's all me. So there, right at the start of our lives, is the fundamental problem to do with identity: Who am I?

Remember that this *avijjā*, this not knowing, then produces acts in the world, which is translated as *saṅkhāra*, which we can translate as habits, our habitual way of saying things. And it would seem that even before three years old, we've got settled attitudes to life. We've got an attitude.

So, with our distorted view of the world and as to who I am, and all this information coming in from society and parents and all that sort of stuff, we end up with a body of habits—habitual ways of thinking, habitual ways of seeing, habitual ways of understanding things. You can see it most vividly between cultures. But even between individuals within society, they live in different worlds. We live in very different worlds sometimes.

So these worlds are constantly created by us within ourselves from whatever information comes through our senses. One of the obvious ones would be sight. So if somebody's color-blind, they obviously live in a different world of color to people who have ordinary sight. And they might not know it for years.

When I went to an optician once, the glasses didn't seem to fit straight. So when I went back, he told me I had astigmatism, which distorted things like a wave on glass. I didn't know I had that. To me, the world looked perfectly alright, except when I put these glasses on. And he'd forgotten this astigmatism—that's what he had. He hadn't actually done the astigmatism. That's a really good example of ignorance.

Not knowing that I had astigmatism, I presumed I was seeing the world as it really is, or as it really ought to be, or I was seeing it from a sight point of view, that is the way it is. But I wasn't. And it was only through the clever work of an optician that I could see the world more clearly. But it's that point that you don't know. The whole point of our delusion is you don't know where you're deluded, or else you wouldn't be deluded. It's a paradoxical definition.

So that's a double bind, isn't it? I don't know where I'm deluded. How the hell am I going to find out where I'm deluded? It puts you in an impossible situation.

But whatever the situation is, we've ended up with these habits. They're not all horrible and terrible, of course. Some are beautiful.

And then, we enter into, with that as an underground, with this distortion, the distorted way of seeing the world and what it creates—all these habits running underground—there are moments of existence, you might say, momentary existences. And it's in that moment that the rest of the middle part of the Dependent Origination was clearly seen by the Buddha.

First of all, you have consciousness, and then the body and mind. He separates consciousness from body and mind. Consciousness from body and mind—*nāma-rūpa*. So he's making a distinction there, because what he's saying is, without the act of consciousness, *nāma-rūpa* is a waste of time. You may as well be dead. And consciousness is a waste of time unless there's something to be conscious of. And they both arise at the same time. You can only be conscious of something as it arises and passes away. And that's your momentary existence. Your consciousness is basically, in Buddhist terms, what we experience.

Now, if I were to give an analogy of that: If you take a monitor or a television, there's all this information coming in, and it has to be put onto a screen—all these percepts, and all these emotional stuff. All that. It has to be put somewhere where it can be cognized, where it can be seen. That's the act of consciousness. And the awareness is what knows what's on the screen. I'll come to that in a bit later.

So then he splits up this *nāma-rūpa*, the body and mind, into its various faculties—what he calls the six senses, the sixth one being the mind-brain complex where everything is sorted out and you end up with a point of contact.

So that point of contact, which means this present moment, the point of contact in the present moment, must have an object, it must have the consciousness, and it must have a sense base. So if any of those are missing, then you can't be conscious of something. So when you're asleep, you're not conscious of small sounds, because there's no consciousness there, there's no awakened consciousness. If you've lost your hearing, then you don't hear anything. And in a very silent room, you normally don't hear anything, at least out there. So these three things have to come together—what the Buddha called this point of contact.

And it's then you see that we make this dual world, because what we experience is then separated into two types—either it's pleasant or unpleasant. There's a whole lot of neutral stuff, but when you look into a neutral feeling, you go really towards it, you'll find it splits ever so gently either into what is unpleasant or pleasant. So that's the natural duality of the world we live in—it's either pleasant or unpleasant. And that's given. And everybody has their own way of experiencing the world as pleasant or unpleasant, and a lot of these things are culturally bound, as you know—say food. You tend to like this food more than that, et cetera, et cetera.

So all that is, shall we say, a given from every moment, conditioned from the past. It arises. I shouldn't say conditioned from the past entirely, because it's conditioned also by the present incoming stuff. Then, that's the point of *vedanā*—feeling.

And then there comes this reaction, which now links into this underlying stuff, this not knowing and these habits, whereby we have a reaction to something. So obviously when we don't like something, there's a reaction to get rid of it. When we like it, we want to indulge it. So that's the greed and the aversion. Aversion splits into two, of course—fear if it's too big. So those are your basic attitudes to the life that we're living in terms of coming out of ignorance: greed, aversion, and fear.

And again we go back down to this point of ignorance. And what it manifests—delusion. So the ignorance manifests as delusion. And the delusion is the sense of identity: I. I am. When you finish that sentence, that's where the delusion is—the I with the object. So "I am a man"—well, that's fine conventionally speaking, I hope—but it's the business of the sense of I being this particular being. And of course it gets undermined with serious illness and death and all that sort of stuff.

So you have that underground ignorance beginning to manifest as a reaction to what we're actually experiencing. It's coming out of these habits, this group of habits. So obviously, today, as soon as we see the soup or something, there comes a natural habit of feeding our appetite. But there's also within there the habit of indulging. So that pops up. That pops up out of this quagmire that exists underneath the present moment. And it's like a little button that comes up, shoots up. And that's the greed coming.

So then, now that point, the next point is you put down the grasping of it. And what this means is the sense of I comes in. This is really quite crucial and an amazing discovery by the Buddha, because if this wasn't discovered, there would be no escape. The fact that the desire comes first and then the identity means that you can stop the process. If the identity came first, you wouldn't be able to stop it.

In other words, in the process of soup, you like—that's the *vedanā*—like, want soup. "I like want soup." That's the normal way. If the I came in first, how could you stop that process? Because you're identified with it. Identity means absorbed. You're it. That's it.

Now, that's our speech that betrays us, because it tells us that the I comes first. So if I say "I am depressed," that's it, isn't it? I'm stuck. I am depressed. So what the Buddha discovered was that it's actually the other way around. It's soup, like, want, I. And it's because that process is before the absorption that through awareness, we can stop it right there, and let the wanting—the wanting that we don't want, that is—begin to express itself and die away. Otherwise it would be impossible.

Now that's what we're doing when we sit. We're stopping that formation of *upādāna*, of the grasping of the identity. So when you sit and you can see there's a pain, and then you see the reaction—"I don't want the pain"—and the desire to move, but you don't do anything, that means you've not identified with that process.

In not identifying with that process, what are you identifying with? Because there's definitely a sense of I still there. So somehow, somehow, through the process of *vipassanā*, we begin to realize that there's a different position which is above the normal physical, psychological processes and can actually view it and see it and feel it and know it and eventually, of course, understand it.

And the other thing we realize is that there's no suffering until the identity comes in. That might be difficult to grasp when your knee is exploding, but if you look very carefully, you've got to ask yourself the question after the experience—don't think about it. You're looking at pain, for instance, in the knee, and then you see the reaction that you don't want it, and then you see that desire—desire of wanting to move, shift. And there's a difficulty because there's a leakage, there's a leakage of identity into that process, and it feels uncomfortable.

But when you finally abstract yourself from it and make it really an object to observe, there's a separation, isn't there? And the observer is no longer suffering—they're just with it in that equanimous way. The equanimity is the measure of non-attachment.

And it's catching that process which establishes in us that inner experiential knowledge that this body is not me, not mine. And what that's doing is it's ricocheting down through all these habits down to this fundamental ignorance, this not knowing. And the view from not knowing is slowly being turned, slowly being turned. So the way we're looking at the world is slowly being turned, and that slow turning is developing a new relationship with the world, and it's taking us out of suffering over a period of time.

So what you're saying is that the desires or the things we don't want are not ours either?

That's right. Nothing belongs to an I because the I is fabricated. It's fabricated by this delusion that begins at birth that we must... Because we have no reflection, we've got no language, we can't think about things. There's just that presumption. I feel uncomfortable in my tummy, so I start crying. It's me. I don't say this is my tummy, I'm just in pain, and I just start screaming until mummy comes. There's no... That early consciousness stage, so they say, about four months, is completely wrapped within a two-dimensional world of just sensations. It's only when you see babies reaching out for rattles that it seems that's when we're creating the three-dimensional world. Otherwise it's flat on you—your face is right in the screen.

Now, the next point is, what happens when we identify? Now, there's a very... just as an aside, this process, up until the desire, the wrong desire, is exactly the same for an enlightened person, for the Buddha. He has a body, and he's hungry, and he has to make decisions. It's time for going out and around. So there's nothing inherently wrong with all that. But what he lacks is the next stage of this grasping nature or the aversion nature. But he still has to make a decision, which is the next step.

So the next step is having identified "I want the soup," there's the action—there's the empowerment of that desire, which is the becoming. So in here he talks about it as the becoming because he uses that word because it's the becoming of the I. The I is creating itself all the time, a sense of person. So this person now that I am now is completely refabricated in the now. In the now I do something stupid, and that disappears, that person disappears. But the next person that comes up has to carry the tag. That's the process, right?

I can say truly, I think, that at this moment, I did not overeat at lunch, because this I didn't exist. But the I that did have lunch did overeat a bit. So I was suffering after lunch from a slightly heavy stomach. You see what I mean? It's not as though... It's the problem of responsibility. The problem of responsibility arises because you end up with the consequences of what this other person did a couple of hours ago. And it's your problem in the present moment. It's my problem now.

So that's why he uses *bhava*, becoming, because it's the I constantly recreating the sense of I. We're constantly recreating the sense of I, which includes everything I'm experiencing now in this present moment.

Now in that *bhava,* in that becoming, to do that there has to be an act, and that's what he calls *kamma*. And the consequence of the *kamma* is a *vipāka*. So at that point, something has to take something potential and manifest it as a word, an action, a thought. Something has to manifest. Now what makes it manifest he calls *cetanā*—that's the will.

Now the important thing to really grasp here is that nothing's happened at the point of desire. There's no *kamma* and therefore no consequence so long as something remains as a desire. But as soon as you empower the desire into a thought, a pattern of speech or an action, then it's processed. You've had it. It's committed. And that's the becoming. So the becoming has both a reinforcement of a sense of I, but also a consequence because of the content of the act.

I always give an example out of the Vinaya at this point, concerning thieving. Some of you might have heard it. Has anybody heard it? Oh, it's new, isn't it? Very good.

For instance, if I wanted this bowl here, this gong, I passed it by and I saw it and I thought, "Well, that's a nice gong." And then there was this desire came up: "I'd like that." Nothing's happened. Nothing's happened.

However, if I pass the gong a second time, and I say, "Oh, it's a nice little gong," and I go over to it with an intention of, shall we say, somewhere in my mind that I might just borrow it for a little while, then I've actually done something. So this is called a *dukkaṭa*. This is a small offense.

On the third pass, I'm slightly overwhelmed, and I actually touch the gong. I actually touch it. So this is called a *garu*—this is a heavy offense. I'm very close to losing my robes there.

On the fourth pass, I really cannot, and the desire overtakes me, and my hand shoots out to the bowl, and it moves a nano-centimeter. And I think, "No, no," and I let go, and I run away. I've had it.

I've committed theft. At that moment, even though it moved only a nanocentimetre, the theft was committed. I lose the robe, and I don't even get the bowl.

So that's a lovely way of pointing out just there in an action how the intention grows and grows and grows and finally commits a real act. Of course, on the other side, there's all the loveliness where you might think of helping somebody and then you go a bit closer and then finally you actually commit to helping somebody. Then, of course, you get the benefit, the beauty of compassion and love.

So that business there - if we can clearly understand what the Buddha's talking about when he says *kamma*, he's talking about an act, a desire which is empowered. In our language now, we say "it's your karma," and what it means is your consequence. But actually, strictly speaking, in the literature of Buddhism, you'll see that *kamma* is one thing, *vipāka* is the consequence of it. So there's your *bhava*. And the end of the process is the beginning of the act, the whole process of the act, and the completion of the act. That's the life, that's the birth, decay and death - that's at the end.

That's taking the understanding of dependent origination as a moment-to-moment phenomenon, which is understood these days much more clearly than it would have been not so long ago, because there they would reinforce the three-life theory. In your previous life, you built up this sense of not knowing, this ignorance, which has created all these habits, and when you're reborn, you're born with it. Then you get the whole run of this, and then of course life is beginning of life, decay and the death of it.

So it can be taken both as a minute thing, as a string of things that happen within a given time slot, or it can be taken as one life, as a lifetime teaching. It doesn't really matter which way you take it, except the moment-to-moment one you see now.

When the Buddha acts in his life, what's missing is that little bit about the grasping nature or the aversion nature. But there's still an act. And in later literature - we call it the Abhidhamma, this later work - they try to give it a new word. So it's an action coming from the self - is either good or bad. And it has consequences. The consequences are outward, of course, but they're also inward. They're also inward.

We don't know what the consequences of an act will be. You might hope that they will be such and such, but you don't know, because when you act, the force of your action goes into a matrix of relationships. And the interesting thing is, it also goes inward into a matrix of relationships, into your psychology. So you don't know how life-changing a small little decision can be, and then you're amazed how you've ended up in jail. "But I didn't do anything!" And the opposite, of course, is true.

This is very similar to what scientists call chaos theory, where a given condition with surrounding supporting conditions can blow up into something awful. I mean, they always have these doomsday views, but it's also nice to think that a small act of kindness somewhere towards Syria is a kernel point where the conflict is healed.

So now, if we talk about what is coming at us now, it is given. We already have a structured personality full of habits and ways of responding. So where's free will?

Now the idea of free will is a very Western thing. It really came about through Christianity and, as far as I understand, through the work of particularly St. Augustine, a philosopher. It was basically an argument about the relationship between a human being and God. So God creates a human being and he wants a relationship of love towards this creation. But if that creation is so constructed to love him, then that's not much of a love, is it? If you create an object to love you, it might feel good, but you know it's not real. It's not real love. So therefore, it had to be argued that there was free will that was beyond conditionings, which could freely, out of an act of understanding and love, be a free act of love.

And what that's translated to for most of us, I think for most of us in the West, is this idea that free will stands outside the conditional world. Now, when you walk into a supermarket and buy chocolate biscuits, this was an act of real free will. You went in there and decided freely that "Yeah, I know about the adverts, but I have decided I am going to buy chocolate biscuits." And this tremendous sense of selfhood, of separation, of an entity completely enclosed within myself. I mean, I see all you people, but you're completely separate. There's no real connection with you in terms of my free will. And it doesn't matter that there's a special offer on chocolate biscuits. I happen to have bought it out of my own personal free will.

So this idea of free will standing outside the conditioned world is something that I think belongs mainly to the West. In the East - and I'm thinking of Hinduism and Buddhism and places like that - there's not that sense of the free will being outside the process. It's more in the sense of you're making decisions about a situation within given parameters with so much information and from your point of view you're making a decision, and it's conditioned both from the conditions you're in and from your point of view. Now that might strike us as a loss of free will.

So all of you had various reasons for coming here. So there were reasons for coming here, and there was your own personal connection with those reasons, and then you ended up here. So looking back on that decision, was it an act of free will, or was it just something that was empowered because of the conditions you found in yourself and what you know of Satipanya?

When it comes to choice - I mean, this is what the consumer society, the religion of the consumer society tells you, that you have a choice. But choice is only there when there's confusion, when there's not knowing really what you want to do. So when you walk in the supermarket and there are - you know, you only normally eat one type of biscuits, and suddenly you're struck with "As well as chocolate, there's fig biscuits." There's a moment of confusion, is there not? Now you could just swear and pick one up,

which is absolutely stupid. In which case there's definitely no free will because you didn't make a choice. Or you sit there with the confusion, arguing with yourself as to which one you might prefer this week. And then you have to look deeply into your heart and think, "Fig biscuits is what..." And then the choice is made, and one feels, "That was a good choice. I really made a good choice there."

And of course it's all been manufactured by my habits and the fact that maybe I got fed up with chocolate biscuits for the moment and I need a change, and by the loss leader that the supermarket has given me on fig biscuits. Who knows? So it's a moot point, isn't it, whether we have this free will? And yet there's something in us which tells us that I am making decisions. I am making decisions. So there's definitely an act of will.

So if we go now back to the original state and just ask ourselves, what is it we all want? Fundamentally, right down there, even before we exist, what is it we want? We just want to be happy. Am I correct? We just want to be happy. And each of us will have a definition of what that happiness is. And that's what we're chasing. We're chasing the dragon, the dragon of happiness. We just want to be happy.

And through our experience of life, we begin to realise that some things make me happy and some things don't. And as we deepen our meditation and we get to this point of identity, we realise that maybe something is wrong around that area. And we begin to realise, I think, that my happiness depends a great deal upon the motivation, the intentions with which I do things. And when I look into my intentions and motivations, they're all about some form of relationship to the world. I may call it wanting or not wanting, but it's about a relationship to the world.

When we talk about relationships, we talk about ethics. We talk about how do I treat somebody, or how should somebody treat me. So life now moves towards an ethical basis. And this you might say was the great shift in human consciousness. Somewhere around the time of the Buddha, this business of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." That was the great teaching both of the Buddha, of Moses, Socrates. That business about relationship and about ethics.

And it moves religion from a power struggle with the gods, where you are appeasing gods to get your way through sacrifice. The big moment in the Bible, of course, is - who nearly sacrificed his son? Abraham. Isaac, excuse me, Isaac. That was a crucial moment in human understanding, that God didn't want sacrifice. And then it moves to Moses where he wants ethical living, he wants harmony, he wants peace and joy and all that. And that was the real shift in human consciousness there, I think.

So now, the problem isn't free will, is it? It's actually more to do with right understanding and following the right understanding, because you know that will lead you to happiness. And if you're following a right understanding that leads you to unhappiness, then there must be something wrong with the right understanding. So it all comes back to the way we're actually seeing things again. This all comes back to this point of view of how we're relating, how we're seeing things.

So the spiritual path, as opposed to the path of the consumerist, is delineating the path. And as you walk along the path, because you don't know where the end is - in Buddhist terms it's this foggy place called *Nibbāna*, or foggy state called *Nibbāna* - and you're making your way over there and you're happy with this present moment because you can see it fairly clearly. As you move along the path, decisions come up, forks appear in the path which seem inviting, and these are points where there has to be some discernment. So you have to go in - well, you have to look at your maps and you have to get your compass out and your GPS and all that. And you have to work out where you are in the middle of this place that you're walking through. And then you make a decision and you stay on the path.

And as you go along the path, there's always going to be a doubt: "Well, is this the right path?" So it's through that process of investigation, discernment, that we find slowly this path. But the path is already delineated for us. The Buddha's written it very clearly.

I know that they always talk about the Buddha's freedom of religious thought. And they always quote the Kalama Sutta. So the Kalamas were a group of people who were very confused. They said to the Buddha, "Look, this guru comes along and he says this. And this guru comes along and says, 'That guru is a load of rubbish. It really is all about this.' And we're completely confused."

So the Buddha says, "Well, you have a right to be confused. Don't believe anything because the person's famous or because of tradition or because it's written in a holy book and all that. Don't believe anything. But do what you know to be right for you."

But then, people forget, he then went and hit them with the old Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path. I mean, it very clearly delineates the line, which he says, "Now, this is the truth, no matter all these other gurus." But he does say, "And it's up to you to discover whether this is right for you." So he throws it back to us to actually investigate what he said. He doesn't put it to us as a belief system.

So as we move spiritually, what we find, I think, is that everything we do, from the moment we get up in the morning brushing our teeth, to the work we do, to the point where we fall asleep, everything is on that path. Everything has to be part of that path. And if it's not, it shoots you off somewhere else. And it creates a ricochet, it creates a disturbance.

So our effort is not so much about free will, it's about right discernment. Because as soon as you discern something to be right, what's the point of free will? You've just got to do it. And it's only in those times in our lives when we know that we're doing exactly what we want to do that we feel most happy. And that was this meaningfulness that I was talking about the other night, this deep sense of happiness, a deep sense of connection that we have with our deepest motivations and the connection of that with the world. Even, as we know with some people, it ends them up being tortured and jailed and awful stuff. But they're connected to this much deeper path of meaningfulness within them.

And then just as a final addition to that is the whole process of that becoming. When it's perceived, when it's understood, there's - remember in our meditation also - a recognition that there is something within this psychophysical organism which is the discerning faculty, which is an intelligence, an intuitive grasp of things. And it really is a case of - I keep repeating this - but when you're in that state of the observer and everything's fairly clear and whatnot, and you come out of that at the end of a sitting or something, one of the reflections is: What is the observer made of? What constitutes the observer?

And just go through the list. Are there any sensations in the observer? Are there any emotions? Are there any thoughts? That might be a difficult one because it so easily identifies with thinking. Are there any images? So how do we know? How do we know what's in the observer? We know what's in the observer by knowing what's not in the observer. And we know what's not in the observer because it's an object. Whatever is perceiving cannot be the perceived. And that's where we are, shall we say, rooting ourselves in something that really is our true nature.

So obviously in Theravāda Buddhism, they don't like to talk about *Nibbāna* in a personalised way. The Buddha, in the original teaching, was much more insistent on talking about an experience. It was only in later Buddhism that the question was asked, "Well, if there's an experience, there must be something that experiences it." And that's when you get phrases like Buddha nature, eventually just "the big self, which is not a

self" - massive contradictions trying to express the fact that there is something in us which does not belong to this phenomenal world, to the world in which we actually live.

And yet, and this is the paradox, it cannot come to know itself without this world. And nor can it know what it knows until it tells itself through thought. And you've all, I'm sure, experienced that when suddenly you've said something enormously wise and wondered where it came from. And somebody said, "Well, that sounds very wise." And you say, "Well... I have this wealth of wisdom which occasionally leaks onto the world."

So it's really, that's our investigation. And I think it's much easier if you abandon the idea of free will and talk much more about what ought I be doing in order to develop my spiritual path. And then just abandon the idea, frankly.

So we've covered quite a bit of ground, really. I mean, books are written on this, aren't they? So, dependent origination. And it's for us to make that a personal, experiential knowledge.

Like, it's something we know through our meditation. We know the body and mind. We know the sense bases. We know the point of contact. That's when you're down in the knee and you're just feeling sensations. That's the point of contact. As soon as the word pain comes up, you're into *vedanā*. You're into the point where you discern things as pleasant or unpleasant. And then you know this process of desiring, skillful and unskillful desiring. Remember, there is skillful desire. The desire to sit, to meditate, is a skillful desire. But even so, there's still an I that's doing it. The fundamental delusion is under there. But that fundamental delusion is... through doing what is intentionally wholesome is undermining itself. It's undermining that sense of self.

So one of the great ways of undermining that is through love, because through an act of love the sense of I becomes a sense of we. So you're undermining it. Even though we talk in a negative sense about the I, and get rid of the I and smash it up to pieces and all that, the I melds into a connection with all beings and with nature and everything. It becomes connected, interconnected with it. And in that sense, it's no longer self-seeking. It's no longer selfish because it sees that the happiness of others also is part of its own happiness. That lovely prayer of Saint Francis... may I love rather than be loved.

It's only when... I mean, one sign, one sign I think of our growing spiritual wealth is the joy of giving something to somebody is greater than the joy of receiving something from somebody. So when that joy is bigger, it's a little signal to us that actually, the release of the I into a we, into a connection, is part of that undermining of a sense of I.

So what does the Buddha say? The Buddha says, "Whatever a teacher can have done for his disciples, I, out of love, out of compassion, have done for you." And the word he uses is *anukampan*, which is moving towards, or giving towards. So that was, when you look at the Buddha's life, that's what he did. He became fully liberated. He didn't just sit there glowing in his liberation with a big sign, "Leave me alone." Because he actually gets up. There's a moment of doubt that comes across to whether people would understand what he's got, but he's quick to overcome the doubt when he thinks about his teachers and then his companions, whom he realised were very close to understanding.

And then we talked a little bit about this whole problem of free will and around *kamma*. And just the suggestion that whether we have free will or not, in a sense, is slightly off the point. Because from our point of view, we're coming from a position of not knowing. And this not knowing is causing us problems. So our aim is correct discernment, to seeing things as they really are. That's a very common phrase in the scriptures: to see and understand how things have come to be. It's normally translated as to see and understand things as they are, but it's not. It's the past pastable. It's how, in other words, process. The Buddha's very much into process. How did we get to where we are? And then you can see that process and correct it or reinforce it if you see it as beautiful.

And just a final little addition. When we see clearly what's happening in the present moment, there's no problem with understanding rebirth after death. It's catching exactly what's happening now that you realise the process is going to be endless. What confuses us is the identity with this physical form. That's what confuses us. So we think that when the physical form drops that's the end of it. But hopefully at some point you'll discern clearly that the mind is something other than the body. Essentially. It's also arising and passing away.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. Not too confusing. May you by your sheer moment to moment commitment to mindfulness break through the delusion and arrive at that wonderful place of *Nibbāna*. Sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu.

CHAPTER 97

Talk at the Re-opening of the Golden Buddha Centre in Totnes

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 55 min

In this talk given at the reopening of the Golden Buddha Centre in Totnes, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a comprehensive overview of fundamental Buddhist teachings through the lens of the Buddha's own journey to enlightenment. He traces how the Buddha abandoned both materialistic pleasure-seeking and extreme asceticism, finding instead a middle way through investigating the causes of suffering rather than pursuing happiness directly. This pivotal shift, triggered by a childhood memory of natural absorption while watching his father, became the foundation of his awakening.

Bhante explains the nature of Nibbāna as an unshackling of intuitive awareness (satipaññā) from identification with the psychophysical organism. Drawing on the Udāna Suttas, he describes consciousness without boundary, untouched by the senses, full of light in all directions. He illuminates how our sense of self constantly shifts through identification with thoughts, feelings, and sensations, and how meditation practice involves taking a stance as the observer to disengage from these identifications.

The practical applications are thoroughly explored: taking suffering out of pain and indulgence out of pleasure in daily life, understanding grief versus sorrow, and allowing the heart to heal itself through patient, affectionate awareness. Bhante shares the teaching of Ajahn Tate—"make it simple, take it easy, stay with the one who knows"—and discusses how emotional energy transforms through the sublimation process of mindful observation. The talk concludes with personal reflections on his own journey from Zen practice through Theravāda training in Burma and Sri Lanka to establishing Satipaññā Insight Meditation Centre.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-enlightened.

I would like to thank Vikram Daya for this opportunity to come and give a talk, and of course to thank them for the dedication they have put in to establish a little meditation center right here in the middle of Totnes. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

I thought this might be an opportunity to go over some basic teachings as a reminder, looking at the Buddha's life itself and recognizing that he is an exemplar. The life that he lived is really what we ourselves have to go through. He is a teacher, of course, and in the sense that it is a path that everybody has to take, one way or the other—and I mean everybody—he is an archetype.

It is a path of renunciation, not to be confused with mortification. Renunciation, remember, is simply the letting go of a wrong relationship we have with the world.

In those times, very similar to ours, there were two basic philosophies. One was what we would call materialism, scientific materialism: one life and that's it, so you may as well enjoy yourself. The Buddha probably tried that as a youth, got fed up with it, became empty, and that was one of the reasons he began to leave. One of our deepest fears is that we want to enjoy life.

The other philosophy was that there was some sort of soul or spirit within us which was held down by karma. In the Jain tradition, this is quite material—it is your actual physical body, you might say. The whole idea was to practice mortification exercises which would then allow the soul to leave the body. So the Jain saint, the one who is a hero, is one who starves himself to death.

The Buddha himself tried these approaches, of course. He tried to attain these beautiful mental states, which were part of the idea of some sort of eternality, and found them wanting. He kept waking up and finding himself to be still the anxious and depressed Gautama. We could say that he was going through what we would call an existential crisis, coming to terms with sickness, aging, and death. Then he tried the self-mortification business and found that it was just more suffering. So he abandoned that.

We can imagine him on the road, having left his companions, feeling quite despairing. Along comes a woman—for some reason we know her name, Sujata, meaning "fortunate birth"—who sees him. Although she is carrying special sweetmeats, little rice cakes (though I prefer to always think of it as rice pudding), she sees this poor wretch and offers her offerings to him. In the scriptures, of course, it says he was glowing like a god. This is ridiculous. He was there looking quite wretched, and he took this rice pudding. As you know, the effect of rice pudding is incalculable.

At that point he has a memory from childhood, and this is really why we call him self-enlightened. In this memory from childhood, he remembers watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, and he recognizes that he is in the same state of absorp-

tion that he would have been in during those practices of absorption, the jhānic state. But there is something extra to it: a sense of curiosity. He is driven by interest to know what his father is doing.

At that point, his whole search, his whole labor turns upon itself. Instead of trying to seek happiness, he now tries to understand how he is creating suffering. With that new inspiration, he sits under the Bodhi tree with great determination: either he is going to crack this problem or die.

Well, lucky for him, and very fortunate for us, he cracks it. Six hours—that is what he said it took. What he realized, what he experienced, is something which he cannot explain. He calls it ineffable, beyond rationality. He has all these lovely epithets, and he points to it often, mostly in the negative: it is not born, does not die, not conditioned. He then gives it a name: Nibbāna. But in the Theravāda tradition, it is the negative side which is mostly accentuated.

That Nirvana is nothing that can be described, that it's an emptiness and all that sort of thing. In the Mahayana tradition, they're much more positive about it.

There are two occasions in the scriptures which, in a sense, give us the more Mahayana point of view. We have a collection of scriptures called the Udana Suttas, which are the inspirational phrases that the Buddha came out with. Somebody collected them all into this special collection, and it doesn't include these two instances—which gives you the slant of a particular school.

These two instances say quite clearly that there is a consciousness which is not touched by any of the senses, which includes the mind. No emotions, no thoughts. Without boundary—only phenomena can create boundary. And in all directions, full of light. Just this is the end of suffering.

So we have to find within us this Buddha. This Buddha that's within us, this satipañña, this intuitive awareness, is completely confused with the body and mind, with the psychophysical organism. And because of that confusion, it seeks happiness in this form. Seeking happiness in this form leads ultimately to frustration.

What it does is make us collect things, to be acquisitive, thinking that the more we have, the happier and more secure we'll be. So more money, more friends, more power. And we find that this isn't ever completely satisfactory, because I'm never completely safe, so I always have to have a little more money. I'm never entirely loved, so I need a couple more friends. I'm never quite in control, so I need a little more power. And so it grows, and in those actions we form unskillful deeds, which create within us our suffering, our conditioning, our unskillful conditioning.

Then one day we wake up and discover vipassana—or any meditation—and the process now is in reverse. The process is to observe within us how we've created this world.

When we say we've created this world, the room we're sitting in now has, we can presume, some sort of objective existence. In other words, it can be here when we all leave. But the room that we're actually experiencing is entirely created by us. It depends upon our sight, our hearing, our body. We live within this cocoon, this bubble of consciousness. And this bubble of consciousness gives us the impression that we are objective about the world, especially in the West, where we confuse ourselves into thinking that we can see the world objectively. It's come about through our science and our technology, but it's left us with a delusion.

What the meditation tells us is that the world we're actually living in is being created entirely by us from very minimal stimuli from the outside. At the eardrum, all there is is pressure. At the skin level, there are only little chemical, electrical changes. The eyes collect a very small amount of photons, and the rest of it is completely manufactured within us.

And so, when we consider that the world I am actually living in is the one that I am creating, then the question must arise: why have I made such a pig's ear of it? That's basically our investigation.

In taking a stance within us, which we call the observer, the feeler, we have disengaged with the psychophysical organism. What do we mean by self? We mean identity. And what does identity mean? It means basically that for that moment, that's what you are.

There are single moments where this comes across to us. For instance, when you trap your finger in the door, for that one lovely, delightful moment, you and the pain are one and the same. That's identity. When you get lost in a daydream, lost in the emotional inner DVD, that's what you are. That's what we mean by identity. As soon as you jump out of it, you've lost that identity and formed another identity of the one who knows.

The whole process of our liberation from that delusion is the process of pulling ourselves out of what we thought was me, what we thought was us.

Consider the child who's born. A lot of research was done, even going back to Freud. There was a psychologist called Margaret Mahler, I think that was her name, who did extensive study on how a child finally individuated, and it takes, it seems, three years. The first four months, it seems to be just a blanket of sensations which has no depth.

We see little babies reaching out and actually creating their three-dimensional world, and very slowly, over a period of time, this mass of sensations becomes the world out there and me. That's why by about the age of three, children can say, "I am a boy, I am a girl."

They're very clear about their little existences.

All we are doing is externalizing the inner world. All we are doing is, as it were, pushing away the inner world so that it becomes an inner world that seems outer. I'm sure I'm making myself perfectly clear.

When you find this position within yourself, it has been named the observation post by Nyanaponika Thera in what is still the classic book on meditation, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. We access within us an observation post, and we feel ourselves to be the observer of thoughts and feelings. We experience ourselves to be the feeler. We can feel pain in the knee and so on. We feel the breath. We can experience it directly. And yet, our identity is of the observer.

In moments of real clarity within your meditation, when the body is perfectly still, and the heart is perfectly calm, and the mind has stopped even for a second, and you really feel yourself, you really experience yourself to be the observer within this psychophysical organism—when you've done that, ask yourself afterwards: What were the inner contents of the observer? What's it made of? Did you find any sensations in there? Did you find any bodily parts in there? Were there any feelings, emotions, moods? Were there any thoughts or images? And yet there was this bright, intuitive awareness.

What we've done there, unwittingly, is we've found where Nibbana is. It's staring us in the face, but we don't see it.

Now, the sense of self that we get, the sense of the observer, is the image of that very sati-pañña in the screen of consciousness. When we talk about consciousness, when we talk about viññāṇa—the fifth of the five aggregates—we're speaking of something beyond body and its feelings, beyond all our perceptions which congregate to become our memories and help our thought patterns, beyond all our conditionings, our saṅkhārā, which are all our habits. And finally, this word viññāṇa. It's translated as consciousness, but we don't really have a word for it in English. I tried to use the word cognition, but when I looked it up on the all-knowing Wikipedia, it didn't seem to fit either.

It's a screen. Can you imagine all the information coming in onto your monitor or your TV screen? Somehow it's got to be held. It's got to be manifest. That manifestation is the manifestation of consciousness. And peculiarly enough, it has its own intelligence

—just as the body has its own intelligence. When you cut yourself, do you get in there? Do you shift the cells around? What do you do? You do nothing. You keep it antiseptic, and the body does the rest. The body itself, the cellular life, has its own intelligence.

So it is with our minds and hearts. We've developed a particular "person," inverted commas, which works by itself. That's why you can be driving to work, thinking about all the problems of your life, and arrive completely unharmed, having driven all that way, wondering where the two hours went. There's something about the mind which has its own intelligence, but it needs to be put on the screen.

Our delusion is to fall into the screen, onto the monitor, onto the TV, and become whatever is happening at that time. When we come into meditation, we're pulling ourselves out of that mass, and we're making it an object. We're making it something to observe. And in so doing, as soon as we observe it, it obviously can't be me.

However, when we get there—and sometimes when you're watching television, you will see your image in the screen—you have a choice. Are you going to watch TV, or are you going to watch yourself watching TV? The sense of the observer is the image of this sati-pañña, this intuitive awareness, in the screen of cognition, in the screen of consciousness, for want of a better word.

Unfortunately, you can't get rid of it by an act of will. You can only get rid of it by paying attention to the object that's before you. When you pay attention to the object that's before you, you're going to absorb into it.

the intention with which you enter that absorption, you come out the other end having developed that intention. If you saw something which you particularly liked—ice cream on a hot day—and you just went for it, thoroughly indulged in it with two scoops, you would come out of that experience with even more desire for ice cream.

However, if you went into that experience without the greed, but just to enjoy—very difficult to separate—then you come out of it with a greater sense of enjoyment without the attachment.

We find we wouldn't get attached so much to things if we began to recognize the aftermath. The aftermath of attachment, the aftermath of indulgence, is the frustration of not being able to get what you want. It's the grief of losing what you have. It's the constant fear of loss anyway, so you take out an insurance policy. There's a sense of compulsive behavior behind it, and worst of all, boredom. Because of the inbuilt obsolescence of pleasure, we can't keep chewing the same sweet. We've got to have a different

flavor. And so we get caught up in this search for happiness in the sensual world, the search for happiness in relationship, the search for happiness in art, in nature, wherever we think we can find happiness—the search goes on.

However, if we begin to enter into these experiences with the right intention, then we don't get that stickiness, and we find that we can enjoy life without these unfortunate consequences. Conversely, if we enter into a situation of aversion, then of course we end up with conflict. And that has its own problems. Pretty straightforward.

So our aim in daily life is to take the aversion, to take the suffering out of pain—all sorts of pain: physical, emotional, relational, whatever—take the suffering out of it, and to take the indulgence out of pleasure. That's our practice, in one way of looking at it, in ordinary daily life.

In the inner life, in our meditation and in our contemplations, our process is always to make things something to observe, something to investigate. And that process makes more and more obvious to us this quality within us which is happily called the knowing.

Ajahn Tate, who was a very famous monk in Thailand, lived up on the Mekong River, was considered to be an arahant, and when he died, two million people turned up to his funeral—so presumably he earned his reputation. And he had this lovely little phrase: "Make it simple, take it easy, stay with the one who knows." That was probably his guiding line, which brought him his own insights.

This process of re-identifying ourselves backward into the observer is the process of relief. It's the process of unshackling ourselves. So nibbana turns out to be the unshackling of this intuitive awareness. That's the process that we're going through. And we can only hope that when we get there, that's it, and there isn't anything else.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your fierce practice, enter into that wonderful state of the end of suffering sooner rather than later.

A question arose about what happened to the Buddha when he ate a rice cake. What I'm suggesting is that sometime around that point, he remembers this occasion in childhood. So there must have been some connection—like Proust and the madeleine. It all comes back to him. He remembers his father, and he just recalls that state.

Now, if you think about children, you'll notice how they suddenly lock onto something—a bug they haven't seen, or something. And when they do that, their eyes just lock and the world disappears. Their jaw drops. And to us, more developed beings, we think they look gormless. We give them a crack on the back of the head and they wake up, thereby destroying their ability to become fully liberated. This is what happens.

When the child is locked in like that, there's no thought. Their attention is completely absorbed in receiving the information. When the jaw drops, it tells us that there's no thought, because the jaw, the tongue are intimately connected to thinking.

So at that point they are in a state of pure observation. That's what we need to get back to. That's original mind.

So Buddha had that memory of his father. And having that memory led him to turn around upon his meditation. He turned around on his meditation. I'm putting it that way deliberately. Before, he'd been practicing in order to be happy.

The first practices were these absorption states, which exist in all religions—something that you create within yourself through mantra, through the fact of metta that we do. The beauty of those is that you don't need anything outside you. All you need is a couple of robes, a tree, a bowl to go around and get a bit of food, and you can sit there all day completely blissed out. But unfortunately you kept waking up out of that state and finding that actually you're still depressed, anxious. So it was a false state. And he left those teachers because of that.

The other side was self-mortification, which is the idea that the problem was the body. So you got rid of all sex, drugs, rock and roll. You began not to eat, to draw the body down to its essentials. And as I've said, the Jain saint actually takes it to the point of death after release. For them, for the Jain religion, they are heroes. He tried that, but he just found it to be more suffering.

So he then has this experience. As far as I'm concerned, he's in a state of despair, because he's received all the teachings that were there, and he's still in a state of complete confusion and quandary, and presumably thinking that this is it—it's just going to be birth after birth, one lifetime a cow and a pig, which sounds pretty miserable. So he's sitting there and then somebody comes along and gives him this bit of rice, this sweetmeat. He has this memory, and somehow it changes his view of what he's trying to seek, of what he's searching for. Instead of trying to seek happiness, he says, "Well, why am I suffering? What's the cause of this suffering?"

And it's that which makes him sit under the tree with this new inspiration of turning inward and observing how he's creating suffering. This later comes out in the teaching of dependent origination, which is a psychology. And the teaching of dependent origination clearly delineates where the problem lies. It does not lie in the body. It does not lie in our sense bases. It does not lie in the feelings and emotions that come up. It lies in our relationship to what we're experiencing. That's the core of it. And that relationship is desire—wrong desire.

But even at the point of desire, in the meditation, you'll know that there's no suffering. Because desire, as it comes up as an intention, is still not manifest. It just remains as a force within the mind. It's only when you fall into the identity of it that the suffering begins.

So the process is the seeing, the initial experience, the way that we divide the world into what's pleasant and unpleasant, and then the desire for the pleasant, and then "I want" the desire for the pleasant. So although in English we say "I want, I see, I want, I scream," it's the other way around. Scream, see, want, I. If it weren't that way around, there'd be no escape. If the whole process began with "I," you wouldn't be able to get out of it, because it's always you. It's the fact that the process before the "I" arises is not you, is not identifiable, and you can step out of that process and observe it in its passing. And in so doing, you're actually seeing the escape route from suffering.

If you haven't understood this in the words, then you must come up to Satipaññā and do a retreat.

"So really then what you're saying is our real 'I' is our spiritual nature?"

Yeah. Why not?

"You're also saying not to take it personally, in a sense, aren't you? Because it's not about the 'I.'"

Well, you have to be careful with this one, because the Buddha never said there was no self. He just said it was false. And it's recognizing the false nature of the self which is the process of disidentifying. So whenever I say, "I am depressed," where's the escape? As soon as I say, "Oh, there's depression," I've escaped.

I've come out of that process of identity. You see?

Except the depression remains.

I know, it's a drag. But everything changes. Remember that the heart will heal itself. You don't have to do anything. This is the magic of the whole system. All there is, is energy. It's the mind which describes it as depression and puts a history to it and a future to it. When you stay with the depression, there's no depression—there's just weight.

In the East, they somatize their problems. Here, we always psychologize it. You get a pain in the knee and it's deep anxiety. Whereas in the East, they just say it's a pain in the knee. So if they're depressed, they're not depressed—they just feel heavy. And there's a little escape from that. At least you don't identify so much with it.

What we discover in our meditation is that simply allowing it to express itself is the process of healing. It's as simple as that. And much cheaper.

And remember that we're not moving towards some sort of dead heart state—the Buddha sitting under the tree, blank, with a sign: "Fully liberated, do not be stirred." He ends up with the Buddha heart. So all these emotional states that we have—depression, loneliness, anxiety—when they come up, that energy is not dissipated. It transforms. It sublimates.

As I understand sublimation in science, it is a solid which moves directly into a gas without an in-between. Although we have ice, water, and vapour, if you have something which goes from solid to vapour immediately, they call that sublimation. That's exactly what's happening all the time.

As soon as you sit with your depression or your anxiety, feeling it, staying with it, holding it and embracing it in loving kindness, affectionate awareness—it feels as though it's evaporating. After a time, of course. And that is changing into its opposite immediately. And you know that because the next time you behave, there's a change of behavior, even if only small. So where there was hatred, you find love. Where there's cruelty, compassion. Selfishness, generosity. Loneliness, solitude.

Happy days are ahead of us.

So a lot of this is about using language to make the state objective, out there, and constantly returning to that practice, would you say?

In the technique that I personally teach, which is taught by the Mahasi side of Burma, we do use a noting technique to make that distance obvious. But that is only a technique. It's not so much to do with language as an inner position that you take.

I mentioned catching your finger in the door. For one moment, you and the finger are one. You become a physical self. And then you jump out of that and become the angry self and start kicking the door. So this sense of self is always moving. It's always changing. It's always catching hold of something.

What is it that is falling into this identity? Buddha. It's the satipaññā, the awareness. It's the Buddha within that is suffering.

The body doesn't suffer. It just has pain. The heart doesn't suffer. It just has emotions. The mind doesn't suffer. It just works. What's suffering is the Buddha within.

When something happens to us—say, just a very simple thing, somebody says something that irritates us—all that's happening is that we can see their face and

That's why we're trying to get out of suffering. You're all looking at me very seriously. You're beginning to feel I'm saying heretical things.

"Can I ask, what do you mean by 'the Buddha within'? Is that an awareness of the fact that we can get out of it? Is that the Buddha within?"

The Buddha within refers to the quality of intuitive awareness. These are not two different faculties—they're two sides of the same coin. First you look, and then you see. But for it to be active, there has to be a desire to know.

"Could you take us through a little process? For example, based on what you've been saying, I've been working with a certain issue to try and release the Buddha within. So there is grief—I'm grieving, so there is grief. And then I feel disloyal in a way because I'm not grieving anymore. So then I say, 'There is disloyalty,' and I'm sort of free of that, and then somehow I'm..."

Stuck.

"Yes, I'm not sure where I am."

Right. Well, first of all, in this particular case, our confusion is between sorrow and grief. Sorrow is the resonance within our own hearts of somebody else's suffering. Grief is the measure of our attachment. So when somebody dies or somebody leaves us, it's like something is ripped out of our hearts and we're just left with this wound. And then if we think that grief is a measure of our love, how can we stop grieving? Every time we stop grieving, we think we've stopped loving. We get into a double bind.

Once we realize that the grief I'm feeling is something personal to me because of the relationship I had—and it has nothing to do with love—everything shifts. Love is very easy. Love lets people die. It's not a problem. Love lets people leave us. But grief doesn't. Grief hangs on.

So we sit with the grief, not confusing it with love denied, but seeing it as the product of attachment. Attachment means we are psychologically dependent on something outside our control for our happiness. Once you begin to realize that, it's a no-goer. You just don't invest in bonds that aren't going to work.

You observe the grief, and the heart will heal itself. It may take a week, a month, nine months—it doesn't matter. The heart will just slowly heal itself.

I had a particularly interesting case of that. An elderly woman came to see me, saying she'd been grieving for her son for five years. And this was exactly what she was doing. She was grieving, and every time the grief went, she felt guilty that she no longer loved her son. As soon as this was pointed out to her, she was back the next week saying all the grief had gone. There is an end to grief.

"You do get like an emotional scar as well, don't you? You can see a photo, the grief can come back, or you can just remember something and the grief returns."

Yes, but hopefully, eventually, there's just the memory of joys. You counterbalance that with gratefulness, gratitude—that you had a lovely relationship. Even if it was a terrible relationship, you're grateful for the teachings.

"Yes, that's it."

It's called Tough Love.

"I was quite interested in what you were saying about the difference in the way that we look at emotional and psychological problems in the West—depression, anxiety, trauma, whatever—and that it's experienced more as a somatic sensation. Do you think working with feelings in the body rather than the cognitions is actually quite helpful when you're meditating?"

We hear their harsh words, the words they intend to be painful. That's all. We might feel, at the heart level, at this surface level of the heart, the vibration of their anger. That's all. The rest is completely manufactured by me. If I now allow anger to arise in response, that has been manufactured by me.

All these emotions we feel—the depression, the anxiety, and so forth—have not been directly caused by someone else or by an event. There is nothing in the world, and nobody in the world, who can actually cause me psychological suffering. If it were true that other people could cause me psychological suffering, how could I ever have been liberated? By getting rid of you? It's the very fact that all the suffering I have is caused by me that liberation is possible here and now.

So now, if all this anger in me is not caused by external circumstances, I'm still left with the conditioning of anger. It remains in me like a red-hot balloon, and it seeks objects. I can get angry with anything. It just depends on whether this conditioning is coming to the surface or not. That's why a lot of our anger is inappropriate. When you go home and your partner hasn't done something, you can burst out in a huge amount of anger. But if it's your boss, you've got to swallow it. You've got to keep it down.

When you consider that there is this ball of anger, which has nothing to do with past, present, or future—it is a present conditioning within us, which has, of course, its own inner triggers, certain things that make us more angry than others—our task is to release the anger as feeling, because all it is, is energy. And it's in sitting within the bonfire, with affection and kindness, that the process of healing happens. You don't have to do anything in the outside world.

If in your meditation you're working with some sort of emotional pain, and you're sitting there, and suddenly a memory surfaces that seems to be the point where this whole mental conditioning arose, it can become a vehicle through which there's an escape for that particular suffering. It can be a healing moment. A traumatic moment. But you can't make that come. That has to arise out of the psyche, out of the mind.

Sometimes you get pain in the body, which you know is emotionally based rather than physical, and you sit with it, and sit with it, and sit with it, and it disappears, and you haven't a clue what it was. You might intuitively think it was anxiety, but you don't know. All you know is that there was discomfort and pain in the body. When it's gone, you know that something has left, and you feel lighter and better for it.

It's when you have these sorts of experiences that you realize the heart heals itself. All you have to do is get out of the way. But it can't heal without expressing its disturbances within your awareness. Until it does so, it remains stuck within the frame of this psychophysical organism—a phrase I particularly like.

Someone asked if I could share a little about myself, how I arrived at where I am.

Well, it's really boring. It's just me.

They asked me to start with my name. Ah, my name. Bodhidharma. That was given to me by my teacher when I ordained. He knew I had a Zen background, so I think it was a bit tongue-in-cheek.

In the ordination tradition, in the way of naming monastics, the name is determined by the day of your birth. The days of the week follow the alphabet—the Sanskrit or Pali alphabet. So the first day would be the vowels: A, E, O, U. Then it would start at the back with G, K, V. Well, Wednesday's child gets M and V, so he didn't have much of a choice. That's how he ended up with Bodhidharma. And as you know, Bodhidharma is the great Indian who went to China and started the whole Chan tradition—and was, for some reason, named after me.

So you just get your name like that. It's not that you can't change it. I have a rather interesting story of a Dutchman who was ordained and was given the name of one of the companions of the Buddha. This companion was called Whopper. And when he finally caught on to what it meant, he was overcome with sniggering. Fancy being called Whopper! He changed his name. So you're not stuck with it. Actually, the proper pronunciation should be "Whopper"—but it still doesn't fit the robe, you know.

So yes, I, like a lot of people, came into meditation because I wasn't happy. I began way back there in a state of unhappiness, seeking happiness. I decided to go to Japan to do some meditation. So I wrote to the Buddhist Society in London and asked if they could give me some direction on how to get to Japan for this purpose. They sent me back a letter with twenty-one points—I wish I'd kept it—as to why I shouldn't go.

Then they said there was a monastery up in Northumberland, Throssel Hole Abbey. They also pointed me to a teacher in Birmingham named Vajra, and she lived but a little bus ride away. I remember my first meditation with her, which was so Zen, you know—the Zendo was very cool. And she had this sort of tough look about her. She sat me down, had me kneeling, facing the wall. Her instructions were simply: watch whatever comes up.

So I sat there and tried to watch whatever came up. And all I can say is, at the end of forty-five minutes, I just knew this was going to get me out of my problems. Within six months I had a job, I bought a house, and I was steering clear of relationships after the former disastrous one. I was giving myself a break.

By then I was living in Birmingham, and there was a Burmese monk there—some of you will know him—Revata Dhamma. Vajra said, why don't we go and visit him? So I went over, and he had a PhD in Abhidhamma. I thought I'd quiz him, so I said, "Bhante,

what is your understanding of neurosis?" He looked at me and said, "What is that?" And I thought, well, can I believe it? Here I am lying about in my problems, and he's off in another world entirely.

Anyway, I was still drawn to practice, and I had my first Theravada retreat with Ajahn Sumedho. It was very different. Although it's the same observation process, Zen had kept me out of the five sense doors and was extremely good at daily life practice. It really did change my life. I even took refuge up there, became a Buddhist after two years.

But in that retreat I did with Ajahn Sumedho, the first one, closing my eyes and going inward was a massive revelation. I thought, this is it—I'm really actually investigating myself. Shortly after that, Mahasi Sayadaw came to England. I missed his first visit, but on the second visit I did a retreat with Sayadaw Janaka. And I just knew this teacher was the real thing.

So I determined to go out to Burma. I took a sabbatical from work and spent six months with him there. Then I came back, and this awful thing began to scratch at my mind. What I really needed, what I really wanted to do, was dedicate myself to the practice. The only way you could do that was to become a monastic, because the institution is there for you to do exactly that.

I resisted it. Then after about a year, I just went to Revata Dhamma and said, "Bhante, I want to become a monk." And he said, "You're too old." I thought, thank God for that.

So I went off, but he just wouldn't let me go. About six months later, I came back again and said, "No, Bhante, I think I really would like to ordain." And then he said, "Well, no, you're necessary here." By then I was doing a little teaching and was very much part of the fabric of the vihara. I mean, I cut the lawn for a start.

So again, I felt this sort of relief—"Oh yeah, right, okay." But unfortunately, he just wouldn't leave me alone. I went on a two-week personal retreat in Wales, and I became really quite sure that's what I wanted to do. When I came back to him again, he said, "Okay."

So I ordained in a very exotic place, which is Birmingham. And then from there, I went to Amaravati. I stayed there for about a year. I wanted to get myself to Burma, but all those terrible things happened in 1989, and so I was quite marooned really, in Thailand, not knowing what to do or where to go. I kept meeting monks who said, "You

know, you want to go to this Mahasi center in Sri Lanka." I'd never even heard of it. And when I got there, there was this little hut and a nice little garden, and the abbot gave it to me. I sat there off and on for eight years.

Then I came back because I didn't feel well. I had a contract, we can say, with the then head of the London Buddhist Vihara, Dr. Vajiragnana. The idea was that I would stay there for the rainy season and just quietly meditate. Then I'd decide what to do. During that time, the monk who was teaching meditation left and got married. So I got plonked onto the podium, and the teaching began. I resisted it—I didn't even want to teach at all.

And so it grew. Then in the year 2000, I went on a retreat with Sayadaw U Pandita in his monastery. It's funny, isn't it, how things happen? But it was really quite a koan, to put it in a Zen way, this teaching business. There was something in me that really didn't want to do it. I was there for about two months, and at the end of the retreat, I just went into the library. You know the Course in Miracles? So here I am in Rangoon, in a Buddhist library, and there's a sliver of a book that catches my eye about teaching—all the quotes from the Course in Miracles as to why you should teach. I read that, and I knew I should teach. It's weird, isn't it?

So I came back and established a little place in North London, which was an utter and complete catastrophe. I had to get out quick. While I was up there, one of the people retreating with me was a man called Peter Menahem, who was very friendly with the Batchelors—he knew Stephen well, it seems. So he knew my predicament: like, what am I going to do? I'd even contemplated leaving the Order.

He wrote to Stephen and told him that the next Cosmic Buddha was in North London. It was just one of those lovely, fortunate situations where they'd left Gaia House, and Yanai and Christina were holding the place with all these personal retreats and they needed somebody to help. I stayed there, as some of you know, for four years.

During that time, it became obvious to me that there were enough people around who wanted to do the real McCoy—the full-on get up at half past three, go to bed at ten, wallop. I thought, well, there's a place there for a niche within a niche. So we began a little trust, and we've ended up on the borders of Wales. I only take eight people at a retreat, and only eight people come. And it's all right. It exists, and it continues. And you're all invited.

That's where I am at this present moment.

People come for various lengths of time. And there are little retreats throughout the year too, week-long retreats.

You really have to get up at half past three. Half past three is a wonderful time. Well, it's like anything else. After the first two days, when you get up a little later at five o'clock, you can feel the effects of the meditation. And so getting up at half past three is a bit of a struggle, but on day four, definitely by day five, one feels completely refreshed. Lots of energy. People cry by day seven. They just don't want to leave.

But then that's only five hours sleep. Five and a half hours. It's enough. Yes, five and a half hours. And then, of course, people who stay long term, even after about seven days, when they're used to that level of sleep, I push them back to four hours. And they're all there. Very few—only one or two have not been able to take that and come back to five and a half hours. You'd be surprised how much energy we have.

And when you're running a retreat at Diane's, do they get up at half three? Yes. Really? Yes, all week they've been up at half past three. The first two days it's five o'clock and then they're up. Yes! Twenty-five people up there, half past three till ten o'clock. Mind you, there were one or two laggards. One has to be compassionate.

Is that it? Thank you so much.

[Bell rings]

CHAPTER 98

The Prognosis is Very Good

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma takes listeners on a journey through the Buddha's core teaching of the Four Noble Truths. He begins by examining dukkha—the unsatisfactoriness inherent in life—distinguishing between unavoidable life difficulties and the psychological suffering we create through identification and desire. The talk explores three levels of happiness: sensual pleasure, absorbed states, and deep meaningfulness, while addressing the existential questions that drive our spiritual search.*
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> *Bhante explains the Buddha's profound insight into the psychology of desire through paṭicca samuppāda (Dependent Origination), showing how identification with experience creates suffering, but also revealing the crucial point where liberation becomes possible. Unlike Western psychology, which accommodates suffering, the Buddha discovered complete freedom through understanding the illusion of selfhood.*
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> *The talk culminates in discussing Nibbāna—not as negation of life, but as transcendence that enables loving connection with the world. Through accessing the observer within meditation, practitioners can glimpse this unconditioned state and develop the wisdom that naturally expresses as compassion, loving-kindness, and sympathetic joy in daily life.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

And we had two escapees, Liam and Grace, decided it was too early. So that's why we're here, just in case you wondered why we're here.

So I thought we'd take a little journey around the Buddha's teachings, try to get a fulsome picture of it. And all his teaching really is contained in what we call these four noble truths, these four truths.

The first one is this core word of his, *dukkha*, which translates as hard to bear. And the question is: do we cause our own suffering or is that caused by the world, something out there? So we've already looked at that within ourselves. And what we're trying to discern very clearly is this distinction between the fact that life is hard to bear on an ordinary, daily basis and in a lifelong basis.

Every day we have to get up, we have to go to work, and if you haven't got work, you're anxious about getting work and it's like a daily grind. Very fortunate if you enjoy your work or if work is well paid and so on. But even that has its ups and downs. A job that we enter with great enthusiasm, in a couple of months becomes boring. And there's also a much deeper sort of pain about life, which is the process of falling ill, ageing and dying.

So it's not as though we're ever going to make this life form any easier through the process of liberation. That's not where the liberation lies. The Buddha himself grew old and died of quite a painful gastroenteritis. He didn't escape any of the ailments. I'm sure he had more illnesses than that. At one point he was healed, and somebody came and reminded him that just contemplating the seven factors of enlightenment would help. And he became better because of that.

So it's not as though the Buddha is saying that there is a liberation from the aches and pains and the process of living. On the other hand, he's not saying that life doesn't offer us pleasures, joys and happiness.

And when we think about happiness and our search for happiness, you can normally put it into three types of happiness. The first one is just the ordinary sensual pleasure of having a meal or chocolate. And then there's a more engrossed type of happiness where we enter into an absorption of what we're doing. And all these dangerous sports are really based on people who are getting that high buzz of losing themselves just for that dangerous moment in a perfect state of excited happiness. Every time we might watch a DVD or something, the underlying attitude would be to lose yourself in the film. And then when you come out, of course, it's been a great film. So that type of happiness, which is a deeper level - of course you lose it as soon as you become aware of it. It's one of those paradoxes, that we're most happy at that level, and we don't know it.

But there is of course a much deeper level of happiness and that has to do with meaningfulness. And when it comes to deep meaningfulness, we're talking about some sort of deep connection with life. We're asking the question: why am I here?

At its most acute example, it would be these people who are quite prepared to undergo imprisonment, torture, etc. for political freedom. Just thinking of one case of Burma and the sufferings of Aung San Suu Kyi. Her willingness to bear all sorts of indignities, imprisonment, not to be able to be by the side of her husband when he was dying. She could leave Burma, but of course they wouldn't let her back in. And they wouldn't let him come. So it was a point of anguish for her, I'm sure. And even more anguish to know that her close supporters were actually being treated far worse than ever she

was, because as an international figure they had to be slightly careful. Many were tortured, tortured to death, and so on and so forth. These people, the unknowns, the ones that are nameless, whom, in a sense, she symbolises, have found a sort of tremendous courage, a deep commitment which comes not from any attempt to find sensual pleasure or to be in one of these beautiful high states, but because of some deep meaningfulness within them.

And one of our problems, she would say, for a lot of people who've lost the connection with religion, is that there's that sense of loss, of a deep meaningfulness about their lives. Hence the huge new religion of consumerism everybody's into. And with the understanding that life is meaningless, so I may as well enjoy myself. But that layering of that deep sense of meaninglessness with pleasure, of course, eventually caves in because there comes a point where sickness, ageing, and the fact of death hits us. And I would have thought that underlying meaninglessness is actually a state of despair.

And I think that's what the Buddha felt when he first started his search. I think he felt that. The idea of constantly coming back to be reborn, just a constant flow of this energy, reborn, reborn, this human being or that animal or that god, whatever, with no end in sight, was meaningless. I think that we have it in our Western culture through the existentialists who saw the idea of being conscious for no reason, having lost any connection with religion. People like Jean-Paul Sartre or Camus would have said that it's completely meaningless. So they had this word, absurd - it was absurd.

And so this drive towards meaningfulness is really what we're doing. We're trying to find out why in the hell we're here. We might like to say to ourselves that we know, but the real test is when you face death, because death is the end of everything you know. And when we face that possibility, that there is an end point to this apparition, this person that I appear from moment to moment, day to day, and I give myself a name, I have a passport, and it all seems very real, comes to this point where everything that I have achieved - all the wealth and the power and the objects and all my clothes - are all left behind. It all just disappears. It was like the solicitor was asked how much the old widow had left, and he said, "Everything."

So that gives you an idea of the finality of death. And one way to really break through the illusion is the contemplation of death. It's a very strong contemplation. And it's there in a commentary - well, the Buddha has it. It's in a commentary where Buddhaghosa, so this would have been a practice that people would have had, and people do have now, of just keep repeating the word "death." He says that's enough.

But the Buddha makes it even more obvious, because we were talking about the discourse on how to establish mindfulness. We were talking about the body, that the first part is about the body, and it's split into various sections. First of all, there's the breath. There's one about actions, which I mentioned yesterday. But there's also one about the cemetery observations. In those days, bodies were laid out in a charnel ground, and they were left to rot, eaten by animals, etc. And those who really wanted to face the meaning of death would go and sit and observe the corruption of the body. And he has, I think it's eleven or thirteen stages where you can see the body slowly corrupting finally ending up as just dust. The commentary gives a very worthwhile comment or piece of advice saying that if you do this practice you shouldn't sit downwind. So when you find a dead body and have a look at it, make sure the wind is coming from behind.

Just as a little aside: there was a European monk, I don't know what nationality he was, who wanted to take that contemplation seriously. And he was able to get permission to take a convict's body that had died and carry it on his back to his cave. And in his cave, or the adjoining cave, he built a glass container which had a chimney going up. And when it became known that this was happening, the newspapers went gung-ho on it and said, "Finally, a real monk was located." And I don't know what happened during that time, but the end of the story is that he left the order and went to work for Mother Teresa in Calcutta. So that to me sounds as though something happened in that contemplation. Perhaps it reconnected him with life and preciousness of life. Who knows?

There is that about life. Its deep meaningfulness. What is the purpose of our lives? At that deep level of just being a human being. Why are we here?

And when the Buddha says this, it even gets even more subtle because once we begin to access the position within us of the observer, and we begin to recognise that the observer in that state, when we're there - you have to make it plain to yourself through the practice - that when you're in that state, there is no felt suffering. Everything that you're feeling is observed as an object. And therefore, the observer is no longer in a state of suffering. And it is said that such is the state of peace within that state that even a moment of consciousness is felt as a disturbance. So this feeling of unsatisfactoriness, it goes really very, very deep. And this is what the Buddha saw.

But in the second Noble Truth he points to at least the psychological reason as to why we're unhappy with this situation. And that is to do with desire. And when we look at desire, which we've been looking at through all our practices, we always find that there's an I in front of it. There's always I desire something. Luckily, through our practice around eating, we can actually observe desire long enough to know that in fact the

I doesn't have to attach itself. Our sense of identity really doesn't have to happen. We can just feel the desire and just allow it to peter out. That of course is the escape. That's the escape from the suffering that's caused through this desire.

But this desire, remember, is rooted in a very good reason. The very good reason is to enjoy life. That's all we want to do. I mean, when we get down to it, I just want to be happy. And the happiness is to be found in the world. That's the presumption. I'm living here, I've got this body and it gives me certain pleasures and I have friends, etc., and I just want to be happy.

But the happiness is based on a deep delusion as to who or what I am. And that's my sense of me, my I. Now, when you're in the state of the observer, there's still that sense of somebody observing. So right there, right when we've pulled out of the body because we're looking at sensations of feeling. Right when we've pulled out of emotions because we can feel emotions, see it and observe it. Right when we've pulled out of the mind - this may be a bit difficult over the weekend - but where you can actually observe just images passing in front of you. Or even a thought. When you've pulled out of all that physical, psychological stuff that's going on, and you've arrived at this observation post within yourself, still there's a sense of somebody watching.

And that's where it begins. It begins right there, with that awareness feeling itself as itself in the mind. It's like a mirror image. It's like when you look into a mirror, you see your face. And we always think that's the way people see us. Now, how many of you have done the two mirror trick? You're in for a big shock. The two-mirror trick is, you look into the mirror, you get a mirror which looks at your face in the mirror, and you're looking at this, at the way people actually see you, because the mirror turns your face around. And it can be a shock. You never thought your nose would be that big. It's like when you first hear your voice on a recording. Or worse, to see yourself on video - it's always a tremendous shock.

So this awareness, this intuitive awareness that we access, purer and purer, through our meditation, feels its presence in the mind. And it even has an object, a very fine object of a sense of I. And that's where you get this feeling of somebody observing, somebody feeling. Then, of course, because it sees itself in the mirror - and this is Alice through the looking glass - sees itself in the mirror, or better still, like Narcissus. Narcissus who looked in the pool and saw his face and fell in love with himself. Went and aroused himself and fell into the water and drowned.

Do you know that is exactly what's happening? That's exactly what's happening. From moment to moment we look into the mind and heart and we embrace it entirely and fall into the waters of life. And we're constantly becoming this poor drowning object in a stream of life's consciousness. Because that's all it is. It's just a flow of these moments and moments of consciousness.

So that attraction, that attraction that draws us there is because this intuitive awareness simply wants to be happy. It has extraordinary innocence. It doesn't start from a place of hatred or aversion or anything. It just starts from a very simple place of just wanting to be happy. That's all. And because of that, it identifies with what's actually happening through this primary identification.

And because of ageing and death, especially death, this sense of self feels so unsure. That's the problem. The self knows, we know - we, you, me - we know that come death, that's it. The body, everything will just drop away. So there's this underlying anxiety to life. And this underlying fear of death is driving us to make ourselves feel safe. And we feel safe when we've accumulated masses of wealth, hundreds of friends, racks of DVDs. I mean, anything that makes us feel comfortable and safe.

Having done that, of course, we have to guard this stuff because everybody else wants what I've got. And so there's always an aversion to anybody who looks like taking what I've got. So there's your three fundamental attitudes to life arising from this initial delusion, which is completely innocent. You have no ill will to it at all. Want to be happy, and we end up being anxious, averse, and greedy. And then of course because of those attitudes we start doing things. We start doing things which are unwholesome, unskillful. And when we do that we start having the secondary level of guilt and shame and remorse.

Now, the point of escape from that delusive action is not the I, because by the time you get to I, you're lost. It's catching the wanting, it's catching the desire. So here, every morning, we've been chanting Dependent Origination. And that's part of the teaching of the second noble truth, desire. It comes in there. And what the Buddha is pointing out is that at first there comes some sort of sense-based information. So we might walk into the dining room and we can see our eyes fall on a kettle and immediately this brings up the idea of tea. Now that happens quite naturally because of our past connection with kettles and tea. You can't stop that happening. It's just within the whole memory base that we've developed.

And then, of course, there comes the desire. See, that's what we've been looking at. We've been looking at this desire, want. Want. Sorry, I'll go back a step. First of all, there's just that initial information that comes in of the kettle. And through that, the

memory of the tea. That's when we get down to our basic experience through the body or through the mind. So for instance, when I've said, first of all, we might use the word pain, but when we go into the pain, we don't find pain, we just find sensations. So it's the same with anything we look at. As soon as we see something or hear something, there's always that neutral base of information that comes in.

But then there is a description of it of either being pleasant or unpleasant. And that's the feeling, that's what we base our attraction on. If it's unpleasant, we want to get rid of it. And if it's pleasant, we want to get it. So that's the process in our psychology, that we see the kettle. The kettle is given a meaning. And then it's connected with tea.

And then the idea that, ooh, tea is nice. And then there comes want. And only then do you get the "I want."

Now this is really, really, really important to see, because if the I came first in the process, there could not be an escape. Because the I is a signal of delusion. It's only because the sense of I comes last that there is an escape. And the escape is at that point of seeing the wanting. At that point you can discern, you can say to yourself, well, is this time for tea or am I being greedy?

Now, at that point you have a choice. And this is one of those little areas where we in the West get a little confused because we have this idea of free will. Free will is a construct which comes from Christianity and it's based on Saint Augustine — he was the one who defined it. And it's defined because God has created human beings to love him. But what sort of love is it if it's conditioned? So a human being has to have the freedom to love him or not. And when they choose to love God, then of course he feels loved. You can't create something to love him and then feel loved by him. There's something false about that. So the human being has this freedom.

And what you get from that is that this free will somehow stands apart from conditioning. And there's no other culture that I know — it's definitely not in the East — the idea that you have a free-floating free will. What you have in the East is discernment. You can see that something is right or wrong, and then you can choose, but your choice will be based upon your conditioning as to whether you're going to allow yourself to do something which is harmful to yourself or others, or good for yourself or others. And through the power of discernment, one tends to move towards what is beautiful, what is good for you.

So, it's like going for a walk. If you go for a walk, and you're going from here to Ennis, there's a path, and you follow the path, and then sometimes you get distracted, and you wander off somewhere, and you get lost. You have to put your compass out,

and you think, well, I'm going to go back on the path, or I'm going to keep being lost. You come to a path, and the map isn't so clear, and the path seems to bifurcate, and you think, where am I going to go? So you think, well, I'm not sure. So you try one path, and you end up in a ditch, and you think, oh, this is not the path. And you come back to where you were, and you try the other one. And that's the process of liberation in Buddhist terms. There isn't actually any free will. What there is, is discernment. Through your practice you make a right decision one way or the other.

So, just to go back to that crucial point: if the I came first, and then you had wanting, and then you had nice ice cream, and then you had the information that there was ice cream in the fridge, there'd be no escape. Because you'd identify right from the beginning of the process. It's the fact that the identification comes at the end of the process that the escape is possible.

Now, there's nothing in Indian literature at the time that expresses that depth of understanding of human psychology. It's extraordinarily new and something which came out of the Buddha's own careful investigation of his suffering.

The path then — the Eightfold Path — is a way of him expressing how this has to become totally systemic. You can't — if you split the human being into different parts then all you get at worst is a schizophrenic person. So if one part of us knows that we shouldn't be eating all this ice cream and the other part says well we should be, then there's going to be this internal battle all the time.

Somehow, there has to be a purification of our intentions. And that's where the work is. So, knowing, for instance, that too much ice cream is not good for us is only the beginning of the process. Then we have to restrain and not buy so much ice cream. It's as simple as that. And keep away from the ice cream counter when we go to the supermarket. It has to come into your specific daily practice, so that everything we're doing has to be questioned. Is this good for me? Is it wholesome? Is it not wholesome?

And one little trick that you can try is to ask yourself, what would the Buddha do? Now that's not entirely reliable, but at least it gives us — it connects us to an archetype which is in us. You could do it with anybody. What would Christ do? What would Saint Francis do? Because we know these stories of people and they've created within us an idea, an archetype of what it is to be holy, to be saintly, to be good, to be liberated and all that. So often when you sit there and you think, well, should I be watching this TV program? Ask the Buddha. No. It doesn't mean to say that you won't, but at least there's a certain level of truth there about it. And of course, if you say, well, yeah, the Buddha

wasn't where I am, then at least you acknowledge your weakness, and then you might make a determination that the next time the program's on, you'll find something else to do. Take a walk or something.

So that business of a systemic process begins with this discernment. And specifically the Buddha has pointed to this process of wrong desiring.

Now, when a desire comes, whatever it is, whatever negative desire comes, it becomes something real for us when we identify with it. So when I say "I hate that person," that feels pretty real. "I'm angry with that person. I'm angry with him." But what we're learning to say is "there is an aversion towards that person." There is. So already I'm pulling myself out of it. I'm not identifying with this thing. And therefore it loses its power over me in the sense of making me say something hateful or even think something hateful if it's good enough, and definitely stopping me from doing something hateful.

Now, this energy, if you look at it like the weather — little storms and then suddenly the sun comes out — if you just see the heart and the mind and even the body as just energy, forms of energy, then what we discover is that any negative energy we have will transform into its opposite. It will just happen. Because no energy is actually lost — whether that's a physical truth or not, it's definitely a mental truth. No energy is lost. It's transformed. And frankly, I much prefer the word — it's gone out of my head — which is to move chemically from a solid directly into a gas without going through the medium of a liquid.

So when we feel aversion towards somebody, if we just stay with it, stay with it, stay with it, as it melts, as it were, as it melts, you're able to put yourself in the other person's shoes. And immediately a sense of compassion and some form of connection, which we might call love, arises quite naturally. Because when anybody does anything hateful to us, they themselves will have their own internal problems, psychological problems.

I remember — and this happened to me very, very clearly on one occasion — when I got into quite an adverse state with my teacher, who was a lovely Burmese monk. And I was very upset with him, for various reasons. It wasn't completely wrong, but definitely I got into a very strong aversion. And it's quite remarkable, because I was doing a personal retreat in Wales a long time ago now, but I remember sitting there and doing exactly that — just not indulging through storylines, my reasons for hating and wanting to hang him, but to sit just with the feeling of this very raw frustration and anger and everything else down there. And then to my surprise — I'm just watching this, I'm just feeling it, I'm not extending any hateful thoughts towards it, but staying entirely with

the emotional content — I actually saw it just completely transform into compassion. And it just happened in front of my eyes. And when that happens to you, then you know that's what's happening all the time, even if it's not so obvious or distinct.

Over the period of time, if you don't just react with anger, but stay with it, if you sit in your anxiety and just sit with that anxiety as it is, without it developing storylines of horror for us — and remember that something like 99% of all we're anxious about never actually happens — once we drive that home, what you see is that it transforms to its opposite.

One of the things that everybody suffers from on occasion, at different depths, is of course loneliness — feeling of loneliness. And loneliness can be very painful, a feeling of not being loved. "I'm no good and everybody hates me, and rightly so," and all that stuff. Now, if you keep that train of thought going, of course, then you're reinforcing that feeling of isolation, of being alone in that bad sense, in that unwholesome sense. But if you sit with it, if you just stay with it, then very slowly, as it decreases, when it ends, when it comes to an end, what you end up with is a transformation of that loneliness into a sense of solitude. Just pure solitude. Which is to be completely happy just being with yourself.

And these things you can practice at any time. And what this does is if you do that and take it to that point — even if it takes days to get to that point, take it to that point — then it builds up in you a real confidence to stay with what is so painful at times within us. And you know that it will pass. And the real insight is that the heart heals itself.

And that's the amazing thing, that you don't have to do anything. It's just like water — if you keep swirling it around with a whisk and it keeps moving, if you take the whisk out, the water naturally settles to a stasis, to appeasement. And that's the natural state of the heart.

So when we say that this awareness, this intuitive awareness, begins from a point of innocence, it begins from that point where nothing is ruffling it. But then it has this delusive moment. Every moment of our lives has this delusive moment. The idea of the self is always a substrate in everything we do. All we can do is notice how it's drawing us into suffering and pull back from that. If I see I'm getting anxious about something, I just stay in the anxiety. Often when the anxiety passes, you find there was nothing to be anxious about.

So our practice is to be aware as best as we can all the day. From the time we wake up to the time we fall asleep is to be aware of how the mind is moving. Not to get anxious about it if we miss it, but just to make us more and more keenly aware of what we're doing. And this idea of going slow — obviously we can't go as slow as this in daily life — but really just to keep stopping and to take our time, to stop and take our time.

And often we think that, especially in certain work situations, that's going to make us inefficient. We may find, actually, that by doing that, we're actually more efficient. Because a lot of our inefficiency is done because of rushing. Forgetting your keys. We create so much bother for ourselves just being in this constant state of rushing.

We've come to a point now where, by the way, the Buddha never offers any solution to the question as to why this should happen in the first place — why we're here in the first place, why we've entered into this life form right at the beginning, because there's no seeable beginning to *kamma*. The Buddha says it's always been here. The idea of cause and effect, cause and effect, is endless. Although in some religions they might talk about the first cause, that is essentially illogical. There is no first cause. It just is. This is the way it is all the time.

And if you think of it in terms of a stretch of time, it seems unimaginable — going this way forever and then going that way forever. But if you take it moment to moment, that things are just arising and passing away, there's no reason to think that ever started or ever stops. Time, remember, is a mental construct. We build up some idea of history. But actually, all that's happening is this, and this, and this.

So we can presume that the Buddha was very anxious before his liberation about this whole problem. And in investigating this process, he discovers something which is quite miraculous, because up until then there had been some hints about it — and the Upanishads that were being written were definitely moving in the same direction — but he came across this state which was outside the whole process of manifestation. Outside it. And yet, within it.

So when he became enlightened he didn't disappear in a puff of smoke. It wasn't as though he went somewhere else. He still stayed in the body and he still got up and he still ate and he probably still peed. I'm sure he peed. And he did all the things that a human being did. And he began to speak about his understandings. And yet he was saying to people that there is an end to suffering and he didn't suffer.

Now, I don't know of any Western psychoanalytic or psychological school which makes that statement. All Western schools talk about an accommodation — that you can get better, you can be at ease with it, get to a certain place, but you'll never get rid of

anxiety. You'll never get rid of fear. I mean, I've read this quite clearly in books on psychotherapy and psychology. And, like in that lovely book, "Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway." You could say that about anything. Feel the depression and do it anyway. It doesn't just work for fear.

And the reason, of course, why they can't go beyond that is because they've not seen the core problem, which is the problem of identity. Once the Buddha had broken through the illusion of identity, he discovered a different state. And in the actual formulation of the Noble Truth, it just says there is an end to suffering. All gone. Later, it's given this word, *Nibbāna*.

Nibbāna is a state which is transcendent of the phenomenal world. In other words, in *Nibbāna* you don't find anything of this phenomenal world. What do we mean by that? There's no thinking. There's no images. Interestingly enough, even though we talk about the bliss of *Nibbāna*, the peace of *Nibbāna*, there's no mental state. There's no emotions. There's definitely no body. There's no sensations and feelings. The whole thing disappears within that state of *Nibbāna*.

Now, there's a kernel experience of that state, but then that state re-enters into this psychophysical organism and begins to express its wisdom. So the Buddha, having achieved this understanding, this experience of what is transcendental, re-enters into this form and begins his ministry.

Now, in early Theravada Buddhism, this state of *Nibbāna* is tended to be expressed quite negatively, because it's describing what's not there. And there are some very collected sayings of the Buddha, where he talks about, for instance, that which is unborn doesn't die. There's one where he talks about the sphere of experience — so spheres, in the Buddha's understanding, are to do with your sense bases. So there's a visual sphere, which cannot be connected with the audio sphere. They're two different sense bases. They're two different ways of experiencing life. There's the mental sphere, but he says there is a sphere where there's no sun, no moon, no coming, no going, and so forth. So he's pointing to something which is quite transcendent of this particular manifestation called world. He talks about it as an island of unconditioned consciousness.

So the Buddha, like anybody who has a new idea or new discovery, is always lost for words because the present vocabulary doesn't include the understanding. So in the verse, in the victory verse that we chant, he actually uses the word *citta*, *asantaka*, the unconditioned consciousness, for want of a better word. So he's using *citta*, which for those of you who know, in the Abhidhamma, refers to the mind. But obviously, the mind can't be unconditioned. The mind is conditioned. So he's pointing to something which knows—*citta* means that which knows—which is not conditioned.

And then he talks about it as a consciousness and uses the word *viññāna*. For those of you who know, that's the *viññāna*, the consciousness of the five aggregates. Now, it can't be that *viññāna* because he talks about it as not touched by any of these senses. It doesn't belong to the sphere of the sense bases, which includes the mind and heart. And it's without boundary. It's phenomena that creates boundaries. It's the walls that create the boundary of this room. But there's a consciousness that doesn't have that boundary. And in all directions, full of light, just this is the end of suffering.

Now the reason I'm pointing to that is because in later Buddhism, the accent moved away from the experience to what was—what was it that knew the experience? What was it that experienced the experience? And that's when you get words like the big mind, the Buddha nature, the Buddha within. Both of these ways of looking at this transcendent state is one from the point of view of experience and one from the point of view of that which the experience is known by. Buddha is the one who knows.

Now, where is it? Where is this experience we've found? Whenever we meditate and we take the position of the observer within us, we meditate. Because when you're the observer, you have pulled yourself out of that identity with what's going on within you, whether it be a sensation or a feeling coming from the body, an emotion or a mood that you can sense within you, a thought which you might see, but definitely images. So you've found a place which is transcendent of the body, and yet directly within it.

So that's why I keep saying to people, when the sense of the observer is very, very clear to you, after you finish the meditation, just ask yourself, what was it like being there? Now, if you say to yourself, that's all right, that's good, yeah, but I'd rather be out there having a good time, in Buddhist terms, that's the level of delusion. The more you seek that inner peace, that inner silence, the more it's telling you that you are finding a different relationship with the world.

That different relationship with the world is not to negate the world. We try to make a distinction between indulging something and enjoying something. That relationship now is one of connection. And connection means love. It draws you into a loving connection with the world. And depending on the situation, it's either the love that we associate with friendship, or the love that we associate with suffering, which expresses as compassion, or the love that expresses itself as rejoicing in somebody else's happiness, sympathetic joy.

And all the rest of it, all the virtues that you can think of, are the expressions of that wisdom into the world. So, the prognosis is very good. May these words be of some assistance. May you by your joyful and committed practice soon arrive at that place of pure joy, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 99

Importance of Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 45 min

Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddhist understanding of human psychology through the five aggregates (pañca-khandha) and the crucial role of resolution (adhiṭṭhāna) in spiritual development. Drawing from the Buddha's teaching on dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), he examines how consciousness operates through momentary cognitions, and how our identification with the process creates suffering through grasping (upādāna). The talk addresses the difference between wholesome intention (chanda) and unwholesome craving (taṇhā), emphasizing that suffering arises not from desire itself but from the sense of 'I want.' Bhante discusses three types of happiness and explains how ethical conduct makes the self happier, paradoxically preparing it for eventual transcendence. He touches on the transcendent dimension of consciousness that the Buddha described as 'boundaryless' and 'not touched by the senses,' pointing toward Nibbāna as already present rather than something to be manufactured. The teaching concludes with practical guidance on making and maintaining spiritual resolutions, emphasizing that mental formations (saṅkhāra) are simply habits that can be transformed through mindful awareness and non-identification.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

Just an opportunity really to revise our understanding of the Buddhadhamma according to a certain Bhikkhu Bodhidhamma. So, just trying to put it in the context also of New Year and a time for resolutions, things like that. An opportunity to look back and to have some way of reflecting upon our lives.

I suppose it's good just to remind ourselves of this basic psychology that the Buddha teaches us. We can start really by seeing that he gives us a sort of cross-section of every moment and also what happens in process, what happens over a period of time.

So that cross-section he called the five aggregates, and the one that's interesting specifically these days is cognition, which is the fifth one. As you all know, cognition is momentary. If we were to really see what was happening now, what we would experience as a sort of stroboscopic universe, it would be arising and passing away at tremendous

speed. These are like little photographs that are caught by consciousness, an act of cognition. It's only because it's happening at this enormous speed that it gives us a sense of flow, a sense of continuity.

And of course, from a point of view of delusion, it's easy for us to identify with that. I am the one. I am that process of knowing because I always seem to be there. And whenever I'm knowing something, it's always me. Even if I lose myself in an absorption, I still come out and say, oh, that was me. So there's that problem of identity which we'll come to in terms of the flow of our psychology.

And what it catches, what this moment of cognition always catches, are these four other aggregates in a singular moment. So there's always the body, *rūpa*. I translate it as the body, but it's not at a subtle level, it's not the body itself. What we know of the body, what we can experience of the body, is quite minimal. I mean, what do you know about your big toenail? Very little. I mean, you can feel it, you can see the color of it. But you've never been it, have you? Have you ever been a toenail? It's not something you can absorb into. It's there. And of course, we're quite happy to cut it off when it gets a bit too long. But we don't think we're losing a bit of me. At least I don't. I don't go through a burial ceremony whenever I cut my toenail off. Or any nail, when I think about it.

So, when you investigate what this body is, I think it's quite surprising how little we're aware of what's going on at any given time. Whether it's an organ such as the liver or the blood flow, or the passage of red corpuscles out of the marrow of the bone, through the bone, into the bloodstream. I haven't a clue what's going on. In fact, I would have been quite happy in ignorance. It's just reading these silly books. I've opened up this realization that I haven't a clue, generally speaking, what's going on in my body. I know when it goes wrong, of course. I mean, when it's okay, it feels all right. There's a general feeling of wellness. When it goes off, I get very worried.

So, when the Buddha talks about the body, yes, he's talking about the way we relate to the body. And we can see that there's three delusive ways of relating. One of them is through a sense of disgust with the body, not being happy with the way it smells and does things. And he gives us these exercises of looking at the disgusting nature of the body. That's not to make us more disgusted. That's to make us overcome disgust. That's to make us see the body as it really is. It's an animal, for heaven's sake. There's no difference between us and those sheep that you see out in the field. They've got everything we've got. Just different shapes.

And it's going beyond the sense of disgust, which is all about, really, the way we see ourselves, the way we perceive the world. So if something is smelly, for instance, we think it's bad. But it's not. It's just smelly. That's all right. And then there's this business of the way we look, which is, of course, a social construct, whether you're beautiful or not. And that can cause us all sorts of misery. It causes people terrible misery. Pimples on the end of your nose can be the cause of deep depression.

So it's a case of recognizing also that the body is just a body. It doesn't have to be beautiful at all to perform its tasks. It's just an organism. And the other thing is, of course, when we investigate our relationship with the body, is that we've invested a tremendous amount of our happiness in it. So that if we, for instance, start going blind or deaf, it's a horror story for us. Meaning we might know that from people who are disabled, that eventually makes no difference to our quality of life if we approach the situation with acceptance. But that doesn't undermine the fact that getting there is very painful.

Even this, I've got this pain in my tooth, it was right at the back of my mouth, nobody would ever know about it. But I'm very worried. I might have to have it taken out, then I've only got one gnasher on the top. Well, that's terrible, isn't it? I mean, if I lose that, I've had it, I'm going to have to wear one of those plastic things in my mouth. Terrible.

So when you look at the body, Buddha is saying all that, but that actually is, in a sense, the more obvious part of our relationship to the body. But when we really investigate what is it we know, what are the building blocks upon which we know the body and you actually go into your meditation. I mean, the obvious one that I normally talk about is pain, isn't it? Because when you go into pain, there's no pain there at all. What you've got is tightness or pressure, burning, prickling, all sorts of sensations, but there's no pain as such. And then you realize that actually all we can know of the body is its sensation, the sensations that are coming from the body. And from that we build up these concepts, emotional concepts too, like pain. Pain is not just a simple medical description, it's actually something you feel.

So, when we go into that first heap, that first aggregate of the body, the Buddha is actually pointing to the fact that it's the point where the mind is touching the body. The mind is against the body. What it can actually cognize that we have to begin to see that that is actually only these momentary sensations. And these momentary sensations are only momentary because that's the way cognition behaves. It just catches every moment like that. Like the old films, like the old film reels.

And then from that, we create our *saññā*, which is our perception. So these perceptions are memories. That's our memory, perceptions. And at first, they're very simple, red, blue, box, and all that. But they eventually build up into concepts. They're ways in which then we start looking at the world through the history that we've had with it.

These saññā, you can see them as basic perceptions which lie at the back of the slow growth of concepts. But as you get a concept, it becomes a saññā because that's the way you perceive the world. You're perceiving the world through a particular concept. And again, in our meditation, we're trying to go beyond that by the process of getting back down to the initial sensations that we have in the body, grounding ourselves in the body.

So, feelings, sensations, they're not made up by the mind, they're actually a direct experience of it. So, when you're walking around the meadow there and you can feel your boots sinking into the mud, it's a case of actually feeling what the sensation is of sinking into mud. And that's not made up. That's not some conceptual idea. That's a direct experience of sinking in the mud. And while I remember, there's all those moles out there. And I'm walking around thinking I shall sink my boot into a molehill. Stop Morris reappearing. We've got a rationale, haven't we?

So those are those sensations, saññā, perceptions. And then on top of that we have a whole, a second layer of experience that we call feelings, *vedanā*. And this is what we feel in the body. These vedanā are made up of these basic sensations that we have, but they're being described as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. And as soon as we do that, in any given moment, we're living in a dualistic world in terms of feeling. It's either pleasant, unpleasant, or some shade in between. Even neutral sensations, when you really investigate them, will have a shade of being pleasant or unpleasant. So that's the mind. I mean, that's a given, you might say, the vedanā.

And remember that these sensations are both physical, coming from the body itself, like pain, like pleasure, but it's also a mental thing. It's also what we call the feeling level of an emotion, the feeling basis.

And then we have these *saṅkhāras*. Now, the Buddha has created these five aggregates really to point to a certain process, these saṅkhāras. Because that's where our problems lie. The other stuff is just a given. And the problems lie within these saṅkhāras.

So, you get lots of models of a human being from Freudian and so on. But the Buddha's model is really to keep pointing us to where the suffering arises, because that's all he's concerned with, isn't it? Just this problem of suffering, human suffering.

Now when these five aggregates start moving in time, then we see much more this process. So the five aggregates are always there, but we see that there are some things that are with us, as it were, all the time as a way of looking at the world and that's our saṅkhāras. So these saṅkhāras, these habits mental habits which express themselves through our body language are all generated by an act of will.

And that's really where we come to this point where the Buddha is pointing to what it is that actually creates something. It's a very mystical thing. The Buddha doesn't describe will. I mean, it's a force. It's a force which manifests something into the world and it arises after an intention. I mean, that moment when intention becomes a flow of thought, or an intention becomes an action of speech or an action of the body, is a split second. Normally speaking, we don't even notice it, we just do, we just carry on. But that distinction is crucial, because at the point of the arising of an intention which is only a thought flavoured with desire at that point nothing has actually happened that's a really crucial understanding because we would then think that every time an intention arises we've already behaved either wholesomely or unwholesomely. But that's not so. It's the arising of that intention.

Now, the intention in the process is called *taṇhā*. That's what he's referring to, that point of intention. If it's something which is unwholesome then we have this special word, taṇhā, for it. But if it's something wholesome, then we can use the word *chanda*, which also has both an unwholesome or wholesome desire, but at least here we can talk about desires that are wholesome.

And the Buddha also goes through this process. I mean, you don't get this written up, of course. But I mean, it's not as though he was an automaton. He was aware of what he was doing, and when he got up, when his body signaled that he was hungry, he made the intention to go out and get some alms round. So that wasn't something that happened automatically. He must have seen the intention arise, and he must have thought to himself, right, this is time to get some food. And he gets his bowl and his robe, and he does all the things that anybody else, that any other of his monks would do, and his nuns, and out he goes. But there's something missing. There's something missing from that process which does not cause him any problems. For us, there's something in there which is causing the problems.

So this taṇhā, now this taṇhā, once it's arisen, we have this next thing, this *upādāna*, this grasping. So what happens at that point? What happens at that point? The point is a point of identity. The wanting becomes I want. And at that moment of identity, where the I comes in, the sense of me, into an action, into that flow, is the point of suffering. There's no suffering as long as it stays at taṇhā.

So now, we can know this, for instance, in our practice, when we are aware of some desire coming up, which we're not going to fulfill, say, when we're eating, so there's hunger there, which is not a pleasant feeling in itself. It's pleasant in the sense that if a thirsty person sees a water tap somewhere, then that thirst doesn't become so painful as it was if there was no water around, if you were stuck on the sea or something. But it's still not a pleasant sensation as such. Hunger is not a pleasant sensation, feeling hungry.

So when we sit at the table and we're in contact with that hunger, and we're not reacting, we're not identifying with it, and we're not reacting to it, it is just a sensation. But we can describe it at that point as being unpleasant, but there's no suffering. There is no suffering. Now, if we were to carry on this fast for sixty-odd days, it would get very, very, very painful, and then the sense of hunger would become something that grasps, and we would enter into that suffering as an I, as a me, and that's the point of suffering. The point of suffering begins with the upādāna.

And of course, once we're in that suffering, we want to escape from it. So the escape is the commitment, the empowerment of that desire. And what that creates is an action. And the Buddha, in this particular stream of actions, calls that *bhāva*, which means becoming. So becoming, becoming moment after moment, driven by, in this case, an unwholesome desire, driven by this force, so it's a force, it's the will that the Buddha talks about, *cetanā*. These are all included in that one moment.

So we've got the becoming, meaning the I becomes, reinvents itself as I want, I scream, I want, I scream, I, it keeps on going, it keeps flipping around itself. And every time it does that, it empowers it, so it's got this force going into that desire. And as it's doing that, it's creating this habit, this saṅkhāra, it's whirling around itself and it's beginning to see that process and to see that the original problem lies in that identity that's why the Buddha is always pointing to this quality of self it's the self, you see, the point of identity which is the core problem.

And this core problem is deep within us because it's buried in this fundamental delusion which runs right underneath all our daily lives. It's just there as a given. I am a human being. Terrible delusion. So, committing ourselves to the human form, we're obviously committed to finding happiness in the human form.

And that's why a lot of this mindfulness stuff, you see how it veers off towards finding happiness. Not that this mindfulness movement isn't a good thing, but it takes it away from the core problem. Mindfulness and stress relief, mindfulness and eating problems, mindfulness and good business, and all that. It's in big business now. All that

mindfulness is about really, making the world a more pleasant place. But it's a goose chase because eventually it will corrupt, eventually it won't satisfy because the person keeps looking for happiness in the world.

Now, the Buddha is actually pointing us to a different sort of happiness which is what he calls *Nibbāna*. So, in our meditation, where do we find this, where do we begin to experience this nirvanic type of happiness? Because it's not as though we invent it. I remember my old teacher always saying, when you get on a train to London, London is not being manufactured as you take a journey there. London's already there, and you arrive. So it's the same with Nibbāna. It's not as though we're manufacturing Nibbāna. Nibbāna's already there. It's staring us in the face. But for some reason, we can't see it. We can't get a handle on it.

So I always mention this, usually in the evening when I'm doing that Mahāsi course —this verse from the Dhammapada: those who are mindful in the presence of *Nibbāna*. I mean, he's actually saying that in the vicinity of, you're in the presence of Nibbāna. So there must be something about our meditation, especially the specific Vipassanā practice, which is taking us very close to that level of, for want of a better word, consciousness. It's definitely a place where there's no suffering.

So when you're sitting there in your practice and all sorts of things are coming up and things begin to subside a bit, and there is just that one little occasional moment of peace and stillness, and there is just this inner I, just this thing that keeps looking, and a sense of me looking—the observer, the observer, the observer, the knower. And in that particular state, after you've come out of it, or even as you hold it, just ask yourself: what is the inner state, what's the inscape of the observer?

So this lovely word inscape, which was coined by Gerald Manley Hopkins—like you get landscape and seascape. Inscape. What is... we know through our meditation, we know the inscape of the body. I mean, we know what we feel, we can see our images. I mean, that's what the meditation makes us very alive to. But when you're just the knower, when you're just the feeler, what's the inscape of the knower? What's the inscape of the feeler?

So there's something about that which is pointing to a level of consciousness—you've got to be careful with these words, consciousness—a level of knowing which is somehow radically different from everything else that we experience. And it's different in the sense that inwardly, in that inner space, nothing's arising. Nothing's arising. And if nothing's arising, nothing's passing away. So already, when we begin to experience that, we're actually touching upon something which is transcendent.

Now, I only begin to talk about this in a way because a lot of the stuff that you get these days with certain types of people in the Dharma is the accent on the immanent, on what's actually present, and the movement away from something which is transcendental, which is—to quote the words of Jesus, actually, Jesus Christ—to be in the world, but not of it. And what it does is, it stops you having this... if all you're interested in is immanence, like now, in this present moment, it stops you having a vision of where you're going, of where the future is. I mean, one can argue, well, you're on the path and the future will arise, etc., etc. But to take away the transcendent is to bring the immanent back into this world as it is. And because we know the world is transient, it's very difficult to see what is immanent as not being transient.

So that's just an aside. So our practice is both to see that there is only this present moment, but this present moment belongs only to the world of apparition. To the world of the transcendent there are no moments. It doesn't belong there. Moments are only something that's manufactured, something whereby we are able to measure what is happening. Now it's a time thing which is completely constructed. It's not as though you don't have to have these things in the world, but there's something else, and it's just leaving that as a possibility, that's all.

Remember, we're not into belief as such, but we are definitely into an openness, that there is that possibility of something in us which is completely transcendent of the phenomenal world. It just isn't part of it at all. And that the phenomenal world is within its scope, but it's not part of it.

Now, you know, the basic quotations that support that would be things like—there is, I mean the Buddha uses a word there which means exists, it doesn't mean like, you know, this is a book—is there exists that which is not born, doesn't die, is not conditioned, not created. I mean, you can't get more obvious than that.

He talks about an *āyātana*. Āyātana is a sphere, and he talks about the sixth āyātana. This is another way in which he made us look at the human experience by way of consciousness. So these acts of cognition are limited by their sense base. So the eye cannot hear, and the ear can't smell, and so on and so forth. And all those cognitions, those acts of cognitions, based on a sense base, is an actual way of experiencing the universe. It's a sphere, and it's a sphere which is separate from the other spheres. The mind is very clever in getting all these things to happen altogether. So you can be watching a film and hearing what's being said and chewing your popcorn and it all seems all one fantastic moment. But in terms of Buddhist psychology, these are all really stroboscopic, minute little acts of cognition which come onto a screen which is happening so fast that it gives us the impression of it all happening together and all in a flow.

But the Buddha's use of the word āyātana is telling us that actually it's not. It's not like that at the base of perception. This is a trick that the mind can produce and a happy one it is, for heaven's sake.

And another phrase that he comes to is he talks about... Well, he's questioned. Somebody asks him a question. Where is it that the four Mahābhūtas come to an end, destroy? Now, the Mahābhūtas, of course, are your four great elements, which is how the mind experiences the body, in other words, this world. Where does this world come to an end? That's another way of saying it. And the Buddha says the question is wrongly put. It's where do these four Mahābhūtas not find a footing, not find a footing. Where do you not find these four Mahābhūtas? There's not a destruction of them. So nothing, remember, is destroyed in the process of liberation. The Buddha is clear about that too. He says the only thing that's destroyed, annihilated, are greed, hatred and delusion.

He says, where is it? He says there is a consciousness which is not touched by any of the senses, not coloured. The word can be translated as not coloured by any of the senses, which includes all the inner senses of emotions and thoughts and all that, and it is boundaryless. There's no boundary to it. What does that tell us? It tells us that there's no phenomena there. I mean, the only reason why we're in this room is because it's bounded by these walls. If there was no walls you'd have an infinite room. So this consciousness doesn't have a boundary, doesn't have limitations, and in all directions full of light. And just this, he says, is the end of suffering.

So again, he's pointing to something in us which simply doesn't belong to this phenomenal world.

So now this brings us to our new year, which is to do with making these intentions. So here, every year we have this opportunity of reflecting upon the life we've just been living and how we would like to progress. And this moment of resolution, you see—so *adhiṭṭhāna*, it's one of the great perfections, one of these things that take us to the other shore—an adhiṭṭhāna, a resolution.

Now, a resolution or a vow or a specific undertaking of this nature, whether it's even on a social level, like a marriage vow, we tend to think that once you've made the resolution, that's it, like it's done for life, you don't have to do it again. But the whole point about resolutions is that they die out, they die out very quickly. So the resolution, for instance, not to snack in between meals lasts probably half a day. So it's like you've got to make this special effort.

So what a resolution is, is a point in time when you are directing yourself in life, like you're turning the ship to the north, you're directing yourself. But then it has to be reinforced, constantly reinforced. Not just every day, it's just every time it comes to mind. You have to remind yourself that you've made this commitment. Abandon all biscuits. You've made that commitment. So when you walk into a supermarket, you steer yourself away from the biscuits. And of course, the more this resolution takes on strength, the more the resolution gathers energy, the less the old temptations can hijack you. It's only when the resolution drops for a moment, then the old habits begin to take over.

So this resolution is a point in time where we decide to behave in a certain manner. It might be resolving the same thing, it doesn't really matter. But the point is, the power of resolution, the power of determination, is right there within the psychology, it's right there within the grasping, the *upādāna*. But here, this grasping which normally is seen as something which is deluded because it's coming from the I, when it's not coming from that sense of delusion, then at least the sense of self is working towards Nibbāna.

So the Buddha talks about inclining to Nibbāna. So when we talk about no-self, the point where all identity with this psychophysical organism has stopped, that's the point of liberation. But until that point, we have to keep, shall we say, amending the self. How do you incline towards Nibbāna? You incline towards Nibbāna by sorting out our ethics.

So eventually, what we find is that the path is the path of relationships. It's how do we relate to the world, to things, to objects, how do we close the fridge door. See, that's important. And then how you relate to individuals, to people, to the earth, ecology, etc. So it's all to do with our relationships and what is our motivation in those relationships. And that's where you'll find resolutions are normally based.

And so when we realise that this inclined towards Nibbāna is about ethics, what we're actually doing is making this sense of self more and more happy. We're not trying to get rid of the self. If you try and get rid of the self, then you're in conflict immediately. What you're trying to do is make ourselves a happier self. And a happier self comes about through our ethical relationships. And then when we're really, really happy, then all the stuff that makes us unhappy doesn't disturb our meditations. These hindrances begin to slough away because we're not feeding them. And it's when the more that we create a happy self, the more we're closer to getting rid of it. See?

There's one lovely example that you might have heard me say before, but in the Mahāsi centre in Rangoon, so the story goes, a woman arrived and said to the teacher that her life was utterly and profoundly miserable and that she wanted to meditate and get out of this suffering. And as he asked her to explain this, he agreed that her life was

absolutely awfully miserable. But he didn't say, now you've got to do Vipassanā, because if she'd have done Vipassanā, she'd probably have committed suicide, because she'd have had to go into this misery at that raw, raw meat level.

Instead, he gets her to do this *mettā* practice. And through the practice of mettā, she actually begins to experience these beautiful ecstatic states and realises that happiness is possible. Nibbāna is something beyond that, but happiness is possible. So with that basis of confidence she begins to practice Vipassanā and in no length of time, as the scriptures say, she was able to make a breakthrough. See?

So our practice, our actual practice, is about making the self happier. And we ask ourselves, well, what makes me happy? When do I actually feel happy?

Well, the study of happiness is now a big thing in psychology, positive psychology, for heaven's sake. And I think we can split it up into three types, three types of happinesses. There are those types which are pretty immediate and they pass away. Ordinary sensual pleasures, the meeting of a friend in a street and then going for a quick coffee with them and all those little fleeting moments where we experience little moments of happiness.

And then there's those happinesses that we have where we absorb into something that really interests us. So it might be a DVD, it might be some hobby, gardening, it might be something where in that absorption we lose a sense of self and we lose a sense of time. That's always a good sign. And then you come out of that and you say to yourself, that was really lovely, it's a great time. But of course, as soon as you come out of it, you've lost it. The whole point of that sort of happiness is the absorption and the loss of self. And so they say that's why people do these dangerous sports, because at that point they've got to concentrate so much into the moment that there's no time for that reflection of me flying through the air with the greatest of ease. And as I understand it, that's what Aristotle talked about with his Eudaimonia.

But the deeper happiness that gives life its propulsion, you might say, is a sense of meaning. And this has also been investigated by positive psychologists, that it's only when your life has an aim beyond itself that suddenly there is a very deep fundamental meaningfulness, which is the base of happiness. So long as we're working just for our little selves, we might produce these little moments, but there'll always be this underlying meaninglessness to our lives. It's a funny thing, but that's the way it is. But as soon as your life is for the purpose of somebody else, for the purpose of some other great aim, for the purpose of some other ideal, suddenly it takes on a deeper meaning and

there you get your deep satisfaction. And that's why we find that people will undergo a lot of suffering for this. And afterwards, they would say that, you know, it was meaningful, looking back they wouldn't have done anything else.

You know, talk about people like people who've been imprisoned—Nelson Mandela. But these are the people that we know like Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi and all that, but there are hundreds of people who undergo torture and all sorts of things for something bigger than themselves and in that they get this real deep sense of meaningfulness and with it there is that happiness.

So we see that in the Buddha's own story when he... At that moment when there's a great doubt, see? So he sat under the tree and, as it's put mythically, but it's his own mind, of course, he's saying, well, what's all this? I've been through all these teachers. I've got all this far. Nobody's discovered the end of suffering. Who the hell am I to try and discover it anyway? And how can I do it? How can I do it? And there are all these great teachers and people I've worked with and they've not been able to do it. See, who am I?

So you get this sense of the great doubt about me, see, about can I do it? And then he touches the earth goddess, and the earth goddess arrives. And he remembers that he's not doing it just for himself, because in his past life he's perfected this idea of generosity. So it suddenly comes to his mind that this is what I'm going through, it's not just for me, it's for my family, it's for my wife, my child, for all these people and all these beautiful people I've met, and all the ugly ones too. And so it's that which gives him, I think, that little extra power to sit under that tree and go through that process, which couldn't have been pleasant, until finally he cracks it.

So this new year is just an opportunity for us to go over these things and to see the importance of a resolution in our lives, the importance of really making these resolutions.

Now, the downside of it is that whenever you make a resolution and you don't fulfil it, you always get this little voice saying, well, you're useless anyway. You couldn't keep a sausage. So it's a case of recognising that that judgmental self, that self which is always trying to undermine us, has to be seen for what it is. It's just another mental state. As soon as you identify with it, then you're stuck in self-hatred. But as soon as you see, well yes, you see that as judging, judging, and you separate from it, you distance from it, you see. And you see it for what it is and perhaps you feel it. You feel this sense of lack of self-worth and nobody loves me and all that. And you keep that and you see it and you wait for it to pass away.

And then you regenerate your self-worth. You regenerate your worthiness and your inner dignity. Dignity, remember, comes from the Latin, which means worthy — *dignus*, worthiness.

So it doesn't matter how many times we stumble and fall and crack our heads. What's important is that we get up, dust ourselves off and start all over again. That's why, I'm sure you've heard me say, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are my heroes. Because that's what he did every time he slipped on the dance floor. He got up, dusted himself off, and started all over again.

So tomorrow, when we do this contemplation, just thinking about our lives, just take the opportunity to look past, to look back, not simply over the past year, but a whole life, to see certain trends, certain *saṅkhāras*, certain habits, certain formulations. And see the ones that are good. We tend to have a downer on ourselves, how horrible we are and the dreadful things that can happen to us. But it's also really reinforcing the fact that we have lots of goodness in us.

And that's why I began to institute this evening chant on joy. I began to realise that you're stuck on compassion, all this suffering of people, and love and all that, but you've got to generate joy as well. It's one of the four illimitables. And you generate joy by being joyful, for heaven's sake. And if you remember a point of joy in the day, even if it was something very simple, and you recall that and you rejoice in it, you say, "That was wonderful, I really enjoyed that. How fortunate I am, how lucky I am to have that moment of joy." That in itself is cranking up the amount of joy in us.

And when we see other people who are happy and are joyful, and our joy rises on their behalf, rejoicing in their joy, that also increases our potential for inner joy. So that could even be a real positive resolution, or one of them for the day, that from now on I shall develop joyfulness and abandon all misery.

So remember, all we're working with is habits. All we're working with is these *saṅkhāras*. They're just habits for God's sake. And it's a case of when a habit arises that we perceive, we can see it's not doing us any harm, you simply don't indulge it. Not to indulge it doesn't mean you don't feel it. I mean, there's a real distinction to be made there. To feel a depression, to feel an anxiety, to feel an anger, to feel hatred, let's say, or jealousy, all these things have to be felt, have to be recognised, acknowledged, but you don't have to reinforce them by putting the "I" in there.

And how do these things reinforce? It's through the mind, it's through this thinking, thinking, thinking. So as soon as you see your thought patterns running in a way which is negative, as soon as you catch it, and see in ordinary daily life, not just here in medit-

ation, and you actually name it for what it is, what's actually driving it — misery or hatred or whatever — immediately you've disengaged. You've disengaged. It cannot make things worse when it's disengaged.

And so long as you remain at the feeling level of an emotional state, of a mental state, it's not going anywhere. I mean, that's a real insight that has to be understood. A mental state, an emotional state cannot be released except through consciousness. But when it's released as a feeling, it's actually exhausting itself. As soon as it catches into a thought pattern, it's immediately regenerating itself and generating itself more.

So, seeing that in our meditation, in daily life, our practice is this constant effort to be awake to what the mind is leading us to. And as soon as you see you're caught up in a dream, a fantasy, to actually name it for what it is. And then if there's time, there's possibility, you stay with it and wait for that feeling to die out.

If there's a strong desire for something and you know it's not wholesome, you stay with it, you stay in the body. You stay in the body as a force. You can feel the energy of it. And every time it releases that energy, it's losing its power. It's losing its power.

So tomorrow I'll hand out these little sheets and I might give you a template to work on. Very good. Enough of that.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you buy your fierce resolutions. A struggle always towards the end of suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 100

Christmas Talk on the Path: Goodwill, Ethics, and Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

> *In this Christmas dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma weaves together the seasonal message of goodwill with core Buddhist teachings on mettā (loving-kindness), karma, and ethical relationships. He explores how the Buddha's understanding of karma as action and will connects to our relationships with all beings - human, animal, and the natural world.*
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> *The talk examines how ethical conduct (sīla) forms an essential foundation for spiritual practice, drawing parallels between the Buddha's basic requirements for monastic life and our contemporary challenges around ecological responsibility and compassionate living. Bhante discusses the relationship between insight practice (vipassanā) and ethical purification, explaining how they work together on the path to liberation.*
>
> *With practical wisdom for daily life, he addresses common struggles with anger, forgiveness, and self-worth, emphasizing that Buddhist practice involves creating a 'beautiful self' before transcending the notion of self altogether. The talk concludes with reflections on the power of mettā-bhāvanā (loving-kindness meditation) to transform both our inner conditioning and our relationships with the world around us.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa, namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa, namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I thought this evening just to let the mind wander a bit about this whole business of goodwill since it's Christmas. This was, if you remember, the message over the manger: "Goodwill to all men," meaning, of course, all humans. And I'm sure you noticed my little sign on the gate. I've extended it to all beings in the hope it might affect the local farmer. You can hear that little dog — he keeps it in a cage with a concrete base and it's obviously quite unhappy, but what can you do?

Goodwill for me really translates the word *mettā*, although I'm sure you've seen it translated as loving-kindness, which gives it its affective value, its emotional value. But we have to link that really with the Buddha's teaching about *kamma*. And *kamma* is an action — I'm using the word technically now, not your comeuppance, not "you get your karma," but more in the sense of just an action. And an action is driven by the will. The

action is a point where the will comes in. And then with the will you have the action, and the action of course produces the beginning of a conditioning or reinforces a present conditioning, and that's your *bhava*, that's your becoming.

Really it's just looking at the position that the Buddha puts this whole business of *kamma* into his teachings. When he went through that liberation process he came out with what's known as the three knowledges, the three great understandings he had. The first one was a realisation that he was completely purified of all these negative states. Later in his victory verse he says that he attained this unconditioned consciousness, *asaṅkhata-citta*. But the other two are related to how he got there. The first is he saw all his past lives and saw how he arrived at this particular place. And then he was able to perceive beings moving from one realm to another, driven by the same force, by the same karmic force, by their will. And what was then just a personal law became a universal law for him.

From that, over time, he develops dependent origination, which is the whole psychology of how we create our conditionings. But also he points to the whole business of ethics. So ethics in its broadest meaning is basically our relationship — our relationship to each other as human beings, of course, to the animal world, to the world of nature, to the mineral world, to use an old medieval way of looking at things. So even rocks and stuff like that we have a relationship with. It might not be a very deeply affectionate one, but we have a relationship with the physicality of nature.

In the Noble Eightfold Path, this comes into play because after we've had some insights, this has to translate itself into Right Attitude. And these attitudes — he names three of them within the Eightfold Path: selfishness to generosity, hatred towards love, and cruelty towards compassion. But you can take any negativity and you can state its opposite as where we're moving towards. And of course that's a change in relationship, and that's what we're talking about, a relationship. And this then expresses itself in right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

This ethics is most keenly expressed in its little detail in the Vinaya for the monks, for the monastic life, the monks and nuns. Because here he's trying to set up an institution, a specific institution, which is to preserve the Dharma and of course to help people become liberated. And he sees that as extremely important. And it's not as though he starts from a position of some ideal as to what the order will be. He follows the normal customs of the time, which was basically to use whatever cloth was about to create clothing, to live very simply in the forests, making your own little hut out of things, out of wood and leaves, banana leaves and stuff, and to eat what was given in a bowl. All these things were set.

And what it tells us is that here's the basis of a spiritual life. We need shelter. We need clothing against the elements. We need food to keep the body healthy. And the fourth one was medicine. And when you look across the world and you see these people who don't have these basic requirements, what we actually understand from the Buddha's teaching is that they haven't even got the basis for spiritual practice. In other words, Buddha's saying that in order to even begin the spiritual practice, you've got to feel safe. You've got to feel safe. If your mind is concerned about where you're going to get your next piece of bread, or how you're going to clothe yourself, or your children, and so on, then you can't begin this process of purifying the heart.

Saint Francis had a similar experience when he gave up everything in a very Buddhistic way and sewed together these bits of sackcloth to create his first robe. He thought to go and live with the beggars, actually live in Rome with the beggars. But he found that they were quite happy to thieve, and the language, of course, and the whole thing. And he had this ideal that, in fact, if you were poor, you were necessarily closer to Jesus, closer to God. But in fact, what he found was that they were robbers and thieves. Probably one or two of them were saintly, but generally speaking, they weren't a crowd he wanted to mix with. And so he left them. He went off on his own back to where he was brought up, started again.

So during this time, Christmas, we have this idea of goodwill to all beings. We then have this problem about will itself, meaning some sort of choice. In the West we have this idea coming really from Christianity of some sort of free will. The ancients didn't have that sort of concept. They were, I think, more deterministic, that things were already determined, a fate. And that choice was really some sort of trick that human beings played on themselves. Because they had choice, they therefore had free will. These days you get these different arguments between those who believe in a deterministic idea of the world and those who believe that we do have some measure of free will.

Now, in the Buddha's understanding, it's hard to talk about this complete free will. It really stems from the idea of the Christian relationship to God. So God has created us out of love. And a love which is determined by him is hardly satisfying. If you could create a dog and program it to love you, then you'd have a hard time thinking that this dog really loves you. I mean, he's already been broken. So the idea of free love was that a person could actually choose to love or deny God. And that was the essential dignity of the human being and the essential oneness of the human being as opposed to God. So he'd created something which was separate from him, and therefore the human being had to find this relationship.

In the Buddha's teachings it's difficult to see this free will because everything starts from this position of ignorance, the position of we're living under a delusion. And this delusion is driving us. So its main manifestation is acquisitiveness, which turns into greed and all that sort of stuff. And the reason is that in that essential delusion as to who we are, there's this presumed understanding that we are what we appear to be — human beings with the body, mind, heart, and so on and so forth. But there is always somewhere in the back of our understanding the problem of death.

All meaning to the self is in life, to the self that feels itself to be this psycho-physical organism. Death is meaningless because my whole effort is to try and enjoy life and make life meaningful for me. And I might extend that into some form of relationship that gives my life meaning. So you have a humanistic approach which is that my life has meaning when I'm helping others. So sometimes you'll get humanists who are just as self-negating, just as giving, just as generous, just as compassionate as anybody who would say they belong to a particular religion. And it gives their life meaning.

But even so, there is this underlying despair, because it's all going to come to an end. And it's very difficult for somebody who sees death as being the end of everything that they aspire to, everything that is meaningful in life, to turn upon death and really look it straight in the face. So there's always this gentle pushing away of it, the denial of death. And what the Buddha is saying is that this essential delusion as to who we are is creating this underlying feeling of disjointedness, of not being actually completely at one with nature that we're embedded in.

Because animals don't worry about that. Animals, as far as we know anyway, they're just happy to live the moment to moment because their minds don't really go beyond. They don't have that imaginative capacity to imagine their deaths. Not to say that they don't know when they're actually dying or being killed, but they don't have that existential fever that can descend upon us.

So when you consider that we've got this underlying delusion which is trying to make sense of this life, then everything is driven by that force. So although on the surface of things, when you walk into Tesco's and you think, well, am I going to have choco biscuits or fig biscuits? And I think, well, this is choice. This is a wonderful thing I have in this society of choice. The governments keep going on about this choice. But eventually, you tend to choose the one you like, the one you've established a decent relationship with.

So even though we have this idea of choice, actually, when we finally make the choice and we ask ourselves, well, why did I make that choice? We find it's actually all conditioned, that we've actually got good reasons for doing it, which is another way of

saying it's not been a free will choice. It's not as though free will stands somewhere outside my conditioning and is able to make this choice which has nothing to do with the conditioning that I have within my psychology.

So when it comes to the path, and we're talking about the way to go, it's like going for a walk, isn't it? You set off for a walk and you already have your map, you know where you're going to go. And wherever you come to a fork in the place or where you come to a place where you don't recognise something, you don't have free will. You look at your map and you decide you're going to go this way. Now, you might make a mistake and end up drowning in a lake, but we'll leave that one aside. Presumably you can read the maps, and even if you do start walking into marshy land, you know you've come the wrong way so you come back on yourself. So the path isn't so much one of choice but one of discernment. And if we discern wrongly, if we make the wrong choices, then there are certain things that happen because of that wrong choice, and the world mirrors back to us what it is.

Now, when we talk about *kamma*, remember, in the sense of that which is leading us to liberation, it's never something outside us. So, if, for instance, I find myself being fired from every job that I happen to get hold of, and I keep saying to myself, these people really don't understand me, they're absolute fools and all this other stuff, then slowly but surely it might occur to me that maybe I'm the fool and not these people I've been calling the fool all my life. But until I make that little bit of insight, the world keeps mirroring back to me exactly what I'm doing.

But if I were to say that losing my job is my *kamma*, then I'd be slightly off centre, because my real *kamma* is the conditioning I have inside me, the conditioning which is creating this personality, these relationships, which continually find me dumped. If on the other hand, take the opposite, if on the other hand I find myself constantly in situations which are creating happiness around me and joyfulness around me, then again that's mirroring back to me my relationship to the world.

So when anything happens to us, there is that business going on. That doesn't mean to say that other people's *kamma* isn't affecting us. I mean, the old adage that just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you. In other words, things happen to us, but it might not be specifically our fault. Somebody else is also dumping their stuff on us. And to sometimes distinguish that is very difficult. In fact, the closer the relationship is, the more difficult it is to discern that.

So, when it comes to this goodwill to all beings, we're really always looking at our relationships. That's what it actually means, just what is our relationship. And when it comes to ecology, and the world and all that, and we have all these deniers and all that

sort of stuff, we might say to ourselves, well, even if it isn't the overheating that's causing this, it would be better anyway to think it is just in case it is. If it isn't, fine, then the world is just changing in its usual patterns. But if it happens to be this business of overheating, then maybe I ought to do something about it.

So there was a meditator here who I asked about ecology and whatnot. Somehow it came up in the conversations that they took two baths a day. And I said, well, isn't that a bit ecologically vandalistic? And their reply was, well, nobody else is doing anything. So you can see how in this particular case this person was judging their particular ethical relationship to the world by other people and excusing what they obviously thought, because of their reply, was in fact ecological vandalism. Their excuse was because nobody else was doing it.

When it comes to ecology and things like that, our question is to ourselves, what am I doing about it? What is my responsibility within this particular situation I find myself in? So here, for instance, I've gone to all sorts of silly extents to try and cut down the amount of fuel we use to heat water. And some of them have been slightly ridiculous. That thing you're using now, which I bought, which was meant to be one of these super kettles that would keep water warm, turned out to be — I mean, that's why I've got that glove around it, that covering, because it was just letting off heat all over the place.

My latest escapade, as you've noticed over the sink, is a hand washing thing, but actually that water which comes straight from the well, straight from the cold water system, is perfectly drinkable. So if you ever want warm water, then you can take it straight from that. And this allowed me to cut down the heat in the tank itself, which I hope you've all forgiven me for. So that is basically just hand hot. It's not even that, is it? It's lukewarm. And then, which is all you need. You only need lukewarm water.

I mean, I go back to my experience in the East where only the rich can have a hot shower. You just don't have hot showers. Most people still shower at wells and it's always cold. Always. Mind you, of course, you're in the tropics, but even so.

So one thing that we can look at is just what is our relationship to the material world? How much heat do we need? What sort of clothes are we wearing so that we don't have to have the central heating on so high? The food we eat. So you go back to your basics — the food, the shelter, the clothing. I mean these days with clothes being so cheap people have quite large wardrobes. I'm now getting to that age group where I can be like the Monty Python sketch where he says, well in my day we had leather for breakfast, things like that.

But this whole explosion of material goods means that people don't have a sense of kindness towards things. They don't treasure anything because, well, if you break a cup, you're going to buy another one. But there was a time when you broke a cup, you'd get a crack around the back of your head because that would cost money.

So it's a case of re-establishing really the preciousness of things. In the Japanese tea ceremony, which I know very little about, part of the conversation is to appreciate the actual vessels that you're using, which may be cracked and very old. There was a lovely tale told by Suzuki, who wrote *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, where when the monks go off and take water with them, they always reserve a bit to bring back, to pour back into the river that flows past the monastery. And it's that sort of relationship that I think we have to re-establish.

I have a niece who works around ecology for schools. She sets up little projects for schools, a charity of such. When I was asking about that, her reply to me about people and ecology was, "People don't care. People don't care." And it's a sadness. We watched a film that was done by a French ecologist, and there was this very moving scene in Uganda where the hippos on this lake were being slaughtered by poachers. All the fish in the lake lived off the hippopotamus poo. That's what they did. That's how the fish lived in the lake. Of course, as they killed these hippos, the fish stocks went down. The man who was looking after it, when he saw that a little gang of hippos had disappeared, he starts weeping, he starts crying because he's so distraught at the uncaring nature of these poachers and the inability of the government or anybody to stop the slaughter. So it's a case really of thinking about our relationship to nature.

When it comes to animals, the animal world, it's a similar sort of thing. It's very difficult really to find products which don't use something from animals. Here I think you can get very tight around things. Although the Buddha pointed out these rules about not harming living beings, they were never set to us as commandments, as "thou shalt not." It wasn't to do with that. They're training rules. *Sekhapada*. You can't make an absolute law in a relative universe because, depending on time and place, human beings, if they want to stay alive, have to eat animals. I'm talking about people in deserts and people up in the icy parts of the world. So it's not as though we have to be particularly tight about that, but it's something that we could think about and ponder and just look at the food that we actually eat. The idea of having a vegetarian meal or two during the week seems to be catching on. But I think one of the problems is that when we move into that moral area, we become moralistic. So again, it's not being too tight around these things and just working with the situation.

Here myself and Martin had to make a big decision about Christmas. As you know, the Trust has made a commitment to using less animal products if we can, but careful not to name it as veganism, because then that locks you into a particular ism. That's not really where the Buddha was at. I remember talking to a German man who'd come to the monastery and he was very uptight about Buddhism. He just didn't like "Buddhism," he just didn't like this word. "We should call it *Buddhadhamma*," he said, because as soon as you enter into an ism, it's as though it becomes set in concrete. So when we talk about not being involved in taking life unnecessarily, I think we always have to be careful not to get into that ism business, but take each situation as it comes. Anyway, we decided that it was Christmas and we would have roast and use eggs to bind it. So it's just one of those things we gave in to that.

When it comes to human beings, it becomes very complicated because we have all sorts of ways of behaving towards each other which are unhealthy and equally as many ways as we can which are healthy. Tomorrow we might go through the perfections, as they call the *paramī*. But again, it's recognising that other people are our teachers. That's one really very positive way of looking at it. When somebody is creating some negativity within us, it's pointing out where we may be stuck, where we are actually holding on to views and opinions. It's a case of really doing that moment-to-moment *vipassanā*. We see *vipassanā* as being something that we sit and do as a practice, and that's true, that's not a problem. But to keep that awakenedness in us so that when we meet somebody and they're pressing buttons, we're right there with the inner turmoil, not to identify with it.

This is the whole point of practising *vipassanā*, is to disidentify with what we're experiencing. When anger comes within me, when I'm sitting and I've got a memory and some anger comes up, I'm gently pushing it away from me to observe it. In so doing, I realise it's not me, not mine. But in daily life, we tend to forget that. As soon as anger comes up, well, I'm going to be angry to hell with it. But the whole idea is to remain with this sharp awakenedness so that as soon as I feel the first stirrings of irritation, I'm right there with it. I can override that. This is the point. I can override that with goodwill. The measure of goodwill could be just a certain openness to the person, just to actually listen to what they're saying without this immediate reaction. If I'm going to identify with something, then let me identify with goodwill.

Here we come to another thing, this whole business about the self. The Buddha, in his teachings, it's not about getting rid of the self. It's about creating, first of all, a self which is beautiful, a self which feels dignified, self-worthy and has a lot of self-esteem. It's only when we feel that certainty within us that we can begin to go deeper and drop the idea of what a self might be. All his teachings, if you go through it, is all about, at

this ethical level, of moving away from negative states towards positive states, from darkness to light, as he would put it. There are some beings moving the other way, he says, but hopefully we're moving the right way, from darkness to light.

The whole training, part of the training is the Eightfold Path, is right speech, right action, right livelihood. What it's doing is creating this beautiful conditioning. When I associate with that, when I say, "Well, I am generous," then it's creating within me this sense of self-esteem. When I've forgiven somebody and I feel the relief that comes with that, I'm purifying my heart. When you're practising *mettā* and you're saying, "May I be safe, may I be well," it doesn't matter whether we believe there's an ultimate I there or not, but all we're doing is creating these conditionings which eventually build up to make us feel good about ourselves.

When we move into that meditation, the next stage is to investigate this sense of I. So it's a sort of parallel process. The process of insight and the process of ethical purity run together. If we're very disturbed over something, we're going through a patch in our lives which is full of anxiety and anger and all that sort of stuff, then it's very difficult to separate from it. Even if we keep falling into these habits of getting angry and all that sort of stuff, at least we know that we've fallen into a place where we don't want to stay. This is the point, we don't want to stay there. Often people will get themselves into this horrible place and they keep churning at it.

I remember Rob, who's our treasurer, he's a solicitor helping people through divorce and whatnot. I remember saying to this man something along the lines of, "You'll lose what you want. You're not going to win this case. And you're going to spend a lot of money, right?" So his whole argument was, let it be, come to an agreement and let it go. But he was too caught up in this bitterness and hatred and he was going to go for it, even though it was actually completely illogical. That's what we tend to do. We get ourselves into these whirlpools of thought. It's impossible to step out of it for a lot of people. They're just caught up in it.

There was another case just recently on the radio of a man who had been tortured by the Japanese on that River Kwai business really, really badly. His heart was just filled with hatred and anger. It was there, undealt with within his heart. His first marriage eventually broke up. Later on in his life, perhaps late middle age, he's just on a train and he meets somebody and begins to talk to her. This stuff begins to just flow outward. He gets in touch with all this goo, all this horrible stuff inside him. For some reason, I can't remember the details, he sees this article where this Japanese man, who was his torturer, has written an article in which he's asking for forgiveness and whatnot. So he determines to go and meet him in Japan and give him the old waffle. But as soon as the

man walks in, he meets this Japanese man. He just goes down on his knees and begs him to forgive him. It's like he can't do anything. The forgiveness just pours out of his heart and they become good friends.

In his case, he was very lucky that the fellow who now regrets bitterly the way he made these other human beings suffer actually had the opportunity to tell this victim how he felt about it now. If not, this man may very well have been still twisting in the little hell of his own making, just unable to forgive.

What our practice is teaching us is that all this negativity is not me in the sense that I don't have to do that, I don't have to indulge it, I don't have to associate with it even. I can see it as just another mental state. Even if I'm caught out by it every so often, and I find myself murdering people and stuff like that, even so, I can then remind myself after the act, "You lost yourself there. There was a loss of myself into that." If I can bring myself out of that and re-establish this good self, then at least I'm not justifying the act. A lot of people might justify anger, righteous anger and all that sort of stuff. But in Buddhist terms, it's very difficult to justify anger. You can sublimate it, you can turn your anger into doing something, but anger itself, the feeling of anger, the hatred that's involved in it, as soon as you put that out, it's a negativity, it's a negative force. It'll have its effect in one way or the other. Even if you get your own way, you'll have got your own way, which may be perfectly just, at the expense of friendship. The person might do it just out of because you've hammered them, because they're so afraid of you. But that's hardly a good reason for them to do it.

What we're trying to do at the level of self, at the level of me feeling I am, I am this, I am that, is moving myself towards this better place. When I get there, I find myself being more contented, less caught up in these mental states and so on and so forth. This allows my meditation to go deeper because these are, in our meditation, what we call the hindrances. They're actually stopping us from going deeper and seeing where the initial problem lies.

This goodwill that we are generally spreading around all over the place at Christmas is something that we also need. It's not only an outward flow, it's an inward flow towards ourselves. One of the purposes of practising *mettā-bhāvanā* is to get that feeling of self-worth about ourselves.

Even during this time, it depends how you wish to spend tomorrow, but you might spend some time just reflecting. Just try to guide your thoughts towards those areas where we find ourselves stuck or where we find certain irritations, certain fears, anxieties, and just see them that actually they're telling us something about ourselves, the

situation out there, the person out there. Then just to find a way of allowing yourself that original fear, anger, whatever it is, to arise. As it moves away, as it turns away, to establish the right relationship, the right relationship with a situation or with a person.

As we all know, this isn't easy work. You've got to keep at it. Even though sometimes you might feel things are going worse, sometimes it feels like that before it gets better. I'm sure you've heard that one before. So it's a case of really seeing our lives as an ethical process. It's not just this insightful process into impermanence and whatnot. It's actually an ethical process. It's a process of correcting our relationships. In a sense that's looking at the third middle characteristic of *dukkha,* of suffering. Remember, it always comes down to desire. This desire is a specific desire. It's not all desire, the desire to meditate, the desire to be liberated. It's not this *taṇhā*. This desire is always based on some wrong relationship we have, which is a fundamental delusion about who we are.

Even when we turn towards things like the ultimate things, like death, the Buddha's not shy about hitting nails on their head, like, "Life is uncertain, death is certain." I mean, he keeps poking you in the eye, sort of wake you up. It's being able to turn on that, turn on that certainty and looking at that fear because right there at the very fear of death we find this self. It's the self, it's this wrong relationship which is creating that initial, that deepest of all fears.

Just trying really to make that path quite clear to ourselves, that on the one side there's the process of insight, the process of seeing things as they really are, as the Buddha said. On the other side, it's how it manifests in our daily actions, speech, actions and livelihood. The one has to mirror the other. The way to liberation can come through any of those points on the Eightfold Path, especially those points about right speech, right action, but especially that right livelihood because in our actions we come across where the self is creating barriers, where the self is not able to extend itself in a fluid way into a situation, definitions, opinions, views, and all that sort of stuff.

Just as a final example of the distinction between what you might call a barrier and a boundary, boundaries are fluid, using that word as a fluid thing, is this whole business about opinions and views. If we see an opinion as just a perspective on a particular situation, political, social, etc., if it's just a perspective, we're much more open to accepting that other people have different perspectives. There's an ability there to work with it to find a compromise. So in terms of a self which is not so self-seeking, the word compromise is not a dirty word. But as soon as you identify with your opinion, "I am..." it's very difficult to find that bridge. We see it constantly in places like the Middle East.

There doesn't seem to be a way that these two sides can even come close to some sort of compromise, some sort of way of understanding each other and giving each other the sense of freedom they want.

However, it is Christmas, and we have to spread a bit of goodwill. And this evening in our *mettā*, perhaps we can bring these things to mind, like the Middle East, and send out our goodwill.

Just another final thing. Some people doubt the power of prayer, goodwill, blessings, and that sort of stuff. But there's a woman called Caroline Myss, some of you might have heard of her. And she tells a tale of a car crash in which the woman dies, comes out of her body. And as she looks down the line of cars, all these people are swearing and getting very angry with her and all that sort of stuff. But there's one woman who's praying for her. And what she sees is this energy going up and then coming down upon her. Anyway, as it is, she didn't die and she goes back into the body and all that. But she remembers the number plate of this person and seeks her out and takes her a bunch of flowers.

So even though we might do mettā only to help recondition our own hearts towards what is goodwill, I don't think we should doubt that it has some force. I'm always bemused, really, because, as you know, we read out these names in the morning, and occasionally somebody will say it really helped. And I can't really understand how it did it, but they actually feel it.

And there was one occasion—I mean, if you're a scientific materialist, obviously it's not going to make sense to you. But there was one case where somebody was dying and we were offering mettā and it so happened they died during that period when we were offering mettā, which I thought was extraordinary. Which means, I suppose you could translate that as being we killed them. But I think of it more positively as helping them move on.

So anyway, I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated by observing these twin parts of the path of insight and ethical relationships. Sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 101

Right Relationship

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42 min

> *In this Christmas season talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the ten pāramīs (perfections) - the qualities that carry us to "the other shore." He explores how the Buddha's teachings on insight must express themselves through our relationships, beginning with the foundational principle of ahimsa (non-harm). The talk focuses particularly on dāna (generosity), showing how true giving requires renunciation and creates meaningful connections with others.*
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> *Bhante discusses how renunciation differs from mortification - not punishing the body, but giving things up to discover where our attachments lie. He explains how generosity, gratitude, and patience form a "virtuous circle" that deepens our relationships and creates genuine happiness through meaningfulness rather than mere pleasure. The teaching covers all ten perfections: dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), nekkhamma (renunciation), paññā (wisdom), vīriya (energy), khanti (patience), sacca (truthfulness), adhiṭṭhāna (resolution), mettā (loving-kindness), and upekkhā (equanimity).*
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> *Drawing from commentary literature, Bhante shows how these perfections prevent virtues from becoming their opposite - how equanimity prevents love from becoming attachment, compassion from becoming pity, and joy from becoming mere excitement. The talk emphasizes that authentic spiritual practice must manifest in how we relate to others, creating connections based on giving rather than acquiring.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arhato samma sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato arhato samma sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato arhato samma sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I just thought I'd continue that theme of relationship. Normally at Christmas I do the *paramis*, the ten perfections. The perfections were — it translates to the word *parama*, which means the other shore. It's what takes you to the other shore. They were a later collection of what the commentaries thought was important about the Buddha's teachings.

But just to try and put it in, I'll just speak them and then you can see what they are. So there's *dana*, there's giving, there's morality. There's renunciation. There's wisdom, which is a mental virtue. Energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness,

and equanimity. So those are the ten that were chosen by the wise ones out of the Buddhist teachings. And as you know, the Mahayana only have six, so that makes us much more superior.

Just to talk about relationships. So, remember that we were trying to say last night that there's a part of the Buddha's teachings about insights, about actually understanding who and what we are and how we create suffering. But the other part is how it expresses itself in the world through our relationships.

Occasionally when I watch these videos on TED, have you come across TED? It's a website that has lots of talks by experts. Some are very well, I like them. But these people who are into positive psychology, they come across this word connections. That's their way of expressing relationship, which to me is really just about reducing it to some sort of communication. Because academics will always try to find another word on the presumption that they're coming up with something remarkably new. It's quite difficult to use ordinary words like relationship.

So the fundamental relationship that the Buddhas talk about, and which is throughout the East, is *ahimsa*, no harm. And this was variously translated. So the Jains, as you know, thought that when you did harm, even if you didn't mean it, you were going to get your comeuppance. So he basically avoided stepping on ants. They'd come back and bite you in the bum or something. And you see them, brushing their way before they take a step as a very great sensitivity to the amount of harm we can do just because either we're not aware of it or we don't want to be aware of it. It's just ignorance, is it?

But from the Buddha's point of view, that wasn't really the problem. His problem was always to do with how we create suffering for ourselves. And therefore it was an internal thing. And he brought it down to this whole business of intention, empowering an intention. So when we empower intention, remember, you create a habit. An action — the usual progression. An intention, an action, a habit, a personality, and a destiny. That's the sort of trajectory. So our personalities are just these combination of habits.

And it's really recognizing what a habit's doing, if it's doing any harm, then to undermine it, to not go with those particular intentions. But our inner intentional life expresses itself outwardly in obvious ways in what we do, in more subtle ways in body language. And this immediately creates a connection, to use that wonderful word. So you're establishing a relationship.

And the relationships are telling us what we're giving out in the world, even when we're not actually fully aware of it. People with passive aggression, where the person's obviously manifesting aggression, but when you say they're angry, they say, not me, I

never get angry. And it's that sort of inability to see ourselves as we are, even in relationship. But when something happens in a relationship, it's mirroring something back to us. Of course, you've always got to take into consideration that the other person's doing the same.

So that's another thing we say, isn't it, that when two people meet, there are six people there. There's me as I see myself, there's me as you see me, and there's me as I really am. And the same applies to you. So in this sort of web of delusion, it's very difficult to work out how or why things go wrong.

But in terms of the Buddha's teachings, at the root of this problem lies this acquisitiveness, this desire, and deeper than that, this sort of sense of thirst, of lack. Other writers use that word, lack. And in order to undermine that, we practice certain things that cut deep into that business of finding safety, finding happiness in acquisition. And that's the process of renunciation.

So again, I'm sure you all know the distinction that's often made between renunciation and mortification. So mortification was based on some idea that the soul was held down by the heaviness of the body. You get it in Christian understanding too, don't you? If the eye offends you, pluck it out. So people often believe it's the body at fault. Sex is at fault. Our sexual powers are what's evil, not the way we use them. That's the devil drawing us down into the pleasures of life.

So the idea was, well, one idea was at that time, that as you undermined the pleasures of the body, the soul released itself. And you often get that sort of self-mortification in other religions too. The Buddha saw that as just more suffering. But he didn't give up the idea of renunciation, you see. It shifted, the definition shifted, and it shifted to giving something up to see where the attachment was. It's as simple as that.

So our fast, depending on what came up for you in the fast, would show you at times your attachment to certain patterns of behavior, you see. Now that would be a sort of negative use of renunciation. In other words, you're positively giving something up in order to see where your attachment is.

So, for instance, we might disguise our loneliness — everybody feels lonely at some time or other — by distracting ourselves, watching TV, listening to radio, always having some input, so we're never actually in contact with the inner person. And then when you go into a silence and there's nothing there and you're not distracting the mind, then suddenly you're on your own, you see. And in that oneness, there's a sort of feeling of being abandoned, unloved. Nobody loves me. How could they? I'm horrible. And it's getting in touch with that nasty feeling of loneliness and unlovedness.

But, of course, we would do it in order to get in touch with it, to feel it, to actually begin to explore that feeling and find out where its basis was, where it's coming from. And we also know that in that exploration, that malevolent energy that we've created through attachment — we have defined love as how much another person can fulfill our needs. That's what we understand love to be. So when there's nobody there to fulfill our needs, then of course I'm completely unloved. I mean, no Christmas present. I don't get any more Christmas presents.

So when we cut deep into that, and when we say cut deep into it, we're not trying to understand it intellectually. See, then that takes you off somewhere else. Cutting deep means going right into the pain of loneliness. Take that as an example. Then, of course, we find that it begins to transform. The transformation happens quite naturally. It can happen very suddenly. Suddenly you find it's gone and you're perfectly happy with yourself and you've discovered solitude.

Other times it sort of fades out, but there's a sort of a murky sort of stuff there and not going anywhere. But even so, some of that energy is in the process of transforming, of moving to the upper. In fact, I'm trying to use this new word, sublimating. It just, there's no in-between state, it goes from one state to the other.

So that's the negative, to use that word, use of renunciation. We're trying to find out where we're stuck, where we're holding on to things, trying to let go of things, you see.

But any time we behave from the heart of love, there must be some form of renunciation. And the Buddha points this out in *dana*. That's one of his main teachings, *dana*, which is generosity. Whenever he's talking to lay people, he always starts with *dana*. And he points out that anybody can be generous, even a thief. Like after they've stolen your money, they can give it to somebody else who's in need. Or Robin Hood.

So, for generosity, it comes even before *sila*, which means these five basic rules of no harm that we chant every morning. It's even before that. You can be a really ugly, terrible person, but still be kind to your dog and give it biscuits when it's hungry. So that's the easiest one to generate.

Now, of course, every time you're generous, you must be giving something up for the benefit of somebody else. So just in that process, there is a process of renunciation, and renunciation here, not feeding into myself, into my selfish needs, and giving it up for somebody else.

And so one of the things, of course, that excites, and this is the little matrix that sort of spins around, are these three things. What makes generosity very easy, at least to practice, is developing gratitude. I remember once reading Meister Eckhart, 13th cen-

tury mystic, who said that if the whole of your life you said thank you, that would be enough. I mean, that was his. That's how important he felt this attitude of gratitude was, thankfulness.

I think it's one of the nice things of America that they have that Thanksgiving Day. I think we have one, don't we? Doesn't the Church of England have an autumn Thanksgiving, doesn't it? Is that what it is? When they collect all the stuff for harvest. Harvest festival, isn't it? Is that what you said? Harvest? Oh, sorry, I thought you said hog. Don't ask me why. You said harvest, I heard hog. You see how wars start.

In fact, it reminds me of a lovely moment in the car with my family when I was driving somewhere. And my mother was in a bit of a little depressed, angry little mood. And she was sat at the back glum. My father was saying something. He was a bit high and being jolly. And he said, oh, come on, Rosa, cheer up. And she said, oh, well, you shut up. That was brilliant.

So this little virtuous circle of gratitude, when you think about just what we've received from society. I remember somebody grumbling to me once that they didn't have any children, she didn't have any children, and she didn't know why she paid taxes so that other children could be educated. She found that absolutely obnoxious.

So when you begin to realize that actually a lot of our education has been given to us by the generous taxation of other people. And it's just things like that and things that we take for granted because of our social system. Doctors, the NHS, I mean, there's all sorts of things which we presume now, we don't see them as something which is gifted to us. Not that we don't pay our taxes, but...

So, gratitude enlivens this idea of generosity. And as soon as we give something of time or of wealth, we must be giving it away from ourselves. We must be giving something up. And in a sense, there are various degrees, as you know, of generosity.

I mean, at Christmas, people swap gifts. So that's what kings do. When they meet, they swap gifts. It's just a friendship thing. It's a social nicety, you might say. But it has a purpose. But it's difficult to call it generosity, because if your lump of cheese didn't turn up, you'd be very upset, because you've gone and bought them another different type of cheese. So it's that sort of swapping of things, which is just a social nicety.

But when it comes to real generosity, you know that you are being generous when in a sense what you're giving actually is pushing the boundaries of what you want to give without of course harming yourself. I mean one doesn't want to give all one's wealth away and then end up on the streets. There's a lovely story of St. Francis, one of his monks or friars, brothers, taking this business of complete poverty as a standard, met

somebody who needed clothes. So he gave him his robe and he came back naked. And so Francis had to make a rule that you can give everything away apart from your robe. There's a certain sort of, we have to use our common sense.

But it's when you give of time, you see, give of time, that you know that when that boundary is being pushed, that actually you are truly beginning to renounce something.

So I was just talking to my aunt there, and my aunt said — she belongs to that old school, she's middle eighties or something. And she was telling me that when Uncle John got sick, he was very old, she never went to bed for two years. She sat in a chair. One day he got up, he had a little stroke and at night he'd be disoriented. So one night she caught him trying to get out of the window and this really freaked her. So what she did was she put her armchair next to the window and sat there for two years, never went to bed. And she would amuse herself by listening to the radio and knitting and doing all sorts of stuff just for fear that he'd be sleepwalking and do something stupid. And it ruined her sleep pattern, which she's never particularly regained.

And I'm just thinking, well, I wonder if I would do that then. I'd probably just chain them to the bed. put a manacle on their foot. So you've got these different ideas of generosity. And that was her, she felt that was her duty. That was her — she belongs to that age group, which talks about duty, not rights, about responsibility rather than rights, my rights.

So this generosity, of course, you can expand that into really all sorts of areas. So one of them, and it's funny, it's not actually in — I don't know why it's not in the Ten Perfections, it's, I think, presumed in the word love. Because when we chant the loving-kindness discourse, you can see that the Buddha is giving it a very wide meaning of just a loving relationship, which includes both compassion and joy.

So when something comes up which demands us to help somebody who is in need, then the generosity manifests as compassion. So it's the same when somebody's rejoicing over something. So to rejoice with them, to be happy for them, is also an act of generosity. Even more so if you feel absolutely miserable and the world's gone completely wrong for you, but you're able to put that to the side and rejoice with the person who's being happy. That's also an act of generosity.

So generosity is, in the widest sense of the term, is giving of oneself, you see. Emptying, sort of giving oneself, emptying oneself towards another. It's very beautiful how the Buddha talks about his relationship to the people he teaches. He says, whatever a teacher can do for his pupils, I have done for you, out of *anukampa*. *Anukampa* means to

move towards somebody, you see. The word that most you know will be *karuna*, which is compassion. But the word he uses, *anukampa*, is to move towards somebody. So when you see somebody who's in need, you move towards them.

And it was one of the things on his big doubt, wasn't it? The great doubt, you see. So remember that in the great doubt when Mara arose and said, who the hell are you to try and become liberated from all suffering? You've been around everybody, everybody, and nobody's made it. And here, you're like... Where's this ego thing coming from, this pride? And it's when he touches the earth and the earth goddess arises. And she defends him by saying, because of his past lives, perfecting the virtue of generosity.

So what does this mean? It means that he saw that what he was doing wasn't just for himself, it was for all beings. And that gave him the courage to withstand the doubt, the inner doubt as to what was he doing this for? This is ridiculous. And that perfection of generosity was basically the — if you want interpretation of that story is, that was the backbone of his effort.

That he wasn't just a matter of me trying to liberate myself from suffering, but also remembering that, you know, probably remembered his own family and his son and all that sort of stuff. And then from then, all his friends and people like that. And it must have occurred to him that if he can crack this problem, then he's cracked it for everybody.

So that gives your effort a meaningfulness which is just beyond yourself, doesn't it? I mean, if you're doing something for somebody else, for yourself, but also for somebody else, it gives it a much deeper meaning.

And if we were to talk about happinesses, you can talk about three sort of levels. You know, one is the ordinary sensual happiness, which is fleeting and all that, but it's a happiness, you know, physical happiness. It can also be intellectual, artistic, even the joys of the practice, you know, when some peace arises very occasionally, then that's a... That is a bit of transient joy and to be enjoyed.

And then there's that type of joy where you get lost in it. I think, what's his name? Aristotle called it eudaimonia. And it's when you get lost. It's when you lose the self in something, like a DVD, you see. And then you come out of it and suddenly you're there again. And during that moment, you've been perfectly happy. You've not been self-aware, but you have been perfectly happy. And then you come out of it and it's gone, you see. And it's catching that gone-ness that brings up this idea of not getting attached to something that you've become so involved in for happiness.

But what makes people really, really deeply happy, which has nothing to do really with transient emotions, because they arise and pass away, and always sense your pleasure, is meaningfulness. And when that meaningfulness goes, you have despair. So that's why I say people who lose meaningfulness in their lives, are really on the point of despair. And there were these soldiers who commit suicide after war and whatnot, for whatever reason, psychologically. But seemingly, they all commit suicide because at some point, they despair. They despair, you see.

And I had a woman phone me up just the other day, you see, in a dreadful state, just at the point of despair, you see, despair, just when you give up hope. And, of course, that's the sign, isn't it, on Dante's hell, you know, abandon all hope you who enter here.

So this idea of generosity has this very deep way of connecting us. And it's only then that our lives seem to take on a much deeper meaning. And in that meaning, that connectedness, that very deep sort of relationship, that is really love at its deepest level, isn't it? And when that's extended from human beings to animals and nature and the world and the cosmos and all that, then you suddenly find yourself in this lovely place of being interconnected. I mean, that's what it means, isn't it? And it comes about through generosity. It comes about through giving, compassion. It doesn't come about because you've thought about it and you've written an essay on interconnectedness. No. It actually comes about just because you've made that effort to give of yourself into that huge sort of matrix.

And you can even see some of the other ones. So *sīla*, I mean, that's the dark side. You know, that's why we say you shouldn't kill and all that sort of stuff. And take what's not freely given and all those things. negative things of not to do that, not to do that. And I think you'll find that every time you are behaving unethically and even in the smallest, simplest, silly way that creates little qualms in the mind, there'll be something against one of those five. The whole rule of the Vinaya, apart from those that are specific to little rules and regulations, are all around these five basic rules. I mean, they're fundamental, aren't they, to our society, fundamental to our relationship.

So, in correcting all the negative stuff that we do on those sides, anger, usual stuff, anger, you know, being callous, little sharp words that we might say to people. By correcting all that, you see, that is also to be seen as a generous act, you see, because you're giving up this inner desire to poke somebody in the eye, which can be very pleasurable. That's sīla. Renunciation wisdom.

Patience, you see. Patience is another one. Now the Buddha talks about a more sort of, what would you call it? I'm trying to think of another word apart from negative. It's not negative. It's just the other side of the more positive language. Where the Buddha talks about it as the greatest form of ascetic practice.

So what does he mean by ascetic practice? He means, you know, bearing with suffering. So the self-mortificator, you know, starves themselves, sits next to fires for the heat, stands in the river Ganges for hours on end so the kamma is washed away. And there's all sorts of wonderful ascetic practices. There was even a Christian saint, somebody of, I can't remember his name now, but he sat on a pillar. He was up there all his life. And that was it. He lived on the top of this pillar. So these are things that probably came from the East. And you'll still see in India ascetics who've kept their arm up in the air and it's withered. You know, I mean, I've seen that myself. You know, because of some reasons. I mean, they have reasons for doing these things.

So what he means by aesthetic practice is that, is to bear with, patient forbearance. And of course, it begins inward, doesn't it? Because all this stuff comes up and we've just got to patiently bear with these emotional states that come up within ourselves. But they're the same states that we see in other people. There's nothing that separates us apart from the stories. Everybody has fear. Everybody has depression, all that sort of stuff. But the stories are all different. They're all different dramas. But fundamentally, we've all got these same experiences of life.

And bearing with somebody who's annoying us is an act of generosity, isn't it? You're sort of taking it on. Of course, you don't want to be abused by them, because that's another thing. When you talk about love and whatnot, people get confused that you have to give, give, give, even though you're being throttled. Give of your neck. I mean, there's a limit, you know, like as soon as the person's hurting you, then of course there's a different moral comes in where your love has lost its... has lost its connection with you personally.

See, it's no good giving, giving, giving, and burning yourself out like a lot of people might do, especially, you know, caught up in things like ecology and all that, and they get very frustrated and angry and despairing. And it's all done with goodwill, with active, but they're burning themselves out, see?

And he gives that lovely example, doesn't he? Somebody came along with a machete. He doesn't use that word, but he came along with a sword and chopped you from limb to limb. If ever you were even to be angry, you're no disciple of mine. I once said that in another talk. Somebody said, well, the Buddha had a great sense of humor. But I think he meant it.

So this idea of bearing with people, patient forbearance, it's a perfection, you see. And it undermines all the other stuff as well, especially the whole thing about victimization, you know, being the victim and how people get caught up in that. You know, why me? It moves into a sort of self-pity, you see. And what happens is they're unable to forgive. So they're locked into a really dreadful. A dreadful state, dreadful state. They just can't get out of that because they have been hurt. Nobody's denying that and all that. But there's that self-pity. Why me? And the hatred.

And so long as there's self-pity, you can't forgive. There's a block. And it's only when you begin to put yourself in the shoes of the other person who's done the harm and recognize that they also are going to have a lot of suffering because of the harm they've done. And how do we know that? By investigating the harm that we've done and recognizing that actually, internally, I'm not looking at the amount of suffering in me for the harm I've done to somebody else. And the greater the harm, the more difficult it is to forgive oneself, you see. So that whole victim thing can be a real lock. And patient forbearance is part of that process of forgiveness.

There's, of course, energy, compassion. The Buddha is very tough on energy. I mean, the word comes up right there in the discourse on establishing right awareness, *tapo*, *ātāpī*, *ātāpī*, which comes from this word *tapo*, which comes up in the Maṅgala Sutta there. And it's the energy that you need to really, you know, complete a task. Whatever it is, to complete the task, to finish it, you know, whatever you undertake.

Often, you know, people, they come on a retreat, you see, they come on a retreat, it gets a bit tough. They made a resolution to stay the week, it gets a bit tough, and towards it they give up, you see. Now, what they're doing is that they're undermining their ability to perfect their commitments. So that any time it gets a bit difficult, there's always this little escape.

That doesn't mean to say... I mean, on retreats, I'm sure you've heard me say that to commit yourself to the course, save an extraordinary circumstance or emergency. So it's not as though it's an absolute thing, you know. You know, I like it, you know, if... If the place caught fire, you're not supposed to sit there and, I will not leave this place. So there's also a sort of common sense. But whenever we say we're going to do something and we don't do it, we're actually harming ourselves.

So, for instance, you might say to a friend, yeah, I'll come and decorate. And then your phone will tell you you're not feeling so well today. And it's like you're undermining this ability to make resolutions, to make determinations. And if you think again of the Buddha's own practice, the moment of great determination, to sit under that tree, either to crack this problem or to die. And that's where he got to. It was almost, you

might say, a point of despair, you know. He had this little insight. He had this insight coming from childhood to actually investigate suffering. But he could see no other way. And if this didn't work, well, that was it. So he was prepared to sit there until he died with it. We call that the great determination.

So that's this business of energy. The energy is needed, but resolution is the other perfection. But you need that energy. When you suffer from dullness and lethargy, you see, remember that is also an energy. So you don't look at it negatively. Don't think to yourself, well, you know, this is something dragging me down. It is dragging you down, but it's an actual force. It's a mental energy. It can also be physical. And if we just allow it to manifest, it also transforms, it also sublimates into its opposite, which is good energy. Sometimes it'll flip and become restlessness, but when it's actually moving towards its opposite, it's moving into this lovely flow of energy when our meditation is very easy for us.

Truthfulness here is something quite specific. It's really keeping your promise rather than not telling great big budgies. You know, I mean that's part of it, but it's actually when you say you do something that you actually do do it. So you can see that that melds into the whole thing of resolution and stuff.

And the other one is wisdom, of course. I've not put them in the same order here. Wisdom is a mental, call it that, a mental virtue. So it's really understanding things. And really it all begins there, doesn't it? If we've misunderstood something, then things go awry. So we always have to come back to this, you know, the Buddha's constant encouragement to reflect wisely, see, wise reflection, *yoniso manasikāra*.

So at the end of a sitting, that's why, you know, just to get in the habit of, even if you only pick up one thing from your sitting, to just think about it, let it come to mind. And at the end of a day, you see, just to look back for a moment, pick up one or two things, yeah. We have to be very careful not to always pick up the negative stuff. We're very good at that. We have to also pick up the positive stuff. Positive stuff that's happened to us today. What we've done today.

And that's another thing about joy. You've got to actually excite joy within us. You've got to remember times when you were joyful. and understand how that joy came about. And this sort of builds up a well of joy, you see. We tend to be a bit negative usually, don't we? We tend to remember all the horrible things, because they hurt. The pleasurable things that don't hurt, they're all right. But by doing that, we get a sort of lopsided view of our lives sometimes. It's all miserable and horrible and all that. We forget that we've just had a good meal.

So these are our *pāramitā*. The final one is equanimity. And it's arguable, definitely Nyānaponika Thera, who wrote that very good book, you know, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. It still is really a classic book. But he also wrote other essays and in one he argues quite strongly that the perfection of equanimity is really the perfection because it balances everything. Although equanimity can have its own dark energy, its own dark side of indifference. It does have this ability to not to stop these things overriding, see?

So that, you know, things like love doesn't become attachment, see? So seeing where the attachment is. How do you know? How do you know when you're attached, you see? Well, there's many ways, aren't there? Especially when you're getting irritated with somebody because they're not doing what you want them to do. That's an obvious case of attachment, see? Or when they disappoint you, when you're disappointed in somebody, see? Expectation, stuff like that.

Compassion slips into pity, doesn't it? Pity for somebody. And if you think about how you feel when somebody pities you, then you know how horrible it is for somebody who's being pitied by you. So it stops that, you see. And again, it's this business of being open to what the other person is asking for, not getting into that do-gooder thing.

Joy slips into excitement. So you can, if you take any virtue, you'll see it has a little, it has a subtle energy, a subtle enemy, you see. So courage slips into foolhardiness. I can't think of any more. Mine's gone. But if you think of any virtue, it'll always have its little, slightly subtle negative side that it can slip into. I mean, we can talk about generosity. So it slips into over-generosity. It goes beyond what you're actually capable of doing, and you undermine yourself by doing that.

So that's a quick run-through, you might say, of these *pāramitā*, these *pāramitā*. So it does say here, these qualities were developed and brought to maturity by the Bodhisattva in his past existences, in this way practicing them, illustrating the many birth stories of Jātaka. However, it's only the verses that are regarded as canonical. That's of the stories around the Buddha. You know, where he's reborn as a hare and a... It's all Aesop's fables, really.

So we can end this just by me reading this lovely little paragraph which expresses what the Bodhisattva or the person who wants to develop these ten perfections. As the great being, see Mahāsattva, so that's synonymous really for the Bodhisattva, destined for Buddhahood are concerned with the welfare of living beings not tolerating the suffering of beings wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings and being impartial and just to all beings therefore they give alms to all beings so that they may be happy without investigating whether or not they are worthy by avoiding to do

them any harm observe morality and in order to bring morality to perfection they train themselves in renunciation in order to understand clearly what is beneficial and injurious to beings they purify their wisdom and for the sake of the welfare and happiness of others they constantly exert their energy though having become heroes through utmost energy they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings.

Once they have promised to give or to do something, they do not break their promise. That's the truthfulness. With unshakable resolution, they work for the welfare of beings. And with unshakable kindness, they are helpful to all. And by reason of their equanimity, they do not expect anything in return.

It's nice, isn't it? I remember once this causing a bit of a discussion as to whether you should give without investigating whether they are worthy or not. This is commentary, remember, so we can feel free to question that one.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. And that you will soon perfect the perfections and enter into that wonderful place, *Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 102

How to Critique the Dhamma and Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's radical approach to spiritual inquiry through the Kālāma Sutta (AN 3.65), where the Buddha explicitly tells followers not to accept teachings based on oral tradition, scriptural authority, logic, or even respect for the teacher. The talk begins with a fascinating categorization of five religious ideologies—from fundamentalism to universalism—before diving into the scriptural foundations of the Buddha's non-dogmatic approach.*
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> *Bhante explores how the Buddha encouraged the Kālāma people to test teachings against their own direct experience of what leads to wholesome versus unwholesome states. Rather than promoting skepticism for its own sake, the Buddha provides practical criteria: observe whether teachings lead to greed, hatred, and delusion (and thus to harm) or to their opposites (leading to welfare). The discourse reveals how the Buddha even submitted himself to investigation, outlining specific ways disciples should evaluate a teacher's conduct, consistency, and freedom from defilements.*
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> *The talk illuminates the Buddha's emphasis on mettā (loving-kindness) practice as the path recommended to the Kālāmas, and discusses the four assurances that come from ethical conduct—benefits that manifest both in this life and beyond, regardless of one's beliefs about rebirth. This teaching demonstrates the Buddha's confidence in the Dhamma's ability to prove itself through direct application rather than requiring blind acceptance.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa, Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa, Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm using this book by Bhikkhu Bodhi, In the Buddha's Words. It's a nice collection, and his translations are very clear and he's got good notes on it. The chapter I'm looking at is "Approaching the Dharma", about stuff that I'm sure you've heard about: no dogma, no belief. But I thought we'd have a look at the scriptures on it.

Before we start, there's a little categorisation here which may be of small interest. There are five types of ideologies, for want of a better word.

A fundamentalist – we all know what a fundamentalist is. Basically they think theirs is the only true mountain, so you think you're actually climbing a mountain but really you're descending into a pit. That's their point of view. It's a case of "I'm right, everybody else is wrong." Obviously, there's going to be contradiction and conflict.

Then you get the relative fundamentalist who has respect for the traditions. They're all mountains, but my mountain is bigger and better. Whereas yours will stop short, mine will actually reach the ultimate goal. At some point, you've got to come across and join my mountain. That even happened to me in India with a Tibetan monk. He told me that the Theravāda path is all right, but if I wanted really to make it, I'd have to become a Mahāyāna.

Then there's a relativist. The relativist is in a sense acknowledging their ignorance of other religions. They usually say all mountains are equal but they're all different. And it's up to you. It's all relative, and there's no way of telling which is more true than the other. I mean the only way realistically a person can decide whether your path is better or less good than their path is by actually doing it, actually reaching the end by some teacher in a path saying, "Yes, this is the end." And they said, "Well, hold on, I went one step further."

This is what happened to the Buddha, remember? He went along to these teachers and they all said, "Yeah, you've got it. We want you to teach, we want you to be part of our faculty." And he felt they hadn't quite made it and he left them. That was two teachers, wasn't it? And then there was the mortification stuff. That was also another path at the time, probably best exemplified by the Nigaṇṭha, the person who founded the Jains. Even that he found wanting – he just said it was more suffering.

Then there's the relativist universalist. The person says, well, if you look below the surface of culture and words, you find that actually all religions are on the same mountain, because eventually they're all saying the same thing. Although each path is distinct and separate going up the mountain, you're always actually on the same mountain. You find that especially between this conjunction between Christianity and Buddhism. There's a lot of work done by a lot of people trying to connect them, trying to find a way, and there's books on it of course. I mean even Thích Nhất Hạnh threw his lot in, didn't he? What was it called? Buddha... But anyway, there's lots of these efforts, both at a very high theological level – when I say high, I mean academic – and at an actual practice level where a lot of Christians practice meditation. A lot of Christians practice *vipassanā*.

But I don't see it going the other way. I don't see much going the other way. In fact, I read an article about this, where the person was saying there was so much connection between Christianity and Buddhism, and that a lot of Christians were – I mean, I'm not putting a percentage on it, just a lot of Christians practiced Buddhist things, but he hadn't seen Buddhists move over to things like belief in God and all that, and a practice of praying to God. If you don't believe in God, there's no point in praying to him. Anyway.

Finally, there's the universalist – not the relative universalist, like yours is equal. There's actually, I would say, the universalist who sees clearly that beneath all these rites and rituals, customs, cultures and all that, there are in fact just three ways. And that's the way of insight, the way of knowledge, the way of love, and the way of action. Usually they're all together.

If you look at the eightfold path, they're there. You start off with right understanding. You have right attitude, which is always described as selfishness to generosity, hatred to love, cruelty to compassion. Those are the three examples that come with it. And then you have, of course, right speech, right action, right livelihood. So you have those three ways in the Eightfold Path, but you can see that each religion does put an accent on one of the ways.

Buddhism obviously tends to be right understanding. A lot of its practices are about understanding things. I mean, there is the heart development, but if you were to categorise Buddhism, you'd put it in the path of understanding, I think, first of all. Because that was the Buddha's own path. You don't hear of the Buddha practising *mettā* before his liberation. I'm sure he did, but I don't know anywhere in scriptures where that's pointed to. It was more the jhānic thing based on the breath and these mortification things, but you don't get... Yet in his writings, he obviously pushes *mettā*, he sees the importance of it. And there seems to be some hint somewhere – I'm working on it – where the Buddha says that *mettā* alone is a path of liberation. But I haven't got proper proof, scriptural proof of that yet.

The path of love, I think most of us would agree, Christianity is very much about love. It's a guru, it's a relationship with Jesus, Jesus Christ, and becoming like Jesus. So as you know, I've been doing this walk with St. Francis, Camino St. Francis. So he's a very great example of that. And the fact that he got the stigmata. Now, of course, in Christian terms, he was given that by Jesus, by Jesus or by God or whatever as a little gift, even though it hurts and bleeds. But I think we would probably think of it more as such a deep identification that the body – such a deep identification through concentra-

tion exercise – that the actual manifestation of Christ's body begins to manifest in his own. So we know the power of mind. That would make more sense to me anyway. So definitely the path of love.

But it's also got the path of good works. And then if you were thinking about good works, in a sense you'd have to see it as Islam. Because Islam is very much on the will of God. The will of God, the will of action. Doing things. And of course it exemplified mainly in their jihād. The jihād – Muhammad said that the inner jihād was much more important than the outer one. But there's still the jihād. Force, will, and all that.

So all these three paths you find, I think, in religions, but you get an accent one way or the other. And probably, I mean, probably the most balanced in a way, or at least seemingly so – I'm not sure about the good works business – but Hinduism has many saints on both sides, the bhakti, the devotional, and the insight one. I can't remember some of the devotional ones. I can't remember. Ramakrishna. But the insight ones, like Ramana Maharshi, who's very modern, and also somebody I really like, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. His book, I Am That, I think is quite remarkable.

So that's a run through of the types that I see anyway. You can comment on that over the weekend. But what we're interested in now, of course, is how the Buddha explains this whole business about belief and no dogmas. And the main one that I'm sure you've all heard of is the Kālāma Sutta. And we'll just read it through, mainly just to get the flavour of the discourse and the way that what comes across on the discourses. I mean, it's formalised because it has to be formalised for the oral tradition. But you do get a feel for the sorts of conversations that would have carried on, and the Socratic thing where you're asking the person a question and they have to give you an answer. That's very much all the way through the scriptures.

Although the Buddha gives talks, he's very much in conversation, starting off with some problem that's been brought in. And he always leans the conversation to a point, to really find out what the person's opinion is, where they are. And then he tends to show the error of that. And then when they see the error of it, they're open to his own understanding. And then he darts in with his own understanding, and lonely time, for the most part, they all... they all take him as their teacher. Not always. Some go away clicking their tongues.

So here's the Blessed One and he's arrived at Kesaputta amongst the people called the Kālāmas. Now the Kālāmas of Kesaputta heard: "It is said that the ascetic Gotama, the Sakyan son who went forth from the Sakyan family, has arrived in Kesaputta. Now a good report about the Master Gotama has been circulating. Now the Blessed One is an Arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortu-

nate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, and teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One." So that's what we chant every morning. That's a basic formula.

"And having realised with his own direct knowledge this world, with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, with its devas and humans, he makes it known to others. He teaches a *dhamma* that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end. With the right meaning and expression he reveals a spiritual life that is perfectly complete and purified." So he's obviously got a very good reputation by the time he gets to the Kālāmas. That's quite a paeon, isn't it?

So then the Kālāmas approach him, you see, and they pay homage. It's interesting how various people paid homage depending on their relationship to the teacher. It seems though the highest homage was to walk around the seat three times. Others would just añjali, bring their hands together. And others would just call out their name and their clan and then take a seat. So there's all varied ways in which you would approach somebody.

Well, it says, "Some exchanged greetings with him, and after greetings and cordial talk, they sat down to one side. Some saluted him reverentially and sat down to one side. Some remained silent and sat down to one side." Then they said to him, "Venerable sir, some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesaputta explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile, and vilify the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and brahmins come to Kesaputta and they too explain and elucidate their doctrines but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of others. For us, Venerable Sir, there is perplexity and doubt as to which of these good ascetics speaks the truth and which speaks false."

So now here's the famous passage, you see. "So it is fitting for you to be perplexed, O Kālāmas. It is fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about the perplexing matter," you see. So he agrees with them that they are in fact confused.

And then come, Kālāmas. So now this very famous statement: "Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by seeming competence of the speaker, or because you think 'the ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, these things are unwholesome, these things are blameable, these things are censured by the wise, these things, if undertaken and practised, lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them."

So these four categories really cover everything. We're talking about spiritual authority, scriptural authority – oral tradition, lineage of teaching, hearsay, collection of texts. That's where the fundamentalists place themselves, isn't it? They place themselves directly into their texts, what the text says.

And then you get the four rational grounds: logic, inferential reasoning, reasoned cogitation, and accepting of view after pondering it. So this is more the modern thing, isn't it? So you've got fundamentalists, you've got people who will only look at the texts, and that's it. And even though they have a reason to it, they'll only accept what has been reasoned in the past. Fundamentalists are very much based in the past. Whereas the modernists – I mean, by that people brought up in the Enlightenment, the European Enlightenment – really relying also on their own rationality, on their own logic. Even that you can't depend upon. You can't depend upon your own logical thinking, because remember, all logical thinking has to be based on a premise. If the premise is wrong, that's the end of it.

So I mean, I think that's one of the doubts of present day people, that you can't believe anything because beliefs in the past have caused such a huge problem. For instance, once you believe you're in a racist understanding, then you end up with some form of Nazism. If you believe in the proletariat and all that sort of stuff you end up with a form of communism. But if the premise is wrong then the whole thing becomes quite nasty and evil. These days of course we're stuck with this capitalist consumerism, materialistic capitalism, which is a world religion, and that's it. And the basis – I mean most thinking people know that the basis is greed and all that – it shouldn't be there.

It's that understanding that you cannot trust your logical thing. You always have to go back to the premise to see whether what you're basing all this fantastic architecture of philosophy on. And if that's wrong, then the whole thing's a complete waste of time. Worse. It creates a lot of problems.

And then, of course, there are authoritative persons: impressive speakers and respected teachers. And that gives us our breakdown really. So that depends on your relationship to somebody. And there's a later one which I'll quote a bit later concerning how the Buddha says that people should actually find a critique about him. How do they know that he's fully liberated? Okay. So he doesn't even let himself off the hook.

So then, of course, the conversation. Now, once he's cleared the boards and said, "Look, don't believe anything," but then he puts to them really a manner of Socratic conversation where he asks a question and they answer him. So he's very basic, you see.

"What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed, hatred, delusion arise in a person, is it for their welfare or harm?" "For their harm, sir." "Kālāmas, a person who is greedy, hating and deluded, overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them will destroy life, take what is not given, engage in sexual misconduct and tell lies, and he will also prompt others to do likewise. Will that conduce to his harm and suffering for a long time?" "Yes, Venerable sir."

So there you've got your basic precepts, your basic conduct, things that you ought not to do. Sometimes we overstress that because the whole point of being clear as to what we don't do should make us clear as to what we should do.

So then, of course, he really wants to drive it home. He says, "What do you think, Kālāmas, are these things wholesome or unwholesome?" "Unwholesome, Venerable sir." "Blameable or blameless?" "Blameable, Venerable sir." "Censured or praised by the wise?" "Censured, Venerable sir." "Undertaken and practised, do they lead to harm and suffering or not? And how is it in this case?" "Undertaken and practised, these things lead to harm and suffering, so it appears to us in this case." "It is for this reason, Kālāmas, that we said do not go by oral tradition." And then he repeats himself.

So again, he's, this business of accepting where a person is and then drawing them, as it were, towards the Dharma. So in fact, it's twice not to go. So he really drums it home, you see. Well, I mean, this is, remember, a formalised version.

And then, of course, he gives them the opposite. So "What do you think, Kālāmas? When non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion arise in a person, is it for their welfare or harm?" See, by actually negating it, by saying non-greed, he opens up all the virtues to do with non-greed: generosity, kindness, etc., etc.

By saying non-hatred, by not specifying that, but saying where there's no hatred, there has to be the opposite. Because you don't live in a vacuum. And remember that these qualities, there's no middle ground. Sometimes people translate this as some sort of middle ground where you're greedy and then you're non-greedy, meaning there's nothing there. You're neither generous nor greedy. But all he's saying is there's a state in which there's no greed. And because you're always in relationship, you must manifest some relationship. And that relationship depends upon the condition, the situation, and so on.

So by saying that when I walk into the dining room and sit down to eat, there is non-greed, you're also saying that there's a right attitude to the food, which is to nourish the body, and so on. So it's not as though he's saying that there's a state of neutrality. Same with non-hatred. So we're always in some sort of position of love, some sort of connection. And non-delusion means that we understand. We're in a state of wisdom.

Now is that for his welfare or harm? For his welfare, Venerable Sir. Kalama is a person who is without greed, without hatred, without delusions. Here he translates it as without — you see, this makes it a bit more clear — not overpowered by greed, hatred, and delusion, his thoughts not controlled by them, will abstain from the destruction of life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, and from false speech. He will also prompt others to do likewise.

That's an interesting one, you know. Normally the precepts are a very personal thing, taking precepts and keeping precepts are things that I don't want to do. But remember that we are exemplars. Wherever we go, we exemplify what we actually believe in. Maybe not in a pure, beautiful way, but we're there. So if you say to somebody, well, I practice Buddhist meditation and I'm a follower of the Buddha and all that, and next morning they find you in the gutter completely stupefied, then it makes you wonder. They say, oh, that's the Buddha's teaching, isn't it?

So, undertaken and practised, will this lead to their welfare and happiness or not? Or how is it in this case? Well, undertaken and practised, these things lead to welfare and happiness, so it appears to us in this case. And then he repeats the things. And then he basically reinforces that by telling us how we should develop. So he's telling them how we should develop, how they should develop.

So he says, look, noble disciples, devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending, ever mindful — see, that happens occasionally, doesn't it? — dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving kindness, likewise the second, the third, and the fourth. Thus above, below, and across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving kindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, and without ill will. And he dwells one quarter of the mind imbued with compassion and so on, with altruistic joy, with equanimity. He dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with love, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility and without ill will.

So here you notice he doesn't say, practice *vipassanā*. His advice to the Kalamas here is to practise *mettā*. The word *mettā*, although it has a specific meaning of love, we translate it as a non-attached or universal love. It's often used as a metaphor, as a figure of speech. It's normally used to refer to the four illimitables.

Now he says they see — now he connects it with the daily life, with the effect of that both short-term and long-term. When this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he's won four assurances in this life. The first assurance he has won is this: if there is another world and if good and bad deeds bear fruit and yield results, it is possible that with the breakup of the body after death I shall arise in a good destination, in a heavenly world.

Okay, so it's *kamma*. *Kamma* in the sense of your comeuppance. So here what he's saying — I mean, this was one of his three knowledges at the point of his awakening, wasn't it — that he saw that the driving force behind all his rebirths was his ethical decisions, his ethical life, and that he saw beings moving from one realm to another driven by the same force: ethical decisions. And here he's making it clear to them that particularly — in other words, what had been a very personal law became universal through that understanding upon awakening. That's one of the things he understood: this connection between delusion, the ethical life or the non-ethical life, and how wisdom always draws you towards an ethical life and the other way around. The more ethically you live, the more wise you must become because the mind and heart are connected.

Now the second assurance he has won is this: if there is no other world and if good and bad deeds do not bear fruits and yield results, still, right here in this very life, I live happily, free of enmity and ill will. So he often points to the fact that living according to the Dhamma has immediate results. It is just to be seen immediately.

And the third one is this. The third assurance he has won is this: suppose evil befalls the evildoer. Then as I do not intend evil for anyone, how can suffering afflict me, one who does no evil deed? Now that's always a big problem because evil, horrible things do happen to good people. So I think you always have to read this from the point of view of *kamma*. And *kamma*, in terms of liberation from suffering, is always internal, and it's always to do with dependent origination.

Just because you're the most peaceful, loving, compassionate, charismatic, booming personality in the world, doesn't mean that somebody's not going to hate you. And in fact, you create a lot of jealousy in somebody, and they'll shoot you. And if you look at examples, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and all these people, going right back — you always find Socrates himself. So you always find that when the Buddha's talking about

evil deeds or things happening to a person, you have to see it from the point of view of this inner *kamma*, the wheel of dependent origination. In other words, the atmosphere we live in.

Now, it doesn't mean to say that the world doesn't mirror back to us our problem. I mean, if I'm angry and I happen to meet somebody who's angry and bigger than me, I might end up in hospital. It's not so much that. It's just that when it comes to suffering, when it comes to liberation, it's always this internal thing. And I don't think we really grasp that until we realise that actually the world that we're living in is being completely manufactured within me. Although of course I'm getting information, photons and sounds coming in as air pressure and all that, what I actually make of it is totally dependent on my perceptual faculties. And then what I make of that and the internal atmosphere I create — my emotional life and my thoughts — is again entirely dependent on something in me.

And in meditation when we open up to ourselves a little bit we find that there's all this stuff, leftover stuff. Smelly stuff like a kitchen smells after lunch, leftovers of yesteryear and who knows, yesterlife. But it's that, it's understanding that that makes us understand this better. Because it's quite obvious that good people suffer from evil coming from outside them.

And then the fourth assurance he has won is this: suppose evil does not befall the evildoer, then right here I myself am purified both ways in this respect. In other words, just because the evildoer gets away with it, well that's their good luck.

And this of course does, shall we say, put a question mark on what I've just said, because here the Buddha seems to be suggesting that some of the evil, or put it this way, we can understand perhaps that some of the evil that does befall us is a reaction from somebody else towards us. But obviously you can't talk about, say an earthquake, if you get squashed by an earthquake — that's your personal *kamma*. What is your personal *kamma* is how you've experienced the process of being squashed.

When Kalamas, this noble disciple, has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he's won these four assurances in this very life. So it is, blessed one, so it is, fortunate one, when this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won these four assurances in this very life.

And then this, before I say that, when you read anything, but when you read the scriptures, you see this constant repetition of things. If you understand it to be a way in which we absorb stuff in a sort of like where stuff can be digested in the heart, you see

— so remember that spiritual reading is different from reading for knowledge or reading for facts so that you can present a good argument. It's really about being affected by something deeply. So just as you might read a poem or listen to some music and it really draws something out of you — you really feel it, great joy or sadness or whatever — so it is with these little phrases. So you can take some of these phrases, and if it strikes you, you just keep repeating it, repeating it, until you get that sense of digestion.

So even this whole idea of the tradition, do not go by oral tradition, lineage of teaching. And after you've understood it, just to keep repeating it. And it has an effect. It just has an effect by just keep repeating something in the heart towards yourself and you get this feeling of digestion like it's been — and then it becomes — you don't get anything more from it and when you go back to the text you might find it again has an inspirational effect on you and then finally it doesn't do anything at all because the effect has been is complete and there's no need to keep going over it.

I mean, on a slightly different note, one of the things that had an enormous effect on me when I look back at it was Beckett's play, Waiting for Godot. It really did something. And every time, for a while, every time I saw it, I would still get this feeling from it of this peculiar mixture of the complete senselessness of life and yet somehow the inherent humour of it. He has that quality about that particular play. But then, much later on, many years afterwards, I happened to see another production. I just saw it as a play. Beautifully acted and all that. But it had lost that zappiness. So whatever that play gave me at that spiritual level — spiritual meaning emotional, the whole thing — really had been absorbed. And I sometimes find that with poems, although some poems I read over and over again.

So, here's the Buddha telling us how to approach the Dhamma, basically. Don't do anything until you've proved it to be true for yourself. Then there's a whole section here, I won't go over it mostly, but I'll give you a hint of it, in which you have to investigate the teacher himself. So he's putting himself up for an investigation. And he addresses the monks, you see. A monk who is an inquirer, by the way, the word monk, remember, in all the scripture refers to all listeners. It would be better to translate it as listener. Anyway.

A monk who is an inquirer not knowing how to gauge another mind should make an investigation of the Tathagata in order to find out whether or not he's perfectly enlightened. So they should investigate me, that's what he's saying to them. And they of course say well, we're rooted in the blessed one, guided by the blessed one, we have the blessed one as our resort. So it'd be good if you could explain these things to us. And then he says, should investigate the Tathagata with respect to two kinds: states cogniz-

able by the eye and through the ear. In other words, what you see of a person and, although he's actually talking about himself, this in a sense is what we do with anybody, isn't it? You first of all see what they're doing and you hear what they're saying. So it's cognizable by the eye. So he's asking people to watch him to see how he behaves and to listen to what he's saying.

And in this way, they have to ask, is there any defilement there? Any defilement that's cognizable. In other words, is he, the Buddha, doing something which is immoral, unethical? Or is there not? Is there no state? Or is it more subtle? Is it mixed? Like sometimes he's the Buddha and sometimes he's not. He's doing naughty things without telling us, you see.

And then he talks about are there found in the Buddha or not cleansed states through the eye or through the ear. And these cleansed states cognizable through the eye, those are beautiful states, beautiful states of mind. Then he wants to know has he attained this wholesome state over a long time or did he attain it recently? And when he comes to know the venerable one has attained this wholesome state over a long time, then he has a deeper faith in that person.

And then he asks, he investigates him further thus. Has this venerable one acquired renowned and attained fame so that the dangers connected with renown and fame are not found in him? That's a common error isn't it, that people who become famous take on that sort of conceit or arrogance that comes with it? I'm not that famous yet so. How does a person bear their reputation really? Is the one restrained without fear or restrained by fear? Does he avoid indulging in sensual pleasures because he is without lust through the destruction of lust, or is he just doing it out of fear? So you've got to watch that as well. Is he putting it on, in other words?

And then he says whether the venerable one dwells in the *saṅgha* or alone while some that are well behaved and some are ill behaved and some there teach and some there teach a group while some here are seen concerned with material things and some are unsullied by material things still the venerable one does not despise anyone because of that. So in other words, although he's living with people with different virtues, he's impartial. He doesn't side with one or the other. That sort of impartiality.

And so, I am restrained without fear, not restrained by fear. And I avoid indulging in sensual pleasures because I am without lust through the destruction of lust. So these are signs of the Tathagata.

And then it's basically repeated because then he simply reinforces those positions that we talked about. And so, a disciple should approach the teacher who speaks in order to hear the Dhamma. And the teacher teaches him the Dhamma with its successively higher levels, with its successively more sublime levels, with its dark and bright counterparts. And as the teacher teaches the Dhamma to a monk in this way, through direct knowledge of a certain teaching, here in that Dhamma.

And when he comes to the conclusion about the teachings. He places confidence in the teacher thus. The blessed one is perfectly enlightened. The Dhamma is well proclaimed by the blessed one. And the *saṅgha* is practising in a good way. And then he repeats that in a slightly different way. As the blessed one taught the Dhamma to me in this way. Through direct knowledge of a certain teachings. Here in the Dhamma. I came to a conclusion about the teachings, I placed confidence in the teacher. And the Blessed One was perfectly enlightened.

So then finally, just to sum up the actual situation. And of course it is always, the proof is always in one's personal experience. When anyone's faith has been planted, rooted and established in the Tathagata, through these reasons, terms and phrases, his faith is said to be supported by reasons, rooted in vision, firm.

It is invincible by an ascetic or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world. That is how, monks, there is an investigation of the Tathagata in accordance with the *dhamma*, and that is how the Tathagata is well investigated in accordance with the *dhamma*.

So what he's saying here is that once we have that confidence in the teacher and we follow the teachings, then the description here is of one who has attained first path and fruit, is a noble person.

He's very much in line with our modern way of approaching things, not having blind faith and really questioning things, and always coming back to our own personal experiences. But even there there's danger, just because we've had an experience. It is of value to have it commented upon by somebody who you feel has the authority to do so. I don't mean in authority, I mean somebody who's an authority.

Very good. I can only hope that these scriptural readings and my commentary, shall we call it, have been of some use, may you by your practice and personal experience finally arrive at the gates of *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 103

An Attempt to Understand the Teaching of Anattā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 49 min

> *In this comprehensive dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma tackles one of Buddhism's most profound and challenging teachings: anattā (not-self). He begins by acknowledging the inherent limitations of language when pointing to truths beyond conceptual understanding, drawing parallels to describing colour to someone blind from birth. The talk establishes what the Buddha was actually refuting—not a psychological sense of self, but the notion of an eternal, unchanging soul (attā) that was prevalent in his time.*
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> *Using the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59)—the Buddha's second discourse to his five companions at Isipatana—as the foundation, Bhante Bodhidhamma systematically examines each of the five khandhas (aggregates): rūpa (form/body), vedanā (feeling), saññā (perception), saṅkhāra (volitional formations), and viññāṇa (consciousness/cognition). He explores how none of these can be considered self because they lack the defining qualities of an eternal soul: permanence, complete control, and inherent substantiality. The discourse reveals how our minimal control over body, feelings, perceptions, habits, and cognition demonstrates that these cannot be the eternal self we imagine.*
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> *The talk then offers practical meditation approaches for directly investigating anattā. Bhante Bodhidhamma describes how noting practice progressively pushes phenomena away from our sense of self—first bodily sensations, then emotions, then mental images and thoughts—until we arrive at the bare sense of being 'the observer.' He encourages practitioners to then investigate: what are the inner constituents of this observer? Drawing on the Udāna passages describing the 'unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned,' he points toward that which cannot be objectified yet makes all experience possible.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble, and fully self-enlightened.

Tonight I'm going to attempt the impossible and try to explain this whole doctrine of not-self. The Buddha is very clear that there are certain things where language cannot reach. When we're talking about something which is beyond phenomena, language simply won't do.

Consider, for instance, trying to describe the colour green to somebody who has been blind since birth. You talk about how it differs from red and grey and yellow, and then you give all sorts of imagery about green valleys and green trees and green leaves. In the end, the blind person has some idea that green is some sort of colour, but they won't be able to visualise it.

So we have to be very careful about conceptual ideas about not-self. Buddhism itself began to develop a very intricate metaphysical philosophy, begun by somebody who is recognized possibly as the greatest metaphysician in the world—Nagarjuna—who went on and on about emptiness, and then, because he was trying to get rid of the concept of emptiness, he talks about the emptiness of emptiness. That's exactly what language and concepts do: they fall into themselves. You're constantly trying to define what you mean.

With that in mind, we'll have a go at this not-self. Hopefully at the end of the talk, I'll give you an exercise whereby you can actually begin to experience it, some of which we've already discussed.

The next thing is to really understand what was meant by attā—an attā, not-self, attā. What was the attā? At the time of the Buddha there was considerable confusion about what this attā was. What they were taught is translated in the West as "not-self," which is unfortunate because the word we should use is "soul" or "spirit." That's what the Buddha is arguing about. He's arguing about something which people believed was eternal.

So how do you describe something which is eternal, doesn't die, is the unconditioned, is not born, not created? How do you describe something like that? Eventually, you can only describe it by what it isn't. The Buddha simply puts to the early disciples certain questions as to whether it is this or that.

Now, what would be the constituents of a soul, of an eternal soul? The first thing is it cannot change, because if it changes, it's something different—so it's not eternal. It's as simple as that. If you say, for instance, "I am happy," and the next minute you're sad, then where has your happiness gone? You can't be the happiness and the sadness at the same time. So we're talking about being. We're not talking about something becoming and changing. A quality of the soul or spirit is this quality of being unchanging.

The second thing is it cannot suffer, because it's in control of itself. It is itself, and therefore it can decide, as it were, that it's going to be happy or sad. If it didn't have that control, then it can't be "me." Parents have a certain control over their children, but they know full well that eventually they have no control. The control is simply a con-

tract between the child and the parent—it's something that's imagined between them. But ultimately, control is part and parcel of the definition of a soul or a self. If it's not in control of itself, then it means that it can be changed by circumstance.

So one thing the soul can do—this eternal soul—is make itself happy. It is in a state of happiness. Now we have to be careful how we define happiness. It's not an emotion, because emotions change. So we're talking about something which is a state beyond emotional states. We'll come to that in a bit.

The final thing is it has to have some sort of substantiality—it has to be real. Often you encounter words like "the real," "the ultimate," "the absolute" in all religions. So there has to be this quality of is-ness: it exists. This is defined as different from "becoming." If something is becoming, then it has stopped being something and becomes something else, so there can't be any change in that process. On the other hand, it has to be substantial.

Now the Buddha is saying, "Well, okay, so we have this definition," and he's just asking these questions. Remember, after he became fully liberated, he goes back to his companions who don't really want to talk to him because they think he's gone soft—that he's left the hard life. But as he approaches them, they see that something has changed about him. So, somewhat reluctantly I suppose, they offer him a seat. During the ensuing conversation he has with them, one of the little repetitions that he says is, "Have I ever spoken like this before? Have you ever heard me speak like this before?"

Now, the first discourse, as it's put, the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, is obviously a later creation, just laying the platform of his teaching. But it would have been in this conversational style. And in the second discourse, after they go off on an alms round and return to eat and rest, he gives them this second talk. This second talk is called the Anattalakkhana Sutta—the discourse on this characteristic of not-self.

In this discourse, we do get the sense of this conversational process, like the Socratic method you find in Plato. Not that I've read Plato, but that's what we mean by this Socratic method of questions and answers. So I'm going to use this discourse as a sort of basis.

By the way, these lovely little e-readers are actually wonderful—I've got a whole library in here. The discourse begins, as these discourses always do, with "Thus have I heard," because they were related after the Buddha's passing by his companion Ananda. So it's what Ananda heard: "On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Baranasi in the deer park at Isipatana."

This is where he went to find his former companions. If you take the mileage from Bodh Gaya, where he was enlightened, all the way to Varanasi on the Ganges, I remember it as being something like four hundred miles. So his decision to teach really meant that he was on the road. And he spent the rest of his life on the road, really.

"And there the Blessed One addressed the monks"—monks here means any listener, really. So they replied, "Venerable Sir." Now, form is non-self, not-self. The word form refers to our physicality. And the Buddha gives us a cross-section of the human being in time. If you were to stop time, freeze a human being at this moment, and try to describe what a psychophysical organism was, he put it in these five aggregates, these five heaps, because he wants to show where the problem lies.

The first heap is all this physicality. The second one is our feelings—all the feelings in the body, both those caused by the body itself and by the mind. The next one is all our perceptions, which includes both basic perceptions but grows into concepts. They grow into ways of looking at something. You might include in that our memory, but feeling also has memory too. Then there are volitional formations. These are our habits, and they are created by acts of will. And finally there are acts of cognition. All of this must be put on a screen for us to know. If it's not on a screen, we won't be able to see it. We don't see things when we fall asleep because the screen has sort of fallen. But there's still stuff coming in, and every so often you'll hear something tinkling and it'll wake up this act of cognition and you'll know it's time to get up.

So these are the five components as the Buddha saw it of the human being. Physical form is physicality, and all the rest is mentality: the feelings as we experience them in the body, all the perceptions that we have, which includes more detailed concepts in time, all the habits that we have—both good and bad—driven by and created by the will, and finally these acts of cognition.

I try not to use the word consciousness because it's being studied these days, and from a Buddhist point of view there's enormous confusion as to what consciousness is. Some philosophers and some scientists actually think that the content of consciousness is consciousness itself. Anyway, we don't want to get into that, so I shall leave that word aside.

Cognition is like a television screen. You've got all these—what is it that hits the TV? I've forgotten the word for it. You know, it's hitting the screen. What are those little subatomic particles that create the light? Electrons, isn't it? Anyway, the screen on the television manifests—it brings things into a form which you can see. Without that, the TV is useless. So that's the act of cognition. There's something in this brain-mind complex

which creates a picture for us. Those of you who've seen how the eye works when it looks at a picture—it's darting all over the place, completely unknown to us. What we see is the full picture.

But the eye is constantly moving, picking up little bits and bobs. Yet the mind is able to take all of that and present us with something that appears still. It gives us an impression of wholeness.

So when it comes to this not-self, this is what the Buddha says. He says that if form—the body—were self, this form would not lead to affliction. And it would be possible to determine the body: "Let my body be thus, let my body not be thus." But because the body is not self, is not the soul, is not in charge, this form leads to affliction. This body leads to affliction. And it is not possible to determine our form.

We have minimal control over the body. I can wave my arm around here while I'm speaking, but I can't stop it falling ill. I can't stop it getting older. And I can't stop it dropping dead. So this limited control I have over my body is a way of saying that whatever soul is, it is not the body.

Then there is feeling. When we discuss feeling from this point of view, we see that we don't have much control over it. When you put your foot on the ground, it feels. You can't say to your foot, "Don't feel the footstep." It will simply do it. We don't have that control. The same applies to emotions. If you get angry over something, you can't stop your body feeling hot. That's the way it reacts. If you feel happy, it feels light. So again, it's to do with looking at feelings and knowing that this can't be a soul. It can't be eternal.

Then perceptions. Perceptions are changing even more quickly because every time we look at something that we know, it's ever so slightly changed. Every time you look at a tree, it's always refining your idea of a tree. Every time you see a cat, it comes onto the concept of a cat so that you can recognise, "This is a cat." But by looking at that cat, your concept of a cat will slightly change. It's always changing. So perceptions, which are manifest in our words and images, are constantly in the process of renewal or forgetting. You forget things that you knew. So again, when it comes to control, our control is minimal.

Then we have these volitional formations—habits. These are created by acts of will. So often we have a habit that we might not want. Say, a smoker who doesn't want to smoke anymore. That's a habit, so they have to work against it. If they weren't able to

change the habit, then of course they would have no control whatsoever. But what we find is that habits have an inner strength in themselves. Trying to get rid of a habit takes time. And the kernel of it is always there.

So often you hear stories of people who have not smoked for years. And then they retire. And at a party, they think, "Oh well, I'll just take the one." And of course what they've done is kick-started this potential within them of enjoying a cigarette, of enjoying nicotine. And then they find it difficult to stop. So even though we've kicked a habit which we felt has dominated us for a while, the potential is always there, you see, as a little kernel, a little seed.

And then finally, these acts of cognition. Acts of cognition happen quite naturally. As soon as you place your eye on something, you see it. You can't not see it. As soon as a sound comes at your eardrum, you hear it. You can't not hear it.

You can't decide, "Well, I won't listen to that," because it's already happened.

So at this basic level of control, we find that if we define a soul—an eternal soul—as something which is in control of itself, then we discover that this psychophysical organism doesn't live up to it.

Then you get this question and answer exchange. Now the Buddha is going on to the quality of impermanence. He says, "What do you think? Is form—is the body—permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, venerable sir."

You're very good at these ones.

"Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?"

"Oh, suffering, sir."

"Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is myself'?"

So here we have three relationships. The first is something that I own. Now think about it—when you say "this is mine," what are we actually saying? When I hold up this e-reader, this Kindle, and say "this is mine"—and I'm very attached to it, by the way—what does that really mean? Somebody comes along, sees my Kindle, and decides they want it. So they take my Kindle. Now I go around saying, "Somebody stole my Kindle! Somebody's taken my Kindle!" But it's not mine, is it? It's the thief's. The thief's got it. It's his Kindle now.

So this "mine" business is just a legal fiction. It's just something we've made up in society concerning my-ness—"this is mine." What we come to understand is that when it comes to objects, you can only use them. As soon as you start possessing them, you end up suffering. There's always the potential for suffering.

Then there's "this I am." If you pose yourself this little sentence—"I am"—and finish it off, what do you get? "I am a nurse." "I am a teacher." "I am..." Is that permanent? This "I am" is always having to describe itself. It's always self-referential. If you say "I am happy," where does the "I" go when you're unhappy?

So this "I am" is always a definition. You always have to finish the sentence, and then you realise that this "I" is only a way of describing what is being done at any given moment. If you're teaching, yes—"I am teaching." But is there a teacher there? If the teacher is being created by the sense of "I," what's actually happening is simply the process of teaching.

And then finally, "my self" or "my soul." Remember, when we talk about self, we talk about soul—something eternal. So can we say that about the body? No. I hope you agree with me.

Then the Buddha goes on to the other aggregates. Feeling—is it permanent or impermanent? Perceptions—are they permanent or impermanent?

Our volitional formations, these habits that we have—are they permanent or impermanent? And these acts of cognition, are they permanent or impermanent?

The answer, of course, is they're all impermanent, venerable sir.

And is what is impermanent suffering or happiness? Well, it's unsatisfactory, isn't it? Now, why is it that these things are unsatisfactory? It's because we're searching always for that complete, utter happiness and contentment. It's within us to do that. As human beings, we find ourselves in a constant surge of trying to be happy, however you wish to define it. You might be happy with a lot of money, might be happy with a lot of friends—it doesn't matter how we define it, but we always want to be happy and contented.

But because as soon as we get something which we call happiness, and then we finally come to a point in our lives and say, "Oh, now I've got everything I wanted"—as soon as you've said that, it's gone. You want to stop the world. "Now I've got it." But the very grasping of that moment undermines its joy. "To kiss a joy as it flies is to live in eternity's sunrise," as Blake wrote. But we don't want to do that. We want to catch it.

So what is impermanence? Is suffering subject to change? Is what is impermanent and unsatisfactory and subject to change something we should regard as "this is mine"? Should I become attached to things when I know that there's potential for unsatisfactoriness there—sometimes great suffering?

This becomes very difficult when you start talking about relationships. How can you love without the attachment? "This I am"—see, a self-definition. As soon as you say that and it's undermined, then you're into some form of suffering. And "this is my self, this is my eternal soul"—well, that's difficult.

So then he tries to put all this together. Therefore, any kind of form—that's the body, remember—whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near. See, he's trying to cover all angles. All bodies, all physical natures should be seen as they really are with correct understanding: this is not mine, this is not me, this I am not, and this is not a soul or a self. And then of course he says the same of the other four heaps—the feelings, all the feelings that we have, all the perceptions, all the different habits that we collect, and our acts of cognition.

Then he says, when we see this, when we really grasp this, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with the body. Disenchanted. So what does enchantment mean, you see? It's being caught up in a dream, caught up in a fantasy. Disenchantment is simply breaking that fantasy, breaking the dream. Disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with habits and volitional formations, disenchanted with acts of cognition. And becoming disenchanted, one becomes dispassionate.

Now that sounds rather empty, doesn't it? What happens if you have no passion, no emotions? But remember, these are the emotions driven by wrong understanding. This is not the Buddha heart. The Buddha heart is full of love, compassion, sympathetic joy, peacefulness, and all the things that we cherish. What he's talking about here are all those mental states driven by this sense of self.

This self-view even corrupts things like love, because love slips into its near enemy of attachment. It corrupts compassion because compassion slips into its near enemy, its subtle enemy of grief. It corrupts joy into excitement, overexcitement. And equanimity slips into indifference. It's all done because we're not actually seeing things, in his terms, as they really are.

It's through this undermining of wrong relationship that finally somebody comes to be liberated. And then that person understands: destroyed is birth, the spiritual life has been lived, what had to be done has been done. There's a lovely sense of completion there. There is no more coming back into any state of becoming.

When the Buddha became fully liberated, he did not disappear. Nor did he become some amorphous blob by the side of the road with a sign saying "Liberated. Do not disturb." From other people's point of view, his personality was the same. He looked the same. Visually, from the outside, nothing had happened. But internally, something had changed. And what had changed was that sense of "me." So what the Buddha is talking about is the rebirthing of "me"—the rebirthing of a wrong sense of self. That's what disappears.

"Now when the Blessed One had spoken, elated, those monks delighted in the Buddha's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the monks of the group of five"—these were his five early companions—"were liberated from the taints through non-clinging." They were all liberated right then and there. Anybody here? No? Do ask around.

So we have here a very clear exposition. And none of it, you see, is philosophy. None of it is mere philosophy. You have to think about it. You have to experience it for yourself.

Now, the Buddha gives this description of not-self as a cross-section in time. If you were to take a human being in the present moment, you would end up with these five categories. But he also examines a human being as a process—what we call dependent origination. There isn't time to go into that deeply, but what he points out in this process is that the sense of "I" comes late. First, there is contact. Then, when there's contact with something, there arises a definition of it in terms of what the texts call its "hedonic value"—meaning whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. We decide whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, or some shade of that. Once that's decided, we form a relationship to it. We either want it or we don't want it. And it's only then that the sense of "I" comes.

So in our language, we say, "I will get this nice ice cream which I saw in the shop." Psychologically, what's happening is the other way around: ice cream in the shop, "like," "get," and then finally "I." The sense of "I" comes quite late in that process of recognising something and deciding to do something. So the "I" is not always there. But because the mind is moving at such terrific speed, we get this sense of a constant "me" throughout the entire process.

Neurobiologists have done tests showing that decisions are made before the person consciously knows them, and then the person, as it were, agrees to it—but actually believes they made that decision. In Buddhist terms, that's called the unaware life. Because one of the things we're doing on retreat is becoming aware of our intentions. When you're aware of your intentions, you re-empower yourself, you take control of your life, because then you actually decide. But when we're living at an automated level, we're just behaving habitually. And then we do this little trick where we think we've actually made the decision.

So you walk down the supermarket aisle with all these hundreds of biscuits, thinking you're going to have a real choice. But you end up buying the chocolate biscuits. And then you say to yourself, "Well, I decided to buy these chocolate biscuits." Phooey. What rubbish. It's only when you make the process conscious that you can then make an informed decision. That's dependent origination.

Now, how do we approach this? Let's take a more modern angle, in the sense of what happens to us from the point of being in the womb onwards. Somewhere in the womb, it seems as though we slowly become aware of what's around us.

We don't know it's around us. We feel it's in us. We feel it *is* us. But we can hear our mother's voice. We can sense her moods and so on. This is what they say.

Then we're born, and it would seem that for the first three or four months, we just live in this bath of stimulus, which has no depth to it. It's like a kaleidoscope. All we know is when it hurts and when it doesn't hurt. When it hurts, we scream. When it doesn't hurt, we feel okay.

Somewhere within that mass, it seems, after about three or four months, the first object looms out of it. And for the most part, of course, it's our mothers. So there's some separation going on. It would seem that when a baby is lunging out in the pram for its baubles and bangles, it's actually creating a three-dimensional world. It doesn't exist until they've actually created it.

Now, you can see that what the baby's doing is pushing the outside world outward from its sense of self. It does this because it doesn't have a conceptual idea of itself—it just experiences everything as itself. As it pushes everything out, somewhere along the line, probably at the point where it becomes self-aware—somewhere around about the age of one and a half, perhaps a little earlier—finally this little baby has pushed the world out and is becoming quite clear that the world is out there and "I" am in it. This is

me. And usually somewhere along the line, perhaps before three, the child knows they're a boy or a girl. They're quite clear about who and what they are and what they are not. "This is not me." They've got lots of "mine," but it's not me.

Now, in our meditation, that's all we're doing. We're taking that process inward to push away from this sense of self what we've always presumed to be me. As soon as a pain comes in the body, you see, normally speaking, a person might say, "Oh, I've got pain," and then take an aspirin or shake their leg about. But we don't do that. We sit with it. We observe it. And these noting words are very good at making it quite distinct. So I'm saying, "pain, pain." I can make it more obvious to myself by saying, "There's pain, there's pleasure, there's a sense of comfort." By doing that, I'm relocating my sense of self into that which is observing, which is feeling.

Now that's the easy one. It gets a little harder when it comes to emotions, because we identify with emotions in a more inward way. So I'm sitting here and somebody coughs just about when I was going to be fully liberated, and a great irritation arises. But I'm quick enough to sit there and observe this feeling of irritation. What have I done? I've pushed it away from my sense of me. I'm saying, "irritation, there, there." I hear a bird and the sound of the bird's voice raises joy in me. And I say, "joy, there's joy, there's joy." In so doing, I'm pushing away this sense of me within the joy, making joy an object. And this sense of me now relocates to that which is feeling and knowing.

When it comes to images in the mind—a big image, sometimes people get colours or strong images in the mind—you're there, you can see it.

You're looking at it. You can say "imagining, imagining." And in so doing, again, you've pushed out into an objective world—an inner objective world—what before you thought was "me." And again, the sense of identity falls back into the observer, the feeler, the knower.

To do that with thought, you've really got to be quite awake. But you can actually, with good concentration, with good attention, see a thought arising and passing away, like a neon light.

So then you're left now, within yourself, with a strong sense of "I am the observer, the feeler, the one who knows inside." And you've pushed everything else out, you see. So everything you've done unwittingly—you've actually said, "This is not me, this is not a soul, this is not self. It's not permanent," and so on and so forth. But the feeling of being the observer has a certain permanency about it. The feeling of being the observer has a certain steadiness about it.

So now, when you get to that point and you really have a clear feel of being the observer, when you come out of that state into reflection, ask yourself: what were the inner constituents of the observer?

When there's pain in the knee—I said this to the small group this morning—we might go into the pain and find that actually the noting word changes. It becomes "tight," "stinging," "a lot of heat," but we don't say "pain." When we come away from that position of observation deep within the pain and we return to the surface of that feeling, suddenly the word "pain" arises, and we know then that the word "pain" is a mental construct. It's not that we want to lose it. We want to know when there's pain in the body so we can go to the doctor. But we're not fooled by it. Pain doesn't exist as such. What exists are those feelings, those sensations.

When we come out of that sense of the observer, when it's very clear to us, we can stop and reflect on what were the inner qualities of the observer. That's the first little exercise you might do.

The second one is more meditative. When you get that sense of the observer—difficult to get it in a weekend, you understand—but when you get that sense of the observer, turn toward it. The feel of it. The sense of presence. That sense of presence is often thought by people to be their soul—a sense of presence, you see. But it's also an object. It can't be you. The feeling of self-awareness—you're aware of the feeling or the idea of self-awareness. So therefore, that can't be you either. It's very mysterious.

So what we do then is put the attention just on the feel, the sense of presence. And then at some point there may be some realisation, some understanding, that that which is looking is what we've been looking for. But we'll never be able to see it. That's the problem.

So in the Mahayana they talk about the eye. The eye can never see itself. The nose can't smell itself. The tongue cannot taste itself. If the basic taste of a tongue were curry, it would mess up the ice cream. It's the fact that it's empty, that it doesn't have any taste, that allows us to taste. It's the fact that the eye cannot see itself that allows it to see.

So we can only be—we can only experience—that within us which is not part of this phenomenal world.

Now we have the Buddha trying to explain this, a little more straightforwardly than I'm doing.

The teaching, the truth—connected to Nibbana. And to those who are receptive, those who have ears, let them hear.

"There is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned."

So there is. Now, the word he uses here is significant. There are two words for "is" in the Pali language. One is *hoti*, used as a connective—so if I say "this is a shrine," it's simply a connecting word. But *atthi*, the word he uses here, means "exists." There exists the not-born. And notice how he uses an adjective rather than a noun, so he doesn't concretize it. The unborn. An unbecome—something which isn't in a process of becoming, of changing. Unmade, uncreated. It was never created. It's not born, it's not created. And unconditioned—beyond conditioning. Conditioning only happens when there are two things present. Because I'm in this room, in this way, in this retreat, I'm being conditioned to sit in this manner. But this is something beyond all conditioning.

"If there were no unborn, no unbecome, no unmade or unconditioned, no escape could be discerned from what is born, from what does become, what is created and what is conditioned. But because there is—there exists—that which is not born, doesn't die, doesn't become, is not created and not conditioned, there is an escape to be discerned from what is born, become, made and conditioned."

That's pretty clear.

But there's another passage where he's even clearer, because he's asked by somebody: where is it that the four great elements come to an end completely? Now, the four great elements are earth, fire, water, and air. They're symbolic for pressure—gravity. Fire represents heat, energy. Water is that which congeals, elasticity, holds things together. And air represents movement. This is the way the mind experiences matter—not to be confused with some grand theory of physics. The Buddha's descriptions are always about the mind and the way it experiences the world.

So this questioner asks, where does the world come to an end? That's what he's really asking—where does the physical world cease? And the Buddha says the question is not put rightly. What you should be asking is: where does the world not find a footing?

And he comes out with a phrase which occurs only twice in all the scriptures: "There is a consciousness." Now again, we must be careful with this word consciousness. I would prefer "there is a knowing" or "there is an awareness." There's an awareness which is without boundary. Boundary is only created by phenomena. It's only because we have four walls here that this room has a boundary. So it's without boundary—there's no phenomena.

There's nothing there in that sense. Not coloured by any of the senses. So the senses in Buddhism are the five that we know, but also the mind as a sensing base, which includes our images and thoughts. So nothing is there that we would normally describe a human being by. And in all directions, full of light. And awakenedness. Just this is the end of suffering.

So now, our job is to find what that is. When we say find what that is, it means direct experience for ourselves. And the process is one of negation. Not me, not mine.

In your meditation sometimes you might sit down and say to yourself, "Well, in this particular practice—this quarter of an hour, an hour, whatever you want to take—I'm just going to point to things as they come up and say, 'There.'" So there's pain—there. There's comfort—there. There's joy—there. There's a thought—there, there, there, all the time. And when you get to that sense of self—there's a sense of self—there, there. Constantly pulling yourself out of this enmeshment, this enchantment with the psychophysical organism. And there is no doubt that within good time, insights will arise which will liberate us from our delusions.

So what is the delusion that the Buddha talks about? What is this essential delusion? It's a delusion about who we are. And the deeper process of our meditation, of our practice, is to find out what it is that we really are. To put it in a very positive way.

We've talked about these five khandhas. The body. Feelings. Khandhas here means aggregates, heaps—they're all different. The body. Sensations, feelings. Feelings in the body. Our perceptions and conceptions. All our habits that are made by will and therefore can be unmade—and this is where the suffering is. To distinguish between suffering and pain: pain in the knee is just pain. What we make of it is the suffering—our aversion and fear of it. And finally, acts of cognition. And each time he's asking: always, is this permanent? Can this be defined as a soul, an eternal soul?

And then he talks about impermanence. Because things are impermanent, they have an inbuilt suffering because they can't satisfy. And that's the meaning of dukkha. Dukkha is a core word in the Buddha's language. We translate it as unsatisfactoriness, as suffering, a sense of lack, a sense of incompleteness. It's always there, even though we might have ecstatic moments—it always passes. So there's always a sense of... And you know you can't get that again. It's a disaster, isn't it, when you have a great party and you say, "Let's have another one." But you just can't do that.

And then we talked about this more modern way of looking at how our sense of self retreats out of the world into a sense of me, the person. And how the meditation is just taking that inward. And eventually of course what we realise is that the outer world

and the inner world are all being manufactured by the mind. We live in this bubble of consciousness which we are actually manufacturing moment after moment. So in a sense, what we make of it is our own problem.

And then finally, statements which point to something in us which doesn't belong to this realm of phenomena, this realm of the sense world. And a couple of exercises which might take us there—that being able to label things, being able to point to things and say, "There, there it is." So you're always creating a distinction between the object and the one that knows. The one who knows.

And that other final thing: when we become very clear about the sense of the observer, as distinct from everything that's happening, the reflection afterwards—what's it made of? What was inside this observer?

Okay? I expect an answer by noon tomorrow. I'll give you marks.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your clarity and devotion to the practice, be liberated from all delusion and suffering—sooner rather than later.

You're supposed to say "sādhu." If you don't say that, I'll go away thinking it's been terrible.

CHAPTER 104

Talk to the European Teachers Meeting: How I Came to Establish a Non-Community

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25 min

> *In this candid and often humorous talk delivered at a European Teachers Meeting, Bhante Bodhidhamma shares the story of how he came to establish Satipañña, a small meditation center in Wales dedicated to intensive vipassanā practice in the Mahāsī Sayādaw tradition. Beginning with his return from Sri Lanka in 1998 and his time at the Sri Lankan Buddhist Vihāra in London, he recounts a series of well-intentioned blunders—from choosing the wrong location to distributing flyers without addresses or correct phone numbers—that led to what he calls an "unmitigated disaster."*
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> *The talk offers valuable reflections on two key decisions that shaped his teaching path: maintaining the traditional Burmese vipassanā practice as transmitted through the Mahāsī tradition without watering it down, and preserving the intensive retreat format despite its limited appeal. Bhante discusses the tension between making meditation accessible and maintaining the rigorous "blood, sweat, and tears" approach of traditional Eastern teachers, noting that his commitment to hardcore practice necessarily means a very small center taking only eight meditators at a time.*
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> *Beyond the entertaining narrative, this talk raises profound questions about community building, organic growth versus organized development, and the teacher's role in fostering saṅgha connections. The discussion that follows explores whether teachers should actively organize communities or simply teach the Dhamma and let practitioners organize themselves—a question relevant to anyone establishing or nurturing a meditation community in the contemporary Western context.*

I thought I would preface this talk by telling you that you're all going to be very disappointed. When Simon emailed me and said they'd like me to do a presentation on my community, I said I don't have a community. Then very foolishly I said I could tell him how to establish a non-community. This was way back, and I tested him a little bit before this conference. I asked if he really wanted me to talk about how I ended up in a place without a community. He said sure. So here I am, explaining how I got to a place without a community.

Now the question is, do you want me to carry on? Thank you.

What this is, really, is a story. So if you just sit back and enjoy a story, then it works. You don't expect to learn anything. Well, that's your story. This is my story.

In 1998, I returned from Sri Lanka not feeling very well, and I decided to spend the rest of the rainy season, which is our summertime, in a place full of good air and a lively and supportive atmosphere, which was London. I got a contract going with the chief monk at the Sri Lankan Buddhist Vihara in London. He very kindly gave me a room at the back end of the monastery where I could just carry on. By the end of that time, I hoped there would be some clarification as to whether I wanted to go back to the East or stay in the West.

Unfortunately, during that period the monk who was teaching meditation, a young Asian monk, decided upon receiving British nationality to leave and get married. Not an uncommon occurrence. They asked me to take over. I said I really didn't want to, and so on, but I had to. So I began teaching, and to my surprise, there was some growth in the audience.

By the end of a year or so, I had come to realize two things. First, I didn't want to go back to the East—my time there was over. Second, if I wanted to stay in the West, there was no way I would get the support I needed to live the life I wanted, which was a solitudinous life at the end of a valley. I would have to earn my living, and to do that, you have to teach.

So I reluctantly decided to teach and went off on a long retreat at one of my teacher's places, Sayadaw U Pandita's monastery—that's the Burmese connection. The meditation I teach is Burmese, the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition. I spent the season there.

Now, just before I left, the chief monk at the London Vihara died. Seemingly, along with his name, as I can't remember it now. He had got very upset with me before his death. I'll tell you why later. I wrote a letter explaining my position. When I got to the monastery in Burma, I began meditating, again in the very lugubrious and wonderful air of Rangoon. I asked people not to give me any letters or anything like that until the end of the retreat.

A letter was handed to me nonetheless. The abbot said, in so many words, that he was tremendously disgusted with me. When I came back, I could stay for two nights. That was it. I'm looking at this letter thinking I've been thrown out of house and home.

I got back, and of course I had a chat with him, and everything was reconciled. But I realized that I didn't have power over my own life, that he could just kick me out when he felt like it.

The reason he took that position was very simple. Can you imagine setting up a business and somebody comes along as a helper, or at least begins to help you, and on the quiet, without you really knowing, he's setting up his own business with your clients? This is what I was doing. I was setting up my own little sangha from the sangha that he had himself established at the Vihara. So he was very upset.

So I decided then to leave the Vihara. At that point, I had the help of a young Dutchman who was doing a PhD in London—Mattes, whom many of you know. This was a time when websites were just coming in, around 2000 or 2001. We set up a website and presented to people this vision: a Mahasi meditation centre right there in the middle of London, serving London, which would not only offer evening classes but the ability to do long retreats, just like in Rangoon. My little mantra was, "Where there's suffering, there's the end of it." And it was here, it was in London. So why go anywhere else?

We collected the money, and then there was a series of blunders which led to catastrophe.

The first was the question of where we would have this centre. We decided on the north of London because there were two Sri Lankan women who were great supporters and wanted us to go there. I didn't want to stay in the west of London because that would undermine the relationship I had with the abbot. So we moved to the north, into an area full of Greek Cypriots and Jews. There wasn't a single possibility of local people who would come to our meetings. That was the first blunder.

The second blunder concerned the opening ceremony. I realised I didn't want to disturb the neighbours. I knew that around thirty people would come from the west of London, but there was also a rather large local Sri Lankan community. So I decided to have two ceremonies: the first would be the opening ceremony to bless the property, and the second would be the blessing of a particular lovely statue that the abbot had given me for this centre. At the opening ceremony, all the English people came with lots of food; it was all very grand, very lovely. But when it came to the Sri Lankan ceremony, three people turned up. They were absolutely insulted that they hadn't been invited to the original opening. So I lost their support.

Then I announced that we would have classes and weekend retreats. But it takes two hours to travel from the west of London to the north. So nobody came. There I was in splendid isolation in the north of London, with twenty-five thousand pounds to spend and rent of twelve hundred pounds a month, stuck there on my own, thinking, "This is a catastrophe."

Then came the third blunder. I began to advertise in all the places around North London. I had two young men ready to cycle everywhere and put up little notices about meditation. I'd given all the information to someone who was quite capable on his computer, and he made this lovely sign—which I foolishly failed to check. After this wonderful spreading of all these notices, they gave me one, and I realised that it did not have an address, and the phone number was wrong. The first meeting on Monday, one person came: the next door neighbour. The second Monday, nobody.

I said to Mattes, "Look, September is when people organise their lives. They go to knitting clubs, violin lessons, whatever it is—they organise it in September for the autumn. If nothing happens by the end of this month, nothing is going to happen." By the end of the month, nothing had happened, and nothing was going to happen. So I said, "We're going to have to close this place down."

I must be thankful to the Sri Lankan community, because when I mentioned this to those two women, they really rallied the Sri Lankans to come and try to lift up this dying elephant. We'd already paid the rent, so there was no point in leaving immediately. Come winter, at least one part of the vision was realised: we had a retreat in that little house in the north of London for five of us. Through the Bodhisattva supermarket—Asda—we were able to get our food each week. We did what I thought was an excellent retreat: very quiet, very still. It was really quite wonderful.

But then, of course, came the realisation that I simply couldn't go on, that the whole thing had been an unmitigated disaster. Through the support of a close friend who had been on retreat with me, he got in contact with someone he knew—the Batchelors, whom some of you know, from Gaia House.

And it was just at that point that Gaia House found themselves short of a resident teacher. So I immediately accepted the offer and found myself invited to Gaia House—only to arrive and realise they didn't actually want me. I stayed there in this sort of limbo place for four years. After one year, it became clear there wasn't any future for me at Gaia House. For those of you who understand the metaphor, it was like being a Catholic priest amongst Quakers—complete utter nonsense. However, I have tremendous gratitude towards Gaia House. It's a really fabulous centre, and they allowed me to run these long meditation retreats—eight-week retreats which were well attended.

It was there, having realised I couldn't stay, that I began thinking about having another go at setting up a centre. Once burnt, well, you've got to burn yourself a bit more. So we set up a trust and off we went, and I almost made the same blunders again—were it not that we woke up at the right time. We found a place which, happily, some-

body took from us by bidding higher. That would have been a real blunder, frankly. Eventually we found a place on the border of England and Wales, fairly easily accessible, and that's where we established ourselves.

Now, two decisions I made during this whole period. First, I resolved to maintain the Buddha Dhamma as it was being transmitted to me from the Mahasi tradition especially, but also the Shwekyin—specifically meditation-wise through the Mahasi tradition. Not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, not to discard what's good about the tradition. To try and be a traditionalist without being conservative. So I maintained very simple forms: just taking refuges and precepts, really centering the whole place upon meditation. The effect, of course, is that it doesn't attract any Easterners, and therefore whatever support might have come from the East or from Easterners in Britain simply doesn't come.

The second decision was something I had to come to grips with when I went to Gaia House. What had happened to the Vipassana teachers—people like Christina Feldman and Christopher Titmuss and all those—was that they were trained like me, by Eastern teachers who really demanded blood. You were up at half past three: sit, walk, sit, walk, sit, walk, drop dead at ten o'clock. Back up again at half past three. It was really full-on. Over time—the years I was in Sri Lanka at the monastery—they had to come to grips with the reality that most people coming to meditate just couldn't handle that sort of form. So very slowly, the meditation being taught became, to put it in a bad way, watered down. Though I don't think that's fair. It's not watered down; it's simply presented in a way that's acceptable for people who aren't ready for this very hard practice. However, when I was there, it was quite obvious that a few people were ready for that sort of practice.

So that was my second decision: to maintain the heavy, hardcore practice of Vipassana meditation in the Mahasi tradition. But that necessarily meant a very small centre. I only take eight meditators, and I don't have a long waiting list. It is very small—this place in the middle of Wales with a very small intake—and a growing sense that these people are coming regularly. That's the other thing which surprises me: I have a return rate of something around seventy percent.

This is where I'm stuck at the moment, and this is where hopefully these talks about establishing community will be of help to me. I can feel that something needs to be done to help this disparate community connect with each other. They come from everywhere—all parts of England, sometimes from other parts of Europe. Having got to know each other through the meditation experience—because I always bring the meditation

down slowly at the end so there's plenty of time to talk and chat—some of them have made connections, made friendships, even visit each other. Somehow I need to let that grow, either organically or by doing something to aid the process.

In my experience, I began teaching weekend retreats, then realised people wanted week-longs. Just before going back, in 1999, I was offered a house in Yorkshire near Thirsk, very beautiful, where I ran my first ever ten-week-long retreat. To my surprise, thirty people came—not for the full time, but five or six actually stayed the full ten weeks. There was this constant feeling of feeding back into the people who were working with me the opportunity to work longer, deeper and deeper and deeper.

It seems to me now that I'm at this place where unless something happens to connect these people, to create what Vajratara has so eloquently explained—unless I do that, something's going to give. It will either begin to evaporate or it will grow.

That's my story. So any of you who can help me in this little dilemma, I'll be very grateful. I'm sorry I haven't been able to say anything about creating community.

I really appreciate your story. I love stories. Thank you. I can identify with a lot of it. And my question is the same—can anyone give me any advice?

I don't know what it is, but it does seem to be something to do with the right people coming together at the right time. It goes, or sometimes it's just not the time. It evaporates. It's not actually a component you can control. That's the way it is. At least I can say that Satipaññā has been a flash in the phenomenal universe.

Somebody told me there is a lack of places in Europe where one can do longer vipassana retreats, so I would encourage you to go on.

I just wondered whether you'd challenge the idea that you seem to have—that it's you who needs to do something.

Oh, well, no, that's what I meant: whether to let it grow organically, whether to see what happens, rather than me all the time. Up until now, it's been me, me, me.

I'm struck by what Vangitara said about the importance of giving young people the initiative—in other words, the autonomy. If you as a teacher can teach, and the people who gather around you want to gather themselves into a sangha and see the advantage of that, you might help them see the advantage of it. But then you could leave them to do what they want to do in the way that they want to do it.

Very dangerous.

Can I just add that I don't get anybody young. They're all over thirty-five. Or even worse.

I'd just like to make a comment about what strikes me—how much joy was triggered through your story here. How much laughing is coming around from somebody talking seemingly about one's own failures.

Yes. Schadenfreude. British humour. Terrible.

I was going to ask you, because you said to me earlier that you didn't have anyone living with you—what about the opportunities for people who might want to live that lifestyle with you?

Well, that's one of my problems. It's too small. When I've got the extra rooms put up, that would really leave me with about twelve maximum. And a lot of it's to do with the size of the septic tank.

I would say that something to be done about your situation is perfect. It's perfect. Get a small septic tank which gives the upper limit of what's possible. Let all the rest just happen. Just let people organise themselves.

I am at a similar point in my process—up in the mountains in a forest, a three-room apartment. Why should I organise the sangha? Why not let the sangha organise itself? Our task is just to give the Dharma, and then what? Let them organise. We can encourage them to organise themselves. We are there; let them do it. No need for bigger septic tanks. That is saving.

Thank you very much. If you ever have to find a source of funding, you can do it as a stand-up comedian.

CHAPTER 105

Happiness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h00

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines what the Buddha meant by happiness and well-being, contrasting it with our ordinary understanding of pleasure-seeking. He explores how attachment (taṇhā) to sensual pleasures, relationships, and experiences creates a cycle of craving, fear, and suffering. The talk addresses the Buddha's negative expressions for Nibbāna (such as adukkha - non-suffering) and explains why liberation involves the elimination of greed, hatred, and delusion rather than the destruction of joy itself.*
>
> *Bhante discusses the four foundations of well-being - safety, health, mental happiness, and contentment - while showing how our misconceptions about happiness lead to acquisitiveness, aggression, and fear. He demonstrates how true spiritual practice involves attending to negative mental states with awareness rather than suppression, allowing the mind to naturally purify itself. The talk concludes with practical guidance on approaching experiences without expectation, distinguishing between enjoying and indulging, and cultivating the brahmavihāras (love, compassion, sympathetic joy) as natural expressions of wisdom. A handout on well-being across physical, material, social, and spiritual dimensions accompanies this teaching.*

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I thought I would just center on happiness. I was watching a talk, I'll probably put it in one of my e-reminders, about mindfulness. And the amount of literature on mindfulness over the past three to five years has zoomed. It's, I believe, well, it says that editors tell writers in self-help psychology areas to make sure they put mindfulness in the title and the other thing is happiness. So we've now got gross national happiness and you'll see books appearing just on happiness. There was a whole issue of Resurgence on happiness, well they termed it well-being, which is a term I prefer. So I just thought to center on what the Buddha means by happiness.

And the handout you've got is for your reflection tomorrow, not particularly now. And this word happiness, by the way, comes from an old English word, hap, which means lucky, luck. So you get things like to happen, that was later developed, and then happenstance, which normally has a good meaning to it, happenstance. So that happi-

ness comes from an idea of luck in a way, which is strange. And we don't use it like that now. But if we try to define what we mean by happiness and just clarify that, then it'll help us really in our practice.

So the first thing is, is happiness essential pleasure per se, just by itself? Would that bring happiness as such? I don't think we normally associate sense pleasure as happiness. We associate what happens when we have sense pleasure, the mental states that arise, but we tend to see there's something separate from the word happiness, I think anyway.

And if you think about happiness as an emotion, happiness. So when are you happy? When are you feeling happy? About a couple of minutes a day, is it? So if somebody said to you, are you happy? It's a difficult one, isn't it? It's very rare that you would have such an intensity of emotion as happiness. And it might shade into excitement.

Or perhaps happiness refers to a mood, an underlying mood, but then moods also are not stable, they don't hang around all that long. So this word happiness has a few meanings and if somebody says happy do they mean your general disposition to life, are you happy? So people, I often get the question, people come and they look around this place and look at me and say are you happy? And I sometimes say, well, not right now. Because it depends what you mean by happiness. So I tend to prefer the word well-being. But even that has limitations.

But if we go through what we mean by well-being. So our blessings, when we do the *metta* sutta, our blessings are: May you be safe. That's pretty basic, isn't it? You want to be safe from physical danger, safe from financial collapse. There's a connection with the world we're living in, the society we're living in, the state of the world, which creates a sense of safety. I would have thought that's basic to happiness, basic to a sense of well-being.

So, for instance, if people get very much involved in this climate change business, there's an underlying anxiety, frustration, despair about the situation, which would feed through to all the rest of their lives, wouldn't it? And it's there within us all, that sense of danger.

And then there's health, of course. The state of your body can undermine your general state of well-being. It might be just something simple. Just having a bad flu. Would you ask somebody who's got a really bad flu, do you feel happy? Are you happy? Have you got well-being? And then there's chronic illness, of course. You've got a chronic illness. That can be undermining to a sense of well-being. And if you're told you've got so

long to live, see these people that were mentioned earlier, so one person there, six months, would you still have a sense of well-being? Would you still be happy about that? So, the sense of happiness, well-being.

And then may you be safe, may you be well, may you be happy. So that also comes into our blessings. May you be happy. That's also here referring to a mental state. And the last one is ease of living. I've translated that as being content with the way things are. Content with the way things are. And live in harmony. So even if things aren't going so bad, we're at least working with it, and we're seeing potential, we're seeing an end to the problem, which can lift the heart. If we resign ourselves in that bad sense to something, then you tend to begin to despair, not feel so good. Well-being goes out the window.

But to try to just go on a different tack, what the Buddha constantly goes on about is this attachment, *tanha*. He has a special word for it. It refers to that relationship we have to things for the purpose of seeking happiness, that's basically it. So you could say from the wisdom point of view there's a misconception, a misunderstanding which is about who we are. So that misunderstanding basically is I am a human being. I am a human being. And finding ourselves with this definition, I am this person, I am this human being.

We then, from the heart's point of view, we're trying to seek happiness. So we seek happiness as a human being in the human world. And that leads us to this connection with pleasure. Connection with, not just simple pleasures, eating, sex, drugs, and rock and roll, that sort of stuff, but art, nature, relationships, anything to do that brings that combination of pleasure and happiness that we can generate, that we can experience through this psychophysical organism.

But immediately we're in a relationship with the world on this misunderstanding that the world can somehow, if we engineer it correctly, if we move around it properly, we can somehow find happiness. So from that you have these basic relationship. The first one is whatever is making you happy you want to acquire. You want to acquire more of, you want to sustain it. And when that moves into a relationship, whatever it is, even with objects, you're moving into an ethical situation, so ethics in its broadest sense is about relationship.

So if I acquire something then I have a relationship to it. So if it's an object, a certain dependency, our computer is just messing up so there's fear, despair, anger, the whole lot, it all comes up when the computer doesn't work. So we have this relationship both

myself and Martin with this machine. Now if I have it with a machine that doesn't particularly affect the machine as such, I mean the machine doesn't know I have this relationship with it.

But with a person it's slightly different because with a person if I have an attachment it means I'm demanding of that person that they make me happy, and that tends to take away their humanity, their individual personhood, because you're only looking at them from a particular point of getting them to make you happy. So they become an object. I mean all our relationships are a mixture of that, they're a mixture of true love, a true connection with the person, but also a certain often unspoken, covert demand.

This comes out in silly things like you buy them a great big lump of special cheese for Christmas, they don't send you anything, that's very upsetting. That you're expecting your usual piece of goat's cheese. It just didn't arrive. So you've got this relationship with people, you see. Part of it is from this misconception about people making you happy. The computer makes me happy. Things make me happy. People make me happy. And then there's all the other areas of art and nature.

So you might have looked on the weather forecast and it says it is going to be good tomorrow, and so you prepare to go out and enjoy nature, and it turns out to be cloudy and horrible. That's terrible, isn't it? That's profoundly upsetting and despairing. And of course we live in a country where you can't judge what's going to happen, which is really good for spiritual practice. I mean Sri Lanka, it just gets hot, and you can expect it to remain like that.

So, this relationship of acquisitiveness, right? When we are actually enjoying it, see, remember, when we're actually enjoying something, that is *nibbana*, by which I mean perfect happiness. I mean, when you are completely lost, for instance, in a DVD or in a bit of food, when you lose that sense of self-awareness, when you become, in that total way, what it is you're experiencing, see?

Remember, every time self-awareness comes up, there's always a break. That's another consciousness. The consciousness is watching you, watching the DVD. You're watching yourself eating. Even if it's a break, you see, there's still not that absorption. While we are absorbed, in the boiled sweet, while we are absorbed in it, as far as we're concerned in that moment, it becomes timeless, doesn't it? There's no self there. So, in the scriptures, the Buddha goes through these various levels of *nibbana*, you see. But he says it's not very good because it doesn't last. You know, the boiled sweet comes to an end. Then despair arises. Unless you can find another one. See? And that's what happens, isn't it? You get this dependency, right? This addiction. Addiction.

This constant having to re-perform in order to get the same bliss and of course there's an inbuilt obsolescence to pleasure isn't there because the same one won't work so you've got to try a different flavour. So you've got this constant chasing. I think in drug circles they call it chasing the dragon. So you're constantly chasing this dragon, trying to get the same high that you had before. So there's your addiction, you see.

Then, of course, if you don't get it, if you can't get your boiled sweets, then you tend to feel frustrated, and you write your MP, things like that. You get very angry. If you've just laid out on a whole bag of special boiled sweets, gobstoppers, if you've got a whole bag of gobstoppers and you leave them on the train or the bus, boy that's very upsetting isn't it? I mean there's sorrow there, there's deep grief. So when you lose something which has given you a lot of pleasure then there's grief.

And then of course while you're carrying your bag of gobstoppers, you're always aware that they might go. So there's an underlying anxiety of loss. I was in India once and I bought a bag of peanuts. And I was walking away really enjoying these roasted peanuts. Suddenly there was a slap on the top of my head. Real shock. And it went. Just like that, just disappeared. Cheeky monkey. Came out of nowhere. It just landed on me and stole my flip.

And then, of course, there's boredom. Boredom. So I like to point out that in an obvious sense, greed is the engine of the consumer society. Everybody wants more, more, more. In fact, more is no longer an adjective, is it? It's a noun. You say to somebody, what do you want? They say, more. That's enough. Just more.

But the underlying driving force, the subconscious driving force, subliminal driving force, is boredom, isn't it? So boredom is that state of negativity, a state of, it's not a very nice place to be bored. So as soon as you're bored, you're looking for distractions, you're looking for something to do to get you out of this boredom and in so doing you again try to repeat the same old process of getting pleasure, getting happiness somewhere.

So these underlying, these post-traumatic stress that you get from indulgence, yeah, so whenever we indulge it's fine. But it's the aftermath where we realize the pain is actually causing it. So there's the compulsive nature, the addiction to it, the frustration when you don't get it, sorrow when you lose it, fear of loss, insurance policies, and boredom. To mention only five, there's probably others.

Now if you take that up from gobstoppers to people, then you can see there's a lot of suffering, isn't there? Our attachment to people, the sense of pleasure we get in it, the sense of joy and happiness. So this whole idea of happiness is a bit strange, isn't it?

Now when the Buddha was asked, used to be accused rather, of annihilation, because he prefers to talk in the negative. So when he talks about Nibbāna for instance, this is a real Nibbāna, he prefers not to use the word *sukha* which means happiness. He simply refers to it as *adukkha* which means non-suffering. So he's pointing to something which is beyond our normal experience.

Now this acquisitiveness, remember it's formed, we formed a relationship with the world of hoping that it brings to us certain circumstances, certain ways in which we can be happy. Unfortunately because of the acquisitiveness we're now in a sense of guarding it because of fear of loss. So the other side of fear is always aggression. So aggression arises naturally, there's a potential of aggression which is commensurate to the amount of acquisitiveness.

So if for instance you are afraid of losing things, of your house being burgled, you see, then you buy two great big Rottweilers. And you train them to bite people and kill them. Because you don't want your TV and your super-duper computers stolen. You're prepared to have people's limbs ripped off their bodies to safeguard your particular property. I say this because just up the road, if you ever take a walk, you'll come across two rather nasty Alsatians.

So you're in immediate sense of guarding, guarding, keeping hold of against others who may want what you have. So aggression arises naturally out of acquisitiveness. And if the enemy is bigger than you then you've got to collect all your stuff and run for it. So there's the fright, there's the fear. The two sides of aggression, the two sides of aversion is fear and aggression, fear and anger, fear and hatred.

Now those three attitudes are the basic relationship we have to our life, to what we experience, because of this essential delusion. So greed, hatred, greed, fear, acquisitiveness, fear, hatred, anger, those are deep dispositions and they're there to maintain our happiness, to maintain our happiness. And once we begin to see the falseness of that then of course we begin to generate a different relationship to the world.

So now, the Buddha was accused, because of his negative way of expressing things, the unborn, the undying, of being an annihilationist, an annihilationist. And he was at pains to say that he wasn't. He said the only things that are annihilated through the process of liberation, process of enlightenment, is this greed, hatred and fear, and the delusion of course, the underlying delusion. So his whole practice you might say is about undermining that relationship, that wrong relationship that's from the heart's point of view. From an intellectual or from a wisdom point of view it's undermining a wrong understanding, a wrong perception. We've conceived something wrongly, see.

Now remember that we're moving towards this liberation, we're moving in our own pace and our way towards this enlightenment, this awakening. Now this awakening can't be manufactured because it doesn't come, according to the Buddha, from the world. It exists before the world began. What he means by the world beginning is being born every moment into this particular world. The world as far as we're concerned is the world we experience. That doesn't deny other worlds. It's just that the only world that we know or can know is the one we're actually experiencing.

Well this is the world right now as far as we're concerned. And he says it's in this world that there is the end of suffering. In this world. The world that we're experiencing. So it's this business of turning that investigation inward to ourselves to find out where the mistake is being made and to see that this mistake is creating some wrong relationship.

So when he talks about *nibbana* which is the highest happiness, right, yeah, he talks about it as the highest happiness, he goes through these various stages. So he says, is the highest happiness sensual pleasures? Is it all to do with the world as we experience it? So he doesn't deny there's happiness in it. He just denies it's the highest happiness. And then he goes through all these ecstasies, these inner ecstasies, the *jhanic*, the absorption states that we can achieve. And each one he asks, he says, this is *nibbana*, but it's not the highest *nibbana*. And then finally he gets to...

a place of non-contact with the world you might say and he says this is the highest Nibbāna. So now this generates a lot of argument in Theravāda circles and sometimes between Theravāda and the other schools. I think there's enough evidence in the scriptures that Nibbāna is a real experience. It's not a darkness. It's not a sort of annihilation. The Buddha wasn't walking around 45 years not knowing what he was doing. He wasn't asleep or something. He wasn't in this nirvanic bliss. He was right here and now and communicating and everything else. And he enjoyed life. It's not as though he didn't enjoy life.

So when he talks about what is annihilated, it's only this greed, hatred and delusion. It's only this wrong understanding and the relationship that comes of it. So there's no way that in this life we can escape from unfortunate things. There's no way we can escape from just the basic stuff of falling sick and growing old and dying. There's no way we can escape from relationships that go wrong. There's no way we can escape from having to work and all that. So it's not an escape. He's not asking us to find an escape from these things.

Now you might say, well what about you monks and nuns? You escape. Nip off somewhere and live in these caves. Just come out and get your grub and then go back. Well of course the holy life can be abused. It can be abused. But basically, of course, a monastery, if it's really working well, a monastic center or a meditation center, if it's really working well, is a hospital. It's a spiritual hospital. It's where you come to have a look at your diseases, your spiritual diseases, and try and sort it out. With the intention, at least in Buddhist understanding, for the benefit of others. That's the Bodhisattva ideal.

So recognizing that the pleasures of life and the joys that life give us are not reliable from the heart's point of view, they're not reliable from the wisdom point of view, they're impermanent, it's accepting that. So when we really accept that there's nothing in the world that we can rely on for happiness and there's nothing in the world which is sustainable, then the attitude has to change, doesn't it? You've got to actually, when happiness arises, there's not that clinging to it, there's not that trying to hold on to it, but just accepting it as something which will arise and pass away.

So if we can develop that attitude to the joys and pleasures of life, then we shouldn't have this aftermath, we shouldn't be feeling sorrow when it goes. We shouldn't be feeling frustration when it's not there, fear of loss - all that should begin to lessen as we just accept each moment as it comes to us. This is it, now it's gone. This is the way it is. If we find a little phrase which captures for us just the way it is - this is the way it is - and just drive it home that it passes, now first you can get a negativity about it. I remember once saying to my teacher what a wonderful sunset that was, and he said ah yes but it passed away. And my thoughts inside were what the bloody hell is he there for? I know it passed away. He just tried to destroy my happiness, you see.

But it's that quiet self-reminder, how things pass away, that allows us to re-establish a moment-to-moment wise relationship with the pleasures and joys of life. So that's the one side of it. The one side of it is to continuously see this relationship of attachment. Remember, you can't get rid of it. You can't say, well, from now on, I'm not going to be attached to coffee. I'm not going to be attached to cigarettes, if you smoke. You can't just say it. You've got to go through the pain of letting go. And that's mainly what stops us from doing it.

So now we've fasted or we've eaten very simply. I mean, nobody's dead. Nobody's lost enough weight to be rushed off to hospital. It's setting ourselves little tasks where we actually face the attachment we have. So now you can do it gently. When something comes up and you enjoy it, to remind yourself now it's gone and just to feel whatever's

arising. You can't stop it. If you suppress those feelings, if you suppress the nostalgia, you want more of it, if you suppress the frustration of not having enough, then of course that all feeds back into the psyche and it just creates more problems.

So for instance after a meal, just to sit there for a moment and just catch what comes up. And it's seeing what comes up actually relates to how we've related to that meal. So if after your meal you sit there and you feel gratified - now be careful of that because that gratification may be to do with feeding the pleasure to a point where it is gratified. Now that gratification feels very close to contentment. That's the problem. Because at that moment you might say, I feel really contented now. But that gratification has within itself the seed of furthermore. All we've done is satisfied a desire to the point where it's now feeling okay, and then a little bit further down the line it pops up again. So to distinguish between gratification and contentment.

So how are we going to undermine this whole process of attachment? As often as we can, it's the intention with which you enter into an experience which is going to determine what you develop. So when we come to a meal, what's your intention? We haven't read it today, but tomorrow we'll read this thing, and it's just there to nourish the body. The fact that it tastes nice is to be taken as something extra. And we're not eating it in order to be happy. We're eating it in order to maintain health, the nourishment of the body. That's a very different attitude.

Now, when you put the food on your tongue, of course it tastes nice. And with that nice taste there arises a certain contentment in the heart. It doesn't always have to be - you can have a nice taste and feel terrible. So it doesn't always have to affect the mind in a very direct way like that. But let's say that for the most part, at least for the purpose of this talk, you put something pleasant on your tongue, a piece of pizza, and the heart goes bright. So that's a given. That hasn't to be destroyed. We haven't got to take that away. That comes up naturally because that's our physical nature.

So it's the same with friendship. It may be that certain friendships, certain relationships, intimate relationships, relationships of parents to children and all that - there's a natural beautiful joy that arises from those relationships. But there's always that underlying business of this person is here to make me happy, and that's the corruption. So how do you overcome that? It's by opening up, by always reminding ourselves to open up to the other person. It's being open to the other person and seeing their desire for relationship and there's that communication. Whereas if you move towards a person with these often unnoticed desires, then it comes out in the way we speak and the way we act.

And you can always tell when attachment has slipped into a relationship because if the other person doesn't respond in the way you want them to, then that's when you feel these things. You feel the frustration with them, you feel a bit angry with them, you feel disappointed with them. Then you might feel afraid that they might not want to be your friend anymore. Terrible. So all these things, all these negative states often show us that there's something underneath the apparent friendship.

Let's take a very regular mistake I think that people make. And that's to do with the loss, the loss of friendship or at a more extreme sense, death. So you lose somebody, they die. Now, the grief we feel - the grief we feel, as opposed to sorrow, I'll come back to it in a minute - the grief we feel is actually a measure of our attachment. The pain that it leaves in the heart is the measure of them disappearing. It's that ripping out of the heart. They're gone. And we're left with memories. They're like ghosts within us. Whenever I, for instance, remember my mother, she's stuck in time. I remember this particular phase, this particular time. And every time she comes up, there's a certain generation of the relationship I had with her.

If I go back to all these people or some who have left me, they're like ghosts within me, aren't they? And I've got this continuing relationship which is frozen in time. It's not being fed again by the reality of this person. And that grief is a measure of that relationship. And of course, normally speaking, if we do it properly and we recognize that, then the grief dies away. And what's left is a sense of gratitude for that relationship. Even if the relationship was terrible, it was horrible, there's still an ending of that process of the pain that's with it, and just an acceptance and maybe some learning about what one's personal relationship was, what one was doing in order for that relationship to be so painful. But it's never just the one, is it? We like to think that. I think it's all you. I like to think it's all you. But that tends to be very delusive.

So we've got this teaching from the Buddha that everything, that our relationship to life is an ethical relationship. And this ethical relationship, if we get it right, will naturally produce all the opposite to that acquisitiveness and the hatred and the aggressiveness and all that and the fear. And the opposites will begin to appear. So now we have always these beautiful states - the love, the compassion. So again, compassion not to be confused with grief. Compassion isn't feeling sorry for somebody. Compassion is wanting to help. And what naturally arises is a beautiful, happy state of mind because you're helping somebody, haven't you?

Sympathetic joy, to be able to really feel happy because somebody else is happy. And these are resonances, human resonances that come to us. We do it easily with nature. So you might wake up on a beautiful morning and hear the birds and you resonate with

their little chirpings and it's all very lovely and beautiful. So it's not as though the Buddha is saying that we have to let go of these things and then there comes this arid desert-like state where there's no suffering but it's actually dead. No, the mind and heart actually begin to produce quite naturally these very beautiful states of mind which through certain exercises you can extend. You can actually develop them within you even more and more, and there's no limit to that. There's no perceivable limit to how much you can develop the quality of love. It's just not perceivable. That's why they call them illimitable. There's no perceivable limit to our compassion or to our sympathetic joy.

So the spiritual life or the life according to the Buddha is really this whole business of trying to get this relationship right. And the relationship itself, once you start working on the negativity of the relationship, the positive sides arise naturally. You don't have to work at it. As we begin to lessen our selfishness, generosity arises naturally. As we begin to lessen all the angers and hatreds and petty frustrations and all that, love arises naturally. As we begin to lessen all our little back-bitings and cruelties and knife-in-the-back stuff, compassion arises naturally. Cruelty to compassion, hatred to love, selfishness to generosity.

But you can take any of the painful traits in our lives - loneliness. Well, normally speaking, what's loneliness? It's a feeling of not being loved or not being loved enough, not being accepted, being separate, being isolated, being on your own, not being able to communicate. I mean, you sit there saying, and then you start saying, I'm a horrible person, which you might be, of course, but you can change.

So you've got this. Now, when you allow loneliness to express itself and you sit within that loneliness - that's what the Buddha is asking us to do. He says, you can't push these things away. You can't destroy them. You have to attend to them. So all this negativity, whatever it is, you attend to it. That's the attention. So that word attend suggests not just the looking, not just the observing, not just the investigation, but a heart's relationship to it, an attention to it in that kindly way, as a nurse or somebody nursing might have towards a patient.

And what happens is, this is what we experience in our meditation, that these things simply arise into consciousness and begin to evaporate. Begin to evaporate. So once we take away our definitions of these things as solid states, as blocks, as emotional states - see that word state - but see it more as just a turbulence, just shades of different turbulences, clouds, cumulus clouds, all those other clouds just passing through the mind like weather systems. And we're just watching it and feeling it and allowing these things to

arise and pass away. The system itself, I mean, that's the amazing thing about this teaching. The system itself purifies itself. You don't have to do anything. The heart itself purifies itself.

As soon as you get in there, there's always a danger that you're doing something just slightly off. You're developing love in order not to look at the hatred you have. And then it becomes like two different mindsets. You've got all this turbulence of hatred and on the top you're laying this ice cream of love. And it's just a case of recognizing that the negativity within us has to be released. It has to be allowed to express itself. And that is done through the *vipassanā*.

The insight is to see it's not me. That's the deep insight, that as soon as you experience an emotion as an object, as something you are experiencing, this you being the observer, the feeler, immediately you've pulled out of it, you're no longer it. The identity is broken. And therefore, in that position, if you look at it carefully, there is no suffering. Even though you might be in a deep depression or a great anxiety or there's stuff coming up, if you can pull out of it to the position of the observer - ask yourself, is the observer, the feeler, the knower, is that actually suffering?

And when you turn on the investigation, it becomes something you're investigating, as a scientist might investigate pollution. It's just mental pollution. So there's no suffering in the knower. As soon as the identity forms, as soon as you fall into that relationship of ownership, identity, suffering arises. So when we chant in the morning, this dependent origination, he lays it out very clearly. With that desire there comes the grasping. The grasping is the identity. And then as soon as that happens, some action is performed, either indulging it or pushing it away or doing something. And there's your act. These actions produce a certain conditioning and there you've got your compulsive behavior.

So now when it comes to the way the Buddha describes his own life, at that point of liberation he's discovered a completely different level of consciousness. Now this word consciousness is used these days in so many different ways that it's very difficult to really use it. The best word I ever came across to try and get this across is knowing. Even the knowing isn't quite right. It's just knowing.

So we have this facility in English, these verbal nouns, gerundum or gerund, which gives you a dualistic understanding that it is something but it's a process. It's also something which is nothing because it's always in a process. So this knowing is telling us that it has this facility, this ability to understand. And that's the Buddha, that's the Buddha

within us. And once he'd achieved that, once that became completely separated from the psychophysical organism, and he re-entered into it, he was living in a completely different world.

So this completely different world, remember, is not the outer world, it's the world that he's manufacturing. And from that point onwards, suffering doesn't arise. It's not possible for it to arise because the relationship's not there for it to arise. So this suffering is something that is simply coming out of a relationship.

That doesn't mean to say he didn't have physical pain. We know he had physical pain. I mean, he said to Ānanda to take over the talk because his back was hurting. See? I feel good. My back hurts. You know, like the Buddha. This is my big connection to the Buddha, bad back.

So if we can understand that, you see, at least intellectually, then we take it into our practice. So right here, now, while we're sitting, some unpleasant thing arises. Just by getting that attitude of investigating it, of finding that position other to it, of turning it into an object to be investigated, we're not suffering. And then when it comes to the pleasant part to do exactly the same so when pleasant stuff comes up to enjoy it but not to indulge it.

Now that's really difficult for us because the distinction between indulging and enjoying they are up against each other. You know, when you don't like something because it pushes it away from you as an object you know when aversion arises. It's very difficult to know when the indulgence slips in. See?

So that's why when something pleasant comes up in your meditation, you see, just for a moment, just reflect, you see. This is beautiful. This is lovely. I'll just be with it and enjoy its characteristics. That's all. So that means that when the sitting finishes, you don't come back into your next sitting thinking that it's going to rise again because it never does anyway unless you're an adept at these absorptions. So you don't get disappointed, you don't expect it.

So when it comes again, oh, very nice. So if we can take that same understanding into daily life, you see, so something beautiful happens and it disappears. Something beautiful happens and it disappears. So you don't expect anything. So expectation is always going to put a pressure on life which is going to undermine the full potential of happiness.

So now there, there we come back to a real sort of deeper understanding as to what perception is doing, what concepts are doing. So remember, you know, just take an example of food. Remember, whenever you see food, unless you've never seen it before,

you've got a concept about it. So you've got, you're looking at an apple. Now there is already an expectation of what this apple ought to taste like. It's just there. Because we've had so much experience with apples. As soon as you say apple, there comes this idea of what a good apple is.

So as soon as you taste this apple, it's always in comparison with past apples. So your direct relationship to that apple as it is, is distorted. You won't actually taste certain things because you don't want to taste them. Or you immediately have a negative attitude towards the apple. Can you imagine that? Then really negative towards an apple. Because this is not the apple you expected.

It often happens, for instance, with pears. So the pear looks absolutely beautiful, but it's not matured. And you sink your teeth into it, and it's got no taste whatsoever. It's got the slightest taste, and you can hear the mind saying, "God damn it, we should have waited. This is a waste of a pear." See, two, three days on, it would be absolutely luscious.

So it's when we understand that the concepts we have, the expectations we have are always messing around with the direct experience of things. So if we can approach an apple as if we'd never eaten an apple before, that apple would be fine unless it's obviously rotten. The apple's fine. It's just as it is.

How do we do that, you see? We do that by driving ourselves to the sense base. If we're right there with the tongue, that's what we'll taste. We'll taste the apple. But if we're there at the level of concept, we'll only allow the tongue to give us the taste that we will allow it to give us.

It's the same when you, you know, culture-wise, you know, these days we're much more multicultural. But there was a time when, you know, Chinese music just didn't make sense. It was awful. You'll still get Italians who won't eat anything else but spaghetti. They're not open to things. It's getting better, by the way. I know there's some Chinese shops, but I haven't seen many curries. But that's by the by.

So it's a case of recognizing, just realizing that to go beyond our concepts, to go beyond our history, which is always impinging on the present, you have to drive your attention to the actual experience that's happening.

So it's the same with people, isn't it? When you meet somebody, there's already this expectation of the person. You've built up an inner image, an inner concept of the person. And therefore, when this person does something which is out of the ordinary, whether it's beautiful or not, there can be a tendency to feel that they're not playing their role again. I mean, this happens most distinctly, say, in a partnership or a mar-

riage where, I mean, this happens, for heaven's sake, where somebody gets involved in meditation. You know, and there's a whole war coming out because this isn't the person I married. You know, this isn't the person that I formed a relationship with. Because you've defined that person in the way that pleases you from the history. So when that person changes too much, you just, you know, it's like that's just unacceptable.

So it's always a case of understanding that when we're practicing *vipassanā* we're actually practicing how to live. There's no distinction to be made between the mindfulness that's in the sitting and the mindfulness in the ordinary day of life. It is to be there with what's happening in that very open, spacious way and to be aware of any judging that we're putting on a situation. Remember all these things have always got, you know, little underlying aspects. I mean it's not as though you want to stop judging; you want to know it's judging. I mean if you know somebody's as rotten as they come you don't want to lose that. It's just that you don't want it to impinge upon your direct experience of them because there's always a chance that they might change.

But if you're always going to go to them knowing in your heart of hearts that they're as rotten as they come, it stops any possibility of change between you and that person. And if you go to the person with always the idea that they are truly a wonderful person and they do something that's horrible, that's the end of the friendship because it's broken your idea of them.

So it's a case of recognizing that this whole business of the delusion, the delusion of who we actually are and why we're actually here and to see how it affects our lives in terms of just that relationship of always holding on to acquiring, maintaining, and then the opposite of pushing anything away, either aggressively or running for it, that seems to undermine these little islands of joy and peace that we manufacture, that we actually try very hard to create for ourselves.

So this little handout, if you just have a quick look at it, I've tried to give some indications for tomorrow. This isn't particularly the rest of the day. This is just for tomorrow. If you want to do some reflection, you see. So you see, you saw another year. Again, make revolutions once more. So you've got this achievable revolution.

So these are four areas, you know. And any comment on this little pamphlet would be greatly appreciated. So physical well-being. So if you look down there, you see. So eating. That means basic stuff. Eating, sleeping, exercise, health issues. So what's your relationship to all that? How can you make it even better? What mistakes are we making?

Then material well-being. So this is all to do with wages, consumer items, cost of living, ease of living, unemployment. What's your relationship to your work? Actually, I'll put that in the next one. But it's just material well-being. You see, how much of our happiness is based on wealth? You know, on being able to take a plane and go on holiday somewhere whenever we feel like. How much of it is based on that? Or a car, see? A car gives you mobility, doesn't it? You just jump in a car and go somewhere. Remember Spike Milligan? He said, "They say that money can't make you happy. But I just want to have a try."

Then there's social well-being, which is a huge area. It has to do with all our relationships and the wider family, friends, workmates. And work itself. What's our relationship to work? Even if the work is not what we want to do, even if the work isn't what we want to do, can we form a relationship with it which is at least meaningful, spiritually meaningful? Civic responsibility, see? How seriously do we take that? That means, you know, things like voting and local issues and stuff like that. It's not that we have to do these things; it's just a case of in what way do they impinge upon our well-being. Would we feel better to get more involved? Would that make us actually feel better in ourselves? Charity work. Do we do any? See? And leisure. So leisure here I'm putting things like art and walking in the country. Anything that doesn't fit into the other categories.

And then finally there's spiritual well-being. So this is again ethics. So remember the Buddha's teaching is all about ethics. Ethics in the widest sense of that meaning of relationship. You can boil all his teachings in terms of the life we live, down to ethics. Even closing a fridge door is an ethical problem. Are we closing it with complete disregard for the door? Disregard for the actual machine which is banging it to. How do we open a door? It goes down to the actual minuscule.

And then there's just lifestyle of a spiritual voice. That includes everything, your lifestyle. And then finally, your spiritual practice.

So in the morning, when I point to all these people at this present time who are suffering, you know, from sickness and wars and all that, see, the last one is who find life meaningless. That's pretty despairing, isn't it? If you feel that fundamentally your life has no meaning, that's a sort of despair, isn't it?

Now what the Buddha says is that the meaning of this life is to discover this perfect place, this perfect happiness. This is what he calls *Nibbāna*. He talks about it as an *āyatana*, as a sphere of experience, which is completely separate from the moon, the sun, from going here, there, standing still, from all the senses. It's an actual experience.

He's pointing to that as something which makes sense of everything. It's not just a final place in itself; it makes sense of the whole of our lives. It's the discovery of our Buddha nature, for want of a better word.

So we should enter the new year with hope in our hearts. This is with great hope and great effort. You see, and if you want you can join in then you see this little ceremony on New Year's Day. So it's a case of putting your resolutions on a bit of paper and we shall take them up and put them in a little container which I've yet to find and we shall offer them as a burnt offering to the Buddha. And then we shall take our resolutions, sorry, all the things that, all our, yes, that's right, and then we shall transform that into action, into an attitude, you see, by chanting at the statue of Kuan Yin. It should be great fun.

So I think that's it. I've been on a bit. I can only hope my words have been of assistance. May you by your continuous effort liberate yourselves from all suffering and find true happiness and well-being and of course the final joy of *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 106

The Body and the Discourse on How to Establish Right Awareness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

> *In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma illuminates why the body holds such a crucial place in the Buddha's teachings on liberation from suffering. Drawing extensively from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he traces the Buddha's own spiritual journey—from his identity crisis as a young man, through his experiments with jhāna practice and asceticism, to his transformative insight under the Bodhi tree. The Buddha's breakthrough came when he shifted from seeking happiness to investigating the cause of dukkha itself.*
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> *Bhante explains how the discourse on establishing mindfulness, delivered to ordinary laypeople in Kuru, offers a direct path to liberation through investigating our embodied experience. He systematically covers the body contemplations: mindfulness of breathing as a gateway to experiencing impermanence and not-self; awareness in all postures and activities; contemplation of the body's thirty-two parts to transform our relationship with physicality; the four elements (earth, water, fire, air) as the mind's basic mode of perceiving matter; and the nine charnel ground contemplations for overcoming fear of death.*
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> *Throughout, Bhante emphasizes that these practices serve not to create morbid fascination but to undermine our wrong relationship with the body—the assumption that it is permanent, satisfying, and truly 'me' or 'mine.' When we accept impermanence and lack of control, anxiety dissolves and we live more fully in the present. He stresses balancing these contemplations with loving-kindness and gratitude toward the body, noting how both approaches together lead to complete liberation.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully Self-Enlightened One.

What I hope to do tonight is explain the importance of the body in the Buddhist teaching and put it in the context of the different exercises that we're doing. The idea of this particular course was to give various exercises to show the extent of Buddhist practice.

Most people who come into at least this school just want the meditation, the vipassana, and that's fine. Most people these days want to collect their own little spiritual portfolio—a little bit of this, a little bit of that—and gather their own direction in the

spiritual life. So these exercises may be of use to you in the long term, but at least you know of them. We've done the body exercise about how to develop a good attitude towards the body, but also how to undermine a certain wrong relationship to the body. This morning we did the metta, which is about developing the heart. We didn't do the forgiveness, which I'll do tomorrow, which is the other side of it. And of course we did vipassana, and part of that vipassana practice was also recognizing that you have to establish a sort of basic platform, which includes these qualities of not just an awakenedness and awareness but this attitude of wanting to know, this curiosity, based on equanimity.

This is a very important attitude. In fact, you could say it's the greatest virtue in the Buddha's teachings because what equanimity does is put you in a position of openness and not let you get caught up in things. When we talk about the virtues of love and compassion, equanimity stops you from slipping into the error of attachment and grief. In terms of insight, it stops you from only seeing what you want to see from your own conceptual ideas of what there is. In a sense, you have to drop all that. You have to drop history, basically.

Tonight I just wanted to center on this business of the body, but looking at it also from the Buddha's own particular teaching around suffering.

A potted history of the Buddha's own life: something happened in his twenties, mid-twenties, which we would call an identity crisis. It comes out in a little story about him going out on his hunting trips and coming across these four figures—a very sick person, a very elderly person, a corpse, and then an ascetic sitting under a tree. These are now known as the messengers from the gods that awoke him into his path. Basically it was him coming to terms with the fact that youth was disappearing and ahead of him looked pretty miserable.

In those days, the idea of rebirth—not quite the same as reincarnation, but the idea of an ongoing process—was looked upon as horrific. Everybody was trying to get out of that. Life wasn't so easy, especially depending on which caste you were born in, although the castes at that time weren't so set; you could move. But the idea that you'd have to come back and do the same thing over and over again without any escape presented those times with their real existential suffering. How do you get out of that?

There were various teachers at that time. Some of them were just basic materialists. There wasn't such a thing as rebirth. You basically died and that was the end of that. Their idea was you got the best out of life that you could, mainly through the sensual delights of life, and then you disappeared.

There were others who had the idea, very close to our Western idea of a soul or self, of something everlasting. For instance, a contemporary teacher of the Buddha was the Jain founder, the Nigantha. They seem to have had a very concrete idea of what karma was—the consequence of your ethical actions. It was almost something material that got stuck on the soul. The idea was that you went through mortification exercises so that this stuff fell off and then the soul could rise to a different place. Their understanding was that whatever you did, whether you meant it or not, if it wasn't good, you got the karmic result. That's why you see Jain monks going around sweeping the floor in front of them. If they stand on an ant, whether they meant to or not is immaterial. They've killed that life and therefore there's a consequence.

So there was that teaching of self-mortification, of letting go of the appetite to the body, mainly around sex but also around food. The Buddha seems to have practiced this for quite some years, to the point where he said he could hold his spine through his stomach. That's a bit extreme. At some point he gave up on that. Somehow it didn't answer his question.

Having left his lay life where he was married—and as the story goes, he'd just had a child born, a little boy—he was a member of the ruling caste. His father was a local headman, you could say, and they all came under the local king in Kosala. This was also a new development at the time, a movement away from pastoral communities that lived in little groups to a more centralized form of government under a monarch. It was creating all sorts of psychological problems and wars and disputes. A new class began to arise, the merchant class. For us it's hardly turbulent, but for them it was terribly turbulent—a change in their society that created a certain dislocation, a certain feeling of alienation perhaps. So lots of men, mainly, left to live this life of the samana, the wandering ascetics.

When the Buddha leaves home, the first thing he does is go to particular teachers who are going to teach him how to create happiness. And that's through these jhanic states, the absorption states. All religions have this. Just by saying a mantra or a prayer with intent, slowly but surely the heart lifts and you enter into your own internal space, which can be ecstatic, peaceful, calm.

So when we're doing the metta this morning, just by getting to that point of repeating, "may all beings be happy, may all beings be happy," very slowly you begin to lift yourself.

The problem with that was that when he came out of that mental state, he was back to being depressed and anxious, Siddhartha Gautama. So it didn't really answer his question, even though his teachers thought him to be adept enough to actually take on the teaching. Then he tries these mortification exercises and he leaves that too because he just feels he's getting nowhere with it.

So at that point he's in a state of desperation, can we say. He's in a state of despair because he's searched for what the society has to give him and nothing's come of it. So we can only presume that he's in this position of despair. And so the story goes—I'm presuming one or two of you haven't heard these little stories.

There's a woman called Sujata who comes along, which means "well-born." She is carrying some rice pudding, or rice cakes—I prefer to think of it as rice pudding—to the local god, to make an offering. Seeing this poor wretch, she thinks, well, he probably needs it more than the god. So he partakes of this, he starts eating this rice pudding, and it sort of revives him. Well, you know the power of rice pudding.

At this point, he remembers something from childhood, and this is really a core point in his progress. He remembers watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. Now, he's as concentrated as a little child—we can think of him somewhere between six and nine, that sort of age, probably below seven. He's concentrating on his father, so his level of concentration is acute, and he's really interested. He wants to know what his dad's doing. And he realizes that there's a quality in that which is different from all the stuff he's been practicing before. Before, he's been trying to get happiness, trying to attain happiness. What this insight into this child does is turn the process around for him to ask, "Well, what's the cause of suffering in the first place?"

It's with that sort of inspiration that he goes and sits under what we call the Bodhi tree, a religious fig tree. So he goes there with a completely different intent. Now the intent isn't "How am I going to make myself happy?" but "How do I create suffering? And who creates the suffering? And why do I create the suffering?"

He determines—it's called the great determination—not to rise from the tree until he's cracked it, or he drops dead. Well, as you know, lucky for him and lucky for us too, he sort of cracks the problem. And he realizes that the problem of suffering is, first of all, at a psychological level that we call desire—it's actually a bad translation, "desire," but we'll come to that in a minute—and at a deeper level, something goes wrong: a mistaken identity as to who we are or what we are.

So one of the core words in the teaching is this word dukkha, which simply means "hard to bear," but it encaptures all what we would call suffering—from the deepest angst and horror and despair to the silliest of irritations and thirsts. It's a whole gamut of human suffering. Dukkha: hard to bear.

And he makes a distinction between that dukkha and the suffering that comes from the body, which is natural to the body. So the first type of suffering is called dukkha-dukkhata, in other words, the suffering of suffering. What he's asking us to do is to separate out the physical pain which comes from the body itself from how we make a problem of it, how we turn it into some real heavy suffering. So that's your first premise.

And when he's pushed—when he's pushed to, you know, "What does he teach?"—because he won't go anywhere near metaphysics, right? There's no God, there's no reason why we suffer in any ultimate sense, there's no reason for us being here. He doesn't enter into any of those metaphysical areas, simply because you can't prove it. He doesn't want to get into arguments. In those days, one of the big entertainments was to turn up at a park on the full moon where all these ascetics would come and have a real old ding-dong battle as to who was right and who was wrong. So he wouldn't enter into those sorts of discussions.

He constantly drew his whole teaching down to what in the Pāli language—that's the language he spoke—is just three words: dukkha, dukkha nirodha, which translates as unsatisfactoriness, suffering, and the end of it. That's all he's concerned with. Of course, it's in that investigation that you come to realize that in fact there's more to us than what actually meets the eye.

So this suffering is caused by this desire. Now, when he talks about desire—and we're going to go into it more deeply during the week—he's really talking about forming a relationship of psychological dependency, so that our happiness is dependent on something. And when it's like that, what happens is when that which you're dependent on disappears, then you know suffering. On the side of suffering itself, if we presume the body will always be healthy, when it falls ill, then there's a lot of suffering.

So a lot of our exercises, a lot of the exercises that he gives, are just a constant reminder of the way things really are—which undermines at least the strength of suffering that can happen when somebody goes, when somebody's taken by surprise, when somebody's in a state of shock.

I don't know whether you know the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross? It's a book called *Death and Dying*, and she's one of the early investigators into what happens psychologically when you die. She was a doctor and spent her time in hospices. When you're told that you've only got six weeks, you can imagine it is a bit of a shock. And that shock, you see—I mean, why is it there? Everybody knows they're going to die. Everybody knows that everything dies in the end. But somehow, when we're told that it's our turn, it's a real thump, you see. And more so when we've never considered it.

So the Buddha talks about four types of people. There are those who wake up to the reality of life when they hear even somebody hardly famous has died. Then there are those who wake up when somebody famous dies. There are those who don't wake up until somebody close to them dies. And then there's the unfortunate who don't wake up until it's their turn to die.

So you don't want to get to the point where you're in a state of terminal shock when the doctor says you've got so long to live. Part of the Buddha's teaching is to bring us always down to this real base. Now, when you come down to this base, as you approach it like this, you think, "Well, that's really gloomy. I mean, what do I want to think about death and dying all the time?" But what it does is it takes away the fear, it takes away the anxiety. And in so doing, you live more fully in the present moment. That's what it does.

Remember that a lot of our actions are an escape from suffering. So as soon as boredom comes, you're looking for something else to do.

As soon as some pain comes, you're looking to get rid of it. There's always this flight from suffering, always a flight from what is painful, a flight from death, you see. So it's always behind you. And it's only when you bring it in front of you and accept it as it is that all that anxiety and fear and rush and bother begins to disappear, begins to fade away. And that means that all your energy now is in being in the present moment and living fully. That's the consequence of these sorts of contemplations.

So what I'd like to do is go through the importance of that in the Buddha's discourse on how to establish this mindfulness. This particular discourse was delivered to people called the Kurus, in Kurusa Dhamma, which is seemingly close to modern Delhi. The important thing about this discourse, which is considered the jewel of the collection—and there are about sixteen collections of these—is that here the Buddha encapsulates all his teachings, his practical teachings on how to become liberated from suffering.

What's important for people to understand is that this was delivered to ordinary people in a small town. Most of these discourses are delivered to monks, because that's who he's talking to most of the time. As he's traveling around and staying here and there, he's giving talks and having discussions with kings and local people. He'd obviously been to this place and returned to find that they were actually following his teachings. He says there was no idle talk, no gossip. So he really sits down and tries to give them this teaching.

It's called the direct path. The two-way path is to develop this very strong concentration, which we call samatha. That can take time—you've got to take time off work, and you've got to sit there and develop it. When it's developed, then you would turn that very clear concentration onto investigating. But in this discourse, he points out that that's not actually necessary. What is necessary is to get these qualities, these factors of enlightenment, and simply begin to investigate things as we experience them.

The first part concerns the body. Actually, excuse me—the first part is how he abides. He abides with his body upright and his awareness set in front of him. The Buddha is very clear about the importance of posture, and there are other scriptures, other discourses in which that's gone into in more detail.

The first thing is that the body itself is an expression of your attitude and your state of mind. That's pretty obvious, really. When you see people in the street looking miserable, they don't walk around as though they're in charge of the world—they're all crunched up and bent over. As soon as you straighten the body up, as soon as you lift the spine, you're drawing energy up the body. This energy that's coming up is the same as the chi or the ki. As soon as you sit up and lift up the top of the head, there's not only the physical energy of keeping your body upright—there is this mental energy coming up. When that mental energy comes up, it will begin to shake those parts of the body that are holding turbulence, those little pockets of turbulence being held there. That's where you get this physical pain coming through the body.

So posture is really of importance, and the part of the posture that's important is the spine. It doesn't really matter what you do with your legs—you can take them off if you want! It's a case of actually lifting up to the top of the head and maintaining that posture. In your meditation, if you find yourself crunching in onto yourself, you just stop and say, "lifting, lifting," and bring yourself back up.

And he talks about putting away covetousness and grief for the world. In other words, when you sit in meditation, you're putting aside all your desires about life and what you want and all your plans, and you're putting aside all your griefs. You're trying to bring yourself into the present moment, not allowing the past or the future to cramp

this present moment as it is. We do that by simply stopping the thought, and the thought stops when you give the mind something else to think. That's the purpose of these noting words. I think last night I pointed up there to the teacher, the Mahasi, and the curtain was over it. I presume you could imagine him. Anyway, that's the Mahasi—Mahasi Sayadaw.

So here a meditator goes—obviously we're talking about a different time—to a forest, the root of a tree, an empty hut. He sits down having folded his legs crosswise, sets the body erect, and establishes mindfulness before him. Ever mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out. The first point is to get in touch with the actual feeling of the breath. The meditator knows the breath is long or the breath is short. It's a getting in touch with the body, getting in touch with feeling caused by the body, sensations caused by the body.

Then once that's established: breathing in, experiencing the whole body; breathing out, experiencing the whole body. What's meant there is that by this time, as you settle in on the breath, you're staying with the whole flow of the breath. Your mind's not coming off it. Don't be disappointed if the mind keeps wandering away, because that's the practice. You wake up, you know what it's doing, you come back to the breath. This process of settling on the breath is bringing about that silence in the mind, silence in the mind, calmness of the heart. You've got to start somewhere, and the breath helps you to do that.

Sometimes you have to spend just a bit of time allowing the breath to silence the mind, allowing the breath to calm the heart. If you try to stop thinking, try to stop feeling agitated, then you're in conflict with your mind, in conflict with your heart. And that produces even more turbulence. So it's a case of being very calm, very peaceful, just allowing things to happen no matter how long it takes.

When your mind is fairly steady on the breath, you train it to be like that. You train it in order to tranquilize—it's translated as the bodily formation—to tranquilize. As you breathe out, you tranquilize the body formation. In other words, you're just getting calmer, getting calmer.

The important thing to recognize here is that the body affects the mind. We know that if you feel ill, you feel down, you feel depressed about it. And if your body feels good, it tends to lift you up. That's why you go for a run and feel good about it. So it's a case of recognizing that the breath, which is something happening automatically, has the power of bringing the mind to silence and the heart to calmness. It all rests upon the body being still.

There's the complete silence, you might say—the stillness of the body, calmness of the heart, silence of the mind. Just because you've gathered that within the beginnings of your meditation doesn't mean it's going to stay there. So every time you get lost within your sitting, you always begin again. Just begin again.

You might find that a little disappointing, because I think we come to meditation thinking, "Well, I'm doing everything right, so the mind should stop." But when you think that—from the time you wake up in your ordinary daily life to the time you fall asleep—does the mind ever stop? In fact, have you experienced the mind not thinking, a state of no thought? When you come and sit in a meditation center thinking, "Well, now I'm just going to sit in complete silence," it just doesn't happen. So part of the training, part of the process, the work you might say, is to allow these things to happen. Remember, you're not trying to make the mind be silent. You're not trying to make the heart be calm. You're just using an object, a neutral object—the rising and falling of the breath—to bring about those qualities, just because the breath itself is calming. As the calming comes, the breath gets finer and finer, and that's a sign to you that the concentration is growing. The breath gets finer, more shallow.

It's not just that the body offers us this quality of suffering, this quality of unsatisfaction, this quality of pain. The body offers us pain so that we can investigate what our relationship is to pain—which is the real suffering. It also offers us a deeper insight into this quality of impermanence. What we all want is something that's permanent and completely reliable. So all the Buddha is saying is: well, where is it? Where is this permanency? Where is it in this phenomenal world that you're going to find something reliable? Here you have the breath, you see.

Now, if the breath were to stop, then I presume we'd panic. But we presume it's going to keep going. What we have to recognize is that every breath is a new breath. It's not the same old breath repeating itself. This is a completely new moment, and this brings us into an understanding that every moment is arising and passing away, arising and passing away. When we see that in the breath, we discover something profound.

When something arises, we often attach the word "new" to it. With that word comes this lovely feeling—something new, a new song, a new product, a new iPad. The word "new" tends to be good. You don't usually use it when something's awful. You don't say it's a "new" revolution in the Arab country.

As the breath starts, it's the coming into life, the movement up. It brings you up, then it stops—there's a moment when it stops—and then it comes down, and then it finishes. Rising, falling. Rising, falling. Birth and death. It's actually contacting you with some-

thing very obvious about life, but something that in our deepest recesses we don't fully accept. We don't fully accept that actually this "me" that I talk about is arising and passing away.

My sense of me is virtually continuous from the time I get up. If you ask yourself, "Do I have a sense of me, of me-ness?"—it's always there, isn't it? That never disappears, does it? There's always me thinking, when I become aware of me, that is. It never disappears, and it always seems to be static, always seems to be immovable, always seems to be above what I'm actually experiencing. By seeing this impermanence, we're actually asking: well, how permanent is that sense of me?

One of the benefits of seeing impermanence and unreliability is that you become much more easy about letting things go, much more easy about just allowing things to happen. Let it go, and then the next moment arises. There's always going to be another moment, another moment.

The final thing is this business of not-self. In watching the breath, especially as something automatic, we begin to realize it doesn't need me. The body breathes. The body breathes, and that's when you begin to look into the body and find that what we actually know of it is very superficial. For instance—I'm told, I've never experienced it—the marrow of our bones is actually manufacturing red blood corpuscles. These corpuscles are passing through the bone into the blood. Has anybody actually experienced that?

When you breathe, they tell us that carbon dioxide is taken out and oxygen is taken in. Have you ever experienced that? You experience the breath, but you haven't a clue what's going on with the body. There are trillions of cells—it's amazing when you look into these biology books—trillions of cells, and they're all reproducing themselves. And I have nothing to do with it. Nothing to do with it at all. There's a whole business going on of purifying the blood through the kidneys, and it's just not under my control. I haven't a clue what my liver is doing. But I do know when it hurts. And my brain—looking at brain science, it's just fascinating what we've come to learn about the brain, and the fact that our moods can be moved around by different chemicals.

When you look into your body like that, you get the feeling that you're an alien within this frame. It's a bit like driving a car. When you're absorbed in the driving, when you are just driving, you become the car. You and the car are one. Then of course it breaks down, and suddenly the car is something else, and you realize you're not the car—you're in the car, but you're not the car. It's the same with this body. There's something in the body, but it isn't the body at all, because it doesn't have this control.

So there's the Buddha's explanation of trying to define the self: if it was really me, I would be in complete control of the body. If it was me. But because it's not me, I find I'm not in control. The more I get into that, the more frightening it can be actually—especially when I realize I don't have any control at all over the aging process and over dying. We don't know the hour of the day, unless of course I take my own life.

Watching the breath as an automatic thing, as something happening by itself, watching it appearing and disappearing, watching my relationship to it, finding it boring—that whole process of liberating ourselves from this dukkha, from this existential suffering, it can all be done just watching the breath. That's how powerful that practice is, once you turn the investigative eye upon it.

Now, that's not the only thing he suggests. All this can be done in the four classic postures of sitting, walking, lying down, and standing. It doesn't matter where you are—you can always do this practice.

But now we've got this business of mindfulness. In the Pali language, there's only one word: sati. That's why I call this place Satipaññā, because that's the Buddha mind—intuitive awareness, or awareness and intuitive intelligence. Even though we think it's two things, being aware and having this intuitive faculty, actually they're two sides of the same coin. We get it in a phrase such as "first you look, and then you see." The awareness is the absorption, the openness; and the intelligence is the understanding.

So "in full awareness" here—it's been retranslated as if he was talking to monastics—but when flexing and extending limbs, he acts in full awareness. When wearing his robes—in other words, when putting on or taking off clothes—in full awareness. When eating, full awareness. When drinking, consuming food and tasting, full awareness. When defecating and urinating—instead of reading a magazine.

He's supposed to be aware of everything. And one of the things that Brian was pointing out was this business of gratitude. Have you ever thanked your bowels for getting rid of that stuff? That's your relationship to your bowel. Instead of saying something absolutely awfully disgusting, you have to thank them and say, "Thank you so much for getting rid of all that stuff." Same with your bladder. "Thank you so much for getting rid of that stuff." So you're actually creating a well-being towards the body by simply activating that attitude of gratefulness, thankfulness.

And he has this full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, and waking up. If you go to sleep with a firm determination to that awareness, awareness sparks awake upon the arising out of sleep. You might even catch whether you wake up on the in-breath or the out-breath. Have a go. And aware when talking and keeping si-

lent. So awareness is just that sense of presence with whatever you're doing. Awareness can only be in the present moment, so it's always being with exactly what you're doing. Whatever your body is doing, your mind is there. And if your mind is doing, you're there with the mind. The mind is never allowed to wander and just go off on its own little trips.

Now, the other thing we did was the foulness of the body parts. This is right here in the foundations of mindfulness. The Buddha has a huge list of things we're meant to contemplate. Not only simple things like hairs on the head and hairs on the body, but skin, bone marrow, kidneys, spleen, lungs, large intestines, stomach, feces, bowel, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine. When you make a list of all these things, you can come out feeling pretty disgusting. But the whole point is to get in touch with that relationship we have to the body and to begin to transform it into its opposite, which is thankfulness, which is non-disgust. This is the way the body is.

There's a case in the scriptures where some monastics have been contemplating in the forests, doing specifically this exercise. The exercise here is to realize that our happiness is not dependent on the body. So one contemplates these sorts of things. The problem with doing it in a non-balanced way is that you end up being disgusted with your body if you keep doing this. So you're supposed to do the opposite as well, which is this thankfulness to the body, this ability to draw mettā into the body.

When the Buddha sees this group of monastics coming out, he sees that they've done this practice very well, but what's lacking is this loving-kindness. So he gives them the practice of loving-kindness, and all of them liberate themselves. That's the story—they all liberate themselves from suffering just with this exercise combined with loving-kindness.

Then there's a deeper sort of experience about the body, which is the way the mind contacts the body at its base before it turns it into concepts and perceptions. We did a part of that when we were doing the standard meditation. When I asked you to feel the base of your foot and to really get into the soles of your feet and what you were actually feeling, you discern two types of feelings: the pressure and the heat. Those are two. The other one, of course, is movement—there's your third basic sense. And the fourth one is a sense of liquidity, or cohesiveness, a stickiness, an elasticity. Sometimes you can feel that on the breath; it's like an accordion, expanding and then contracting.

In the Buddha's psychology, that's the point of contact between the body and the mind. The mind can only perceive these four things, and it's from these four things that it creates its percepts. The eye, for instance, would be seen as a fire element—heat, light

—and it's from these little pixels that the mind actually takes this in and begins to create a picture. We know, for instance, that when somebody's looking at a picture, the eye is moving around all over it, but that's not what you're aware of. What you're aware of is the whole picture. That whole picture is being manufactured inwardly, and all the eye is picking up at that sense base are these little pixels.

When you put your attention on the ear, you actually hear recognizable sounds, such as the little tweets of birds. But actually, if your meditation is clear enough, the initial perception isn't a sound at all. It's just pressure, like a drum, and all you experience are drums. It's from there, from that basic pressure—which is the earth element, as it's put in more metaphorical language—that the mind takes it in and begins to create an image, which is then recognized and then understood. That's a whole process going on.

So these four elements in Buddhist psychology are the basic perceptual base of the mind touching matter. That doesn't mean to say they exist in matter itself. It's the way the mind experiences matter.

It either experiences it as some sort of pressure or lack of pressure, some sort of heat or lack of it, some sort of movement or lack of it—stillness—and some sort of cohesion, elasticity. It's just from these basic percepts that we create this world around us.

The final thing in this section on the body are what's known as the nine charnel ground contemplations. In those days, they didn't bother to bury bodies as such. They offered the body—which after all is just meat and bones—to nature. Bodies were wrapped in white cloth and ceremoniously placed in the charnel grounds, where vultures, foxes, wolves, lions, tigers would feed off them. And one of the contemplations was to sit and watch a body slowly corrupt away.

The Buddha had obviously done it himself, because there are eleven parts of the process described. He sees a corpse thrown aside on the charnel ground, devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, various types of worms. Then he sees a corpse thrown on the ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, and a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together by sinews. A skeleton without flesh and blood held together with sinews. Disconnected bones scattered in all directions—here a hand bone, here a foot bone. And all the while, the meditator is saying, "As this body is, so is mine. As this body is, so is mine."

That's a pretty heavy meditation, that one is. If you can find a body—these days you can't do that sort of thing. It's interesting because as a monastic, if you go to the East, Thailand mainly or Sri Lanka, you can get easy access into the autopsy rooms and just watch them do what they do to a dead body.

Now again, what's the purpose of it? The purpose is to overcome your fear and overcome your delusion as to this body being me, this body being mine. This tells you how important the contemplation of the body is in the Buddhist teaching. All these exercises that we do around the body are really to see these three characteristics—the lack of control, the changing nature, the dependency of the body on everything outside it: the air, the food. Minimal control. And just like when you take something away that you're dependent on, there's always that pain of letting go. That's the way it is.

So if your car breaks down, or if your iPod breaks down—that's worse—then you've got this pain of not having your iPod. But then, if you can't buy one, if you can't get one, there's a slow acceptance of that situation, and the pain disappears, the suffering disappears. So it's slowly just letting go of things, letting go, letting go.

When you're in meditation and you can see a lot of suffering around various things that happen in your life, as that comes up you keep saying, "Let go, let go." But you've got to be careful with that little phrase. You're not supposed to push things out. Not "let go" like "get away," giving it a little flip, because that would be an aggression. Letting go just means let it arise and pass away, let it arise and pass away.

And when all these things arise and pass away, it's not as though anything is destroyed. That's the joy of the process—everything is given back, but renewed. Everything is given back in its non-attached form. When the Buddha, for instance, went to do this practice, he would have had to let go of thinking. One of our big problems is to let go of thinking, to stop thinking. And you would think, well, when he's fully liberated, that would be it—he'd just sit there like an amorphous blob with a sign: "Leave me alone." But the very quality of discussion, the very quality of being able to argue a point is now re-established, only this time to express his own understanding.

It's the same with emotions. By letting go of these unfortunate emotions, they're transformed. Nothing is lost in that process. What was grief becomes joy. What was hatred and anger, unforgiveness, all that sort of stuff, becomes love. You can't stop that transformation. It happens naturally. We do these exercises to push that process along, but in Zen they tell you that with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. It just arises naturally.

There used to be a fairly famous teacher in Zen in London, Myoko-ni. She was quite a fierce person, it seemed. I never met her; she died quite a while ago now. And she said doing loving-kindness meditation was a waste of time. That was very peculiarly Zen, very Japanese. Perhaps that was nitty-gritty: stop wasting your time.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated through your investigation of the body sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 107

Q&A Session: Family Distractions, Selfish to Meditate, Negative Emotions, Suffering on Identification

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

> *In this engaging Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers practical wisdom for practitioners navigating the challenges of daily life. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he reframes the common concern about family distractions by explaining that meditation is not confined to the cushion—it is fundamentally about developing awareness in every moment. The key, he explains, is cultivating the right attitude of service and goodwill, then repeatedly returning attention to whatever task is at hand, whether washing dishes or caring for children.*
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> *The discussion explores the delicate balance between serving others and maintaining healthy boundaries, illustrated by the story of the three Anuruddha monks who lived harmoniously by each asking, "What if I put aside what I want and do what others want?" Bhante emphasizes that this attitude must be paired with awakeness to avoid being manipulated or abused. He addresses whether meditation is selfish, suggesting that helping others without first developing our own awareness often leads to the "do-gooder syndrome"—imposing our idea of help rather than truly serving.*
>
> *Particularly valuable is Bhante's guidance on working with overwhelming emotions. He distinguishes between suppressing feelings (done with aversion) and skillfully "parking" them (stepping back temporarily with wisdom). He explains how identification—the moment we shift from observing anger to believing "I am angry"—is where suffering truly begins. By relocating awareness into the observer, we discover a place of profound peace that, while initially seeming unexciting, reveals itself as the source of deep happiness and freedom from suffering.*

Q&A Session: Family Distractions, Selfish to Meditate, Negative Emotions, Suffering on Identification

> *I have a family of children. How am I supposed to practice with so many distractions?*
>
> It's best to give them up.

This is a very regular sort of problem we come across, isn't it? It's really about understanding that meditation isn't sitting on the cushion. Meditation is about developing a type of awareness, a type of being in the present moment, you might say.

In the Satipatthana discourse, this discourse on how to establish awareness, there's a section on daily life: when you're stretching your arm, you're stretching your arm. When you're doing this, you're doing that. Meditation in action is doing something deliberately—doing something that you actually meant to do.

There are various ways we can approach this, but it's basically always to do with attitude. It's always about getting the right attitude, and this sets the heart in the right direction. That's where you put your attention. So whatever you're doing in daily life—whether you're looking after children, cooking, or working—it's important just to stop every so often and put the right intention in your heart. And that's the good heart.

Generally speaking, the attitude in daily life, in terms of work and family, is service. You're serving people. Service. So there's the good heart, and that's where you put your attention.

Just like in meditation, you're washing the pots and you find yourself worrying. You have to stop and decide: now, am I going to wash the pots or am I going to worry? You make a decision: I'm going to wash the pots. You re-establish your connection with the pots. When you're with children and they're getting up your nose, you stop and say, "Children are getting up my nose," and you re-establish your sense of service to your children.

In a busy life, if you can actually find some time to sit in the morning, that's important because it sets your mode for the day. It's sort of like saying, "This is the way I want to be. I want to be bright, I want to be awake all day, and aware." Then you always end your practice with metta, and that reconnects you with the world. Even though we do it in a more generalized way, that doesn't mean that in that practice, at the end of it, you can't bring to mind people whom you're going to meet during the day. Some of them might be difficult. So you meet them with no ill will.

When you meet them, of course, a lot of ill will comes up. But you know, "Oh, ill will's come up." Then you re-establish a certain open-heartedness. At least you can establish an attitude of no harm. There might be a lot of ill will, but at least no harm.

Sometimes when things seem to get on top of us—so many things to do all at once—just try to maintain a line of calmness through it. Know that when you're trying to do two things at once, there's going to be some inefficiency. You can't do it perfectly. But sometimes you have to do that. You're trying to cook and the baby's crying and somebody's shouting for you. You're going berserk. You just do the best you can.

The driving line is just this sense of awareness. And to be aware, you've got to be generally relaxed. Once you get tense, it's very difficult. A lot of energy gets dissipated with tension and fretting and all that sort of stuff. Just keep stopping. Start again. Even if you have to do that every ten seconds. Start again. It doesn't matter. You just keep stopping and starting again.

When we talk about meditation in action, we're not talking about being self-aware. That's often a mistake we make, because in the practice of vipassana, you become very much self-aware. You become this observer up here somewhere, observing. So you think, "Well, when I go around in life, I've got to watch myself doing things." But that's a real split in daily life, because one minute we're aware of what we're doing, and the next minute we're aware of "myself" doing. Even though self-awareness arises, you don't develop it. You know it's there, but you keep putting your attention on what you're doing.

When you enter into an action—no matter what it is, whether looking after children, doing the garden, doing a piece of work—when you enter into that and you lose that sense of self, you also lose the sense of time. Then you suddenly wake up and you've been at the computer for ten hours, and you wonder where it's all gone. But if you've entered into that absorption with goodwill, with a sense of service and a sense of awakeness, that's what you're developing.

with anxiety or with some sort of greed or with some sort of craving—that's what you're developing. So once you understand that we develop our personalities and characters by thinking and doing, then you become much more wary about entering into what you're doing with a good intention. And every time you lose it, which we will, you just start again.

In the Buddha's understanding, you can become fully liberated looking after children. Why not? So it's not to do with sitting on a cushion. I mean, it helps to sit on a cushion, especially at the end of the day—sometime after work, sometime when everything's quiet, even if it's only for ten minutes—and just let the accumulations of the day come up: little anxieties, little irritations. That's a time when you might actually go through the day, and as you remember things, you can feel the emotional value

you've put on them. Just stay with that for a little while, not letting the mind think about it, so you're not trying to work something out, but just staying with the emotional value around it, and wait for it to soften. Just to know how attachment manifests.

Parents love their children, but there's also always some attachment there because there's a self. So how do you know when you're acting lovingly and when you're acting from attachment? It's very difficult. But there are certain signs. Whenever you're getting angry with somebody—with your spouse or someone—that's because you want them to do what you want them to do.

There's a lovely little section in the discourses where three fully liberated monks are living together. The Anuruddhas, they're called. The Buddha approached them and asked, "How is it you live so peacefully?" He would turn up at monasteries where monks were arguing and jumping about and making all sorts of mess. And one of them said, "Well, in the morning when I get up, I say to myself: What if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?" That puts you immediately into a very different relationship with all the people you meet.

Now, you've got to be careful there, because the reason they were living so peacefully is that the other two were saying the same thing. If you say, "Why don't I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do," then there's a danger, of course—you're going to be manipulated, you're going to be abused. So you've got to be awake. It's not stupid. But what you're trying to do is establish a relationship. So you're awake when you see you're being used or abused. Then, of course, you stop it. You're waking up to it.

The two main things to remember are: develop the good heart through constant intention, and keep putting your attention exactly where you want it. Some days we find it very difficult, with the mind so scattered. You keep getting caught up in things. You get fed up with yourself, fed up with everybody else. And then some days it goes really smooth, and you think you've made it. Foolish.

So that's it, really. It's very simple. This is what foxes us, I think. We expect it to be clever or difficult. We expect some trick or other to become fully liberated. But it's just getting the right intention in daily life and staying awake. And that little bit about not confusing self-awareness—what you want to do is give yourself to what you're doing, so much so that you lose that sense of self, that sense of time. That's your meditation in action.

A question came: "How do you tell the difference? You're saying stay awake so you don't get abused, but how do you tell? It's a very hard call to make in practice sometimes."

Well, as I say, it's up to the person to decide whether they're being abused or not. It's up to the person to develop that sensitivity, and to be able to reflect back to the other person how you feel about it—without getting angry. These things aren't hard rules. It's just a case of getting the feel that somebody's messing you about. You might not know it while it's happening; it might be a reflection afterwards, and you think, "I've been making tea all day for him."

This problem in a lot of workplaces to do with bullying can be very subtle. Bullying can be very subtle. If you're in a position of power over somebody, just ignoring them can be quite destructive. And some people are highly trained to bully. They know exactly how to abuse people in this very subtle, easy way.

And you wake up and think, "Hey, hold on, what's happening here?" So that's the waking up, you see—suddenly realising that your service has been abused.

Well, that's very true. Partly it's a habit. It's just getting into the habit of stopping. The way you can try is to make a determination, a decision to do something. It could be just a phone call. And then you remind yourself: when I put that phone down, I'm just going to stop for a moment. I'm going to go inward and see if there's been any accumulation of something during that phone call. Then before the next thing to be done, before you make a phone call, you can stop.

So it's making an intention which is clear and obvious—what you're actually going to do—and making it very clear to yourself that when that intention is finished, you stop for a moment. It doesn't have to be long, you see. You don't have to sit there for an hour. You can make the next phone call. It's just—Thich Nhat Hanh, you know, he's very good at this. He has this bell going off at any old time during his monastery. And even when the phone goes, you have to stop.

So it's only training. There's something you can download—I've got it on my computer—this mindfulness bell. Have you come across that? You can put it on for any length of time, twenty minutes, half an hour, you see. And then you have to train yourself to stop, because sometimes you think, "Oh, there's a bell," and you get on with what you were doing. So you've got to train yourself to stop and breathe out. Just get that feeling of stopping.

And of course what you find is that you've actually been far more efficient. This is the point. You've been far more efficient, and you've reserved a lot of energy, because so much energy goes on emotional stuff which you just don't need. A lot of energy goes in the head. What is it, twenty-five, thirty percent of our glucose is used by the brain? Something crazy like that, you see. So just to relax the brain for a minute. And you do that by just repeating a little mantra to yourself: relax, relax, relax. You have to talk yourself into it.

I always quote Ajahn Tate, who was a very lovely teacher in Thailand: "Keep it simple. Take it easy. Stay with the one who knows." That's it. Keep it simple, take it easy, stay with the one who knows. That's the one you've got to find out. Once you've cracked that, you've made it.

So yes, I'm just trying to think—instead of calling them distractions, they're not distractions. They're only distractions to somebody who's intent on doing this even though everything else around them is calling them to do that. But they're not distractions; they're just the next thing to be done. Abandon the word distractions. Is that alright?

Someone asks: "Isn't it selfish to meditate so much? Shouldn't we be trying to improve the lives of others in tangible ways?"

Yes. The problem is improving others in tangible ways—this is the big problem. Because of the self, we tend to improve other people's lives in tangible ways by the way *we* want to improve them. So we end up with this do-gooder syndrome. A do-gooder is somebody who wants to do you the good *they* want to do you. It's irrelevant whether you want it or not. And it makes them feel good—that's the point. They're going to feel goodness.

Sometimes it's not that there's meditation and then there's this other thing. They're not opposites. Whatever life we choose to lead, that lifestyle will determine how much time we're putting to meditation, how much time we're not. So if your work is one of these terrible things that you have to keep going on for ten, twelve hours a day, then that's what you have to deal with. And in between, you try to stop and keep this awakenedness going, try to do the morning and evening meditation.

When it says "to meditate so much"—I mean, what's so much about forty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening? That's not so much, is it? That's your basic template.

Forty minutes to an hour in the morning. And then, every so often during the day, try to stop. See if you can stop for ten minutes occasionally. At lunchtime, instead of all that chatter, if you find a quiet place, just sit quietly. You don't have to sit in posture. You just find a quiet place to sit and quieten the mind, quieten the heart—ten minutes, fifteen minutes. And then in the evening when you come back.

Now, you wouldn't do that if you didn't see the effect of it on your life. That's the point. I mean, for me it was immediate. As soon as I started meditating, my life became so much easier. I was a teacher in a further education college, so you have to go from one class to another, sometimes right across the college. Normally speaking, you'd be shouting at somebody, then you'd bang the door, then you'd be rushing to the next class with all your stuff under your arm. But then I began to realize through the meditation that the movement from one place to another was a time just to collect yourself. So the whole day became so much calmer. Just simple things like that.

You wouldn't do that if you didn't realize what sort of mind or awareness you're trying to develop. And that's what the vipassanā is doing. It's trying to help us realize that there's a way of being aware which is awake and alive, and it's engaged in the sitting. It's engaged in the sense of really feeling and seeing things. And in the world of doing things, being in your doing, being your doing. Ram Dass—very good book, *Be Here Now*. It's an old one but it's still worth reading.

And then you realize that. And then what you discover—I think most people begin to experience this—is that when the meditation drops off, their life starts going back to the old habits. And then you realize, ah, hold on, that was the purpose of my meditation. And then you need little fillips during the year. You need to do a day retreat occasionally. If you can get away for a week, wonderful. And these lift your practice. Lift your practice.

So there's nothing wrong with trying to help people. It's just that you're not out there for yourself. This is very difficult. You're not out there trying to make yourself happy through helping others. You may be happy helping others, but that's not the reason you're doing it. Now, you may say to yourself consciously, "Oh, I'm doing it for their benefit." And then when somebody—I mean, my usual example, for those who know me—you make this soup for somebody because they're ill, and they say, "Well, I don't want the soup."

"Stick with this soup now. Took me two hours."

And they say, "Do me a favour."

"What's that?"

"Clean the toilet. I'd rather have a clean toilet."

"I've made this soup!"

Ha! Of course you do—you clean the toilet, but you're grumbling.

And then that awful business of saying yes too quickly. "Will you help me move house?" "Oh yeah!" Where's he going? And you have to start lying. "I feel really ill, I can't go." All sorts of dead ends.

So I would abandon trying to help others. I'd wait for somebody to ask me to help them. That's a safer patch.

Would anybody like to add to that?

A practitioner asks: "You said that when we feel strong negative emotions we should allow ourselves to feel them fully and they will burn themselves out. What can we do when the pain of these emotions feels so overwhelming, when we simply feel we do not have the strength to endure until the emotion passes?"

Now, when it feels overwhelming like that, you have to park them. I try to make a distinction between suppressing something and parking it. When you suppress something, you're doing it out of anger, you're doing it out of aversion, you're doing it out of fear. When you do that, you're just adding more bad energy into the system. But if you say, "Well, this is too much, it's too much"—you stay there for a minute, you say, you talk to it, "Stay there for a minute and I'll have a cup of tea." Or call up a friend, or do something, or go for a walk. You don't have to be overwhelmed in that sense.

And of course sometimes it feels like that because when you open up to yourself, you're taking away these suppressive measures. So you're sitting there, for instance, and the fear comes up and you don't want to feel this, and you're a bit afraid of it—some anxiety, a sense of panic. So you stay with the panic. But when that panic and that sense of fear of what you're going to experience and the aversion to it disappears, this stuff is then allowed to manifest. So don't be surprised if it comes up with a whoosh.

So then you—whoa, whoa, stop. You take a walk. And you just wait. And then very slowly your courage comes. You get more courage and you're able to sit with it. And then you're able to sink into it.

And one question that you might ask yourself is: what is an emotion before I give it a name? Once you give something a name, you're into a reaction.

If you don't know what it is and you've lost some fear of it, then you can sink into it more easily. As you know, if you have a pain, many people might feel very sick and not know what it is, but it turns out to be a serious disease like cancer. There's a certain relief in knowing what it is. It's better to be in a place of knowing than not knowing, even though it's a horrible diagnosis. It's the same with these emotions. We don't know the extent of them, the depth of them. And you have to go sometimes a little gingerly, that's all. Gingerly.

Does that make sense? Anybody got any other tricks?

One student shared that just persevering had been essential. She actually went on a retreat to help deal with the negative emotion she was having toward somebody she had to work with every single day. It took her three years of visiting, visiting, visiting that emotion. She still has a bit of a low threshold when encountering that person, but at least she doesn't feel that overwhelming ill will anymore.

And of course we know from Freud that if you do push it away, it comes out in sneaky ways. It comes out in little slips of the tongue, just the way you look at them, which makes everything worse.

Well, congratulations for not slipping into murder.

Another question arose about identification. I had mentioned earlier when talking about identification that there can be moments where all our suffering begins, but identification can often be seen in interpersonal relationships as a kind of empathy with another's pain. Is there wholesome and unwholesome identification, or do we just get it all confused?

When I talk about identification, I'm talking about identifying with what is unwholesome. If you watch how the mind works, say you see somebody whom you don't like—first of all, as soon as you see them, which is the immediate contact, there's a reaction: you don't like, you don't like. And then there's an identification with that reaction: *I* don't like. This immediately turns into a train of thoughts or an action of speech or body. And that's creating your conditioning, that's your becoming. That's what the Buddha means by becoming, by karma.

Now, so long as we are aware of that dislike, we're not developing it. It remains there as a difficult feeling, it remains there as unpleasant, but the one that knows isn't actually suffering—until they become "I am angry" or "I am depressed." To make that distinction really clear, you have to work in your meditation when, say, a negative state comes up. Some sort of anxiety. And you're feeling it. It's become quite objective to you. You feel it.

Just reflect on that. Yes, there's an interior unpleasant feeling, an unpleasant environment, an interior unpleasant environment. But that which knows isn't actually suffering. It's observing it. If you can make that clear to yourself, then you see that the problem starts when we slip into this "I am"—I am depressed, and so forth.

Now, when it's on the positive side—I want to do something for somebody, I love somebody, I'm rejoicing in that person's success—there's still that identification of "I am the one who is rejoicing, I am the one who loves," and all that. So there's still delusion there, but it's developing the good heart. In Buddhist therapy, we are letting go of unwholesome states which are causing us problems, and we're moving towards wholesome states so that we're developing the beautiful mind.

But the delusion is still there—that I am happy, I am the one who's happy, the "I" business. Now, when the heart is strong, when the more beautiful the heart is, the easier it is to see that delusion and to drop it. It's very difficult to drop the delusion of "I" when you're in a lot of pain, when you're in a lot of emotional pain.

If you think of other therapies, other ways of seeing this—in the Christian way, you've got sinfulness. That's their way of describing this unfortunate conditioning: sinfulness. And on the other side, you've got God and the commandments and the guidance, and you've got this free will. So this free will now has to decide whether it wants to go towards hell or towards heaven. And by realizing what the choice is, one hopes to make those choices that are moving us towards heaven.

Now if you look at the Freudian model, instead of sin you've got id—terrible id, which is animal and dreadful. And on the other side, you've got superego, the voices of your parents and the Bible and the Buddha. And in the middle you've got this poor ego trying to navigate some sort of decent life for itself.

So it's always the same thing, just looking at it from different angles. From the Buddha's point of view, the problem is ethical, and that would be the same as the Christian point of view. The problem is ethical, which really in its broadest sense means our relationships. How do you relate to other people? How do you relate to other animals and birds and all that? How do you relate to objects? How do you close your fridge door? Well, you should be ashamed—you should close it very gently.

It's by correcting the negative side of us, the unwholesome side, by simply not indulging those intentions. And by indulging those intentions that are beneficial to us. Now there's still a bit of a self there, but we're getting much more beautiful in ourselves. I'm using the word beautiful because that's the way the Buddha talks about the mind. Beautiful mind.

So that's what the identification is. So long as there's an identification with this psycho-physical organism as being me, even in the most subtle ways, I'll be seeking happiness through it, and it's not going to deliver. So I've got to search for happiness in a different place.

Where are we going to find the happiness the Buddha talks about?

So again, as I said this morning, as you relocate back into the knower, into the observer, the feeler, and that becomes a very strong experience for you—separate from the body with its sensations, the heart with its emotions, the mind with its thoughts and images—even there, afterwards you can reflect: what was it like being there?

Now, you may at first be very disappointed because it's completely unexciting. But actually, there's no suffering there. And the more you stay in that place, even during daily life, even during your actions—which is simply to be aware, just to be aware—the cooler our lives become. The cooler. And there's a deep happiness, because life isn't about chasing the next excitement. It's about meaningfulness. We'll suffer anything as long as it's meaningful. Take a look at political activists—torture, all that sort of stuff—but for them it makes their life utterly meaningful, and therefore they experience a profound happiness.

We suffer from a sense of impotence when we see the troubles of the world. And really, that's a case of being humble, which is recognizing exactly where we are in the scheme of things when it comes to power. The amount we can do is extraordinarily limited. The amount that we can influence other people to do what we want them to do is very limited. And it's a case of saying, "Well, that's it, that's all I can do," and being happy with that, being content with it, knowing that you're not asked to do any more. That's the limit. And just to accept that.

So, may you enjoy good fortune. May all the gods and beings that can protect us protect you. May the force be with you. And may you receive the blessings of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

Bhavatu sabba maṅgalaṃ, rakkhantu sabba devatā.

CHAPTER 108

Mindfulness: Time

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h03

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's understanding of dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness) and how Right Awareness (sammā sati) offers liberation from self-created mental suffering. Drawing from the Four Noble Truths and the psychology of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), he explains how mindfulness creates space between primary pain and our secondary reactions of craving, aversion, and fear.*
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> *The talk explores three levels of identity - body, emotions, and thoughts - and how stepping back into the observer position allows healing without indulgence. Bhante discusses the therapeutic applications of mindfulness in treating depression, anxiety, and grief, while emphasizing the ethical dimension of our responses to life's inevitable challenges.*
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> *The teaching concludes with insights into the Buddhist understanding of time, impermanence (anicca), and the gradual recognition of anattā (not-self) through sustained awareness practice. This comprehensive exploration shows how mindfulness-based approaches can lead not only to psychological healing but potentially to complete liberation from suffering.*

Well, I think the general feeling I was getting from people was that therapy was very good at getting people in touch with their stuff, but didn't quite know what to do with it when it was up. And it was through research by John Teasdale here in Cambridge, and of course Kabat-Zinn bringing it to pain management, depression, anxiety. According to John, it was something like a 90% success of mindfulness and panic – of not going back into panic.

And it's really understanding what the Buddha means by *dukkha*, by suffering. I think once we're clear on that, you can see the role of mindfulness in undermining suffering. It's there in the Second Noble Truth. The first is just basic statement that there is this *dukkha*. We'll define that in a minute. And the second one is the cause of it, which is desire. And the third one is very hopeful – there is an end to it. And the fourth, of course, is the path leading to it, the actual practice.

So what does he mean by this word *dukkha*? It translates as hard to bear. But what he's referring to are three types, as he lists them. One is the suffering caused by attachment to sensual pleasure. The next one is an attachment to becoming. And the next one is an attachment to annihilation.

So it's a case of separating out what you would call just the natural pain of being a human being. So just the physical pain. He wasn't as though he got rid of physical pain. He died very uncomfortably with some sort of gastroenteritis. And he once asked Ananda to take over his speech because his back was hurting. So whatever he means by *dukkha*, this suffering, he's not referring to physical pain as such. And he's not, in our state of non-enlightenment, talking about the primary level of mental suffering. So when we feel, in an obvious way, when we feel depressed or anxious or something like that, there isn't actually any suffering there in his terminology. There is just this mental state.

Now, to understand that, you have to go into his psychology, which he called dependent origination. It basically says that something arises dependent on something else, that's all. And therefore it doesn't have its own existence, it doesn't have its own reality base. Everything is interdependent, I'm sure you've heard that. The Buddha's gone on and on about that. This was turned into a sort of universal idea by Mahayana. But in the original teaching, the Buddha stayed very close to the human actual experience. He was very wary of turning anything into some sort of metaphysics. So when you read the Theravada scriptures, he's right there with the human being and what we experience – our personal experience within this globe of consciousness through which we experience the world.

So, this problem of desire... We begin by what is our essential mistake. So the Buddha is saying that somehow we've made some mistake somewhere, which is often translated as a delusion. And this fundamental mistake is a mistake of relationship. The relationship is to seek happiness in a world that's not going to deliver happiness, if only by the fact that it just doesn't stay. It's always in a process of change. So as soon as you think you've entered into this heavenly place, in whatever way you might define that for yourself, it always moves on. It always comes to an end. So when you have a great party and somebody says, we must do this again, you know you're heading for disaster. Because the second time is never. It loses juice.

So the fundamental position then is one of trying to seek this happiness in a world that's transient and doesn't deliver. And the more you accumulate, the more you feel safe. So the more friends you have, the more feeling of friendship you feel safe. The more money you have in the bank, you feel safe. You're always moving back to this business of safety. And that fundamental feeling of safety is resting upon a deep understanding somewhere within our being that we're not safe, that there is death. And so we cover that up by making something of life. So we move towards life and what it can give us, and we make ourselves feel safe by all sorts of little mechanisms.

Unfortunately, once we've accumulated this stuff, it has to be defended against marauders and against the government. So you have to build up a certain aversion to get the energy to get rid of the enemy. If the enemy looms a little too large, well, you've got to run for it. So there's your three basic dispositions in life coming from this fundamental delusion or mistake about seeking happiness, real happiness, not transient happiness, real, permanent, meaningfulness, real, permanent, existential groundedness in the transient world – the business of acquisition, accumulation, aversion, and fear.

So from these three dispositions, we move into every moment. It's always there underneath. It's not that every moment demands these things, but they're always there as potential. And we move into actions of speech, thought in our head, and then it moves out into speech and then into action.

Once you've done that, you've created something within yourself. You've created a conditioning. And it's these conditionings that are driving your destiny. So these conditionings that we built up unwittingly in childhood and in early, up to teenage and places of that age, and even beyond – people who are not aware, who are not mindful – this compendium of habits is basically what we call our character, our personality. And it drives our destiny. And it's only when we hit walls that we begin to question. Normally speaking, we blame everybody else. That's much easier. Society, parents, everybody – that fault. But slowly wake up that maybe this crash has come about because of a certain way that I'm behaving.

When the Buddha was fully liberated, we say he had three knowledges. Three knowledges came to him. The first one was that he was completely, he'd come to the end of these, what he called defilements, these wrong ways of relating. There was nothing unwholesome in his heart. There was nothing unskillful in his thinking anymore. That had been completely taken away because some deep delusion had been destroyed. We'll come to that in a minute. And then he had memories of all his past lives, and he saw that it was his ethical decisions which had moved him into hell realms, into hellish places, and then finally driven him to his liberation. And then he saw beings moving from one place to another, driven by this same cause of *kamma*. So what he's saying there is that our consciousness is in a process of relationship. So everything is to do with ethics.

We in our time, we medicalize things, or you socialize things. So you do things because your parents have done this to you and all that or you've got some sort of illness or something like that. Remember that our forebears would talk about being a bit off or got out the wrong side of bed or feeling heavy, but now we talk about depression and it becomes a sort of mental dis-ease. When you go to the east, they don't – they physicalize

it, they embody it. They say that they're feeling down or they're feeling heavy, but they don't turn it into a psychological thing. So as soon as you turn it into a psychological problem, then it becomes, you have to move towards therapy. And in a sense, it takes away the personal responsibility we have for having constructed these mental states. That's the problem. So it's the personal responsibility of having constructed depression, anxiety.

Now, the understanding is that when something comes towards us, either a physical pain – somebody hits me on the nose – or some anger from somebody, that somehow they're causing this reaction. That their anger is causing my anger. That this clout on the nose is causing my grief. And because I can't get my own back, I feel very depressed.

I once went to a group that was a group for people suffering from depression. And we sat in a circle and everybody started telling everybody else how depressed they were, which was extraordinarily depressing. And then when we got round to one person who said he wasn't depressed, he was really happy, he was obviously up on a bit of a high, everybody looked very jealous and glum. And everything they said – well, I'll give you an example. The leader of the group said, a week ago or so, I tripped over the pavement and hurt myself. So I wrote to the council and asked for compensations. The council wrote back and said that it wasn't on. He wasn't going to get a penny. So he got very angry. And then he got depressed. And it was the council with this pavement that had caused this depression.

Now, in the Buddhist psychology, that's not actually what's happening. What's happening is some information is coming towards us. And the reaction that we have to it, the response, the reaction that we have to it, is actually coming from a different centre. It's not coming from this person. It's not coming from the pain on my nose. The reaction is pain on my nose, which I'm well aware of, and then inside me, coming from a different place, is this little being who's quite frightened because somebody's just hit them on the nose. And the way you respond to somebody hitting you on the nose is you get very angry, unless they're very big, and then you run for it. And that's coming from this inner center of the heart, not from the bump on the nose.

So when we get, these days, a lot of people are suffering from unemployment. Now, when you become unemployed, as I remember it, there's a loss of your wealth, there's a loss of your status, there's an immediate loss of your place right now. That's bad enough as it were because you have to reorganize yourself. But on top of that, there's something else happens which is to become depressed about it. So that's this inner reaction to a situation. And what mindfulness is drawing us to understand is that that isn't necessary. That second part is not necessary.

So the Buddha always talks about these two darts. The first dart is just the pains and sorrows and woes of ordinary living on this planet. And the second one was completely self-manufactured as a relationship to what was happening. And that relationship is our ethical position. Either we're trying to accumulate something or we're trying to push it away or we're trying to run for it. That's a relationship. It's an ethical relationship.

Now, the Buddha himself didn't have a brilliant time all the time. Towards the end of his life, I think he got quite worried because the two great kings who had been his great supporters – one was murdered by his son, and the other one died naturally, and the two sons who became kings didn't like him at all. In fact, one plotted with Devadatta, a dastardly fellow, who was a monk, and tried to kill him. I'm going to tell you the story.

And the other prince, actually, he married into the Sakya family, his family. And because they thought he was of a lower caste, they secretly gave him a slave girl. I mean, the untouchable. And when he found this out, of course, he was raging. And he got on his elephant with all his other elephants and started going to destroy the Sakyas. The Buddha turned up and said, hey, what's going on here? And he got a bit of sense and he rode back. But after a while, he got into his heart again. He got on his elephant, and off he went again. And the Buddha said, whoa, turned up and said, hey, what's happening? So he said, okay. So he went back again. Third time on his elephant, whoa, and the Buddha turns up – come on, he says. So he turns back. The fourth time, the Buddha says, I can't do anything. That's it. He won't listen now. And, of course, he did. The Sakyas were, many of them were killed. They had to move their capital elsewhere.

So these were very worrying times for him towards the end, and he obviously was concerned about the order, the support of the order, because, as you know, these religions grow because of temporal support. I mean, in China, for instance, whenever the emperor was Buddhist, you were away. When he wasn't, you ran for the hills. That's how they developed this kung fu – self-defense. In our rule as a monk, we can defend ourselves. You're not supposed to attack. You can definitely defend yourself. So that whole way of combat in which you're trying to use the other person's energy to undermine them, to destroy them. And as they pass you by, it's a quick rabbit chop. So it's... just finish it off, coup de grace.

So, where was I? I go off on these tales and I forget where I am. So, yes, so we're still struggling with this word *dukkha* and how to deal with it and where mindfulness comes in.

So the Buddha's saying, if you put your attention in between the original pain, whether it comes physically at you, like you bump your head and catch your finger in the door or something, or whether you put it within yourself as some old conditioning arises – some depression, some sadness, some guilt, some shame – if you put your attention there, upon that object, and you observe this relationship you have with it, of indulging it... indulging our depression, I'm so depressed, I'm depressed, all this self-hatred, I'm terrible, I'm useless, nobody loves me, it's true, I'm horrible, things like that, and you're working, you're actually developing that particular conditioning by this indulgence – a sort of false humility. So by observing that reaction, you're cutting in between the original suffering or pain that's coming up, physical or mental, and this reaction.

When this reaction falls away, you can stay with the original pain and you've discovered a sort of an equanimity with it, a non-reactive position. And when you do that, you find that this original pain, whether it's the pain in the nose, the physical thing, or something in the heart as a mental state, begins to evaporate. And if you do it long enough, you realize that actually there's some therapy going on. The heart's purifying itself. It's healing itself. You begin to realize you don't have to do anything. All you have to do is be aware of it.

But that awareness demands a certain ability to bear with, to bear with the conditions. And what we also discover is that the heart cannot purify itself except into consciousness. And it will either do it as a felt emotional state or as a physical illness, psychosomatic illness.

So this ability to cut in between the original given unfortunate state and the reaction to it is, you might say, the point of escape. That's how he would put it. There's the escape. The escape from what? The escape from further suffering and past suffering. The escape from suffering caused by the past. So when you realize the power of that mindfulness to be with suffering, then you obviously want to be there more and more.

Tell them they'd be expelled if they make any noise.

So this mindfulness that the Buddha's talking about. So there's your, that's mindfulness at its most obvious position in the Four Noble Truths – desire the cause of suffering. So remember desire here is the desire to accumulate, the desire to annihilate, to get rid of what you don't want, and the desire to run from fear. So if a person can see that in their depression, in their anxiety, in their rage, in their revenge, and all – they can see that – they see that they found an escape from suffering.

You can see how it's very helpful in all these therapies to get a person to find that position within themselves. It's talked about as the objective observer, the objective feeler, or the one who knows, the one who experiences.

So by objectifying what we experience, we find a sort of different place, something which is transcending consciousness, transcending what we would normally identify with.

So what do we mean by transcending? We mean by transcending finding a different identity point. So when we are in the body, when we are the body, we are the body self. That's who I am. Children, that's where they live in their bodies. They don't separate their emotions or thought life. They are their bodies in a very embodied way.

We really can only get to that level by accident. If you trap your finger in a door, just for that one singular sweet moment, you are the body. And then you jump out of that and start kicking the door. So to be a body self, you have to get into high states. I mean, that's why people like these dangerous sports. Because just for that one moment, they are that experience of going through rapids or flying in the air or something. And when you identify with something so totally like that, you feel completely alive. In that moment of absorption, there's no you. There's just the action.

So that's the paradox. When we're completely happy, we don't know it. And as soon as you bounce out of it, you've lost it. What you're aware of is the dregs of the happy state. This ability to absorb into something. We do it, many of us do it just at work, which we find interesting, and you're just absorbed into it. People have hobbies like gardening. Time passes. The garden's been done beautifully, but there's not been a sense of somebody doing it.

So these are our happiest moments. And as soon as you jump out of it, then there's something that knows your happiness. You've lost that happiness in a way. You've objectified it. So coming out of the body and being aware of the body as something means that my identity isn't there. I mean my identity will soon re-establish itself if something is life threatening. As soon as something threatens my life then I really become my body very quickly, but I can actually find this other position of having a body without being one. So when I'm looking at my hand, there's something looking at the hand. It's not in the hand.

So it becomes an object to me. That's a different relationship. I still own this hand. My relationship with this hand is different from my relationship to your hand. If you lost your hand, I'd be very compassionate. But if I lost my hand, I'd go berserk. That's the difference.

So the next identity is, of course, emotions. So I am happy, I am sad, and so on and so forth. That's an easy one for us to stay with. If it's a good one, we like it. If we don't, we tend to jump out of it and become aware of it. Only when you go into it completely do you find yourself becoming mentally ill or falling into an uncontrollable rage. So there's that point of identity that I am. If you say I am... In the identity, in that moment of identity, there is no I am, there is just the identity. There is just depression, just panic. In a panic situation, you just lose it, you just go for it, and then you wake up out of it.

When you become aware of an emotional state, it's an object, isn't it? So there's something in us which is no longer identifying with the emotional state, though fully aware of it.

And then there's the mental identity of thought. That's even easier. I mean, we'll go off on these thought trips anytime. And you just get lost in thought. And then you wake up, and the thought's gone. In meditation sometimes, when this ability to remain as the observer is very acute, you can see thoughts arising and passing away. They don't develop because you're not in there to develop them. You can see a thought arising and passing away, like a neon light.

So, you've got these three major identities, which you're pulling out of: the body with its sensations, feelings, the heart with its emotions, moods, and the mind with its thoughts and images. And when you pull out of that, you've found a different identity. You're now the observer, the feeler, the knower. And that's the position of somebody who's being mindful—in this particular case with therapy, mindful of painful states, painful mental states.

Now that isn't your final position. To be the observer, the feeler and whatnot—it's not your final position. But the Buddha actually says those who are mindful like that are in the vicinity of, in the neighbourhood of *Nibbāna*.

So when we're in that state, mainly in the sitting posture, and you find yourself acutely being this observer within all this body, mind and heart—usually the body has to be very still and the heart has to be very calm, and the mind has to be silent. And then there's this very acute sense of the observer, the feeler. So when that comes to you, after that experience, ask yourself, what was it like being there? What were the constituents of the observer?

Because at that point, there's the ability to discover what we really are, which is something transcendent. So it's something which transcends all these identities. Even the identity of an observer, of a feeler. And that's what the Buddha is pointing to. So when he's teaching of not-self, it's just this way of saying everything that we experience, if you can objectify it, it can't be you.

When you are aware of yourself as a self, as an observer, as a feeler, there's something that feels itself to be a self. So it can't be that because it's an object. So you're always moving, you're always taking a step backwards. And when you actually fall off the cliff of the self, that's it. That's when we realise who we really are. That's the transcendent point. And that's what the Buddha is referring to when he calls himself the *Tathāgata*. *Tathāgata* means arrive there or gone there. And its best translation is the transcendent one, the one who's transcended the psycho-physical world.

So now, this mindfulness, when it comes to just ordinary problems of life, ordinary mental problems like anxiety and lots of stuff—what it does is, it allows the person to find that position where they are no longer making things worse by identifying with that emotional state. That's the desire, that's this business of either saying, I am depressed. As soon as you say, I am depressed, where's the escape? But as soon as you say, there's depression, there's an escape, isn't there? You can do something about it if it's there within yourself. But as soon as you say, I am, that's it. We're locked into a particular type of relationship, this identity with it.

So the ability to maintain that mindfulness stops that identity, which is indulging it, which is actually making it worse, and allows the original state to manifest. And that's what's so difficult, is to be with these very painful mental states and just be with it in this calm way and feel them, experience them fully. And what you're doing is you're saying to your heart, manifest your turbulence. And it's in that manifestation that turbulence can exhaust itself. So that over a period of time, you begin to feel this alleviation of all this turmoil within the heart.

Think 25 years. I wouldn't want to give you any false hope.

So, this business of indulgence, how do we develop our mental states? We develop them through thought. It's through making up these constant stories that we're actually developing mental states. So the first thing is to know that the mind, if it's not under our control, is really working against us. So anxiety, remember, is really being anxious, 99% of the time, anxious about things that aren't going to happen. Because the mind here, in a state of fright, in a state of uncertainty, extends the future outwards. And it always

builds up this tremendous fearful storyline. The scenario of fear just extends itself. And that's completely unnecessary because if you come back into the moment, and you feel the fear, and do it anyway—you all know the book, yeah?

So you feel the fear, and you're letting it go. And then when there's an equanimity, when the fear has subsided, then of course you see the situation with much more clarity. It doesn't mean to say that you can't see that unfortunate things may happen, but at least it takes away the huge agitation around it, the exaggeration of it.

So that's the power of your mindfulness, not to get caught up in thoughts driven by unwholesome mental states. And you'll do that when we realise that, when we allow the mind to do that, it gets worse. It's actually developing the mental state.

So, on a very obvious psychological level, what mindfulness is doing is it's putting this awareness, this mindfulness, which is our intuitive intelligence. You know, we talk about mindfulness, we talk about awareness, but remember that two words always come together in the Buddhist scripture. It's *sampajañña-sati*, which means an intuitive intelligence and awareness.

To think of them as two things is really to look at the two sides of the same coin. We have it in our language when we say, if you look carefully, you'll see. So the see is the grasping of the situations. So awareness is the ability to look dispassionately, to look from a position to an objective position, and as we look, we grasp the situation, we see what's wrong. So although we say this awareness and intuitive intelligence, it's actually intuitive awareness. And that's the reason I call this centre Satipañña, because that is the Buddha mind.

To be in that state, you're actually in a state of awakening, right? You can't say awakened, but we can say definitely a state of awakening. So, when we see the power of that to stop us making things worse and to undermine old habits, that's the point. When these mental states come up, remember, these are conditioning, they're old habits. And when we're undermining, when we're allowing them to manifest, we're actually allowing that turbulence to exhaust itself. So that's the healing. So these turbulences find it harder and harder to hijack our lives. We can stay above them, walk with them, see them as our companions, but also to turn a certain kindness towards them too as if you were with somebody who was depressed or anxious. So this awareness, this mindfulness can be saturated or flavoured with loving kindness, and that gives us a great strength. It gives us a great courage to stay with the actual state no matter how long it stays.

And it's through that process that two things are happening. One is the psychological dis-ease is being eased, and the other one is there's a slow recognition of where the escape is from all suffering—by non-indulgence, non-reactivity, non-aversion, non-fear—and it's seeing that second arrow as the Buddha would call it, second dart of aversion, fear, pushing away, and just allowing that to manifest and die away, that we are slowly receding backwards to this place of pure equanimity, of non-reactivity. So it could be, in my understanding, that somebody who comes into therapy, a mindfulness-based therapy, very easily just by observing the process of how suffering is created, find their way to complete liberation on one of the insights.

As you do that of course the other two insights, the other two characteristics of existence, become obvious to the person. As they move along first they realise that everything is impermanent because they're watching it. So it dawns upon them that there's nothing that they're experiencing which remains. Nothing that is permanent. Therefore, everything that we experience is unreliable. You can't rely on it. You can't rely on a relationship lasting. I mean, the person might think better of it and off off. Or they die. You can't rely on human beings. It's terrible. It's terrible. You can't rely on your happiness on another human being. You're into a hell realm. Because you're not in control. The whole point about being happy is that you're in control. And if you can't control something, there's always going to be fear that you'll lose control.

So this is your attachment coming from this position of I am. I am a human being. As soon as you say I am a human being, you're stuck. Because now you've got to seek perfect happiness in this form. And so you're constantly in conflict with the world because it just doesn't deliver.

And that impermanence, you know, it leads you to this beautiful statement by the Buddha. There's nothing in the world worth holding on to. And one thing you can do with these phrases when you come across them in a book that you're reading and it strikes you is to keep repeating them. This is the spiritual reading. So you come across a phase and you keep repeating it. Keep repeating it. Repeating it in all its inflections. Like there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There is nothing in the world worth holding on to.

And you keep repeating it and repeating it. And you repeat it gently until you feel a sort of digestion. And that means that it's moved from being an intellectual understanding into a disposition. It's moving into a disposition. And when that's really grasped, it comes out in your actions, in your speech. That's your eightfold path. If it stays at an in-

tellectual level, it's sterile. Nothing's ever going to happen. You're going to sound very clever, but nothing's ever going to happen. It's got to move into the heart, as a disposition.

So, one sees this impermanence. In seeing the world as impermanent, one begins to realise what is permanent within the world. So, these qualities, these characteristics are always making us find the opposites. So, where the Buddha says this is suffering, he talks about this place, for want of a better word, *Nibbāna*, where there is no suffering. Don't call it happiness just says there's no suffering because if you say happiness we immediately associate that with some sort of emotional state. So he prefers the word no suffering. And what is able to see that which arises and passes away must itself not be arising and passing away. So another quality of *Nibbāna* is that it's not transient, it's not changing. It's a state which has a permanency about it and is utterly reliable. That's what he's saying.

And then as you begin to take this position of the observer two things become more plain to you is that your control over your body, heart and mind is only apparent. So you can move your body around here and there but there's very little you can do about your bones. Like whatever skeleton you've got you stuck with it, and you can get rid of bits of it, break bits of it, but basically speaking so much of our physical nature is a given isn't it? I mean we don't even know what's happening. Do we know what I mean do we know what's happening now in our liver? Yeah, completely blank as far as I'm concerned. And as long as it doesn't hurt, I'm quite happy to leave it alone.

It's like neurobiology tells about all these chemicals and neurons. I don't experience any of that. I haven't a clue what's going on. All I know is that I have these thoughts and images coming up here and I'm aware of feelings and emotions. So my actual experience of life, it's nothing to do with chemicals and whatnot. Not to say that chemicals don't affect the experience of my life.

But that's not what I actually experience, you see. So in thought, you see, what happens if we become senile? We suffer from Alzheimer's. Who are we then, you see? So this business of pulling out of and looking at something makes us realize, and it's a frightening thing, to realize that actually you're not in control.

But it's also beginning to discover a position which is outside it. So this is the transcendent position. The transcendent position in its absoluteness cannot know itself. If it knows itself then it must have an object. If it's an object then it can't be it. Simple as that. Whatever is an object to awareness can't be the awareness. It's an object. So that's

why the Buddha says even *Nibbāna* doesn't have this sense of self. And that's the process of liberation. The process of liberation is the eventual abandonment and destruction of any idea of a self. That's all there is to it.

Now when we experience these things, they are not, they don't have to be mind-blowing experiences. They're sometimes like a drip feed. And over a period of time, you wake up and realize actually that you don't see the world as you did 5, 10, 15 years ago. Because it's a slow dawning. That's why the word awakening is so much better than enlightenment, you know.

And as you begin to have that, as you begin to, as it were, find this identity, remember that it doesn't stop there. You have to re-enter the psychophysical organism. You have to become a person. And it's through the personhood that you begin to express the wisdom that you have. So, in the Buddha's own story, he retreats from life. He goes into these meditative experiences. And when he's fully, when he wakes up to what he's actually discovered, see, his first thought is, who can I share this with? Who can I teach? See? It's a natural outflow.

So this Eightfold Path that he left, right understanding, right attitude, flows naturally into right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Right livelihood. And that's the way that you begin to understand that this process of mindfulness is actually making you re-engage in life in a much fuller way because it's not being enclosed by a barrier that we call the self. The self is always defining the world for its own self-benefit. And therefore the relationship we have with everybody or anything always has this angle of what's in it for me. See? When the what's in it for me goes, then you get that pure relationship. Not that there isn't anything in it for you. It's just that that's not the dominant thought. That's not become a barrier. It may be a boundary, but you can step over boundaries. But barriers, you can't step over. See?

So you can see how somebody who has entered into a therapy just with the purpose of overcoming panic or grief, they've had a terrible grief in their lives, and they're taught this business of separating the grief from this indulgence. So often when people die and we're left with this grief, we make the mistake of thinking that the amount of grief I have is the measure of my love. So that means that every time your grief begins to disappear, you panic. And you've got to start grieving because you're saying to yourself, I don't love this person anymore. So you have to grieve again. And so it goes on and on. It becomes a never-ending indulgence in grief. And there's a deep satisfaction that, oh, I'm so grieving that I'm so happy that I love this person so much. But the grief is actually an expression of your attachment. Real love allows the person to go on.

It's like, say, a parent who won't let the child go on. You're holding on to the child. But when the child is launched into the world, there should be happiness, you know, as well as relief. There's more happiness out. So it's like you see parents see their children and they're happy for them. They don't hold on to them. They stay here, you know.

So when a person sees that grief, it's something coming out of attachment and allows the grief to pass. Stop indulging in it. Stop confusing it with love and allowing the person who's passed away to actually pass away and to rejoice in the relationship they had and just to let go of that person, let them go. Then, of course, the grief disappears. The grief begins to just exhaust itself. So it's not as though the mindfulness is going to help you get over the grief quicker. The process of grief will be determined by the measure of your attachment. But it's still going to take three, six, nine months. They say if it goes on longer than that, it's becoming chronic. But if you, you see, it doesn't stop the suffering. What it does is it opens you up to it. But it opens you up in a way that it's going to heal the heart. See?

So you can see by seeing grief, supposing someone comes with grief, and they cut in between this business of indulging grief from a wrong understanding that it's an expression of love. So this misunderstanding dies away, and the reaction of indulging grief therefore stops. The grief now is allowed to arise and pass away, and they're beginning to see that it's impermanent. And then they're beginning to see that actually, I'm looking at it, I'm feeling it, it's not me, even if it's only a slight insight. So all the time they're discovering this new identity of being the one who knows.

So it seems to me that even though a person might enter at the level of deep suffering, of psychological suffering, there's a great possibility that they find their way completely. As the scripture says, in no length of time, so and so, so and so, became fully liberated. And the commentaries gloss that with 25 years in the forest. Fifty years in the forest, but in no length of time. Well, cosmically speaking, that's 25 years.

Are there any questions around that?

Bhante, a lot of what you were saying related to experience of time, impermanence and passing of things and so on. I wonder if you could say a little bit more about the kind of Buddhist experience of time and the importance of the present because there's very much an idea of letting go of the past, not becoming too involved in the future. And also in a more deep sense, there's an underlying picture of what reality is. It's saying, in a sense, there is no past and future. They aren't solid, real things at all. And that's something that can be quite disturbing.

Well, the mind is very clever, isn't it, in maintaining a certain continuity for us. And in a sense, it'd be difficult to see how you could operate without some level of continuity as to who you are, where your position was in society, what your job was. You've got to be in the morning and thought, I'm not supposed to be doing today. You have to ring around and find out, oh yeah, I'm supposed to be at work. So there has to be some connection to the past. You have to have known, it puts you in a position of time in flux. And time in flux is basically a series of events, isn't it? And you're slotted into that series. And there's a presumption it's going onwards.

Remember that in the West we have this impression that time is linear, it's going somewhere, it has some sort of progress. Whereas in the East and in more ancient cultures it was more circular. It was just going round on itself. That's why in the West we often find it very difficult to think of rebirth or reincarnation because we have this idea of progress as a linear state. You begin here and you end up somewhere up there. But as I say, the more circular idea of time which you find in the East allows the mind to allows us to create the possibility that things come round again, things come round again.

So and in daily life, you have to know. I mean, if you've got a dental appointment on Monday, you have to reorganise yourself for that dental appointment. So you can't lose a reality base of what's actually happening at the level of where you are in society, what you're supposed to be doing, where you're supposed to be going, and so on. That's right. But, of course, the delusion is that this is something that has an absolute reality about it. If you walk into a door, there's something absolutely real about that. You know what I mean? It's solid, and it's there, and you've hurt yourself, see? But we know that actually it's just subatomic particles meeting subatomic particles. I mean, there's another level of reality, you can say, that there's actually not much there apart from this energy. This is what we are told. I've never experienced that myself. But this is what we're told, that there's this level of reality about the universe we're living in, which is just energy. It's just this frazzled energy.

So in the belief of continuity, in that sense, there's a belief, an underlying belief, that it's the same person. That's where the delusion is. So, even though you see that your face has changed since you were a child, even in the last five, ten years, you still say, well, it's me. That's me, you see. There's something in us which remains this insoluble, permanent sense of I-ness, of me-ness. See? Even though all our opinions have changed over a certain lifetime, there's still me that hasn't changed. Even though all my emotions are constantly changing and moving around, I don't change. See, this sense of I, see? And this sense of I creates a permanency dependent on this impermanent relation-

ship, on this impermanent happening in our lives. So it's I that I'm going to the dentist. It's I that I'm thinking. It's I that I'm doing this. And this I, you see, substantiates the present moment. Turns it into a real thing.

Now, when you bring your attention to the present moment, into the here and now, you'll hear that, you know, you read that in the literature, you are able to stop this growth of I. So this is the other problem with this fundamental delusion of this becoming. By always in a state of becoming, it's a way that we feel we can control the future. So you're going to do this. I'm going on holiday to this sort of place. When I retire... And it makes you feel very safe because you've got it all worked out. The rest of the world doesn't know you've got it all worked out. This is the problem. It's only you know that it's got it worked out. So this sense of I, you see, begins to collapse. It begins to move. As you move into the present moment, you see, and see the present moment in its totality, you're aware of the difference of the next moment and that it's arising dependent on and yet separate from this present moment. See?

See? So there's a feeling of letting go of that grasping onto time, onto this present, onto a future which you can only imagine. It doesn't actually exist. The future cannot exist, but you imagine it. And what it does is it opens you up to the present moment in a way that allows the potential of that present moment and its expression to be much more available.

So if, for instance, your sense of control is about the sort of person you like, if you go through all your friends, you'll notice that you like them all. See, that's one of the... If you go through all your enemies, you'll notice that you don't like them. So you've split the world into all these people whom you like. Now, every time you form a friendship, you reinforce this idea of who you like. And without you knowing it, you've put blinkers on because you've defined what is likeable, and what's likeable is what's likeable to you. Now, if you're in the present moment much more, and you're open to a new person coming towards you and you haven't got this history of what I like and what I don't like and you're completely open and you're not envisaging some sort of friendship out of this, then as you meet this person you're much more open to them and your sense of who you like and what you don't like begins to expand much more at ease.

So this whole business of time in Buddhist understanding, it's a mental construct. It doesn't actually exist, and I think most people would see that fairly clearly. And we're in a vortex of actions and reactions, and what awareness is trying to do is to weave a way through that which is going to create happiness. See? Does that make sense? So we're in this state of being in time flux, but the awareness is absolutely now within the flux. It's not allowing itself to build up a future from what's happening now because it knows it

doesn't know what the future is. In not knowing the future, it then, as the next moment comes up, is completely open to it because it's not trying to manipulate it. And in not trying to manipulate something one sees the fullness of it. Yeah. When one sees the fullness of it one sees the potential of it. And in seeing the fullness of the potential of it one hopes that the decision made is going to produce something greater out of that situation.

I think I'm sure everybody here has experienced the point in their lives when you come to a full stop. And you don't know what to do. And in that emptiness of not knowing what to do, where to go, there is a certain type of openness there. And then something always arises. Especially if you have a general aspiration, you know, a generalized aspiration to be involved in something. Yeah? Or is that just me? Yeah, you see. It's being able to... It's stopping presumptions from the past launching into the future and creating what we think is something real. And when something comes against that projection that we've made, we're always in conflict. We're in conflict with it. And if it happens to conjoin with our projection will drive it to its bitter end because we don't see its consequences.

I mean, an obvious example is this financial crash. Who was the last Treasury guy in the States? The one with the glasses. Do you know who I mean? Names evade me. I suffer from nominal aphasia. Yes, Greenspan. He said, didn't he, he said it was just greed, that nobody foresaw that the whole thing would collapse because they were still stuck in this greed. That's a wonderful example of what happens. You don't think things are going to end because you keep projecting. It can't end. This is always going to be this tremendous growth of wealth. They just don't see it coming. And the Queen writes to all these economists at the London School of Economics and says, why didn't anybody see this? Because they're all greedy. It's a tunnel vision, isn't it? Very few people foresaw this collapse coming.

But it's interesting, isn't it? We have such a different way of thinking about the future than thinking about the past. So we think the future is completely open and undetermined and not there in a way. We make it. And we think the past is all fixed and definite and that it's an absolute reality. And the actual situation is a lot more fluid than that.

That's right. And I think you've hit the point there. What was that, Rand? Atlas Unbound or something, wasn't it? What was that book? It affected all these people who were in control of their lives. What was her name? Rand? Ayn Rand. That's right, Ayn Rand. And the book was called Atlas Unbound, wasn't it? Atlas Shrugged. That was it, Atlas Shrugged. You see? And it gave this generation of entrepreneurs and Silicon Valley people the feel that they could control their lives. And for the most part, the situation

actually supported it. Here's the point. Sometimes the world will support your aspiration. But then we lose the understanding that actually it's happening because of contingency. Not only because I'm in control. It's happening because at this particular time certain things have come together to form a situation where I make a million. I make a billion for myself. Like Zuckerberg with his Facebook. But he might think he's done it. His idea, I've built up the empire, etc., etc. And completely loses the idea that in fact he's just one part in a whole contingency.

So that's what the self does, you see. The self takes control because underneath it, at a deeper level in our psyche, we know we're not in control. We know there is death. That's the problem. So it's an evasion of death. It's a running away from death all the time.

When we say death, we don't just mean physical death. We mean ending. Every time the day ends, that is a death. Every time you finish your lunch, just stay there for a minute and say, the meal is now dead. It has come to an end. It no longer exists. When you walk out of the house, turn around and say, that moment is dead. Keep using the word dead, and slowly it dawns upon you that actually we're dying every moment.

Well, that's true on the actual level of the physical world and all that, but the problem is the I doesn't change. The I always remains the same. It was always me. I mean, that's the problem. I never change. See, as far as I'm concerned, I'm still 35.

CHAPTER 109

Monks: Daily Life: Not-Self

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 57 min

In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses three interconnected topics requested by retreatants: monastic life, mindfulness in daily activities, and the challenging teaching of anattā (not-self). He begins by tracing the historical context of Buddhist monasticism, explaining how the Buddha entered an established ascetic tradition and gradually developed the Saṅgha with its various ordination practices and rules. The evolution from forest-dwelling meditation communities to urban monasteries serving lay practitioners provides context for understanding different approaches to Buddhist practice today.

The discussion of daily life practice centers on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), which Bhante describes as 'the jewel of the collection.' He emphasizes that this discourse was delivered to lay practitioners, the Kurus, offering a path to liberation through mindfulness in everyday activities. Practical guidance includes maintaining an attitude of service, setting timers for mindfulness bells, establishing morning practice routines, and cultivating careful speech. The principle from the Anuruddha disciples—putting aside one's own wishes to serve others—illustrates the relational dimension of practice.

The teaching on anattā is presented not as philosophy but as methodology. Bhante explains how the Buddha examined the five khandhas (aggregates)—body, perception, feeling, saṅkhāra, and consciousness—finding none that satisfies the criteria for a permanent, controlling self. Yet the Buddha carefully avoided both eternalism and annihilationism, pointing instead to an unconditioned awareness that cannot be grasped as an object. This intuitive awareness (sati-paññā) is what practitioners cultivate, learning to avert attention from the sense of self toward direct experience of impermanence, thereby opening the path to liberation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I asked what sort of things you want to talk about. I remember two of them, but I can't remember the third. One was about monastic life, the other one was about daily life, and there was something else, wasn't there? Not me, not mine. Ah yes, that's a killer that is.

Let me start with the daily life one, which we'll sort of tackle tomorrow, but maybe just say a little this evening. But just to answer a question about monastic life: when the Buddha left home, he entered a tradition of his time which seems to have had quite a long history, maybe going back even to the civilization of the Indus Valley. The Aryans came down from the Russian steppes and either took some of their practices—yoga practices—nobody really knows. But the idea of leaving the ordinary worldly life to go off and live in the forests and practice these exercises for one reason or another was well established by the time the Buddha came along.

It would seem that his age was a bit like the hippies of the 70s. Anybody and everybody was out there. When these ascetics turned up at parks, crowds would gather to ask all sorts of questions. It seemed to have been this sort of entertainment of the age, really, on the full moon, in the bright full moon. And so he was just joining a tradition.

The tradition simply said that you lived really close to nature in that sort of climate. During the hot season, you might just live under a tree—and they still do it, you still find ascetics out there doing that. Then in the rainy season, you'd build yourself a hut from branches and leaves. And in the cold season, you'd make sure you got a bit more cloth to cover yourself with. So it was a very basic lifestyle.

The idea was that they would go begging for food on alms round. It wasn't so much that you went and asked people—you would stand in silence. Then hopefully somebody would take pity, and the exchange was of course that people thought these were spiritual people from whom they could get advice about their own lives, much like psychotherapists these days. Some of them were healers, so there was that sort of exchange between them, and many of them would teach lay people their practices.

The Buddha entered into a particular tradition as opposed to that of the Brahmins. The Brahmins were really the priests in the sense that they officiated at these rituals. They could be landowners, they were advisors to the king, some of them very rich. The Buddha often talks about the true Brahmin, sort of pulling their legs, saying the true Brahmin doesn't do that sort of thing—he's supposed to be the spiritual leader of society.

In his district, in his part, the Brahmins really hadn't got to being the top dogs yet. Over towards what we now know as Calcutta, the Brahmins were at the top, then the kings, then the rulers. But where he lived, the Brahmins hadn't quite ascended to that level, and the king still had the greater status in society. Of course he belonged to that caste, the ruling caste, the Kshatriya caste. So when he went out to train, he basically took on those traditions.

Within those times there were people, mainly men though women did join them, who would practice these absorption states and some of these mortification things. All this he gathered, and he reinterpreted it all after his own enlightenment, his own awakening. He then reinterpreted all this in a slightly different way to make sense according to his own understandings.

So he begins—he thinks he's going to, he wants to share this stuff, so he goes out to teach. The story is that he meets this ascetic on the road, and the ascetic says to him, "You're bright, your face is shining, you're obviously well advanced. Who is your teacher?" And the Buddha says, to the effect, "I have no teacher. I'm the fully liberated one, I am fully enlightened." And the man went, "Oh yeah," and then walked off. So I think the Buddha sort of quickly realized that's not the way you get his message across, by announcing his status.

He then ends up with his own companions, his disciples. But as his fame grew, you might say, as he walked around giving his teachings, people would ask to join him as an ascetic. His response was "Ehi passiko"—come and have a try. That's known as the first ordination.

After so many people had joined him, and many of them became fully liberated as well, they established this Sangha, this community. Then there came the taking of refuges, which is known as the second ordination, where you take refuge in him as the teacher, the teaching he's giving, and the community around him. That became the lay ordination—when lay people wanted to take him as a teacher, they would take these refuges and precepts.

Then the later rules came because monks and nuns had all sorts of misdemeanors. The ordination became more complicated in the sense that questions were asked. Certain things were established: you couldn't be in the service of the king, you couldn't be a criminal, you couldn't escape into the order by being a criminal, you couldn't be ill. That last rule came about because one of the great doctors of the day offered free medical care to his order, and of course people who were sick purposefully joined the order to get free treatment. So they made this rule that you couldn't do that.

For the first few years we can imagine that they basically stayed with him to get his teachings and to practice meditation. They would go off by themselves, and just by hearsay—not having mobile phones—they'd occasionally come across him, they'd hear that he was over there or over here, so they'd go and search him out. As it grew to a bigger size, there came the establishment of monasteries, mainly for rainy seasons. During the rainy season it was difficult to move around, but also there was this feeling that they shouldn't move around in case they accidentally trod on little creatures.

Remember, the Jains were also very powerful at that time, whose teaching was that whether you meant it or not, if you did harm—like you stepped on something by mistake—you still had bad karma coming towards you. So there were a lot of different teachings around karma and the meaning of karma.

Eventually he had these monasteries here and there, and the population grew. It tended to remain fairly close to his teachings, which was that anybody who joined the monastery had two duties: the duty to meditate and the duty to study the Dhamma, which meant mainly reciting off by heart his teachings. We have the product of that in all the scriptures now, which for 500 years were just kept by word of mouth.

He's the monk who... Well, I'll tell the story and I'm sure Mario will remember his name. He's an Arahant. He becomes an Arahant and he says to the Buddha, "What I'd like to do now is just show people where to stay when they come to the monastery."

So it was said that those people who were interested in meditation, he would put in these quarters, because they were meditating. Those who were interested in the Dhamma, the teachings and memorization, he'd put here. Those people who were interested in the Vinaya, the rule of the monks, he'd put over here. And the athletic monks, he'd put over there—being the people who messed about.

So people would come to the monastery, especially late at night when it was dark, to see this phenomenon of light coming out from the end of his finger while he showed them where to go. A bit like E.T., if you remember that film. Anyway, he's quite a character because he also has to give talks to the nuns, and the nuns complain that it's always the same talk. When it finally comes to him to pass away, he says to the Buddha, "It's time for me to go," and the Buddha says—when somebody says something like that to the Buddha, he always says, "Do as you think fit. Do what you think is right." So he rose up into the air, burst into a ball of flame, and disappeared. Can you imagine that?

So you can see there that the monastery had certain sections in it which were devoted to certain practices. Later on, the monasteries entered into cities, and becoming close to lay people meant there had to be a much more intimate interaction with them. There was much more service to do with lay people.

The monasteries that you see way out in the jungles—well, there's not many jungles left now—but way out in the countryside, they tend to be more specific in their practice. They're mainly meditation. As you come into the city, the monastery tends to become urban. So you have monasteries specifically devoted to study. And then you have small

viharas—vihara just means a dwelling place of a monk. There were so many on that side of India that the state Bihar is a corruption of the word vihara. So at one point there must have been a lot of them.

As they came into the city, they had to interact with lay people on a much more religious level. So there came the establishment of little rituals—people coming to take refuge and precepts, sprinkling of water, all those things that were slightly coming over from old Brahminical traditions. Like for instance the string that's tied around your wrist—have you all heard about that? I'll offer you all that at the end. That really goes back to the Brahmin string that they hold across their bodies, connecting them to Brahman, the Brahma.

These days you have much the same pattern. You have monasteries which are very singular. If you go, for instance, to some of the monasteries like Mitirigala in Sri Lanka, or you go to Wat Pah Nanachat or the Ajahn Chah monasteries, they're all very separate huts and the monks just live by themselves and meditate. Then they turn up for lunch, that's all. Well, it's breakfast—it depends on the tradition they're in.

If you go up to northeast Thailand, you're out with your bowl as soon as the light breaks. When you come back and you have your meal—food's often brought to the monastery—by eight o'clock you're finished, and that's it. You don't eat again. And you might think, "Oh God, that's terrible." But in fact, it seems to work. What's that old adage about breakfast being like a king, lunch like a prince, dinner like a pauper? To my surprise, I found it actually worked. If you eat a lot in the morning, and you're not doing much during the day—remember, you're just meditating and walking gently up and down, you've done your exercise wandering off to get this food—then you find that that suffices. Other monasteries will give you breakfast and lunch.

I mention Mitirigala because it's a Mahasi monastery. These places tend to be exclusively for monks, and some will have monks and nuns, so they tend to be really for order members. But as you move into the city, then you get this connection. The Mahasi Sayadaw was one of those monks of the last century who brought the monastic life directly into the urban life. He was actually invited, and one of the interesting things about that was that the Mahasi Centre in Rangoon is actually owned by lay people. That's really quite against tradition—normally all the buildings and grounds that monks live in are owned by them through a trust or some mechanism, but this is actually owned by lay people. A lot of Mahasi centres are owned like that.

So here we get a slightly different thing. Before that, generally speaking, the idea was that lay people lived the good life and created good karma so that in their next life they might take on the spiritual life. And the monks and nuns, they lived the spiritual life

hoping to attain full liberation. This sort of changed during the middle of last century, where the meditation techniques were taught directly to lay people with great success through the Mahasi tradition especially, but also U Ba Khin and Goenka, people like that. And the same was beginning to happen in Thailand with Ajahn Chah and others.

So the monasteries then became also meditation centres for lay people. That's what you've got. Depending on what monastery or what tradition you belong to, you could find yourself in a university. Peradeniya, for instance, in Sri Lanka—there are a lot of monks there who are basically academics. There's a sort of mismatch between the real academic life and meditation, because if you do long meditation retreats, you forget. Memory is like a muscle.

If you don't keep exercising it, it disappears.

There was a story of an academic monk who came down to the Mahasi center and was taken by the technique, really liked it. He went back to his study monastery and began teaching the monks how to do it, and they were drawn to it. But then the senior monks thought, no, this is not good. So they kicked him out and stopped it. Because sometimes it doesn't work, you see, if you want to really remember stuff.

And then you get these meditation centers now. The one I was at, Kanda Bodha, had a throughput of a thousand people every year. But it also had a monastic sangha, both nuns and monks. And we were devoted mainly to—well, entirely to—the meditations and the teachings around meditation. Nobody there you would have seen as a scholar or anything like that.

Then you get all the viharas in cities which really are there to service lay people. Even now, if you go to London, there's a Chiswick Vihara which is the biggest Sri Lankan vihara. There's just a continual throughput of lay people coming in either to make offerings or to seek blessings for an exam, or a pending birth, or anything like that. So there's that sort of connection. And the monks there may or may not study, may or may not meditate.

Lay people in the East are very happy for anybody to take the robe and just live the good life. For them, that's praiseworthy enough. So that's it—there's not much else going on.

Those of you who know about Christian monasticism, the ones developed through St. Benedict rather than, say, St. Francis, will know that there's a routine through the day. But in his rule, in one of his writings, he always saw this as training, and that eventually the monk or nun would go off by themselves to seek solitude. That was the main idea.

Have you seen Into Great Silence? The Carthusians, in French Switzerland, on the border. That's really very inspiring, very challenging. The filmmaker asked for ten years, thirteen years before the monks gave him permission to film. Well, they thought about it for quite some time.

So basically that's the monastic life. I remember this woman asking Venerable Nyanaponika—the very man, a German monk, very revered and very renowned. He's the one who started the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy. His book, by the way, *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, is still a classic and definitely a good read.

The woman said to him—because she thought, as people often think, if you're a Buddhist then you must be a monk or a nun—she said, "Well, what if everybody becomes a monk or a nun?" He said, "Don't worry my dear, it won't happen."

And basically that's it. It's a lifestyle, and you're either drawn to it or not. There's nothing—it's not the only way to live a spiritual life. It's an institutional way. And what makes an institution are the rules and customs. A layperson who really puts their mind to developing spiritually wouldn't need such tight rules and customs to achieve that, but would simply have to guide their lives as best they can within daily life, with the feeling that they're moving forward.

And that in a sense brings us to daily practice.

The jewel of the collection is the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse, known as the jewel of the whole collection. The Buddha is giving instruction on how to establish this mindfulness, this awareness, this right awareness. He's been to visit a group of people called the Kurus who lived near modern Delhi. So he's traveling quite a bit—between Delhi and all the way over to Varanasi, and then up towards Nepal. He's always walking, except in the rainy season when he stops. He gives them his usual talks, and then he returns to visit them and finds to his surprise they're actually doing what he said. It said that, for instance, there was no well talk—in other words, gossip. Around the well you have a bit of a gossip.

So he was taken by this, and he actually delivers this sermon, this teaching, to them. What the discourse is saying to those lay people is: if you want to attain liberation as a lay person, without going through all this ascetic business, this is the way to do it.

In that discourse, it's basically about the meditation practice we're doing and how to overcome these hindrances—everything we've talked about. But there's also a small section on daily life, which really is just mindfulness, just being with what you're doing. When you read the scriptures, it's obviously been adjusted by monks and nuns who were memorizing it, because everything is skewed towards the monastic life. But if he's

giving it to lay people, then he must have also talked about cooking and washing and looking after babies—the whole business of how to bring your mindfulness into daily life.

I think the core attitude is service. Whatever you're doing, you're doing for your own benefit—the Buddha is clear about this—you're doing it for your own benefit, or you're doing it for somebody else's benefit, or you're doing it for both your benefit and somebody else's. If you're clear about that, then this is going to be your attitude. Every time you come to a decision point, and there are many during the day, you just stop for a moment and give yourself the right intention.

So we've been doing it with food—well, I hope so. You've been in front of the food and you've said, "This food is to nourish the body, full stop." The fact that it tastes nice is to be enjoyed, but that's not why I'm eating.

I'm eating purposefully for the benefit of this body.

Now, it doesn't mean to say that while you're eating, greed might not come in, and you find yourself shoveling it in. But as soon as you notice that, you might stop. You say, "Whoa," put the spoon down. Okay, stop. And you breathe out and wait for it all to settle. Then you re-establish your right relationship to the food. You can see how, if you take that into daily life, it becomes transformative.

One of the lovely small incidents in the suttas is when the Buddha turns up and there are three monks there. They're called the Anuruddhas, as a group around the chief monk Anuruddha. They're three fully liberated monks living together. And the Buddha asks them, "How is it you live so peacefully together?" Anuruddha says, "Well, what I say is, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?"

Now, that sort of works best when everybody is saying it. If you say it and somebody else isn't saying it, then you can tend to be abused. So it has to be used with a certain wisdom. But fancy just waking up in the morning and saying, "Well, today I'll put aside what I want to do and do what others want to do." Not as an absolute, but just as a general attitude.

So that anytime you meet somebody, anytime you go into a situation, even at work, there is that attitude of openness to find out, "Well, what do they want to do?" You don't have to do what they want to do, but the attitude is that of genuine inquiry: "What do you want to do?" Normally speaking, when you do that and people actually feel your sincerity—that you are actually open to what they want to do—they're usually open to

what you want to do. And after some negotiation, there's usually a little bit of compromise, and you end up all being happy. So that sense of openness, that sense of service.

Now again, just like in eating, you might start off with the right intention and then this other stuff creeps in. You find yourself being anxious, you find yourself controlling. And then, as soon as you wake up from that, you re-establish your right relationship. So if you think of service as a way of relating both to individuals and to groups, that sense of openness to them—and knowing that you don't have to do what they say, you're just open to it like a suggestion—the mindfulness that we're practicing really allows us to try and maintain this wakefulness during the day.

When we did that global awareness practice, where you are aware of what's inside and what's outside, it's not tight. It's not tight around something. Now sometimes you have to be focused. If you're adding up your bills, you've definitely got to be focused. If there's something specific that you are reading or studying or looking at or involved in, then there is that sense of focus. But if you don't watch it, it's like this other stuff creeps in, and before you know it, it's getting tight, it's getting obsessive, and all that sort of thing.

One of the things you can do is always set a time. Have either a little timer so that it wakes you up every so often—it could be any interval: twenty minutes, forty minutes, one hour. That would be a moment where you stop and say, "What's going on?" There's a mindfulness bell you can download on your computer, which comes from the Thich Nhat Hanh community in Washington. You can set it to whatever time you want. So there you are on your emails and your Facebook and all that, and you hear "ding." The point isn't to say, "Oh, I'll put it away." You say, "Oh, ding," and you stop and wait for three bells, and then you carry on.

That business of stopping every so often, depending on what you're doing and where you are, is a really skillful thing to do because you catch yourself.

Other times, when you feel a bit more relaxed, when you don't have to focus so much on what you're doing, try to maintain that global awareness where you're also aware of what's happening in you. In conversation, we often lose contact with ourselves and get drawn in completely. If you keep in contact with yourself, with your reactions to what's happening, just in the background, often it can stop you saying silly things and getting caught up in somebody else's problems and such.

And then there's just a basic routine—having a morning practice. The importance of the morning practice is that it sets you in the right mode for the day. Even if you lose it, at least you've reminded yourself in the morning that you want to maintain this sense of awakenedness. What do we mean by that? We just mean that I'm aware of what I'm doing. Everything is deliberate. I'm aware of the state of my heart—whether I'm in a depressed mood or too excited, getting too carried away about things. And I'm careful.

You have to be careful with your words. Speech is so easy to fall foul of. The Buddha talks about kindly speech—always kind speech, honest speech, being honest. And most important to me anyway: at a suitable time. It's all right being kind and honest, but you want to choose your moment. These factors help us to just be a little reticent about jumping in with our talk. They just pull us back.

I'll give you one example that often happens to me, and I think happens to a lot of people. Somebody might say to you, "My garden's in a mess. Have you got any time to come and help me?" And you say, "Yes," right away. And then afterward you think, "I don't want to go there. What am I doing? I'm busy." Now you're going to have to pull back. So you phone up and say, "I'm not feeling very well," or, "Somebody's just called me." All you had to say in the first place was, "I'll tell you a bit later. I've just got to check—I think there's something else on." You just give yourself a little break. And then when you make that decision, it's coming from a good heart. If you don't want to do it, you say, "I haven't got the time," or something, or, "I just don't want to do it." You have to be careful with friends.

So it's just little things like that—being slightly aware of how we get into conversations.

Now, all these things, all these tricks—there are many books on daily life, they're a dozen a penny now—all these things at first feel slightly false, as though you're forcing yourself, as though it's... what's the word I'm looking for... as though you're pretending.

For instance, you might start off by saying, "Before I speak, there will always be a stop." When you're in the mode of listening, actually listening, there has to be a moment where you become proactive, where you've got to answer. Our problem is that while we're listening to somebody, we're already forming our answer. That's where conversations get all jumbled up. But if I say to myself, "I'll get in the habit of first of all listening," you find that when you really listen, there's always a gap before you can actually speak, because you've got to change mode—you've got to become active.

When you practice at first, it feels false, it feels forced. But that's always true of anything you do when you want to get into a new habit. You have to go through this process of it feeling practiced, forced, false. But then, once it becomes habitual, it becomes spontaneous.

It's the same with mettā. At first you practice mettā and you might not feel like doing it, so it feels false—because we think that goodwill has to be an emotional thing. So if I'm depressed, feeling down in the dumps, and somebody comes along who is really happy, they've just got this job they always wanted, I put on this happy face: "Oh, I'm so happy for you." But inside I'm thinking, "No, I'm not. I bloody hate you." Then I think, "Oh, this is so false. I'm being so false with you."

But that's because you're identifying with this down mood. You're not identifying with the part of you that really does want to rejoice in their good fortune.

So at first it feels false, you see. There's a phrase, "fake it before you make it." I'm sure you've come across that. So you've got to pretend to do it, and then eventually it just becomes natural, becomes spontaneous.

All these things that you read about, they just take a little bit of effort. Keep reminding yourself. Don't worry about forgetting it or not doing it or getting all jumbled up. And when you get that judging mind coming in saying, "You're useless, you'll never do this," you note that as judging, so you don't get involved in it. And you just keep reaffirming your right action.

After a while you find these behaviors begin to change towards the positive. That gives you more confidence. The more confidence you have, the more ease you feel about yourself. But even after years of training yourself to respond with kindness and all that, don't be surprised if suddenly you fly off the handle and go berserk. Because those habits are always there. Sometimes we think that we don't suffer so much from that anymore, until somebody presses the button. And then we know, oh heck, we've still got more work to do.

I remember my teacher said to me—he was, generally speaking, a very peaceful, very kind man, Dr. Ilze Dammer—and he would always say to me, "Well, I'm not tested. When I go to the station and these people make fun of me and all that sort of stuff, that's when you want to see me. Then you'll know how peaceful I am."

So it's a case of just gently pushing ourselves, just a gentle push towards what we see as wholesome.

Now there was—ah yes, not-self, my goodness. Well, first of all, in the discourse which is known as the second ever discourse that he gave, all he says is—he talks about control. First of all, you have to understand what they meant by the self in those times, or the soul: something which was eternal, it had to be everlasting, it had to be in control, and it had to be happy. If you're in total control of your existence, you should be totally happy because you can make yourself totally happy.

So the first thing he asks is: have a look at what you're experiencing and just see what control you have. On the body, for instance, sure we can wave our arms about and take it here and there, but on the essential stuff—sickness, aging, and death—there's very little control. You can't grow taller, can't grow smaller, you can't extend your arms. When you look at the body, there's very little control as such.

When you go a bit deeper, you find that actually you haven't a clue what's going on there. I think red corpuscles are now leaking out from the marrow of your bones through the bones into your bloodstream. Have you ever felt that? Have you any idea what your liver's doing now? And even if you knew, could you do anything about it? So when you actually ask questions about what it is you know and can control about your body, you find it's actually not much—it's just surface stuff.

Then he asks the same about our perceptions. When you perceive something, he's talking about the way we see things and hear things. That's completely dependent on our sense base. If you're hard of hearing, you're hard of hearing. You're not going to hear very much. If you lose your sense of smell, your taste tends to disappear. So a lot of our perceptions are, again, based upon the body and also based upon our culture. Sometimes we can't see things because we haven't got the culture for it.

One of the things that happened to me when I went to Sri Lanka was I heard this barking, and for some reason I hadn't associated this noise with any animals, and it was way up there in the trees. So I said to somebody, "What is that?" It was the monkeys! I said, "Monkeys?" And I kept looking at these trees—where the heck are they? The Sri Lankans said, "Well, there they are," and I'm looking, I cannot see them for the life of me. And then suddenly I see one monkey in the trees. Of course, once I'd seen one, I saw them all. There was a whole troop up there. But for the life of me, I couldn't see that first one.

So you can see how the way we're trained affects the way we perceive things. For instance, the Inuits have something like ten or fifteen words for snow, because they see the various types of snow, whereas for us, snow is snow, eh?

Then there's feelings. Now, the word vedanā covers both the sensations in our bodies and the sensations caused in our bodies by our emotions—feelings, sensations. And what we discover in meditation is that we don't have much control over those either. You can generate good feelings through the mettā, but in a sense they can't be sustained. They disappear, they arise and pass away. So we don't have much control over those either.

Then it comes to our saṅkhāras. These saṅkhāras are our habits. Now, this is where we could have some control through our will, but we find that we are creatures of habit and we're dragged along by our habits. So you find that our control over habits can be quite minimal too.

And then finally there's consciousness. Now, consciousness is dependent on the psychophysical organism. So if that goes, you've no control over it. The obvious time is sleep.

So you lose your awareness—or should we say your awakeness—in sleep. There's always some consciousness, always some awareness, because otherwise you wouldn't hear the alarm clock. You're sort of woken up by this little tapping on the eardrum.

So that's his first argument. He says, well, if there is this soul, if there is this eternal thing, where is it? Where is it in your experience? And he's asking us to look at our experience and see. One of the definitions of a soul is that it's in control of itself.

The next thing is he points out this impermanence, which is just another way of saying control—that you can't control it. So he asks you to look at the body and our perceptions and our feelings, all these habits, and even consciousness itself, and see that they're all arising and passing away. So they're not eternal.

When he asks us to look like that, you see, he's not saying therefore that there is nothing, that all there is is this psychophysical organism and then there's nothing at all. That would put him in the category of materialists or annihilationists of his day. So he's not saying that. On the other hand, he doesn't want to fall into the error of saying, well, there is a soul or a self, because if he does that then he's pointing to something which has some sort of eternality about it, some sort of control.

So he's very careful not to fall into the error of a concept about what a soul is, and he's very careful not to go into a complete denial of it. Therefore he then tries to point to something which is there, which sounds very much like a soul. He says, for instance, there is that which is not born, it doesn't die, it's not conditioned, it's not created. So that sounds a bit like a soul, doesn't it?

And then he says there is a sphere—there's another way of saying it. A sphere, as he uses it, we're translating the word āyatana. A sphere is a type of experience which can't be mixed with another. So there are six spheres of experience. One sphere is sight, the next sphere is hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and the inner mind. All these are called spheres. In other words, you can't see through your nose—you can try, but you can't do it. So these spheres are quite separate.

Then he says that there is a sphere where there's just no phenomena. There's no moon, there's no sun, there's no coming, there's no going, there's no here, no there—but there is this sphere of experience.

And then finally there's a lovely little discourse, a lovely little phrase which happens twice in the scriptures. The one I'm thinking of begins with somebody asking him, where do the four great elements come to an end? In other words, disappear, annihilate. Now the four great elements are earth, fire, water, and air, and they stand for certain properties. Earth is pressure, weight. Fire is heat and lack of it. Water is cohesion, elasticity and lack of it, stiffness. And air is movement or lack of it. What they're describing is not physics—they're not describing the way a physicist would describe what there is in the universe. What they're describing is how we experience matter. So when you go into your body, or when you touch something, you'll see it has one of those qualities. All four qualities will be there, but some of them will be preponderant.

The question is, where does all that come to an end? In other words, is there an end to all that? He's asking about annihilation. And the Buddha says that's the wrong question. He says the question ought to be, where do these four elements not find a footing? Where is it that you don't find the world, the phenomenal world?

And he says there is a consciousness—and I'll come back to this word consciousness in a minute—there is a consciousness which is not touched by any of the senses, which is without boundary (you have to have phenomena to create boundary), and in all directions full of light. And just this is the end of suffering. So he's obviously talking about something within us which is not phenomenal. It doesn't belong to this world of phenomena, and it cannot be described as a self.

It cannot be described as a self because when you are that consciousness, you don't know it. It cannot be an object to itself. And you'll find this in Mahayana scriptures where they say things like the eye cannot see itself. It can't, can it? The tongue can't taste itself. Can you imagine if the tongue had a basic taste of curry? It would be a killer, wouldn't it? I mean, it's all right if you're eating curry, but what about ice cream?

So it's the very fact that senses are empty. They are empty themselves of what they receive. So this awareness that we are exercising, this satipaññā, this intuitive intelligence—we're drawing it out of its confusion with the body, confusion with emotions. When I say "confusion," I mean "together with." Every time you say "I am," you've got to ask, who? You say "I am angry"—who's angry? With thought especially, very quickly we are the thinker.

So we're drawing this quality, this intuitive awareness, out from that to become the observer. When you're the observer, the Buddha says, you're in the presence of Nibbāna. You're actually in the presence of the ultimate state. But we can't see it. It's right in front of us and we can't see it.

And what we actually feel ourselves to be is the observer. To be the feeler. And the double bind is, how do you get out of that? Because every time you want to get rid of that sense of self, another self appears to get rid of it. So you're in an eternal double bind going all the way back.

The Buddha's instructions are to keep averting away from that sense of self—that's the delusion, that's the first object we make. Averting yourself to actually what it is you're experiencing, because that sense of self is only a concept in the mind. It also has a mirror image in the heart as a sense of presence. Often that's described by people as their soul, but actually it still belongs to the world of phenomena because it's a feeling. And if you have a self-image like "the observer," that must also still belong to the world of phenomena, to the world of feeling, perception, and so on.

So it's by bypassing that, keeping our attention on what it is we're experiencing as arising and passing away—not me, not mine—that there comes the experience of who we really are. The Buddha referred to himself as the Tathāgata, which means the one who's transcended. So there is within us this Buddha nature, this intuitive awareness. You'll find it referred to in various ways. And really, to experience that in itself is our aim, because once that's known, the path leading to the end of suffering is open wide. That's what it says.

But once you know that, then you can't know it? Well, that's the interesting thing, isn't it? In your meditation, this intuitive awareness we're exercising, looking at these specific qualities of impermanence, of the role of desire, and of that seeing of not me, not mine—something distant—when it sees something, the insight, the actual insight, is immediate. There's no thought involved. You either see it or you don't see it. But then it has to tell itself what it's just seen. And that's where the mind comes in. The mind has to be used; the intellect is used to refer back to itself what is just observed.

That's why often some of you will have experienced it, but in meditation a line will come up, just out of the blue, some insight. There's one beautiful example by a teacher called Ajahn Mahā Bua, who died recently. If you get hold of his book called *Straight from the Heart*, these are really beautiful talks, although you have to get into his way of speaking. He's meditating, meditating, and there just comes this line out of the blue: "Wherever there arises a sense of a self, that is the beginning of another level of existence, of another level of becoming."

What he's saying there is that as soon as the "I" appears, a process happens. And because of the "I," because of the delusion of "I," there's always going to be some dissatisfaction involved, because this "I" is always seeking real happiness in the sensual world, and it won't deliver. With that insight, he seems as though he really moved. Now, that came from this intuitive intelligence telling itself what it's just seeing.

It happens to us in ordinary daily life, when suddenly you say something amazingly wise and you wonder where it came from. Has it happened? You suddenly find yourself giving advice to somebody and you wonder how the heck you came across that.

So it's one of the more tricky teachings, mainly made tricky because of the books written on it. Everybody, any academic worth his salt writes about not-self, and he just confuses it. Because it's not actually a philosophy, it's a methodology to make us discover what's real, that's all.

When it came to questions about the soul, there's a lovely one where this man Vacchagotta comes up, and he's completely confused. He goes to the Buddha and says, "Now come on, is there a soul or isn't there?" He's obviously had discussions with this and that. He's had discussions with the Buddha and he's finally fed up. He says, "Look, come on, I want to know, is there a soul?" And the Buddha is silent. So Vacchagotta goes away.

Ānanda, who's with the Buddha, says, "Why didn't you answer him?" The Buddha says, "Well, if I'd have said there is not a soul, he would have gone around thinking that I would have been put into the camp of the annihilationists. If I said there was a soul, I'd have been put in the camp of the eternalists. But I didn't tell him that because if I'd have said to him there was no soul, he would have gone away confused, saying to himself, 'Once I had a soul and now I don't have one.'"

So with all these questions, he kept silent. One of the regular questions was known as the quadrilemma. We have a dilemma; they had a quadrilemma. And the quadrilemma was put as: Did the Tathāgata, upon death, continue to exist? Did he annihilate?

Did he both exist and annihilate? Or did he neither exist nor annihilate? You can't get around that one. And of course, he kept silent. He wouldn't go into metaphysics, because as soon as you get into metaphysics, you get into all sorts of mess.

I don't know whether that's been as clear as the problem or it's made it even more confused. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your practice, deliver yourself from all these confusions and arrive at that wonderful place of Nibbāna, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.

CHAPTER 110

Retreats, Attachment, Children and Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 28 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the practical aspects of intensive Vipassanā retreats in the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition, explaining how three months of pure insight practice can lead to complete liberation from suffering. He discusses the intensive schedule of 18 hours daily meditation alternating between sitting and walking practice, contrasting this with the Samatha-Vipassanā combination found in other traditions.*
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> *The talk delves deeply into the challenging topic of attachment, particularly in parent-child relationships. Bhante explains how attachment manifests through holding on, pushing away, or running away, and how parental anger toward children reveals underlying desires for control. He explores the distinction between necessary guidance and unnecessary emotional reactions, illustrating how professionals remain calm in crises while parents panic due to attachment.*
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> *A significant portion addresses grief and loss, with Bhante offering the radical insight that grief measures attachment, not love. He explains how true love involves letting go when someone's time comes, sharing a powerful example of a mother who overcame five years of chronic grief by understanding this principle. The discussion extends to how psychological suffering is always self-generated—while others can physically harm us, our emotional reactions originate from within. This understanding, though initially challenging to accept, offers the profound hope that what is self-generated can be self-cured, making liberation from all psychological suffering possible through the Eightfold Path.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Any of the persons do any component for fasting? Well, it's inbuilt because afternoon you don't eat. Fasting itself in Buddhist understanding wouldn't be – they don't like you doing fast, not in the monastic world. They don't mind you, I mean, as far as they're concerned, the only reason for fasting would be a process of renunciation. You might do it for health reasons, of course. That's another thing altogether. But in terms of a spiritual practice, the only reason you lay off something is to see your attachment to it. I think I mentioned it now, sitting in front of the TV. That's a killer, that. And then you see what your relationship is. So that's what you would do it for.

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

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

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

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

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

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

You mean the death? Ah, yes. Well, that, of course, is a real horror story for a parent. But the grief, the loss of somebody, the grief we feel is not a measure of love. It's the measure of attachment. And if you don't see that, then you get yourself into a double bind. Because every time you grief lessons, you say to yourself, I don't love them anymore. So to re-establish your love with a person, you've got to re-establish your grief. There's no way out of that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

So if you stop saying I'm happy when you are feeling happy, then it's just – I mentioned Blake's little phrase, to kiss a joy as it flies is to live in eternity's sunrise. And every time something good comes up many times, the best thing is to feel gratitude, to thank it. And then let go. That's it. Finished. That will never come again. Something similar may arise, but that will never come again. That's the nature of impermanence. Nothing ever repeats itself.

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

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

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

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

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

But when you actually bring it down into an attitude, you're moving towards love. Because love is the acceptance of interdependence at the heart level. And compassion and joy. If it stays at the heart level, you might feel good about it, but it doesn't do you

any good. It's got to move into action. And as you act from those attitudes, it feeds back into the understanding. Because you're actually experiencing interconnectedness. In that way you spin yourself to *Nibbāna* without getting dizzy.

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

Every time you fall, you just pick yourself up. So we're bound to fail. That's the point. We're bound to fail. But we keep trying. Keep trying. And the failures get less intense.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All the postures that you see are representative of something. So that's your *samādhi* posture, that's in concentration. When he's holding something, he's holding a lotus, which is the teaching posture. When he's like that, it's the fearless posture. Towards the end of his life, his cousin, who was one of his disciples, Devadatta, tried to kill him. Even if you're a Buddha, someone's going to try and kill you. And on one occasion, they set a mad elephant on him. And so it said that as the elephant came towards him, he held his hand and offered loving kindness. And as the story goes, the elephant stopped and bowed. Wonderful. So it's fearlessness. You'll sometimes get like that too, although they're not so common, and that's love, compassion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, you can test this out yourself. The next time you're with somebody who's really angry with you, see if you can just drop into that moment of just awareness. And you'll see the anger stops here. If you let it in, you get your reaction and then you get your anger and you're hurt. That's the understanding. And it also includes children, children who are abused. What's happening inside them is being self-generated.

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

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

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

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

"Oh, really?"

That's right. Very good.

CHAPTER 111

New Year Revision of Buddhadhamma Theory and Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 56 min

> *In this New Year teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's analysis of dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness) and how we unconsciously create our own suffering through the process of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination). He explores the five khandhas as the Buddha's framework for understanding human experience, emphasizing that the world we experience is personally manufactured rather than objectively given.*
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> *The talk traces the psychological sequence from initial contact through vedanā (feeling-tone) to taṇhā (craving) and upādāna (grasping), showing how identification with mental states leads to suffering. Bhante explains how vipassanā practice works by creating distance between the knower and known, allowing negative conditioning to burn away naturally. He emphasizes that suffering only begins when we identify with experience ('I am angry' rather than 'there is anger').*
>
> *The teaching integrates meditation practice with daily life through the Noble Eightfold Path, showing how insight wisdom naturally translates into ethical conduct and loving-kindness. This accessible yet profound exploration offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for anyone seeking to understand how Buddhist practice leads to contentment and liberation from self-created suffering.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

There are a couple of questions here, but they take me slightly off what I was hoping to address. I'll come back to them this morning. This morning we talked about this business of creating our own suffering, and I just wanted to go into that a bit more deeply.

The Buddha uses the word which translates as "the world," *loke*. He says in this world there is this *dukkha* and the end of it. *Dukkha* is one of these very difficult words to translate because it has ideas which just don't make sense to us in terms of the word "suffering." "Unsatisfactoriness" gets close to it, but it's really the whole gamut of human misery which all of us I'm sure have experienced. So it's not only the existential

despairs and deep depressions and death—it's also the suffering that comes from our indulgence with pleasure, the consequences of that, the addiction, and the grief when you lose somebody or lose something.

The attachment, the pain that comes from attachment, is always hidden, remember, because while you're actually enjoying something, it's heaven—not a problem. When I say "enjoying" here, you've got to be careful, because we can get into the mistake that therefore we're not supposed to enjoy life, we're not supposed to enjoy smoked cheese, which is ridiculous. It's trying to make a distinction between enjoyment and indulgence, which is very difficult for us because they're symbiotic. They arise together very closely.

Aversion is easy to spot because aversion immediately distances the object. It makes it an enemy. You want to push it away. So one is aware of any feelings of aversion, fear, and all that. But when it comes to indulgence, it's a close marriage. They're very difficult to distinguish. Even so, distinguish we must.

So this word *dukkha* is very wide-ranging indeed, and we're not completely free of it until we are liberated. That's what the word "enlightenment" refers to—the understanding, the clarity. But "liberation" refers to the liberation from suffering.

Now the way the Buddha uses the word "world" is referring to the five *khandhas*. These five *khandhas* are just a way of looking at the psycho-physical organism from the point of view of somebody who wants to become liberated. We have various models of a human being, and it depends what you're actually looking for. If you're a Freudian, then you'd think about your superego and all that. But from the Buddha's point of view, it was trying to see the human being in terms of these five categories. We call them heaps or aggregates because they're all made up of bits.

The first one is all to do with the body itself—what we experience as sensation. It really is actually only talking about the body that we can sense, not the body in itself, because the body in itself we know very little of. Have you any idea what your liver's doing now? When you had your biscuits, were you directing the amount of enzymes that were going into your stomach to digest them? There's a whole—when you look into your body and actually ask yourself, "Is this me?" you find out you don't know much about it directly. We know from science, you can read about it, but in terms of our direct personal experience there's very little that we're actually directly in charge of.

Cells die, multiply—I don't know what they do. I haven't a clue. I breathe, but it's normally automatic, and something else takes care of this oxygen, carbon dioxide stuff. I wouldn't know it was there, frankly, if I hadn't been told.

So when the Buddha spoke about the body, although that's included, he's really talking about the sentient body—in other words, the body that we can sense through the five senses. So it's mainly feeling. There's also sight and hearing—direct contact. At the very base, remember, right here at the eardrum, all there is is pressure. There's no sound as such. All that's partitioned off to one side.

Then there's the next bit, which is to do with perceptions. I'll put them together—perception and feeling—because in Buddhist psychology they always ride together. As soon as you have a feeling, the mind, as it were, copies it, and you have a percept. It has some sort of mental image to go with it. And as these images build up, so you move into more of a conceptual mind. It can be concrete concepts, like "apple"—that can be anything, can't it?—or more abstract. But it all begins with these little percepts and feelings.

He splits into those feelings that come into the body through the senses and those feelings that come from the mind, from the heart. They include the whole feeling that we have within the body. The thing about *vedanā*—that's the word he uses, as opposed to the earlier feelings of the body—is that we distinguish them as pleasant or unpleasant. Up until then, sensations are just neutral, but as soon as we perceive them as pleasant or unpleasant, even neutral, then we move into that area of feeling-perception.

Now the next bit he calls *saṅkhāra*, which are those things that we compound, we make up by ourselves. The core ingredient of this is will. Now it separates all this to point out that it's at this point that the creation comes in. The will that's creating these *saṅkhāra*, these habits—emotional, mental habits—that's our inner atmosphere. Whatever you're feeling now in your general inner atmosphere, whether it's peaceful or unpeaceful, whether it's beautiful or unbeautiful, that's been created by acts of will. And what we are experiencing is the conditioning of it. So the mind is always producing this mental stuff.

And the final one is consciousness. Consciousness here—not to be confused with this pure intelligence of *paññā*, the Buddha within—we're closer to it when we think of it as like a screen upon which things are thrown. So it's like a television screen. You've got all this input coming in and it throws it onto a composite picture. And that basic knowing is what the Buddha is referring to as consciousness.

Now he says that this is the world. But when he's talking about the world, he's not talking about something objective. He's not talking about something out there. One of our Western fallacies is to presume that we can know the world as an object, something quite objectively outside ourselves. So that when we look at a tree, we actually believe that the tree really looks like that even if I weren't looking at it. That would be true, wouldn't it? One presumes that the tree you're looking at and you see is what every-

body else is seeing. When you taste a bit of cheese, you presume, "Well, this is how the cheese really tastes, completely independent of my tongue's ability to taste. This is how the cheese tastes."

That fallacy really came up with our scientific revolution. Of course it brought about huge scientific and technological advantages, but it's left us in a bit of a delusion in the sense that we have this idea that the world and consciousness are two different things. That's where the delusion lies.

So the world as we know it, the world as we experience it, can only be experienced by us. It can't be experienced by anybody else. And that's the world we are actually living in.

Just a simple instance of this room. It's not as though Buddhism would deny the existence of this room—if we all left and disappeared, it would still be here in some way. But our experience of the room as we come in is individual to us. For some it might be a very pleasant room. For others—I remember when I was at the Vihara once and somebody came to see me who was a very strong Christian. When he walked—when I took him into the shrine room—you definitely got the feeling that he was walking into the devil's den, and there was this shock, horror, and a moment there of resistance. But he did give in.

So people have different ideas of how a room feels. They have a different experience of the feeling of a room. When you walk in, what did you see? Some people are very perceptive immediately. They see the pictures, they see this and that. But other people don't. They walk in the room and they walk out, they can't tell you what the hell was in it. But they've been there. They can't tell you what the wallpaper was or anything. It's just the way they are. They're not particularly interested, we could say.

So even though there are, I think, eleven of us in this room, there isn't a single room in terms of our personal experience. In other words, as the room exists for us.

If we take that proposition, if we realize that the world I'm living in is actually being manufactured by me, dependent on, of course, the stimuli coming in—for instance, a sound, I might hear some dogs barking. The actual sound that's hitting my ears is always dependent upon my eardrum. So obviously if I haven't got very good hearing, I'm not going to hear the same barks as you. But the barks that come to me will be the ones that I personally hear. And at that perceptual level it's all very neutral. I can look at something—I can look at a bird—and at the point of perception it's just neutral. It's just a picture in my mind which I then project onto that bird.

You've seen that, haven't you, on these science programs, how when they study the eye looking over a picture, it's darting all over the place. We're completely ignorant of that. And all the time it's picking up these little pixels and throwing it back into the brain, the brain-mind complex. And then the mind picks up an image, it finds the image, and it very cleverly projects it back on the picture. It's quite amazing.

So we're not looking at the picture at all. We're just looking at what we're making out of the picture from all these little pixels coming through the eyes. It's the same with hearing. All we're getting is little pressure points, and then the mind, the brain-mind has to take it in and make something of it, and then very cleverly projects it back onto the bird. So we actually believe that we're hearing the bird. But what we're hearing is what we have made up from these little sounds.

Once when I was in meditation, I started getting this tinnitus. And I would sit, and my mind wouldn't be quite so steady, and suddenly there'd be this tune—lovely little tunes going on, very creative, wonderful. And then when my attention went to the actual tinnitus, it became a drone again. It was really weird. And I kept playing around with this. One minute it was just a plain, dead sort of drone, and the next minute it was playing these amazing Mozartian tunes, which I've failed to write down, of course.

When we begin to recognize that the world we're living in is the one we're creating, then the question has to come: how is it I'm not blissfully happy? How is it that I've not found a way of creating a world which is full of peacefulness and joy?

When the Buddha gets to his liberation—or a more telling story really—somebody says to him, "This training to become liberated is very difficult, very hard." And the Buddha says, "Yeah, of course it is, but when you get there, you get to *Nibbāna*." And the questioner says, "*Nibbāna*, so what?" He says, "Well, when you get there, you are contented and with it happy."

Contented and with it happy. So the contentment is the manifestation of no wrong desire. To be content is to be at one with what there is, even if it's not particularly brilliant. And happy is the general state of mind. Now this happiness can be translated into all sorts of facets, all sorts of modes. So it might be love, it might be joy, it might be just peacefulness, but the point is that it's happy.

So that's the proposition. The proposition is the world we live in is actually being created by us, and something is going wrong in that creation which is not making it contented and with it happy. And the Buddha is saying that that's a possibility. And his whole teaching is to try and get people to move from that position of being uncontented and unhappy to being contented and happy.

In the five *khandhas*, in the five heaps that we've just described, that's like a slice in time. If you were to just stop a human being and slice right down there at that moment in time, you get this congregation, this aggregation of things. But when it's in process, then it becomes dependent origination.

The point of interest for us is that point where the five *khandhas*, these five groups, have actually got to a point of producing a contact with the world. That's the moment. This world, remember, is both the outside world—something we hear and see—but also the inner world of things that we feel, emotional states, thoughts, images. All that is our inner world. All of them are objects to this consciousness.

So there's a sense base, there's the object, and there's the knowing of. Then at the next point, there's a sort of basic duality in the world that we experience it as either likeable or unlikeable. That's a given. Even the Buddha had a bad back and didn't like it. I'm sure he didn't like it. I mean, he was given food, I'm sure, that he didn't particularly like. But that's a given. I mean, the food that he ate that was supposed to poison him—he knew it was bad. One wonders why he took it, but anyway, he knew it wasn't so good, and he told Chunda, the person who offered it to him, to bury the rest of it, which leaves a question mark in his mind.

So that point of feeling, *vedanā*—the world splits into this likeable and unlikeable, but you can still remain at peace with it. That's the basic contentment.

But then something happens, remember, psychologically, which produces a relationship to this. And that's what we call this wrong desire. It's often translated as "sensual desire," which I think narrows it too much. It's just a wrong desire. We don't have, remember, a good word to translate this *taṇhā* with. *Taṇhā* is the desire arising out of wrong understanding, attachment and all that.

At that point, there's a habit of just trying to grasp the object, trying to hold it, trying to develop it, and there's that desire there. Nothing's happened at that point—that's why it manifests as an intention. It manifests as a desire, as an intention. I was saying that if we can just remain at that point, to hold that point, to hover within that point, and recognize that movement, that desire, as being unwholesome, and just wait for the energy of that to dissipate, to just blow itself out, we're destroying that conditioning.

We're destroying that conditioning. And if it's, of course, a wholesome thing, then you empower it, you do it. Just that very simple way, you just change yourself completely. All that negativity that we have begins to blow out, and all the positive stuff within us begins to grow. Very simple.

Now, at that point, when that intention arises, nothing's happened. It still remains at the level of potential. That's the important thing to grasp. So if we have a desire arise which we see is positively evil and terrible, and "How could you?" then you don't get into—and guilt arises, or this huge thing about "I must be a terrible person"—then you also note that as a judgment, because nothing's happened yet.

Now, you might have murdered somebody in the past, but that's irrelevant now. At this present moment, the desire to do something evil may arise. And if you just stay with it, nothing's happened. It still remains as just a potential, an idea. And that's really important, because if we start getting guilty—you're sitting here in meditation and suddenly you're throttling somebody, and you start getting guilty about that—then you're going to create all sorts of psychological problems.

Actually, that's not quite right, because if you're already imagining throttling them, you've already potentiated that initial desire. And although it remains only in the mind, of course everything begins there. There's nothing in the human world that the human creativity didn't start in the mind, whether it's the atom bomb or whether it's jet planes — it all began in somebody's head somewhere. So that initial desire arises. Now the next step, remember, is the grasping of it, and that's the point where we identify, where the want becomes "I want".

Now, something happens there. Something psychological happens. You lose control. That's the real bad thing. You lose control because now there is anger. Now I am angry. There is a feeling of depression. I am depressed. At that point, you've sold your soul to the devil. You can't get out of that anymore. You've identified with it. Of course, you can jump out quick and say, "Oh, don't stop," — no, there, there's depression, not me, not mine. But for that moment, you've lost it. And that identity now is very difficult to stop. Sometimes you can — you have to be really, really, really awake to stop the next step, which is to empower the desire. And so that energy comes in and that's what the Buddha calls *cetanā*, will.

Now, it's only at the point of identity that the suffering begins. That's what we've got to really grasp. When you're there and there's a desire — when you walk into, say, your kitchen at home and there's a desire for that biscuit — if you remain there and just hover over it and wait for it to pass, there's no suffering. But as soon as "I want the biscuit" and there are no biscuits in the tin, then there's suffering. So that point of suffering, the actual suffering doesn't begin until the identity. So long as we're saying to ourselves, "There is anxiety, there's depression, there's grief, there's all this awful stuff" — there, it's not pleasant, nobody says it's pleasant, but it's not the same as "I am".

As soon as the "I am" comes in, that's what the Buddha means by *dukkha* — that's the dukkha of the dukkha, that's the suffering of suffering. And as I say, at that point it's very difficult not to reinforce, not to put energy into that original desire. And that energy is the will, and the Buddha says will is *kamma* — that's your act. It's not been an act and therefore there's no actual consequence until something is empowered. And as soon as it's empowered, the "I" is reproducing itself, and that's why he uses the word *bhava*, becoming — I'm constantly becoming this "I".

So every time — like for instance, somebody's played a little trick on you, and you've seen the irritation come up, and you've been very mindful. It's there, it's very strong in you, this irritation, but you don't join in. And then there's just a little slippage, and before you know it, you've manufactured this little daydream of telling this person exactly what you think of them. Now, at that point, there was, first of all, the desire — the irritation coming up. Then there's a moment where there's a loss of mindfulness, and that means there's a becoming of the irritations. As soon as you become the irritation, it slips up into this wonderful intellect we have, this imaginative intellect, and produces something.

Now, in our meditation, what that's pointing to is to be very much aware of what the mind's thinking about all the time. Because unwittingly, it's developing these conditionings. That's why in our meditation we're always taught very quickly, as soon as you come out of a fantasy, whatever it is, you note what the attitude is. Not concerned at all with the subject matter. That's irrelevant. It's just this emotional state, this conditioning, grasping hold of something in the memory and making something of it to develop that mental state.

So if I'm angry, if there is anger in me, the desire is to develop the anger. It might be righteous anger. That's the best of them all, righteous anger. You can blow the world apart with righteous anger. And what you're doing is you're creating this imaginative world in which this anger is developing.

Now, that's the sequence. You have the contact. A feeling perception arises, which you, in this case, in this negative sense, you perceive as unwholesome. And then there's this reaction of wanting to do something with it, either to develop it or to get rid of it, if you don't like it. Wanting, not wanting. There's a sudden falling into an identity — "I want," "I don't want" — and then "I do," or "I don't do." There's your sequence. And once that's done, once the doing is committed, whether in the mind — I'm just talking about the mind at the moment — that reinforces the whole of these conditionings, these *saṅkhāras*.

Now so long as it stays in the mind, in a sense it's only doing us harm. It's only creating an inner environment which is not very pleasant. But it's very difficult once you've established a mental attitude not to begin to launch it out onto an unsuspecting world. So what was angry inside your own heart, your own mind, suddenly begins to manifest in the way you speak and in the way you act. So the outward flow of the mental states is very difficult to stop once you've actually begun it, once you've actually started developing this mental state.

So if we're clear about that, then when we're sitting, that's our purpose, is to get down to the heart level of attitudes, the felt level of an attitude, and to stay with it and allow it to burn out. And that demands, of course, a growth in patience, a forbearance, which is really difficult to be with. If we suffer from anxiety, fear comes up. Fear of fear — that's your panic, isn't it? And just to be able to stay with that, not to move — be like a mountain, just not to move and just wait for that, wait for that nausea and awful feelings just to pass away. And of course the more you do it, the more you grow in patience and the more you grow in courage to turn into these inner demons. And that constitutes the purifications.

So when the Buddha says that he's got rid of all desires, that's what he's talking about. He's talking about exactly what we've been describing. Got rid of all that negative desire stuff. And remember, when we talk about this, although we always talk about, or generally speaking we talk about things that are quite negative within us like anxiety and anger and all that, it's also — remember all the indulgences we have, all the lusts, all the desires, all the griefs which we experience as rather pleasant when the mind is dreaming away on it. These things also become very obsessive. The lust for power — nothing like it.

So that's all how to deal with — the Buddha is saying you've got to be at that level where the *vedanā*, this mental state has arisen, and the reaction to it, the desire. If we can stay with the desire to develop, to indulge, or the desire to reject long enough and let it just die away, we're actually allowing this original stuff to blow itself out. That's all.

Now to see that is to see this sequence of events of the desire and how the "I" comes in. So even at this point we're also seeing the impermanence of these states. But we're also seeing this business of the "I," this self that the Buddha keeps talking about — this idea that the self is the deeper root cause of our problems.

Now if we go back to the beginning of that dependent origination, he always starts with this word *avijjā*, which translates directly as not-knowing. Sometimes you get it translated as ignorance, and that in a sense gives it a twist which is not there. It's not

that you should know, you're ignorant — it's not that. It's just not-knowing. And because of this not-knowing, we presume to be what we experience. That's about it. We presume to be what we experience.

So we experience ourselves as human beings and therefore we presume that's what we are. Conventionally speaking, we know we're human beings, but in any ultimate sense, then it doesn't have any substantial meaning to it because this me is constantly in a process of change, constantly changing its parameters, constantly changing its understandings, constantly changing its experiences.

But somehow, within the whole of this life experience, there seems to be this centre point which never changes. Have you noticed that? This me always is there. It doesn't matter what happens on the outside. I can lose both arms and both legs and my nose, but me, I'm still there. I can change all my opinions and do all sorts of things, but this me remains completely constant. It never seems to move. The sense of this deep inner sense of presence. Correct?

Now, the Buddha says this is the root. This is the root cause of all our problems. This very sense of self, this very feeling that we have of being me. Now the fact that we are aware of it, the fact that we actually know it's there, tells us immediately we can't be that. You can't be something that you know as an object. Being, to be something — it's like, for instance, they say very well in the Mahāyāna, the eye cannot see itself. But it does perceive. But it can't see itself. If it could see itself, that would be really interesting, wouldn't it?

It can see itself by way of reflection. We can see our faces in the mirror and we can fool ourselves to think that that's how people see us. But we don't, do we? They see our faces the other way around. It always comes as a shock when you use two mirrors. Because you never thought your nose was quite that twisted. It's like your voice. You hear it on voice. It's only when you hear it coming out from a loudspeaker or something that you think, "God, that sounds terrible." We have this view of ourselves. It's always very, normally speaking, fairly positive, I think. And we think that that's how actually people experience it. But they don't.

So the eye can't see itself, the tongue can't taste itself. Even here, within our experience of this body, we're being told that you can't be something you're aware of. If the basic sense of your tongue was curry, how could you ever enjoy ice cream? It'd be difficult. Everything would be a lovely taste of curry. So it's the fact that the tongue is empty of taste that it tastes. It's the fact that the eye can't make images that it sees images.

So there's something within us which is beyond the phenomenal world and yet able to receive it. That's the proposition. When the Buddha talks about in that victory verse, he uses this little phrase *cittaṃ asaṅkhataṃ* — this word *citta* translates as a consciousness, a knowing which is not conditioned.

Now everything in the phenomenal world is conditioned in the sense that it depends on something else. Everything that everything you see in this world is leaning on something else, is dependent on something else, is in relationship with something else for it to be. I mean, we take so much for granted, but we know that we have four minutes if we don't get air. That's not very long, is it? Four minutes. Nine days without water. I think it's two months or three months without food. And we forget that dependency. We forget, in fact, that this body is like a fountain. There's stuff coming in and stuff coming out all the time. It's a double-headed fountain there. And in the process it changes.

So there's something in us which is receiving all this material, knows all this material, feels all this material, experiences all this material, and yet is not of it.

Now this process that we go through in *vipassanā*, it's about turning the inner world into an objective world in the same way that the young child around about the age of four months or something begins to externalise the world that it experiences as totally me. I think in psychology they call it the first object relation — your mum usually. And that's the first — out of this massive of sensation, it's difficult for us to imagine, isn't it? But it's just all sensation, and you can't make sense of it. All you know is pleasant or unpleasant. When it's unpleasant, you scream. The world's coming to an end.

And then, suddenly, this thing separates out. Sometimes you see little children, where they're trying to make a go at some rattle or something. And what they're doing is — that's what they tell you anyway — is they're building up this three-dimensional world. Before, it's just presumably flat, and suddenly they see this thing and they're reaching out for it and they're creating distance. They're creating this three-dimensional space. And at some point or other they become quite aware that there's a world out there — might not be conceptual, don't have words for it — but there's something out there and there's something here, quite separate.

And all we're doing is taking that process inward. That's all. So whereas we have bathed ourselves, confused ourselves with all the inner world that we experience — our thoughts and imaginings, our feelings, our bodies and all that — as soon as you sit in meditation and these become your objects, they become the other world. You're disidentifying with them.

And that little distance that you feel between the knowing and what is being known is — we can call it a Nibbānic gap. Don't quote me. It's a Nibbānic gap because somehow we've pulled out and it can no longer affect us.

When we're sitting in meditation and perhaps we're dealing with a very pleasurable feeling, a very joyous feeling comes up in the body, and it wants to attach itself to something. So it begins to think about this planning, this business you're going to set up, which is going to conquer the world. And you stop it doing that and you still stay with this sense of excitement, a slightly excited sense of joy. And as you separate from it and it's there, it's got no power, it's lost its power. It can't get into the mind, it can't begin to create. It just remains as a lovely little feeling. And then slowly it passes away.

If there's a grasping after it, if there's a wanting it to stay there, then we haven't distanced enough, we haven't let go of it. It now becomes that connection which we might not have perceived while it was there, but as it fades away there's a desire to grasp at it. That little connection — that's the *taṇhā*, that's the beginning of suffering. But if we're just there absolutely equanimous — the Buddha's always got his left hand resting equanimous — and it fades away and there's no reaction, there's only an interest in that process of fading away, then it's not touched us. It's not grasped us — or rather, we've not grasped it. But that's how the feeling is, that it's not taken us. We're not being hijacked by it.

So all these things that come up in the meditation, pleasant or unpleasant, and neutral — we'll come to that in a minute — are all points where we can begin to experience this distance. And every time we pull ourselves out from that relationship, we are unwittingly establishing a different relationship. And that different relationship is taking us to a place, slowly but surely, which is completely in the world — the Buddha didn't exit the world once he was liberated. He didn't just disappear or something — and yet untouched by it, unaffected by it in any negative way.

Now as you — we can get so far, remember, with our acts of will. When pain comes, for instance, in the knee. So the normal thing is, the first sensation of it, you might just get that feeling of just not wanting it. So there's your desire, right? But it's not big enough yet to grasp you. So you just stay with it, and you wait for that to pass. If the pain gets really bad, then you get a deeper sense of aversion towards it, a fear that your knee's going to explode, all that stuff. And you're just watching it. You never get involved. You're just feeling it.

Your attention goes to the reaction. As the reaction dies away you're left with just this pain. You're equanimous with it. Not that we try and defeat pain—you never win on that one. But so long as it remains manageable, you then go into the pain and you come across sensations which constitute the pain.

So that's at the level of the first aggregate we're talking about. That's when you're experiencing pain not as pain but as tightness or heat or pressure. And at that level you notice there's no desire. It's a perfectly equanimous level to be at the level of contact. As you move your attention or it slips back into a step before that and the perception "pain" comes up, then you realize that there is no such thing as pain. That's a mental formation. What there is, is sensation.

Now that doesn't mean to say that it's useless, because if we don't recognize pain, then we obviously can do ourselves damage. But it's just knowing that pain is mental and not physical. And as soon as that word "pain" comes up, you've got this reaction. Just to observe that process is to observe how we create the world out of this, how we're creating that world around pain in just that little experience.

And you can do the same with an emotion. So when anger comes up and you feel irritated about something, you stop it from creating a world—this imaginative world—and you come back into the body and you may still feel it as anger. But as you go into it it becomes just heat, heat and fiery energy, and then you know that that's what it actually is and it's the mind that then conceptualizes it.

In this sense it's the other way around because the mind is full of this fiery stuff and it's affecting the body. And in some of your meditation sometimes you can see that separation that the mind with feeling separates from the body with feeling. And it's those sorts of little insights that make it very easy for us to understand how there are psychosomatic illnesses. Because the mind itself is making the physical part of our body sick—it's confusing it. So we pull out from the body with its sensations, pull out from the heart with its emotions, and when it comes to images we can also just note them. But you have to be very careful because in placing your attention on an image, it's often actually empowering it, and the image can take over. So again, you just note the image, come back to the breath.

And there comes that point where there's just this knower, just this witness inside you—the feeler, the observer, the one who knows, the experiencer, call it what you wish. And that's really the final point you can get to by an act of will in your meditation. And if you're very still at that point, occasionally it comes—turn your attention towards that, towards that feeling. Where's that feeling, that sense of a self being manufactured?

Now, on the positive side—that's all this negative stuff—on the positive side, remember that that whole process is developing very positive attitudes in us. It's developing that sense of discriminative inquiry. It's developing patience and forbearance. And also, remember, you can flavor your looking with kindness. So you're looking kindly upon yourself, kindly upon these things.

And the other thing it's developing is this equanimity, this complete openness to the way things actually are, to see and understand the way things actually are. That's the Buddhist phrase—it's translated literally "to see and understand the way things come to be," because the Buddhist question, remember, is never why we're suffering but how. He's not interested in metaphysics. He's interested in this process of how we create suffering, and in seeing it he's presuming that we'll see how to end it. So that's what the *vipassanā* is about. The *vipassanā* is about seeing this process, to see it as impermanent, to see it as not me, not mine.

But when you then come out of your meditation, there has to be a translation of that understanding into an attitude. And that's where the *mettā* comes in. So whereas intellectually or understandingly we might begin to experience or understand this idea of interconnectedness, it remains very dry unless it's turned into an attitude of love, of a quality of love, whether it's sympathetic joy or compassion or any other quality that you can think of which you would put under that large umbrella of good relations. And that's what the practice of *mettā* does.

Now, in some traditions, and you have to agree, it's not absolutely necessary because the wisdom would translate naturally into an attitude. But it does, I think, help to make that little effort to develop goodwill. And then that's why every morning there's that point where I remind people to make an act of will for the day. What is your resolution for the day? It doesn't matter whether you keep it or not. What matters is that you keep, as the Buddha says, inclining to Nibbāna, just leaning in the right way. So if you lean far enough, you tend to take a step. So these little resolutions in the morning, which every time you lose it during the day you reinforce it, they have this effect of making you do it.

There's a rather nice passage in Joseph Goldstein's work, which he wrote about his experience right at the beginning, about the experience of insight. And if I remember rightly, he would get up very early in the morning to do this meditation and fall asleep. But he didn't say, "Oh well, I'm just too tired, it's obviously not working for me, I'll just sleep a bit more." No, he just kept getting up and going to sleep. And then one morning, I think two or three months on, he got up and he didn't. And that's it, that's how it

works. You keep empowering your good intention and you keep tripping over and forth. You pick yourself up, you dust yourself off, you start all over again. And then one day, you're doing it.

And it always begins, remember, in the mind, with intention. So these little resolutions at the end of a sitting—it can be specific to something you're going to have to meet during the day. It can be general. And it can be either a negative one, that you're not going to go down that road. I would always suggest that one. And a positive one, that this is the path you're going to take. And every time you know you've slipped, you reinforce your commitment to those resolutions.

And this immediately begins to have an effect on the way we speak. That's right speech. And then it affects how we just generally behave—right action. Which is always on an ethical basis. Because remember, the self is always self-endearing, it's self-protective. It begins not from the point of view of evil but from the point of view of delusion. And so it feels better if it's bigger, and it considers bigger being richer and more powerful and all that sort of stuff. So the more you have in the bank, the more happy you feel. You might not—I mean, it's like Spike Milligan said, wasn't he? He said, "They say money doesn't make you happy, but I would just like to have a go. I just want a chance to prove it."

So the self is always trying to substantiate its existence to make itself feel safe. Remember, that's the fundamental fear of the self, that it is not safe. That's why it can't handle sickness or age and death—it doesn't make itself feel safe. So everything you could say on a positive level, when we're working from this particular delusion, is just to make ourselves feel safer. The fact that it's at the expense of everybody else in the world is irrelevant. What is relevant is that I feel safer. And so all action in terms of this process of liberation is always around some sort of ethical basis.

And then there's right livelihood. Now, it's very interesting that the Buddha should put that there, because logically speaking, I suppose you didn't need it—it's included in right action—but he does. And there's your livelihood. If you think about what the virtues, the traits of your personality, which your actual employment is developing—so whatever we do for the better part of our lives, those eight or so hours a day, they're having an effect on us. So somehow we have to make sure that whatever we're doing is done with right attitude.

So if you're doing a brilliant job begrudgingly, what's the point in terms of this process of liberation? If you're doing what seemingly might be to other people a menial job or something, not an important job, it is important to that person if they make the decision that "this is what I'm going to develop in this work."

I mean, the kernel experience in my life was when I was a kid and I went to work—I got this holiday job in this factory making cakes. And it was one of these old belts that came around, these cakes. And all the women were standing there. And they put me on the end of the line of these women. And for them, it was utterly automatic. My job was to put the cherry on top of this thing as it passed by. And of course, for them, they were yapping and talking, having a whale of a time. And they were just doing all this stuff just like that.

When it comes to me, I'm starting to put this damn cherry on. Every so often, I'd miss. And the machine had to stop. And the foreman would be shouting at me. They were all very kind, looking at this boy. "Oh, leave him alone." And of course, I remember thinking to myself, "What a dreadful, what an awful job these poor women have got to come in and do this all day for eight hours making these cupcakes."

Looking back now, of course, from the point of view of the meditation, what an amazing opportunity to develop concentration. Moment to moment, concentration on that cake. As it passes by, cherry spot on in the middle. Never missing. Eight hours. God, I'd have come out enlightened, I'm sure. I'd have completely liberated from all cakes anyway.

So it doesn't matter what you do eventually. It doesn't matter what you do. I mean, apart from the obvious unethical things that we can do, it's the attitude which you're doing it. It's your resolution as to what your work is that develops in you and to do it for that reason. And for doing it—when we do something for virtue it automatically benefits the other. You don't have to worry about whether it's benefiting the other or not. They might not receive it so well, but the point is it is to their benefit.

And that's how the rest of the path—right speech, right action, right livelihood—begins to recoil back into the mind. So where we started in the sitting posture getting that vantage point, allowing negative states to arise and burn away, beginning to develop that wisdom about who we are, what we are, as it moves into daily life it actually is developing these mental states so that our inner life becomes more and more joyful, more and more peaceful.

That's the theory. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your deep and profound commitment to the practice, move towards your liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 112

Hope to Inspire: The Seven Factors of Awakening in Daily Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *Opening the retreat season at Satipanya, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers an inspiring and comprehensive teaching on establishing a foundation for meditation practice through the seven factors of awakening (bojjhaṅga). He emphasizes how Right Awareness (sammā sati) serves as the governing factor, supported by calmness (passaddhi), curiosity-based inquiry, steadiness of attention, and equanimity (upekkhā). The talk explores the delicate balance between these factors and how to skillfully work with both pleasant and unpleasant experiences in meditation.*
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> *Bhante explains the crucial distinction between enjoyment and indulgence, showing how we can fully appreciate life's pleasures without creating psychological dependency. He addresses the three characteristics of existence - suffering (dukkha), impermanence (anicca), and not-self (anattā) - demonstrating their practical relevance for understanding our relationship to experiences. The teaching includes guidance on integrating mindfulness into daily activities, from washing dishes to handling emails, showing how any action can become meditation when approached with proper intention.*
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> *The talk concludes with practical advice for establishing a sustainable practice rhythm through morning and evening sits, mindful pauses throughout the day, and creating conducive conditions for restful sleep. This accessible yet profound teaching serves as both inspiration and practical roadmap for sincere practitioners seeking to deepen their understanding and application of Buddhist meditation principles.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and fully Self-Enlightened One.

So this retreat is the beginning of our little season which lasts about three-quarters of a year. So I suppose I'd better say something especially inspiring to kick off the season.

That exercise, that standing exercise that we do, just to get across those particular qualities, that's the platform of your meditation. Those qualities are what you first of all develop before you bring in the inquiry. So the seven factors, right awareness.

Awareness is just being here, isn't it? Just like, it's just being here. You know, awareness is all the... People put a mystical turn on it. But it's quite natural. Animals have it. Everybody has. You're just being here. What turns it into right awareness, of course, is what it is you're aware of. That's the difference.

And then there's these qualities of calmness. So you always begin our meditation by establishing that sense of calmness. See, the body, calm body, still body, that's about the easiest. That's the easiest thing we can get. Just to bring the body to us, to a stillness. And that immediately affects the mind. Because, remember, in Buddhism the mind and the body are not... they're entwined, they dissolve the one into the other.

When the Buddha talks about the body, he's not normally talking about the physical body that we know, such as your nails or your bones. He's talking about the sentient body, what you actually feel in the body. And actually that belongs to the mind. It's where the body and mind meet, that point of contact. So as soon as you relax the physical frame, the sort of heavy physical nature, it immediately begins to relax this inner body of the mind. And that brings about a stillness.

Normally speaking we do it by lying down, and then very shortly fall asleep, which isn't really insightful meditation. You've got to somehow establish that calmness that you would normally get just lying down and relaxing, but to keep the wakefulness. That's the problem. And that's the sense of *passadhi*.

Now this *passadhi* actually has a connection with curiosity. And curiosity is that quality within us that wants to know. And if the calmness isn't there, then what happens is it gets very excited, and then the mind starts wandering. So these two things balance themselves. But if you try to go into a meditation with just that sense of wanting to know, you often find yourself getting just excited about it. It brings in a wrong energy, a restlessness. So if you have this platform of calmness, you see. So that's why we use the breath just to bring this sense of calmness.

And when that's there, it's as though you awaken that wanting to know. So if you're looking at this carpet, for instance, and just relaxing your eye on it, you see. And then this little bug walks across. And immediately the curiosity comes. It's not as though you have to work at curiosity, it's quite natural. But if the calmness is not there, or if your attention is somewhere else, you don't see it.

You know, I think about watching, I think it's a football match, and they put a gorilla going across the pitch and nobody sees it. You know that one. Basketball, is it? That's too much concentration, you see. So you don't want too much concentration, you want enough to see things arising and passing away, you see.

Then there's that sense of steadiness of attention, which I think is a much better phrase than concentration, because when you say concentration, it brings a tightness to it. I think it brings reminds of school and things like that, or a knitted brow and that sort of thing. But actually, it's just steadiness of attention.

Now, when I first began teaching, I taught it in the Eastern Method, which is really about effort and concentration. And I just found people exhausting themselves. And it was only later I realized, actually, what motivates us more is this sense of inquiry, this sense of curiosity. And that when it comes to energy, if anything, we've got too much of it. So I wouldn't worry too much about concentration. If you ask yourself, do you ever have problems with concentration when you're interested in something? You don't, do you? It's just natural. You just naturally want it. So often our practice is raising that interest. See? Raising the interest.

And then there's this quality of equanimity. That's really, really important. Equanimity in the factors of enlightenment has these two qualities. It has a heart quality of not being attached to something, having no preference, not holding on to something. And it has a wisdom quality or a mental quality of not coming from a particular view or an opinion. So it's really a very deep concept about a position you take in life. Very relaxed, very much at ease with the way things are, not wanting them to be other than they are.

I mean I'm talking about the present moment. So you don't find yourself in conflict with the world once we are in a situation and we see it as it is. Then potential always arises because time changes, changes everything. There's no such thing as time, it's just this process of change. So it's not as though when you walk into a situation that you accept it in that resigned way, this is the way and I can't do anything. It's more in the sense of, this is the way it is, and then what can be done? But if you don't see it as it is, then you're always imposing something on that situation. As soon as you do that, you're in conflict. You want it to be other than it is, you see.

And that's what we're learning in this meditation. We're learning just to let the body be the body, let the heart be the heart, let the mind be the mind. So if the body feels discomfort, you just let it feel discomfort. Most discomfort in meditation comes from mental states within the body. Heaviness, dullness, all those sorts of things.

And if there's a pain comes in meditation, then you have to decide whether it's just something which is not important or something which is. So for instance, if you're getting pain in the back, it may be your posture's wrong. So you have to look at that and make sure your posture's correct. If the posture is correct, then it's probably some mental state caught up in there, some tension. Because that's what we realize, isn't it? That

the mind deposits these turbulences in certain places in the body. That's why you feel anger in the chest, you feel grief in the chest, you feel fear in your stomach and things like that. There are certain places, you see, where it deposits it.

And often we're not aware of it at all in our daily lives. But suddenly when you sit, you suddenly get these funny feelings come up. But if you feel that, if there's a physical feeling, such as your knees, then obviously that's coming from the body, and you just have to be careful, that's all.

So these factors, the awareness, which is a governing factor, the Buddha goes as far as saying, if you get the right awareness, the rest of it just falls into place. You don't have to work at the others. That doesn't mean to say that we shouldn't be aware that sometimes things go wrong. So, if there's too much calmness, there's a tendency to sleep. So you've got to put effort in there. Keep awake. If there's too much effort, then it gets tight. And you find yourself getting restless. So then you have to calm yourself. So it's a case of juggling these states, you see, until you find yourself in a position of just general calmness, stillness of mind.

And in a sense, we ought to try and do that within 5, 10, 15 minutes of a sitting. And what happens if you do that is you find this observation post. That's a phrase I get from Nyanponika. It still is the best book to read, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. He was a German monk. He died quite a while back now.

What you find is that this awareness, it withdraws, doesn't it? It finds this place above, within the psychophysical organism. Am I correct? Not vigorously pleased. So you're finding this place, you see.

Now this is the spiritual point, you see, because from this place you can observe what arises in the body whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. You can observe what's arising in the heart in terms of its emotional mood states. And although it's difficult, you've got to be really sharp, you can see thoughts, but you can definitely catch images. So it's a very privileged space that you find when this awareness abstracts itself from that psychophysical organism.

And our job is to maintain that as best we can. And just to keep watching, just to keep watching. And our faith, you see, the trust, is that this awareness is itself Buddha nature, is itself the intelligence. And it will come to know, it will liberate itself. As soon as you try, it's coming from some other center. It's coming from this, I know, this is the way it should be, is it? And as soon as that happens, we're completely deluded. And this

essence within us, this consciousness, this awareness, is constantly screaming, get that meditator out of the way. See? And you get the meditator out of the way by observing whatever is arising and passing away in that calm way.

Now as you're observing things, so pain comes up in your knee, there's always this reaction to something which is unpleasant. So you're always watching this reaction because it's drawing you into a relationship, a wrong relationship. So a mood or emotion which is nasty, some sort of fear, some sort of anxiety, depression. You're always watching that, not wanting to go there.

And remember the two suppressive forces are aversion and fear. That's what's keeping things away from us. So by turning on to that reaction, you're getting in contact with this aversion, this fear. And it's allowing that to die away, that we're able to find that space, that courage really, to face the original problem.

And as you face the original problem, which is this nasty emotion coming, which is normally felt as a feeling in the body, you're actually allowing it to exhaust itself. It's just, all it is, it's an energy. It's the mind which puts a label on it. So when you get something like fear or depression, you see, the mind suddenly says, depression, fear, so you get this pushing away, not wanting. You wait for that to die away. And as that original feeling starts coming up, you see, and you draw your attention into it, it loses that definition. It just becomes heaviness or sickliness or... yeah.

And at that point, you see, all you're doing is observing energy. You're in a flow of energy. And this is a turbulence. And if you just give it enough time, it exhausts itself. And that's one set of conditioning gone. And then you think, no more fear, no more depression. Oh, very foolish. Next morning you wake up with more. And that's what can be a little depressing. In fact, there's a lot of this gunk down there, you see.

But what you discover is that by creating a right attitude towards it somehow it takes the edge of suffering out. And what you begin to realize is that the pain which is coming, the discomfort which is coming, is not actually suffering. It's always that relationship that's the suffering. And when you identify with that relationship of wanting and not wanting, that is the suffering.

As long as we can maintain the position of the objective observer, the objective feeler, the objective experiencer, even in the most disgusting and awful turbulences, it's not the same as actually suffering, which is when you become it, right? To observe depression is not the same as being depressed. To observe fear is not the same as being fearful. And it's catching that distinction, you see, and realizing that this position of the observer, the feeler, is a liberation in itself, a liberation in itself.

Now when it comes to the pleasant side, see the indulgence brings us shall we say a sense of *nibbāna*. Because when you're actually enjoying something, you are, in that moment, perfectly happy. I mean, when you get lost in a DVD, that's heaven, isn't it? You know, when you're eating your tiramisu, it's heaven, isn't it? You see, the actual indulgence doesn't present you with a problem, see?

So when you're in love, when you're in a beautiful relationship, when you're out in the country, when you're listening to music, all that is wonderful. What we don't realize is that we formed a certain relationship to it. And that relationship is becoming a dependency. And we're describing, unwittingly, happiness being an emotional state. Happiness is an emotional state. And this emotional state is dependent on something outside me over which I don't have control. You see, the DVD doesn't get posted. The friend dies. The person I love most disappears and hates me. I mean, you know, like, yeah, see?

And then you realize that maybe there's a different way of relating to what is beautiful in life. Hmm, that's a difficult one. But we don't start really seeking that new relationship until we see the aftermath of indulgence. And the aftermath of indulgence is dependency. Some sort of psychological dependency on something. Even if it's, you know, just taking a walk in the country. It can be something very simple, but if you don't get it, then you feel that lack. Hmm?

There's a frustration when we don't get what we want. Yeah? There's grief when you lose it. There's a constant sense of anxiety which we very rarely acknowledge which is always that knowledge that there is a possibility of losing it. That's why we have this huge insurance industry.

And then finally, something that our society won't link with indulgence is boredom. And boredom is the psychological driver for all our commercialism, for all our consumerism, is boredom. I mean, I know that they put these adverts out and they blame the adverts and they blame all this clever stuff, but actually, psychologically, it's the inability to be with boredom. Boredom seeks distraction. So you don't have to advertise very much. As soon as somebody's bored, they're going to seek distraction. You just put something in their way, you know, cost of coffee, doesn't matter what it is, you just start and you've got to go in there and get out of this state of boredom.

Remember that after the Buddha was fully liberated, Mara sent his three daughters. There was sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure and boredom. It comes with that indulgence. And what that little myth tells us is that even though the Buddha was liberated on that night, there were still these leftover conditionings which took seven years to burn out. So finally it took seven years. So really catching that in our lives, you see.

Now what happens is, I think, is that when you do that, you become afraid. There's a possibility that one becomes afraid or averse to pleasure because you see the aftermath suffering. And this is often a big mistake for monastics, actually. That's why you can't laugh in a monastery. There's no humor. You don't crack a joke. So you have to be careful that you don't get this idea that you have to get rid of pleasure. You have to get rid of the joys of life. That would take you into the second mistake of self-mortification.

So remember the Buddha in his first discourse, he talks about indulgence in the world is ignoble, useless, and all that. And self-mortification, which is part and parcel of a misunderstanding of the role of pleasure and joy, where you're trying to get rid of it, thinking that it itself is evil, comes under the area of self-mortification. And he found that was ignoble, and wasn't on the path, and in fact just more suffering. So there's no point in laying suffering on it.

Our problem in daily life is to recognize that certain things bring us great joy and great pleasure and after we've enjoyed it just to wait a little bit for the aftermath, the loss, the feeling of something coming to an end. Just to stay with that and very slowly we begin to develop an attitude within us of enjoying something without creating that psychological dependency.

Now that's why I stress this business of eating. So when we go for lunch it's an opportunity really just to enjoy something without indulging. And the problem with these two words, enjoyment and indulgence, is that they're so close. Aversion is very easy because what aversion and fear does, it pushes the object away so you can always make a distinction between them.

But this business of enjoyment and indulgence are very subtle. And it's only when you begin to work with it that you realize there is a way of being in the world and enjoying it fully and enjoying relationship and enjoying everything the world has to give us without this aftermath, without this clinging thing.

It's very difficult for us. So in our meditation, when something pleasant comes up—a pleasant feeling, a warm feeling, a peaceful feeling, or it might just be a complete relaxation of the body which can be very pleasant—just be aware of that draw of wanting to fall into it, and just begin to experience it as feeling, just as feeling. It's fine. As feeling, there's no problem. It's still very pleasant and it's still enjoyable.

So these things I think are very difficult for us to practice, but once we begin to catch the aftermath of these things, then you tend to be drawn to really investigating this whole area of our lives which is to do with pleasures and joys. Just to take a for instance: in our work, in whatever work we do, if we do it with the right attitude and turn

it into a service, then joy always arises. The heart naturally feels joy when you do something from the right attitude. It's just there within the mechanisms of being a human being. And then one enjoys that, and then very subtly you're beginning to do these wonderful things in order to feel good. Then slowly you turn yourself from being a saintly person offering your service to the world to a do-gooder, and that's dreadful, because what a do-gooder does is they do the good they want to do to you, whether you want it or not, because it makes them feel good.

And you always catch those sorts of people, so you can see that movement in you. You like doing this, you enjoy doing this, and then you start doing it for the enjoyment. So it's just catching that movement in the mind and re-establishing the right intention. That's all it is.

And this brings us to the role of intention, and that's why this standing meditation which is about always coming to a stop—after you've done a job, after you've seen somebody, after you've had a cup of tea, you just stop. It doesn't take a moment, you just stop. It's a lovely word, stop. And then you see the next intention. And if we can be aware of these intentions, then you can see some of them are taking us this way, some of them are taking us that way, and there's some that are taking us right on the spiritual path.

And it's a case of waiting until that negative intention, whether it's towards some indulgence or towards some aversion, just waiting for it to exhaust its energy, and then very slowly, just by reinforcing those intentions you see are skillful, wholesome, you just change yourself. There's no magic to this system and there's no tremendous great effort, unless you have something like a severe addiction or a severe mental problem. There's no big effort needed. What's needed is patience and continuous practice. Because as soon as you let go, the old habit reasserts itself. That's all.

So people come here and they do a week retreat. Occasionally they do a three-month retreat. And they go out and they recondition themselves completely. Even within a week, you're behaving completely different than in ordinary daily life. And by Tuesday, you're drunk again. And it's just been able to sort of maintain that steady road. And to do that, you have to get in these habits of cajoling yourself. Come off all that criticism, self-criticism. That doesn't do any good at all. And it's a case of just being very kind and just being very gentle, treating ourselves like children. You cajole, you urge yourself towards a more skillful behaviour, and remind yourself that where skillfulness is, there's happiness. Skillfulness and happiness come together. Virtue naturally brings us happi-

ness. You don't have to work at it—happiness is the result. If you work for happiness, you're sunk. But if you work for skillfulness, wholesomeness, if you work for that, for virtue, happiness just arises naturally. You don't have to work at it.

Now, all that really belongs to the area of, we might say, ordinary daily life. But in a sense, we also have to dig at the roots a bit. And this is where you're looking at the other two characteristics of existence. That's what the Buddha called them. Three characteristics of existence. The first one is to do with our psychology. It's to do with all beings in Buddhist understanding. And it's to do with this business of wanting, not wanting. But there are two deeper ones, which is to do with impermanence and to do with this idea of not-self.

And the impermanence is just recognizing that things come to an end. It's very difficult for us. We're always at the beginning of things, something new. That's not a problem. But we always want to make sure we've got something in place before that newness disappears. You never see things coming to an end. It's like putting the attention on the ending of things, the end of a day, the end of a job. Just see it come to an end, a full stop. And the more you do that, the end of a breath, for instance. If you're right there with the end of a breath, you're not sure the next one's going to come.

And the ending of things draws us towards that whole area of decay, dissolution, death. And unless we touch that area, then it's always there underneath us because we know we're going to die. And it's getting accustomed to that. It's getting the feel for that. Losing our fear of it. And then it doesn't impinge on our lives. And the way that the fear of death impinges on our lives is that it's a sort of underground pressure, an underground pressure, and we're running. We're running away from things. And this all fear—all fear is the fear of ending. So all fear is the fear of death. The anxiety of something corrupting, disappearing.

And it's just getting in touch with that, no matter how difficult it is, that brings around a certain acceptance of it. And with the acceptance, there's a loss of fear of it. And the underground, this underground welling of pressure in our lives begins to sort of drop away. Find yourself getting just a bit more peaceful. It's not as though, so long as there's a self, so long as there's a feeling of a me, it's not as though we're ever going to overcome the fear of death. As long as there's me, it's going to die, so it's going to be afraid of it. But it's just feeling, it's getting a comfort with it. This is the way things are.

And eventually, the great gift of seeing impermanence, in the Buddha's words, is that we begin to realize there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. You keep repeating that phrase—it's got a tremendous value for me anyway—it sort of gets into the heart of things. There's nothing in the world worth holding on to. There's nothing in the

world worth holding on to. As long as you just play around with the phrase and slowly it sinks in: there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. And there's a sense of release, a sense of release. When you release it, what have you lost? You haven't lost anything. The world's still there. What you've lost is this cramp in the hand.

So these little phrases, they really help to sort of form a different relationship to the world.

And the third one is this sense of not-self, not me, not mine. And that brings us to the area of not control. So we notice that the breath breathes itself. That once you decide to walk across the road, the legs move. You don't have to—there's something sort of magical about the human body. If you think about the body like now, do you know what your liver's doing? In a sense, do you experience what your liver's doing? You might know what it's supposed to be doing. Have you ever felt oxygen being exchanged for carbon dioxide? You know, all these things we know at this sort of intellectual level, but they're beyond our experience. I mean, I dare say some yogis might get down to that sort of level of direct experience of the body, but most of us haven't a clue.

And then you realize that you're an alien within your own body. You're just this consciousness just stuck in this frame, and it's getting on with things. And sometimes it doesn't, of course. That's frightening. And when illness comes, then you realize that actually you don't have this—you think you've got this control. Like it's my body, but actually, suddenly it falls ill. That's it.

So that sense of no control is very fearful for us. But what it does is it makes us come back on ourselves to find where is that place of security, where is that place of comfort. And that's what the meditation does—it draws us into this observation post. And the more you see that that space, that that place is unassailable, nothing can touch us in that space. When we fall out of that space, then we're into the world of suffering, we're into the world of *saṃsāra*. And our job is to try to maintain that sense of mindfulness in daily life.

These terrible things that are happening in Japan—there was once I heard a tale of some Zen monks when there was an earthquake in a restaurant. Everybody, of course, got quite upset and fearful, but the Zen monks kept eating. It's like that's what they were doing—eating. So the body—the building's shaking, and they know that, but they just keep eating.

So it's getting that sort of sense of poise. And it's just practice. It's not as though these things are magical. It's just a case of constantly reminding ourselves to be present.

Now, one of the confusions is that we have to be self-aware. This position of the observer, remember, is still a false position. There's still somebody up there who's observing, who's feeling. So it's not quite—it's a good place to be, but it's not quite right, because there's still a feeling of somebody. And when we take that into daily life, we get the feeling that we should be aware of ourselves. So I'm aware of myself when I'm speaking. I'm aware of myself when I'm writing a letter. I'm aware of myself when I'm adding up my bills. And of course, you can't do it. You get all confused. Your sums will be all wrong. You can't, because there's a clicking consciousness. One minute you're doing this, and one minute you're being self-aware.

When you're washing the pots, you're supposed to be aware of yourself? No, that's not it. One is aware of oneself, but then one, as it were, concentrates, pays attention to what you're doing. And as you do that, there's an absorption into what you're doing and there's a loss of a sense of self. You're just doing. That's meditation in action. And what turns it into a skillful action is the intention with which you enter into that practice, into that action.

So if you're washing the pots, something as simple as that, and they're just something you've got to get out of the way because you want to get on with something else, then of course you will absorb into it, but you'll absorb also into anger, irritation, fed-upness. But if you see washing the pots as just a simple action of mindfulness, of mindfulness action, putting aside all that negative stuff, seeing a certain beauty in washing the pots, then of course that's the mental state you are developing. And as you give yourself to it, you lose the sense of somebody washing the pot. The pots are just being washed. That's meditation in action. And it's a case of keep reminding ourselves of that.

I spend about half an hour to an hour, sometimes one and a half hours on emails. And at times I think, I'm going to strangle this computer. All these emails, emails, emails. So I have to stop and say, no, no. Emails, and I have to get myself into that right frame of mind. And then, of course, I enjoy it. It's not a problem anymore. But if I think of it as a chore, as something—these emails keep coming at me—then you get that sense of boredom, fed-upness, frustration, all the negativity. And that's all coming because something in me wants to be somewhere else, wants to be doing something else, wants to employ a secretary.

So every time—I mean the great thing about becoming aware like this is that every time something is negative, you know that's the wrong frame of mind. That's it. So you work with it. You let it manifest in its fullness, and if you've got time, you let it arise and pass away. If you haven't got time—supposing you go to work and you feel depressed—you park it. That's not the same as suppressing. To suppress something means you don't

want to look at it, you don't want to engage with it, so what you're using there is some sort of aversion, some sort of fear. But you can park things. You can just say, "I'll deal with you tomorrow. I'll deal with you later in the day." Then you put your whole attention into what you're doing, and that brings up a different mood.

And that mood is the mood or the motivation, the emotional state that is going to support your work. It's like when I—there was a time in sort of what you might call, all this, what do you call it, the psychology of—I can't think of the word—but there was once a point, I don't know when this phase has passed yet, but there was a point where if you felt angry towards somebody or you were upset with them, you had to go and tell them. I was—

Venting. That's it, venting. Oh, goodness. So this was presumed that this other person was causing you the problem. So when I was at Gaia House, I used to have this woman used to come up, and she would start off our interview with, "I have a problem with you." What was I supposed to do? "I have a problem here. Thank you very much." It was as though she was venting.

And the thing is that you don't have to do that, because as soon as you realize that your moods and your mental states are not directly caused by others, but are caused by the internal conditioning that we ourselves have manufactured—this is the point. We ourselves have manufactured these mental states. Nobody does it for us. Whatever somebody does stops here, stops at the point of contact. So if somebody's angry with me, I hear the words and it stops at the eardrum. I feel their mood of anger and it stops at the body here where I feel it. It's when I take it into myself and then react with anger or with fear, that's the conditioning I'm dealing with.

So when something comes up, if I meet somebody, if we meet somebody whom we have a disliking for, whom we feel has done things horrible to us and all that sort of stuff, we have to recognize that this pain that we feel inside us is self-generated. It's not caused by this other person. And that's why you can put it to the side and still greet the person with at least a sense of no harm. You might want to strangle him with a sense of no harm. And then you deal with this, you deal with this as just a mental state.

And remember you don't think about it, that's not the way to cure the mind, cure the heart. You allow the heart to express itself. You have to sit with that nastiness and slowly it dissolves, slowly it dissolves. And when we do that, that's another little pointer to this business of not-self. These emotions are not me, they're not mine.

And they have their — it's like being, I mean, I liken the heart to the weather. Storm comes, storm goes. Nice day comes, nice day goes. Our problem is to find a relationship with the weather where it doesn't bother us. When we had the opening ceremony, it was chucking it down. And we asked the chief monk who was here to offer a blessing. And his blessing was, may the weather not bother us. Not may the weather go away. May there be a change in the clouds. No, just may the weather not — which means, may we not be bothered about what the weather is. And we weren't. We just bought them all wellingtons. All these monks lined up with green wellingtons.

So that's a roundabout touching upon our practice. And to try and see how it melds into our daily life. So the morning sit, the evening sit. The morning sit gets you into the right frame. It reminds you of that level of awareness you want to take with you during the day. And throughout the day these little stops. If you can extend it to five minutes. You just relax. And then in the evenings, always best when you come back from work or sometime even before you eat. It's always better. Just to allow any residues of the day to come. Some little irritations, some anxieties. Just let them exhaust themselves. They've got a nice evening ahead of them.

And of course, sleep. Sleep's so important. Good sleep. The idea of a rushed life and then it's time for bed and you fling yourself into the bed. You try to go to sleep, pull the clothes over you. And it's so counterproductive. The whole idea is to wind down, give yourself a full half hour just to let the day disappear. Some pleasant music, some *mettā* meditation, something that draws the mind to a quietness and stillness. And that's your mental state just beneath your sleep. That's your subliminal state. If you go to bed with a subliminal state of anxiety, it keeps popping up, doesn't it? You can't rest. So no matter how bad the world is, we can spend a little time just allowing the mind to rest, the heart to rest, and then you get good sleep.

So if questions come up out of this, at the end of the day we can bring up whatever needs to be for discussion. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated by your constant endeavour of all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 113

Opening of Dhamma Centre in Ghent: Community, Practice, and Daily Life Integration

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

In this talk celebrating the opening of a new Dhamma centre in Ghent, Belgium, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the crucial importance of spiritual community (saṅgha) as the third refuge. Drawing from the Buddha's practice of encouraging both solitary retreat and communal gathering during the rainy season, he explains how urban centres create focal points for community formation and mutual support in practice.

The talk centers on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, noting significantly that the Buddha delivered this core teaching on establishing liberating awareness not to monastics, but to the lay practitioners of Kurukshetra who had genuinely embraced his instructions. This demonstrates the Buddha's conviction that lay practitioners could achieve full awakening through dedicated practice.

Bhante Bodhidhamma provides practical guidance on integrating the Noble Eightfold Path into daily life, emphasizing how seeing intentions before acting breaks the cycle of unconscious habit formation described in paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination). He explores how right livelihood, right speech, and right action can transform ordinary activities into spiritual practice through proper intention and awareness. The talk concludes with a traditional blessing ceremony using the Metta Sutta, connecting individual practice with community celebration.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So first of all I want to say I'm very joyful to be here at the opening of this little centre in Ghent and really joyful that Linda has achieved her dream, for heaven's sake. Wonderful thing to set out an intention and then find yourself actually living it. So many congratulations.

And really I just want to remind people and inform people who don't know about the Buddha's teaching just how important it is to have a little centre like this in the city. When the Buddha set up his order, it tended to be a time of tremendous enthusiasm. It is said that for the first twenty years, he didn't have to make any rules. Everybody who joined was committed and kept to the general customs of the monastic life. And then after that they began to corrupt a bit and they had to make rules and regulations and

we've ended up with 227 of them. So that's only the beginning, frankly. There's all sorts of rules and regulations. And of course what your rules and regulations do is they establish your institution. Yes, so that your institution is basically what your rules and regulations are. The way a country is ruled, its institutions define your country, don't they?

And what happened eventually, just as a long sweep of Buddhism, is that of course the monastics began to create these big university monasteries and monasteries that were stuck out into the forests and the jungles. And there was a slow, whether they liked it or not, there was some sort of disconnect because some time or other there was this movement that we know as Mahayana which really began to put the accent not so much on seeking your own liberation but also on compassion.

So although for instance my little place is out in the country, one of its drawbacks is that it doesn't, I can't see it unless something happens, it forming a sense of community around people who do similar things. Because everybody who comes to me then sort of disappears back to where they live, which is basically all over the place. Whereas when you have a centre in the city, what it does is it creates a little focal point and there's a chance of some community forming around it.

And the importance of community is right there: *Sangha*. You see, it's the third refuge. So during the year, he would encourage, the Buddha would encourage his monks and nuns to live quite isolatedly, go find a foot of a tree or build a little hut somewhere and to carry on by themselves. But when the rainy season came, he would urge them all to come and live together. One of the reasons that they gave was that they shouldn't be trampling around killing little beasts during the rainy season walking around. But that seems to me sort of an excuse. The fact is that he saw the importance of actually people living together and actually being in communion.

And we need other people because if you don't have other people, there's a danger of you living in your own little world. And when we live in our own little world we don't see where we're going wrong. You need other people in a sense to correct your behaviour and to be a correspondence with, to sort of resonate with.

This morning we mentioned this eightfold path, you see. So the first one is this right understanding. So that's the importance really of meditation. And what a place like this does, it does encourage you to come every week to just make the effort to come to a place to sit and meditate together.

Just in my own development, looking back now, I was extraordinarily fortunate because in Britain in the late seventies, there were very few monks, just a handful of monks really dependent on the ethnic group. So there would be a Thai monk for the Thai community, etc. But in Birmingham, in the centre of Britain, the centre of England, there was a Burmese monk came to live there. There wasn't a particularly large Burmese community at all. In fact, it's never been very large. But he came to live there. And it's a bit of a funny story because what happened was the Tibetans were established up the road, the Tibetan group. They had asked the Karmapa, the old Karmapa, the one who died about twenty years ago I think, to send a monk and he sent Dr. Revatedama you see, who was a Theravāda monk. They were all very disappointed. And what happened was that there was this big house and eventually Revatedama had the top floor and the new Tibetan monk came and had the bottom floor.

And what it allowed people to do was to come every week to do their meditation, to meet, and to take it with them back home. Now just that, I found that just the effort of one evening of a week of having to make my way across town and sit with people and came back was like a little boost of energy. And I would continue throughout the week until the next boost. If I missed a couple of weeks my practice would go down. So I really made a big effort to make sure that I got there just every week.

The other benefit that I found at that time was that because after a few years, two or three years, he was able to move to a different place. So it became a sort of Theravāda centre. So I began going there also to do day retreats. And I ended up with the habit of going there once a month to do two days. That was a resident thing. You could stay there. And that again was a sort of boost.

So that's what we need. We need to have community. We need to have a place where you can keep giving yourself little kickstarts. And by coming here just of an evening, it gives you a kickstart for the next week. And if you did a day retreat here once a month or so, that would be a little boost, you see. And then once a year to try and get a decent week in, you see, then you complete the cycle.

And the process of spiritual growth is just very slow. For the vast majority of people, it's a slow process. The Buddha actually warns us, it's gradual. So very few people have this cataclysmic insight and are suddenly boomeranged into the higher realms of the spiritual life. Most of us, it's just an uphill slog. It's just one foot after the other, up and down. And it would be all right if it was directly up, but it isn't, is it? It's up and then down and then up and then down, then down and down, then up and up. But eventually over a period, you can see that there's been some change, some progress, you see.

You know, say twenty-five years. And you look back and think, oh, I have changed, you see. But if you look back over a week or a year, you think, well, nothing's happening. So it's a case of taking a very long-term view of the spiritual practice.

Now, the core scripture, the jewel of the collection, as it's known, is the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse. And it's a discourse on how to establish this awareness, this awareness that leads to liberation, leads to knowledge and insight. And who does he deliver that core discourse to? Now, you'd think, well, he delivered it to his order, to the monks and what not. He didn't. He delivered it to the ordinary people of Kuru Sadamma. And the Kurus, in a special town called Kuru Sadamma, lived approximately where you get modern Delhi. And he'd been up there teaching, teaching them, and they'd been sort of very interested. And when he went back to visit them, he was surprised to find that they were actually following his teaching.

See? I mean, I found this when I first began to teach. I would give these instructions, but hardly anybody really followed them, you see. And I used to get irritated, you see, just in myself, I didn't show it, of course. And I'd say, you know, why didn't you follow? So, and then I found out, well, people aren't going to follow your instructions, you see. So now I rejoice when somebody actually follows my instructions, see. So I never get irritated. I say, oh, finally, somebody's doing it.

So you see, he got back there to Kuru Sadamma, and he found all these people actually practising this moment to moment mindfulness. And he said, there are things like there was no well talk. So in those days, of course, you'd go to the well and you'd have a gossip. But they weren't doing that. They were actually following his instructions. And it was there that he gave this talk about how to establish a specific type of mindfulness that led to liberation.

So this shows us two things. First of all, that he really took practising lay people seriously. It wasn't as though he was just connected to his monks and nuns. And secondly, most important, he had no doubt that lay people could become just as enlightened as monks, if only they gave themselves to the practice.

So, as a lay person, your job is to bring the Dharma into everything you're doing. Now, in the standing meditation there, I pointed out to you that seeing of an intention is the point of change. If we don't see an intention, then we'll just do it in a thoughtless way.

Recently I read this report, I think it was about a year ago, that psychologists had found that decisions are made before you're aware of them. Did you see that report? Where they've shown that in the brain, in these circuits, they show that actually a de-

cision has been made and then the person becomes aware, does it and then thinks that they've actually made the decision. But the decision was actually made before they became aware of it. Now that is a simple, pure, wonderful example of the unaware life. That is the deluded life where you think you're making the decisions, but actually you're being an automaton. You're actually running according to past habits.

Now, the whole point is that as you become aware of those intentions, then they don't get empowered. You see the intention coming up, like we did, intending to sit. If you're there still, you see, with that awareness, and you see that intention to sit coming up, there's a moment there where you can say, well, should I be sitting or should I be walking or should I be doing something else? See? That's how you take control of your life.

How many times has suddenly you've said to yourself, oh, I'll have a cup of coffee. And you're just making a cup of coffee. You don't even think about it. You're just done. And then while you're drinking your coffee, your mind's running all over the place and you finish your cup of coffee and you think, hold on, did I have that cup of coffee or did I not have that cup of coffee? Completely lost. No memory of it at all. And you think, well, I'll have another one. Because you didn't enjoy that coffee at all. You meant to enjoy it, but your mind was somewhere else. So this is the unaware life. I mean, that's what we're trying not to do. And just observing that intention re-empowers us. This is the point.

In the core of his teaching, he teaches this dependent origination, okay? And dependent origination without going into it in too much detail is the psychology of either delusion or liberation. And there's a point in the process of mentation, in the process of how we think and do things where feeling arises which is either pleasant or unpleasant. It can be caused by anything. So it might be that just at this time of day, I always have coffee. So this unpleasant feeling comes up and it has to be assuaged. It has to be answered and the answer is coffee. So with that unpleasant feeling, there comes this intention, coffee. Now that intention is coming from past habit of always drinking coffee at four o'clock in the afternoon. Is it four o'clock yet? See, at four o'clock in the afternoon. Not yet. No, it's near enough. Okay, it's getting close. Okay. Relax.

So, this intention for coffee comes up, you see. Now, normally speaking, there's an immediate identification with it. I want coffee. The I comes in at that point. And once the I comes in, it's impossible to stop the next moment of willing. See? So, it's coffee. Coffee. Right? Feeling coffee. Want. I. Get. That's how it goes. Now, in our language, we say, I want coffee. But it's not. It's coffee want I. That's the process. And because it's coffee

want I, you can stop it at the want. And you don't have to identify with it. See? And in not identifying with it, means you don't collapse into, you don't become the desire. And that moment gives you a moment to say to yourself, well, should I, should I not?

And if you say no, and it's a strong desire, then you have to sort of stay with it, right? And wait for this pain, this suffering to give way. You see, you get this tremendous urge for coffee, just to wait. And as it passes away, what's actually disappearing, what's actually being undermined is the force of that habit. See? So the next time that intention comes up for coffee, it's not so great. It's not so grasping. See? And eventually it'll die out.

Now if we did that as a constant throughout our lives, every time we saw, first of all, to be awake to see an intention, secondly to have the patience when we see there's an unwholesome intention to die away, you see, very quickly you change your habits. And of course in the opposite, every time you see an intention which you come as wholesome, and there's this negativity saying, no, I don't want to do that. But you actually do it, you see, then you're producing a habit which is taking you into wholesomeness. That's all.

Now, that is practice in daily life in a very simple way. See? Now, what we do is, the coffee comes up, you see, and you say, no, no, and you suffer and you suffer and you suffer and then it finally gives away and you think, great, I gave up coffee, you see. And then you're a bit anxious, you're a bit depressed, you see. Coffee comes up, whoop, you have coffee. So one minute we're letting go, and the next minute we're finding it again. And that's why it takes so long to become liberated. But if we were actually fierce in our intention and never gave way, then we'd very quickly change ourselves. And that's the core practice. And that's the core practice. It doesn't matter whether you're a lay person or a monastic. That's the core practice.

Right as right speech, right action and right livelihood. So take livelihood for instance. Whatever your livelihood is, you see, unless it's obviously immoral, you know, I don't know, arms trafficking, human trafficking, that's pretty immoral. So if you're not doing that, you're all right. So most people have jobs which are in themselves wholesome.

What turns it into a spiritual practice is your attitude to the job. If you see yourself doing work which is a service to others, that's an immediate act of generosity. Whether you want to or not is immaterial. It's the fact that you've now intended your work to be a service to others, and of course you include yourself, others and yourself, but mainly your intention is to be of service to others in whatever way you can. Immediately you see whether you like it or not you're developing a beautiful attitude. And at first it may,

you may be still stuck with the effects of an old attitude of being grumpy, of not wanting to do the work, of hating this and hating that, you see. But as those die away, that sense of service begins to resonate in the heart and that's where you get your joy. And then your life work becomes a joy, no matter what it is. Whether it's sweeping the streets or being a nurse or being an astrophysicist, it doesn't really matter, because it's your intention as to why you're doing it, and that becomes right livelihood.

And in ordinary daily life, just washing the pots, you see, washing the pots, I mean, that becomes a practice in itself, right, to actually just turn it into a mindfulness exercise. And then every time you wash the pots, you can see your mindfulness increasing, you see. And then you start looking for a job washing pots. You see, it's such a wonderful practice.

Right speech, you see. The Buddha talks about kindly speech, right? To make sure that when you're talking to somebody, it's always coming from some sort of heart of kindness. It's honest, right? And the third one, which I think is particularly important, that is at a suitable time. You don't put your foot in it. You're actually saying that you might want to say something kindly and you might want to say something honest, but it might not be the right time. You have to be careful when you say things. So if you take those three little guidelines, then you're careful in what you say, in what you speak. It's probably the hardest of all these training rules is right speech, because we're always talking.

So you can see that every moment in our lives, from a spiritual point of view, offers this opportunity to bring awareness, to bring goodness, to bring virtue, and naturally—so you have to work at it—the joy arises.

Now that's the positive bit. The negative side is, of course, that you have to also work with stuff that comes up, the anxieties, the depressions and whatnot. And slowly, by finding this position of being able to bear with them, being patient with them, allowing them to manifest at the right time, so that you're no longer hijacked by your emotional states, they no longer govern your life. See, that's a liberation. And also not getting that attitude of being against them, fighting them, being frustrated by them, wanting them to go. You're immediately in conflict. If you feel a little anxiety and you want it to go, you're in conflict with it, you're creating even more disturbance.

So when we have these negative states, to actually find the space and time to let them express themselves. And in so doing, you're allowing that turbulence to die out but also developing an attitude of not being affected by them so that you can carry on your daily life no matter what mental state that happens to arise. And remember we were talking about it this morning that when something negative comes you can always

park it like a car—which is not the same as suppressing. Suppressing is you push it away with anger or with fear. But just by putting it to the side and then putting your whole attention on what you're doing, then as it were you're building up another mental state to the side of it which is joyful. And then you find some time in the day or in the week where you can go back to this mental state and let it manifest, and that's how you work with negative mental states.

So from negative mental states you're bearing them when you can so that they are dying out. And you're being skillful in the sense that you're not being governed by them, overtaken by them, by putting your attention, by training yourself to put your attention in what is positive and wholesome. And on the positive side, whenever you see something wholesome or where you want yourself to develop, you put your whole attention and effort into that area. Very slowly you move across from darkness to light. Easy-weezy-peasy.

And when we fail, you see, when we go back to old habits, when you find yourself going down again, you see, so at some point you have to bump, you have to stop, you see. And then you have to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again. That's it. And frankly, most of our spiritual lives is picking ourselves up, dusting ourselves off and starting all over again. That's it. Just very slowly. Resilience. Resilience, you see. Continual effort. Very slowly. And that's really basically how we bring the Dhamma into our lives.

So there's no mysticism about Buddhist practice. It really is about developing the good heart, letting go of the heart which is full of horror and misery, and developing the good heart. And as we're doing that, as we're doing that, you see, there's a natural separation of this awareness, this consciousness. There's a natural bringing, there's a natural elevation, a movement of this consciousness out of the psycho-physical organism. Out of emotions, out of the body, out of mind—meaning thoughts and images. And as it pulls itself out, it comes to recognize its own true nature.

And it's the slow recognition of this consciousness, of this awareness, that is the spiritual part of your practice, the real spiritual part, because this is what doesn't belong to the earth, it doesn't belong to nature, it's something other than. And as it gathers its own inner understanding, you see, it now goes back into this psychophysical organism and into the world in order to spread its understanding.

So when you're sitting in meditation, you're displacing your attention into an observation post. It's like a crow's nest on a ship. You know the bit where the sailor climbs up to see if he can see the land? So he's up there, you see. You've discovered this place of the one who knows, the observer, the feeler. So this is a special place from which you

can observe the body with its feelings, the heart with its emotional states, the mind with its thoughts and images, the process of desire which is where the problem lies. And from that state you see—whether we are aware of it or not, really recognizing it or not—this consciousness has been displaced, it's relocated somewhere, and in that relocation it's discovering a new identity.

So this identity is the observer, the feeler, the knower. It's still false because there's still somebody there. It's not the end product. But it's a place where we can observe the whole process as to how we create happiness or unhappiness for ourselves. And then slowly but surely, as that becomes more and more obvious to us, then we'll want to stay there more. You'll want to stay in that peacefulness.

And what we discover is that whatever happiness is—it's a difficult one—whatever happiness is, real happiness, true, unchanging, everlasting happiness, is not an emotion. So that sort of discovery, you see, leads us to a different place.

Now does that mean that you therefore, does the Buddha not have a heart? You see? No, not at all. Because when that Buddha mind re-enters into the psycho-physical organism, the human being, it then begins to act as a human being. So the Buddha's asked, he says, when somebody comes to you, hears your teaching but does not respond, how do you feel? He says, it's all right. He's their *kamma*. I've done my bit and it's up to them now. And they ask him how do you feel when somebody does accept you? He says, I feel joyful, sympathetic joy. So there's, it's as though the heart is a sort of resonance, see, to the mind, to this consciousness. It resonates. So that's the spiritual part, you see.

And when you connect the ordinary psychological daily action, the ethical part of our lives, with that process, then you see the connection that when we are coming into a situation, when we are acting from the point of delusion, misunderstanding, it manifests in unethical actions. And when we're coming from the point of wisdom, it manifests in virtuous action. So you can't separate ethics from the spiritual life. The one goes together.

Yeah? I mean, how would you feel if the Buddha was caught shoplifting? Terrible, wouldn't it? Shoplifting, stealing from a shop. It wouldn't be good, would it? You know, the Buddha being carried out by police. You know, for shoplifting, for heaven's sake. I mean, murder, we can understand. But, you know, silly stuff. It's petty, it's ridiculous, you see. It doesn't work, does it? Yeah? So complete virtue and complete enlightenment are one and the same thing. The one is the mirror of the other. So that's why when you take the refuges, you always take the precepts, because they're connected. You can't have the one without the other.

See, when I started meditating, there was still the aftermath, really, of, you know, of the hippie period and all that sort of stuff. And I would meditate with people who would meditate really hard for six months, I mean, you know, sweat to the brow, I mean, really give themselves, you know? And then after that it was sex, drugs and rock and roll. You know what I mean? And they never got anywhere, you know? What to do?

So hopefully these days we've gone beyond that a bit and recognise that there is a connection between spiritual growth and our ethics, our moral lives.

So that's it really. The beauty of having a little center like this is it allows you to come here once a week to recharge your batteries, your spiritual batteries. And then to make sure that in daily life you always have a right intention for everything you do. And that even when you're rushed, you can still stop. Even when you have to do something quickly, you needn't get into a rush. See, that's also a skillful thing to be able to do. And that you begin to understand the role of intention in developing yourself.

And that just by that action of coming to a center, meditating this *vipassanā*, finding that position of the observer, doing it every morning so that you always re-establish that place, and know how to get back to it at any moment of the day. See. Close the door. Just stand there for a minute. That's it. You just stop. You got it. See. And always moving from that point. Right. Making the right intention. And that's it. And just very slowly. The whole process works for you. Becomes a habit. Once it's a reinforced habit, even when you don't meditate for a day or a week, you see, then you still go back to it.

There was a very famous Russian ballet dancer, Nureyev, in the 70s, some of you might have seen him, and he used to say, if I didn't practice for one day, it was okay. If I didn't practice two days, I felt it. If I didn't practice three days, everybody else did, right? So there you've got your standard, you see. You can miss your meditation for a day. The second day you'll feel it and the third day everybody else will. So it's just getting yourself into that continuous.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated by your constant and ever energized practice from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Very good. So now what do we do now? Got to get this, the strings. Ah yes, the long strings. Okay. Right. Yes. So now is this company coming in just in time for the blessing? Wonderful. Is that door open? Is that...

Ah, she's shy. Look, you see. She doesn't want to be seen. I love it. You see, that's very interesting, isn't it? Because when you see, if like, if you're sitting on a train and there's a baby there, looking at you, seeing you're going, and then, and then they look at you, and then suddenly they're like what's going on, you know? And then there comes this

point where the baby actually sees that you're looking at them, see. At first it's just them looking at you, that's it, you see. Then suddenly you're looking at it and actually you gotta hide. Other people's eyes are like, oh, they bore into them, yeah. It's funny, isn't it? Little children. The growth of consciousness.

So, okay, so now we have to pass this string around and as we do it, it's very bad *kamma* if it touches the ground. I'll only say it once. I'll only say it once.

No, you take it. Yeah, that's it. Just make sure you wrap it around. No, you want a bit more because you want to keep your hand down there. Give it plenty, give it plenty. I don't want you to pull the jar over. Yeah, you're alright.

So this, you see, is going into the water here. You see? And it goes around the Buddha, around the flowers, and then it's going around everybody. Everybody has to piece this ring, you see? So you're all connected, so that when we do the chanting, this water becomes entirely empowered by your kindness and love. It starts to boil.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter how it goes, zigzag, it doesn't matter. Just keep passing it around. It'll come up in a minute. It doesn't have to go around your head. It doesn't have to do that. It could hang itself. I don't want people to throttle themselves. Ah yes, all around the back. What's the little girl called? What's the little girl called? Um...

And then, oh, I just thought you've got to do the pouring, haven't you? Yeah. Can we just shift this a bit? Yeah. Actually, no, if you come, I have to tell you, the best thing is for you to come here. That's it. For you to come here. That's the best. That's better. Have you got enough string there? I have enough string, yeah. How are we doing? Is it coming up this way again? Now, if you hold it there, you see. Are you going to hold it there? Yeah. Okay, okay. Whoa, whoa, whoa. Okay. Right.

Now, I'm going to chant the discourse on loving kindness, and then afterwards Linda will read it in Dutch. And then while I chant, now you're going to pour the water, and remember it overflows, see. So this is an opportunity for you just to offer your goodwill. There are four classic blessings: may you be safe, may you be well, may you be happy, and may you live contented in harmony with the world, see. So it doesn't matter what blessing you use, but use it in order to spread it out to yourself, to everybody here, and to this lovely little building. Okay.

Sabbe sattā averā hontu abyāpajjā hontu anīghā hontu sukhī attānaṁ pariharantu. Sabbe sattā sabba-dukkhā pamuccantu. Sabbe sattā sabba-rogā muccantu. Sabbe sattā sabba-upaddavā muccantu. Sabbe sattā sabba-dukkha-domanassa-upāyāsā muccantu. Sabbe sattā sukhī hontu.

Sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā. Ye keci pāṇabhūtā pāṇā vā thāvarā vā anāvaseṣā dīghā vā ye mahantā vā majjhimā rassā-kānikā-thūlā dīrghā vā ye diṭṭhā vā adiṭṭhā vā ye ca dūre vasanti avidhure sabbesattā bhavantu sukhitattā.

Na paro paraṁ nikubbetha nātimaññetha katthaci naṁ kañci kiñcanena viheṭhayetha na aṇḍaṁ sajīvaṁ hanyāt. Mātā yathā niyaṁ puttaṁ āyusā ekaputtam anurakkhe evampi sabbabhūtesu mānasaṁ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṁ.

Mettañca sabbalokasmiṁ mānasaṁ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṁ uddhaṁ adho ca tiriyañca asaṁbādhaṁ averaṁ asapattaṁ. Tiṭṭhañcaraṁ nisinno vā sayāno vā yāvat-assa vigata-middho etaṁ satiṁ adhiṭṭheyya brahmam etaṁ vihāraṁ idha-mahu.

If you are wise and you want to achieve a state of peace, you should be capable, upright, perfectly upright, compliant, gentle, and humble.

CHAPTER 114

The Problem of Identity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 39 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's analysis of identity as the root of human suffering, explaining how we continuously create ourselves through the five aggregates (pañca-khandha): form, feeling, perception, volitional formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he demonstrates how Right Awareness allows us to step back and observe these processes objectively.*
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> *The talk reveals how meditation practice leads us to dis-identify with body, emotions, and thoughts, relocating our sense of self to the observer position. Yet even this observer-self is constructed, pointing toward the Buddha's description of nibbāna as an unconditioned sphere of experience (āyatana) — a boundaryless consciousness full of light that exists beyond the six senses.*
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> *Bhante explains how glimpsing this nibbānic awareness undercuts identity and fear, leading naturally to compassionate re-engagement with the world through mettā (loving-kindness). He concludes by exploring dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda) and how the process of rebirth occurs moment-to-moment through our fundamental not-knowing, creating cycles of acquisition and aversion that keep us trapped in suffering.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm just tackling the problem of identity, which is core to the Buddha's understanding of our problem — identity, and perhaps to just understand how we create ourselves continuously. The Buddha dissects the human experience both in the present moment and as a flow, as something that happens over time. In the dissection in the present moment, like a cross-section, he splits us up into five parts that he calls aggregates, because they're just heaps — they're just a collection of the same things.

So the first one is all our physicality, the physicality — just the body itself in its gross material form. But it also means how we actually experience the body at that very basic level that many of you will have experienced when, for instance, you go into a pain and what you're actually feeling in it is tension or heat or something like that. So that's the point where the body and mind meet. So these are two distinct things in Buddhism.

The next one is feelings. So feelings — the distinction between feelings and ordinary sensations is the definition we put on them. So a feeling is perceived as either pleasant or unpleasant, or neutral. But if you ever get close to a neutral sensation, really go into it, you'll find that it divides into something slightly pleasant or slightly unpleasant, because that's the basic duality within which we live. The world is either experiencing something pleasant or unpleasant. Can't do anything about that. Just the way it is.

Then there's a whole section of perceptions. So perceptions are a mental image of what it is that we're experiencing, and it produces our memory. And the perceptions are not... I mean, normally speaking, they're talked of as very basic things like the colour and shape of something or just the basic aroma of something. But that process of *saññā*, as some of you know, actually builds up on itself into the higher concept. So a concept is another perception, another way of perceiving the world. They tumble on each other until they become more and more complex through our thought system. So these are all separate from feeling — they're mental things. They are either images or this very fine energy that we call thought, reason, logic, whatever you want to call it, the intellect.

Then there's this whole business of *saṅkhāra*. Now, the reason why he's partitioned all these is really to point us to this business of *saṅkhāra*. So, the thing about *saṅkhāra*, sometimes translated as volitional formation — it never makes sense to me that — but the real point of it is that this is where the will is. This is where we actually create. The others are given as a human being. We have a body. It offers sensations. It offers feelings. We perceive them in such and such a way. But this whole business of *saṅkhāra*, volitional formations, includes all our, what we would recognize as our emotional thought life — that whole business of the creation that we can manufacture within ourselves through our thought. I mean, in its highest extent it would be things like philosophy and art, but it's ordinary — the ordinary sillinesses that come up in the mind is also part of that complex. And that's a heap, but the important thing about this heap is — will come back to that if I remember.

Then the next bit is consciousness. Now this consciousness is a problem because the English words don't find it very difficult to describe this. It's the act of cognition where all these other factors come together to form a picture. So the only way I can think of it — the only example would be, say, a computer screen or a television screen where a lot of things are coming up from behind of which we are not conscious and suddenly appear on a screen as an act of seeing, an act of, you might call it, computer consciousness — an act of cognition. And there's an understanding involved in it. There's an internal

understanding. It has an internal logic. So when you are watching something on television or doing something on a screen, it's presenting you with an already manufactured picture which makes sense in itself.

The problem arises when we try to understand what the Buddha meant by this *satipaññā*. So in the main discourse where he's really putting forward this process of how we become liberated — it's called the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, discourse on how to establish this right awareness — because a robber has awareness but it's not quite right. It doesn't have what you might call an ethical juice, or the wrong ethical duty.

And this, by the way, this discourse is not delivered to monastics. It's not delivered to people who sit on the trees meditating. This is delivered to the Kurus, the Kurus of Dhamma. And Kurus of Dhamma was very close to modern day Delhi. He travelled quite a bit, hundreds of miles. And he'd been there, given his teachings. And when he revisited, he was quite taken by the fact that people were following his teachings. I myself also find myself amazed when people... So he gave them this talk to the Kurus. This is a talk that he gave. This is the jewel of the collection. He gave this to lay people, and that's really worth remembering, because in the Buddhist scene one thinks that monastics have the better of it. After all, they don't have to work and they just hang about doing nothing getting enlightened. Some of them do, but in fact the Buddha is quite clear that emotional life — that also leads us into always trying to manipulate the world so that we can re-establish that same happiness, same emotional happiness.

So on a more gentle note, seeking happiness in nature. So one goes out, one is at one with nature. What does that one-ness mean when people say I felt that one with nature? See what happened? Now remember that the world out there is not what we're experiencing. We're experiencing only what our senses can give us. When I look at a tree, I can only see the tree if my eyes allow me to see the tree. I can only feel the wind on my skin as my skin will allow me to feel the wind. I can never know the tree in itself, or how other people see the tree. They can tell me, but I can't see it. People can tell me how they feel the wind, I can only do it by analogy, because I feel the wind.

So, getting lost — when somebody has a oneness in nature, what they're actually saying is, for one moment, they're absorbed into the perception of nature that they're creating. It comes as a mystical experience to some because they've never been at one with anything. They've always been at two. There's always been me and something else. And just for one moment, they're out in this beautiful place, suffused with the joy that nature can bring, that sense of beauty and aesthetics, a beautiful valley or something like that. And just for one minute, the giving, the loss of a self, the absorption into that experience.

And in a sense, of course, it is a mystical experience if you oppose it to ordinary daily life where there's always a me doing something, there's always a me experiencing something. So now, going back to that *satipaññā* — this awareness with intuitive intelligence.

So now, what is it that can pull itself out of these five aggregates? What is it that can make the five aggregates an object to be observed, to be felt, to be understood? So obviously that's something that cannot be within the five aggregates itself, because the five aggregates, all these qualities that we've talked about — sensations, feelings, perceptions, acts of cognition — are all very much dependent on each other. And yet here we are within ourselves observing this stuff, and that's what we're doing with meditation. We're pulling ourselves out of that process and we're actually seeing these things arising and passing away within this field of awareness.

Now although the Buddha uses these two words *sati* and *paññā*, really they're the two qualities of the very same faculty that we have. So we understand it if we say you look and then you see. So first of all something rustles or you see something passing, a bird of some sort — first you look and then you see what it is, a woodpecker. But without seeing, without looking, there's no seeing.

In our practice, we're pulling ourselves out to this objective position within ourselves — feeling, seeing, looking, observing, experiencing. And it's in keeping that inner eye still, the gaze, and allowing the seeing to come. And what we discover is that this is not within our control.

Here we have this body with its sensations, feelings and all that, which have become objects. As soon as they become an object, then obviously it can't be me. So you've dis-identified with it — that's the process of dis-identifying with it. And one of the things that you notice when you dis-identify is that they carry on without you. Feelings carry on whether you want them or not. Thoughts flash in the mind and take you away whether you want them or not. So that lack of control is also telling us that whatever it is, whatever this psychophysical organism is, it's not me. Scary stuff, by the way.

So then we have this *satipaññā* which is observing these things happening. Normally, our position is still with a sense of self, the observer. So what we've done is we've relocated this identity. So from a baby-like complete identity with the body, we identify with emotions. I feel upset. I am upset. I am depressed. So as soon as we say that, of course, you are. As soon as you say I am depressed, that's it. You're stuck. You're imprisoned. But as soon as you make the feelings of depression something objective, it's still not pleasant, but at least you're not that. You've found some other different location for this sense of self.

Same with thought. When you're thinking, more often than not, we're lost in it. I think, therefore I am. I'm not so sure he meant that, by the way, but even so. So then you pull yourself out of that and you find yourself relocated into this position of the observer, the objective observer. But there's still the sense of self. So all the time, just in this process of insight meditation, you're rediscovering a different centre, a different place where you get this sense of me.

And in that process, afterwards, after you've done it, at the end of a sitting, just ask yourself: what's it like being the observer? I mean, is that a better place than being an emotional self? Is that a better place than being a thought self? I mean, it's all right when the body, mind, and heart are working in perfect harmony and are jumping high in joy, peace, and all that, but that only happens occasionally. But this place, the observer — after you've come out of it, just reflect upon it. What's it like being in that location?

Now, where then does that sense of self arise when I'm in the position of the observer? So again, going back to that screen, going back to that television screen or computer screen. Sometimes when you're watching, you can see yourself, can't you, in the screen? See yourself watching TV, if the light's right. So that's it. That's the self. The sense of self is coming from a feeling of that *sati*, that awareness, that intuitive awareness within the mind. It's both a feeling, a feeling of a self, and a perception of a self. There's always those two. In Buddhist psychology, they always arise together, feeling and perception. You can't have one without the other.

Now, here's the interesting thing. How can we pull ourselves out of that? We've been able to objectify our bodies, our sensations. We've been able to objectify our emotions. We've been able to see images in the mind. I mean, it's difficult to see a thought, but you can. You have to just be a bit more concentrated. You see a thought coming up. We've been able to pull ourselves out of that, but if you try and pull yourself out of this more subtle self, you just create another self trying to pull yourself out of this self. It becomes a double take. It's a never-ending loop.

So how do we get out of that? So again, it's always this teaching about trying not to achieve anything. And when you're in a very good state of very clear meditation, when the body is absolutely still, when the heart's calm, when the mind is not thinking, very still, and there's only the breath — once in a blue moon, when you're there like that — really turn your attention on this feeling of a self for no other reason than to observe it, right? As soon as you try and get rid of it, you're in conflict. So just observe that thing, because that's also being created.

Now, that's why the Buddha says those who are aware are in the presence of *Nibbāna*. When you're in that state, you're very close to the experience of *Nibbāna*.

So what are the qualities of this Nibbanic experience? So in early Buddhism, I mean, the way the Buddha himself taught it, he taught it more from an experience point of view. What is the experience of *nibbāna*? And he's very clear about it. He's very clear about as to what it isn't, right? He talks about it as that which is not born, does not die, is not created, not compounded, not conditioned. That's pretty straightforward. So it's not one of them.

But then he talks more positively and he talks about it as an *āyatana*. Now this word *āyatana* he uses as a sphere of experience. So we have six of these spheres of experience and they're dependent on the senses. And they are each of them unique, discrete unto themselves. So the eye can only see. It can't hear. It's another *āyatana*. It's another sphere of experience. And the sixth one is the mind itself.

Then he says that there is this *āyatana*, there is this sphere of experience where there's no sun, there's no moon, there's no coming, no going, etc. He's got a whole list of things, but it's not there. But there's definitely this sphere of experience.

And then finally, it comes up twice in the scriptures, he's quite clear that it is a consciousness. Because he uses the same word that he uses for these other experiences of just being aware in the world. And he is very clear. Again, he says there is a consciousness which is not coloured by any of the senses — and remember the mind is also a sense in Buddhism — and it has no boundary. Only phenomena create boundary. Walls create boundary. No boundary, and in all directions, full of light or awakeness, full of light.

So it's not as though there's often — how can we say — a very negative interpretation put onto his teaching and this *nibbāna* becomes more and more distant, more and more impossible to grasp. But when you actually pick out these little phrases from the scriptures, it's very concrete. There is a real experience of something within us which does not belong to this level of existence. And once that is attained, even if it's only a glimpse, there's a whole revolution in the way that we relate to the world because something has been deeply undercut, and that is identity.

The whole point of a Nibbanic experience is that there is that inner knowledge that one is not what one appears to be. And with that, of course, there's an ease of letting go. So we talked this morning about seeing impermanence is to be able to let go of things. You don't get caught up in it. You don't hold on to anything. And because there isn't this identity with the world, there's not a seeking of happiness in it. So we stop investing in it as a place for happiness because we've found a deeper happiness.

Now, does that mean that there are no more joys and no more pleasures in the world? Far from it. They still remain, but our relationship to them is radically changed, because we've found this — there's a deep happiness. Even if at first we can't attain that, at least we know it's there, just like a fully liberated person would always be in that state.

And the point of this is to understand that that's what we're developing through meditation when we talk about awareness. That's what we're actually developing all the time.

And as it develops, there's an ease with the way things are. See, that's the point. So it's not as though things have to get better. They can get worse, but there's an ease with it. You know, financial collapse, it doesn't mean that you don't do anything about it. We'll come to that in a minute. But there's not this tremendous fear that arises. Fear is undercut, so always remember that our fears are the measure of our identity. And remember that this is all relocated in different areas of our lives. I mean Freud understood that well, so that all fear is actually the fear of death. It's the fear of ending, it's the fear of losing.

Now on the positive side, having now brought ourselves out of this enmeshment — they say bewilderment as it's called, bewitchment with the world — there's now a re-engagement. That's important. So at the end of every practice, there's always the *mettā*. And what the *mettā* does, what the practice of loving-kindness does, it forms a different relationship with the world. Not one based on me, not one based on selfishness. Definitely self-care — not to confuse selfishness with self-care — but a whole relationship change.

So there's an engagement in the world. And this is best mirrored in the actions of the Buddha himself. So once he understood what he'd got, his immediate thought was to teach it to somebody, to pass it on to somebody else. That's the compassion. That's that immediate movement of the Buddha within to the Buddhas that is within all of us. And although he has this doubt — that's put mythologically as a great god appears to him and encourages him to teach, because some people have only a little bit of dust in their eyes — that's a doubt that he probably had when he thought, well, would anybody actually understand this?

And it's interesting that he first tries to go to his early teachers. And of course they've died, they've passed on. And eventually he goes to his old five companions. And the one interesting thing when he meets his companions and he talks to them about this new

understanding is that he has this little phrase keeps coming up: have you ever heard me speak like this before? Have you ever heard me speak like this before? And slowly but surely he gains that confidence in passing on his message.

So it's the same with us. The more we meditate, the more the purification, the more the insight, it comes out just in our very actions, just in the very way that we are. Whether we like it or not, we become teachers. We become exemplars. You should be very ashamed if you get drunk. You should put yourself in jail for three days. So if you say, well, I meditate, and then they find you on the street, all paralytic, they think, well, what's the point? So in a sense, also, we have to bear the burden of our responsibility.

Now just to explain — I don't have any more time — to try to understand this process of rebirth. So the process of rebirth is happening right here and now. Once we understand that, then the idea of it may be happening after death becomes at least more acceptable. It's not necessary to believe in any of this in order to become fully liberated for the actual Dharma to work, because the teaching is immediate. It either works now or it doesn't work. It's not something that you're preparing for the future. Meditation either works now, the practice works now, or it doesn't work at all.

Now if we go back to an original position that the Buddha states of our conditioning, it's this not knowing. It's a word that begins the process of dependent origination, which is describing the person in flow, in action. And there's not enough time to go into that too deeply, but this business of not knowing, what is it that doesn't know? So it is this *satipaññā*, it doesn't know and it arrives in this form at birth, it arrives there in this form. So it's no wonder that it should then presume itself to be what it is experiencing, so that immediate identity with the physical form is natural to that consciousness, for want of a better word, to that *satipaññā*. I don't like to use the word consciousness, to the awareness, to that intuitive awareness — that's better. Or better still, the knowing. You'll find that in the literature too. And that's a very clever way of talking about it, because being a sort of verbal form, it gives the impression of it not being substantial, a thing. It's a process, a knowing.

So this knowing finds itself within this physical frame at a birth point and just presumes this is what I am. Now as soon as it's done that, it's seeking happiness within this form. And in seeking happiness within this form, it creates two attitudes. The first attitude is acquisitiveness, because the more you can have of a good thing, the happier you are. And the other one is the opposite: anybody who gets in the way must be hated and destroyed, annihilated, must completely get out of the way. So you've got your division immediately upon that wrong identity — one of acquisition which leads to greed and

robbing and all that sort of stuff, and one which is getting rid of what is getting in the way which leads to murder, and if it's too big it leads the other way to fear, despair, suicide.

So either way, it immediately leads us into a position of conflict with the world. But because, generally speaking, most people find a sort of modicum of living which is at least fairly comfortable — I think I'm only talking about Westerners — we presume this is the way it should be, this is the way it is. So Freud, if you remember, came to the conclusion that there's no way you can get rid of unhappiness. You just get to this point where you're not utterly completely neurotic and you have a general feeling of well-being.

So this not knowing — and because it's an original not knowing, because it's an original state of not knowing — you'll see it translated as ignorance, which gives it the feel of culpability, you know, you should have known better. But it's not, it's just simply don't know. It's like when we have a real accident.

CHAPTER 115

The Body as Meditative Object

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 36 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the central role of the body in Buddhist meditation practice, particularly as outlined in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10). He begins by distinguishing between physical pain (dukkha-dukkha) and the mental suffering that arises from our psychological relationship with bodily experiences, explaining how the body serves as a 'sounding chamber' that amplifies our mental states.*
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> *Drawing from the Buddha's own journey from extreme asceticism to the Middle Way, Bhante explores how the Awakened One discovered that liberation comes not from escaping the body, but from understanding how suffering arises through our attachments and aversions. The talk covers the four foundations of awareness as they relate to bodily contemplation: breath awareness, posture awareness, daily activities, contemplation of bodily constituents, and charnel ground meditation.*
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> *The teaching emphasizes practical applications for meditation, showing how bodily awareness can reveal the three characteristics of existence - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self (anattā). Bhante explains how our identification with the body creates suffering, and how contemplative practices can develop a healthier, non-attached relationship with our physical experience. This accessible yet profound exploration offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners insight into using the body as a gateway to deeper understanding and liberation.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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

What I want to centre on tonight is the body really and just show you how in the Buddha's teachings the body is so important, just our physicality.

The first thing is to understand what he means by *dukkha*. This word translates literally as hard to bear, but we translate it variously as - well, it used to be translated as suffering but these days people prefer unsatisfactoriness. But it's basically the whole gamut of human misery from the smallest little irritation to existential angst. So it's the whole stretch of human misery that is included in this word *dukkha*. And I think one thing we might confuse *dukkha* with is ordinary pain, the pain of the body. So he talks about dukkha-dukkha, which is the suffering of ordinary physical pain.

Once we're clear that the process of liberation isn't about getting rid of physical pain, then it becomes more possible because you can't imagine the body not having pain for heaven's sake. So he himself had pain. There's a lovely bit in the scriptures where he asks Ānanda to take over because he's got a bad ache in the back, and he falls ill as you know. In fact he died in the end from gastroenteritis from eating food that was off. So it's not as though he stopped suffering physical pain, but that's not where the suffering lies. As long as we're clear on that, and then he points out of course in the second noble truth that it's desire which is the cause of suffering. And what he means by that is the psychological trigger.

And it's really here that we're looking at suffering - how we constantly form this relationship with the world of either wanting it or not wanting it. So there's the suffering in the body caused by the body, and the suffering in the body caused by the mind. And that's what we mostly come across when we sit.

Normally speaking, if you're sitting, if your posture is comfortable and you've overcome the knees business - the exploding knees - then it's normally just the tightness, the sickliness, the shakings, all that. All that becomes the mind in the body. And it's being able to distinguish that and being able not to be afraid of it, to get over your fear of what's coming up.

And sometimes we might make the mistake of saying, "Oh, well, this is physicality because when I move, it goes." But as soon as you sit, this energy, this chi that we talk about this thing in the morning, it's rising up the body. And as it rises up the body, it starts shaking these parts that are held within the body - parts of the body in the stomach and the abdomen and the chest and the head and the shoulders, all these areas. And as that shakes, that's what we experience. We experience this pain.

But it would be wrong to think of it as pain which is going to cause us more suffering. This is the pain of release. So if you think of a clenched fist around a case - we don't have that anymore because of wheelies - but if you really want to know what it's like carrying a big case, well, fill one up with bricks and walk around with it for a while. And then when you let go of it, you get this excruciating pain as your hand opens up. But actually that's the hand releasing this pent-up pain, which we're not aware of when it's clenched.

So all these pains that we get in the body through meditation, which we can be pretty sure are not physical, are this release, the release of *dukkha*, as the Buddha would mean, this internal suffering. And the interesting thing is that the body is like a sounding chamber - it makes things worse, it makes things very obvious. You might in

your meditation, when you are deep and profoundly meditating, you might actually experience the separation of the mind from the body, of the mental state of depression from what it's actually doing to the body, from anger from what it's actually doing.

And these little experiences point out to you that the mind is more subtle, it's not so painful. It's when it touches the body and the burning begins and the tightness begins and the disease starts, the psychosomatic disease, that we suddenly realize, we suddenly are in contact with the strength of that mental process within the body. So the body is subject to mental states and it can disturb that cellular base. But we know that don't we?

So the body in a sense is mirroring back to us the mental state, makes it very obvious. And in that case it's like a sounding - it's like an alarm bell. So if for instance you come home every night from work with a headache, something's wrong. I mean if you blame the work that's ridiculous - there's something wrong with the way you're working which is causing a headache. It can be as simple as that. If you're suffering a lot from indigestion, then maybe you ought to look at the amount you're eating and when you're eating it - a constant drip feed I think they call it, grazing, grazing throughout the day, biscuits and things like that.

So that's the one - that's the main thing to be clear about. The body has its own suffering and the mind has its own suffering, but they are like milk and water - they saturate each other and that's why you get these psychosomatic diseases.

Now in the Buddha's biography he goes through this leaving of home which is a tearing away from sensual pleasure. There was, of course, there must have been some misery about leaving his family and his newborn child. But something had happened within his psychology which made it seem vain, made it feel as though it was going nowhere. And I think that one of our motivators in the spiritual life is to see the emptiness of sensual pleasure in itself. I always like to quote - what's his name? Yeah, Woody Allen, thank you. It's funny because you know my little quote. And he says, just having sex is an empty experience. But as empty experiences go... I mean, that's it, isn't it?

Unless sensuality, unless simple sensual experiences have some greater meaning, then they're fatuous, they're empty. I mean you enjoy them for a while but then they become empty in themselves. So there must have been that feeling and also a search for something more meaningful. And in his own process it was this whole problem of suffering. So that's what drove him away to seek the end of suffering.

And he tries to escape it by practicing these jhānic states, these absorption states. But of course they only last as long as you're in them, and when you come out you're still depressed and horrible. However he then gave up on that and practiced these mortification exercises - mainly not eating it seems, mainly starving himself. And you know he talks about being able to hold his spine through his stomach. Have you tried that? And he sort of... Certainly can't get anywhere near mine.

And the whole idea there, you see, is that it's the body which is the problem. And you get this in spiritual traditions, don't you? It's the body. It's sex which is the problem. It's hunger which is the problem. It's natural appetite to the body. And somehow you have to train the body. You have to batten it down. You have to beat it up. And then somehow the soul is released.

And of course if you've done a long fast - you know, some definitely beyond three days - you do feel this liberation from appetite, feel very light, the mind's very at ease, you feel at ease. Of course the body's eating itself and that's why it's given up - it's gone into famine mode. And that was the basic understanding of how to overcome desire.

It's not as though the Buddha was the only one who said desire was the cause of suffering. It was well known at those times. Even Socrates says it. I shouldn't say even Socrates. Socrates also said it. He's our hero, isn't he? Western hero Socrates. So this idea that somehow the fault was in the body just drove him to this really unhappy end.

And when he realized he wasn't getting anywhere, that's when he went off. And it was only because somebody gave him some rice pudding and he remembered something in childhood - at least that's the way I see the story - this incident in childhood where he's watching his father in the plowing ceremony. And it's that state of mind which opens up for him another avenue, which is not so much "How do I escape suffering?" - how can I jump out of it and find myself in a different place? But "How does suffering arise?" If you can see how suffering arises, surely you can see how to put an end to it. And that was why we call him enlightened. It was that that brings about his success, his liberation.

So the Buddha goes through that, and then eventually he doesn't dismiss the body then. It's actually very much deeply part of his teaching. So the whole of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, that's the discourse on how to establish this mindfulness that we keep talking about, leading to insight. The whole first part is about contemplation of the body. And the first part is, of course, about the breath.

And you see, he says here, well, I turned the wrong page here. He says here - so he's gone to the... Here a *bhikkhu* - we can say a meditator - gone to the forest, to the root of a tree, an empty hut, sits down having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect and established mindfulness in front of him. That means establishing mindfulness straight on. Ever mindful, he breathes in, mindfully breathes out.

And then - breathing in long, he understands "I breathe in long." In other words, you're in contact with the physicality of the breath. You know it's long, you know it's short, you know it's tight, you know it's loose. You're actually right there with it. And then he says, you know, breathing out a short breath, he understands.

And then he trains himself. See, the word training comes in. So first it's just mere contact, but then he trains himself: breathing in, experiencing the whole breath. Here it's translated the whole body of the breath, but it's like you're staying with the breath and you're experiencing the breath, the whole expiration of the breath. And then it's breathing in to tranquillize the body formation. So here he's telling us that just by watching the breath like this, the body itself begins to calm down. Breathing out, tranquillizing the body sensation.

And then he gives this image - he's very good at giving us metaphors, but we'll leave that. And then he says he abides contemplating, this breath, either in its internal factors. You're just watching the breath, you're feeling the breath, experiencing the breath. You can even do it outwardly by observing somebody breathe.

Or he abides contemplating the body as arising factors. He abides contemplating this body as vanishing. In other words, one breath completes, and that's it. It's finished. It's gone. You never get that breath again. The next breath out. So in that way you get this feeling that we're on this knife edge of time. There's only this moment. Breath comes, breath goes, that's it. You just hope for the next one.

Or else he is mindful "there is this body." Establishing, he establishes in him the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. In other words, you're now drawn into the breath and you're there steady with it for insight to arise.

So you can see the process - getting in touch with the body, the breath as body, as feeling, as sensation. And then you begin to realize that this sensation is just arising and passing away. And then you're actually there just watching this, and as that concentration grows, the focusing, the steadiness of attention, with that curiosity, you begin to have these slightly deeper insights into what the body is.

Then he goes on to about the four postures. So when I'm walking, the meditator understands "I am walking." In other words, you're aware of walking. When you're standing, you're aware of standing. When you're sitting, you're aware of sitting. When you're lying down, you're aware of lying down. It's simple, see? But it's always centered on the body. It's not some airy-fairy imaginative state. So you're actually aware of the body and its sitting posture, aware of the body walking and so on.

And then he goes on to just daily activities. I mean, here it's centered on the monastic life. So he's full awareness of wearing his robes, carrying his outer robe and bowl. He acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food and tasting. You're right there with it. It is the body, yeah? He acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating. We'd rather be reading magazines. He acts in full awareness walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep. Can you catch your last breath? Difficult. Waking up, can you catch the first breath? Difficult. Talking and keeping silent.

Now you have to remember here that this awareness isn't self-awareness. Often we get confused about that because in the meditation practice, sitting practice, we become the observer, the feeler. So there's a sense of self-awareness. Remember that's a split consciousness really. One minute you're doing and the next minute you're aware of yourself. It's a little mirror image going on in the mind.

So when he's talking about awareness here he's not talking about trying to be aware of oneself doing something. It means just being absorbed into what you're doing, just being aware.

This isn't difficult for us to understand. DVDs, films, yeah? You turn it on and then you wake up two hours later and they say "That was a good film." You know, where have you been for two hours? You've been absorbed into the film. What's the difference between that and an absorption which is going to bring about an insight? It's your intention.

So if your intention is to enjoy the film because you're a film buff and all that and you just want a break, and that's then what you get back is an attachment to films as dummies. You need something in your mouth to suck.

So if you go into film with more the intention of a right attitude, which would be something to learn, something to understand, then you come out with the understanding. I mean, a film itself can engender a right attitude. Have you seen that film Spirited Away? Yeah, see, wonderful, isn't it? And just watching that, you don't have to have a right intention to watch it. The film itself has the right intention for you. So when you come out, you just feel lifted by it and, you know, a lovely experience.

Same with music. Whatever music you're listening to, it's going in, isn't it? It's affecting you. The books you read. Even the adverts you look at. You've got to be careful, eh? So everything - remember, an act of attention is an act of intention. Once you've grasped that, then you're wary. As soon as you look at something, it's gone in.

Then the next section is about the foulness of the body. So that's what we did this morning a little bit. And, you know, he's... in the body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestine, small intestine, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat. Shall I go on? Fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints. I mean, he's got it all there in your eye. He ends up with your eye.

And just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of all sorts of grains such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus - he would say "Well this is hill rice." So it's a case of getting in contact with the body as foulness.

Now that gives us a downer on the body so we think we have to hate the body because it's foul. But it's not that. It's a case of accepting the body as body as it is. And what you're looking at, which we did this morning, is this sense of disgust, sense of dislike. Is that necessary? You know, people who work in hospitals, nurses, people who help nurses, they have to get over that, don't they? So there isn't that reaction to blood and people with incontinence. You can't be a nurse, can you?

You can't do it. And yes, of course, when we do that exercise on foulness, you can do it very quickly. You can do it any time of the day. These exercises aren't specifically—you don't have to do them for hours on end or something. It's like just a moment's reflection. But that has to be balanced with the importance of the body, and else it gets too much.

It has to be balanced by pouring loving-kindness into the body. So there's an incident in the scriptures where these sets of monks have been in the jungle, and they've been practicing foulness of the body to get this sense of non-attachment to the body. That non-attachment was now highly developed to the body, but when the Buddha saw them, he realized there was something missing, which was this loving-kindness. So he gave them the practice of loving kindness and they all became liberated. That's the story. So you can see it's a very strong practice for non-attachment, but then somehow you've got to re-engage.

And then finally, to really rub our noses in it, there's the nine charnel ground contemplation. And this brings us to this core problem about death and dying. So here, in those days, they used to throw the dead bodies on the charnel grounds, wrap them in white cloth and just leave them there for animals or nature, just to slowly corrupt.

In the commentaries, for those people who want to do this exercise—it's difficult these days, of course, you have to find somebody to kill and throw them out there and have a look at them and watch them. There's a lovely direction of not to sit windward. So he says, what the meditator is saying is, this body too, my body is of the same nature. It will be like that. It is not exempt from that fate. Not exempt from that fate, from that destiny.

The body has a destiny. As soon as there's conception, there has to come this moment where there's decease. That's why it's very good to visit graveyards. Oh yes, once a week, walk around the graveyard, see, just as this body is, mine will be. It brings a certain sobriety to life.

And then he goes through the whole thing. We were to see a corpse thrown aside, devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, various kinds of worms, see. This is what happened in those days. Good, eh? Interesting stuff. A skeleton with flesh and blood held together with sinews. I mean, he's obviously done this exercise. A fleshless skeleton smeared with blood held together with sinews. A skeleton without flesh and blood held together with sinews. Disconnected bones scattered in all directions. Here a hand bone, here a foot bone, a shin bone. And again, a corpse thrown aside, bones bleached white, the color of shells, bones heaped up, more than a year old, bones rotted, crumbling to dust.

See? Seeing the whole process from somebody who was alive and jumping around and full of the *joie de vivre*. And there he is, just a heap of dust. And even if we can't actually find somebody who might do this for us, at least we can go through that process of imagination. And that's why I think visiting cemeteries can be a good exercise.

So there you see, right there in this major discovery, the jewel of the collection—that's what it's known as—the Buddha is pointing out the importance of the body as a meditative object. And this brings us really to the *anattā* doctrine, the doctrine about not-self. The Buddha never says—he doesn't make the statement there is no self. The teaching is always about what is a self, what constitutes a self. Now, one of the important things, the two important things about a self, was that it was permanent—it didn't change—and it was in control.

So now, when you look at the body, we have this dualistic relationship. So we'll say something like, "I have a headache." So this I has a headache. When you're really bad, you say, "I am ill." So you see there's a connection there. And as soon as you say, "I have a headache," you've got a pain, you've got suffering. If you say, as you might do in meditation, "There's a headache," you've already abstracted yourself from it. If you say "The body's ill," you've already found a different relationship just by saying "The body's ill." As soon as you say "I am ill," that's it—you're ill, you are ill, and the suffering arises.

So just going over certain experiences of the body—what do we actually know of the body? It's a funny thing. You walk around and you really do think—most people think they are the body. Think they are the body.

Well, I was once with a friend and his father was there. He was getting to be slightly elderly, and we were talking about Buddhism—that just came up in the conversation. And I said to him, "Well, you know, the body's not real." And this old fellow barked at me. Yes, he did. He was dead in a couple of years, but he couldn't handle that statement: "The body's not real."

There's an unquestionable—for most people there's an unquestionable identity with the body. It doesn't occur to them to even think that they're not. And this, when you ask yourself, well, what do I know of the body? Like, for instance, at this present time, so I'm told, so I believe, because the science tells me, the marrow of my bones is creating red blood corpuscles. Have you ever experienced red corpuscles coming out of your bones? I mean, when you look into this body, you realize actually you haven't a clue what's going on. Have you ever experienced one cell dying and another cell appearing? Have you ever—I mean, you presume—when I breathe, oxygen comes in, carbon dioxide goes out. Have you ever experienced that? If I hadn't told you, you wouldn't know, would you?

I mean, remember, there was a time when, before Harvey and those people, we thought blood sort of swashed around the body. It didn't go through the veins or anything. It was just a bubble of blood. And that's why when something was wrong, you stuck a leech on it. Because they thought there was too much blood there. So he sucked the blood out and he felt okay.

So if you look into the body and just ask yourself little questions like that, then you realize actually you're an alien. You're stuck in this body and actually you haven't a clue what's going on. And that's why illnesses suddenly catch us. We don't know. We don't even know the body's falling ill sometimes. So those sorts of—this body is not me, not mine. Just little reflections like that.

And then you look at the changing nature of the body. That's something we only catch every so often. Suddenly, you're middle-aged, your face has dropped. Suddenly you reach 60 and your face has dropped. Something else has happened. It's like, normally speaking, not even aware of it. You look at your face in the mirror and it's the same one you had yesterday. We don't see this constant little change until one day you look at—oh God! So why do we drive ourselves to these little shocks? See, if every day you looked in the mirror and you thought, "That wasn't there yesterday," remember, this face changes, your whole body changes every seven years. So every time you look at your face in the mirror, just remind yourself: you weren't here yesterday. You weren't here seven years ago. Every atom in the body, seemingly, is exchanged. So it's just those little reflections every so often.

There is aging. And it's inescapable. Absolutely inescapable. That brings terror to the heart. There is time. The arrow of time just moves towards dissipation. It's the second law of thermodynamics, isn't it? Going from order to disorder. You cannot stop it. It just moves that way.

And these little reflections are frightening, but the fear and the frightening part of it is the measure of our delusion. So what you do is you feel the fear, you allow the fear to express itself, and then slowly the fear begins to dissipate. As the fear dissipates, so is your delusion about what's real and what isn't real.

Then there's dependency. And in a society like ours, most people don't have problems getting hold of food, water, shelter, but when we look at these disasters around the world—what an awful suffering. Like these floods in Australia kicked everybody out of their homes, and suddenly, or famines, or just any natural disaster that you see where people are just thrown completely out of their comfort zone. And it's massive suffering. It really is very painful, isn't it? You only have to imagine yourself—if you lost everything today and you went out on the streets. It's tough.

So then you get that sense of the body. The body is so dependent on what the environment can give. The food, the shelter, the housing, the medicines. So that means that it's not me, not mine. See, the idea of me and mine is that I'm in control. I'm in control of the body. It's me. But then I find that actually the body has its—I don't have that complete control. Full stop.

It's very similar to when you drive a car. So when you drive a car, you do have the impression that you're in control, and then it stops or it's a tire burst or the electrics go, the light stops. It's just like the body. And yet when you're driving it, you get this feeling of, I'm in control. And it's when things go wrong that we're suddenly thrown back on ourselves that in fact we don't have this control.

And of course, in working with the body like that, what you're trying to do is establish an ease with it. This is the way it is, not going against the nature of things. And that's what the self does. It always tries to concretize, to grab things, to hold it as it always is. But as soon as you're with the idea that things are in a process, things are changing, and you just go with it. So there's a release.

There's a lovely phrase from the Buddha about detachment, or non-attachment—that's the better word, non-attachment. When you really grasp, I mean at that really deep, fundamental, inner understanding about impermanence—the I is impermanent, everything is impermanent—there's nothing in the world worth holding on to. And if you take a phrase like that, which I'm going to suggest we do on Monday on spiritual reading, and you just play around with that phrase: There is nothing in the world worth holding on to. There's nothing in the world worth holding on to. There's nothing in the world worth holding on to.

See, you play around with it. And it's like a little drip feed. It slowly begins to realize that there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. And that comes a sense of relief. Because in loosening your grip, you lose nothing. All you lose is the tightness of your grip. Because the world is as it is. And that's what we mean by non-attachment. That's what we mean by non-attachment.

So when it comes to the actual practice of it, it's always to undermine these delusions. A delusion at least is half gone once you realize it is a delusion. I mean, you're almost there really. Then it's just the practice of bringing that to mind whenever an occasion arises. You don't have to go searching for dead bodies. It's just when one arises, that's the time to contemplate dead bodies. And that's what we did in this exercise.

So we start by undermining these wrong relationships. First, this whole area about the relationship to the body as mine, the disgust with it, the way that we're affected by how we view ourselves on that line of being impossibly ugly to impossibly beautiful. Where you sit on that line has effect on your self-esteem—that's what they tell you. How do you undercut that so that your self-esteem has nothing to do with how you look?

And then there's the contemplation of the body as pleasure. So the body offers us beautiful pleasures through the ear, the loveliness of music. And it's through recognizing the attachment to that. And remember that you don't realize how attached you are to something until it disappears. You don't realize how important eyesight is to our well-being until we lose it. And so just contemplating these things. So should disaster hit us, should tragedy hit us, at least it doesn't come as something impossible.

I always remember years and years and years ago, I can't remember now, but there was a policeman and he got into a shooting thing or something and lost a part of his legs.

CHAPTER 116

Starting a Retreat

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min

> *In this opening talk from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides participants through the traditional ceremony that begins intensive meditation practice. He explains the significance of taking the three refuges (Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha) and the eight training precepts that create the optimal conditions for deep spiritual development.*
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> *Bhante carefully outlines each precept, from the basic five (not harming living beings, not taking what isn't given, refraining from sexual conduct, right speech through noble silence, and avoiding intoxicants) to the additional three retreat observances: eating only before midday, avoiding oversleeping and entertainment, and refraining from beautification. He emphasizes these are 'training rules' - voluntary boundaries we establish to support our practice, not rigid commandments.*
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> *The talk highlights the importance of reducing external inputs to observe our internal processes clearly, establishing a rhythm of sitting and walking meditation, and understanding bowing as a physical expression of surrender. Bhante's practical approach makes these traditional elements accessible while maintaining their spiritual significance, setting the stage for the transformative work of intensive Vipassanā practice.*

I'm going to explain this little ceremony just to open us into the retreat. And then I'll do a standing meditation, a sitting meditation, a walking meditation, and a loving-kindness meditation, by which you should be thoroughly exhausted and ready to go to sleep.

Now, what we do is the three refuges and precepts. So for those of you who don't know, this is very regular practice in Buddhist countries. But there are special training rules. Let me go through that first.

The first five are pretty straightforward. So not to harm any living being—that's pretty straightforward. Not give up killing each other for the weekend. Not to take what is not freely given. Not to indulge in erotic and romantic delight—difficult. But we need all the energy we can muster to make spiritual progress. Not to use wrong speech. That's easy. We keep the silence. Not to take substances that cloud the mind. So even strong tea can make your mind race. So be careful.

Not to overeat. So we keep the rule of not having anything after lunch. Now, for those of you who've never done a fast or have never passed more than three hours without a biscuit or something, I can assure you, one does not die. One continues. If anybody has problems with that, diabetes or something like that, of course, it doesn't apply. For everybody else.

Not to oversleep. A bit difficult in the first three days, especially for those who are weekenders, because everybody comes with some sleeping imbalance of some sort—either they're not sleeping well or they're oversleeping. So it just takes a couple of days to get that sorted, and then after that it is definitely sloth and torpor. Don't kid yourselves.

Not to indulge in entertainment. So to observe ourselves, you have to stop the input if you want to observe the output. So you don't want to read. You don't want to write. I mean, to jot a few things down for a diary, that's not a problem. It's just when it gets into an autobiography. And for those of you staying long term, even to keep your eyes down, not to get involved in anything around, you see. Stop the inputs.

Not to indulge in self-beautification. Here we don't have to worry about how we look—it's a relief. To cherish the noble silence—very important.

Now these are called training rules. They are something that we take on to establish a sort of boundary for ourselves. The other thing is the schedule. So that's also your discipline. It's not a word we particularly enjoy these days, but that's really something which you devote yourself to so that you get a rhythm. See? Sitting, walking, sitting, walking. That's important to get that rhythm going. And if you can, to stay within the boundary of Gaia House. You think you're going berserk? By all means take a walk up the street, talk to the cows. Very cool and calming, you know. Just watch them chew.

So we'll take those training rules now. When it comes to the *pūjā*... see *Buddham pūjemi, Dhammam pūjemi, Saṅgham pūjemi*. Bowing is a very strong physical language for surrender. And remember, the spiritual life always asks you to do exactly what you don't want.

CHAPTER 117

The Principles and Problems of Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 35 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the core principles underlying vipassanā practice and addresses common challenges practitioners face. He begins with the Buddha's central teaching that all of dharma concerns dukkha (unsatisfactoriness/suffering) and its cessation, tracing how our fundamental mistake lies in identity formation—the habit of saying "I am" rather than observing "there is."*
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> *Bhante explores how our search for happiness in the conditioned world leads to attachment (upādāna) and aversion, creating cycles of psychological dependency. He explains how the noting technique helps practitioners shift from identification with experiences to awareness itself—the radical move from "I am angry" to "there is anger." This shift reveals how the body offers only sensation, while suffering arises from mental constructs and proliferation (papañca).*
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> *Drawing on the Buddha's teaching on dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), he shows how we unconsciously reinforce unwholesome habits through craving (taṇhā) and how mindful non-reinforcement allows these patterns to naturally fade. The talk emphasizes that liberation comes not from rejecting life's pleasures, but from understanding that no external condition can provide lasting happiness. Through sustained observation of arising and passing away (anicca), practitioners discover the "observation post" of pure awareness—the foundation for awakening.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I like to start with that little chant just to remind myself what I'm supposed to be doing, which is to express the Buddha's teaching and not my own peculiar understandings.

So this morning really it's just a little revision for most of you about the principles of meditation and maybe for some of you just an introduction. The Buddha is very clear about his teachings. Even though we have masses of scriptures, stories and teachings that come from his time, they're all really pointing to this one and same thing that he reduced his whole teaching to. He was only concerned with *dukkha* and the end of dukkha. This word is really kernel to his teachings.

There's no single English word that grasps its meaning. It's basically anything that you would consider to be unsatisfactory, suffering. So it traverses the whole gamut of human misery from the slightest discomfort to the deepest despair, panic, all that sort of stuff. But it also is around something that we mentioned this morning, around indulgence and our relationship to the pleasures and joys of life. And so he says that the whole of his teaching is around that and the end of that, the end of that suffering.

And the core problem lies in identity. Once we've grasped that, then we can really begin to undermine a lot of our suffering. Identity is when you say, I am. I am. So, I am unhappy. Well, how can you get out of that? If you say, I am depressed, what way is there out of that? That's what you are. You see what I mean? You've blocked yourself in. You've built this wall around this depression called me. I am hungry. What can you do? You've got to eat. There's no way out of I am. And so the core of the teaching lies around this problem of identity and its secondary problem of possession.

So once you say I am a human being, big problems arise. Of course, I'm not suggesting that, conventionally speaking, we're not human beings. I mean, we are different from other beings. But something goes awry when we make that very deep connection with this form of life. That connection is about being happy. I mean, if you were to ask anybody in the world what do they want to be, they'd be happy. They might have all sorts of definitions as to what happiness means, but they all want to be happy. And therefore, we seek happiness in the world. So that's where things go wrong, because nothing in this world can really fulfill the deep desire to be in a continuous state of happiness, because nothing lasts. It's a big problem for us.

So as soon as I have something which makes me happy, I form a relationship to it. I say, well, this is me or this is mine. So if I'm feeling good, I've just been successful at something or I've just met a good friend and all that sort of stuff, I say I'm happy, see? And once I found a situation, once I found an environment, a circumstance which makes me happy, then of course there's a tendency to just want to continue it. It's like, the party was great, let's have another one. It's just the next one's never quite up to it, is it?

So this grasping, that's what we mean by this grasping, this attachment, is whenever something happens to us which we associate with happiness, then of course we want to hold it, want to maintain it and if possible to make it grow. And if it's something that we have then of course we want to make sure that we protect it. If you have a car, have a mobile, then there's a relationship with this object which you don't have with other people's cars and other people's mobiles. It's like it's mine.

Do you know what I mean? And it's not only a psychological dependency now, because you get very upset if somebody steals your mobile, it's a legal fiction, isn't it? I mean, if somebody steals something of yours, your mobile, you go around saying somebody stole my mobile, see? As though it was still yours. It's ridiculous, isn't it? Because it now belongs to the thief. They're the ones who have the mobile. So, when we look at our relationship to the things that we experience and the things that we have, and we look at them closely, then we can see it's actually causing some psychological dependency. It's a form of addiction.

And whenever we do that, if things change, then it produces the other side of happiness which is unhappiness. That's only one side of the equation. The other side is this business of aversion. So now we're into really fending off anybody who undermines my happiness. And that puts me into a state of aversion, of hatred, of wanting to get rid of the person. My life would be really happy if you would just disappear, if you'd go away, leave me alone. And then if it's too much, I'm into the obverse of fear, of hatred and aversion, which is fear and anxiety.

These two are very close. If when they arise in you, you actually experience them as sensation, not as an emotion, a named emotion, you'll find that the sensations around those things are very close. You'll find, I'm sure, that hatred is very cold like fear and anxiety is very hot like anger. And at a sensation base, it's often quite difficult to sometimes see a distinction between them. It's the mind which produces the definition and the consequent action that we take.

So here we have a real duality of behavior in the world where we're constantly in conflict. Every so often we do reach a stasis, a place that we might call happiness. It never lasts. And so we find ourselves constantly holding on to something, making sure it doesn't move, doesn't change, or we want to get rid of something. So our lives, even at a very simple level, are a conflict.

So you're lying in bed and suddenly you feel uncomfortable, the body feels uncomfortable. So you've got to move. If you don't move, you start getting angry with yourself, angry with the bed, it's not quite the right bed, and so on. It's like when you catch that this deep relationship that we have with this body, this psycho-physical organism, then you see that something's gone wrong at a very deep, profound level. And that's what we're chasing in our meditation. We're trying to see the consequences of this and go back on the process to find out where the original mistake is made.

Now that original mistake is what the Buddha calls the delusion. And it arises out of, really, a very innocent state, which is often translated as ignorance. But ignorance gives it a pejorative meaning. It's as though you should have known. But actually it's a state

of not knowing. So it's a very open state in which simply by not knowing the way things really are, so there's a little pat phrase from the Buddha to see things as they really are, to see and understand things as they really are, we just made a simple mistake. Although it's simple, it's also profound.

And the fact is that the society we're born into supports that mistake, supports it completely. And in these days, of course, with our materialism and our materialistic science and materialistic understandings, that's not all of us, of course, but with that understanding subsisting a lot of what our society does, then it completely turns us all towards this life, what this life can give us as a source of true happiness.

So all the Buddha's saying is, look, really investigate this stuff, try to find out whether in fact where you're putting your energy, where you're putting your investments, whether in fact you're getting a decent return. And when you begin to look at it from that point of view in the beginning, then there comes this doubt as to whether in fact we're chasing the right thing here.

One of the mistakes that we can make is to think that therefore the Buddha is saying that what we have to get rid of is all pleasures and all joys of life. But that would be one step too far. He's not negative towards life. He himself knows when he's having a beautiful meal. He knows when he's eating, but he also knows that there is no greed involved. Now that greed is something to do with our relationship to food that we mentioned this morning, seeking happiness in food.

And therefore, one would think, well, if I don't seek happiness in food, therefore the food becomes tasteless, or I lose interest in food, or I don't even want to know about food. But that would be a step too far. We have to understand that the body is always going to give us pleasure and pain. So when pleasure arises, it's to be appreciated. It's to be enjoyed, but somehow not to be seen as a source of happiness. When the heart responds with joy and you're in a state of peace and calm, that's beautiful. It's to be appreciated, it's to be enjoyed. But if you think that's real happiness, then there's a problem.

Because if you think that emotions, that the emotional life is happiness, then you're always going to try and manipulate the whole of life to make yourself feel happy. And that produces a real conflict within us because life just won't do it. Even people, people who sometimes delight us are sometimes extraordinarily painful. And of course, we to them. And it's just that natural ability to see that the emotional life is not really where true happiness lies.

So now, then we're left with the intellect. Then we're left with thought and imagination. And what we realize through our meditation is that it's absolutely rampant. I mean, most people, I think, before they begin to meditate, think that they are in control of their minds. They think what they want to think and feel what they want to feel. Then when they come to meditation, try and sit still, they realize, actually, they're berserk. They're absolutely nutters. The mind simply goes absolutely AWOL.

And then you realize that actually, for most of people's lives, they're acting in a very automatic, automaton way, that decisions are made before they know about them, and then they say that they've actually made this decision. But it's made at a subconscious level because it's habitual. And this came up in some tests that some scientists did about this stuff, where they do brain scans and they can tell when somebody's made a decision. And the decision comes before they actually recognize that they've made a decision.

Now that, in Buddhist understanding, is the mindless life. That's exactly how we often behave even people who've been in meditation for a long time find themselves behaving in that mindless way because it's habitual. It just happens. But then there's this little trick that we play on ourselves where we actually think or we somehow experience that as me making that decision.

Now, what our meditation is trying to do is to waken us up and to be in that state of alertness so that we actually see this movement in the mind and heart of an intention. And it's at the point of intention that we can take control. Because if that intention, we see that intention as being unwholesome, then we have to relax around it, not to be governed by it. And we find that just by letting that energy, that desire, die away, we're actually undermining that conditioning that we ourselves have put there. And every time we see something which is wholesome, then you decide to do it, you empower it. And in that way, the conditioning that we are reinforcing grows for us.

So you might feel, for instance, lethargic during the day for no reason, really. You've slept well. There's no reason to feel tired. But it's more to do with the dullness that we suffer from, the lethargy that we suffer from, which is often, for most people, a big hindrance in the meditation. As soon as you sit, you fall asleep. And in daily life, you might find just feeling a bit tired. So without really thinking, you just lay out on the couch, head for the bed, all that sort of stuff. And unfortunately, without us knowing it, we're reinforcing that little habit. It feels nice, it feels good, but it builds up within us this habit of seeking happiness in sleep. Seeking an escape in sleep.

And of course that's a very suppressive measure, so that sometimes we might wake up feeling better, but it's at the expense of having pushed things down into the psyche, into our psychology. And that comes out later on as greater feelings of dullness, greater feelings of lethargy. And so the wheel turns. And without us knowing, we're just making these little decisions, quite unmindfully, just falling asleep all over the place.

There was once when I was in a monastery and there was a monk there who got himself into this awful state of constantly falling asleep. And as soon as you sat with him, it was a very strange situation really, but as soon as he came to sit with you, you'd be talking to him and he'd just fall asleep like that. And he got himself into this dreadful state, and he complained to me that his concentration was very bad. So I said, well, you've just got to put a bit more energy into life. And that's one of the pitfalls of the monastic life, because you don't get somebody pushing you. So eventually, you can fall into this habit of just, as soon as you sit down, you fall asleep.

It's understanding how we empower these things that begins to make us understand how we can disempower them. So there's a process, and that's why I chant this dependent origination in the morning, because there the Buddha describes very clearly the process whereby we create this conditioning within ourselves. So as soon as we have an idea or some feeling, some state enter into our minds, there's a movement towards it. And that's what he calls this *tanha*.

Tanha translates as craving, but in a sense that gives us a wrong impression really. It's more that there's a desire to indulge it in some way or to resist it in some way. And it's actually staying with that feeling of resistance, feeling of desire, and not empowering it, not doing what it makes you to do, what it wants you to do, that if you stay with that feeling, no matter how strong it is, no matter how uncomfortable it is, stay with it long enough for it to die away, for it to begin to exhaust itself. And you find that energy, that habitual energy, begins to just fade away. Because you're not reinforcing it. It needs, these habits need to be reinforced. They need new energy to keep going.

I went walking up a hill down in Dingle there with this guy. And he's a regular mountain climber. And he climbs two mountains a week. Can you imagine that? Two mountains a week. And in between time he cycles. And he just says if he stops climbing the mountain, even for a week or so, there's a loss of stamina. There's a loss of actual muscle power. So even at a basic physical level, if you don't keep up that practice, the habit immediately begins to atrophy, begins to die.

Now, in terms of the parts of ourselves which are negative, that works for us. All we have to do is not empower an intention. And in so doing, that habit that we want to get rid of dies away. And of course, that sounds easy, but anybody who's tried to give up a strong habit knows that it's extraordinarily difficult. And you've got to keep the effort to just keep letting go, keep letting go.

This phrase that you'll come across, letting go, it's not your letting go of something, it's your allowing something to arise and pass away. Actually, it's not an active part on our side of letting something go, but more in the sense of being with something and allowing it to arise and allowing it to pass away. That's what it really means.

So, the final is that we've talked about this identity business and how we have to actually not fall into the mistake of always saying, I am. In our meditation, we're pulling out of the whole process. That's what the meditation is about. It's about showing us a different position that we can take. So, for instance,

when I've got a pain in the knee from the sitting, I can see immediately that there's a desire to want to move to get rid of the pain. But instead of doing that, I'm actually being aware of that process of wanting to get rid of the pain, of being unable to stay equanimously with pain. And then as I watch that, I might be surprised to find that that desire disappears.

The consequence of wanting to get away from the pain is something that we've taught ourselves, because this doesn't make us happy. And then when we sit with the pain, when we just sit with it equanimously, we find that there's no suffering. So we made a distinction between a physical discomfort and a mental state. And the two become quite separate for us. And we realize that this suffering is actually a mental position. It's not a physical position. The only thing that a physical position can give us is sensation.

Now I'm not suggesting that we get to a point with pain where it's not making us scream. As soon as we stop learning from pain, there's no point, to my mind anyway, in bearing with it. We can move. It's not a macho thing. You're not trying to defeat pain. I don't think you'll win, frankly. So as soon as you recognize this aversion towards pain, then we watch that. So already I've pulled out of a certain psychology. Already I've discovered a different position within myself. Instead of "I don't want, I don't like this pain, I will move away from it," suddenly we're saying, "There is the desire to move away from pain. There is dislike."

That shift, that shift from "I am" to "there is," is radical. It's a completely different level of identity. I'm hoping everybody's shaking.

So when you get an emotional state, you feel depressed or you feel anxious, our normal reaction is to say, "I am depressed, I am anxious." Here you're sitting in your meditation and you feel the depression. You feel it as a physical state, as a mental state. You feel your anxiety, you feel your anger, all the usual rubbish. So as you feel that, instead of saying, "I am angry," you're saying, "There is." You're pointing to it, saying, "There is."

Now that's a radical shift, isn't it, in your position. Before you were "I am anxious," and now "there is anxiety." That shift in perspective, that shift is a shift of identity. You're now identifying with that which knows, that which feels, rather than what it feels and what it knows.

Now that little shift of identity, really, when you do that, really investigate it, really be with it, really see what its qualities are, and ask yourself: when my identity is with the knower, with the feeler, with the experiencer, am I actually experiencing suffering? Is there suffering there? Even though the situation I'm in may not be particularly good, even though the anxiety creates a mental state, an inner environment, an interior which is not particularly pleasant, am I actually suffering?

So make that very plain to yourself. And this constant pulling out from what we're experiencing within ourselves, constantly bringing ourselves out into the knower, the feeler, the experiencer, is the process whereby we're re-establishing a different identity. And so when we do that, we can see that all the body is offering us is sensation. Pain is a mental construct.

When you have pain in your knee and you're using a noting word, "pain, pain," and you're getting close to it, see if you can bury your attention directly into the sensations that you're calling pain. When you go deep enough, you'll find that the word "pain" disappears. You'll find the word "pain" disappears and you're using other words. Perhaps you're using the word "pressure" or "heat." And at that point, the whole concept of pain disappears. All you're left with is sensation. When you pull back a bit, then suddenly the word "pain" crops up again. And this is how we begin to realize that pain, suffering, all the stuff that we have, are actually caused by the mind and not by the body. All the body can offer us is sensation.

Now when it comes to the mind itself, and you've got these painful emotions and stuff, then it's the same process. As soon as you go into depression, you lose the word "depression." What are you left with? Heaviness, dullness. As soon as you stop saying "anger" and you go into the feel of anger, what words are you using? Fieriness, heat, agitation, but you're not using the word "anger." And as soon as you step back a bit more, as it were, then suddenly the word "anger" appears in your mind.

And what's happening is that these emotional states, which are actually only feeling states, in the Buddha's vocabulary there's only one word to cover sensation, feelings and emotions as they are experienced in the body. That's the *vedanā* that you come across in what we chant. Then what you realize is that there's a movement of that energy into this higher faculties that we call our imagination and thought. And it's through the imagination and thought that these emotions are finding expression. But it's not just expression, they're actually indulging themselves.

So as you know, the more you work on anger, the more angry you get. The more somebody's upset you and the more you keep bringing it up in your head, then the more angry you get and by the end of the evening you're raging. You've insulted, you've repeated the insult a hundred thousand times. They only said it once and you've used it to crank it up so you can go out and have a very good purpose for killing them. So it's a case of recognizing that it's the mind which is causing the problem. In the Buddhist understanding, this is proliferation.

So that's why we make this very great effort in meditation, that as soon as the mind wanders and we wake up within it, we note what the attitude is that's propelling the mind into these thought patterns. We're never concerned with the content. Now, why is it we're never concerned with the content? Because it's not the content, it's not the person that's causing the problem. The problem is deep within ourselves to do with our relationship, our attitude.

So, if somebody shouts at me and says, "You stupid, bald-headed monk," that's very painful, isn't it? I mean, I could get very upset about that. But actually, it stopped at the ears and it stopped at the heart level where I can perhaps feel their anger towards me. But that's where, that's all they can do towards me. Then, as it were, I take those words inwards, and I chew over them, and I think, "Who the hell," and then before I know it, I've got myself in a rage over this person who dared to call me that. And all that's done by me.

If I'd been mindful, I would just have heard these words, "stupid, boring," and the feeling of anger, and it could have just stopped there. And instead, I could have been pouring out my great compassion towards them. So, what we begin to realize is that nobody actually is causing me suffering. This is a radical statement. Nobody can cause us psychological pain.

And once you realize that, then of course, at first, it's a bit disappointing, because it's good to be able to blame somebody. But in the end, it's actually our liberation, because if I'm causing all this problem, then maybe I can undo it all. And that's exactly the Buddha's position.

So, our meditation, the actual practice of meditation is this constant effort to come out of what's happening and to observe it, to feel it, to experience what's happening from this vantage point of the knower, the observer, the feeler, the experiencer.

Now that's not the end point because there's still a sense of self there: "I am the knower" or "I am the one who knows." But at least that point is a very objective point and it allows us to see how we're creating the suffering for ourselves. How the world that we are creating is in a constant state of change. And now every time we fall into an identity with what's happening or a possession of what's happening, some form of unhappiness arises. Even if it doesn't feel immediate. For instance, when we indulge in something. So when you're indulging in something, while that's happening, it's pure heaven. It's when it comes to an end that you get the aftermath.

So although you find these loads of books written on Buddhism and heavy philosophy and deep psychology, actually speaking it's extraordinarily simple. All you have to do is just find this position in yourself, make sure that you know it quite clearly as to this observation post, that's a happy phrase by one writer, an observation post within ourselves, and you just watch. You just feel what's arising, just experience what's arising.

This intelligence which is liberating itself from the delusion, where does this delusion lie? It lies in the looking. It doesn't lie in the body. The body isn't deluded, the body is just the body. Emotions don't know themselves, do they? Emotions can't reflect upon themselves. There's some intelligence within us which is not looking correctly.

One good example of that is these astigmatisms in people's lenses, in their eyes. I mean, I'm supposed to have one. And it's like in the old glass where you've got that wavy because they hadn't perfected the way of making glass and you've got that wave. It's a distortion. But actually, if you've got one in your eye, you can't really tell it's there. It's really a very strange thing, but it's there. It's somehow distorting your sight. It's like a person who's colorblind, who's never been told they're colorblind. And they see the colors what they see. It's just that not everybody else is looking. Nobody else sees that. They're completely happy in the world that they've created.

So it's the same with us. We've created this world for ourselves coming from a distortion which we're not fully aware of. And we keep blaming the world, we keep blaming others, we keep blaming ourselves. But actually the fundamental problem lies in the way that we're looking, the way we're relating.

So, as we pull out from the body with its sensations, pleasant or unpleasant, you pull out from the heart with its emotional states, pleasant or unpleasant, as you begin to observe these thoughts that are coming through and not getting caught up in them, we're constantly correcting this astigmatism that's in the way we're looking. And the Buddha is very clear about how that astigmatism is destroyed, completely taken out of the equation. And he says, just observe that things are rising and passing away.

So when you do that, when you realize that everything is rising and passing away, never repeats itself, then you immediately start letting go. What's the point of holding on to something which is going to disappear? And the radical position is that there is nothing in the world worth holding on to.

And then when you realize that this relationship we have of always seeking happiness in the world, can we be in the world in a different way? Can we just appreciate it, enjoy it, without holding on to it, without defining our happiness by what we experience, by what we have, by our mental state? And then finally there's this business of identity. And we do that through meditation. We do that through pointing at something. That's the noting techniques, extremely good at making us be very clear that what I'm experiencing is not me, not mine, because I'm actually pointing to it.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you continue to put great effort in your meditation and be liberated from suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 118

Not-Self: Indulgence and All

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

In this profound dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma illuminates the Buddha's teaching on kamma (action) and its intimate connection to the doctrine of anattā (not-self). He begins by explaining that kamma in its original Buddhist sense refers specifically to intentional actions driven by our fundamental misunderstanding—the delusion that we are separate, permanent beings who must secure happiness through sensual pleasures and attachments. This basic confusion, rooted in avijjā (not-knowing), sets in motion the wheel of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), our continuous cycle of craving, becoming, and suffering.

The talk offers a careful analysis of how identity forms in each moment of experience: first contact with an object, then desire arising from past conditioning, and finally the emergence of 'I' that claims ownership of that desire. Bhante Bodhidhamma emphasizes that liberation lies precisely in the gap between awareness and identification—when we can observe desire without becoming it, we touch the freedom the Buddha pointed toward. He explains how bearing with uncomfortable states like loneliness, without indulging in mental proliferation, allows their energy to transform naturally into wholesome qualities like peaceful solitude.

Practically, this means developing the capacity to 'stop'—to pause before habitual reactions and witness the arising of impulses without acting on them. Through this process of renunciation and clear seeing, we gradually drain our saṅkhāras (mental formations) of their compulsive power. The talk concludes by pointing toward the brahmaviharās—love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—as the natural expression of a heart freed from the prison of self-identification, offering a vision of complete liberation from suffering in this very life.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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

At the time of the Buddha, there were various ideas around this word kamma. We know it more commonly through the Sanskrit word karma with an R, but the way that Theravāda spells it is K-A-M-M-A, which is Pāli—what the scriptures are actually written in, a dialect from around modern Varanasi, around the Ganges.

Kamma is a core teaching, one of the Buddha's main insights upon liberation, upon his awakening. He talks of three things that happened to him upon awakening, in the immediacy afterwards. First, he was able to see his past lives and see how his ethical decisions had brought him to this place, how they caused him to suffer and put him into dire straits. Then he was able to see beings moving from one realm to another according to their ethical decisions, their moral decisions. What was then a personal understanding, a personal law, became a cosmic law. The third thing he recognized was that all his defilements had gone—there was nothing negative within his character and personality anymore. These are known as the three knowledges.

It's very difficult, I know, and you may come across Buddhist speakers who deny rebirth and things like that, but it's very difficult to read the scriptures without coming to the conclusion that the Buddha definitely understood the process as being very long-term, over lifetimes. The reason for that was that we begin from this point of not knowing. This not knowing is not a culpable state. It's often translated as ignorance—this word avijjā, for those of you who know it. It's referred to as ignorance, and that has a sort of pejorative meaning, as though you should have known, as though you've been an idiot. But it's actually a very neutral state of simply not knowing.

From this not knowing, it's your basic intelligence—that which does not know—finding itself in a situation, making sense of it. And it's made sense of for us by the society, culture, and history that we find ourselves in. It's from there that we build up our characters and personalities. We could say that at any given moment there is, underlying, this state of just not knowing. Because of that, we've moved into a situation of understanding, and this fundamental understanding as to who we are, what we are, or where we're going is actually the fundamental attitude that causes everything else.

One of the main understandings we have is that we are human beings. This is a big problem. Conventionally there's no problem; everybody knows we're human beings as opposed to primates and cats and all that. But when we actually say to ourselves, "Well, I'm a human being," our energies go into trying to make this life the end, the purpose of our living.

Especially these days, many people have lost any spiritual or religious foundation. There is only this life. And when you ask yourself, "What is it that I really want? Really deep down, what do I really want?" I think you can just come to the word: I want to be

happy. You just want to be happy. And this happiness is then sought for in the world. What is it that brings us happiness as we understand it? It's sensual pleasure, it's relationships, it's our work sometimes, our hobbies. There's an absolute investment in life as a place where if you can just get it right, you'll be happy.

What this produces is a relationship to life and a relationship to people and what we have as collections. We collect things, we collect money, we collect our job, we collect people. That collection—the word normally used for it is attachment. The reason we're attached is because this makes me happy. I'm attached to the things I own, to my house, to my HDTV and all that, because this is what's making me happy. That's where I actually put the investment.

Unfortunately, having created these little islands of happiness around objects, anything that begins to upset that, I form a very negative relationship towards. That's your aversion. Anything that undermines my happiness becomes my enemy. And if the enemy is too big, then I become frightened, I get very anxious.

So from this fundamental misunderstanding, which is often termed delusion, you have a basic relationship to life of having to collect things around you, hold on to things, keep things which are going to make you happy, and you've got to make sure that mustn't be upset. From that sense of attachment—often referred to as greed, though it's not quite that word, just attachment—we get aversion, which splits into two relationships: one of aversion, not liking, pushing away; and one of running away, anxiety, fear.

From that basic relationship we produce our kamma. Kamma in the Buddhist teaching is a technical word which actually only refers to an action—that's what it really means, just an action. Whatever we do, whether it's an act of thought, an act of speech, or something we actually do physically, an action as such is driven from that particular delusion. Constantly, we're in a constant relationship of trying to jiggle the world to make sure we're sort of happy. Even as you're sitting here, you might find that without knowing it, you become slightly uncomfortable in your seat and shift position. If we just watch ourselves throughout the day, we're constantly moving towards comfort, towards what makes us feel happy, always trying to escape what is uncomfortable, what is making us feel unhappy. These actions—this is what the Buddha referred to as kamma. These are your actions.

In dependent origination, which is the Buddha's psychology as to how we create our misery—we'll go on to happiness towards the end of the talk, a real happiness, so I don't want to get you too depressed—in the way that we create this unhappiness, the Buddha points out very clearly through the teaching of dependent origination. This dependent

origination, you might come across in later Buddhism, was expanded completely into a sort of universal concept of interrelatedness, everything being dependent on something else. But in the Buddha's original teaching, although you may find those sorts of ideas, he's very centered upon our inner personal psychology.

What happens to us on the outside is not really material to the process of liberation. It's always what's happening inside us which is actually causing either the misery or the escape from misery. So, for instance, if I'm in the quiet coach of a train—I'm sure you've all been in a quiet coach—and somebody decides to use their mobile, it's what's happening in me that's turning the quiet coach into a really small little hell realm.

because I'm saying they shouldn't be doing that, this is a terrible thing, it's really unethical and punishable by law, and I'm getting all heated and hot about it. All of that is being created internally—it's not being created by the phone call. And then of course, suddenly my phone goes off, and this call is very important, so I've got to take it. I presume everybody else will understand that.

You can see from this that if we look at ourselves throughout the day, there's always something coming at us from the outside, always something impinging upon our consciousness. And there's always this response—you might call it a reaction rather than a response, because the reaction is already dictated by our past actions, which have produced certain habits, certain patterns of behavior within us. It's really beginning to see how these are produced that allows us to see where the escape is.

So long as people say to themselves, "The reason I'm unhappy is because of the government," or because of bankers, or because of my neighbor, or because of my kids—if I am constantly thinking that the other person is the direct cause of my misery, then I'm always going to be in some sort of relationship to the world of trying to change the world. I'm always trying to do something out there which is going to make me happy in here. And I'm sure we've all experienced people who've tried to change us, and it's the last thing we individually want another person to do. So as soon as you try to change somebody else or try to change a situation, you often find yourself in this very antagonistic position where in fact you're making things worse.

Now, if we go through the Buddha's teaching about how we create these mental states, you see very clearly that he puts the accent on a moment—the moment of identity.

In dependent origination, there is this moment where something impinges upon us through the five senses. The Buddha also calls mind the sixth sense. Something comes from the outside: somebody says something, or you see something, and as it were, it

comes into the mind, into consciousness. I'm using these words very loosely because they have so much meaning these days. It comes into the mind as a sort of primary object which is recognized, acknowledged.

So if we're sitting here now and suddenly a bell goes off, the first thing would be the actual acknowledgement that there is a bell going off. That's your first thing. Then it's taken inside, and suddenly we attach a meaning to that bell—it's an alarm bell. As soon as an alarm bell goes, then you get the meaning that there may be fire. So you get higher levels of understanding of what the alarm bell might mean. And then the understanding comes towards the end of that process: I have to get out of here.

Now, take for instance just a normal thing, like you're in a shop and you want to buy something. The normal sentence would be, "I want that." But what the Buddha is actually pointing out is that psychologically it's the reverse.

First of all, you see Costa Coffee, and you smell the coffee—that's your first recognition, the point of perception, of cognition, that this is Costa Coffee. Then with that, there arises the relationship that we might have developed with Costa Coffee, which is our want. So first there's just the simple contact. Then there's this wanting that comes, which is there because of our past experience with Costa Coffee. Because once you've created an act and you redo that act, you are constantly reinforcing a certain relationship. And once that's happened, then the "I" comes in. So it's coffee, want, I. That's the process in terms of psychology.

It's only at that point of "I," with the identification that I want this coffee, that you get the empowerment of that desire, and in you go and buy yourself some coffee. That's the becoming.

This word becoming in Buddhist teaching refers to this constant reinvention of the self, constant reinvention of me, a constant playing around with who I am and where I want to go. An identity is not something static—it's always something that's moving with time and place and with what it is I'm experiencing.

The reason why understanding this act of karma, this action, is so important is because when we understand that things are happening in this way, then you can see the escape. If it happened the other way, if the identity came in immediately, there would be no gap—not enough of a gap between the "I want this" and the actual action. Because the "I" is that point where you've absorbed into the wanting; it's like you've become the wanting.

But when we're actually awake—and I'm not talking about sitting here in meditation, I'm talking about just walking down the street—when you're actually with that earlier process of wanting as a force within you, of actually moving you towards the object, then there's no identity. You're still aware of the desire. And being aware of something means you can't be it. You've already created a separation.

When you look into that separation, then you begin to understand what the Buddha's teaching about not-self is. Because if you separate from something, you can't be it. So as soon as I'm walking down the street and I get this wonderful whiff of Costa Coffee, if I'm aware of that desire arising in me, then it creates a little distance, a little separation. And that separation allows me just enough time to reflect upon whether I should go in and have this Costa Coffee or not.

This becomes a deep and profound moral problem for anybody trying to undo past conditioning. Now you might say to yourself, "Well, yes I will." It could be so overpowering that in fact you miss that moment, and before you know it you're there drinking your coffee.

I'm sure this happens to you at home, or at work, where you're doing things and then suddenly—tea—and before you know it you've drunk your tea, and then you suddenly realize you've drunk your tea and you don't remember drinking it, so you may as well have another cup. This is called the unmindful life.

What you're trying to do is come back on that process to regain control over your life. That's what it is. It's about actually going back to a position where you're in control and not the habits that you've created.

Remember, nobody else has created these habits within us—that's another insight. We've done it through the mechanisms of our own psychology. And it's in seeing how we're entrapped in these particular habitual formations—these are your sankharas for those of you who know the term—that you begin to try to pull out of it. Now, you don't pull out of it until it begins to hurt.

So long as you're getting your satisfaction from these habitual actions, and you're getting some pleasure, and the happiness is outweighing the unhappiness or the effort that you have to make to achieve that happiness, then you tend to stay on that treadmill. You tend to keep moving. But as soon as something disappears from that equation and you find that actually there's more suffering involved than there is happiness, that's when you start looking for some sort of spiritual practice to help you out of the hole.

So if, for instance, you have a habit of drinking tea or coffee a lot, it's only when the doctor says, "You've got really high blood pressure here—you'd better come off the coffee," that something comes in and destroys that easy equation. There was coffee equals happiness. Now coffee equals happiness, but it also equals ill health. And suddenly you have to pull yourself out.

As you pull yourself out of any habitual action—some of which may be deeply ingrained from early childhood, and some of which may be physical, like smoking or alcohol—what you come across is this enormous resistance. The whole psychological mechanism has been set up to find happiness in this particular habitude. And suddenly you're saying, "Well, I want to stop that." Then there has to be this pulling back, which is the suffering of coming off a habit.

So if you find yourself constantly grazing throughout the day—little snacks here, snacks there—and you've suddenly bloated into this huge balloon, and the doctor says, "Well, you know, if you don't lose weight, you're going to explode, or worse." You think, "Oh God, I've got to stop." So now you have to come off all these little snacks, which were little comfort zones where you found happiness. And it's painful. You've got to really work at it.

In coming off that, you're beginning to realize—or we are beginning to realize—that this whole process of liberation, this whole process of karma, is tied into the whole process of ethical living. And that is tied into deep insight into how we create suffering for ourselves. It's all one and the same thing. It's not as though there's all this meditation going on with great insights into not-self and conditioning, and you can separate that from your daily actions—because the one is an expression of the other.

So here we are on the wheel of dependent origination. "Dependent" meaning that every step is dependent on some step before it, or dependent on some present conditioning—that's what it means. And there's no absolute origination; nothing arises of itself. Everything that arises is dependent on something else.

Here we have this internal psychology which is trying to make sense of the world and trying to create happiness for itself. And every time we go into that mode of seeking happiness in the sensual world, then this wheel turns. It's not turning all the time—it doesn't turn when you're asleep. But every time it turns, it reinforces the habit, reinforces the habit. And it's only when we come off the habit that we realize how strong the habit actually is.

So here we get this teaching of renunciation. Now, the Buddha himself, of course, tried very heavy self-mortification exercises, which had as their understanding that the problem was with the body. So if the body didn't have an appetite, then you'd never suffer from overeating. If your body didn't have any sexual organs, then you wouldn't suffer from lust. That was the idea. By going into self-mortification exercises, you reduced the importance of the body. You stopped feeding the body, thinking that as soon as you weaken the body, desire weakens with it.

He found that to be pretty useless, definitely not on the path, and just more suffering. So he abandoned that, but he didn't abandon the idea of renunciation.

Renunciation is the point where a person says to themselves, "I have to give this up"—for whatever reason, might be health reasons, psychological reasons, money reasons, whatever. And you stop doing a certain action, you stop behaving in a certain way, and of course what you find is this enormous resistance. It can be physical. If one of our problems has been around food, then it begins to claw at the mind. So it's being able to sit with that, being able to sit with that pain, where what you're actually doing is allowing the engine of that particular habit to lose power.

This is where you could say the psychotherapy of Buddhism takes place. Once we've identified that a certain habit is unhealthy for us, I don't know of any way in which you can undo that habit without going through the pain of allowing that desire to express itself and release its energy. And if you come across an easy way, please tell me.

So you've got this habit, for instance, of taking snacks during the day, eating all the time. Every time you approach food, you have to stop. This is a really powerful, wonderful word in English: stop. I was in Spain recently doing the Camino. I was greatly overjoyed to see that the road sign was "Stop." Every time you came to a junction, it said "Stop." I thought, very intelligent.

When you say this word "stop," it puts a brake on things, and it allows you to feel this animal, this urge for that biscuit. It comes up like that. And if you can just stay there with it, if you can just bear with that urge and allow it to die away, what you're doing is draining that particular conditioning of its power, of its energy. It comes to a point where it no longer has that sort of energy in it. And we experience that as an ease of being around food and being able to say no.

It's these little victories along the way where we realize that by simply developing that little power of renunciation, we're actually changing ourselves very deeply. And it's not just the change—and this is where we're moving into a bit of happiness now—it's not just the change of letting go of something which is painful. There's also always some

form of transformation happening. Because energy is never lost. It's not lost either in the universe, I believe, but it's definitely not lost psychologically. And in fact, it can grow.

So, take something like loneliness. Often we might find ourselves in a situation where we feel lonely. It could be forced upon us by circumstance—perhaps all our friends have gone on holiday and we're just sat there watching television. We've got this loneliness, you see.

Now, my normal reaction would be to phone up a friend and say, "What are you doing tonight? Do you want to go somewhere?" Not actually recognizing that what's making me do this is a deep sense of loneliness.

When we look into that, when we stop that impulse and say, "Right, I'm feeling lonely, I'm just going to sit here and actually investigate that feeling"—by which I don't mean doing some sort of psychotherapy, trying to find out why I feel lonely and trace it all back to childhood. It's simply to sit there and think, "What is loneliness? What is it, really?"

The heart speaks in feelings. It doesn't need all these memories. Those memories may have given us some original cause, but what we're left with is the product of these things that have happened to us. The technical word for that in Buddhism is *vipāka*—it's the result. There's a *kamma*, an action, and then you get the result.

When we stop still with something like loneliness, what we're getting is the full force of the result of conditioning within us that produces this state—a discomfort of being on our own. It might be a sense of not loving ourselves, of hating ourselves, whatever it might be. But it's definitely a discomfort of being alone, perhaps an anxiety.

This feeling is the product of all that past conditioning. So I don't have to go into the past conditioning. Whatever happened before is irrelevant to this actual product at the end of it. This is the big part—this is the product. All I have to do is deal with this product. This product now is very painful. I feel lonely. I feel alone. Nobody loves me. And I'm sitting there with this self-pity, this self-loneliness.

So I stop all the verbiage. I stop the mind working on this emotion, working on that particular state. And that's how, by the way, these emotions develop—we develop them in the mind. If you feel lonely, your mind will enter into the higher faculties of imagination and thought and begin to create wonderful reasons as to why you are lonely, useless, and should make your way to the nearest bridge.

It's a case of recognizing that the mind is actually now developing the state. So the first thing we do, the first thing you learn when you come to sit in meditation, is you simply stop the mind. And the reason I think people don't want to stop the mind is that they think they're suppressing something. But you're not suppressing anything. All you're doing is stopping the indulgence of the mind, of yourself, in that particular mental state.

Now, stopping the mind while not looking at the presenting emotion that's causing it—that would definitely be suppression, that would definitely be repression, because there's a negativity there. The two forces that keep things out of our minds are the very forces that keep things away from us in the world that we don't want: aversion and fear.

So instead of running off and finding a friend or doing a bit of clubbing, I decide to sit in this room with this loneliness. I stop the mind from agitating around it, proliferating around it, and I'm just sitting and bearing with the pain of loneliness. As I sit there with that pain, I can actually begin to understand the underlying feeling, the motivation of loneliness. Occasionally words may come to mind, but I'm just staying with the feeling.

And then to my enormous surprise, as I sit with it, it begins to dissolve. There may come a point, even that first evening, where that loneliness completely dissolves and I suddenly find myself in this beautiful state of solitude. Then I realize that if I stop indulging this loneliness and just bear with that particular state of mind—because that's all it is, just an emotional state—it will actually die out. And when it dies out, that energy transforms into solitude. Solitude is to be perfectly content with being on one's own.

If I take any negative state of mind and do this, the same thing happens. And the joy of that process is that I don't have to do anything. You don't have to do anything to change yourself. All you have to do, in that sense, is do nothing—but bear with what is actually being presented.

Now, that is the *kamma* which leads to liberation. No matter how many good works you do in the outside world, or bad works, that's not what's going to be directly relevant to this inner process of transformation leading to liberation. That process is always inward. What the world does is either press buttons that awaken us to painful conditionings within us, or present us with situations where we can take this transformation and begin to develop the good heart.

It's up to us to recognize that our real power is internal, not particularly external.

Obviously, if you have power externally—you're a boss or you're the prime minister or something like that—then of course one wants to do good. But internally, in terms of liberation, it's always some internal process happening within us that moves us towards this freedom. There comes a point where one is liberated and cannot be touched by the world, cannot be moved by the world.

In the Buddha's own words: "The world argues with me, I don't argue with the world." I'm sure some of you will have come across that striking statement he makes where he says, "If bandits were to come along with their knives and cut you limb from limb, if anger should arise in you, you're no disciple of mine." When I said this once to a group, they said, "Yeah, but the Buddha had a great sense of humor." I said, "No, I think he actually means it." The separation of that consciousness within from the body is such that yes, there is pain, but it doesn't produce negativity because at the deepest level, there's a loss of identity with it.

Now, if we go back on this process, what we find is that this sense of identity is the point where I am saying, "I am." I am, meaning I exist. And when you look into that at its deepest level, you're always talking about your physical and mental processes. What is there beyond your physical and mental processes, beyond your body, mind, and heart, beyond your emotional life, your thought life, and your physical life?

So: "I am." Immediately that "I am" is producing a certain relationship to this body and through the body to the world. When you take that one step further—to what I am—then you get, "In this particular moment I am angry, I am depressed." There's always this direct relationship, this identity with what we're actually experiencing. And if it's not a direct identity of "I am," it's an identity of ownership: "I have."

So is there something which can break that process and allow us to find, for want of a better word, a different identity?

One of the key teachings of the Buddha is this business of not-self, *anattā*. All he's saying—it's a skillful means by which he allows us to investigate this phenomena that we call "me" in such a way that we're always creating distance. We're always creating separation between that which knows and what it knows.

In our meditation, when there's pain in the knee, there's pain in the knee. There's something that knows the pain in the knee. And by taking that objective stance, we discover a liberation from the pain. That liberation expresses itself by a lack of aversion towards the pain, a lack of fear towards the pain. So already, right there, with something as simple as pain, we've experienced liberation.

We've experienced liberation. Nibbāna is actually staring us in the face. It's just that we can't break through the veil. Every so often we do it and we don't recognize that in fact we've actually touched upon a completely different level of consciousness.

Whereas before I had a headache and would say, "Oh, I've got this terrible headache and I can't handle it," and take aspirins and whatnot, I now use it as something to observe. When the reaction stops of "I don't want this headache" or "This is my headache," and I'm just aware of the headache as headache—I'm not saying it's not a headache, I'm not saying it's not painful—there is that gap. That little gap between awareness and the object of what it's aware of is the nibbānic gap. I'm not suggesting that's Nibbāna, because Nibbāna is a technical word meaning the end of the process. But what we are experiencing by these little separations is: I am not that.

By doing so, this sense of "I" is always moving backwards. Whereas before you might have said, "I have a headache," now there is a headache. Whereas before we might have said, "I am angry," we're now saying, "There is anger." That little separation is a liberation from not only that anger but from old ways of reacting to that anger, old habitus by which we may have behaved whenever we were angry. All these little separations are little moments of liberation too.

When that's taken to its final degree, what we discover is this awareness is not actually part of this whole psychophysical organism—it's something other than that. That's what the Buddha points to when he says there is a consciousness which is not manifested, there's nothing in it, which has no boundary because there's no phenomena, and in all directions full of light. What he's guiding us towards is something transcendent. He would refer to that by speaking of himself as the Tathāgata, which literally means "gone there." When you look at his imagery, it's always about going to the other island, across the sea, across water.

These are very ancient images telling us that there is something other—an "other" which is separate from, distant from, completely different from the way we normally experience life. And that end process does not mean a negation of life. Often Buddhism has been portrayed as a negation of life. What happens is that this transformation re-establishes a new relationship to life, to people, to things. And that relationship we describe as love.

Love is the basic relationship you have towards people and even objects, which allows us to be in the world without being touched by it.

The great example the Buddha uses is that of a mother in his discourse on how to establish mindfulness. He talks of a mother with her four children. The first one, a little child, is ill, so there's a natural desire to help—that's compassion. One child has become successful in their exams or whatever, so she's naturally joyful for that child. One child she's simply a friend to—friendliness, and that's the love, *mettā*. And when one child leaves home, that's fine—that's equanimity.

Equanimity stops these three great relationships of love, compassion, and sympathetic joy from sinking into their near enemy of attachment. Love can become "You do what I say." Compassion can become pity, grief, "I'm so sorry for you." Joy can become getting all excited, wanting to share that joy in a wrong way. If somebody wins the lottery, of course you're happy for them, but you're waiting for them to send you a little check—they are your best friend after all. And if it doesn't come, you're very angry. That shows us the near enemy of sympathetic joy is envy, jealousy. Equanimity cuts through all that.

If I were to pull this all together: when we normally think about karma, we think of something coming to us because of our actions. If I say something rude to somebody, that person's going to be angry with me and I'm going to get my comeuppance—they're going to tell people how horrible I am. That is of course a result, a karmic result, but that isn't really pertinent to the process of liberation.

The liberation comes when that person reacts to my rudeness, and I now have a chance to either see the pain I'm getting from their response and let go of that, undermining my own habitude of being rude, or I can use it to increase my rudeness by having good answers, good comebacks. That karma, that action, is produced from some habitual way I behaved in the past. Therefore, I have to be careful to come back on that process. Coming back on that process means I've got to keep really alert.

The mindfulness that we do when we sit is the very mindfulness that has to come with us throughout the day. As soon as we feel, as soon as we see that initial difference —

Desire coming up, negative or positive desire, but basically unethical—you're either being greedy or you're being hateful. As soon as we see that, there is that ability to stay with it and not let it express itself through thought, word, or deed. And just by allowing that desire to come up, no matter how forceful it is, and remaining still within that storm, we allow that energy to expend itself. In so doing, we undermine the whole habit we've produced from the past. And remember, that habit now is not wasted energy. We find it being transformed through actions driven more from goodwill.

What we begin to see is that there's a process whereby there is an intention, and there is an identity with that intention. It's this point of identity—this "I am"—which is so dangerous to us. Because once we've said "I am angry," "I am unhappy," then we've lost our separation from it. We become that. And that's what the Buddha means by becoming. We're constantly reinventing ourselves, constantly reinforcing old habits by saying "I am this, I am that."

And at a slightly less intense level, "I have." If you take any object and say "I have," legally speaking you probably do own it. But when somebody steals it or you lose it, there's this enormous unhappiness, especially around something you've attached to. Then you realize that having this possession is just a legal understanding between human beings. Whoever stole it—they have it now. It's their possession. So to go around saying that somebody stole your mobile doesn't make sense anymore, because it's not your mobile. It belongs to the person who actually has it. By undermining these definitions, we undermine our relationship to the object. Whether we lose it or not, it's not going to cause suffering.

There's a lovely tale, fairly modern, of a thief who kept coming into a convent to take things. The nuns tried to catch the thief. Eventually, when they saw the thief running away, they ran after them calling out, "It's an offering! It's an offering!"—just to stop the thief from feeling bad about what they'd stolen. This is an ability to let go of things, which doesn't come if you have a strong sense of identity, of strong possession.

One little exercise you can do when you go home: look at something you really do like, something you feel is truly yours. Then imagine what happens if it breaks or gets stolen. Through these imaginative exercises, one can begin to release oneself from these little imprisonments around objects.

Far more difficult is this business of identity—"I am." That comes up most clearly when death approaches us. When death approaches, we realize this whole idea of "I am" is built completely on sand. When death comes, who are you? When the light goes out, where's the "I am"?

It's a case of recognizing that process of identity in our daily lives, stopping it, then finding some positive way of establishing good habits. If you're making an offering, helping someone, you have to be aware of any subliminal small print saying, "If I do this for you, when I need help, I expect you to help me." Being aware of that, and being aware of any self-hatred for having such thoughts, any self-judgment—all the stuff that arises when we open up to the negative things inside ourselves. Let that go. Put the real purpose of your helping in your mind and make it an act of pure giving. In this way, we develop the habit of helping people.

This whole process of bringing into consciousness everything that has been unconscious—these little unknown intentions—gives us back control over our lives. We undermine the process driven by this deep sense of identity, of "I am a human being." When that collapses, we find a completely different relationship to the world. In a very broad sense, another identity.

It's good to remember that when the Buddha became fully awakened, he didn't disappear in a puff of smoke. He didn't become reduced to a useless blob by the side of the road. He was still recognizably Siddhartha Gautama. When he walked around, everybody recognized who he was. When he approached his friends—because he was thinking about whom he could pass this good news on to—and started talking to them, he constantly asked, "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?" Every time he said something: "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?" Eventually they were convinced that something had happened within Siddhartha Gautama and began to open up to his teachings, finding the same liberation.

So that's our task: to really understand that the world we're living in is the one we are personally creating. There's no world outside our own consciousness. Once we grasp that, we look for the causes of suffering inwardly, never outwardly. It's the inner conditioning we're constantly investigating, finding ways to change it, understanding how we create this world that is not always happy for us.

Ultimately, the message of the Buddha is that there is a way of being in this world where there is no more suffering. I don't know of any psychotherapeutic school that has ever claimed you can actually, now, in this world, in this very life, find a place where there's no suffering. That's pretty radical.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 119

Impulsive or Spontaneous

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

> *In this talk from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the subtle but crucial difference between impulsive and spontaneous action. While dictionary definitions show these terms are remarkably similar, their spiritual implications are vastly different. Impulsive actions arise from unconscious conditioning and often lead to regret, while spontaneous actions emerge from wisdom and virtue.*
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> *Using the Buddha's metaphor of crossing to the 'other shore' (Nibbāna), Bhante explores how the ten pāramīs (perfections) serve as training grounds for developing authentic spontaneity. He demonstrates how virtues like dāna (generosity), khanti (patience), and mettā (loving-kindness) require careful cultivation rather than mere impulse. Drawing from personal examples, including his own journey from reluctant teacher to joyful dhammadutta (dharma messenger), he shows how accepting situations with the understanding 'this is the way it is' transforms our relationship to difficulty.*
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> *The talk weaves together practical wisdom about daily life challenges - from caring for sick relatives to dealing with workplace irritations - with deeper insights about developing samādhi (concentration) and paññā (wisdom). Bhante emphasizes that true spontaneity, like that of accomplished musicians or athletes, emerges only through dedicated practice and the cultivation of wholesome conditioning. This patient work gradually dissolves the murky motivations behind impulsive behavior, allowing actions to arise from clarity rather than compulsion.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So I just thought this evening we might approach daily life a bit in terms of our practice. I looked up two words here in the great Oxford dictionary — the contrast between impulsive and spontaneous. It's interesting how close the definitions come. It says impulsive is an action done without thought, and spontaneous, spontaneity, is performed or occurring as a result of a sudden impulse, inclination without premeditation of one's... Not much difference there, is there?

It's interesting that the word impulse comes from the Latin, which means driven on. But spontaneous comes from the Latin, which means of one's own accord. It gives it a slightly different flavour. But definitely in our use of these two words, impulsive is seen

as something not very good, and spontaneous is exactly how we want to be. To live a spontaneous life. Everybody wants to be spontaneous. And I think the added understanding of spontaneous is that you're very happy. You're spontaneous and happy, impulsive and wicked and silly, reckless.

So these two words are very close together and it's... We've just got to look at these *parami*. So *parami* means the other shore. It's translated as perfection, but it just means really those virtues that take you to the other shore. And that's the Buddha's image for *Nibbāna* — it's the other shore. And the sea he uses often as a metaphor for the journey. He talks about those who've not achieved Sotapanna, the first instance, as swimming under the water. Don't know where they're going. And the stream entrant, their head is bobbing up and down. So they sort of generally know where they're going. Oh, no, that's right. No, the stream entrant, his head's above water. So at least he sees or she sees where they're going. The Sakudagami, the one who is a once-returner, is swimming vigorously towards the shore. And the Anagami, the non-returner, is actually standing on the shore. So they've actually in some sense reached the end of the path. And then of course there's the path towards the middle of the island, and that's the attainment of full liberation.

So the idea of the other shore is one way of the Buddha pointing that these virtues are needed. And if we take that trilogy of generosity, well, gratitude actually isn't one of these, pardon me, but generosity is, and renunciation.

When we're generous impulsively, when we give impulsively or even recklessly, or when we help somebody — somebody says, can you help me decorate? — and when you say yes in that impulsive way, there's always that aftermath of, oh, God, do I really want to do that? And then you're trying to work out some way of getting out of it. And at the time when they expect you to come, you've mysteriously fallen ill, disappeared down to the beach or something.

So that impulsive action — if we stop, if we can just stop that, and it's very difficult, of course, when you're in action, when somebody comes and says, can you help me? Can you do this? It's very difficult to just stop and say, no, I won't. But I think we can give ourselves a bit of time by saying, oh, well, I'll have to look at my diary or I'll think about it or whatever. Just give me a moment. So you have to give yourself a bit of space to not fall into that impulsive way of doing things.

And of course when you... If you do something like that, if you decide to do something impulsively, and then you sit with those feelings, rather than letting them take you over, the feeling of self-annoyance and annoyance with the person for asking you and all that, if you sit with those feelings and you let them pass, then perhaps the un-

derlying motivations come up, the ones that are impulsive and driving you on. I mean, that's where the impulse is coming from. It's coming from some underlying conditioning. It may be that you're afraid to lose friendship. It may be that it's one way of not feeling lonely that you go and help somebody occasionally. I mean there might be all sorts of reasons, murky reasons underneath which is making us act in these impulsive ways. This is something that people like Freud understood very well.

But it comes out if you give it time. This is the point. It comes out if you allow the negativity that comes up to just pass away and then just see what comes up. I mean, if nothing comes up, nothing comes up. But something may just come up which manifests to you what's actually making you make these impulsive decisions.

So how do we become spontaneous? I mean, how do we undermine that and become spontaneous? Well, the underlying understanding of spontaneity is that it is virtuous. So absolute spontaneity won't arise until, in a sense, we're fully liberated in that total way, because there'll always be some murky little nasty reason for doing something which is driving us on, even unknowingly. But even so, even if that's there, we can still develop that virtuous habit, that virtuous conditioning, which allows us to act spontaneously in that virtuous way, and it brings more happiness than a feeling of compulsion, of being compelled to do something.

And that's where we get a bit confused because I think we think that spontaneity ought to arise spontaneously. Like you wake up one morning and, yeah, everything's spontaneous. I just woke up and had an egg and everything happened spontaneously. But spontaneity only comes with practice, with actual training. And I think I mentioned this one of the days.

If we look at people like concert performers, pianists, violinists, people like that, and sports people, I think these two manifest what we mean by spontaneity. And we know that an awesome amount of practice goes in to be able to play a piece of Beethoven or something or even to move with that amazing alacrity of a tennis player. I mean, the ball's moving at 100 miles an hour. They're not thinking about, well, should I go over there? Or should I hit it back strong? Should I spin round? What should I do? It's gone.

And this, of course, takes you into things like Zen, which is really high on that spontaneity. And it's interesting that one of the masters of Zen, Takuan, I think his name was called... he talked about stopping but not stopping in my sense. What he meant was the mind sticking. As soon as the mind sticks on something it loses that spontaneity — that's sticking. So if a sportsman just stops even for that moment of doubt of wondering what

to do, that's it, they've lost it. There's only a moment. If a performer just for one moment loses confidence or feels they've lost some concentration, that's it, the music is lost. They hit the wrong note and everybody boos. Get out of it.

So spontaneity also demands that concentration and that giving to the moment, but also that sense of complete looseness, where the mind doesn't hold onto something. Well, this takes practice.

So if we're looking at virtues, our virtuous life, then it's a case of recognizing that every time there's an opportunity to practice a virtue, then that also is leading us towards this beautiful spontaneity, where there's a clarity, where there's a wisdom that comes, so that the action is a response through wisdom, not through some murky impulse. And with it, with wisdom of course, there's a natural happiness comes, a natural feeling of fulfillment.

I'm thinking of one incident there in the scriptures where there's a monk who's ill, but ill in that very difficult way — smelly, the bowels are loose, and he's probably quite nasty, and the monks don't take care of him. And when the Buddha hears that this poor man is squirming around in his own juice, he goes with Ananda to look after him. And there's no doubt in the Buddha's mind as to what has to be done. And then he turns to the monks and he says, who's going to look after you? You've no mother, you've no father, you've nobody to help. If you don't look after yourselves, who's going to look after you? So he's saying to them that there's a very good reason for tending the sick. But in his mind, there was no confusion. Somebody's sick, so you're going to help. And I think that's one of the meanings of compassion.

In something like compassion we often get confused with grief. Not only is there a feeling of obligation. Take for instance somebody who has a poorly parent. Now, you've got a situation there where somebody's life might be having to change to look after this poorly parent. And there's a natural feeling of not wanting to do it, a feeling that, why don't they die quickly and get on with it while they destroy my life and all that. And there's a feeling of compulsiveness, of having to do it.

Now, that means that we're feeling a duty being imposed upon us. Now, whenever a duty is imposed upon us, we're always trying to shrug it off. We always feel it's unfair, it's unjust, and, why me, and all that. And that idea that the beauties that we have towards other people are an imposition by them upon us turns that compassionate act into something which is quite horrible for the person. They're chewed up inside. They don't want to do it really. And it comes out in little angers and not really taking care and moving them towards the window hoping they might jump. Things like that. Murder. All sorts of, I'm fed up. All I want is the money.

But as soon as you take on the duty as a personal responsibility, the whole thing changes completely. As soon as you take it on as a personal responsibility, it becomes a source of training, it becomes a source of generosity, a source of compassion. And it's not anymore a source of personal happiness, a feeling that one's life is being destroyed, because if you take it on as your personal duty, you see it as your personal training. You're using it for your spiritual benefit.

And in that care, I'm thinking of somebody specific, really, who has to look after his mother, and himself is quite sick. And it's amazing. I've known him for years. I've never heard him complain. And he's been looking after his mother for years now. And he seems to just have that very natural generosity. Just, well, this is my mother, and I'll look after her. And there's no... I don't think, never heard him being bitter or backbiting or talking about the pain and all that. And he seems to be in himself quite happy with the whole situation. And that can only come about because he's taken on that task, that duty as something very personal to him.

So in all these virtues, if we see them as a path of training, then we understand that the negativity will arise, but just like, I mean, this is what the vipassanā is for, it makes us more globally aware of what's happening within us. So when we practice a virtue and we can see the negativity come up, then we're not hijacked by it, we actually see it. Even if it's there, and even if it's putting a certain nasty feeling into the equation, the point is, we can distance from it, know it's there, and not act according to those suggestions, to those negative suggestions. And then we put the positive suggestion in our mind and we act from that. And at first it feels difficult, at first it feels hard. But eventually, as it were, the heart's being reconditioned.

Now, here, when we were talking yesterday about the will, you can see that the will is something separate from emotions, is something separate from thoughts. The will is something which empowers, and the practice is leading us to a point of wisdom.

So every time a situation comes up which we are uncomfortable with, that we don't want, that we're fighting against, struggling against, you have to be quite clear to yourself that that's the negativity coming from some sort of delusive thought, from some sort of misunderstanding. And it's allowing that misunderstanding and allowing the emotions that that misunderstanding is producing to come up into consciousness and for them to be recognized. As soon as you did that, you're doing vipassanā. You've separated out. You see it as some negative conditioning within us.

And then sometimes one has to wait for that to dissolve a little bit. But even so, even if it's there in a very strong way, you can always bring the right intention to mind and you do it with right intention. Even though within yourself you might feel horrible. This is the point. In yourself you might feel down, you might feel depressed, etc., etc. But there's this intention which you empower and you keep working that way.

Now, with the action, with the good intention and with the action, it's bound to begin to develop the right attitude. The right attitude has always been there, it's just begun to develop. And when you have right attitude, in time, it has a systemic effect, so the heart begins to respond. And all those negative feelings that we have begin to dissolve and this more positive feeling begins to arise.

I mean, I'll just give you a personal example. I've never, until maybe five or six years ago, ever wanted to teach. I don't know what I'm doing here. It was the most... I remember when I was sitting on a beach in Alicante, down in Spain somewhere, with a bottle of sangria. And I went down to the post office to get this telegram from my father, who said, you know, you've got your BA and your teacher's certificate, and he said, congratulations. And I went and sat on this rock overlooking the sea, the Mediterranean, isn't it? And I remember distinctly saying, there is no way I want to teach. That was it. And I didn't for about two or three years.

But then, of course, you need money. And when I came back to Britain, and I realized that I didn't want to go back east again, and that I wanted to stay here, I also realized that there's no way I can exist in a country which doesn't have an infrastructure to support the monastic life, unless you've got ethnic groups supporting you, like the Thais or the Burmese or something, which I didn't have. There's no way you can exist as a monastic unless you give something to lay people. They won't give you money. Westerners don't give you money for nothing.

So I realized that I had to teach. I felt it was a bit of a... It was a necessary contract. And I took on what's known as the Dhammadutta, which is the duty of teaching the Dhamma. So in this country, you'll hear certain monks, or you'll hear in the conversation, especially amongst Sri Lankans, that they're a Dhammadutta monk, which means that they're missionaries. That's what it is — mission. Come to a foreign land to convert the heathen.

So I made that decision. But even so, there was a long, long time I just felt this negativity, which I only shared with close students, that this was something that was really against the grain because I didn't want to do it. And then, of course, that negativity builds up, and you think, well, what's happening here? I've got to look at this.

And so this was 98, between 98 and 99. And I went to Upandita's center. It's named after him, of course, Upandita Rama. And when I was there, I came across, I'm sure you've all heard of that book, A Course in Miracles. And I came across a little book. It's really strange because I was struggling with this business of teaching. I mean, the alternative was to basically return to the East and return to my little hut, which tended to gain a certain glow after my hut. What happened to my hut?

And I came across this little book, which is one of these serendipity things, which you can't really explain. And here I am wondering about what to do. And this little book was a collection out of the Course in Miracles on teaching and the purpose of teaching and that. Now, I can't remember it, but by the end of that book, I was convinced that this was actually a good path to be on. So I have the Course in Miracles to thank.

And then once that attitude changed, the negativity didn't go. See, the negativity is still there. And even now, occasionally, I'll get this, God, I don't want to go in there and give a talk.

I want to sit in there and go, tea. See? But it's no longer that awful mental state that was coming up for about a year when I just felt I was wasting time. I mean, that's what comes, you see. My inclination is to be a recluse. So I'm wasting time. I mean, that's the big thing, you see. I should be in there, you know, knocking my head against the wall. I shouldn't be out here teaching.

So that sort of negativity, even though it comes up occasionally, it actually is just a dying conditioning, you might say. And the more I gave myself to the teaching, especially when I went to Gaia House, the more I gave to it, the more, to my surprise, there came this lovely feeling of joy. I didn't say to myself, right, I've got to feel joy when I go in there. I didn't. And the more I began to give talks, the more they became sort of spontaneous in the sense that even now I've not prepared it. You just come in and you speak and hope for the best. And that's it. Just make sure I haven't got any bricks.

So it was that sort of passage. Now, I think if you look in your own lives, I'm sure you'll find something which gets you down or whatever and it's a case of looking at that and accepting the motivation there, looking at that motivation and seeing what is it you're doing to make a job which previously you might have been happy with suddenly miserable. What is it you're doing to make something which you can see quite clearly could be very beautiful, could be a real growth area for you, something that you see as a sort of hell realm.

A lot of people do that with their jobs. At first they walk in and they're sort of pretty excited by it, most times. And they're looking forward to it and then they get into it and they like it. A few months down the line, a couple of years down the line, it's, I've got to get out of here. It takes on a board and it takes on all those sorts of things. And it's interesting because even in the most menial tasks, there's spiritual training. Even in something so repetitive of being on a production line can be a process whereby you grow in concentration just by putting your mind on exactly the same action.

I mean, what are we doing here? We do walking meditation. It's exactly the same thing. We're lifting, moving, lowering, placing, up and down, up and down. We do it for 40 minutes, an hour, four or five times a day. By the end of the week, you've walked hours going up and down. But you've never thought to yourself, well, this is really boring. I should be paid more for this. This is ridiculous. I'm being abused. I have to write a nasty letter to Bodhidhamma.

So it's even in something so repetitive or so menial, which we all do at some point just in our household chores, just cleaning the toilet. I mean, that's considered a menial task. But to actually bring a joy to it, to actually see it as purposeful, to actually see that it's something that you can develop a certain care, cleaning the toilet bowl, we can do it with care and attention. You know what I mean?

And it's these, like you walk into these public toilets, you see, and there's either a man or a woman sitting there, and sometimes I go and I think, I wonder what sort of life it is down here in the Jakes, living in this subterranean world with the smell of urine. And I think, God, this must be a hell realm. And some of them do give you that impression. I mean, they really are, they don't want to know.

But the other day I was in some station or other, and there was a woman at the main kiosk. And she was having the time of her life. She was having a chat with people and drawing their attention and shouting out about toilet paper and all sorts of stuff. And she was okay. You could feel she was okay. And everybody was okay with it. It was a completely different sort of toilet I've ever been in.

So it's like as soon as you see every situation you're in as something to train in, then that sort of joy arises. And with the joy comes the spontaneity. So you've got these two lines. You've got both the trying to undermine old attitudes, bringing up a good reason for doing things. And by doing that, the heart responds. It's just as simple as that. And we may surprise ourselves occasionally by doing something quite spontaneously, which on reflection we realize has actually come from pure wisdom, that we've actually done it out of that really good heart, one way or the other.

So if we just look at one or two of these, well, I've not got much time now. One or two of these, that trilogy is interesting. Well, take, I mean, the ten perfections are, we haven't got time to go through them all, is giving and morality, which morality is good conduct, slightly better. Renunciation, wisdom itself, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity. But just to take patience, for instance.

Patience, that patient forbearance, that feels like an imposition, with a naughty child or with somebody who's messing you about, or that great nuisance, the thumping bass beat through the wall while he's trying to sit there, trying to do some reading or meditating, murderous thoughts arise. And that patience, that ability to bear with the uncomfortable, to bear with that which one does not want.

Now, normally speaking, when something arises that we don't want, you get that negativity, you get the aversion, you get the anger. But to be able to allow that to come, it's always the same process. You allow that negativity to arise. If you push it away, if you bat it away, then it just remains there as a conditioning. And the power of your suppression is in a sense like pushing a spring down. And that's how these rages happen, you see. People don't realize how much anger they've built up in themselves. And then suddenly they do something which is quite awful.

So one actually feels that negativity, you see. And then you have to recognize it. You have to label it as unwholesome. And then, as it were, you change your attitude. And the great phrase for patience is, this is the way it is. As soon as you say, this is the way it should not be, you're into conflict. This is how it... It shouldn't be like this.

Did you ever see that film, Unforgiven? Clint Eastwood. Classic sort of silly western. And at the end, of course, he shoots everybody. And everybody's dead. And there's, I can't remember the name of the actor. He's very, very good. But his dying words are, this shouldn't have happened. This shouldn't have happened. I mean, that's it, isn't it? That's where we are. It shouldn't be like this. It should be other. Why am I suffering this? All that sort of stuff.

But as soon as you start using the phrase, start grounding yourself in the present moment as it really is, this is the way it is, then the patience comes as a sort of acceptance, an acceptance of this is the way it is. Now, when we do that, we sometimes get confused. We think, oh, well, that's some form of resignation. But the distinction between these two is that when somebody resigns themselves to something in that sort of bad sense, they disempower themselves. This is it, I can't do anything, I'm miserable, and that's the way life is, it's horrible, and whinge, and all that sort of stuff. And that, of course, is really harmful spiritually, because at that point, you're conquered, you're destroyed by what it is you've resigned to.

But acceptance is a completely different attitude. Acceptance is that beginning with the ground of, this is the way it is, and then with that sort of patience, with that ability to accept the way it is, then there arises what can be done. See? When one sees a situation, there's always something can be done. I mean, if it's music, you can always go for a walk. Or buy a gun or something. Yeah. There's always something can be done to alleviate it. Earplugs. That's an alleviation.

There was a lovely... I used to know this fellow. I wonder how he is now. I often wonder about him. He was a big man. Strong, toughy. I mean, when you saw him, you didn't want to say the wrong word. And he was the head of the Communist Party. This was before it disbanded. This is going back a while. And he was with his partner, and they had a room right at the top of the house, or the flat at the top of the house.

And these students came in, or I'm not sure who the students, young kids came in next door, and started playing rock music, the practicing, drums and everything, 12 o'clock at night. Okay, so he goes down, knocks on the door, and they come, and he says, knock, noise, this time of night. They say, yeah, all right, all right. And they stop, you see. Either next night or a couple of nights on. So down he goes again, knocks on the door. The guy comes out and says, a bit more angry. And they say, okay, okay, we'll stop, we'll stop. So they stop.

So the third time, there's music, he goes down, goes out the door, and he just went, whop, right on his nose. That was it, end of music. Sometimes a hard lesson is needed. And I used to just laugh when I heard of that. He was a lovely man, you see. He was very patient. He'd been woken up. He has to get his clothes on. He has to go down, knock on the door. Can you please stop? He goes down a second time, third time. Enough. Clunk. And that's the end of that. And they don't play music again. It's like... Now, I'm not suggesting.

But it's that ability to accept the way things are, wherever we are, especially, of course, those times when we feel uncomfortable or in a situation which we find hard to bear. Just accepting it. It's like you're accepting the load. Instead of trying to shrug it off, it's like carrying a haversack or a rucksack. If you're carrying a rucksack and you don't want it in your back, it really is painful. But if you accept that you need this rucksack in order to wander over the world, then you're quite happy having this huge weight on your back. You don't complain about it. You carry your house, your washing machine, they're all on the back. And you're quite happy carrying this huge weight. It's amazing when you think about it.

And campers, you see, they want to go camping. They don't mind carrying these huge weights on their back in order to go out and camp in the wilderness. But as soon as somebody says to you, would you carry this for me? You say, oh, yeah. And they go, ooh. So it's that lovely way that we can train ourselves this is the point about our spiritual life we can actually train ourselves to be like this so this is the way it is and the anger goes as soon as you accept the situation as it is and then always at least to my amazement there's always a way of dealing with the situation there's always a way of alleviating the situation in some way or other.

And it's just through that practice of patience that, in a sense, it just becomes part and parcel. Now, I've been here now for three years, and I haven't run a centre before. I mean, this is a new experience for me, running a centre. And thank goodness it's small. And people do things which get up my nose. If people come here and they do things, I think, what the hell are they... They go, I just want to pick the flowers. Pick the flowers. Put them up there. It's very nice. But like, it's always, and you get people putting carpets. You have a carpet, they come back and it's put over here. Like, why? Why are they doing that? They've come to change me.

So, and it's been, and having to work with managers, you can't use it. And you just get, and after a while, you see these irritations, you see these irritations, and you keep saying to yourself, what am I getting, why am I getting irritated? This is really silly. I mean, to actually have these little Bernie things going on in me, for what? And actually silly things anyway.

And slowly, because you see, one of the dangers of living as a recluse or living by yourself in a hut or living by yourself in society, living in your own flat, is that you forget how to live with people. It's like, I mean, I was brought up with brothers and sisters, so we always shared a bedroom. These days kids have a room of their own. Sharing is like a pain, it becomes a war.

And just to be able to allow these irritations to actually see them for what they are, just silly places where the mind grabs, places where the mind is *upādāna*, is grasping, you see. And then you just recognize this is not doing you any good, it's just absolutely silly. And you begin to relax, you begin to relax. And you never approach the person in that state of anger, because if you approach that state of anger, for sure, you express it in some way. It might be just the trembling of your hands as you're talking, but something will leak out. And in that way, unwittingly, you're engineering this anger. So you have to sit with it, wait, wait, wait.

And I found, for instance, at the beginning, it would take three days for these little angers to disappear. It would take them for three days. I'd be sat here thinking, this is ridiculous. And very slowly, just by accepting this is the way it is, it's quite surprising how quickly those old habits begin to be disempowered and just a more natural ability just to be with the way it is, to be with people as they are.

I mean, I'm very lucky here because most people come here with good intent. It's not as though they ripped the flowers up to ruin the garden. I mean, I'm surrounded by people with good intents. I mean, that makes it much easier. But at work, you might find yourself with people who have their knives out for you. I'm thinking of one person who was terribly bullied. And in those sorts of situations, yes, you accept the way things are. This is the way it is, but you definitely don't allow that to go on. You find ways of undermining that sort of really bad behavior. But if you don't accept the situation as it is, then either you're deluding yourself, such as, this person really isn't bullying me, and this is the way it ought to be, or you're just getting yourself into huge fits of anger, frustration, and a final sort of giving in to the situation, of a sort of resignation. And that's really bad spiritually. Really bad spiritually. Both ways are bad spiritually.

So, slowly, through this process of seeing where anger arises, see, that's your sign of impatience. That's the sign there's no patience. Wherever anger or irritation arises, you can say, this is the lack of patience, right? And you're holding on to something, right? If you have children and they do something which makes you angry, then you're holding on to something. There's no need for the anger. Even with children, there's no actual need for the anger. You might manifest anger to get your own way. But to actually feel it in your heart is not actually necessary.

That's something we are putting into the situation by saying, this is not the way it should be. This should be other. I'm not accepting the situation completely as it is.

And with that patience, there always comes a natural wisdom. It arises naturally. You don't have to work at it. And I think the more you find yourself becoming patient, the more this wise response to situations arises spontaneously, arises without having to work at it so much.

And you can take all the other virtues. Giving, you see, giving... Our moral life. You find yourself over-exaggerating in your speech. It's a form of wrong speech. It's a form of not speaking the truth. And just by recognising that, you accept it, you see, and you come back and you correct yourself. You're slightly more clear. You're slightly more careful about what you say.

Renunciation, you see? Renunciation is, if you're doing it as a sort of self-hate thing, or for any other reason apart from seeing where your attachment is, there's probably some wrong intention there. The whole point of renunciation is to see the attachment. So if you decide to have a look at your eating habits and you decide to fast or to do without a meal, you're doing it in order to see the habit. You're not doing it for any other reason. If you do it for some other reason, then maybe some aversion come into it. Maybe some trying to control come into it.

But remember, if you try to control habits, you're into a battle with them. What we're learning here is to allow the feelings to arise, but then always make sure they're not translated into an action, an action of thought, word or deed. But if you're in the habit of controlling it, which means you're pushing away, you're trying to hold it, there's always some negativity there. And that isn't right renunciation.

Energy, you see. Here we're learning how to be calm. There's no need to get over-energetic in things, to put your energy in things which sort of pump up the energy. What we're learning here is that if you do things calmly, the energy necessary for a particular task arises naturally. You don't have to go over the top with it.

And then there's patience. We've had truthfulness, which we've talked a little bit about, especially in terms of exaggeration. Resolution, you see. Every day we have that moment after chanting to make a resolution. If it's done with a good heart, if it's done with real resolve, you'd be surprised. It does work its way through. It does actually come through. Eventually.

Of course, every time, if you're resolving not to do something because it's negative, every time that negativity comes up, you have to bring that resolution to mind. Even if you indulge. So you say to yourself, I will not drink any more coffee. And you're walking down the street and Costa Coffee grabs your nose. And you think, ah, and then you hear yourself, I will not drink, and hmm, and then you go, and you're drinking coffee. Then you say to yourself, okay. I drank coffee. And you drink your coffee and you say, then you make a resolution. Next time, no. And eventually, to your surprise, Costa Coffee will come. Grab your nose, but the body will keep moving past. It won't have that huge effect on you.

Loving kindness, you see? They translate *mettā* as loving kindness, which is all right, it's more the heart side, but it's goodwill. It's that goodwill, and just having that as a basic attitude to all beings, wishing them well. And in the morning just to practise that after your *vipassanā*.

So remember the *vipassanā* has to be brought into an attitude. *Vipassanā* is about understanding and wisdom. You have to translate it into an attitude. And that's why the *mettā* practice after *vipassanā* as a daily practice is absolutely necessary. Otherwise you can become too detached, too disinterested. And that's what draws you back into relationships. So make sure that you always do a little, even if it's only a few lines, just to bring you into an attitude.

And then as you get up, you take with you into your daily life the wisdom and the loving kindness that you've just been practising. It's a substrate.

And then finally, equanimity. And I think I've said before, this is the greatest of all virtues because it subsists them all. It keeps them all balanced, that equanimity. So that we can practise. And we lose equanimity when we get too excited. Every time we fall into an unwholesome state, we've lost equanimity, basically. Equanimity is that calmness of the heart, steadiness of attention and coming from the place of wisdom. That's what brings about equanimity.

So there we have it. We find ourselves doing things impulsively, things that we often sometimes regret, things that make us feel embarrassed afterwards. And what we have to do is recognise that, and then we make that resolution. And we remind ourselves, and then come the next time, hopefully we've got that clear, calm awareness, carrying all day long this sort of just relaxing into the present moment, and we see that old impulse come, and we've got just that enough space to say no, in the sense of not doing it, and then to allow that impulse to arise and to slowly pass away, and then for the right intention to arrive.

And then very slowly you get this movement. And we can surprise ourselves every so often with a spontaneous act which is coming from the heart of wisdom.

So I can only hope, my words have been of some assistance, that your life will become fully happy and spontaneous, leading you towards final liberation, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 120

The Body and the Three Characteristics

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 36 min

> *In this teaching from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's evolving understanding of the body through his spiritual journey. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he traces how the Buddha moved from initial disgust with the body, through extreme mortification practices, to the balanced middle way of mindful observation.*
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> *The talk illuminates how contemplating the body reveals the three characteristics (tilakkhana): dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), anicca (impermanence), and anattā (not-self). Bhante explores how our identification with the body creates suffering, and how vipassanā meditation helps us recognize the distinction between the physical body and the observing consciousness. He discusses practical exercises for investigating bodily disgust and attachment, emphasizing the importance of balanced awareness that neither indulges nor rejects the body.*
>
> *The teaching concludes with the essential practice of mettā (loving-kindness) toward the body, showing how Right Awareness develops through accepting our psycho-physical nature while remaining unattached. This represents the mature spiritual attitude that embraces embodied existence without delusion about permanent selfhood.*

My job is just to put what we're doing in the context of the Buddha's teaching.

In terms of his own particular passage, the Buddha, remember that one of his awakening moments, when he first begins to get this disaffection with life, with the ordinary way that he was living, was when after a party he saw everybody dishevelled, puking, all the usual stuff that you see after a party. And he saw these bodies hanging around, and it brought a certain disgust about the whole body to him. The body draws you into indulgence.

Now, that would have been his understanding when he practiced these mortification exercises that he went into. There would have been a presumption that the body is really the one to blame. So, if you didn't have hunger, you wouldn't have greed, full stop. So when you look at all our appetites, basic appetites, our sexual appetites, our eating appetites, all that sort of stuff, it's all grounded in the body. And it would seem that the signals come from the body. And therefore it's easy to make the mistake that,

well, it's the body that's at fault. And somehow I've got to subdue the body, I've got to keep the body down. And in doing so I can control the body, and in doing so I can control the mind.

And to a certain extent I think that's true. But that sense of controlling the body is again coming from a center within us which presumes it has this control. And that's one of the definitions of self. One of the definitions of self is that I am in control.

And what happened to the Buddha in his fasting, mainly fasting, was that he just got terribly thin and almost seemingly took himself to a point of death. He talked about holding his spine through his stomach. So that's pretty thin. And at some point he came to recognize that these exercises weren't actually getting him anywhere in the sense that he was still suffering. That's the point. Having done those exercises, he came to the conclusion that they were useless, they weren't on the path to liberation, and they were actually suffering, they were actually causing suffering, even though, while you're doing them, there may be a release, a temporary release from hunger. Those of you who fasted know that after two or three days, there's no appetite really, the body's just feeding itself, frankly.

So that was his own personal rejection of a philosophy or an idea which was current at the time that it was through mortification of the body that one became liberated. It was the body that was holding the spirit down, this *atta*, this self, you see. And once that was done away with, then it would be liberated.

The next thing, of course, the next big awakening moment was seeing these three, what came to be called, messengers from the gods, which is basically sickness, old age and death. And as the myth goes, I'm sure you know it, he's out on his little hunting party and he comes across somebody who's sick, then there's somebody who's very old and rockety, rickety, and then somebody who's a corpse. And each time he says, what is it? And will it happen to me? Is it? And it was that connection with what he saw as being something horrific and himself that drew, shall we say, a certain horror about life, about his situation, recognizing that all beings move towards death one way or the other. If they grow old enough, they just get very sick and lose energy and all that sort of stuff.

So it was that connection with the body that made him seek the end of suffering, because it manifests, suffering in that sense manifests in the body. And his first effort was to escape the body completely through what we now call the *jhānas*, the absorption states. So in so doing you're creating a mental state and I think he would have understood at that time that the mind or it was understood at that time that the mind could separate from the body so if you began to engender these beautiful states within your-

self through mantra practice through breathing just watching the breath calms the body etc. calms the mind and you go into these beautiful states that therefore either upon death, or if you were clever enough before it, you would leave the body and enter one of these realms, you see.

And again, to his disappointment, while he was in those states, no problem. When he came out, he was still sad sack, he was still depressed old Gautama, you see, Siddhartha Gautama.

So he then begins to practice in a completely different way, through really this memory from childhood, where he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, that memory awakens in him a way of observing the body, a way of actually investigating the process. Rather than trying to do something with it, rather than trying to change it, he actually discovers a way of just observing it. So in a sense he's entering into a scientific field, he's entering into a psychology. He's interested in how does suffering arise, right? He's left that question as to why, because when you ask why, you start getting into metaphysics, you start wondering why it is, why do all beings suffer, that sort of stuff. But when he actually draws himself into this mode of observing his mind, observing his body, the question that's coming up is how does it come, how does this happen? And that's where he eventually becomes liberated and through the liberation begins to describe this dependent origination.

And dependent origination always begins at the point of contact. And the main point of contact is this contact between the body and the mind. So it's not as though what the Buddha said that there was a mind-made body. It's quite clear about that. There's a physical body and a mind-made body. And this mind-made body has the same characteristics as the physical body in the sense that it's not permanent. It itself is a collection or an aggregate of energies. It's not substantial, but it's still something separate from the physical world.

And that, of course, goes against our principles, received wisdom from a lot of materialist scientists these days, who reduce everything simply to chemicals and what's measurable. But in the Buddha's understanding, they were two different forms of energy. And I think we contact this other form when you contact your own qi, because I don't think that's measurable by any scientific standard. But you can feel it, you can feel the energy. And that energy can then move into these mental powers, such as healing. Healing is actually a mental power. It doesn't belong to the physical body.

So that separation of the body and mind is one of the first insights that you have on the trail of liberation. In the process of what we call the vipassanā insight process, the first thing is to recognize that the body and mind are actually two different systems.

And when you look into the body, I think one of the first things that sort of surprises you is how little you actually experience of it, unless it goes wrong and you might feel a pain or something. But there's lots of the body that we're completely unaware of and haven't a clue how it works.

Just a simple thing like toenails. I mean, you're not a toenail, as you would say, be an emotion, are you? You can see it, you can feel it, but it's only on the outside. You can't sort of get into the toenail. You can't be, in that sense, a toenail. And yet there it is, growing, just like our hair, or like mine was. And it's just growing, and we haven't a clue what the process is. We just presume that it knows what it's doing.

And we also know that things like the marrow of the bone is constantly creating red corpuscles. When we breathe, we're told that there's this exchange of carbon dioxide with oxygen, but did you ever experience that? See what I mean? There's a whole, there's a lot of things that the body's doing which we're completely unaware of, and it's being seemingly guided, it's being run by systems that we are completely unaware of, these autonomic systems.

One of the most amazing things that I came across is the way the eye works. Because when you look at a picture, the eye seems to be darting here and everywhere. If you look at the picture of the eye actually moving. And it's picking up little pixels and sort of taking them into the brain. But what we keep seeing is the whole picture. We don't see the eye moving at all. It's the most strange thing. And then the brain is able to create a picture which it then somehow launches back onto the retina so that it gives us the impression that we're actually seeing. We're actually seeing the whole picture or we're looking at the whole person. And we haven't a clue that all this stuff's going on, but it's not for, you know, clever little cameras hidden in pictures watching people's eyes. There's one at the National Gallery that shows you how that happens.

So it's that as you begin to investigate the body, even at this intellectual level, you begin to realize that you're an alien within this frame. Like there's this sense of me. You've got this me, me in there, but it's not in control at all. And that's how, that's why we're terribly upset and baffled as to why illnesses arise within the body over which we not only don't have a control, but didn't even know it was there, you know. Autonomic diseases, you know. Things like multiple cirrhosis and stuff where the body seems to just do its own thing. I had a student down in Gaia House and his body started eating his own liver. Can you figure that out? for no apparent reason. I mean, they've got drugs to sort of delay the process, but it's that whole business of suddenly recognizing that where as a child we think we are the body, we are the body. There's no distinction really in our mind.

Slowly, he's going to realize actually there is this sense of self, there is this sense of a me, a presence within this body, which it can superficially move the body about. You can wave your arms in the air and stuff like that. When it comes to the real things that you do want to have control over, which is the health of the body and the longevity of the body, and we don't particularly want to die, no control whatsoever.

And that coming in contact with that may raise within us you know these fears these anxieties and what not and what that is measuring is this delusion that the Buddha talks about as to where is this me where is it so in the Buddha's teaching the investigation of the body the contemplation of the body is absolutely crucial in undermining this essential delusion about who we are see

I mean the other delusions are to think that we are an emotion, to think that we are feelings, to think that we are thoughts. If you look at it from more of a Western point of view, there's the body, there's the heart with its feelings and emotional life and all that, and there's the mind with its thought life. And through meditation, through your vipassanā, you're taking an objective stance outside these three areas and recognizing that there's a distance between that which is observing and what's being observed. And it's that distance which is, as it were, informing this, that which is looking, that it's not that. It can't be that. You can't be an object. You can only be the subject. Yeah?

So these exercises that we were doing the one about the repulsive nature of the body is right there within the discourse on how to establish right awareness in other words right understanding leading to right understanding and that particular exercise is an interesting occasion in the scriptures, which is rather strange really, in terms of the Buddha's general teaching, where some monks have been practicing this repulsiveness of the body all through the rainy season, that's three months thinking about how repulsive the body is.

And he sees them coming towards him and maybe has a discussion with them or whatever, but he recognizes that they've gone over from seeing the body as repulsive to actually being repulsed by the body. There's two different things, right? The reason we're doing that exercise is to go beyond disgust of the body. But we're not... If you go too far about the repulsion of the body, to your dismay, you may find you're getting more disgusted with the body. So it's a case of investigating the body to catch that sense of disgust that we have about it, or the sense of ugliness we have about it, and then to allow that to pass away, you see, so that we then become equanimous with the body. The body is just as it is, and we're perfectly content with the way it is. That's where we want to get to.

So he saw that maybe they'd gone over the edge. So he gave them the practice of loving kindness towards the body. And all these tales end off marvelously. They all became fully liberated through this practice. The commentaries always gloss that with after 25 years in the forest or something like that.

So the exercise that we were doing at the beginning concerning the business about finding areas of the body that we have this disgust towards, that may be a too stronger word sometimes, but it's the only word that sort of gets across that visceral feel about certain things of the body. and the bit about our self-image. We're using it to actually get in contact with the fullness of that self-image that we have of ourselves and then to allow the feelings around that self-image to really come up clearly in the mind and to observe them and observe them long enough to see that in fact they die away because you're no longer feeding in to that delusion.

And that's important if if these feelings of disgust or fear and all that sort of stuff around the body come up and we don't wait long enough we don't see that the process of just observing just feeling just allowing these things to express themselves is actually the therapy if you if you if you stay until they come up strongly then you say I've had enough of this and walk off And you may be under the impression that actually all you're doing is just lifting up the disgust and feeling disgusted all the time.

So these exercises have to be taken, you have to sort of practice them until you see that in fact it's fading. If you've got the patience to stay until it completely faded, that's even better because then that really is undermining the conditioning. But if you haven't, at least to see the way it goes.

That's not only within the body, but of course within our emotional life. When we feel depressed or we feel anxious, if we can just go into the body, see, forget the mind. Remember, emotional states are always developing themselves through the mind. That's how they develop themselves through stories. That's why when you go into vipassanā, the teacher is not at all interested in your stories. Either historical, whether they're true or not, they're not actually part of the process of healing. It's letting them go and getting down to the root feeling that's been there, the rooted mental state, emotional state. Allowing that to arise and to let it express itself, to expend itself, and in so doing you see this fading away. So that's how it also works in terms of just our emotional life in general. Just to be able to hold on in there and wait for it to slowly fade away.

So that's part of the teaching around *dukkha*, which means suffering, hard to bear, hard to bear. And there are three types of suffering. So the first one we've been discussing is what's called the dukkha dukkha. It's the suffering of ordinary pain. And with that, there comes the pain that is caused by identity, which we contact through sickness,

old age and death. And that's a very strong meditation. I mentioned this business of the charnel grounds and the cemetery meditations. And, you know, it's just one of those paradoxes that if you spend a moment every day just contemplating one's own, the possibility of sickness or rage and death, and then to, you always have to balance it with loving kindness towards yourself, it actually has the ultimate effect of taking away irrational fears about sickness or rage and death.

One of the things about sickness is that the mind produces a future. So as soon as you're sick it's always going to be like this. As soon as you've got something wrong with the body, the mind immediately creates this huge plan where you're going to keep suffering forever. But actually when you come down to the experience of the sickness, just as it is in this present moment,

All you have, and I'm talking about just ordinary illness—I mean obviously there are some which are extraordinarily painful—all you have is discomfort and some disability. You know, you have to get out, you can't do what you normally do. And when you come into an ordinary illness, I'm talking about flus and colds and things that aren't so bad, when you come into that sort of present experience of the illness, it's okay. But the mind wants to go beyond it. The mind, first of all, is very negative. It wants to create this terrible future. It's going to get worse. And secondly, it wants to escape. So we're constantly in contradiction with what's actually happening.

But when all that goes, and we just clear the mind of all that, we just sink into the present moment—and that's why there's this constant reminder to be present in the present moment—what you find with most illnesses is this discomfort and a disability. And it's bearable. That's the point. It's bearable. There are very few illnesses that one would consider to be completely unbearable.

And I mentioned this morning, when pain gets to a point where we're not learning anything from it, then it's good to put an end to it. Try to put an end to it. And I'm not suggesting there that in extreme cases one should commit suicide. That's always a moot point in Buddhism. Generally speaking, it's quite clear the Buddha didn't support suicide. But there are two instances which, shall we say, are interesting.

One is of a monk who is despairing about his practice, and in his despair, he kills himself. And when the Buddha comes along, he says that, no, in that moment of dying, he actually became liberated. So one presumes that even in that desperate moment, just to be able to take the position of the observer and to actually see what's happening in a very clear way would liberate you from delusion. But I wouldn't chance it. I wouldn't risk it, personally.

And the other one is, an interesting one, is of an Arahant—he's fully liberated—who is suffering, obviously, from some very severe, very painful state. And in those days, of course, they wouldn't have had anaesthetics in the sense that we have. So in that terrible pain, he says to the Buddha, he's going to take the knife, that's how he would express it, and he kills himself. And the Buddha didn't say—the Buddha doesn't make decisions for you. If you watch the Buddha, if you come to the Buddha with a question, he doesn't say, "Don't do this or that," he just says, "Do what you think is fit." So, in other words, you're the one who has the responsibility. You don't go to the Buddha and say, "What would you tell me to do?" He's not prepared to do that. He always says, "Well, you do what you think is fit."

So, he commits suicide. But you have to be careful of that because this particular person was fully liberated. So, in a sense, one has to put a question mark over that.

So that's looking at it from the point of view of suffering, the suffering which is caused by pain. And the distinction we have to make is that pain is pain coming from the body and it's not suffering. Once we can get that angle on it of observing it, allowing it to be, relaxing around it, being open to it, then it's not actually causing suffering.

And the second thing is this sense of impermanence. One of the things that the self defines itself by is that it's permanent. It never changes. It's always happy. I mean that's how you define a spirit or self or a soul or something. And the whole process of observing impermanence is one of the routes whereby you can liberate yourself. So just to bring it up as a daily little meditation that things change, everything changes. It stops you clinging on to things, stops us from expecting things to be as they ought to be. It's us which put these oughts and musts on situations.

But it's just relaxing around that and accepting that everything is impermanent, everything is in a process of change. And that this change is impossible to know in any absolute sense which way something is going to change because there are so many factors that come into any given situation. So you simply don't know. And resting in that situation of don't know is very difficult for us. Because one of the things that the self wants to do is to be in charge, to be in control. And if you want to be in control, you've got to know. So all these little things that come up for us are quite little awakeners which point to this essential delusion that lies within us.

Now the gift of investigating *dukkha*, investigating this sense of suffering that we have about things, is of course happiness. Because you move towards being at ease with the world as it is. One of the gifts of impermanence is that you begin to let go much more easily. And you begin to realize in the Buddhist world that there's nothing in the world worth holding on to. And if you keep repeating that to yourself, let it sink in—

there's nothing in the world worth holding on to, nothing in the world—it's all that sinks in that there is actually nothing in the world worth holding on to, and that makes us very easy with things, and it expresses itself through an easy generosity, an easy forgiveness. You don't hold on to things.

And then finally there's this self, this idea of who we are. So the investigation of the body is constantly undermining that basic identity. And it's understandable it comes to us at birth. Very shortly after birth, at some time in early childhood, there's a growing idea of me as opposed to something else. I mean, they tell us, psychologists tell us that up to about the age of four, we don't seem to have an object. It's just one mass of swimming sensations. And it's all us. There's no distinction between me and somebody else.

And out of that looms the first object, it seems, your mother. And then we move to this point where everything around us is objective to us. So by the age of, I don't know, somewhere between two and three, I suppose, one is quite clear that I'm me and everybody else is not me. I might not phrase it like that, but it's quite clear.

But that child is entirely the body. There's no distinction between somebody in the body, observing the body—they are just the body. And I often say, well, if you want to know what it's like to be a body self, just catch the next time you trap your finger in the door. Because just for that one glorious moment, you are the pain. There's just that complete flooding of your consciousness—pain. You are the pain. That's the body self. And that's why physical pain to children is all the more acute than it is to an adult.

Now all we're doing in this process of liberation is turning the inside world into an outside world. So just as the child has turned this complete me into something objective, the world that it can feel, see and talk to, so as we move inward, that's all we're doing.

So this body is the walls of this room. So you're looking at the walls of your own inner self, you might say. And the atmosphere of the room is your emotional life. And all the pictures and writings and all that are your thoughts. And when they all come together you get this human being. But by observing all that you are finding a very different place within yourself and that is the observer, the feeler, the knower, the experiencer. That level of consciousness has the ability to both understand and to feel and yet to be quite objective towards its experiencing.

And that objectivity, seeing the inner world as objective, is the process of undermining the delusion that we are the body, we are sensations, we are emotions, we are thoughts. So the exercises that we were doing was really also to do, especially the one

about sickness, old age and death, observing that, getting in touch with that, is that process of deconstructing the whole of the world that we are creating and beginning to realize that there is something within that which has this power to understand.

And this knowing is what actually liberates itself, because the delusion lies in the looking. The delusion lies within the way we relate, and that is in our understanding. And the understanding is this knowing, this part of us which is our pure intelligence.

That's why I call this place Satipaññā, because *sati* is the passive form of the enlightenment which is that which receives—and that's why the exercise we do in standing is so important because it's actually developing that open-minded, open-hearted reception without any barrier—and the *paññā* is that very same faculty which sparks and understands the way things are. So one is passive and one is active.

The *paññā* is described as an intuitive faculty. So often you get this translated variously as intuitive awareness or awareness with intuitive intelligence or whatever. But that's the Buddha within. That's what we are. That's what's becoming awake. That's what's awakening to its circumstance.

So in doing these exercises, the ones to do with sickness, old age and death, and the disgust and the ugliness, and then also, I forgot to mention, the business where you recognize that a lot of our happiness is dependent upon the actual sense body. And once you realize that, you realize that there's potentially a lot of suffering. So this exercise is trying to undermine that by, as it were, recognizing that we don't have control. And in not having control, we have to accept the way things are. And in that acceptance, there is the peacefulness.

So always make a distinction between acceptance and resignation. Resignation is saying, "Well, this is the reason I can't do anything about it, and it's all horrible, and I may as well go and jump off a bridge." I mean, that's resignation. But acceptance is, "This is the way it is. This is the way it is." And in seeing the way it is, always something arises, some potential arises, because everything's moving, everything's changing.

And so finally, having undermined these different misunderstandings about how we create, about what happiness is, about impermanence and permanence, about self and not-self, we then have to, as it were, begin to take that understanding into an attitude. And that attitude is one of reconnecting with the body and that's why the love is so important. Because now having distance from the body and having seen that it's capable of creating a lot of suffering for us, we then have to go back into that body and embrace it in all its fullness.

That's the same with the mind. When you open yourself up to these negative emotions within us, and we're allowing them to express themselves, we then have to return to our emotional life, our heart, with loving-kindness to embrace it. And the same with thoughts.

So in so doing, we are developing a different relationship to the experiences that we're having in the world. And it's based upon this acceptance of the way things really are, the openness to allow the things that really are to express themselves, and then to pour back into the situation a really good energy. And that's the purpose of the exercises we're doing specifically to the body, but when we're doing *vipassanā* and then we end with *mettā*, we're doing it for the heart and the mind.

And very slowly, you see, there's this development, development of the spiritual life. That's what we mean by the spiritual life. As opposed to a simple psychotherapeutic life or a physical, a life based on just your physicality. The word spiritual is a bit—it's got all sorts of tags attached to it, but it's about the only word I think we have which makes sense. I mean, the other one you might use is the growth of consciousness, but these days that's becoming really somehow confused with the contents of consciousness. So it's all these words. But it becomes clear to us through our practice.

It becomes clear to us through our practice that there is something within us which can be entirely objective to the body, heart and mind, to the whole psycho-physical process, and yet be completely at one with it. And that's why, when you're in meditation, you're making this effort to objectify everything and to understand everything. When you're doing *mettā*, you're redirecting. But when you get up, you see, this is the point, when you get up—and that's why I stress it in the work period—your attention and care go into what you're doing. And there's a loss, at best, there's a loss of a sense of somebody doing something. And that's enlightenment in action. That's the process of awareness in action.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering and delusion and enter into that blissful state of *Nibbāna,* the deathless, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 121

Why Noting Without Stop

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7 min

> *In this teaching on Mahasi vipassanā technique, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a common question: why should practitioners continue noting without stopping? Drawing from the classical Mahasi tradition, he explains that noting engages the vijñāna—the discerning mind that distinguishes and categorizes experience through concepts and words.*
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> *Using the traditional metaphor of a bee approaching a flower, Bhante describes the two stages of vitakka-vicāra (initial and sustained application): first the mind circles around an object, then settles upon it. Many meditators mistakenly stop noting when concentration seems stable, but this premature cessation leads to wandering. The noting mind, when properly conditioned through consistent practice, becomes automatic and continues to support steadiness even as satipaññā (intuitive awareness) develops its capacity for direct experience.*
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> *Bhante explains how advanced practitioners may shift from noting specific sensations to noting the process of experiencing itself, deepening attention through phrases like "feeling, feeling." He describes the eventual natural separation between the knowing awareness and the noting mind, culminating in moments when satipaññā completely merges with its object —a non-self experience beyond personal control. This practical guidance illuminates why continuous noting remains crucial throughout all stages of concentration development.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Just a quick note about the technique. In the strict Mahāsi tradition one doesn't stop noting. And the reason for that is that that which is noting is the discerning mind. For those of you who know your *khandhas*, that's the *vijñāna*. It's the mind that is able to distinguish between black and white and know what something is for. It's that sort of — it's the higher faculty of the mind.

And it works on basic perceptions, basic cognitions. And it uses words, it uses concepts, it uses images, but mainly it uses words, thinking. And at first, the beginner, when you start the Mahāsi, it's up front in your face, it's like you're watching yourself, all you're aware of are these words coming out of your head. And then as you keep displacing your attention on feeling, on sensation, the word recedes or becomes like a quiet note in the background.

As you then begin to settle in on an object, begin to fix in on an object, we were talking yesterday about this two stages of *vitakka-vicāra*, the bee flying around the flower and the bee landing. So as you're noting the bees flying around the flower and then suddenly you find yourself landing on the flower and the noting again might seem to get in the way so the meditator stops the noting and before long they're wandering again because the landing on the flower has not matured.

If you say to yourself, well, my mind is really — my attention is steady, like that's a thought that arises, I'm really steady on the rising and falling of some object, and you keep noting, that noting now becomes automatic. And sometimes you might find it more skillful not to note so much what it is you're experiencing, but the process of experiencing. So instead of saying something like pain, pain or something, or it might even be a subtle sensation for which there's no word, and you might use the word feeling. And you're using the word feeling to describe what it is you're actually feeling.

But at that point, it's often more skillful to describe what you're actually doing, which is feeling the object. So when you say feeling, feeling, you're driving your attention closer and closer, more steady on the object in the act of feeling. You're actually feeling. Because this *satipaññā*, this awareness, intuitive intelligence, intuitive awareness has the ability not only to understand, observe at that level, but also directly feels, directly experiences.

And at that point of when that bee really sticks to the flower, you may be surprised to find that this very noting mind distances itself, so that there's quite a clear separation between the knowing and the noting. And this noting carries on, because it's been conditioned to carry on discerning. So just like when you've learnt to walk, and now when you walk across the road, you don't have to be aware of your legs, the legs just do it. So this discerning mind keeps discerning, and you're aware of the object and this discerning mind. But the discerning mind is still helping you, is still keeping you on the object. See, still keeping you there.

And in the classic Mahāsi teaching you don't stop because at some point that bee begins to so suck the nectar that it loses itself in the nectar and there's — it sounds a bit dramatic — a collapse. There's a complete joining of this *satipaññā* with what it's actually experiencing at which point this thinking mind shuts down and at that point this *satipaññā* is at its purest — not that insights can't come before that but at this point it is extremely pure and it's not something you can manufacture.

You can get yourself to that point by just diligently noting and diligently guiding your attention to the object. You can't make it collapse, because that collapse is a non-self experience. It's beyond your power. Because as soon as you say, let it collapse, there's somebody there saying, let it collapse. You can't do it. So that has to happen naturally.

Now, it's very difficult, generally speaking, to arrive at that sort of concentration within a week. It takes, you know, because we spent three days just getting it together. But if you do move towards the end of the week, towards that singularity, that feeling, it's like you almost feel it like a gear change, like there's a drop. People experience it in a different way. And you can feel yourself stuck. And the mistake is that the meditator thinks, oh, right now I'm really concentrating. So they stop the noting. The mind wanders and then it becomes a game, you see. So it's a case of being skillful at that point to not overestimate the level of concentration you've got, the level of focus you've got.

CHAPTER 122

Why We Need a Technique

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 29 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma examines why meditation techniques are essential tools for achieving spiritual objectives, drawing parallels with athletic and musical training. He discusses the major Theravāda vipassana techniques, particularly the Mahasi Sayadaw method of noting, and clarifies what vipassana meditation is not—neither direct physical healing nor psychotherapy, though benefits may arise.*
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> *The talk emphasizes that vipassana aims at spiritual insight and ultimate truth realization, not merely alleviating physical or psychological symptoms. Bhante explains how proper technique helps develop the crucial position of 'objective observer' or 'objective feeler'—depersonalizing experiences by removing the 'I,' 'me,' and 'mine' from our relationship with arising phenomena.*
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> *Central to this teaching is understanding how noting practice works: using intellectual labeling to point attention toward direct experience while preventing conceptual thinking from filtering immediate reality through past conditioning. The cultivation of open-mindedness and equanimity through present-moment awareness allows mental turbulences to naturally exhaust themselves when observed without personal identification.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (three times) - Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this evening, just to go over this business of technique. A technique is there to perfect something, isn't it? If you think about musicians or sports people, they have their techniques. The Fosbury flop just came to mind there. The guy who started jumping over the bar with his back. So there you see, that's a good example actually when I think about it, because people are jumping over this bar and using the usual technique of just jumping over it, as you would as a kid. And this Fosbury finds a way of doing it by throwing his shoulders over first. The weight of his body and then he's almost doing a somersault really. And of course the records go absolutely berserk. So the aim is to jump over this bar, but the techniques are different. And if you get your technique right, then you get over the bar. So that in a sense tells us the relationship between a technique and your objective.

I'm also thinking of people like the violin player, Menuhin. Years ago, he re-taught himself the violin under what was known as the Suzuki method. And this gave him just that extra bit of expression in his playing or whatever. I don't quite know what it did for him, but he found that by doing this other technique, his violin playing improved. So there is something about the connection between the technique and what it is you're trying to achieve.

And we can also say on the negative side that if the technique isn't right for what you're doing or isn't as perfected or is leaving something out of the skills, then you tend to end up not as skillful as somebody else. Another good example of that in sports is our great achievement in the last Olympics with 19 medals or something, wasn't it? And I think it was a terrible thing for the Australians. It was the first time we beat them, I think. The thing is that what I discovered was that we'd filched a lot of their trainers. Now there's something else. The person who is actually guiding the sportsman is also important in terms of getting the technique across.

So if you look back at just the recent history of Theravāda, there are at least two major techniques that come to mind, which would be the Mahāsi Sayadaw's technique, which he got from his earlier teacher, and the one taught by Goenkaji and Mother Sayama, the U Ba Khin technique. These are probably the two most used in the West. And then on top of that, you might say there's the less directed technique of the Thai forest tradition of just observing the breath and whatever comes up. It's very Zen in a sense. You just watch and you use the breath to get a certain level of concentration, and whatever comes up, that's your object. You just watch it. In a sense, that's the basis of all technique. But the little techniques that were developed by these other teachers just made the pointing just a bit more sharp, guided the meditation more to look more closely. So that's the importance of a technique as such. It's just a way of practicing, a way of developing your skills of meditation.

And no matter how good the technique is, no matter how clever it is, it's of no use to the meditator if their actual aim isn't right. That's another thing too. It's no good learning the Suzuki technique on violin playing if you want to be a footballer. It doesn't work. Or even a thief, fiddling.

So we have to be very clear as to what state, what state of consciousness or what state in general we're trying to develop through *vipassanā*. That's very important. And the first thing is to be clear as to what is not. So if we know what is not, then at least we can be more clear as to what it is.

So it's not about directly healing the body. There are many techniques these days to do with healing the body, going from something very physical like osteopathy to something on the edge like homeopathy, and then you get into all sorts of stuff. And when you get into that, the person has a clear aim in mind. They've got a physical problem and they're looking for help.

Now we hear about physical problems being cured by *vipassanā*. They are definitely - headaches go, backaches go. There's that amazing example from the book from the Mahāsi centre when he was alive, which is a compendium of all these cures that took place. It's on the web. And perhaps the most astounding one is this man who comes in with stomach cancer and he's dying of it, and he decides to take no medicine but just to sit in *vipassanā*. And as he explains it, there's an explosion in his stomach and it's gone.

Now of course, that suggests that whatever the cancer was, it was caused by the mental state. It obviously wasn't something like asbestosis or something that you can actually point to a chemical or a substance which is messing the body about. And one of the things that we come to realise in our meditation is that a mental state has a direct impact on the body. We can feel it. If anger comes up, you can feel the heat in the body. It's messing your cellular life about. Fear comes up, it's all constricting and tight, and you get these funny nausea feelings and stuff like that.

So it's not as though the mind isn't affecting the body - we know that, psychosomatic diseases. And when you hear about *vipassanā*, insight meditation curing diseases, when people say, "I used to have these terrible migraines and they've all gone now through *vipassanā*," then the meditator thinks, "Well, I've got this problem, so I'm going to sit." And it skews the meditation because that's what you're looking for. That's what you're trying to do. You're trying to get rid of this headache, this backache, neckache, noseache, whatever has gone wrong, trying to get rid of it.

So all these techniques - noting, going slow, up and down the body, there's hundreds of them - are then all skewed over to this aim to try and cure the body. Now it may or may not - hopefully it does - but you miss out on the whole point of *vipassanā*, which is a spiritual insight which is to do with realising ultimate truth, for want of a better phrase.

And in the same way, we make the mistake about therapy, psychotherapy. All of us have some imbalance or other in our psyche. I mean, it's just the way we are because of our conditioning. And we know now through mindfulness training and CBT and mindfulness-based stress reduction that in fact there's some connection between the devel-

opment of *vipassanā* and mental purity, heart purity. So therefore the meditator then begins to meditate in order to get rid of their psychological dis-eases, their psychological stress.

And hopefully it does. Hopefully it does alleviate the problem, as we see with something like mindfulness stress-based stuff. But again, it misses the point. It's skewed off. And by doing that, we miss out on a deeper healing, which is the spiritual disease that we suffer from.

And that spiritual disease could be perhaps contained in the phrase, "Who am I?" Or "What am I?" Digging deep at a deep existential level, like "What am I doing here? Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?" That's even worse.

I think a person might have that approach, especially Westerners with our psychotherapeutic history, on the understanding, and to an extent it is true, that it is our psychological problems which are distorting the way we see. But the Buddha's technique, the Buddha's way of teaching is actually to leave all that to the side and to move to an angle, to move to a position where that still is within the purview of our investigation, but it doesn't become the purpose.

And we wouldn't do that unless we become more and more confident, have faith in the system that these mental turbulences, the turbulences that we call emotional stuff, actually we don't have to do anything for them to heal themselves. And that's a big leap for us, because all our therapies offer us techniques about doing something about them. And a lot of them are successful. I mean, there's nothing particularly harmful about them, far from it. So they're very clever techniques, they're very good ways in which therapists can help people overcome certain mental problems they've got.

But the understanding is that when you depersonalise - this is the point - when you depersonalise these mental diseases, they cure themselves. What do we mean by depersonalising it? It means taking the "I" out. And that's one of your main techniques. You're actually objectifying something, you're looking at it.

Whereas before, we might go to a therapist and say, "I'm always depressed and I'm getting manic and I'm up and down." And we say, "I, I'm doing this, I'm doing that, I'm doing that." And so the therapist gives techniques which may alleviate the problem, but it doesn't get rid of the "I," because it's the "I" that's creating the problem in the first place.

When we take the "I" out, the "me" out, and we begin to see these mental diseases objectively, then we find certain characteristics about them. That in fact, by depersonalising them, they lose their power over us.

Now you experience that in meditation when something, a memory comes up or something, and you feel there's a bit of anger or a bit of depression or even a bit of excitement and joy occasionally. One, as it were, looks at it as an object, and there's that disconnection with it. Not a disconnection in the sense of not feeling it, not knowing it, but a disconnection whereby you're observing something very objectively, as you would watching that chicken that comes around here. He's not been around actually these past years. I frightened him. I frightened her. I barked and she ran off squawking. I'm very good with animals. There are two ducks as well. They haven't come back either.

So it's like we're taking a position in ourselves where we can observe ourselves. And that position of observation is not an abstract thing, it's not an intellectual thing. It's a direct experience of what it is that we're actually feeling.

So when pain comes up, it's not as though by pulling out the "I," by no longer saying "my knee is hurting, I am suffering pain in my knee," by pulling that "I" and "me" and "mine" out and noting "there's pain, there is pain," there is an object. Paradoxically, we can actually feel it the keener, because when the "I" steps in, you get that resistance, not wanting to be there, fear of it.

So when an emotion comes up in a similar way, depression comes up, our interior dialogue would normally be "I am depressed and I am fed up with this depression." There'd be some sort of identity with the depression, and then in a peculiar way that human beings do, they find another identity which hates the depression. "I'm fed up with the depression now." So "I am depressed and I'm fed up with being depressed." And this catastrophic way that we keep growing and growing around a central problem by resisting it and then resisting the resistance of it. You get depression and you get fed up with this, and then you get angry with it, and then you get so angry you're afraid of it, and then you get so afraid you really get depressed about how afraid you are. And the whole thing churns into this whirlpool of disaster.

And what we're trying to do is to take the "I" out of that, to take the "me" out of that, take the "mine," "me," "my." And in so doing, it loses that personhood, loses the personhood. Now when we do that, what do we find? We find that it begins to diminish. Begins to diminish. Sometimes it will diminish almost immediately. Sometimes as soon as you pull out, the thing begins to fade away. Sometimes it hangs on a bit longer. It might hang on a day, might hang on a month, who knows. But it always dies away.

And when it dies away, when we're in that position and it dies away, we realise actually I didn't do anything. It itself lost energy, it itself began to undo itself, exhaust itself. And then there comes this feeling that what I'm doing with the heart is allowing it to express itself. I'm liberating, for want of a better word, these pent-up states that are within the psyche, within the mind.

And our problem as meditators is how to keep maintaining that position of the objective observer, the objective feeler. Often in the literature around *vipassanā*, you get this accent on observing, seeing, and in a sense that only gives us half of the equation. The other half is feeling. The other half is bearing with in that very patient way, just allowing things to arise and feeling them.

And I suppose that's the big paradox, that these emotional states - this is not true of physical states, because the body has its own laws and its own separate existence from the mind - but it would seem that the mind cannot express, cannot liberate itself of these burdens save into some form of consciousness. Either you feel your emotional distress as an emotion, or you feel it in the body as a discomfort or, at worse, as an illness.

If you think of it as turbulence, that's the way I think about these things. It's just turbulence, like the weather. It's a turbulence. Somehow we've caged it in, we're holding it through resistance, through fear and through aversion. And we normally express that by simply not looking. And that's basically what Freud discovered through repression. I mean, it's a brilliant discovery. Remarkable discovery. It was completely unknown as far as I understand in the West. The whole mechanism of how human beings in ignoring something actually push something away.

So whatever techniques we employ, the whole purpose of them is to get us into that position of the objective feeler, the objective observer. That's all it is.

And one of the main techniques that the Mahāsi developed was this business of noting. Now the reason for the noting is not just simply to point us to the object, to keep the attention on the object. It does that very well, if you do it consciously. That's the first thing.

If you get into the habit of noting - the rising and falling, rising and falling - that also becomes conditioned in the mind. And our experience is that we're off in Acapulco somewhere, and when we come back the mind's happily going "rising, falling, rising, falling," like we've taught it to do that, in which case, of course, it's absolutely useless.

There is a connection between the intellect, the words, the concepts and the intelligence - this intuitive intelligence which is observing. We confuse this intuitive intelligence with the intellect. But the intuitive intelligence is using the intellect to talk to itself, to tell itself what it knows. Otherwise you wouldn't know. It's a paradox, one of these things. But our confusion is that this intelligence is the intellect, and therefore the cleverer a person is, the more intelligent, the more intuitive intelligence you think they have. But that's not necessarily so. And that's the separation between cleverness and wisdom. Not necessarily so.

So that's the first purpose, is to use the intellect as something which keeps pointing the attention at the object. Keeps pointing it there. And if you get into the habit of it, it's quite remarkable. It takes time, it takes effort, and it takes continual effort. The noting comes quite easy. And one of the reasons why the noting comes quite easy is because in a retreat of this nature, or a Mahāsi retreat, in fact all retreats, there's an awesome amount of repetition during the day.

So you get up and hearing, hearing, right? Because the bell—that's every morning you wake up, hearing, hearing. So after three or four or five days you wake up and hearing, hearing becomes quite natural.

And then you know, brushing your teeth: brushing, brushing. So eventually you find that your day doesn't give you a choice. I mean, that's what a good meditation retreat ought to do. It shouldn't give you a choice. You shouldn't be saying, "Shall I sit or shall I not sit?" or "I think I'll do some walking now. I might go for a walk." All that is taken away from the meditator because it becomes a distraction.

You know, you're fed up and you think, "Well, I don't think I'll sit now. I'll have a cup of tea." Whereas actually you're supposed to be sitting watching this fed-upness.

So the noting, because of the repetitious nature of a retreat, becomes quite easy and normal, becomes quite straightforward. And the noting can be both as to what you are experiencing—so if it's pain, you're saying "pain, pain"—but it can also be the process that you're actually experiencing. So hearing might be just hearing, where you're observing just what's happening within the mind, within the heart, and at the eardrum. This sound—you're interested in the process of hearing.

And a word obviously cannot contain the whole of that experience, because there's a part of you which is hearing like this little black bird, and there's a part of you which is giving you pictures of the bird and where it might be, and there's a part of you which is responding—a sense of joy, you know, birdsong. So there's lots of things going on there.

And what we don't want to do is start thinking about it, because then we lose the direct experience. So the word—like "hearing"—as it were, contains the thinking mind, holds it there in a sort of limbo. It can't think, it's not producing a train of thought, but it's actually acting as a push behind the observing to make you actually look. And that's the purpose of the noting.

In terms of *vipassanā*, in terms of the intellect itself and why we need to shut it down, it's because everything that we experience is always being filtered through our past experience. It's always being distorted by what we've experienced of this thing in the past. When something comes along that we've never experienced before, then you get what these pictures in the room tell us—especially that little girl. Now there's no—you know, she's so enthralled in looking at that butterfly and reaching out to it that she's no words for it, she's no concept about it. This is something very new, and therefore the thinking mind has stopped. There's just that gaping mouth, you know. The jaw drops and you look a bit gormless.

But actually, that's when your intuitive intelligence is at its most lively. When I mentioned this, I was at a monastery up in the Algäu Alps, would you believe? It's the forest monastery set up by Ayya Khema. Lovely, beautiful place. Unfortunately—well, I say unfortunately—the teaching is all in German, so I should speak German. The monk there, he speaks very good English, the actual Ñāṇabodhi, he speaks English. And the other two monks with him, Kassapa—I've forgotten the other's name now—they're also excellent English speakers, so you could stay there.

Oh, what was I going to say that? What was I saying that for now? Where was I? Oh yeah, the jaw dropping. That's right. When I said that in this talk, a woman came up to me afterwards and said that her father would say to her to close her mouth or a bee would fly in. And that's what we do with children. We don't see that in fact they're actually really alive and taking stuff in. But outwardly, of course, you look gormless. And if an adult does it, then you think they've got learning difficulties. But actually that's the sign of the complete newness of an experience, complete openness to it.

So when we have an experience and the intellect comes into it—by intellect I mean images, thoughts, concepts, ideas that we've gained from past experience—it always distorts the immediate experience because we're looking at it from that history.

So just take a very simple example: fruit. Remember, every time you taste, every time you eat an apple, you're not just eating that apple, you're eating all the apples you've ever eaten. Because all the apples you've ever eaten have congregated into this idea of an apple. And when you taste that apple, it's either good or bad, or it's not sweet

enough, it's not firm enough. And all those are comparisons. The apple itself is just an apple, and it has its own characteristics. And it may be soft or hard, sweet or sour, but that apple is unique in itself.

But we don't see it like that. We see it as part of Apple—big Apple with a capital A, Apple. And we've got this line which says these are good apples and these are bad apples, and this fits somewhere here, and don't buy them again. So all the time we're doing that. All the time we're doing that, it's very, very difficult for us to establish this open-mindedness, this real unadulterated observation.

And that's one of the reasons to develop this abiding in the present moment, because it's exactly what it's developing—exactly the qualities of open-mindedness, open-heartedness, *upekkhā*. To me, that's the root virtue of *upekkhā*—that it...

CHAPTER 123

Subliminal Inclinations, Defilements and Hindrances

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 55 min

In this teaching from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how Vipassanā meditation serves as therapy for the heart by addressing three categories of unwholesome conditioning taught by the Buddha. He explores the anusaya (subliminal inclinations or proclivities) - the seven hidden tendencies including sensuous greed, grudge-holding, wrong views, skeptical doubt, conceit, craving for existence, and ignorance. These manifest as the kilesa (defilements) - ten mental impurities including greed, hatred, delusion, mental torpor, restlessness, shamelessness, and lack of moral dread, which the Buddha called "guardians of society."

The teaching culminates in practical guidance for working with the five hindrances encountered in meditation: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and skeptical doubt. Bhante emphasizes that all mental states arise from our own attitudes and conditioning, liberating us from blame while empowering personal transformation. He provides specific techniques for each hindrance and explains how mindful acknowledgment without suppression allows these mental formations to naturally dissolve, leading to genuine purification of the heart. This comprehensive exploration demonstrates how Vipassanā meditation addresses psychological healing within the framework of Buddhist liberation.

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

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

This evening I thought to try and answer one of the things that we touched upon yesterday: how does *vipassanā* work, or what is it that vipassanā does to help us to get rid of our unwholesome conditioning? In other words, what's its therapy at a mental level?

There are three ways in which the Buddha categorises these unfortunate conditionings. The first he calls the *anusaya*, which is translated as proclivities. They're basically inclinations or tendencies. The next one is the *kilesa*, which is translated as defilements. And the third one is the five hindrances that we deal with when we're meditating. So they're just ways of looking at the same problem, although they have different accents.

When he's talking about *anusaya*, these tendencies, I think it gets very close to our idea of things being repressed or suppressed. Just as in our understanding we ignore, we don't want to see certain parts of ourselves - painful parts, fears, griefs, all that sort of stuff. And we push it out of consciousness, turn away from it, just ignore it. Sometimes we keep it down with fear, not wanting to go there, and aversion - we just don't like being in that state. Those things that are suppressed like that, I think equate to the word *anusaya*, these inclinations or tendencies.

So they're there within the system, and there's no way of knowing what's in the system until it manifests, until something triggers, until the button's pressed and then you realise, "Oh, I've got that, have I?" This word *anusaya*, as I understand it, was later categorised into seven types. But in the actual discourses, the Buddha uses it quite loosely as meaning the tendencies, hidden tendencies, things that we're not aware of at all. And as you know, sometimes we're not aware of characteristics, but other people are. And you wonder why everybody's crossing the street when you're coming down.

These proclivities became categorised - it does actually say it's in there. It comes from the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the long discourses. So I don't know when that categorisation came, but there's a feeling sometimes that *anusaya* just means tendencies, your unwholesome tendencies. I don't think any of them will come as a surprise.

The first one is sensuous greed. So it's greed for the pleasures that the sense bases give us. That's pretty straightforward - indulgence, greed. So that's always there as a potential. That's the point - it's always there as a potential.

The next one is grudge, which you could put down to aversion really, but holding on to something, a grudge. That's what it's translated as.

The other three are more to do with mental states, the way we think about things rather than feel about things. Speculative opinions - holding on to views and opinions. "I'm right, everybody else is wrong." It's that sort of thing.

The other one is sceptical doubt, and we'll come to that in more detail when we do the hindrances. And just very quickly, that's not the same as questioning something, wondering whether something's right or wrong. That's the sort of mind the Buddha would have us develop, actually. That makes us investigate. What sceptical doubt does is it stops you from investigating, stops you from even going near it, because well, you don't believe it. It's a lot of rubbish.

I was once leading a retreat, and somebody was a biology student, and he'd come to the very firm view that there was only the body - that emotions, thoughts, consciousness and all that were simply effects of the brain, neurons and stuff like that. And as I

began teaching, and one of the teachings, of course, is to separate the body and mind, with the suggestion that there's even another quality that we refer to as *Nibbāna*. He couldn't hack it. He'd come to meditate, which I think what he meant was to cool out, chill out, calm. And so that was it. And I saw him again. He left. That was after a day or two. So I thought, well, that's the way it is. Wrong speculative opinions, sceptical doubt.

And this conceit. So the conceit is normally split into three types. "I am better than you." That's what normally people think of as conceit. But the obverse is true - "I'm worse than you." Even that's a conceit. It might feel good about that. "I am worthless." It's a sort of downing oneself, isn't it? But it's to do with comparing, constantly comparing who we are.

And the other one is more subtle: "I'm equal to you." Now, we're only equal to people who think like us. So it's a sort of subtle conceit. Because I have you as an equal to me, it means that all the people who aren't equal to us must be either better than us or worse. It's just a group identity. And that happens all the time, doesn't it? That's why people join groups, religious groups, political groups, and they say, "We've got it right, everybody else got it wrong." So that's the conceit business.

The next one is this continuing, this craving for continued existence. In other words, we want to keep living. We don't want to die. It's as simple as that. We want to just keep going and going. And that's, of course, a very deep desire within us. That's a real obsessive thing. As you know, when illness, any serious illness approaches, or a hint of death, even somebody we know can put the fear of God in us. Somebody who died and you think, "All right," especially when they're your age group, or your age - that's even worse. And so you get that craving, the desire for continued existence.

And the final one is the usual basis upon which all this is built on. It's ignorance. This word *avidyā* is a bit strange because it literally means not knowing. Not knowing. It's not really ignorance in the sense of "you should have known" or "you're stupid." It's a very neutral state. I did find a word actually which translates it rather well: nescience. But nobody knows it. And I didn't know it until I found it in the Oxford English Dictionary. So there was no point in going around calling it nescience. Everybody else said, "What's that?" And I said, "Well, it's a sort of ignorance." So what's the point?

Anyway, these are listed, the seven. So you see there, there's something to do with attitude - the greed and the hatred. It's the usual split, greed and aversion. It's just put slightly different. There are three to do with the way we think, which rebounds back onto this final one, ignorance. The wrong views, the sceptical doubt, and the conceit. The sceptical doubt is also based on a fear. Most of these will be based on some sort of attitude, but you can see that they're more mental attitudes than anything else. And the

craving for continued existence is a projection of craving really, just another form of craving. The Buddha in the Four Noble Truths talks of three cravings: the sensual desire, the craving for existence, continued existence, and the craving for non-existence.

That sometimes puzzles people, but suicide is craving for non-existence, you see. And in our own little way, every time we use sleep to get rid of a certain down feeling or go for a sleep or something, that is also a form of getting rid of yourself. And again, we'll come to that when we come to the five hindrances.

The reason I mention this is to let you know that in the Buddhist teaching there's also these potentials that lie within the mind which to me is akin to something which is suppressed or repressed or something like that. But the Buddhist teaching always has an ethical bias, whereas our modern way of thinking of it is more like diseases, mental dis-eases, mental health. So in a sense it's more neutral.

But the Buddha would really bring us back down to the fact that a lot of our problems are created by unwholesome decisions. But you can't say all of them are. Fear, you know, if somebody frightens you a great deal when you're a child, you can't really call that an ethical thing. But later on, when you become aware of your fear, when you become more self-reflexive from about the age of 16 or 18 onwards, then in a sense you have to take responsibility for it and do something about it. And in that sense it becomes an ethical problem - ethical in the widest sense of that term, not to be confused with evil. So for instance, an attachment that a mother has for the child, a child has for the mother, you can't call that evil, but the attachment is actually causing problems, especially when it's confused with love.

So when these begin to rise into consciousness, then there is this other category which is called the *kilesa*. And when you read Eastern writers, I'm thinking especially somebody like Mahāboowa, he'll use things like "kill the *kilesa*." Really sort of heavy. But I'm not so sure that's a skilful way for us anyway, urging people to kill the *kilesa*. And these are defilements.

So there are ten of these. And again, you won't be surprised by any of them. And some of them, of course, mirror these underlying tendencies. The first one is greed and the second one hatred. So you've always got that split. And the third one is delusion.

Now, this not knowing - and we're talking about consciousness here, we're talking about that which knows. Unfortunately, the word consciousness these days is getting really confused because they've decided to study it. Before it was just meant "to know," but now they... To me, when I read some of the writers, they seem to confuse it with the

mind in terms of content. But in the Buddha's teaching, it's just a knowing, just an act of cognition, which really is a discriminative consciousness. It's being able to tell this from that. That's that.

When we talk about the five aggregates, which some of you may know, the body, perceptions, feelings, all our emotions and thought patterns, and consciousness. This consciousness at the end of the line is that part of us which is able to discriminate, to know the difference, to discern, and it's part of the intellect.

So that's deluded, you see. There's a delusion at a deeper level which we call this not knowing, and that's referring to this real deeper intelligence, this intuitive intelligence which we are contacting when we do vipassanā, when you become the observer and thought has stopped. So that there's something about that intelligence which sees clearly, sees directly, doesn't have to go through thought or anything like that. So there's something about the way it's looking which isn't quite right, and what it forms is a fundamental delusion.

And that fundamental delusion is to believe we are this body and mind. In other words, humans. It's a big delusion. Conventionally speaking, of course, we are human. But when we look deeper and you try and define what a human being is, you don't come up with much. Or you come up with little bits and pieces that are tacked on to each other and that always splits into a relationship. So we're seeking happiness. So where we see happiness we greed for it, where we see unhappiness we try to get rid of it, annihilate it. So there's always this basic split that we're working with.

And then if you put it the other way around, there's conceit, speculative views and sceptical doubt, depending how you want to list them. So that's the way it manifests in our thought patterns - conceit, thinking I'm right, nobody else is wrong, and sceptical doubt.

When people approached the Buddha and asked him questions such as, "What's your understanding of *kamma*?" He was sort of clever enough to ask them, "Well, what do you understand by it?" Sort of throw the question back at them. And of course, they'd be very happy to tell him what they thought. And then, as they would explain what they thought, he would then point out to them some wrong thinking, some wrong understanding, you see. And it was only when they were able to drop their view that their minds were malleable and easy to receive, and that's when he would offer them his teaching.

It's like if you went to the Buddha and said, "What do you think of *kamma*?" He'd say, "Well, this is what I think," and he'd sort of tap you on the nose with all his thoughts. So he's very clever to, first of all, ask the person and sort of play on their conceit, really. "I'm right, you're wrong." And then to undermine their position by showing its illogicality or the fact it doesn't work or something. And then when they were just ripe, he'd hit them with the Four Noble Truths.

Didn't work all the time. Some went away clicking their tongues. There's a fellow called, he's called Dantapāda, we described him. He's "stick in hand." And he says, "What do you teach?" And the Buddha gives him a cryptic reply, I can't remember. And he goes away clicking his tongue. So he obviously didn't particularly like that.

The next are more to do with what we come across in the five hindrances: mental torpor and restlessness. Mental torpor and restlessness, and we'll come to that in a bit.

Then there's two things which are rather interesting because we tend not to think quite this way: shamelessness and lack of moral dread or unconscientiousness. So in other words, a big defilement would be not to have shame or dread of consequences, which we could just say guilt for that, although guilt has other meanings.

Generally speaking one would talk about shame and guilt as being unwholesome things people shouldn't have, and a lot of therapy books seem to say that all our problems are because of the shame that was poured upon us when we were children and stuff like that. Now I'm not saying that there isn't neurotic guilt and shame, shame that really is just perhaps inbred from childhood and what not, but in the Buddha's teaching shame and dread are actually guardians. Because when we do something which is unwholesome, we're letting the side down, we're letting ourselves down.

And that letting ourselves down, that loss of self-esteem, especially in other people's eyes, is what we call shame. And it's not a very pleasant feeling. And a more lesser intense feeling, although it need not be, is embarrassment.

I always like to tell the story about Sir Walter Raleigh. He was at the court of Queen Elizabeth. And presumably as he was bowing, he unfortunately let off a rather loud fart. Do you know this? And he was so embarrassed, can you imagine, to the queen, that he did not return to court for a year. And when he did, the queen, Elizabeth, greeted him as, "We welcome you to our court. We're glad to see you, Sir Walter. We have forgot the fart." I think that would be brilliant.

So these sorts of embarrassments can be almost as embarrassing as being caught shoplifting or something which is actually unwholesome, a social gaffe. So I'm not so sure that the Buddha is referring to that sort of thing, but he's definitely referring to things which are unwholesome.

And the lack of moral dread, which we can loosely call guilt, is that if you don't see that there's going to be consequences to unwholesome actions, then of course, why would you not do them?

Once I was at the Goenka retreat in India, his big place there, Dhamma Giri. And after the retreat, I was sitting on the grass and this man sort of joined me. And I just said to him, "What work do you do?" He said, "Well, I'm a theologian." Well, I haven't met a theologian before. So I said, he's a Catholic theologian. It's amazing, isn't it? A theologian. So I said to him, I asked him, "What do you think, in terms of Buddhist teaching, what about God and evil and sending to eternal hell and things?" And he was of the opinion that no matter what harm you did, once you saw the beatific vision, once you actually were in the presence of God, God's compassion would forgive everything. Which is a beautiful idea.

But it occurred to me afterwards - I didn't say this at the time - but it occurred to me: why would anybody stop doing evil if you believe that?

You know, you mess everybody up, make your million, kick everybody in the teeth, and then God says, all right, you know what, you come in here and stay forever. So I think he was probably a little bit confused about it. But that sort of person who doesn't have any dread of consequences, or any shame, moves towards criminality and at worst it can be a sign of mental illness.

It's a funny thing about paranoia. You hate the person—this is, I understand it, you'll have to check it out—you hate the person and you project your hatred onto them. Seeing their hatred for you, which they might not have, you're full of fear and therefore you have to kill the person who hates you. It's a sort of peculiar thing that happens. Very strange.

So these two things the Buddha actually calls guardians of society. Because when we actually feel shameful about what we've done, or dread the consequences, then the next time that temptation comes up, they come up and you say, well, I don't want to go down that road again.

So one of the exercises that I say to people is, you know, when you're eating and you've taken too much food, there you've got a moral dilemma. Are you going to throw it away and waste food, or are you going to eat it and do your body harm? So my nor-

mal advice in a circumstance like that is to eat it and to know you're doing your body harm. And then when you come to the next load of food—I don't want to harm myself. It sometimes works.

So there's your two things which are, I think, of interest to it—actually calling shame and dread guardians of society. Interesting.

So if I just read through those again then you can compare it and then we can actually see how we deal with things in a meditation. So you've got these proclivities, these inclinations—greed and grudge hatred, delusions, greed and hatred, speculative opinions, skeptical doubts, conceit. So here it's turned around—conceit, speculative views and skeptical doubt. And then you have this craving for continued existence which in a sense produces everything else, that craving, and there's the ignorance, conceit. On this side you have much the same. Added to that is the mental torpor, restlessness, shamelessness, lack of moral dread. And the ignorance in the *anusaya* as a potential manifests—the ignorance in the *anusaya* as a proclivity manifests in the *kilesa,* defilement, as a delusion.

So those are your—that gives you a sort of idea as to the basic conditionings that we have within us. On the dark side. We'll do the light side another time.

So now what we come across in our meditation is a different way of categorizing all this, which are the five hindrances. The first one—I mean they're very straightforward—there's all to do with greed and wanting and craving, there's all to do with hatred, aversion and things like that. There's the dullness and lethargy, there's this restlessness and remorse, where I think you can count in things like guilt and shame, and finally skeptical doubt.

As each of these come up they will always manifest as a thought pattern—either a thought pattern or what you're doing. So when you're eating these things manifest. When you're sitting in meditation in the quietness there's nowhere for these to go except up into the head. You can't express them anymore outwardly because you're keeping the silence and the stillness and so they create these dreams. So that's the first thing to recognize—that these mental defilements develop themselves through the mind, and not only in meditation but also in daily life.

So that's why we might be thinking about getting into an argument with somebody and we'll do that before we actually get into an argument with them. There'll be some mentation before we do it. So everything in the Buddha's understanding begins at the mind level, and from the mind you get that expression out into words and actions.

So here when we come out of a fantasy, come out of a dream sequence, that noting of it is so important because that's a recognition. And as I say, it's nice to do two notes—it's like you're reinforcing it with an acknowledgement—this is what the mind is doing. And by turning away from that—and this is what's so important—we're no longer developing that state because the mental state can only develop itself through thought and imagination. So when you're turning away from something that the mind is producing, that's not a suppression, that's not a repression. You see?

But it's only not a suppression and not a repression if you then contact the actual feeling which is empowering it, and it's getting in contact with that and allowing it as a feeling, as an emotion to express itself—that's where the therapy lies.

The next thing to understand is that the history which lies behind a particular mental state is not the actual cause of that mental state. And therefore, dealing with that mental state does not mean we have to seek history.

The Buddha puts it as an image of the person who gets shot with an arrow. And they come to heal, they come to take the arrow out and do something with the wound, and he says to leave it alone until he knows who shot it, why he shot it, who made the arrow, and of course he's dead before they can come. So here we are, we're angry and we're thinking, why am I angry? Was it because my mother hit me with a banana when I was three? And you keep going back and you keep going back and of course it's all wanting to know things that are absolutely irrelevant to the actual mental state.

And the reason why it's not connected is because all these mental states are reactions to a given situation by an attitude. So it's coming from the heart itself. That's why some people enrage at a little insult where others can just palm it off. Our differences lie within the heart, you see.

So when an emotion comes up, and a mental state comes up, it doesn't matter what it is, on the whole gamut of human misery, when that comes up, we have to remind ourselves that this has been created by me. It's not that the other person or whatever caused it, inverted commas, whatever caused it, didn't have a role to play. Of course it did. But the actual way we reacted to it or responded to it is dependent on us.

So if somebody is cruel to somebody, that cruelty can't get through, can't get beyond the body or what's actually being heard at the eardrum or felt at the surface of the heart. So if somebody is shouting at us, we can hear it, we can hear the voice, like me with that chicken today. The chicken heard the voice—get out of this room—and the

feeling, you see, so I gave it a real, you know, get out, and the chicken knew it was not wanted, so he got this. So you've got this hearing, so the hearing is telling you, you know, this is anger, and you get the feeling of the person, they're angry.

And that you can call the catalyst, that's actually pressing certain buttons within us. If those buttons didn't exist, then the anger and the feel of the anger would stay just at the doors of perception, stay where we actually receive it. But because we have a conditioning to react to anger, then anger arises in us, out of us, out of an attitude towards that person's anger. So the anger we're left with when they're gone is completely self-made. It is rooted within our own hearts.

That means that we cannot blame others for our mental states. And it releases us from wanting to blame them. That doesn't mean to say they get away scot-free. Because remember, in their anger they're developing a state of mind, they're developing a conditioning which burns within them. It's not as though they get away with it or something. They've got their own mental state and of course they'll come across somebody who really can't handle their anger and they get punched on the nose or something.

I mean, you know, it's like we're in the world, we're in a world of reaction and responses, and at some point we'll do something which for us has become habitual, which rebounds back on us. So we're not letting somebody off by describing this sort of psychology, by saying, well, you know, my anger is not their problem, my anger is my problem.

So when we come off any type of dream, any type of fantasy and we come back into the heart to actually feel the emotional content, what we're experiencing is a product of an attitude within a given situation. So it's all ours. It's all ours. And it is disappointing at first, you know, to recognize that you can't blame somebody else. It's always nice to find somebody to blame. But on the other hand, suddenly we're liberated.

Because if other people actually cause my suffering, I'm going to have to get rid of them. I'm going to have to, you know, if another person really does cause my suffering and they cause it, then I've no option. I've got to annihilate them. It's the only way I'm going to attain my own personal happiness. And of course, that's unfortunately the way most people, most human beings think, isn't it?

So it liberates us from that and it also liberates us now completely to do something with it. Because when I recognize that it's me that's developed these mental states then it's me that can undo them. And of course the whole process of mental purification, specifically through *vipassanā*, but also just through not indulging these things in daily life

and acting from goodwill, we undermine them anyway. So we can change our personality, we can change our characters. That's not a problem. And we'll do it the quicker, the more we take responsibility for us, for what we've engendered in our own hearts.

So when it comes to these first two, the greed and the hatred, whenever you see a fantasy in the mind, a story in the mind, you should be quick enough to say, well, that's greed. Even though it's very enticing, even though you want to get into it, even though you want to develop it, just really cut into it and say, no. And know you're not doing yourself any harm. And then you come into the body and you feel that state.

And sometimes they're very loud, they're very painful, you know, really. But the longer you can stay with it, the more the heart's actually healing. You can think of it as a sore in the heart, as a postulating sore, and it needs to get rid of the poison before it can heal itself. So that has to be born, you have to be able to bear with it, to sit amidst the flames. And that's one of the reasons the Buddha calls patience, patience endurance, the highest form of ascetic practice. It's more difficult to sit with our own burning than to sit on a bed of nails. That's external. You can do all the ascetic practices you want but the worst one that we have to do is sit in the bonfire within us.

So these two—opening all everything to do with anything to do with that we crave for, wish for in that wrong way, and anything we hate, dislike—even depression is a form of aversion, boredom, you know, they're all there within aversion—have to be felt, see, have to be felt. And sometimes it's difficult because they're so loud and they're so constant that sometimes you think, well, this is never going to end. You get that feeling that this is forever.

But if you hang on in there and you begin to see it sort of release, you begin to see it sort of die away a bit, then that gives you the confidence that, yeah, this is the path of healing, you know. And occasionally, with a bit of luck, you might see that energy turn and present its opposite.

One might be something like loneliness. So loneliness has all these little things about nobody loves me and I'm hateful and why should anybody love me? All that sort of rubbish. And it's painful to be lonely. It's not a pleasant place to be at all. And instead of rushing out and calling your friend and saying, look, I'm really lonely tonight, instead of seeking that sort of escape in that way, to just stay with the feelings of that unlovability, you know, unwantedness, you know, orphaned. If you just stay with that feeling in the heart, you don't let the mind wander—in the heart—it might just be that as it passes away, as it sort of dissolves, there comes this lovely moment of just being happy with being on your own.

And that's solitude. And then you're seeing that actually loneliness is a lie because you're never less alone, never less lonely than when you're happy with being by yourself. It just doesn't occur. And one of the advice that the Buddha gives is to fare lonely as a rhinoceros.

Now I don't know much about rhinoceros or rhinoceri—I don't know which one to use—but I was once on safari. It was only one time I just happened to be in the right place and we did see a rhinoceros I remember and it was actually alone. There was nobody around. Like, I mean, it's a huge beast. You don't want to get near one. And I remember the driver, because I remember somebody said, come on, let's go and have a look at it. You know, big clothes. Whoa, he said. Once that thing moves, you know, it's like a tank. Anyway, that's his advice—to fare lonely as a rhinoceros.

The next one is all this dullness and lethargy that everybody has, a huge dollop of. And that's not to be confused with tiredness, with real tiredness. And we need sleep, everybody knows that. But this dullness, this sort of stupor in the mind, you know, it feels like porridge, you know, sort of a soupy mix in the head, and the heaviness of the body, see? So one is to do with the brain and the mind, the way that you sort of can't think anymore, and the other one is to do with the body, which is sort of a lethargy. And you can have the one or the other, and most times you have both. It's all a general state.

And that's, of course, a consequence of seeking happiness in oblivion. As we said at the beginning of the talk, it's a form of annihilation. So when you're a bit fed up, when you're tired, off you go to sleep. But it's not only that. Being asleep is, in a paradoxical way, rather pleasant. We seek sleep.

Now we wouldn't do that if we thought that we wouldn't wake up. There's a presumption that I'm going to bed tonight and tomorrow I'll wake up. If the doctor said you fall asleep and you're never going to wake up, that would be a real pain. You'd put pins in your eyes. So there's something about sleep which is delightful, especially that falling asleep, you see. You know, the way we actually say it—falling asleep, you know, like falling in love, like falling, you know, just sort of letting go, you know, it's lovely, you see.

So there's something very pleasant about it, one feels refreshed. But if one actually does it also to escape some unpleasant state, then it's being used as a suppression. And this stuff always comes up as a heaviness in the body later on as a feeling of depression itself.

So dullness and lethargy, after two or three days on a retreat, definitely the fourth day, if you're feeling tired during the day and you've had a good sleep, then really name it for what it is. And the way we counter that is by always doing the opposite. So if you

get it heavy, lift the spine, open the eyes, look straight into the light of the window. If it gets to stand up and even then you might be so heavy that you just go for a walk. Now, whatever you're doing, you're accompanying it. You're not trying to get rid of it.

As soon as you try and get rid of something, you're putting aggression back into the system. So you're walking with it and it's a real mental state. It's as important as anxiety, depression and everything else. And you just take the big fat dog for a walk. You just keep going. Come on, come on. You keep one step after the other. Just keep going up and down, up and down, up and down. And of course, just like all these things, it begins to evaporate, begins to loosen up.

And it can hit you hard. All these *kilesas*, all these hindrances and defilements can hit you very hard at various times in your life. And everybody has their own particular constellation of it. Some people suffer horribly from sceptical doubt. Especially the "me." Everybody else can do it, but not me. I'm not good enough or something. But from my experience with meditators and myself, doubt, lethargy is definitely there. It goes back a long way.

The next one is the opposite, the restlessness. So that's the mind. Sometimes the mind can be so restless you think you're going berserk. Absolutely berserk. It's absolutely terrible. But you have to be patient with it because that's the energy of thinking. And sometimes the dullness and lethargy just flips and you find yourself running around like a chicken. And sometimes the restlessness is in the body. You're sitting there, the mind's all right, but you just get this tremendous feeling of wanting to move.

So there it's good to move up and down the body. Just move around the body. Move around the body. Just feeling where the restlessness is. And that draws a bit of energy back into the observing. And the same you can do with the dullness and lethargy. You can move around the brain, around the head part here. You can move around the body. And that keeps you awake.

And by moving around restlessness, especially if you move, if you go the opposite way. So for dullness and lethargy, if you go up the body, wherever the attention is, there's always energy. So if you move up the body, it actually lifts a bit of energy. Go from the toes up to the top of the head. If you're feeling restless, go down from the top of the head down to the toes. So it has a way of bringing energy with it, attention.

And don't move. That's basically it. So with dullness and lethargy you move and with restlessness you don't. It's as simple as that. Very simple instruction. And just hang on in there. Wait for it to give. And if you don't, fine, okay. It's going to come back. You'll have plenty of opportunity to work with this stuff. It's not as though you failed. Like you say, oh my god, I failed.

And running with that is remorse, guilt, shame you can put all that in and that makes you very fidgety - guilt, shame and all that. And when those things come up, you have to sit with it. Sit with it. And if something comes up which you feel you can put right - perhaps something comes in your mind where you've said something sharp to somebody and upset them - so you make a decision to, as it were, close off that karmic line by just apologising. As simple as that. Whether they accept the apology or not doesn't matter. You've actually cleared it within your own heart. That's what's important.

And then finally there's this sceptical doubt. So that sceptical doubt is the inability to believe anything. And it's a stopper, it's a killer. You just won't do anything if you don't have some sort of confidence in it. And it can be fear or aversion, fear I think mainly. If you're of a very scientific frame of mind, and everything has to be measurable. So even though, like an alternative medicine like homeopathy, they can't understand it. They can't understand it. There's nothing in the medicine. So it's like, it's all hocus-pocus.

And even though you say, well, if it's true medicine, I mean, if it really is true medicine, it'll work whether you believe it or not. It's like an aspirin. Whether you believe it or not, it'll work. So I say, have a go. No, no, don't go near it. It's like there's a block. Just don't go near it.

So there are three things that you obviously can be sceptical of. It's the actual teaching of the Buddha. So when we feel sceptical about that, always remember that the Buddha never put it to us as some sort of belief statement. It was always something for us to investigate, to make our own knowledge. That's why we have these three levels of knowledge or of understanding. The understanding we get when we hear something, the understanding when we think about what we've heard, and it becomes our own intellectual knowledge. And the third one is this understanding through insight meditation, through insight, through direct understanding.

So in the Buddha's understanding, that is the process of liberation. Belief is a stopper. You just, like, you don't investigate, you just bow to the Buddha-rupa, and that's the end of that. But he'll still end up with you. He's not going to do much for your hindrances or insight.

And then there's, well, there's doubt in the teacher, heaven forbid. I can't imagine it, but there can be. And it's like it's a healthy thing to always question what the teacher actually is saying. Again, it's not to be taken as, but one tries it. One tries it.

I remember one of my teachers, the main teacher, he said to me, what meditation did you do before? And I said, Zen. He said, well, they don't meditate. And I said, they don't meditate, Sayadaw? I said, why is that? He said, because they keep their eyes open. And I said, hmm. I said, well, we keep our ears open. There's dead silence. It's like, it's prejudiced. So, I mean, you don't have to believe what a teacher says to you. But it's good to try things out. And if it doesn't work, well, yeah. If you find that there isn't that connection, that isn't, well, yeah.

But the one I think that's most pernicious is oneself. One begins to lose confidence in oneself. Often, when a person's been doing meditation for a long time, and they don't see much progress, you get this coming up. But usually they've taken a very short-term view, and when you actually ask them to look back over the years to where they were when they first started, they can normally see the progress. Everybody that's happened to them, I've talked to, sees progress. It's just it's never progressive enough, that's all. We're not expected to be fully liberated by now. So it's like just see what our presumptions are really.

And remember that the path isn't this one direct upward slope. It's up and down, up and down, up and down. It's just every so often you get to a hill, you can look back and see that the hills that you've actually climbed are actually lower than where you are. You haven't gone down. So it's a case of when you feel that lack of confidence - getting nowhere, what's the point, all that sort of stuff - again just name it. Give it its true name, the sceptical doubt.

So that's our task anyway. That's what we're working with on the negative side. And everything that we've been talking about of course is what therapy tries to deal with. So in a sense the way we're dealing with this not only brings us this spiritual understanding which are the true liberation, it's also helping the heart to purify itself.

Sometimes when you listen to certain teachers actually you get the impression that Vipassana isn't enough. You've got to have therapy. In fact, I know certain teachers who say that. And I dare say there are people for whom walking into meditation would be just too much. But I think the main reason for that is lack of faith. It's not our culture to be Buddhist. It's not our culture to have that absolute faith in the teacher like that. And if you don't, of course, then that undermines everything you do. I think that's one reason anyway.

In the East, people who are brought up Buddhists, they have just this natural faith. So when the teacher says, you've got to go through this pain, they go through it. Not everybody, of course, but I mean, I'm just saying there's that natural faith in things.

And I dare say that there are certain things which Buddhism doesn't tackle really in a particularly - I mean, like madness. There's not much in Buddhism, at least in Theravāda Buddhism, how to deal with madness. Frankly, that's done by local shamans, by the local culture. The ancient culture, they're usually better at dealing with that than Buddhist monks anyway.

But for the ordinary person, the ordinary person with our usual little neuroses and stuff, it's not that therapy won't help - it does, I think some of them are very skillful - but it's not necessary. And just in my own personal practice, I mean, I never had any therapy. Childhood traumas came up. Two childhood traumas cleared out the heart. And this is exactly what Freud talks about, that these traumas, deeply hidden within the psyche, they're causing all these whirlpools around here, which you're dealing with, not recognising that there's some deeper disease underneath.

But it wasn't easy that's all. It's not easy to really squeeze a boil. Get your thumbs into the side and give it a real squeeze till it pops. But what I'm saying is that yes you don't actually need therapy. A lot of these modern therapies I think are very skillful, very helpful. And complementary. Most of them are complementary.

So, that's it. That's what you're tackling with and it's up to us to just develop our skills. This is one side of the skills of meditation that we're developing. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance.

May you, in your wise tackling of the hindrances, overcome them, allow them to dissipate and achieve a full purification of the heart and liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 124

Questions and Answers: A Dolly Mixture

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this question and answer session from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a wide range of practitioner questions with characteristic humor and insight. Beginning with amusing anecdotes about chasing chickens and dealing with moles as metaphors for our relationship with defilements, he explores the fundamental Buddhist teaching on how seeking happiness in sensual pleasures leads to suffering and boredom.*
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> *Bhante examines the paradox that boredom itself arises from our attachment to excitement and variety, teaching that the antidote to boredom is not more stimulation but sustained attention and repetition. He offers practical guidance for working with difficult mental states like resentment and obsession in daily life, emphasizing the importance of awareness and resolution-making.*
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> *The discussion covers diverse topics including intuitive intelligence as Buddha-nature expressing through heart and mind, the cultivation of gratitude (kataññutā) as part of the virtuous cycle of generosity and renunciation, and the distinction between intellectual and embodied understanding of emotions. Bhante addresses questions about dhammās as constituent elements of experience and provides guidance on using wholesome antidotes to personality tendencies (anusaya), always emphasizing the Middle Way approach of wisdom rather than aggressive suppression of unwholesome states.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So all our pleasures on this planet, on this earth, are dependent on the body itself. Seeking happiness is always through the body and what it does to the heart and mind, which in Buddhist understanding is something separate. It's another form of energy, we can say. The Buddha talks about the mind-made body as opposed to this physical body.

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

So you go on holiday, it was a great place, you want to go back. You go back, it's not quite what it was, you get bored, so you come back, and then you think there's somewhere else to go. If we look at our lives as this constant movement towards what's going to really make us happy, lift us emotionally and intellectually, and the boredom that comes from it, we don't see that the boredom is actually a product of pleasure itself. Be-

cause no pleasure can give us the same buzz, we always have to either increase it or find something similar to it or give it a break. If you were eating all the time it would become really boring.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yeah."

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

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

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

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

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

There's no easy way out of it. It is just hard practice. And the resolution you make in the morning, and you keep repeating it through the day. You can take just one thing. Supposing there is a situation at work which is stressful. This may be resentment or something. So make a determination at the beginning of the day: "I'm going to watch this. I'm not going to let it grab me, so I can keep cool. I can keep a certain objectivity

about what's happening." And then during the day, keep reinforcing that resolution, especially when you fall into that habit. So you come out, you notice it, resolve it. That way you can hopefully sustain a better objectivity about it.

In that objectivity, in that clarity, usually some sort of solution arises. A small amelioration of the situation sometimes. Often it's because we don't know how to talk to people. We don't know how to approach them when they're messing us about. Or if we're in charge, we don't realise how we're messing them about. We think they're messing us about, but actually we're messing them about. There's a lot of that goes on.

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

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

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

It's a whole area of human relationship.

"Is contrition part of intuitive intelligence?"

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

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

So intuition, in this sense, is the Buddha Mind. That's what it is. It's that faculty which sees and understands the way things really are, and that's one of his pet phrases: to see and understand the way things really are—*jñāna-dāśanā yathā-bhūtaṁ*—to see and understand, to understand and see, how things have come to be. In other words, the process. That's the literal translation. You'll see it translated as "how things are," but actually the literal translation is how things have come to be, which to me makes much more sense—to understand and see how things have come to be: process.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

you? If you've got enough food, enough clothing, enough shelter and medicine, you're not actually destitute. I would say that people who don't have that are destitute as opposed to being poor. That's an awful state to be in.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well, in fact, there's a very good example of that, isn't there? You know when the tsunami came, all the animals left the beach—they all went off, but the humans still stood there. And in the Andaman Islands, the people there also still had that connection to nature and went off. They just felt it in the air—something wrong—and they went off. Either they felt it like the animals directly, that there was something out there coming towards them, or they felt the fear coming from the animals themselves. But one way or the other, none of them got touched by it. That's what I read.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So the antidote to feeling stinginess is to be generous—do the opposite. But we have to be careful not to be aggressive towards the negative within us. That's the mistake we make—we make a judgement about it: "That's bad, that's negative." It's just the conditioning. It doesn't mean to say it's not unwholesome, but it's when we say "I'm bad" and then you sort of make that identity with it—and that's harmful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 125

Importance of Mettā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 24 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the crucial role of mettā (loving-kindness) in balancing vipassanā practice. He explains how the objective equanimity developed in insight meditation can dangerously corrupt into cold indifference, and how mettā practice re-engages us with warmth and care for ourselves and all beings.*
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> *The talk clarifies that mettā is not an emotion but an attitude—a way of relating with goodwill even when we don't feel like it. Bhante guides through the traditional mettā practice, beginning with benefactors and extending through family, friends, neutral people, difficult people, and finally all beings in the six directions. He emphasizes the authentic power of intention over feeling, explaining how mettā prevents the brahmavihāras (divine abodes) from corrupting into their 'near enemies'—attachment, grief, and excitement.*
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> *The session includes a complete guided mettā meditation with traditional blessings: 'May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.' This practice demonstrates how to 'live consciously with a good heart,' integrating loving awareness into both formal meditation and daily life as taught by the Buddha.*

When we practice *vipassanā*, we put ourselves into this very objective place, the objective observer, feeler, and so on. And to get there, we have to develop that equanimity, non-involvement. Just as, say, a bird watcher might watch birds, they don't mess around with the bird, they just watch. And in watching, they begin to understand and see and write a bestseller. This is how you can start writing your autobiography. And it was a bestseller.

However, the danger is that this equanimity corrupts into indifference. And to stop that, we do *metta*. *Metta* re-engages with the psychophysical organism and from there into daily life. *Metta* is all the qualities you would expect of yourself as a good friend or of a good friend. And it's the basis of our relationship to each other, to all beings really, a sense of care.

And when we've got that established, the other two illimitables, as they're called. Illimitable because they can be developed indefinitely, a bit like number. No matter how big your number you can conceive, you can always have one. So when we have that attitude of goodwill towards somebody, and if they fall into misfortune, compassion, a desire to help, rises naturally. And if they enjoy good fortune, we're happy for them.

Equanimity, which is the other illimitable, of course, sits underneath these three, stops them corrupting into their near enemy. Love corrupting into attachment, whereby we confuse liking somebody with love. Compassion into grief. And joy into excitement. This is self-indulgence, really. So *metta* in the Buddha's teaching is really part and parcel of the whole practice. And he asks us to maintain that goodwill throughout the day with awareness. So to live consciously with a good heart.

Now the one thing we mustn't do is to confuse goodwill, this *metta*, with an emotion. It's an attitude, it's a way of relating. So that you can have goodwill and act in a friendly way, even though you don't feel like it. You might not like the person. They might not like you. This is what's meant by loving your enemies. You don't have to like them.

That's one of the gifts of a spiritual companion. You don't have to like them. But they're there as support. And as we practice that of course the heart does begin to respond and you can experience delightful feelings. Then the danger is that we begin to practice *metta* just to feel good. So it becomes a selfish practice.

The traditional blessings are may you be safe. So everybody wants to be safe from danger, danger outside, danger from within ourselves. From financial crises. Everybody wants to be well. Everybody wants to be free of mental distress. Everybody wants to be happy, fulfilled. And to have a certain ease with life. Not to be always in conflict with it. To live contented.

Contentment is the mark of the fully liberated person. This is the way it is. It's not a resignation. This is the way it is, what can we do? Contentment. And that contentment leads to a certain harmony working with the situation. Even when it's not particularly pleasant. Contented and in harmony with the world.

So those are our blessings. May you be safe, well and happy. Live contented, in harmony with the world. We begin with the particular, especially those who've helped us. So with gratitude, goodwill arises naturally. And then to near and dear, friends, neutral people, the people we see every day, maybe when we travel, our neighbours, but we don't know them. Even people we're familiar with on television, radio, but we don't actually know them. We can even offer goodwill to a politician.

Then there's ourselves, of course. We mustn't forget ourselves. So we offer those same blessings to ourselves. And then when the heart is softened, we can bring in somebody we find difficult. Not that they are difficult, we just find them difficult.

Then we begin to spread it outwards, first of all, to each other, here, now. And to our neighbours, so you can relocate to where you live, all the people in our country, all the peoples of Europe, and finally all people on earth. Then after all people on earth, to all

beings, all beings in all directions. And we'll do the six directions, before, behind, left, right, below and above. And we end with a chant, which means may all beings be happy.

So if you wish to continue standing, you can do this standing. But if you'd like to sit, then we can take a posture. So remember that you're not trying to feel good. That makes the practice very nice. You're just trying to develop an attitude and you do that by little internal acts of will. That's why at the end of a sitting we can make these little resolutions and eventually they'll make their way through.

So let's bring to mind somebody who has helped us in our lives. As we picture them before us there. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented in harmony with the world. Just gently repeat that towards. Now some people feel a warmth in their heart. Why not? Some people have a colour. Doesn't matter. Whatever helps to develop that attitude is fine.

Bringing to mind those who are near and dear to us. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world. We can bring to mind friends, people at work, whomever we wish. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

And to neutral people, people we see but don't know, offering them the same quality of goodwill. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

Turning now that stream of goodwill towards ourselves. May I be safe, well and happy. May I live contentedly in harmony with the world. When we do this practice, especially towards ourselves, it can feel inauthentic because we don't feel it. But that's the confusion. Whether we feel it or not, we make these intentions. And it's the intentions which are authentic. Put your identity into the intentions. May I be safe, well and happy. May I live contented, in harmony with the world.

And into the heart of goodwill someone we find difficult. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

And we can begin now to radiate it outwards to each other. May we be safe, well and happy. May we live contented, in harmony with the world. And we can begin to radiate it outward to our neighbours, so here we can relocate to where we live. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

Radiating outward to all the people in our country. And you'll notice here that unlike in *vipassanā* where we want to shut down the imagining thinking mind, now we're using it skillfully to develop attitude. Radiating outward to all the peoples of Europe. And from there to all people on earth. And as you hover over places where there's war, destitution caused by natural disasters, poverty, all sorts of suffering, just hover above those places and offer your goodwill.

Now we can begin to radiate it outwards in the six directions. First of all, to all beings before us. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented in harmony with the world. All beings behind us. All beings to our left. All beings to our right. All beings below us. All beings above us. And to all beings in all directions.

And I'd like to offer you another format which you may find useful. Turning that stream of goodwill towards ourselves. May I be free of greed and selfishness. May I be free of hatred and ill will. May I be free of fear and anxiety. May I be free of ignorance and delusion. May I be kind and gentle sympathetic and benevolent. May I be forgiving and compassionate. May I be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May I be peace loving and calm. May I be liberated of all my suffering. May I experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

And radiating that out to all beings in all directions. May all beings be free of greed and selfishness. May all beings be free of hatred and ill will. May all beings be free of fear and anxiety. May all beings be free of ignorance and delusion. May all beings be kind and gentle sympathetic and benevolent. May all beings be forgiving and compassionate. May all beings be joyful and rejoice in the success of others. May all beings be peace loving and kind. May all beings be liberated of all their sufferings. May all beings experience the peace and bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu. Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu. Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu. Sādhu sādhu sādhu

CHAPTER 126

The Kamma of Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this Christmas Day teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's distinctive interpretation of kamma, contrasting it with fatalistic views prevalent in the Buddha's time. He introduces the fundamental 'this-that' law (idappaccayatā) from paṭiccasamuppāda, showing how liberation depends not merely on past actions but on present moments of creative will.*
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> *Drawing parallels between Jesus's teaching 'as you sow, so shall you reap' and Buddhist understanding, Bhante clarifies five universal laws affecting our lives: physical laws (like natural disasters), biological inheritance, psychological conditioning through dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), ethical kamma, and spiritual laws. He emphasizes that the Buddha defined kamma specifically as cetanā (volition): 'It is the will that I call kamma.'*
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> *The teaching explores how our internal world is entirely self-created through acts of intention, even simple attention being intentional action. While external circumstances arise from various causes beyond personal kamma, our suffering is generated through our responses - the grasping, identification, and becoming that perpetuate the cycle of unsatisfactoriness (dukkha). Through patient endurance of past conditioning and redirecting attention toward wholesomeness, we can achieve the liberation that comes from understanding the true nature of kamma.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (three times) — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

It would be nice to talk a little bit about *kamma*, which is one of the central doctrines of the Buddha, at least his particular interpretation of it, because in those times there were various interpretations of *kamma*. But I thought since it was Christmas and this is a Christian feast, I'd tie it in with the work of Jesus Christ because here we have a man who in three years had an enormous effect on the world eventually. And he said something which resonates very well with the Buddha, I think: as you sow, so you shall reap. He was very clear on that.

When I was in Sri Lanka once, I asked the person who used to attend to our monastery — we were talking about this and that — and I said to him, "Why do you think Jesus Christ was crucified, died such a death?" He said, "Well, he must have done something terrible in his past life," which I thought was a very Buddhist way of looking at things.

Of course, what he didn't understand, or what this person didn't seem to grasp, is that sometimes you do something out of compassion where you get a backlash. In fact, even if you're the most peaceful, loving person on this earth, somebody will hate you for it. All these people like Martin Luther King, Gandhi — they all get shot in the end. So the manner of our death is not necessarily a direct karmic consequence of our actions. And really that's the distinction I think we have to be very clear about.

When the Buddha is talking about *kamma*, he's talking specifically about that which is to do with our liberation. And he has this very simple law which underpins the whole of the law of *kamma*. It's called "this-that," the this-that law, in the Pali. And it goes something like this: because that happened in the past, this happens now. And because that didn't happen, this doesn't happen — or this does happen, depending how you want to interpret it.

So that's basically the way most people would think of *kamma* in the sense of cause and effect: something you did in the past and you get clobbered by it somewhere in the future. And obviously there is such a thing. But if you think about that, then you tend to get into fate. And the problem with fate, of course, is that you lose your free will. I mean, why make decisions? Because it's going to happen anyway.

There was a sect in the Buddha's time who actually believed that it didn't really matter what you did, because your *kamma* was set. So the teacher said if you went down one side of the Ganges performing great acts of compassion and love and all that and came up the other side murdering, thieving, doing all terrible things, it wouldn't make a blind bit of difference because your *kamma* is set. So we have to be very careful about thinking about our *kamma* as something which is only a product of past action. But of course, there are products of past actions — not to deny that, it's just that's not the overarching effect upon our present life.

The second part — oh, by the way, if you did only believe in that, it's difficult to see where creativity would come in. It would be repetitive, wouldn't it? Now the other side of that equation is: if this happens now, this happens now, and if this doesn't happen now, this doesn't happen now, or something else happens. So here we have a very direct creative moment right here, right now.

One example would be us. All of us have come here through different karmic past lines, but we've all arrived here to create this particular situation. This situation would not be the same if one of you hadn't arrived. So, for instance, Jean Stewart, who was supposed to be here, got caught up in the snow and is not here. Therefore, this situation is different because of that — she didn't come. If she suddenly arrived, then we'd have a different situation.

So if you can grasp that situation where you've got one line of action which is coming from the past into the present and things happening in the present because things are meeting in the present moment... If this universe were only about things happening in this present moment without any connection to the past, then one can only presume it'd be rather chaotic. Can't see where order would come. So the past gives us the order. The past gives us some sort of order, but the present gives us the sense of chaos. So when you put the two together, what you get is a very creative situation because you've got that fundamental line and something happens to it because things meet — things meet within the universe.

Keeping that in mind, just consider when you do something. In science they have this theory of chaos, don't they? Where something happens and with supporting conditions — that's important, the supporting conditions — a little butterfly wing or something turns into a storm further up the line. And in fact I suppose that's happening all the time. How does turbulence happen? If you only look at the world of politics, you see suddenly you've got mayhem out of nowhere. It just arises very quickly out of supporting conditions. But it also disappears just as quickly too when the supporting conditions also disappear.

And I'm always amused how we always have to, at least Westerners anyway, have to think of the most dire consequences. Why we can't put a positive spin on it, such as a little act of kindness done at Satipanya in White Grit Day with supporting conditions changes the whole world and everybody becomes enlightened in no length of time. Not that it will happen, but even so it's a nice way to put a positive spin on the theory of chaos. And in a sense that's very close to the Buddha's teaching. I mean, I can't see much of a difference to that.

Now when we do an act, it goes out into society. No matter what you do, it goes into a set of conditions which are also moving. They're also dynamic. It's not as though you're putting something into a still place and moving it. Everything's in this state of dynamism. And you throw something into the pot and who knows what will come out. Who knows what will come out. And it may be wonderful — like say all these people who buy tickets on the lottery. They're all spending all this money on the lottery. Somebody

wins. Somebody hits the jackpot and comes away with millions of pounds. Why should that happen to that person, nobody else? So you might say, "Oh, it's good *kamma* — in the past life he gave lots of money away." But I think we can also now see that it doesn't quite work like that. It's more in the sense of you put something into a situation and you may or may not receive something wonderful, and may or may not receive something terrible. You just don't know.

Things happen to us which are completely outside our control. There was a lovely man — it's funny I should forget his name — he was in charge of the building, that guy at our house. And while I was there he developed asbestosis, cancer through asbestos in the lungs. A remarkable man, a remarkable way that he worked with that disease. It was truly spiritual, actually. It was very moving. I mean, he wasn't into meditation or anything, but he seemed to be at ease with the whole situation and died peacefully.

Now, this fellow was only in his 50s, I think, if I remember rightly. And when he was a young worker, a boy — 18, 19 — doing apprenticeship with Costain, the builder, they were throwing snowballs of blue asbestos at each other, which is the worst of all asbestos, I believe. And years later, he dies of this painful disease.

So now, what we begin to understand is that things happen to us which have nothing to do with us. It's just other people's ignorance, other people's carelessness, other people's, sometimes, genuine mistake — just not understanding. Things happen to us quite out of the blue. And so when we look at the universe like that, it gets a bit scary. Because anything can happen, my goodness. And that's, of course, why when we touch upon that, there's this rush to make everything very secure, make sure you've got your insurance policies and all that.

So the world is not something we can control, and it's not something that we particularly make. You put your pennyworth into the pot, and you don't know what you're going to get out. Generally speaking, society tries to make it so that if you put something good in you get something good out. You put your work in and you get a pension and you can live happily in old age, unless you drop dead too early to enjoy the fruits of your life.

It's understanding that there are other laws apart from *kamma* — that are obviously the physical laws. Look at all these people that were killed by the tsunami a few years ago. Now, that struck the east coast of Sri Lanka, and the south, wasn't it? And it just wiped out a load of people. And I'm sure they — because in the folklore of Buddhism, you will get people drowned because in the past life they must have done something terrible. To support that, unfortunately, there are passages, especially in the commentaries, which support that almost in a very direct way.

There's a lovely story which goes to one of the Dhammapada verses, where a ship was crossing the ocean, and it suddenly stopped, even though the wind was up, and they didn't know what was happening. So the captain wondered what to do, and luckily, of course, there was a group of monks on board — Theravādins amongst the good. And he asked them to think about it and consult it. So they went into deep meditation, and when they came out, they said, "Who is your wife?" He said, "In the past life, she drowned all the dogs," so the ship won't move until you throw her overboard. So, of course, the captain, who no doubt was very sad — he might have been a ploy, of course, to get rid of his wife, but we'll put that one aside — he chucked her overboard and lo and behold, the ship sailed on.

So when you get these little stories from the scriptures which support a very mechanical type of *kamma*, you can see that it becomes impossible to sustain. So there are all the physical laws of the universe. And you could say in a very broad sense that you've been born here, you've been born here in this situation, so whatever happens to you in this situation is part of your *kamma*. But it's not personal, it's not direct. You didn't cause the tsunami, for instance.

Then, of course, we come to this rather interesting place: it's biology. These days, reductionists take it right down to your genes. Everything that you are now is caused by your genes, for heaven's sake. So in which case, of course, where does free will come into that? It's all in my genes. I'm an idiot because it's in my genes. I'm a totally foul person because it's in my genes. I just happened to become a complete wonderful saint because it was in my genes. So when you start investigating that, it's just a bit off. Not that I'm sure reductionists take away the effects of society on the genes. Obviously what comes to us from our genes we know is from past generations, so what we have is the body we have is the body we're given. You're stuck with it — that's it. You might have preferred to look like a film star, but unfortunately you've ended up with this one.

The actual gene pool that we're abstracted from, which creates this body — in Buddhism it doesn't create the mind, the mind is of another order — but the body is definitely given. If we're born with physical problems from our forefathers, or mothers as well, it's something we have to handle, but to talk about it as my personal *kamma* would seem to stretch it a little bit.

Now I do have my own peculiar little theory about this, so I can labour you with it. The body comes with its history, with its genetic history, and the mind which enters into it also comes with its history, with its psychological history. And when the two meet, somehow the strains within the mind, the turbulences within the mind, must locate

themselves. And I often wonder whether the mind searches for a weak part of the body where it locates itself, and if there is a genetic weakness in there as well, then the effect could be even worse than the mind can do to the body.

So, how do we know the mind affects the body? How do we know the mind does damage to the body? Well, here in your meditation, you know. I mean, every time some anger comes up in your meditation, you can feel the conflagration in the body, the heat that it's causing. And these mental effects on the body is having a direct effect on the cells. And it's interesting that something — I read a figure, I don't know how scientific it is — but 80% of cancers happen after a trauma. So there's some link there between that disease or some similar diseases and mental states that we get into.

So whether, if you're born with a very good constitutionally strong body, but you have a terrible mind, then it may be that you live long and happy. But if you have a constitutionally weak body and an awful mind, then you might find that your life is shortened for it, because just the physical frame can't handle the turbulence.

But that, of course, gives us our third law, which is the law of the mind. Just to go back to the body, remember that awful incident with Hoddle — and what was his name? Glenn Hoddle — and when affected by Hinduism, he made this real... I think it was the reporter really who said that people born with genetic diseases and stuff was their personal *kamma*. And it just wasn't politically correct. It would have been in India — it would have been hailed in India — but in the West it's just not politically correct. And I don't think it is correct myself.

Because we now have this — the law of the mind, and then we have the law of *kamma*, and then the final law are the spiritual laws. So *citta*, the mind, which in Buddhism is difficult in English — in Buddhism refers to the whole heart-mind complex, it's your emotional thought life. You'll see it translated often as heart-mind, which is a bit awkward in English. I mean, the old word was soul in English. It was body, soul and spirit. So the soul was pointing to your psychological life, your emotional thought life. And then I think it became confused with spirit as being everlasting or something. But I think we can thank Descartes for the split between the body and the heart. So we've ended up with a language that we don't have a word which combines for us these two things anymore.

But in the East, I think you may find people saying that when they say, "I think," they actually point to the heart, they don't point to the head. So there's still that understanding that our thoughts and our understanding arise out of attitudes, attitudes which are really based in the heart, an emotional feel about things.

So, the psychological law of the Buddha, of course, that in Buddhism is talked about, is the dependent origination. So, the Buddha doesn't have a total, complete description of human psychology. I mean, there's no developmental psychology, there's no psychology in Buddhism that I know of as to how a child develops, for instance. And there doesn't seem to be that much understanding of very severe psychological states, like schizophrenia and stuff like that. And because that's not where the Buddha places himself. He's very firmly placed in this whole area of how we create suffering. And dependent origination is really about that.

In the Abhidhamma, of course, it tries to finesse on that, trying to talk about mind moments, seventeen mind moments in every material moment. It tries to describe how moments of cognition build up to a conscious moment and all that. But even so, it's still about how do we create suffering.

The psychology that emerges from dependent origination is the Buddha's own explanation, and it would seem that there was nothing like it before him. There's no intimation of that sort of psychology before the Buddha. In his awakening, there were three things that he saw.

The first thing was about karma. Throughout his past lives, he saw how his ethical decisions, his moral decisions—both the beautiful and the negative—had affected his rebirth, had affected moment to moment his life. And then he saw how beings moved from one place to another dependent on such actions, so that what was a personal law for him then became a cosmic law.

But the inner insight, the actual insight that came to him as he sat there, was that he realised he had destroyed all the defilements within him. Something had completely disappeared out of his psychology. Now he talked about that later—delusion, greed, hatred, the three roots, the three unwholesome roots. But that was in his victory verse, which we chant in the morning: "I have attained the unconditioned *citta*. I have attained a consciousness which is no longer part of this world of conditioning, which is the world of kamma."

So that psychological law is embedded; it really expresses itself mainly through dependent origination. And it's up to us, of course, to investigate that.

When it comes to kamma, this is the teaching around cause and effect, which we talked about before in large terms about "that having been, this becomes," and so on. But within us, we're talking really about the role of will. This is absolutely core to the Buddha's teaching. He says it quite distinctly. He says, "It is the will that I call kamma." And when he talks about kamma, he's talking about an act. He's not talking about

karma as we would use it today, meaning your comeuppance. He's talking about an act. And remember, once an act is done—whether it's a thought in the mind or an act of speech or an act of the body, an action—it has an effect. It's an energy which goes either in the mind, it goes into the psyche itself, or through speech and action out into the world. That's an action. And the proper word for your comeuppance is *vipāka*.

But it's very clear how he says that. Now in dependent origination, you'll see that there are little moments there as we perceive something. As we perceive something—say a flower—there's a feeling arises with that perception. Perception and feeling arise together. So not only do I say to myself, "flower," I have a feeling of pleasantness, contentment, joy when I see a beautiful flower. Now, at that point, that's what happens to the Buddha. There's no distinction there between us and somebody who's liberated.

But then something kicks in which says, "I want that." And the first thing comes: want, want. There's something else comes into the equation that wants the flower. And then there comes the identity: "I want it." So it's the reverse of our language. "I want" is actually "I, want, want, I"—that's how it happens psychologically. And at that point of identification, the next moment is very difficult to stop because psychically it's very empowered. And that moment is the grasping of the flower and ripping it off and running away with it. And that action is the becoming.

So becoming, that action, is the same as the empowerment of will, is the same as kamma, is the same as an action. So these three words really are all pointing to the same thing: will, how we use the will, how you actually empower something.

Now this is really very important to understand because don't confuse an idea which is laced with wanting—that we call a desire or a craving—with an act of kamma. Nothing's happened. So if you, for instance, walk into the kitchen and you think, "I'll have a cup of tea," that's still at the level of desire. But as soon as you move even a nanometre of a finger towards the pot, you're empowering that desire, and in empowering that desire, you're reinforcing your conditioning.

So the will is the engine or the empowerment of something. The kamma refers to the act that has been done, and the *bhāva* refers to the self that continues its self-existence through this action. Every time it does something, it says, "Oh, it's me, me again! I've done that, so I must exist." So those three things meld together in any action, whether we are thinking or whether we're speaking or whether we're doing in the world.

We're always acting. I mean, it's only when you sleep that you're not actually acting in some way. And the same can be said of the Buddha. So the Buddha woke up and he thought, "Well, it's time to do a bit of meditation." He did it for his own benefit, he said,

and for the benefit of others—that's a good example. And then he thought, "Well, I'm a bit hungry now," so he'd get his bowl together and go off on *piṇḍapāta*. Somebody would stop him on the way and say, "How are you doing, Bhagavan?" And he'd say, "Oh, I'm doing fine, how are you?" Little pleasantries—he wasn't above the ordinary little pleasantries of life. On his alms round, people might ask him in and have a chat with him about the Dharma or something. So he's acting perfectly normal in the world, like we do, but somehow we end up suffering, or we end up unsatisfied, or we end up unfortunate.

So there's something special. The Abhidhamma tried to create a new word to describe the actions of a Buddha, and they came up with this word *kriyā*, which means functional. And what they're trying to point to is the fact that although the Buddha was making decisions, although he was acting, there was no perpetuation of this delusion of "I," this self.

Now, we were talking yesterday about how we can come out of these levels of self—the body self, the emotional self, the thought self—into just this quite distinct feeling of a self-awareness. And it's the association with that, of course, when it dives into these other parts of our becoming or existence, as it dives into the thought life and emotions and whatnot, it manifests through that. This self manifests as somebody who speaks, somebody who feels, somebody who does.

So that process there is the core of the kamma that the Buddha's talking about when he's talking about that which is going to liberate us from suffering or otherwise. And all he says is: if you do something harmful to others or to yourself, harm will come of it. And if you do good, good will come of it.

Now, as we say, on the outside of things, it doesn't often turn out that way. You do something good and somebody hates you for it. You do something bad and you get away with it. But internally, it's not possible. That's the point. Internally, when we do something unwholesome, it creates an unwholesome habit within us which creates a turbulence and often finds its way out in speech, in actions. And eventually, of course, you do get some comeback. I mean, if you're an angry sort of person, in the end you do begin to wonder why nobody's calling around and nobody makes a phone call. Whereas if you've got onto the idea that if you're very open and kind and generous, people hang around. You think, "Oh, that's a good thing." Of course, it becomes a big ego thing then, but at least it tends to be a bit happier than being a grump.

So internally, we're creating this internal world. And that's exactly what we come across when we sit in meditation. This is our creation. Nobody's created the inner world for us. This has all been done by our act of will.

Now, of course, there are catalysts. If you happen to be with people who are coarse and vile and all that, it's very difficult to maintain a purity of mind. But if you're with people who are good, generally speaking, then it's easier. All the surroundings, all the culture that we're in, people we meet, the jobs we do—all that, sure, they're there as catalysts. But it's always an internal process which is actually creating this internal psychology.

And that's, at first, that might come as a bit of a disappointment because it's always nice to blame somebody else for our problems and try and get compensation. But there's also a liberation there because obviously if my happiness is dependent on you—fundamentally dependent on you—and you're making me unhappy, then I don't have much of a choice. I've just got to get rid of you, and I've got to get rid of anybody whom I don't like. But if I am the one who's creating my own unhappiness, then this means that it's just me I've got to work with. It's just me that I have to find the answer within.

And that comes as a liberation really, because it liberates me from the world out there and throws me back into myself and makes me want to inquire as to what am I doing? What decisions am I making? What thought patterns am I constantly reproducing to create this unhappiness?

Even if I'm doing things which are actually making me very happy—helping people and art and going to the cinema and all the things that we can do to generate a sense of well-being and goodness within us—even that can become painful when the stuff begins to disappear or when we fall ill.

I have a friend at the moment who likes to walk and he likes the country, likes to visit places. And through an accident, he's gone and done something to his Achilles heel or something. He has to hobble. And whenever I am in contact with him, I can see he's very frustrated with it. He's very angry, and the NHS should do something about this. And he's finding it very difficult because it's curtailed his happiness, which was dependent on all this stuff.

So when we really want to know about the kamma—the real kamma, which is to do with our liberation from suffering—then it's always inward. It's always looking inward to see exactly what it is we're doing that creates the world that we are living in. And that's the real thing we have to grasp.

It doesn't deny the reality of the outside world. It doesn't deny the reality of other people and so on and so forth. But what it does say is that the world I'm living in is the world I'm creating. Even at the basic level of the senses. If I'm colourblind, then I see things that other people don't see. And I see the universe differently, just even at that level.

And when we recognise that, then we actually take on that responsibility, the full responsibility of trying to do something about our situation. And that's why we're all here. We wouldn't be here if we hadn't taken on that responsibility.

Now, one thing that might be said is, "Oh, well, this is very selfish. It's very self-centred. What about love and other people and all that?" Well, of course, what we begin to realise is that there is this interconnectedness. Before, when we were reacting to people, we were reacting from some self-centredness, some ego-centred—I don't particularly like using the word ego, but there we are—some selfishness, only self-regard, so that everything has to fit in with what I want, how the world fits in with me. As we begin to undermine that, of course, the magic is that suddenly you begin to experience other people and the world and nature differently because this kink in the way we're looking at things has been taken away, slowly being drained out of the system.

I had a lovely incident once in a car with my parents. My mother was Italian and she could get a little bit depressed at times. And we were driving along and we hit this beautiful scenery. And I can't remember whether it was my brother in the car, but somebody said, "Oh, look at that, Mum, isn't it beautiful?" And she says, "Oh, what? I can't see anything." And my father said, "Oh, cheer up, Rosa." And she said, "You shut up." It was a brilliant little party. And here you've got someone who completely mishears something because of her own grumpiness. She did cheer up, by the way.

So you get this: every time you're in a mood, every time a mood comes up, it puts a colouring on the world, puts a colouring on the world around you, and you can't stop that.

Now that's the second thing that we come to about this psychology, about the real kamma which is to do with our liberation. Past conditioning, you can't just get rid of. You can't just say, "Well, I'm not going to be angry anymore, full stop," and it just doesn't work.

What we realise is that this conditioning is not me. This is the funny thing. It's not me, it's not mine. I've created it through these acts of will, but it's not me, it's not mine. It has its own engine, it has its own power, it has its own obstinacy. And so what we find ourselves having to do is to sit patiently, to endure all the conditionings that we've created through these delusional thinkings, delusional actions, delusional speech.

And that's really the hard bit of the practice. I mean, that in a sense is why the Buddha calls them hindrances, because were it not for those, we would very quickly attain liberation, we would attain enlightenment. What's actually dragging us down, making it very difficult for us, is our past conditions.

So this demands this patient endurance that the Buddha often talks about. The highest form of ascetic practice is patience. And when we sit and we are allowing the kamma, the *vipāka*—this is the product of past actions, the product of past decisions, the product of past kamma—we are allowing it to manifest in its fullness and beginning to die out. And then we are changing that energy into its opposite through the practice of goodwill.

And even if we don't do the practice of goodwill as a specific practice, the fact that energy which has manifested as anger or grudges or depression—all that stuff—that naturally manifests outwardly begins to manifest rather in a positive way. Because remember, what's changing in this process is our view of things, and our view of things changes our relationship to things. And therefore just by sitting with whatever negative states come up within us, even that is part of the process of changing our understanding of the world.

And finally, you could say we come to that deep delusion which is creating all this obvious kamma, which is the initial mistake that's also our fundamental kamma in terms of liberation: this fundamental mistake of seeking happiness in the sensual world. And by sensual world we mean the whole caboodle, we mean the whole cosmos, we mean other people, we mean everything that can be felt, sensed. That's the sensual world.

And by seeking real happiness there, confusing pleasure, confusing the joys of life—see, the Buddha's not saying he doesn't enjoy life, he enjoys life, he enjoys the things that life brings—but confusing that with real happiness is where the problem lies. And that's why I say, when your meditation is very calm and you've got just a general peaceful state, and you are in that place of the observer, you just ask yourself, "What is the state of the observer?"

And just to finish off: when Sāriputta is asked, "You talk about the bliss of Nibbāna, you talk about the joy of Nibbāna, but there's no emotions in Nibbāna," he says, "Well, it's the very absence of emotions which is the bliss of Nibbāna." You get your head around that one.

The law of kamma, really, in terms of the spiritual laws, which is the fifth law. So we had the physical laws, the biological laws, the psychic laws, psychological laws. The law of kamma, which is the law of morality, really—the ethics. And finally, we have this law of the spiritual laws, in which we can include our *vipassanā*, the Four Noble Truths, and so forth. And so kamma holds this specific place of action.

Every time we do something, we have to remind ourselves that it's going to have some effect. So we have to be very careful not to get neurotic about it. And remember that an act of attention is an act of intention. That's really, really important to grasp. As soon as you attend to something, there's an act of intention there.

So every time you're sitting on a bus and you're passing these billboards and you look at them, and you attend to them, it's affecting you. It's a passive state. We're not doing it on purpose, but it's going in, because to put your attention somewhere demands an act of intention.

So our aim is to keep pointing our attention at what is wholesome, what is good for us. And eventually, I'm sure you've all felt a turning, a movement within yourself.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your *kamma* and achieve full liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 127

The Karma Concerning Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44 min

> *In this dharma talk from a 2011 Gaia House retreat, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's understanding of karma as it relates to liberation rather than mere mechanical cause-and-effect. He begins with the fundamental 'this-that' law of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), explaining how we live in a subjective bubble of consciousness where our reactions of wanting and aversion create our own psychological suffering.*
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> *The talk clarifies that while physical, biological, and social laws affect us, the karma of liberation specifically concerns our ethical responses to experience. Through detailed exploration of the perceptual process, Bhante shows how we create internal atmospheres of happiness or misery based on our relationship to what arises in consciousness. Nobody can cause us psychological pain - we generate it through our own reactions.*
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> *The path to liberation involves two concurrent processes: purification of the heart through patient forbearance with arising mental states, and the development of insight (vipassanā) that sees through the illusion of permanent selfhood. By recognizing impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā), we gradually exhaust our karmic conditioning and return to our original purity, but now with wisdom. This understanding transforms meditation from mere therapy into a spiritual practice leading toward the vicinity of Nibbāna.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

I just wanted to talk about *kamma* and give you, well for those of you who haven't come across the teachings of the Buddha on that, just to lay the platform and then see, as we were saying this morning, how we create suffering for ourselves, how we bring it to an end, and how full liberation is possible, even in this lifetime.

The fundamental law that exists beneath everything is what is termed as the this-that law, and it's basically a law of causality. So we're all, I think, fairly familiar with the idea of cause and effect: that something in the past is causing something in the present, and if something doesn't happen in the past, something doesn't happen in the present.

If you don't turn up for work, you don't get your wages. Simple as that. So there's both commissions, things that we do, and omissions, things that we don't do, which have an effect.

But the Buddha also pointed out things happen now because things happen now. It's not only a contingency, a sort of connectedness with the past, but an absolute connectedness with the present. So here we have so many people in this room who have all come from a past. You all started off from a different place this morning, you all made your way here, and because that happened I'm able to give this talk. If it hadn't happened, I'd have had a day off. So if you can think of streams of effects coming from the past and meeting, you see.

Now, if everything were just cause and effect from the past, it would suggest a repetitive universe, because where would you find your creativity? Everything is determined. And that would lead us to a morality of fate: things happen, it's in the will of God and all that sort of understanding.

On the other hand, if it were just things happening at present without any connection to the past, you would presume it'd be chaotic because there'd be no order. And that would lead you to a morality where nothing mattered. What does it matter? In the Buddha's time, there was one teacher who said if you went down to one side of the Ganges, murdering, stealing, creating havoc, and came up the other side with great acts of compassion and love, it wouldn't make a blind bit of difference. Sort of an antinomian world.

So somehow, the Buddha said there was a connection between these two. And every moment has both: a connection with the past and an immediate connection with the present. So there's that feeling of an interconnectedness, a sort of contingency, a touching at all sorts of different levels, and we'll come to that in a bit. So if you carry that in your mind, what it's telling us is this: we don't know what's going to happen. We live in a world where we think we know because generally speaking this room will be here next year, but if you look at that law you really don't know what's going to happen next because we don't know what's going to meet at this particular point in time. And that leads us, if you really contemplate that, that leads us to fear.

Because one thing the self wants is security. It wants to know exactly what's happening next year, because I want to take my holidays in the south of England. And the weather forecast is a wonderful attempt at trying to determine what happens. I mean, I look it up because of the retreats. And it's amazing. Seven days before, they're predict-

ing rain on a particular day. And then the next day, it's not going to be rain. And then it is going to be rain. And it's like, forget it. So one thing they really can predict is what's happening now. Which is a blessing, because they have satellites.

So you've got this edge, this knife edge of existence. See, no past, no future, this knife edge of existence. And when we can begin to recognize that, we get what's known as the wisdom of insecurity. Which means that you never presume. You never live on a presumption. You never live on an expectation. And this takes away a certain delusiveness about our lives.

Nobody expected this financial crisis. And it's affected lots of people and continues to do so. And there was just this blind expectation that the money would just keep growing. Where else could it go? It was quite obvious to everybody. And that edge of insecurity, like we did this morning, is always making us look at the ending of things.

Remember, the self doesn't like insecurity. So it always presumes something's going to come up. Something's always going to be there when you jump out of the plane. Like every moment there's always going to be something. Now that sense of insecurity brings us to the fear of death. And if you look at all fear, it's the fear of death. Death here meaning endings. Death meaning loss. Death meaning that which we cannot control.

Now, paradoxically, the more we're at home with the feelings of those fear, the fear of death, coming to that wisdom of insecurity, the fears disappear, which means that we can live more fully in the present moment. That's the benefit you get of losing fear. Remember, fear has this way of stopping us doing things. It manifests sometimes in doubt, fear of failure. So you don't go into a relationship just in case it's not going to work out. You don't take a job just in case, you see. It becomes a barrier.

So if you want to hit fear right, if you want to put your head right in the mouth of the lion, see, go towards death. And when the fear of death has become undermined, all fear becomes undermined. Now I'm saying this especially because I have a retreat on death. And you're all welcome. That's just a little plug. All the retreats are full, but not this one. And I can't understand why. It's such an interesting subject.

So we've got that basic law: this and that. Things coming from the past, things happening in the present. A sense of unknowability about the future. Not in control.

Now, when it comes to our actions, when it comes to what happens to us, there are five laws. And this gets rid of these very mechanical ideas about *kamma*. That if something happens to you, it's because you did something in your past life, or you did something wrong somewhere in your existence and it's taken eons to come round but it's finally smacked you in the back of the head.

So the first law is what's known as the law of heat, which is basically the physical laws. So the physical laws include for us all the laws of physics, of geology, of chemistry. And it's one set of laws. I mean, if you look at where we're living, you've got all these so-called subatomic laws that govern the subatomic world. You've got the physical chemical laws on top of that. You've got the biological laws on top of that. You've got the psychological laws. And then you've got the social laws. And all these laws are somehow interconnected, but they're quite different. And we live within, I mean, I'm sure there are more, and we live within that mass of contingency. All these things are touching us.

So, for instance, when this terrible flood happened in Pakistan, was that because in their past lives they drowned so many people? So making that sort of very mechanical idea of *kamma* is something the Buddha would not have agreed to. He said there are all sorts of reasons why things happen. So there's your first thing. And it may not be, something might not be caused by you at all, but your *kamma*, and we'll come back to this, is how you react to it. That's your *kamma*.

Then there are the laws of biology. So that's another area where you get awful, really painful statements where if somebody's born with a disease, a hereditary disease, then it's presumed that sometime in their past life they must have done something terrible. If you remember, what was his name, the manager of England? Very unfortunate. I'm not so sure he meant it but they made him mean it. And that really isn't again what the Buddha says because as we know now the body we end up with is caused by who knows what, hundreds of generations who've misbehaved. How could I possibly? So you end up with this body because of other reasons, but how you relate to your body, ah, that's something else.

So you've got all the biological law. Then you have the laws of psychology, which we're fairly familiar about. Most people are familiar with those. How the mind works. Without going into too much detail, I'll come back to this towards the end because I think this is a crucial understanding. We are dependent upon our senses to the world that we create. And in Buddhist understanding, we can't stop information coming in at the level of the senses. It just comes to us. And inwardly, things come up as memories, as emotional states. And all these are conditioned by past behavior or by the world.

Then we have this reaction, this relationship to what is actually happening. And it's this relationship we've been looking at: wanting, not wanting. We create an attitude towards things. And again that comes from a deeper misunderstanding as to who we are. This sense of self.

Then there comes the law of *kamma*. Now the law of *kamma* is to do with our well-being or lack of it. And then finally there are the spiritual laws which are to do with the practices that we're doing, the *vipassanā* practice. Even the law of *kamma* itself is part of the spiritual laws. So when you look at all that you see *kamma* is only this little slot and it's to do with in a very wide sense of that term our ethical behavior.

So now, if we now look at how we create the world, and this is the Buddhist psychology for those of you who know dependent origination. So there's contact. Now, this point of contact is entirely determined by the sense base. So if a person is colour blind they simply won't see the world the way most other people do. But even our seeing is particular to us. So although we all might be looking at the colour blue we'll all see something ever so slightly different. And I have a very crude tool to express that. I can only say blue. I mean, it's obvious when it's light blue or navy blue, but if it's a blue that we all agree with, it's very difficult to express to each other the shade or the type of blue that we're actually seeing. So there's a point where words can't communicate.

Now this blue that I'm creating is within my mind. And as we know from our own psychology, this picture of blue is then thrown out onto what I'm looking at. So when you've seen these... whenever we look at a picture, we see the full frame, the full picture. But when the eye is actually photographed, as a film, it's actually moving all over the place, scanning completely. And we're completely unaware of that. Just picking up little pixels. And that's what the Buddha means by contact, you see. And it comes into the mind, into the brain-mind complex. Because the brain and mind in Buddhism are two different energies. They're not the same. It comes into there and it begins to be perceived. It begins to put on a sort of screen. And this screen then is magically deposited back onto the object. This we already know from our own psychology.

So can you see that even at the level of something so tangible, something that we see, something that we touch, it's all being internally created. It's all being internally created. So this world that we're living in is just a bubble around me. The world I'm living in is a bubble around me. Outside that bubble the world doesn't exist. And this world that I'm living in is not the same as yours. It may be very similar but it's not the same. And you can't enter my world, and I can't enter yours. I mean, that's why we have art, isn't it? Because I have an experience and I want to express it to you I find a medium through which I can get that maybe I can get that across.

In the Buddha's time there wouldn't have made a distinction between the world and consciousness. The world and self. Self, consciousness and the world were all the same thing. It was understood at that time that the world was always completely subjective. In our own culture, we objectified it. I think it crystallised somewhere around the 18th century, our enlightenment. I'll say that twice. Our enlightenment. And in objectifying the world like that, it gave us control. We began to control it. And that's where we get our wonderful science and technology. But then we entered into this delusion that actually we are all experiencing an objective world. And I believe only now neurobiology is telling us that in fact we're not. We are experiencing the world as we can only experience it. There is no objective world. There isn't one.

When I say there isn't one, I mean from experience. It doesn't mean to say that when we all leave this room, this building disappears. That would be an idealism, wouldn't it? To be is to be perceived. But you can see the logic in that. You'll find that certain schools of Buddhism towards the Mahāyāna actually came to that form of idealism. But the Buddha didn't go that far to say that everything is created through mind. The Buddha is very grounded in what is it that we can know, rather than speculate on.

So, for instance, with, if I remember rightly, the philosopher Berkeley, Bishop Berkeley, when he argued very strongly that to be is to be perceived, and this is what we're actually saying, in a sense. When he was asked, how does everything else exist when you can't perceive it? Well, it's in the mind of God. See? That's an easy way out, that. So the Buddha, having declared that there wasn't a God, is stuck. The Buddha is very careful not to enter into anything which is of that sort of transcendental sort. That sort of thinking he doesn't go there. So he doesn't ask all those questions that we'd love to ask like why am I here? He's only answering the question: you are here, how is it you're suffering?

So if we can now imagine that we are in this bubble and the edges of this bubble are in contact with things that come towards it. And it has these senses. It sees, it touches, it smells, it tastes, and so on. At that point, we bring this stuff in, and it's perceived.

Now, there's something happens inside the bubble, which is our relationship to what we're experiencing. And that relationship is either we're saying to ourselves, this is fantastic. And you want to hold it. And you want to develop it. You want to find out how you can get more of it. Or you're saying, I don't want this. And you're trying to push it out. Trying to push it out of the bubble. Trying to get rid of it. So this duality of wanting and not wanting, of acquiring, of being in conflict, and of course the other side of aver-

sion is that if something's in the bubble that we don't like, then of course try and run from it. Try and turn away from it, find a little hiding place. Or stamp it down somewhere. Put it under a heavy load.

And every time we react that way, we create a conditioning. This conditioning is simply, when this comes, this is the way I react. So if I find that somebody has given me a chocolate, and I put it on my mouth and I think, ooh, that's very nice. And there comes this relationship with this piece of chocolate. I then think to myself, that would be nice to have some more of that. And all the time, by doing that, I'm creating a relationship with chocolate. Now, this relationship with chocolate is creating within me an atmosphere. This atmosphere I call happiness. And it's not the chocolate so much that I want, is it? But the happiness that it creates.

So now this happiness is dependent on chocolate. It's crazy. And if I look at all my happinesses they're always dependent on something over which I can't control. The worst is other human beings. You cannot trust another human being. They're generally horrible.

And worse than that, they die. I mean, just when you've got this love relationship the person disappears. So that relationship we have with things coming in, you see, with things beautiful coming in, that are creating this beautiful internal space, always have the potential of making us unhappy.

But there's more, because we now become addicted to what's there, and we start doing things to really maintain it. And that leads us to immoral action, meaning that we're doing things which are actually harmful. Harmful to ourselves and harmful to others. I can't remember his name now, but a bank robber in America was asked, why does he rob banks? And he said, because that's where the money is. See? What's the problem? That's where the money is. So you see, we get into such a corner that money means happiness and it's in banks. So what's the problem? You don't get it.

On the other side you've got all the negativity. So something comes into consciousness, we don't like it and we form a negativity, a resistance. If that discomfort is too much, then we start moving towards an antagonism. The aversion moves into a real irritation, an anger, a frustration. It moves into a deep-seated hate. Very quickly you can move across the whole gamut of human horror in just relating wrongly to something that we're perceiving is actually causing me unhappiness.

So, this comes in, you see. Somebody says something like, you know, you stupid bald-headed monk. Possibly. You see, these words have stopped here, you see. And the emotion, the hatred, stopped here. It didn't come any further. That's the surface of my

bubble, you see. But, of course, I'm incensed. I mean, how could anybody say that to me? So I take it in and these words are there within my within, they're resonating around and my reaction is I'm getting angry, and then I say to myself hold on I'm a monk I better not do that I suffer down, cool down, cool down, and then while I'm having a cup of tea, all these are coming from past experiences to anything that I experience as being unpleasant. And remember the unpleasantness stops here at the feeling level. The unpleasantness I feel within me is being caused by me as a reaction.

So I find that my anger is making me unhappy and if I can't do anything about my anger I push it down, I get depressed, all that sort of stuff. And if the enemy, if I experience the enemy as too great, then it begins to build up this internal atmosphere of fear. And that fear I find very difficult to be with. I push it away, I run away, I do anything just to get away from this outer stimulus.

But remember, all these outer stimuli are not actually creating this business inside. That's the crucial understanding. Nobody can cause us psychological pain. You have to really sort of grasp that point. Nobody can cause us psychological pain. It's all being produced by us. Discomfort, yes, I mean, I hear the words, I hear that, but that's nothing. The internal stuff that comes up, the turmoil, the addictions, all that, are caused by me, inside. See?

So here we have this little bubble, you see, and I'm creating this world inside and that's what the Buddha means by karma when it comes to the karma of liberation. This is the karma he's talking about. This is where his whole teaching is centred on how to turn this internal life into a way which brings us towards happiness. Now that happiness is not, remember, to be confused with *Nibbāna*, may come to that at the end. It's basically trying to clear up our ethical lives.

Because what we find is that my relationship to the world is always being governed by liking, not liking, wanting, not wanting. The liking not liking is a given you can't stop that, that's part of the perceptual process. We can see when something tastes and it doesn't taste nice. That's not a problem. It's the not wanting it, it's the internal reaction which is causing the internal atmosphere of disgust or whatever it is. Once you've clicked into that, you see first of all it's incredibly disappointing. Because from now on you can't blame anybody. Nobody can make you unhappy. I mean, it's not right, is it? On the other hand, it now gives you total power over your own well-being. When you realise that actually your well-being is not determined by what's outside of it.

So, let's take this financial crisis. Many people are going to suffer. Suffer loss of job, loss of income, all that sort of stuff. That's bad enough in itself. But there then comes the internal suffering of the loss of status, the loss of what money would normally bring,

and the anger about that, and then the depression about that. All that is not directly caused by the situation, by this person's internal reaction to it. And society would generally say that was justified.

So everybody now feels that unless they are angry about the situation, something's wrong. Something's wrong with them. They ought to be. They ought to go out and kill somebody. That's the only way to really bring justice to the world. So what the society is telling us is that there's no way that you can be at peace with the situation as it is. Right?

But when you realize that that isn't necessary, that all that internal anger and all that stuff isn't necessary, then what that does is liberate you. It liberates you to actually work with the situation as it is. The other negativity is drawing energy, it's drawing energy away from you and it's throwing it out, more bad energy, whereas when something happens like this financial crisis, if it only stops at the point of economic pain, it is pain, then there's this liberation inside, there's this freedom inside to work with the situation.

That doesn't mean to say that we don't go and hang some of these bankers. There's got to be justice somewhere. What I'm saying is that the internal horror is not necessary here. I mean, the whole point of a judge is that he doesn't get angry. He's not supposed to sit up there and say, you, how could you do that? I'll have you hanged. He's supposed to remain calm, not get involved with the emotions of the lawyers. He's not supposed to be confused by their clever arguments. He's not supposed to be prejudiced and all that. So we expect these very clear attitudes of a judge. But we don't expect it of ourselves.

So now, once we've clicked into that understanding that we are creating our own suffering, then that's a liberation for us. Okay, that's a liberation for us. Because now we can take control. And what we find is, of course, that working with it is not easy. Because as soon as we sit, the old habits, these old habits have enormous momentum, right? But the other thing about recognizing that the outside world or what is happening to us on the outside is not the direct cause, the catalyst, but it's not a direct cause for our internal stuff. It means that...

When we realise that we are in control of this life, it gives us the ability to work with it internally. And that's what the meditation is about.

So the actual anger we feel towards something, or the fear we feel towards something, is, I would say, never appropriate. Never appropriate. Because what there is, is a conditioning of anger, is a conditioning of fear and all the rest of it, and a conditioning of excitement and lust and all that sort of stuff. So there's this conditioning, okay? It's like a potential. And if you imagine it like a balloon, and something that pinpricks that

balloon, all the energy in that balloon wants to go out through that little hole. And that's what happens when something makes us angry. When something makes us despair. When something makes us excited. All that conditioning wants to express itself through that particular stimulus.

And that's where we also begin to recognize that the stimulus is not actually causing the mental states. It's coming from somewhere else. Then we're left with the karmic results. I'm using karma here to mean the way we normally use it, like your consequences. The actual word karma means an action and the proper word for result is *vipāka*. We'll put that aside. Karma, our karma here now, we can't get rid of it. You can't just stick it in the bin and they'll take it away from us. It's just stuck within the whole machination of our psyche. And when you open up to yourself, that's what you come in contact with. These very strong habitual tendencies. The Buddha called them tendencies.

In a sense, it's almost like, you know, we would talk about the subconscious, but it's not a thing. It's not as though it exists. It's more in the sense of a potential. A bit more like a computer which holds these programs, but you've got to press a certain command and it manifests. And the awful thing is that we don't know how much of this stuff there is down there. We don't know ourselves in that way.

So every time something happens and the stuff comes up, some anger, some depression, some anxiety, whatever it is, you see, that's an opportunity for us to just sit quietly with it, be with it, and allow it to express itself. And that's what we begin to recognize is the process of healing. That's where we recognize that this is the way that the heart has to empty itself, right? These things have to be, in a sense, liberated. And they have to be done into consciousness.

So that is what he means by suffering our karma. This is the quality of patience. Patient forbearance. Which he says is the highest form of ascetic practice. And we learn it mainly within ourselves. Never mind other people and kids. But we learn it by sitting within ourselves and bearing with the stuff that's coming up.

Now, if it were just that, it might be just an ordinary psychotherapy, you know, just an ordinary healing process. But what turns it into a spiritual process is beginning to recognize the mechanisms by which it's created, which is this wanting-not-wanting. And to know that if we just stay with the wanting-not-wanting and let it drain its energy, that particular conditioning is exhausting itself. That's how it comes to an end. And when we look at it as something which is impermanent, something which is constantly changing, it helps us to disidentify with it. And that position of the observer is a transcendent position.

See, consider that. When you've found that observation post within yourself, everything that you would normally say was me has now become an object that you're experiencing, but it's still an object. So the pain in the knee, the pain in the back, the emotional state that arises, a thought, thoughts are difficult to catch, images, images, they're all objects to be seen. So there's something which is separated out from that process and found a perch, you see.

Now when you find that perch in yourself and you're very clearly within yourself, the observer, just try to reflect on that state. What's it like being that rather than these emotional selves and physical selves? And the Buddha says that those who are mindful, and that's what he's talking about, those who are mindful are in the presence of Nibbāna. They're in the vicinity of Nibbāna. So we're actually very close to some sort of deep recognition.

Now as we sit in that place of the observer and that very strong sense of self is there, the self-awareness, the self-awareness. Normally speaking, people might say, well, this is my sense of presence. This is what I am. But it's an object also, isn't it? You're aware of this sense of self. So you can't be. Anything you're aware of, you can't be. But even so, that place that we found is crucial in terms of our investigation.

And the investigation that the Buddha presents to us is not finding out what there is, but finding out what we're not. So it's a bit like walking backwards to the edge of a cliff. We can only hope that when we fall off, something wonderful is awaiting us. If you turn around on that sense of self, all you get is more senses of self. So there comes a point where that sense of self disappears just because of the one-pointedness of your attention.

Now it happens, actually, in a wrong way when we get lost in DVDs and films and conversations. When you are watching a DVD, you wake up, don't you? An hour or two later. Where have you been? There's been no sense of self. Time has disappeared. Sense of self has disappeared. It's a bit like sleep too. You fall asleep and then you wake up and here I am. The bell goes and you wake up. I'm here again. Where were you? Where were you in sleep?

That loss of identity into what we're doing unfortunately has been empowered by the desire for happiness. Seeking happiness in films. Seeking happiness in food, in conversation, seeking happiness. So all we do is engender a conditioning of seeking that happiness there. That's the karma. That's what Buddha talks about, his karma. And all we're trying to do is to re-enter the world, re-enter situations, but without that sense of wanting, not wanting.

So, this is where that crucial point on the dependent origination, the weird dependent origination, the crucial point of intention, right, comes into its own. Because intention is the beginning of karma. And intention arises, and at that point, all it is, is some idea laced with desire. Nothing's been activated. Yeah? Tea. See? Nothing yet. Just comes up tea. But before I know it, I'm making tea. I've drunk it and I don't even know I've done it.

So it's just like tea. If I can be awake at that moment, I can feel the power of that energy coming up from this balloon we talked about. It's got a little hole. It wants to get up there through tea. Desire. If we can stay there and just let it go, let that energy go, something has been deflated from that balloon. Something's gone out of that balloon. That's the process of purification. In seeing that, we also recognize that we created it and we can uncreate it. That's where our choice lies. That's where our power lies, is to allow things to exhaust themselves and return the heart back to its original purity.

So there are these two lines in terms of the process of liberation. There's the process of purification of the heart which we've been talking about, which is recognising that we are creating our own internal suffering, our own psychological pain, and that there are ways in which we can allow this to exhaust itself and this leads us to purity. It began at a point of innocence. There's a point, in we can't say in time but there's a point beneath our existence which is innocence, meaning we never meant to do harm. Then there comes this crucial moment of an identity.

So, coming into every being, like the baby being born, what do they identify with? You identify with your body. You identify with your emotions, with your thought patterns. You identify with people around you. This identity congregates around a concept that we call the self. And this self is now trying to manipulate the world to make itself happy. So, so long as we see these characteristics, we're undermining this fundamental mistake of who we actually are.

And so that process is a dual process, quite clear in the Buddha's teaching, of insight, driven by this *vipassanā*, began with ignorance, a simple not knowing, not culpable, but then there was the mistake of identity. And this identity of self, seeking happiness in the world, creates misery and mayhem. Wakes up to its horror and begins the process of devolution.

As it processes devolution it begins to see where the problem lies and it's in these three characteristics. The role of desire, seeing permanence where there's impermanence and seeing substantiality, self, where there isn't any. And it leads us to insights which undermine this mistake and takes us back to our original position, but this time with wisdom so we know who we are. The Buddha knows who he is and he's not a self.

Running concurrent with that is the product of that delusion which is all the karmic stuff we've got inside. That's the karma of liberation. Through the process of purifying the heart it becomes immaculate. So it began at the point of innocence, created havoc and mayhem, goes back on the process and returns to purity.

That's why, in the end, and it's not possible, psychologically speaking, for human beings not to become fully liberated. He never states that. That's me. Because if he'd have said that, he'd have been called an eternalist. But when you see this psychology, you see it's not possible for sentient beings not eventually to liberate themselves. And the goal which is driving that liberation is suffering, is what the Buddha said. What drives us to the end of suffering is suffering itself. And so these two are always concurrent: with every purification of the heart there arises some insight; with every insight there arises some purification of the heart.

So that's why when a person becomes liberated he is also ethically beautiful. It would have been disappointing if the Buddha had been caught shoplifting.

I can only hope my words have not added to your confusion, would have clarified the situation, and that with your constant endeavour you will attain full liberation sooner rather than later. And you're supposed to say, "Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu."

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

And if you don't say that, you see, I get depressed. There are scriptures where the listeners delighted in the words of the Buddha, and there are others where they were silent.

So I have to bring it to an end there, because we have to get out by five o'clock.

CHAPTER 128

Dignity and the Qualities of a Ruler

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this exploration, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines dignity not as aristocratic bearing, but as inner strength arising from spiritual cultivation. Drawing from the ten qualities of a ruler found in the Jātaka tales, he demonstrates how these virtues—generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), altruism, honesty, kindness (mettā), self-discipline, non-anger, non-violence (ahiṃsā), patience (khanti), and uprightness—develop our character and create genuine self-worth.*
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> *The talk beautifully connects these classical virtues to daily practice, showing how generosity undermines self-clinging, how restraint of the senses protects the mind from unwholesome conditioning, and how patience becomes "the greatest form of ascetic practice." Bhante emphasizes that dignity comes not from external status but from treading a worthwhile spiritual path, creating an unshakeable sense of self-worth that external circumstances cannot disturb.*
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> *With characteristic warmth and practical wisdom, he addresses challenging topics like righteous anger, the distinction between force and violence, and the cultivation of forbearance in meditation and relationships. This teaching offers profound guidance for developing the inner strength and noble bearing that naturally arise from committed spiritual practice.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa three times. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I thought we'd talk a little bit tonight about those qualities that we can develop in daily life. Just a little bit of reading I've done over these past couple of weeks, I've come across this word dignity. I hadn't really thought about dignity. It's not a common or garden word, is it? Dignity. We associate it really with emperors, don't we? Royalty, aristocracy. They act in a dignified way. In the past they did. Well, I think they did. And unfortunately, it moves towards snobbery. So that's not the best of examples, really.

But we do talk about dignified behaviour, don't we? You'll hear it, say, people at funerals. Somebody who's been heavily grieved, they behave in a dignified way. People under duress or in court, falsely accused or even properly accused, act in a dignified manner. It's a certain bearing, isn't it? But that bearing is out of certain qualities that we have in us.

I don't know how many of you saw the YouTube, wasn't it, of Saddam Hussein's execution? Anybody see that? No, I did. Later on I'm going to talk about what we shouldn't be putting in our minds. And you have to say he was surrounded by jackals. Just the cruelty of it. I mean, one or two were trying to give him instructions on what was going to happen, but the rest were taunting him. And within all that he seemed to maintain, well, you could talk about a dignified bearing. That cool stillness that comes when you know you're going to die. I don't know, but I was quite amazed by that. And his daughter then wrote or spoke saying that she was proud of her father in the way that he faced his death. Charles I, he got his head chopped off. So he had a certain dignity, and then he lost his head.

But the inner strength comes up when we're under duress, doesn't it? We find an inner strength which maintains a dignified posture. In a more scriptural incident, when Bimbisara, who was the king of Magadha—that was the kingdom that was really growing in those days around Varanasi on the Ganges—when he saw the Buddha doing alms round, it seems he was taken by his bearing, by the dignified way he was doing it. And it struck him to such an extent that he actually wanted to know who that monk was. And that's how the friendship was first formed.

It is self-worth, isn't it? To feel worthy of yourself, to have a dignified bearing. I mean, that can slip into pride, but there must be some self-worthiness in the word dignity because you feel good about yourself. I think that's a deeper goodness that we feel about ourselves if we see our lives in terms of a spiritual life, in terms of spiritual growth. It puts it into a much greater context, doesn't it?

If one has a bearing because of status that's put upon one, that society puts upon you—certain kudos, having a job and all that—then that bearing, that dignity that comes with it in any job really, is dependent on the job. But if our sense of worthiness comes from living a spiritual life, then really nothing that happens on the outside can upset that feeling of self-worthiness. That's a theory.

This life, in terms of all these religions, is seen as a training ground, isn't it? It's not a matter of being perfect in order to have dignity. It's not a matter of having arrived. It's the sense of worthiness you get from treading a worthwhile path in life.

And I came across these ten factors, these ten qualities of a king in the scriptures. I think they're commentarial. They come in the *Jātaka*, the tales of the Buddha's past lives. But they give us something to work around. And the one that seems to always head the list is generosity, charity.

It's interesting that when he was attacked by the great doubt just before he became awakened—and it's put mythologically as Māra attacked him—the great doubt was: Who was he? Who was he amongst all human beings to think that would be an end to suffering? Who was he to have that presumption that he could find the end of suffering? It was a real deep self-doubt. And he touches the earth, you see, and the goddess arises to say that the quality that he's perfected which allows him to have this presumption, inverted commas, is the perfection of generosity. Which means that he's not doing it just for himself. He sees himself already connected to the whole of humanity, the whole mass of suffering. And that's what gives him his sense of self-worth back, to go back into the meditation. And after that, he makes the break. It's very interesting.

That's a quality of not getting flustered, not getting angry when we lose something or when somebody takes something. There's the Zen story of the monk who was sitting there and a thief came and took all his possessions, even his clothes, left him naked in the moonlight. And he looked up at the moon and he said, if only I could have given him this beautiful moon, if only I could have given him the moon. See, that's generosity, isn't it? And it's that spirit of not just giving when you're asked, but letting go, actually giving when you don't feel you want to give. And to do that, there has to be that connection, doesn't it, to the other.

The more generous we are, the more it mirrors back to us our lack of possessiveness. And when we're generous, we let go of something that we could have used for ourselves, either our wealth or our time for ourselves. Just to do that is to let go of the self. I mean, that's the practice of undermining the self-view in action. This business of undermining self isn't just an act of insight, like when we observe things as separate and all that. It manifests in our virtues. And generosity, the Buddha puts it always at the head of the list because the more generous we are, the more we have to renounce. And that process of renunciation is the spiritual path. It doesn't mean to say that you have to actually let go of everything, but you have to have that attitude with everything of being able to let go of it should occasion demand. Develop that attitude.

Sometimes you can play little mental games with that. Take the most treasured thing you have and then think about it being stolen, being lost. Would it be that important? Can you let go of something treasured? Just do a mental game with it. Because often our fears are unfounded. We think that if we lose this or lose our jobs or lose that, the world crashes around us. But if you just turn it into a little story within the mind, using the creativity of the mind to set up a certain situation, a thought experiment, then you see there's nothing. Even to the point of losing your life, you can try that one. It's a bit heavy.

Last year I went to Auschwitz and just heroic stories around all those years of that camp. Just heroic tales of people who act out of kindness and get severely punished or killed. Killed from it. And you go there and when you go to the place, it grounds all the stories that you've read. And it has quite an effect on you, I think anyway. So even to the point of being able to let go of our lives, that's the ultimate generous act, isn't it? Our greater gift. So this generosity digs deep. It's a profound virtue, isn't it?

Then the next one is morality. Here we can take it more in the sense of not doing what is wrong. That's keeping the basic precepts. Often just to resist the old temptations. Most of us have given up killing and thieving. We're not talking about gross behaviour. But just those little things, little greeds, little aversions. And just to work with them, just to see them as ways of developing that strength of resisting temptations.

Even at these more subtle levels where we can't talk about good and evil, we're talking about unwholesomeness, we're talking about unskilful behaviour. Just attachments to a certain routine in our lives, or the morning cup of tea that's difficult. And just to play little games with ourselves, like what happens if I don't have my Lapsang Souchong this morning? Go through the hell of letting go. And what that does is it builds up your will, your will to resist what is unwholesome for us.

And the idea is, of course, that you keep doing it until you've lost a real connection with it. And then when you go back into it to... Is that a door, is it? There we are. The cats have come. What to do? The cats have arrived. Fancy.

So you try going back into the routine, see how it is? Well, it's a case of breaking routine, you know. The practice is really getting rid of habits and getting other habits. But as soon as we get a habit, we tend to hold on to it. Even meditation becomes a sort of obsessive thing, can become an obsessive thing. You think your day will collapse if you don't do your 40 minutes. It's a case of tempting oneself to let go of things that we've become attached to. And it strengthens our character, strengthens the will, you see, the ability to resist temptations.

It's not necessarily anything which is negative. You were talking about the morning cup of tea. There's actually nothing wrong with the morning cup of tea. It's a question of breaking the habit because you become attached to that particular behaviour. Because the self comforts itself in little ways. In Christian literature they're called imperfections. But the purpose of that is again to renounce. And in so doing, you create a certain inner strength. This is the point. And I think that's one of these things about when you see somebody who has dignity, to use that word—an inner strength. And it comes from being able to resist what is harmful.

On the positive side, the next one is altruism. If you remember that verse from the *Dhammapada*, "Cease from evil, do good, purify the heart. This is the path, this is the ancient path." This is the path before the Buddha, this is an ancient path. Altruism, putting somebody else before yourself, or at least equal to yourself. When the situation calls for it, you're not saying that there isn't a situation where you're caring for yourself. The Buddha is clear about that. We do things for ourselves, for others, both for ourselves and others. But this altruism is really an expression of that interconnectedness, isn't it? Interdependency, recognizing that. So when we offer our service, we offer our wealth, put ourselves out for somebody.

There's a lovely passage, the scripture I think is called the Anuruddhas, but there's three *arahats*, three fully enlightened monks living together and they live, hopefully not surprisingly, peacefully. And the Buddha asks Anuruddha, how is it you live peacefully? And he says, well, when I get up in the morning, I say to myself, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do? I think that only works if the others are saying the same thing. If they're not, I think you'll be messed about. But at least that attitude, you see, just putting aside what I want to do and let's see what the others want to do. You're not getting rid of what you want. You're just putting it aside for a moment so that you can hear what other people want to do, which is not our normal position. We prefer that other people know what we want to do. And then we bargain. Then we have to negotiate. It's coming around it from the other way and hopefully people respond. That's altruism.

Honesty. I think honesty is a great part of this bearing, dignified bearing. Truthfulness with ourselves, truthfulness with others, not to trick people, not to exaggerate. I mean, that comes close to humility, really, in its proper sense of knowing who we are. It comes in all sorts of ways, honesty. To do one's due at work, to give of one's best at work in business.

See, it's funny, on a retreat there was somebody, he was into buying and selling. And he says he can go to a house and somebody will show him something who hasn't seen the antiques road show. And he'll get out of them that they don't really know it's worth. So now he can really say, well, look, I'll give you 20 quid for that. I'll take it off your hands for 20 quid. And he always sells it for a couple of thousand. And I could see he was confused because this was business. This is what you did in business. But there was some doubt in his mind because he asked, you see. I mean, what about that, you see. And before I could say something, I just let it rest in the air, just what the others say. And there was another businessman there, you see. And of course, he went on about integrity. They blew that one out of the water, really. But it's funny how you can confuse yourself by having different aims. So this person's aim, of course, was to make money.

It's not his fault the other person didn't know it was worth. They should have known better. It's not his problem, is it? So that sense of integrity, I think, is part of the quality of dignity.

The other one is kindness. Gentleness. We often translate *mettā* as loving kindness, don't we? Kindness. The quality of being kind. Being gentle. It's a lovely word, isn't it? Kind. In a sense, the word itself tells us what it is. I was always amused by gentleman. I mean, I know in old literature they say gentle woman, but it's very rarely used. It's the man who's about to be gentle. A gentleman. Interesting, eh?

Kindness, yeah. Often it's to see the fragility in others, isn't it? To see their weaker part and not to take advantage of that or hammer them for it. Often you can ask people to do things which they wouldn't do if it weren't asked with kindness. A gentleness about the way we speak to people. It even extends to objects.

How do you close the fridge door? It's just treating everything with that sort of—when I used to go up to the Zen monastery in Throstle Nest, just here in Hexham, North England anyway, they used to insist that we treat even these cracked bits of pottery as if they were Ming vases, you know. Everything had to be treated with that gracious kindness. And you bow to everything out of gratitude. Bow to the room, bow to the door, doorknob. And at first it's all a game and then you realise, no, no, this is what it's about really. Kindness. Remember, these are the qualities that are supposed to be of a king.

Self-control, self-discipline. It's not a word we particularly like, discipline. It reminds us of Victoriana and the old ways. But the interesting thing is that the word discipline actually comes from the word to learn, a disciple, following the advice of a teacher. On this course, for instance, the schedule was your discipline. It set out the rotor of the day. So one tries to follow that particular rotor as best as you can, no matter how you feel or don't feel.

So this discipline is coming from some other centre. It's not coming from feelings. It's not coming from whether you want to do it or not in that feeling way, whether you're bored or not. So one has the discipline, the inner strength, the control to actually do what you've set yourself, like resolution.

There was a robbery in Bishop's Castle just down the road. It's a close town to us. And I was in the builder's merchant's yard. And they said there'd been a robbery in Bishop's Castle. I said, oh. I said, why?

I don't know why I said why. It's not a silly question, really. It's like the bank robber who was asked, why does he rob the banks? He said, because that's where the money is. And he answered me, he said, just lack of discipline, he said, and walked off. Lack of discipline. And that's the way he saw it, lack of discipline. All this bad behavior is all lack of discipline.

I think you have to be careful that it doesn't become a disciplinarian. I mean, that's where we associate discipline with. It's more cajoling. It's more returning to that kindness, to that self-cajoling, to actually do what we'd set ourselves to do.

And when it comes to self-control of the senses, the Buddha's hot on that. Because everything that comes into the senses is conditioning you. An act of attention is an act of intention. Intention is an act of will.

I always like to refer to that example of these billboards on roads. In the 80s, I was living in Birmingham, and there was obviously some doubt about the efficacy of these billboards, whether they had any worth in terms of advertising. So the owners of the billboards advertised this really funny perfume from Australia. I had a funny name, which I've forgotten. Did you ever see it? And it had a hat on top of the bottle with corks. It was really funny. And the amount of inquiries about this proved without a shadow of a doubt that these billboards worked. I can't remember the name, but I definitely remember the shape of the product. Anyway, it didn't exist. And so there you are on the bus, you see, and you're just lazily looking out and you're catching these bubbles. And it's coming in, it's coming in.

So the Buddha always talks about restraint of the sense spaces. Restraint of the sense spaces. So we have to be careful about what we put into our heads. What we see on TV, stuff we read. It's not a matter of guarding ourselves against, shall we say, bad news, but it's just being, you know, just recognizing that what we put into the mind has a conditioning effect, that's all. Now remember that these conditionings are not everlasting. It's not as though, oh my God, I'm about to go to the Avicii Hell or something. It's a case of recognizing that, you know, if there is a negative conditioning in the mind, then we're going to have to suffer, stay with, be patient with that conditioning coming out and exhausting itself. That's all.

But once we put a conditioning in the mind to which we're attracted, then there'll always be that, every time you put it in, you're reinforcing that conditioning. That's the problem. So it becomes more and more difficult not to resist, more and more difficult to resist the actual temptation. So this self-control is absolutely necessary for the spiritual life.

See, the Buddha, all these rules that we have, it's 227 on the last count, so many of them were to restrain the monastics from doing things. I mean, one of them was food. In the early times, the monks and nuns could go out anytime with their bowl, collect a bit of food, go back, have a munch. There was no rule as such. And then the lay people started to complain. They said, look, your monks are turning up any time of the day. And they're all rushing off with all this food, you see. So then he made this rule. He said, from now on, you have to go out in the morning and you can only go out once and you have to eat it by midday.

And the monks didn't like that. They rebelled. They said, no, we're not having that. But eventually they came to their senses and agreed to have it. And there were proper arguments like, well, everybody cooks the best food in the evening. You go in the morning, are you going to get his rice? But he wouldn't have it. I can't forgive him.

And you get things like that. There was once he saw monks coming away from a village or something with loads and loads of cloth. So he thought, well, that's not right, the robes. Because by that time, obviously, they'd become well-established in society and were getting lots of presents from there, lots of gifts from lay people. So he himself went out and seemingly tried to eat. At night, he just put his, he had his two robes. And then as the night got a bit cool, he put another robe on top of it. And in the early morning, the coldest hour, you need another robe. So he made a rule. You can only have three robes. The one, the under robe, the over robe, and the last two he put as one. You have to stitch them together. And that's it.

So all these little rules that we have, these institutional rules, are there really to restrain the senses. That's the idea, you see. So it's up to you, self-restraint, like, you know, retail therapy. That's a bad one. Nipping in, getting a pair of shoes you don't really need. I mean, if you gave one away, if you gave one blouse away or one skirt away or one pair of trousers away and then bought another one, there might be something. I mean, like the wardrobes get bigger and bigger.

Then there's non-anger. Oh, this is a very strange area for us. This question comes up often, this righteous anger. I mean, it's there within Christianity, depending on how you interpret the actions of Christ, you know, when he overturns the table. I mean, I don't see why he should necessarily have done it with anger. He could have done it in a dignified way, couldn't he? You know, just get out of here and just tip the table over. You know what I mean? Like it's, but they always think that he's all rage, like berserk. Which doesn't, I don't know, I don't know. Anyway, but this idea of righteous anger, you know.

Anger itself, anger itself always has an underbelly of cowardice. Because you'll only manifest anger to somebody you can beat. If the person's bigger than you, you're not going to get angry. If the person is more powerful than you, you're going to keep it cool because you don't want to lose your job or you don't want to get flung into jail or something. So that anger always rests on the presumption that you'll win the battle. It's not a very strong position to come from, I think.

And we have this little thing about being aggressive and being assertive. Now, being assertive, as far as I can see, is far more wise than being aggressive. And to be assertive, you don't have to be angry. And I think that's part of this dignity. It means that you're coming from the place of truthfulness. And the strength of that.

In, you know, today we have this problem of these wars. I had, just last week actually, was it last week? Or the week before? Anyway, I gave a talk to Her Majesty's Armed Forces on this business of non-violence. And I think the problem... The problem lies around this word force and violence, you see. I mean, force, I think, can be assertive. Violence is always aggressive. So force, so violence is force with something added. Violence is forced with anger, with revenge, with all that.

Now, of course, it's difficult if you're a soldier and your mate's just got shot, not to have a sense of redress or something after the enemy. But I don't think it has to be like that. I mean... People who are sent out by the UN, peacekeepers. Even the Yiddish army does that, doesn't it? It was out in Israel, wasn't it? On the border, wasn't it? Their job isn't to kill, but to protect. It's a very different attitude, isn't it? So I think that distinction between force and violence is important. In a sense, you've got to have a righteous cause. That's your other problem.

But leaving aside armed conflict, I think when we feel angry, it's this business of sublimation. That's another word I... They very rarely come across, but it's there within a lot of Christian literature in the old days. I just don't hear it, to sublimate. Now, I believe I'm right in saying, do correct me if I'm wrong, that in science, in chemistry, to sublimate means that when something sublimates, it moves from a solid directly into an air. What's the word I'm looking for?

Gas. Thank you. It doesn't pass through the fluid state. So, somehow to, I mean anger is energy, that's all it is, it's energy. And to somehow turn the energy around and use it for benefit, you know, it can really give you a lot of force. But somehow you've got to take the turbulence out of it. Somehow you've got to drop down to the righteousness of your cause, and to work from a base of equanimity, then it becomes very powerful, I think.

Your energy, the person's ability to stand their ground without anger has a lot more force than somebody jumping up and down. It's that inner strength, people feel it. I mean, all these people that we praise these days, like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, all these people all have that. That's one thing they've really developed, isn't it? Not to get angry when they're being attacked, but to maintain that dignified presence and the strength that comes from it. It's very difficult.

So that's this non-anger, that was non-anger. And then, funnily enough, they put non-violence underneath non-anger as the ninth, I think it's the ninth, is it? No, it's halfway down the list. They put non-violence, harmlessness. I think that's what they mean by that, harmlessness. So that's the positive sense is caring for all living beings, coming from a sense of care. Non-anger, non-violence, they're very close really, aren't they?

And then you always get this in the list, forbearance, patience. The Buddha talks about it as being the greatest form of ascetic practice. You don't have to line the bed of nails to get the best form of ascetic practice. Just be patient with what you're doing. Enormously annoying. Remember old Frank Sinatra, I did it my way. I took the blows. Frank took the blows.

And the idea that you can't win all battles. You're not going to win all your battles whether it's at work or in the family or anything. Somehow there has to be a point where you say well I'll give into that, you know. Even I mean there's only myself and a manager I said at Satipaṭṭhāna and sometimes I think, no, it's not worth it. Let that one go. And it's good practice because then you give up trying to win battles. You know, like, you've got to always try to be the one who gets their way. And just to lose a few, it's easy then, you see. I mean, we're not talking about immoral things. Just, you know, doing it my way.

When I was a kid, I remember a raging argument between my mother and father over polishing shoes. My father having been in the armed forces, you put the polish on with the cloth and then you brush it up with the brush, bloody obvious. And my mother who wasn't trained in these fine arts just used the brush all the way through. The thing was the shoe came up just as bright anyway, but that wasn't the point.

So it's a case of, you know, being able to give in a bit sometimes. I think that's a quality of patience, forbearance. And in meditation, of course, we are, we're learning that, you see. You want the heart to be other than it is. But you can't, you have to let it go. If it feels a bit depressed or a bit anxious or whatever, as soon as you try to get the better of it, then you're in conflict. Somehow we have to be able to let the heart do its thing and

yet put our energy into the way we ought to be behaving at the present time. And then deal with the heart later. You don't put yourself in conflict with your own heart, with your own mind, or with your body, heaven's sake.

You know, like pushing the body to do things when it's not capable. See these, you know, when somebody comes to meditation for the first time and they have to judge, you know, from the body, but generally speaking, once you've reached 30, you know, forget the cross-leg business. It's just, like, it's not worth the pain. I mean, I did it, but I mean, looking back at that guy, it could have been easier. Sat there with a raging bull in your knees.

And these little things are so annoying. It's amazing how they can make us so angry about the smallest of things. And that's because remember these emotions aren't caused by the object. These emotions are like a big bag full of rubbish, a big bag full of air, stinky air and all you got to do is put a pinprick and all of it wants to get out through there like a balloon. So we've got all this vast reservoir of anger and self-righteousness and all that sort of stuff. And somebody's only got to, you know, just in the right time at the right place. Put a little punch in there and you go, boom! It's completely inappropriate.

It's funny how we gauge when that's possible. If somebody comes into the house who's a stranger or a visitor, they knock something over, it's, oh, no problem. But if the kid does it, you go for a second. If the dog does it, you hang him. And that sort of inappropriate behaviour that we have, you know, just to have patience with things, just develop that patience with things.

And then finally there's this business of uprightness. And I presume that's the word for dignity really, just the courage to stand up for what one thinks is right. What's that lovely phrase, I always forget it, about, you know, if people of right mind stood up for something, then these bad things wouldn't happen. If they only spoke their mind and stood up for what was right. Have I touched upon anybody's memory? One of these beautiful quotes. Can you remember the quote? It's to that meaning, isn't it? No, no, that's about... No, it's a different matter. It's a lovely thing, actually.

For evil to flourish, it is only necessary that good men stay silent. That's the one. Sorry. Yes, and I want to write that down afterwards. Could you say that again, Ruthie? For evil to flourish. For evil to flourish, it is only necessary for good men to stay silent. Yeah, see? There may be one or two words out of place, but that is definitely what it is.

That's it, that's it, you see. So that's that sort of uprightness.

So these qualities, I mean we haven't discussed other qualities that we'll I'll go into a little bit tomorrow, the mettā karuṇā, the loving kindness, the compassion, the joy. These are just things that were listed as qualities of a king.

Who's list is that? Well, it comes from the Jātaka tales, it comes from later commentarial stuff.

But it's not what the Buddha himself said? Not in so many words, I think, as far as I can see. I don't have my books, so I can't really say for absolutely sure.

Is it presented as being from the Buddha or from his advice? Well, usually the Jātakas are, but they're not canonical. They're not put into the canon as such. But they'll do, won't they? As a list, as a starter.

It occurs to me actually, very interesting, that list is absolutely vital, given the nature of kings in those days, and in fact even today, because without a list like that, you've got mayhem, because the king is all-powerful. So it's a way of tempering the king's power to assign him all these qualities.

That's right. In the scriptures you have this figure of the world-conquering monarch, who seems to me to be like the alter ego of the Buddha. So remember when he was born, the wise man said he would either be a world-conquering monarch or a fully self-enlightened being. And so you have this figure coming up through the scriptures of this very good, very gracious king who does everything right according to the model law and everything's very peaceful.

And if you think about it, supposing we just took the first precept. Everybody on this earth took the first precept not to kill another human being. I mean... Just that, never mind the rest of it. It is totally revolutionary, the idea that a king shouldn't kill another human being. That would essentially forbid warfare, wouldn't it?

Yeah. That's right. But by this time, he's conquered everything anyway. He's rolled his wheel. He doesn't have any opposition, really.

There is a nice little scripture where there's lots of robbery and the kingdom goes into disarray because the king has not kept these rules. The advice is given by the Buddha in a previous life that he ought to stop inequality of payment—there shouldn't be anybody who's poor.

It says when you get rid of poverty, then the stealing stops and the hatred stops and the killing will stop. That's an interesting ancient idea.

So anyway, that's it. This gives us some ideas how we can walk around in a dignified fashion from now on. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance.

May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 129

Practice in Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h09

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how Buddhist practice addresses our emotional life and psychological suffering. He explores the fundamental problem of identity and attachment, showing how we mistakenly seek happiness in the external world, creating dependencies that inevitably lead to suffering when circumstances change. Drawing on the Buddha's teaching that all mental states are self-created rather than caused by external objects, Bhante demonstrates how insight meditation (vipassanā) reveals the process by which we manufacture our own emotional reactions. He outlines the precise psychological mechanism: from initial contact through feeling, perception, and identification, to the moment where consciousness becomes entangled in saṅkhāra (mental formations). The talk emphasizes that healing occurs not through suppression or indulgence, but through mindful awareness that allows unwholesome states to exhaust themselves naturally. Bhante explains how this practice gradually relocates our sense of self from body-consciousness and emotional identification to the position of observer, leading to moments of liberation where there is no suffering. He concludes with practical guidance for integrating this understanding into daily life, including the simple yet powerful practice of 'stopping' to return to present-moment awareness.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

What I'm hoping to do is to explain the Buddha's model as to how the heart heals itself. When I say heart, when I use heart during this talk, I'm simply talking about your emotional life — your moods and emotions both the pleasant and the unpleasant.

This is an area where you'll find that Buddhist practice and modern psychotherapy meet, and I don't see a problem with that. But what sometimes seems to happen is that I get a feeling from some books I read that the Buddha didn't actually tackle this problem of our emotional imbalances. So I just wanted to make it as plain as I can this evening how we create the problems and how we undo them.

The fundamental problem lies with identity — as to who we are. Unsurprisingly, we think of ourselves as human beings. Unfortunately, having thought of ourselves as human beings on this particular planet and all that, our deepest desire to seek happiness,

to be at peace, is sought within the world. And by making our happinesses and our joys dependent upon the world, it means that when the world forsakes us then we have all the downside of that particular commitment.

For instance, if I am attached to my morning cup of tea and I wake up one morning and there is no tea, this is potentially a disaster — one feels dreadful. That dreadfulness is caused because of that conditioning within me which creates morning happiness dependent on English breakfast tea.

At a more solid level of suffering, if my happiness is dependent on my job, on what I do, if I find myself identifying with that, when I lose my job, then I go through an identity crisis. I don't know who I am in society because that's how I've defined myself.

At an even deeper level, there's our relationship to other people, especially those close to us. And when they let us down, either because they leave us or they die, then I'm stuck with this dreadful pain in the heart, this grief, which I mistakenly think is actually the measure of my love, but actually is a measure of my attachment to that person. Because one good thing about love is that it can let go. It can allow the person to do what they want to do. But the grief we feel with the loss is a measure of how much we are dependent on that person for my personal happiness.

And the worst time comes when it's time for me to die. Because then, however I've defined myself looks pretty unsteady. And that's why death comes to us as a great shock. Because death is saying, whoever you thought you are, you're not. If you've defined yourself by your body — I am this body — then for sure we're in for a shock. If you define yourself as, I am this person, I do these things in society, I have these relationships, all this 'I' and how we relate to the 'I', what death does is it undermines all those particular self-definitions and dependencies.

So you can see that somewhere deep within our psyche there's a mistake happening. And it's through this mistake that we form this relationship to the world we live in. And it's not just identity, it's also possession. So we form a certain safety, a safety net around us by possessing things, possessing money. We feel much safer if there's a hundred thousand pounds in the bank and not ten. So all that psychology around possession, around identity, is a cause of suffering for us. Because when we lose it, we feel grief. When we can't get it, we feel frustrated. And we're constantly afraid we might lose it. So there's always this underlying anxiety around those things that we're dependent on for our particular happinesses. Hence, the huge insurance industry.

From that position, we formulate a dual relationship to the world. We either want something or we don't want it. It's extraordinarily simple. If I like something, if I enjoy something, I try to hold on to it. I try to keep it. I try to develop it. If I don't like it, I try to get rid of it. If I don't like somebody, I try to take out a contract on that person and just get rid of them, thinking that in so doing, I should make myself happier. It might be a relief, but unfortunately it doesn't tackle the fundamental problem.

So this is the core of our problem. It's one to do with the question, who am I? And the essential purpose of insight meditation is really to solve that particular question. But you can see that from these wrong relationships we formulate, we've begun to develop a whole emotional life, a whole attitudinal life which is creating this inner atmosphere that I feel that often I have to suffer.

What it's done is it's created habitual patterns within the psyche. For those of you who know the words, these are what's referred to as your *saṅkhāra*. They're things that are put together. They're accumulations. Well, that's not quite the right word. They are inclinations towards a certain type of behavior. So, if one is in the habit of nipping into Costa coffee for an Americano, and you do it two or three times, it's very difficult to pass Costa coffee without slipping into your Americano. What is it that generates that compulsive behavior? And it is what we call these patterns, these habits.

I personally like them to these programs on a computer. If you look at your computer, where do these programs exist? But you press a button and something appears on the screen. Something takes something out of potential and just manufactures it. It's an electrical mechanical habit that if you press this button, the word program appears. Isn't that similar to us? We have these buttons, and if they're pressed, we behave in a certain way. And this behavior in a certain way manifests the strength of that habit. And often our response to things tends to be inappropriate.

Now, here's a really crucial point that the Buddha points to in our psychology. Whatever we experience, whether it's the seeing or the hearing, whatever is done to us by somebody else, whether it's something beautiful or something not so beautiful, what I feel, what I experience as my response or reaction to that is not caused by the object. The happiness that I feel when I enter Costa Coffee for an Americano is not caused by the Americano coffee. All the Americano coffee can do is put a nice taste on my tongue. That's the contact I have with an Americano. That's all. The rest is completely manufactured from within my own psyche.

All the perception of coffee, all the comparison as to whether this coffee is better than Nero's coffee, the whole mentation is all to do with me inside myself and has nothing to do with the coffee that's been poured or the original coffee beans that were

picked. The coffee beans do not cause my mental state. And my seeking happiness in coffee has produced in me a reaction, a learnt reaction to coffee. That whenever I smell coffee or taste coffee, happiness immediately arises. And I think that the coffee is making me happy. But it's not. It's my attitude to the coffee that has created this happiness.

If it were not so, if it were that the outside world were creating my mental states, in terms of the process of liberation I would find myself in an impossible condition. Because in order to make myself happy, this coffee has to be exactly the sort of coffee that I need to make myself happy because this coffee is making me happy. If this person makes me sad, the only way I can get rid of my sadness or my anger is to get rid of this person. That's very simple. But if all my mentation, if all my emotional life, if all my thoughts are self-caused, then I should be able to undo those processes within me which are unwholesome and continue to develop those processes in me which are wholesome. And there are wholesome processes to be developed. Love, compassion, joy, all the beautiful states that we can develop as human beings.

So now, if I perceive that there's something in me, an attitude, a misunderstanding — well I should say a misunderstanding which creates an attitude, which formulates a relationship, which formulates certain habits, is all conditioned on something that is happening within me — then how am I going to undo the processes within me which I see as being unwholesome, painful, and to develop those processes in me which I see as actually beneficial and beautiful.

Here, the Buddha's teaching is again very clear to talk about the practice of *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā* simply means insight or just the ability to find a position within ourselves where we can begin to see these misunderstandings and how they're working and what the trigger is that is actually causing the problem.

In the process, we turn inwards. There's an introspection. But it's not just the looking. It's a direct contact with what we're actually feeling. It's a direct experience of our emotional life. I'm only here talking about emotions. I'm not talking about the body with pain or anything like that. I'm just talking about the emotional life. And as I sit quietly with myself and an emotion arises or a mood arises or a mental state we can call it, say something has happened during the day and I'm feeling irritated and I'm sitting with this irritation — what do I notice happens? Suddenly I find myself in an argument with this person, creating an inner scenario where I'm finally getting my own back. This little scenario.

When I wake up from that I acknowledge — so this is the practice of *vipassanā*. I acknowledge that there is anger. I'm not at all concerned with the narrative because the narrative is only a metaphor for the actual presenting emotion. The emotion is looking

for some way of indulging itself and it's just stuck here as a volition, a wanting to be angry. It's got an energy in it that wants to go out and grab an object and murder it. So there's your anger. And because you're sitting still and the person whom you're angry with is not there, it wants to create a scenario where it can be fulfilling its particular wishes. And it does this through thought.

Something has happened psychologically to move that emotional state into a thought pattern. Something's happened there. And it happens so quickly that we don't actually see what that process is. So the Buddha is very clear. First of all, there arises a consciousness, a knowing, which contacts that emotional state. It's the bare consciousness. And it feels that consciousness as it knows that consciousness as a feeling. And it perceives it at the same time. All this is happening in microseconds. And it also determines whether it's likable or unlikable.

Now, funnily enough, we've trained ourselves to see anger as something quite likable. Think about it. Because when you express your anger, there's a feeling of relief. So this anger now is grasped hold of as a desire to fulfill the desire of the anger, the desire within the anger itself, which is to express itself. And that desire then becomes identified. We identify with that desire so it becomes 'I want.' And as soon as that happens, there's another moment where we put energy into it. And that's the will. And as soon as we energize that process, we're into a whole set of thinking. That's what's happened. And you can, if you're quick enough and you're still enough, sit there and watch the beginning of that process.

In the vipassanā, what we realize is that when I'm sitting still and just feeling the anger objectively, but feeling it, there's no suffering. When I'm aware of the wanting to indulge the anger, there's no suffering. As soon as I identify with it, suffering arises. There's a magical moment where the awareness, the mindfulness, consciousness — for a better word, I prefer the word knowing — loses itself in the process of becoming angry. And at that point, where we put the energy into that process of mentation, we're becoming. This is what the Buddha means by becoming. Moment to moment, we recreate the sense of self. And unwittingly, every time we do that, we empower that particular habit, that particular condition. So we get more and more. There's more and more potential for anger.

Now, you'll all have experienced, I'm sure, sometime in the morning, somebody saying to you something which has slightly upset you. Nothing much. Didn't like it. And then you've put it to the side. You're not going to be bothered by it. That's the way they are. And then you go and have a cup of tea. And the mind works on it while you're eating lunch. By the time you get home, it's raging. You have to take an aspirin. This person

only insulted you once, but you've repeated it. We've repeated it to ourselves a thousand times so that the original little bit of being miffed becomes this huge raging anger, which can only now be revenged by some heinous crime. All that process was never even originally caused by the person who spoke those cold words to us. Even the original reaction of being miffed was self-caused. And we've created this whole world of burning anger all within ourselves and mistakenly determined that they're the problem.

The whole of the Buddhist psychology brings us back into the realization that it is me that's creating my world. Even as we walked into this church, this hall, it's not a denial that the hall exists when we're not here. There is a reality of this hall at a certain level. But all of us would have had a different experience of this hall. We're all living in a different hall, actually, even from what we can see. I'm completely — I'm living in a very different hall from you people, I can assure you. I can see the organ for a start. So everything that I experience is being manufactured by my own psyche. I like the word psyche because for me it joins the whole mental process of emotions and thoughts, which actually work together. It's us that split the two. The one is always firing off the other.

Now, here's the magic of the Buddha's teaching. Having developed a certain conditioning — we'll stick with anger — having developed a certain conditioning of anger, how are we going to get rid of it? Having now developed it to such a delicate degree, how do we now undo this process? If we try and undo it, we find ourselves in contradiction with the given state. We're trying to get rid of anger. Have you ever tried to do that? What you end up doing is pushing it away. What you end up doing is suppressing it and worse, you end up repressing it because no energy can get rid of this turbulence. All you do is you put bad energy into bad energy because you don't want that.

What we discover is by allowing the anger to manifest, it cures itself. It blows itself out. Now when I say allow the anger to manifest, I'm not talking about allowing it to form thought patterns. We've already understood that to be a way in which it indulges and grows. What I'm saying is, what the Buddha says is, sit with it, feel it, allow it to manifest. And — this is the tricky bit — see how you're relating to this anger, to this feeling. Does fear arise? You observe the fear. Do you think it's going to overtake you? You observe that fear. Are you averse to it? Is there some judgmental thing going on? 'I shouldn't be feeling angry. I'm a bad person because I feel angry.' You observe that. That's also another conditioning. Is there a desire to enter into the anger and to develop it? You notice that. But all the time you're centering on the feeling that's arising in the body from this conditioning of anger.

Now, you're neither suppressing it, you're not repressing it, and you're not developing it. So what can this energy do? It can only exhaust itself. And that's how the heart heals itself. You don't actually have to do anything. Once you've understood that process, that's where your attention goes — just to being with the presenting state. Whether it's anger, depression, anxiety, despair, guilt, shame, the whole gamut of human misery. All you need to do is attend to it. And you can even flavor the attending with kindness, so that you're allowing it to come up and blow away.

Now, when it comes to those things that we enjoy, all the indulgences of life, perhaps we have a problem with overeating, it's the same thing. When you sit with those particular desires, you find that they're not actually so pleasant. They're only pleasant when they're being gratified. To be in a state of thirst is not pleasant.

It's only pleasant because we know when we drink the Coca-Cola, I'm going to feel great. So to sit with those desires that we see are over the top and to allow them also to express themselves is to take away that conditioning. And what is that conditioning based on? It's based on this fundamental misunderstanding that happiness is to be found in the sensual world.

So now, if we cannot find happiness, and if we can undo all the unwholesome conditionings that we've got, what is it that we're actually moving towards? What's the process of insight meditation or Buddhist practice? You don't have to do it sitting, it's just an attitude, it's a way of living. Where's it actually taking us?

What we find is that by accessing this position of the observer, we are constantly relocating ourselves to a different centre. When we are a body consciousness, when we think we are the body, then it's very difficult to find any objectivity to the greed and the desires of the body. How do you experience yourself as a body self? Well, I mean, as very young children, I think that's what we are, up to about the age of three or something, I don't know. But when you trap your finger in a door, for that one moment, you are a body. All you are is that searing pain. There's no objectivity, one becomes the pain. That's a wonderful example of being the body.

When you're now finding this position of observing the body, feeling the sensations of the body, you've relocated out of the body. You're not the body because it's an object. You can't—the object and the subject can't be the same. You're feeling the body as an object, the sensations.

Keeping more to our emotional state: when do we become emotions? When are we our emotions? When we lose ourselves. When you go into a rage. When you say to yourself, "I am depressed" and you're completely lost in it. When you're anxious and

you panic and you run around panicked. Then you become an emotional self. There's no distinction between the self and the mental state it finds itself in. But through this process, one relocates to a different position of the observer, the feeler, the one who knows, the experiencer.

And it's the same with thought, except that thought and images are even quicker than both the body with its sensations and the heart with its emotions. And so it's even harder to actually be objective about thought. But at least when we come out of thought, we can see where it is that we've been caught, that what it is we've been caught up in. And by doing so, we relocate to a different position. This relocation is the observer.

And especially in meditation, but also in daily life, just sitting in a park and just watching, finding yourself in that position, you see, is a point where you discover that there's no suffering. Now, this isn't the final point, because obviously there's still a sense of self. If there's a sense of self, you see, then there must be something that knows the self. Right? So even that can't be the final position.

How do we experience, you might say, nirvanic or perfectly happy moments in our daily life? If you put a good intention in your mind to do something and you give yourself to the action, it may be that at first you're aware of yourself doing something and then suddenly there's a loss of that self-awareness. You might have experienced it doing the garden or a job that you're really interested in. But you have to be careful because every time you lose yourself in something, if the intention is not pure, then it'll be developing these other types of habits which causes problems. But if the intention is pure, it'll be developing a habit which is supporting our liberation. Liberation from what? Liberation from suffering. That's all the Buddha's teaching.

And when we enter into those states where we lose a sense of self, when we come out, we also recognize that we've lost a sense of time. Time and self arise together. And we also notice when we reflect on that moment, that in the moment where there was no self and no time, we were perfectly happy.

So even in daily life, even in ordinary daily life, we can begin to move towards those places which we know are going to develop this inner sense of peace and happiness, which is not dependent on the outside world. Not dependent on another person. And that, you could say, is the process of liberation. Liberation from the fetter, from the shackles of belief that the world can produce pure happiness.

Now, having said that, does that deny the pleasures and joys of life? Not at all. All it's saying is your relationship to them are of a different order. You neither want to possess them, nor do you identify with them. You simply enjoy them. And the distinction between enjoying something and indulging is extremely subtle and difficult to get. But in that distinction lies our happiness or lack of it.

And when it comes to those things that we find painful—when we can sit with patience with them and bear with them in a patient way, we find actually there's no suffering. So all this suffering, dissatisfaction, unsatisfactoriness, discomfort, all that stuff has never been caused by the world, by anybody else. It's all been caused within ourselves by a wrong understanding. And that wrong understanding is undermined through right practice and through the insights that we get by investigating ourselves through these processes of insight meditation.

And if we do this with a certain commitment, a certain diligence, then hopefully we should see some benefit and it's always possible that we may be fully liberated even in this lifetime. But I do not want to give you false hope. But at least we can over a period of time feel that there's a sense of deep meaningfulness about our existence. That's where the real joy lies. That we're not here for some peculiar reason. That there is a deep meaningfulness to our lives. And that our lives are becoming more at ease. More at ease. That we're more contented. We tend to want peace. We tend more to want what we get than always get what we want. And we find ourselves living in harmony with the way things are, even when the way things are are not particularly pleasant. But you work with them in such a way that they don't cause the old depressions and anxieties of the past. And these are the telltale signs that we're actually moving spiritually.

And the other great benefit of spiritual progress is the feeling, the growing feeling of connectedness with other beings, with other people. And that manifests in our kindness and gentleness, in our easy forgiveness, in our compassion, in our sympathetic joy. And when you feel these things are growing within you, these are the signs to you that you're moving spiritually.

So with those words of hope, I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

So if there's any questions, brickbats...

You're finding what one writer calls very happily an observation post within yourself. It's like a bird watcher. They find this place, a hide. They actually call it a hide, where you can just view the birds and you never interfere, you're just watching. By the end of it, you can write your bestseller.

So it's the same. As you find this position in yourself of that little hide of this observation point, which we feel, generally speaking, as the observer, the feeler, the knower, the witness, there's all sorts of words for it, then you begin to understand how your psyche is working. It's all birds. Everything.

And what you're trying to see is the connectedness of things and how the one arises dependent on something else. So you put something sweet on your tongue and your heart becomes happy. You put something sour on your tongue or something not tasty and you can feel a bit depressed. The mind comes up, the mind remembers something from the past and suddenly you feel sad, some nostalgia arising. The mind remembers, and you feel it in the body. You feel heavy or you feel whatever. You remember something from the past and it makes you laugh and your body reacts with lovely sensations.

Bless you.

Well, that's right. How many of you have actually done any insight practice? How many have not done insight practice of Vipassana? So you'll be coming tomorrow.

Metta practice is just developing the heart of goodwill. It's often translated as loving kindness, but that in a sense gives it a feel which is not necessary because you can practice goodwill when you feel horrible. You can still send out goodwill messages when you don't feel very well.

Sometimes if you're watching, so we say, suppose you're watching a cat. I've just been at a house where there's a cat. And at first you might just watch it in a sort of disinterested way, and then somehow you form a relationship with it, you're still watching it, you're still observing what it's doing, but there's a sort of kindness exuded towards the cat. So you're inside yourself and you're watching these feelings, perhaps a nasty one, say you feel a bit depressed, you feel it, but there's as it were within the looking, there's as it were in the contact, there's a feeling of embracing it, opening up to it, a certain kindness towards it. These things obviously become apparent with the practice. If you haven't done the practice, it's a bit abstract.

"You said towards the end that doing this suddenly your life has meaning."

Not suddenly. Never suddenly. Yes, it has meaning. Well, normally speaking, the meaning of our lives is dependent upon the life we're living. It depends on my relationships, on my job, on everything else, you see. When I begin to realize that these are very untrustworthy meaningful things, because they can disappear, I'm seeking for a deeper meaning as to why is it I'm here in the first place?

And what spiritual practice does is it takes you to that core purpose of your being here. And in Buddhist terms, it's the evolution of consciousness. It's the evolution of the knowing. Don't confuse that with the act of cognition, which is a mental thing. It's that deep knowing within us which is confused with the body, heart and mind complex. And the process of meditation is the process of extracting that from that confusion. And in so doing, it discovers its true nature.

And the Buddha refers to it, he tends to refer to it in a slightly negative way, as the unborn, the undying, the uncompounded, the unconditioned. Which means that it tells us what it's not. If we were to describe what it is, it puts a concept in our mind and we start searching for it. You see, a soul, see? And as soon as you start defining something, it's very difficult not to search for that thing that you've imagined. But whatever it is, it's beyond the concepts, because concepts are only to do with this particular level of being.

And you'll find that in all *vipassanā*, insight meditation, whether it's that to do with the Theravada school, or the Zen school, or the Tibetan school, all of them tell you to get rid of thinking. They all tell you. Zen puts it as no mind, which people think that you might be zonked out or something. But all they're saying is no thought. Why should they do that? Why is that so important? It's because that's what we are looking at the world through, we're experiencing the world through preconceived ideas.

When you see a tree, you immediately compare it with all the other trees that you've seen. Just the word "tree" conjures up ideas with which you look at a tree. I remember a teacher used to teach art to children. She would take them to a tree and get them to draw the tree, and of course they'd all be this stick with a lollipop on top. And then she would get them all to lie underneath the tree looking up and then draw the tree. And of course, just seeing it from a different perspective produced a much more realistic tree.

Our problem is to go beyond the world that we've constructed through our thoughts and continue to construct through our thoughts. Even at the basic simple experience of taste, you see. As soon as we put something, like if you're eating a pizza, you go and order a pizza, you've got an idea of what a pizza is. And when you get your pizza, it's either a pizza or it's not a pizza. It's just not a pizza. "This isn't a pizza."

But even those, remember the old, I don't know whether they, they don't seem to sell them anymore, but those old pizzas, they used to sell in plastic bags. Now, if you'd never had a pizza before and you tasted one of those, you'd have said, at the end of it, you see, and got into it, you'd say, "Well, that was a rather nice, chewy sort of bread with a hint of tomato. Very pleasant." Call it a pizza and it's a disaster.

So our big problem, this is the biggest problem we have, frankly, is to stop thinking, is to see the world without thought. And we do that by burying the attention in sensation and feeling. That's what we do. That's how you do it. So what is an emotion before you give it a name? What is it? What is pain before you call it pain? That's a mental construct. There's no pain in the body. There's only sensation. Pain is a mental construct. You can prove this to yourself tomorrow.

Even people whom I deeply love are still objects of my mind. I can never know them in themselves. And they can never know me. All we can form is a pleasant relationship. A loving relationship. But I can never know you. You can never see the world as I see it. And I'll never see it the way you see it. In this way we live in parallel universes. So is there any wonder that we get angry with each other?

The Buddha himself reduced all his teachings to a very simple three-word formula in the original language of Pali. And it translates as, "I teach suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and the end of it." That's it. He was only concerned with that area of our lives where we're not happy. His whole psychology centres on that. It's not a developmental psychology. It's all about how do you attain perfect peace and happiness.

And we don't really get on to the spiritual path in Buddhist understanding until we realize that nobody can cause me psychological pain. This at first comes as a great disappointment because it's been very pleasant blaming others. But you cannot say to your partner, your spouse, to your friend, "You make me angry." You can't say that anymore. "You make me depressed, you bore me." Which is a disappointment.

Well, of course, you know, the way one overcomes that is through the rather painful process of forgiveness. Oh, that's not a problem. I mean, you're not supposed to purposefully enjoy suffering, for heaven's sake. Oh, no, absolutely not. No. And if you are putting up with it, then in a sense you've got to ask yourself, why am I putting up with this rubbish? What keeps me in this particular place?

There was an old program, member of, he's going back years now, and they interviewed this bag person. You know these people who carry bags of rubbish? I don't see them these days. Do you see them? It's gone, hasn't it? There was a little neurosis there, a social neurosis. You used to see them around stations and all that. Yeah, I remember them. Yeah, about, I don't know, twenty years ago? They'd be carrying bags of rubbish and bits of paper.

And they asked this lady, this woman, she was sitting there in a cafe. And wasn't mad, wasn't mad at all. They just asked her, "Why are you collecting all this stuff? Why are you carrying this stuff around?" And she said, "I was involved in the death of a child." It's her way of expressing her penitence, her guilt, and inability to forgive herself, which is probably the hardest thing of all to do anyway, to forgive yourself.

But all that harm, all that pain that we have received from others has not been the direct cause of the traumas within our system, or the pain within our system. That's why they can be expunged, either through certain therapeutic techniques or *vipassanā*. But the real thing about all this is forgiveness.

And when you hear somebody say, "I can't forgive," see, that's the child. That's the child who says, "I can't sleep because they want to watch the football." Of course you can forgive if you don't want to. You don't want to let them off. You want to punish them.

And they've done that in the States, haven't they? Where they thought that would be some sort of healing process, where they've allowed the family of the murdered person to watch the execution of the murderer. It's not been satisfactory at all. They didn't think it was painful enough. "Do it again." Because revenge, isn't it?

And there's beautiful stories. I've got a book of beautiful stories of forgiveness where all that pain goes. One of the most startling is of a mother whose son is murdered. And she visits the murderer in prison and continues to visit him. And when he's released, only a young man, she takes him in as her son. That's a bit of forgiveness, wasn't it?

And it's an interesting process if you really give yourself to it. You may actually see, you may actually experience the transformation of hatred and revenge into compassion for the person through a change of attitude within ourselves. You might actually experience that transformation.

She lost her father, Rajiv. Of course. There we are. How interesting.

Yes, one of the core teachings of the Buddha is the role of intention. Everything begins with your intention. An intention you can describe as a desire or a wish. It's a movement in the mind of wanting. If that's unwholesome, it's going to create an unwholesome conditioning. If it's wholesome, it'll create a wholesome conditioning. This is where your true *kamma* lies in Buddhist understanding.

What happens, you put an action out in the world, what comes to you from the world is being—you can't say that's your true *kamma* because it's been messed about with by all these other people in the world. What you get back may be inappropriate to

your original action. For instance, you may go to a lottery and buy a pound worth and you win ten million. That's not your *kamma*. That happens to be part of the whole system of joining a lottery. And if you have an understanding, "Oh well, in my past life I must have given thousands and thousands of pounds away," you're just rationalising something which is a perfectly ordinary, you can put a straightforward rational argument to it.

On the other hand, you might do some good and the person hates you for it and continues to hate you for it. And that's it. That's their problem. Real *kamma*, in terms of the liberation of the heart, in terms of achieving this pure peace and happiness, is within ourselves.

So when we intend something, it's important to recognise, is this going to do me good or bad? And remember that when you pay attention, it's an act of intention. Every time you pass a billboard on the bus and you look at it, it goes in. It's conditioning you. Because you've made an intention to actually attend to it. So that's why your intention is the beginning of your conditioning.

So having recognised that this intention is a good intention, you then empower it and go into the action. As you go into the action you may be aware of yourself doing what you're doing, but as your concentration grows and your commitment grows, you lose yourself in the action. That is, you can call it a jhanic moment. Ask yourself when you finish that, ask yourself how was I in that moment? You'll see there's no suffering. There was peace, there was happiness.

Now, if you go into a situation with indulgence, it's exactly the same. You go in there saying to yourself, "I'm going to really enjoy this film. I'm going to really enjoy it. This is the sort of film I want. A lot of violence and sex, great." So you go in and you lose yourself. Two hours. And you come out, no time, no sense of self. But unfortunately, there are consequences within the psyche. One is a loss of self into an indulgence which is going to create problems, and one is a loss of self into a non-indulgence which creates the beautiful mind.

So that's where it's like in anything like when you give something. Say you want to help somebody, so you're giving your time, or you want to make a donation to something, you're giving of your wealth. When you do something like that, just stop for a minute and get your attitude right. So I'm doing this for the benefit of somebody else. And then you get that benefit of renunciation. And what renunciation does is it loosens that possessiveness on things. It loosens it up. And when your thought is full of that, when your mind is full of that intention, that's when you start doing. Or that's when you give.

Now, is that the end of the problem? No, because as you're doing, these other thoughts can come in as well. But you know what they're there, because you're aware of them coming, and you keep re-establishing your right intention. And in that way you train yourself to keep on the straight and narrow.

When you're giving, and you give something, and you've done it with that mind full of the purpose that this is for the benefit of somebody else, you're actually giving it. As soon as you give it, you always get that little thought come up: "You are truly a very generous and wonderful person." But you turn on that. That's an afterthought. That did not affect my giving. Or it could be more negative: "Too much, get a bit back." Ah, you catch it there. "I caught you there, Mara." This is the evil one. And all the time, you're making the effort to make sure that your intentions are wholesome and good, and eventually, you surprise yourself with spontaneous actions of goodwill.

For which you may not be loved. So you're not dependent on whether somebody appreciates it or not. Then you get into fame and celebrity. Then you've really had it. Then you become the classic do-gooder. The do-gooder is someone who does you the good they want to do you. And you'd better like it.

Well, one of the big things that works for me is to keep saying "Stop." The biggest, one of my biggest tricks for myself is to keep saying the word "Stop." Just get in the habit every time you stop. Great, isn't it? It only lasts a bit, but at least in that moment there's been stop. Wonderful word.

So after you've answered the phone call, stop. When you're doing something here and you're involved in this, the phone goes. There's no need to launch yourself at the phone. I mean, most people will hang on for three rings. So you know you stop. You hear the bell. And then you put it down. Stop. Relax. Relax the shoulders. Stop. So you're constantly bringing yourself back into the present moment, into the presenting moment. Very little, very simple trick.

And whenever you find yourself rushing, stop. If you're going to be late, fine, stop. It doesn't matter. If you lose your job, fine, stop. Relax. So the more we can get the habit of just stopping, that's the big trick.

I visited, some of you will know, Plum Village, you know, Thich Nhat Hanh's place. Do you know that place in France? Well, he has a little trick of—he has somebody who can ring the bell anytime in the whole monastery. So once he rings the bell, everybody stops. You have to stop walking, you have to stop, stop. And even, and he's put it down

even to the phone bell. As soon as you hear the phone bell, you stop. No matter what you're doing, you're brushing your teeth, stop. And it's just a little practice of stopping. I think you'll find that, I find it really powerful.

And the other thing is, when you know that you're doing something which just carries you away, like the computer—you're on there for three hours, for heaven's sake. So, get yourself one of these watches with a timer on it. Just put a thirty-minute timer, and then really obey it. Like, stop. Stop. Cup of tea, when you have a cup of tea, when you have a break. So make that a little ritual, a little ceremony, right, where you stop and you make it a meaningful break.

Most times you make the cup of tea and mind's all over the place and then you put it down and you think, "Did I have that cup of tea or not?" Or you make it and it goes cold, you have to go to the—oh damn, what's that machine called? The microwave, stick it in again. You do that all day with the same cup of tea. So yes, it is, it's not our habit. We're always living in some future time. We're always moving towards the future.

And your own body language, to make sure your shoulders are always relaxed. And the jaws relaxed. Teeth are usually set apart, not clenched. If you relax your face, you can feel a smile come. All the dopamine starts pouring out. Nobody else can see the smile. You still look grim. Just there you can feel it. Just come to the natural relaxation of your face.

"But I suppose for most people that is already quite an advanced stage, you are already able to control yourself, you can stop. What if you were seriously addicted, like addiction to tobacco and alcohol, for instance, how many times would you stop?"

Ah, that's a different, yes, no, no. That's a slightly different type of stopping. I'm just talking about stopping what you're doing and being present. Stopping a heavy habit is hard work.

Well, if you have a... I mean, my father used to smoke heavily. And it was ruining his voice. He used to like singing in a choir. So he stopped himself. He stopped smoking by whenever he would normally have a cigarette, he'd go and take it out on the piano. I mean, that's a sort of skillful way of displacing your energy.

But I think you just have to be careful with an antidote that you're not actually suppressing the problem. That's all. You still have to be in contact with the feelings that are being presented. That's all. But there's also times in our lives when it's inappropriate to express what we feel. We might be feeling a bit depressed in ourselves, but we meet a friend and you lift yourself over it, don't you? And be friendly and joyful. So you're putting it aside, as it were.

But I don't particularly like antidotes because they tend to suppress. Through certain practices like *metta*, the goodwill practice, you can build up a real charisma. A real person that everybody wants to hug. But it's just sitting on top of this pig's will. It's like icing on top of pig's will. It's not really dealing with this stuff. So there has to be some time when you can allow these more unwholesome turbulences to manifest.

"Well, that's another one. It's either it's producing a beautiful state of mind, which is good in itself, or you can observe the quality of impermanence in the breath, in which case it becomes an insightful practice."

"So that could be used as a situation where your mind is repressing that particular emotion, not suppressing it? You could be using it for that. Not wanting to feel something, so you put your attention on a physical action or..."

I mean, there are times when it's skillful to put to one side unwholesome states. Just put it to the side and say, "I'll deal with you later or another time."

"There's also this thing about watching sensations and the connectivity between thought processes and sensations. Would you like to say something about that?"

Well, bodily sensations are, they're perceived by the mind, they're perceived, and then some thought comes up around it. Just an ordinary thing like eating. Just watch your mind when you're eating something. It's always talking about it. Always saying something about it. It's forming a relationship. The mind forms a relationship with sensations. All we have to do is make sure that it's a wholesome relationship. That's all.

So when you eat, for instance, you eat to nourish the body. That's it. If it tastes nice, consider that to be a plus. It doesn't have to. Not if it's just to nourish the body.

Is it time for a cup of tea, is it? Thank you very much.

CHAPTER 130

Samatha-Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the relationship between samatha (tranquility) and vipassanā (insight) meditation by returning to the Buddha's own spiritual journey. He traces how the young Gotama, disillusioned with sensual pleasures and facing an existential crisis, left home to seek an end to suffering. The Buddha mastered the jhānas (absorption states) under his first teachers, reaching the formless realms of infinite space, infinite consciousness, and nothingness, yet found these concentrated states insufficient—they created temporary bliss but failed to purify the heart or end dukkha.

After extreme asceticism also proved fruitless, a childhood memory of natural absorption while watching his father perform a ceremony revealed another approach: simple, open awareness without forcing or achieving. This led to his awakening and later, his teaching of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) to the villagers of Kammāsadamma. Bhante emphasizes that the Buddha called this the 'ekāyano maggo'—the one-way or direct path—specifically for ordinary laypeople without time for elaborate jhāna practice.

The talk illuminates the seven factors of awakening, distinguishing between passive qualities (calm, steadiness, equanimity) and active investigation of the three characteristics: anicca (impermanence), dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), and anattā (not-self). Bhante explains that anattā is not a philosophical denial of self but a practical tool—recognizing all experience as objects of awareness, thereby loosening identification. He also discusses the Mahāsi Sayādaw's contribution in making this direct vipassanā path accessible to modern practitioners.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I want to make a distinction between the two types of meditation that we find in all forms of Buddhism: samatha and vipassanā. Samatha means peacefulness, quietening. Vipassanā means insight. To get an angle on this, it's always good to go back to the Buddha's own personal experience and how it comes across to us through the scriptures.

Here we have a young man in his mid-twenties, slowly becoming disillusioned with life. He's living the good life, belonging to a ruling family—although in later commentaries he's elevated to this huge eastern potentate, he's really just a local boss, a local head of a tribe who actually has to pay tribute to the king of Kosala. So he's what you might call upper middle class. He has a wife and an ordinary family life, an extended family life with lots of cousins, many of whom of course join him when he starts the order. The women join him eventually as well.

Just about the time his son is born, he leaves. From a psychodynamic point of view, from our Western psychology viewpoint, it's rather interesting that his own mother died when he was only a week old. That must have had some psychological effects on him, even though it was his mother's sister who became his stepmother. And somehow he leaves just as his child is born. That's a rather interesting coincidence of facts. Freudians or Jungians might say something about that.

One perhaps could say that this trauma, even at that young age, the loss of your mother, does create some imbalance in the psyche which begins to manifest in him in his early twenties as what we would call an existential crisis, leading perhaps to an identity crisis. What brings it about is a sudden growing realization that once youth has passed, once you've come out of the fantasy of youth where things like sickness, old age and death are very far away—one isn't concerned with these things anyway, concerned only with good living—but around about twenty-five, there's a change of view. Something happens within us, most of us anyway, where we realize that in fact youth is passing as we know it, and we're looking ahead to a hopefully glorious middle age. We start taking things seriously, we tend to sort out our pensions, get married, take a career—we move away from the easiness of youth.

Within that sort of context, he comes to realize that actually in the end there's just sickness, old age and death. It's a crisis which builds up in him to such a degree that it makes him leave.

But there's another side to it which also reinforces that search. He's experienced, shall we say, what Blake would call the road of excess—"the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," I think that's how he puts it. At some point when he's had all his parties and he's had a good time, he sees the vanity of it, he sees the other side of it, the emptiness of it. It's expressed in a visual sense: he wakes up at the end of a big carousing and just sees these disheveled bodies, maybe the smell of sickness, and that gives him the other side of pleasure, the downside of pleasure.

Psychologically, remember, indulgence brings about frustration when you can't get what you want, grief when you lose what you've got, and anxiety when you've got what you've got and you're afraid to lose it. All that psychology is in there. We can say that he was waking up to the fact that the life he was leading had this deeper emptiness to it. One could say that he hadn't found any real purpose in the family life that he was leading, in the sort of career that was being offered to him as a kshatriya, a warrior caste, a ruler.

And so there comes this crisis point. We know about crisis, we know about financial crisis. He's having a psychological crisis. And so he leaves.

Now, he wouldn't have left if he didn't have somewhere to go. The thing was that, just as in the seventies there was a great movement of hippies searching for love, in those days there was quite a movement of people searching for the answer to life in what we call Hinduism, the Vedas. There was this slowly growing new literature, the Upanishads, which manifests this questioning of the age. It was also an age of change in culture, a movement away from pastoral societies dotted here and there with local rulers to a city-based civilization in which there grew a merchant class which had not been there before, a rich merchant class that began to have power. And kingship, which the Buddha didn't particularly like—he preferred the more democratic meetings of the pastoral societies. So there's ferment, there's change happening in society, not perhaps as vicious as we've experienced, but definitely some dislocation going on.

There were these groups of men—very rare for women to do it because of the dangers involved and of course the sexism involved too—who went out into the forests and tried to find the meaning of life. That was their job. One of the strains of understanding which empowered them was the belief in rebirth, the belief in reincarnation. There were many sorts of answers to it, but central was the horror of having to be reborn again into this life.

Remember, these times are a bit harder. There's no videos, there's no DVDs, there's no cars. It's dog work—you're out in the field digging, and you come back, what do you do? The only entertainments, you might say, were the occasional big events, military parades, and believe it or not, the holy men who would turn up in their parks, in their shrines, and everybody would go out on a full moon night and ask questions and they'd do some chanting. That was, in a sense, the fullness of their entertainment, apart from the usual things like playing games.

The idea that one had to be reborn again and again and again and go through this horror—because in those days, of course, sickness, old age and death wasn't something that happened in hospitals or was shut away somewhere. The dead were taken to the

charnel ground. You could see the bodies rotting. When the wind changed, you knew where it was coming from. It was there, it was in the open, as you might still see in India. That's one of the great things about India—it doesn't disguise these things.

So this whole idea of having to come back to this, again and again—one was looking for an escape. Where was the escape? That was the atmosphere in which the Buddha left home. And I dare say that when he left, he didn't say, "I'm off for good." More likely he said, "Well, I'm just nipping off for a little while, checking this thing out, see if I can find an answer to my deep sense of disturbance."

She collapsed into such deep weeping, coming from the very deepest part of her heart. Even I started crying. So I gave her a hug and said, "Mum, it's only for three years." And she stopped just like that.

Of course, you have to put it in the context of Catholicism, because priests are around—you can see a priest there. But if you become a monk, that's it. You cut your ties. You enter the monastery, and nobody ever sees you again. I think they've softened up on that now; I believe they can see people once a month or something. But in the old days, that was it. Left. Gone.

So I dare say there was a lot of gnashing of teeth when the Buddha left. His parents wept. In later tales they describe how his parents wept at his leaving, his wife wept, everybody wept. And I'm sure he said, "Well, I'm only going for a while. I'll be back in a bit." He was going to see what it was like.

So he goes off and joins these ascetics living in the forest. The people he goes to, his first two teachers, teach him what we now call the jhānas—what we now call absorption meditations. When you practice this samatha type of meditation, you're creating a state of mind. But the beauty of it is that although you begin with an outside object—either a candle flame, you all know that, or a circle, or an inner object like a mantra, or an inner object like your breath—it's still an object. You're only using it to bring about a certain laser quality to the mind.

I think you'll know that when the mind begins to concentrate, bliss arises naturally. It's just the quality of the mind as it concentrates—a sort of energy in it—and we experience it as a certain type of inner happiness. The first teacher really took him right through what we now recognize as the jhānas: the rūpa jhānas and the arūpa jhānas.

The rūpa jhānas are those states that you achieve by deepening your concentration until, as it were, the mental state leaves the body, goes inward, and finds its own joy—and then even leaves that to find a perfect peace. This is not the equanimity of the seven factors of enlightenment. They use the same word, you see. These words are used variously—the same word, but with slightly different meanings.

And then, leaving that, one enters into a stranger place where there's no object at all. Right up until that point, there's always an object—a light, a feeling, a sense, something there. But when that disappears, this consciousness, as it were, flips into a different state where there's nothing there. Those places are called infinite space, infinite consciousness, infinite nothingness.

These relate—and I'm speaking now to people who know the Dharma a bit more deeply—these relate to the four khandhas. When you're in that area of nothingness, it's out of that nothingness that the sankhāra arises, the manifestations of mind arise. When you're in that space of consciousness, you're at the beginning of the vijñāna process of consciousness, which manifests eventually as one of the aggregates. When you're in the space where everywhere there's just space, you're at the subtle level of vedanā, feeling. And when you're at neither perception nor non-perception, that's the beginning level of perception as that consciousness descends into the mind and finally coagulates into what we call the physical body.

So that process a person might go through has its own insightfulness as you pass through it.

The Buddha took this path with his teacher and became an adept, and the teacher said, "Please, join me." But he said no. He said, "Although I've done all this, and they're very blissful states and all that, it hasn't really answered my question: Is there an end to suffering?"

Now that's the core thing I should have mentioned earlier. The quest was: Is there an end to suffering? And that eventually distills his whole teaching into just three words in the texts: dukkha, dukkha nirodha—suffering and the end of suffering. This dukkha, of course, has a very wide meaning. Here I've translated it as suffering, dissatisfaction, sense of lack, meaninglessness. It's the whole gamut of human suffering, from the smallest little disturbance to the deepest despair and horror.

So he leaves that teacher and finds another one who takes him just one step further than these arūpa jhānas. Again he becomes an adept, and again he's asked to teach. But he says no—he leaves. So although he's practiced these concentration meditations, al-

though he's taken them to the fullest development recognized by his own teachers, there's just something lacking. There's something which has not been undermined, which is still causing him suffering, causing him some feeling of dissatisfaction.

So now he tries a different tack, which he seemingly takes from an elder teacher, a contemporary teacher: the Nigantha, the leader of the Jains. Now, his understanding was that bad karma was accrued even when one didn't mean it. You know that Jain monks go around with a whisk, making sure there are no bugs they might accidentally tread on. Their understanding is that even accidentally, you still cause suffering, and therefore there's going to be a karmic comeback.

And the real problem lay—and this runs right through Indian literature—in desire, trishna.

So one had to live the absolute ascetic life, deny the body any pleasure, because there was a danger. He did not make, seemingly, a distinction between pleasurable sensations and the attachment or desire that you have to them. So one had to, as it were, undermine that whole process. And if you think about it, pleasures come through the body, don't they? So you begin to blame the body for your problems. And you fast, you sit in front of very hot fires, you do all sorts of ascetic practices which are meant to steel you against the pleasure of the body.

So he took this again, seemingly took it to his own personal end, like he couldn't go any further with it. And basically he just got thin. He said he could hold his spine through his stomach, that's how thin he was. And again, he wasn't achieving anything. This fundamental question about suffering, about meaningfulness, had not been answered.

He's with five companions, remember, at this time. They're going for it, helter-skelter, really whipping themselves and getting into it big time. And so he leaves.

Now, in the opening stanzas of his very first talk, he says that the life devoted to sensual pleasure is base, ignoble, a waste of time, leading nowhere. And the life devoted to self-mortification—which is not renunciation; renunciation is not doing something to see your attachment—self-mortification is based on self-punishment, self-negation in that sort of bad way, rejection of life as it is. And that self-mortification was also just painful, he said, and led nowhere. At least the first one was pleasant and led nowhere, but this was just painful and led nowhere.

But he doesn't say that the jhānas, that the other things he learnt about developing the qualities of mind, were a waste of time. And that becomes part of his system.

But we can, at least I can, get a sense of his despair when he leaves his companions. What's he going to do? He can't go home because it would just go back into that emptiness, that bad emptiness. He's been to all these teachers, he's talked to a lot of people, and you can see from his teaching that he knows all the local philosophies of the time and the psychologies of the time. He learned that. And he's tried everything, and he's got nowhere to go.

So I imagine that when he sat on that road along which Sujata came, he was in a state of real existential despair—and thin. And when Sujata comes along with her rice pudding, or well, rice cakes, she takes pity on this man. In the scriptures they soup it up: she's going to offer this to a god and sees the Bodhisattva who is resplendent and believes that this is the god. But actually, he must be looking miserable. She thought, well, maybe he needs it more than this god. And we all know the salvific effect of rice pudding—it's enormous in its power.

So having tasted it, he sort of feels better. And around about that time he has this memory of his father doing a ploughing ceremony. He's a child, and there's something about the way he remembers, something about the way he's looking at his father doing the ploughing ceremony, which offers him another way of seeking the answer to his predicament.

And that's why I've got these pictures, you see. The little baby at the back there on the board was on a poster, an advert in Birmingham Station. I came out of the train, I saw this—it was part of an advert—and I went home and came all the way back to Birmingham station to take that picture. I'd probably broken some sort of publication rights, but I thought it was fantastic. Make sure you have a look at that, because what it expresses is that way of looking and the moment of seeing.

And the little girl in the other picture was given to me by a friend in Dublin, Dennis. This is a picture that was brought into the Dublin centre, the Irish centre. There was an opening of a nature reserve—where they put trees and little animals. And you can see that she's reaching out to a plant to see what's there, but the look on her face, if you look at it, has both an intense interest but also a sense of trepidation, a sense of fear of the unknown—like, if I see this, what will happen? So that comes first, and the baby face comes second.

So here's this child watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, and there is a tremendous interest in what his father is doing. And that interest draws him into an absorbed state. He's just looking. And you see it in children, don't you? You see it when

their jaw drops and their eyes become fixated, and you can't shake them out of it unless you give them a clip on the back of the head. And that's it—that's the pure openness of that intuitive intelligence, just receiving.

So that's why I try to stress this quiet abiding, because there you drop your preconceptions, you drop your ideas, you drop your concepts, you drop your history. Dropping your history, you lay yourself open, just observing, feeling, experiencing what's happening right now.

So there was something in that looking which encouraged him to have another go. And he was so certain that this would actually be the answer that he makes a determination. He sits under the tree and will either die or find the answer to his existential problem of suffering.

Looking for him, looking for us, he does six hours, it seems. There's an interesting moment which is worth pondering: the great doubt arises. I'm sure you've seen that posture of the Buddha where he's putting his hand, touching the earth to ground himself, and Māra, the evil one, attacks him. Although it's depicted in pictures as all sorts of things attacking him, what it is is the great doubt. It's known as the moment of great doubt. And the doubt is: Who are you? Who are you to try and work this out? There's no single human being you know of—nobody's ever worked this out. Who are you? How come you've even started on this quest?

And with it comes the temptation of going back into the ordinary life. That's what Māra is. Later on in Buddhism, Māra is put across as sort of an evil being, a bit like the Christian devil trying to kill you and do all sorts of bad things. But he's much more the tempter. And the god Māra is actually the chief of a most delightful heaven. So what he symbolises is the attraction of the sensual life.

And it's interesting that when he touches the earth and the earth goddess appears, it's his perfection of generosity which enables him to continue to sit. Now, what is generosity? Generosity is doing something for somebody else. And I presume that what came to him at that moment was that this wasn't just for him—this was for humanity. It wasn't a selfish thing, that he wanted to get out of suffering, trying to save himself. It was in the greater context that this was the question, and it was for the benefit of others that, I think, gave him the strength to sit there and continue that investigation.

This is my own interpretation, by the way. The commentaries just say it was the quality, the perfection of generosity, that gave him the strength.

When the Buddha began to teach, he taught these two things in tandem, and the absorption states were something he really emphasised. The thing about the mind is that if it's very concentrated, very open, very still, obviously it sees something—obviously it's more capable of seeing something—rather than a mind that's scattered, unable to be gathered onto a single point. One can develop that sort of single-pointed mind through various exercises, and you can do it, as it were, just by repetition.

But remember that when you do that, there's a tendency to be able to block, to stop the purification process. And that's what the Buddha found. When he was in these beautiful states, fine, but when he came out again he was still the same old depressed Gotama. It hadn't done anything to purify the heart. It had built another mindset which, as an adept, he could enter any time. So he could always go to this place when he felt a bit depressed—push it away, do your mantra, in you go, blissed out. But it never actually dealt with the problem. That's what he came back to. And it can't, because these jhānic states are about developing the mind.

Now we see this distinction between a charismatic who is not wise and somebody who is wise, and somebody who is charismatic and wise. Somebody who's charismatic builds up this huge love, you see, and it can become a radiance. You can be attracted to it, and then one day you stand on their foot and they go berserk. So that's why the Buddha says you can't tell how wise somebody is until you live with them for quite some time. And then you suddenly see these little defilements, these little odd bits of behaviour come out, and you know that something has not been purified.

But that doesn't mean to say that in that charismatic form the person might not be doing a huge amount of good. Even that person may be confusing their charisma with wisdom. And the great enemy, the Buddha points out, of the leader are the followers, because they keep telling you how wonderful you are. The person who is fully liberated might not be charismatic at all—might be quite an ordinary person.

Even though the Buddha definitely had some charisma, there's a lovely moment in the scriptures where somebody, a monk or perhaps a lay person, comes into a group of monks and has to ask which one is the Bhagavan. So it's not as though he displayed this huge charisma, or it doesn't seem to have done. But then again, you can have somebody who is charismatic and who is fully liberated.

What the jhāna does, all these jhānas, is to produce charisma, depending on what you practice. So if you practice love, that's the charisma you'll get.

In my travels in Thailand, I met about four or five monks—because you only get to see monks as a monk, you know—who were all highly developed, and all of them were generally considered to be liberated. And they all had very different atmospheres around them.

The two I remember most: one was Ajahn Sim, who lived just beyond Chiang Mai. There were three of us travelling together, a couple of Americans and myself. When you sat in his presence, you were immediately drawn into his sense of peace. It was a tangible feeling. It immediately affected you, and you sat in peace. Just like that.

When I went to Ajahn Tate, who had this beautiful monastery up on the borders of Laos, on the Mekong, it was just me at the time, I think. You were just enveloped with this very lovely loving-kindness. He might just have been feeling that at the time, I don't know. But it was tangible. It was a real tangible feeling. Immediately softening, you know. Immediately you felt this open friendship. When he died, something like a couple of million people turned up to the funeral. He was pretty famous, Ajahn Tate. He's the one I quote, by the way—I've said something else out there, but when I do a day of resolution on the retreats: make it simple, take it easy, stay with the one who knows. That's Ajahn Tate.

Now, when people began to join the Buddha—the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis—they were people who'd left the worldly life. So what were you going to do? What do you do all day? Well, you haven't got to go to work. What do you do? And you can't grow anything. You're not allowed to grow. You can't cook. You don't have any money. You can't buy anything. You can't get into retail therapy. What are you going to do? You've got to do something.

So these jhānic exercises are specifically for those people who have time. And if you find yourself with time, this is something you might want to practice.

It's beneficial, it's creating beautiful states of mind.

But he was travelling once, this is later on in his teaching, out towards Kammāsadhamma, amongst the Kurus, a village of the Kurus. The Kurus lived in what we would now recognise as modern Delhi, that sort of area. He'd been there before. These are ordinary village people, you know, people who look after cows and sheep and the fields. There's nothing technological about their lives—this is drawing water from the well, cutting wood, all that sort of stuff.

He'd been there before and he'd given them the teachings. When he turns up again, he's quite taken by how they're actually practicing the Dhamma. He says for a start there's no well talk, no gossip around the well. Everybody was doing things mindfully

and they were all practicing meditation. He was so moved by this that he gave the talk which is known as the Discourse on the Establishment or Foundation of Mindfulness, which is recognized as the jewel of the whole collection. Because here he actually tells you how to become liberated—this is it, he puts it all together in one discourse. And he says it to these ordinary people in Kammāsadhamma. He doesn't give this talk to his monks or anybody else.

Now, this for me is highly significant, because normally speaking he's going on about the jhānas and vipassanā, you know, the one leads to the other, and so on. And there are teachers who teach that now. But this, you see, is directed to lay people who haven't got the time to sit there and get into these blissful states. They've got family to tend to and all this sort of stuff.

It starts off by telling them clearly, and the word he uses is *ekāyana magga*, which means the one-way proceeding path, or the path that proceeds in this single way. The commentary normally puts that as opposed to the *dvāyana*, the two-way path, which is the combination of samatha practice with vipassanā. That's his first words: *ekāyana magga*. And it's translated variously by authors, depending on their particular viewpoint. So you'll see in Nyanaponika, in his still-core book on meditation, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, he says it's "the only path." That's a bit fundamentalist. Then there are these people who are friends down in Devon who translate Pāli as a sort of hobby, and they call it "the shore path." But Bhikkhu Bodhi, the American monk who is the doyen of Buddhist studies, makes it quite clear that this *ekāyana* means the one-way path as opposed to the two-way path, which to me makes a lot of sense.

So this is the one-way path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for reaching the end of suffering and discontent, for finding the true way, for the realization of emancipation—namely, the four applications of mindfulness.

When we practice vipassanā, there has to be included in it a certain concentration content. What the Buddha does is pull out for us seven factors which, developed, lead to this natural insight process. The first one is just this awareness. But it's right awareness, and right awareness always means the observation of the three characteristics, because that's where the delusion lies. It's seeing the impermanence. It's seeing how we indulge or resist what is happening, whether pleasant or unpleasant. And the quality of not-self.

This not-self is not a philosophical statement. The Buddha doesn't say there is no self. It's a teaching tool in which everything you experience you make clear to yourself is an object you're aware of. So if you're aware of something, it cannot be that which is aware. Think of how as children we began to distinguish, out of that mass of sensation,

the world out there—object relationship, I think they call it. How out of this mass of sensations, mother starts to loom, your first object, something separate from you that separates out of the mass, until eventually you're quite clear that this is me and everything else is not me.

All we're doing is taking that process inward and making the inner part of our experience as objective as this room is. This room has a body—walls, ceilings—and it has atmosphere, it has a mind, so to speak. So it is the same within us. As we begin to push out, push away, objectify the inner world as we've done the outer world, that process is the process of detaching from it, undermining that relationship of it being me or mine. And that's why we feel this process of liberation. That's why the Buddha says the taste of Nibbāna is freedom. It's the liberation from that wrong connection with what we're experiencing.

But this awareness has to be supported, and the split is between those qualities which are passive and those qualities which are active. When we practice this quiet abiding, we are practicing those qualities which are passive, which for us are not highly developed in our society. It's the active qualities which are developed.

Those passive qualities are calmness. Just be calm, not excited all the time. Not seeking a sort of high level of energy, but just bringing ourselves to a real deep calm. And interestingly, that's linked with this interest, because interest can get excited. If you're interested in something, you can feel yourself getting all excited. But that excitement then becomes—that interest then becomes tainted with trying to achieve something, trying to see something. Once there's a trying to see something, that self is taking over the process.

So to see something at this level, one has to let go of the idea that I'm achieving it. There has to be this business of just having faith, a real confidence that there is within us that which will make insight without us trying. And that's the abstraction, the taking away of this self, which manifests as a sort of over-effort, a trying to see something. You won't relax and just let the eye look.

So tomorrow, when you're wandering around the paddock or the garden, or you go for a walk, just rest your eye on something and watch the way the eye perceives. You don't have to try and perceive. Put a leaf in your hand, or just look at a tree, and watch how the eye itself is perceiving. Stand back from that process and then you gain confidence. Oh, the eye perceives. I don't have to try and perceive.

It's the same with intelligence. If we get out of the way, the intelligence works naturally, because that's the quality of intelligence. It understands. It perceives. It has insight. It doesn't think. This is the thing. Thought is another process. The insight is immediate. You either see it or you don't see it.

Then there is this passive quality of a steadiness of attention. Just steadiness, just keeping the attention steady. And that has to be coupled with right effort. The effort is just to maintain the focus. Put too much effort in and you start getting restless, you start getting a shaking, putting too much effort into it. Too little effort and the concentrated mind very quickly falls into sweet oblivion—sleep. Because that's what happens when the mind's nicely concentrated.

It's calm. And off you go.

Then there is the passive quality of equanimity, which is so difficult for us. In this sense, it comes from a position of not knowing—which means that you're looking at something, investigating something, without any preconceived ideas or preconceived notions that this has to be this way. This is very difficult, because on one side we're being fed these three characteristics, and then we're told, "Just look. Forget about that. Just look and see for yourself." And there's no prejudice in the sense that the heart isn't involved in any over-desire. It's a calm heart, you see.

All these factors we've talked about are natural to daily life. Everybody has these. What turns them into factors that lead to liberation is the investigation of the Dharma. These same factors would be present in anybody involved in science or some active research—they're all the same sort of qualities that you need. But once you turn all of that to investigating the Dharma, which here means these three characteristics, then this leads to a change in the way we relate to the world we live in.

All of that is within this discourse, you see. This is what he taught lay people.

Just as a little aside about the Mahasi, whose picture you see here: after the Second World War, when Burma gained independence from us—oh, pity—the elected prime minister, the only one unfortunately, because in 1963 there was the military coup which they're still suffering from, along with a group of people, were looking for a meditation teacher. The Mahasi was a well-known teacher up in middle Burma, and they brought him down and set him up in a meditation center. By all accounts, he had virtually immediate success. He was teaching this—he wasn't teaching jhana absorption, for which you need time. He was teaching a direct path, the ekkāyano, and he created the parameters whereby people could move quickly. So it involved great effort, as you know—

sitting, walking, sitting, walking, eighteen hours a day—but it was never about trying to attain something. He was always encouraging practitioners to relax and to watch and to see, to explore.

His effect on local society in Rangoon was immediate. Eventually, it expanded so much that by 1956, not many years after, he was undertaking his first tour around the East. He didn't come West, I don't think, for a while. So that's the specific place the Mahasi holds in the Vipassana scene, you might say—that he teaches this ekkāyana magga, this direct path.

So there we have it. What makes the Buddha an especially great person in spiritual history wasn't simply the amazing insight that he had, but also his amazing ability to get it across—to actually produce a systematic way and a systematic teaching which people can understand. And not just the intellectuals, that's the point. Ordinary people. People of Kuru Siddhāma.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated of all your suffering, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 131

Vipassanā and/or Therapy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how Buddhist psychology offers a complete framework for understanding and transcending mental suffering. Drawing from the Buddha's teachings on the five khandhas (aggregates) and paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), he illustrates how suffering arises through our mistaken identification with body and mind processes.

The talk addresses the relationship between Buddhist practice and modern therapy, exploring when each approach might be skillful. Through the lens of dependent origination, Bhante explains how suffering occurs not at the moment of contact with pleasant or unpleasant sensations, but when we grasp and identify with our desires and aversions. He emphasizes that liberation comes through relocating our sense of identity from these conditioned processes to the position of mindful observer.

Drawing on stories from the Buddha's own challenging final years, including Devadatta's betrayal and the destruction of the Sakya clan, Bhante demonstrates how equanimity (upekkhā) remains the foundation of awakened response to life's vicissitudes. The talk offers practical guidance on balancing vipassanā practice with mettā (loving-kindness) to create sustainable conditions for inner transformation and the gradual exhaustion of unwholesome mental formations.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa.

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

Every so often I hear about somebody who, just out of the blue, is hit by a mental disturbance, a storm, which drives them to taking tablets. I mean, it's that bad — some mental illness which seems to arise and then just pass away. Thinking of a friend who just suddenly out of the blue experienced a deep depression, took about six, nine months and disappeared. Still hasn't returned.

Whereas others, just in the middle of life, even after years of what you might call ordinary neurotic living, suddenly they're struck with this really painful mental state, deep anxiety that seems to be uncontrollable. And if we haven't got a model of how the psyche works, then of course it can add to it an enormous sense of despair, panic — what to do?

And these days we have various models coming from the psychotherapeutic tradition, which is helpful, no doubt about that. And there was a time when taking drugs was a real no-no in the Buddhist society because it wasn't facing up to your *kamma*. So I think people have relented on that a bit and decided that skillful use of drugs can steady somebody. But even then, it doesn't always work.

I'm just thinking of a friend who was an occasional student. Again, somewhere around his forties, suddenly struck by depression. And the psychiatrist told him it was a type that would recur, which didn't help. And eventually he got into this state. When I went to see him, there was no humour in the man. None whatsoever. And he was in the habit of, when he was talking to you, I was always filled with this profound disgust.

And so I said to him — now he's a committed Buddhist, he practiced quite a bit, and he understands that, or I think he held the belief, because he used to say to his sister, that there would be a future life, future *kamma*. So I asked him, I said, are you contemplating suicide? He said, no. Then, of course, a few days later, I hear that he has actually killed himself. And he downloaded a little mechanism from the websites that creates carbon monoxide and put it in his car, drove out to the countryside, set it going, and they found him in a peaceful place.

And obviously things had got to the top of him. He was taking drugs. They didn't help. And he had about six people constantly visiting him. All the support services came to help him. His sister was everywhere. It just became unbearable. And I think in those times, unless your practice has grounded you in a psychology, in a model of the mind that allows you to see hope, then it looks pretty dark.

And really that's what we're discovering. We're discovering that no matter how much physical pain or mental pain there might be, if we can just hang on in there it will dissolve or it will kill us. But for it to kill us is not the same as for us to kill ourselves.

Just to give you one example of where — I mean it's a bit dramatic and it's not the best of examples, but I remember reading in this manual of what happened at the Mahāsi centre while Mahāsi Sayadaw was teaching. And there's a man who went along with stomach cancer, pretty advanced, they'd given up hope on him, and he stopped taking all the drugs and began to meditate. And as he expressed it, there was an explosion. I disappeared. So this would suggest that the cancer had been caused by a mental imbalance, not by some chemical state.

So our aim really is in the long term to take from the Buddha's teaching some model of the mind which allows us to see this liberation. And there's, you might say, three parts to the process. One part is how to deal with all the stuff that comes up which is

painful, both physical and mental. The other part is how to develop a beautiful mind. And the third part is how to liberate us completely from the possibility of suffering, from the possibility of suffering — and that's his message.

Nibbāna isn't a peaceful wonderful state so long as that doesn't happen, so long as this doesn't happen. It's complete liberation from the possibility of suffering.

Now the Buddha himself didn't have an easy time. I mean, apart from the early part where he's left his family — I mean, that can't have been very easy. Then all that training. And then there must have been a joyous period where he's teaching and people are gathering around him. And then towards the end of his life, things go all upside down.

Devadatta tries to kill him. His two big mates who'd supported him all his life, the two kings of Kosala, Pasenadi and Bimbisara of Magadha, which is around modern day Varanasi, died. And their sons weren't particularly — I mean, the son of Bimbisara had been in cahoots with this Devadatta and he killed his own father. He starved him. Starved him to death. You can go and see where the building is, if you want, in Rajgir. At least that's what they say it is.

He starved his father so he could become king and the thing was that Devadatta would get rid of the Buddha and he'd become head of the order and there'd be peace and harmony. And after all that, when he'd killed, he had a remorse, he had a great remorse, and he went to apologize to the Buddha, confess to him, all that stuff. But there's nothing else in the story that I could perceive anyway, that he became as devoted a supporter of the Buddha as his father had been.

And the same with Virudhaka, who was the son of the king of Kosala. The story there is that he'd married into the Buddha's clan. And because they thought that he was of a lower caste, he wasn't really up to the Sakyas, they palmed him off with a servant girl of a lower caste. When he found this out, he was justifiably enraged. And he got his army together, got on his elephant, and off he went to destroy the Sakyas.

So the Buddha went out and had a chat with him. And he went back. But as it happens, it builds up on the mind. So he got on his elephant again and rode out with his army. And the Buddha again went to have a little chat. And he saw the senselessness of it, so he came back. And off he went again, got on his elephant, off he went again.

In one part I read it was the third time the Buddha said, I can't do anything, that's it, the *kamma*'s too great. It might have been the fourth time, he said. But anyway, there was a point where the Buddha knew he couldn't stop it. And so he did. He killed a lot of his people. They moved capital.

So there he is, this old man. I mean, he's in his seventies now. He died at eighty. He's got to handle all this stuff. And his family's being killed. And his supporters are going. And his cousin, Devadatta, whom he's given all this Dharma to, wants to kill him. It's a heck of a way to end your life, isn't it?

So he wasn't immune from the vicissitudes of life, but nowhere do we get the impression that he's perturbed by it. It's like this is the way it is. And he does his best to try and cure the situation. Like when Devadatta takes off a load of monks, he sends his two chief disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, to talk to them. And they bring most of them back. But Devadatta continues. He continues as a monk.

So it's this ability to remain equanimous. That's probably, well, according to Nyanaponika, on the heart of Buddhist meditation. Well, actually, no, it's in his later book, *The Vision of the Dhamma*. So Nyanaponika was a German monk. He started off the Pali, the Buddhist Publication Society, up in Kandy. And he wrote two very good books, one of which, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, is still probably a classic on it. And very luckily he practiced the Mahāsi system, so I was pushed off.

But in *The Vision of the Dhamma*, he goes on about equanimity being the primary virtue, because it's equanimity that keeps everything in control. So when love comes, it stops it going into attachment. When compassion comes, it stops it going to grief and so on.

So what was this model that the Buddha offered us? There's a few ways of looking at our experience which gives us an angle. The one is the most static experience. If you were to slice one moment of life, then you'd end up with what he called the five *khandhas*, five aggregates, five heaps. It's a still. And what he's doing is deconstructing everything, not simply for the joy of deconstruction, but to show us exactly where the problem lies.

So when it comes to the body, it's a given. What the body offers us is within the construct of the body. It has its own intelligence, you might say. All these millions of cells that we've got, they all know what to do, don't they? We don't have to get in there and educate them, train them, breathe. It's like they know. And what we come to recognize about the body is that our knowledge of it is very superficial, isn't it? I mean, direct knowledge. We know from diagrams and all that about what's happening in the body. But as a direct experience of the body, there's very little we know, isn't there?

I mean, have you any intimation at this present moment that the marrow in your bone is creating white blood cells? I haven't a clue. I haven't a clue what my liver's doing, but it feels alright. All these synapses in the brain which work at, so they tell us, quantum physical level — I haven't a clue. All I know is my memory's going. That's for sure.

So it's recognizing that we're aliens in this body, strangers within our own body. And it's a vehicle, isn't it? It's a vehicle that we're in. But we are aware of the sensations it gives us. We're aware of sensations that come from it. We're aware of the light that hits the eye and creates pictures for us and the sounds that strike the ear. We're aware at that point where the body comes in contact with the mind or the other way — the mind comes in contact with the body.

And at that point, there is the body, there must be some feeling at some sense door, whether it's sight or touch. There has to be some perception. So the perception is the mental image that we have of what's happening and it creates our memories and goes on to create our concepts and thought patterns. So those are all separate heaps. You've got all this stuff coming from the body, a sensation. Then you have it defined by the mind as being pleasant or unpleasant. Those are how we define it. And then you have these perceptual faculty going on.

All that, you might say, is all a given. It all happens in one single moment. And then there's these *saṅkhāras*, which are the mental stuff that comes up, the thought and emotional life we have. And the reason he separates that out is because this we have power over. This is where our power, in terms of how we, the atmosphere within us, what we call our emotional life, states of mind — this is where we can do something, at our *saṅkhāras*.

And then there's this magic of the mind which creates a picture for us, the cognition, the act of cognition, like a television screen. So that, in a sense, gives us a slice, but it doesn't tell us the movement, it doesn't give us a timeline of how these things come together. And that's what he does with the dependent origination.

So, using the *khandhas*, using these five different types of experiences, using these five categories, that's also a way of undermining the idea that what I am is some entity, some wholeness — not a composite. As I look deeply I see what I'm experiencing is a composite, it's made up of this and that and this and that. And that undermines the idea of this body being a me or a self. It undermines the idea that the mind with its thoughts and emotions is a me, a mine or a self. In itself it's not a self.

Now why would you want to do that? I mean it was pretty miserable before and now that I've discovered I'm not what I'm supposed to be or I appear to be, it's even more miserable. What's the point of doing that? So the whole point is that we are taking our identity into a higher place. So I'm using identity now in the sense of realizing who we really are or what we really are.

So it's a case of stepping back from everything, pulling ourselves out of everything to be able to say well I'm not that, I'm not that, I'm not that, and eventually you see you come to realize who you are. It's like walking backwards to a cliff — at some point you're gonna fall off. That falling off is the liberation from what you thought you were.

When we're in meditation when we're looking at what's coming up, the looking is looking at what it's not. As soon as you're looking at something, at something, it can't be that what's looking. It becomes an object. Not too mystifying — be an object.

If you go back to childhood, to our early months, we're told that the first couple, two or three months, four months or something, it's just one bath of sensations. There's no objectivity in it. And then out of that looms our first object, mother. Something looms out. And then, over a period of time, the whole world becomes out there, and I'm here. And I associate entirely with this body.

So that process of separation, all we're doing is taking that inward. It's a slow process of separating from everything.

Now, in dependent origination, the psychology which produces the suffering in our lives — when I say suffering, remember, I'm really pointing to anything which is a slight discomfort to the most existential angst you can think about. It's the whole gamut of human misery — that's *dukkha*, wherever you find misery or unhappiness or even the slightest discomfort like when you're watching TV and you've got to shift your position because you feel slightly uncomfortable. That's *dukkha*, the whole thing is *dukkha*. It's a big word and it's his core concept. He says eventually, remember, all I'm teaching is *dukkha* and the end of it is *dukkha*.

So in dependent origination at the point of, shall we say, this moment, you find these listed. So the body and mind. These are two different things. The body is not the mind, the mind is not the body. And yet, are completely dissolved in each other. They only separate at death. This is the theory. They only separate at death.

And the mind which is in the body can only know what the body offers it at this point of contact. The mind has the body, the mind and body, and there's the six senses, but this includes the mind, as a sensing organ. And then you have, with the body-mind you have consciousness, this ability to create pictures in the mind, whole pictures. You've got consciousness, body-mind, the six senses, and then you've got this contact.

The contact needs an object, so the senses have to have an object — that's why you can't see in a dark room. At the point of contact there's no suffering. Point of contact there's no suffering. When it comes to the next point where you discern something as being pleasant or unpleasant, just that point of seeing unpleasant, pleasant, just at that point — so now there's just sensation, just contact and then there comes this pleasant, unpleasant — there's no suffering. There's no suffering at that level.

The Buddha mind lives at that level. It's not that he doesn't have unpleasant feelings or pleasant feelings, sensations in the body. The heart's purified. I mean, that doesn't have depression or your usual stuff. The mind, the heart now is full of joyous, beautiful states. He says that himself. But the body still gives pain, but it's still at the point of contact. It's seen as pleasant or unpleasant. No suffering. No suffering.

Then something happens of a relationship to that which we are experiencing.

And we call that this craving, this thirst, desire, but desiring coming from the misunderstanding that you're going to be happy by devoting yourself to either getting rid of what's unhappy or indulging what is happy.

So you can see that, can't you, in meditation. A bit of pain comes and you can immediately feel you want to push away, you want to push away. If you're experiencing *tanhā*, so the word for that is *tanhā*, the word is that craving, there's no suffering there. Then something happens. It becomes me. Then there's suffering. At the point it becomes me, we're in pain, we're suffering, we're running from it. Or we've thrown ourselves straight into the cheesecake. We become a cheesecake. And create the relationship with cheesecake which is forever a source of suffering, because you can't get enough of it.

It's interesting, isn't it? Because in our language we say, "I want the cheesecake." But actually, psychologically, cheesecake wants I. And nothing is suffering until there's that point of identity. When we grasp it. At that point of identity the desire which was beforehand is then empowered and it's virtually impossible to stop that in my own understanding. Perhaps you can to a certain point, but once you've identified with your desire, there's almost immediately afterwards an impulsion of energy which we call will

and it manifests. You can't stop yourself eating that cheesecake. At least not the first bite. You have to spit it out. You can't stop it. That's the becoming. You've become a self. You're becoming a self. The self that enjoys the cheesecake.

That point of empowerment by the will is the point of *kamma*. It's an action and the result will follow because it has an effect, and the agent that does it is the will.

"Excuse me, may I just ask something? You're implying a time lag there. Are these time lags ever in fact perceptible?"

Yes, but you've got to be right on the ball for that. You've got to be really on the ball. It's so automatic. That's right. So that's why you see you have this given. You've got the cognition, the ability to cognize, to know, a primary knowing. That arises at the same time as the body and mind. They can't arise separately. There you've got your five, six senses. And then you've got your contact. All that arises in one solid block.

Once the contact's made there's a perception of it as being pleasant or unpleasant. Once that's done you have a relationship with it of wanting it or not wanting it. Once that desire arises there's a grasping of the desire and it's "I want." And as soon as you've done that it's virtually impossible to stop the energy going in to produce, to manifest the desire, to take it out of potential into actual. At that point you've created a *kamma*, you've reinforced the idea of a self, and the consequences will be dire. There's no way you can stop the consequences.

Apart from doing something to counterbalance it. So for instance, if you've said something nasty to somebody, you know to be comfortable you're going to apologize and that assuages that karmic line in that action. So it's not as though you're helpless. You can do something. So what the Buddha is pointing out is that if we want to change ourselves, the point of change, you've got to be there at the point of intention. If you're not there at the point of intention, you'll be dragged off by the old conditioning. And that's what we're watching every time you sit here. You see these intentions keep coming.

You know, you want to move away from pain. Something pleasant comes up that you want to think about. The holiday you're trying to prepare. Before you know it, off you go. It's like you're constantly developing this self through dream work. And every time you dream, it's an act. It's an act of becoming. So there are three ways in which we become. Through action, which is pretty straightforward. Through speech we become. And through thought patterns.

So every time an emotion arises, a mental state arises, it'll want to create a certain storyline around it. And unwittingly, we're developing that attitude, we're developing that state. And remember that is coming from a deep ignorance, a deep not knowing. And that runs concurrent under everything we're doing. That's running concurrent. And it's creating these, it's manifesting through these conditionings that we have in the past, these *saṅkhārās* that we came across with the five aggregates. They're running underneath, like programs on a computer. And as soon as you press the right key, this program arises. It'll catch you.

So to be actually right there with the arising of a program and to see it and to catch our relationship of wanting or not wanting is the practice we have to take into our daily life. And to do that, you've got to be calm, you've got to be equanimous. Now frankly that sounds dull, because I want to be happy. I want to jump around and get excited. I don't want to be calm all the time. And that's of course what draws us, because this conditioning beneath us, this deep identity, this deep mistaken identity is telling us that the real happiness is to be found in the world. Fame, riches, power, sensual pleasures.

So you've got these two ways of looking. One from a static perspective: in any given moment you can deconstruct what's happening in terms of the body and the sensations, the raw sensations. The feelings as they manifest by way of perception, whether pleasant or unpleasant. That perception of the feeling, which is like that perception of it being pleasant or unpleasant. See, they both come together. You can't split them in Buddhist psychology. The feeling and the perception arise at the same time. And then you have these *saṅkhārās*, these things that we call our emotional thought life. And then you have this cognition, this active cognition.

On a timeline, you can see how you begin to create it. So now, if we want to reverse that process and stop creating any further problems for ourselves, we've got to be alert to stay at the point of intention. At the point of intention, we have a choice. We can see that the intention is either wholesome for us or unwholesome. And it's a case of renouncing, letting go of those intentions we see as unwholesome, which can be painful because you're renouncing it, you're letting go of an old habit, and reinforcing those that we see as wholesome.

And in this way, the contents of this bag of *saṅkhāra* start filling up with good stuff. And that's why we do the *mettā*. Every time we do *mettā*, we empower the thought of goodwill. So it's affecting the mind. When it affects the mind, it'll affect the way we speak. Speech becomes more gentle, more kind, more compassionate. It affects what we do. So it's systemic. That's the good thing.

The bad news is that we've got all this other old *saṅkhāra*, all this huge bag of rubbish that we've collected over who knows how long. And that's our *kamma*. People in, shall we say, popular Buddhism would say that what happens to you on the outside is your *kamma*. But what happens to you on the outside is governed by all sorts of laws. Things like the earthquakes and the tsunami, a terrible tsunami. That isn't your, that isn't personal *kamma*. That's just part of the general *kamma* that you get when you're born in a certain place. When you're born into a culture, a language, that's part of your general *kamma*. But it's not your personal, you didn't create it. You didn't create the language, you didn't create the culture. You just slot into it.

What is your real *kamma* in terms of liberation, in terms of freedom from suffering, is always internal. If this were not so, then we'd have to change something out there. We'd have to change the culture, go somewhere else, go and live in India or Sri Lanka. And if my liberation were dependent on somebody, I'd have to get rid of them. Can't be having that. So whatever liberation is, whatever this *Nibbāna* is, its attainment is not dependent on what's happening outside of my mind.

So now I sit, I come to sit and I'm assailed by all this stuff coming up, the grief and the anxiety. Dreams of greatness of discoveries that will change the world. The mind creating vast compassionate scenarios where finally I'm given the Nobel Prize. The ability to create an inner world is wonderful. So here I am sitting with this stuff and I've got to go into it and what I find is that I have no option but to suffer it. There's my *kamma*.

So what is the virtue that the Buddha points to as being the greatest of all virtues? He says, the greatest of all ascetic practices is patience. Patience, endurance. And in a sense, we won't want to sit with this stuff unless we feel it's actually exhausting itself. If we feel that we're just sitting with this stuff and nothing's happening, it's just going to be misery all the time and there's no end to it, it just keeps coming up, then well, you may as well not do it. What's the point? I wouldn't do it. Definitely not.

So there's got to be in our meditation a feeling that something is being released. Something's just moving out. And I think that comes with the practice. Over time, sometimes we expect, I mean this is another problem we have. In a society where pain can be got rid of, you can get rid of pain quite quickly with aspirins and stuff like that. Sometimes with the use of drugs you can get rid of painful mental states. There's an expectation that spiritual practice will just sort of zap everything and sort of lift one to the seventh heaven in one of these balloons.

Unfortunately, we find that it's not like that at all. It's quite hard, constant, dogged work to just sit with the stuff that we've created. That's the other thing. This psychology that the Buddha's pointing to is telling us that none of the suffering and the joys that we

experience has been created by anybody. It's all been created by us through our relationship to contact with the world. When we say the world we don't just mean objects, we mean people, we mean our history, our language. That's the contact we have and how we relate to that has been the cause of both our joys and our woes. Internal joys and woes.

So that's the other part. The other part is bearing, enduring, sitting with the stuff. Now we don't have to push it. If we want to understand the Buddha's psychology, so long as there's a self, there'll be an existence. We're never going to be short of time. There'll always be time, so long as there's a feeling of self. So it's not a case of having to do it all in one weekend. It's a case of recognizing that there's probably a lot of work to be done, of just bearing with the conditions that are arising.

And that's what's difficult for us, because we always want to do something. So this mental state arises, and we want to do something about it. Immediately we want to engage in a way which is actually going to create more turbulence. You're trying to shift something, which all it wants to do is liberate itself. And you have to have patience for that, you have to just be with it. And to perhaps have an image of being a comforter to yourself, being a nurse to yourself.

Now if you go to somebody with something on your heart, you want them to listen, don't you? It's just that witness of being with you, which is the solvent, you might say. So in a sense we've got to be able to be a comforter to ourselves. And that's the *mettā*. So when you're looking, when you're mindful within yourself, when you're doing your *vipassanā*, you can flavour that with kindness. Put a sort of flavour to it. And then it's sort of bearable.

If it gets unbearable, fine. You just put it to the side for a while. Go for a walk, read a book, turn the TV on, do something. Just to give yourself a bit of time to regain the courage and the determination you need to go back into the fray.

So there are these two sides. There's the side which is developing beautiful states of mind through practices, through an act of service to our society through the work we do. And that creates joy through practices like *mettā*. So you're constantly building up conditioning. There's no limitation to the development of mind. We call these states illimitable. Mind isn't confined by the body. You can be as joyous as you can make your mind full stop. There doesn't seem to be a limitation to it. That's one side of it, which you practice concurrent with every so often, allowing the steamy stuff to come up.

If you do that as a balance, it doesn't seem so bad. If you just go for the heavy stuff all the time, well, it's miserable, isn't it? You've got to get a bit of froth, a bit of lightness. And then running concurrent with that is this process of growing wisdom, of growing liberation. So through the practice of *vipassanā*, there's this regaining of a different, you're relocating your identity. You're relocating it.

When you trap your finger in a door, just for that one second, you are your body. There is nothing else in your mind. I mean, you suddenly shoot out and kick the door. But for that one moment of delicious pain, there is only body consciousness. And when you're very happy and jumping up and down and all that sort of stuff, you're emotion, aren't you? When you're lost in thought, even if it's good thought, you become your thinking, you become a thinker.

In meditation we've relocated this sense of self to this point of the observer, where we are, as it were, above the manifestations of the body-mind complex. But that's not the end game. Even that self is a false self, but at least it's a damn sight more peaceful. If we can hang on there, no matter what's happening down here, there's not that much suffering going on. In fact, if you maintain that clarity, again, we find there's no suffering. It's unpleasant. It may be unpleasant, but there's no suffering.

And that's the reason why we need to continuously bring ourselves back to this position of the observer. Now when we're actually in the process of action, when we're doing something, having put the right intention into the work, whatever work you're doing, having put the right intention into the work, and then devoting yourself to that task, just to doing that task fully, body, heart and mind, there may be moments of self-awareness, me doing something. But that's a false state, in the sense there's a split there. There's a moment of doing and a moment of watching myself doing. That's not meditation in action. I mean, it'll do, not a bad place to be, but it's not meditation in action, not the clarity of pure meditation in action.

But as you keep devoting yourself to the task, there's a loss of a sense of self, and that is just the doing. And then one finishes the task, or one wakes up again to this self-awareness, and there's been a time when there hasn't been that self-awareness, and there's been a time when there's been no awareness of time. So time is a concept that arises with the self. That period has been a period of liberation from suffering. These are all little indications, little touches upon the Nibbanic mind, upon the Nibbanic consciousness.

So it's not as though *Nibbāna* isn't there. It's not as though you're trying to achieve it. It's not as though it's like you're going from here to Dublin, and Dublin manufactures itself as you're going towards Dublin. *Nibbāna*'s already here because what *Nibbāna* is is

a different relationship. It's a relationship which doesn't have this split of a self. So there's your contrast between *saṃsāra* and *Nibbāna*. To do with our relationship to the particular life we're leading and to what happens within that life and to what happens within us. And the process of liberation is to change that relationship.

So when this man says to the Buddha, "This training you've given us, it's very hard, it's a bit tough," he says, "Well, it is. But in the end," he says, "you achieve *Nibbāna*." And the questioner says, "Yeah, *Nibbāna*, so what?"

He says, well, when you get to Nibbāna, you are contented and with it happy. Contentment is the state of no desire. There's no false desire, a place of absolute contentment and with it happy. And happiness can be described in its various modalities of how you relate to what's happening. So sometimes it's love, sometimes it's compassion, sometimes it's joy, sometimes equanimity, and there's a whole gamut of mental states that arise.

So in the process, what we discover is that the only thing that's lost, the only thing in the Buddha's words that's annihilated, is this greed, hatred and delusion. And all the energy that was once malevolent within us—these anxieties and excitements and all that—they're all transformed. All that energy, it's not lost.

So probably in his early life the Buddha would enter into all sorts of discussions, which seems to have been the pastime of the day, about philosophy and moksha and liberation and all that with passing ascetics. And when he went out to practice, he came to the point where he dropped his mind, the thinking mind. But that wasn't the end of his thinking mind. As soon as the liberation came, the awakened mind came, he had to work it out. He had to tell himself what he knew. He had to describe to himself what it was, how it was before, when he was deluded. And that's the wheel going one way. And what you do when you want to be undeluded—let the thinking out. And then he starts teaching.

So the very same faculty of thought now becomes a servant to the Dharma. He's not lost anything. If anything, he's gained clarity. So you don't lose anything by the process. Everything is purified, clarified, and the heart begins to live in a deeper peace, deeper happiness. And that's it.

We've made it! So you've got these three things that we have to be working at. The first is to spend some time, if we can, every day just letting the heart speak its problem—just sitting with it patiently. The other bit is to develop the beauty of the mind, how beautiful the mind can be, through the practice of *vipassanā*, through the process of work as service. All that reflects back on the mind. I mean, you've got it there in the

Eightfold Path: Right Livelihood. Apart from obvious stuff like trafficking human beings, virtually all jobs that society offers us are fine. It's to do with our attitude to them and how we use them to develop goodwill.

And then there's this other bit of undermining our essential delusion through the practice of vipassanā. And he does that by giving us these models of how to look at our experience, which may be different from Western models. So it's beginning to see our experience through the Buddha's eyes, through the models of these aggregates and the Wheel of Dependent Regeneration, that we're tackling this problem of suffering.

It's not a total psychology. There's no developmental psychology there. It's concerned entirely and solely with this problem of suffering. It doesn't deny other psychologies that have their truth in themselves. It doesn't deny therapies that are of assistance. But it's very arrow-headed towards this problem of suffering.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 132

Buddha Day Address with Refuges and Precepts

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 34 min

In this Buddha Day address, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides us through a contemplative reflection on the Buddha's life journey from his privileged beginnings as a Kṣatriya prince to his awakening under the Bodhi tree. He explores the Buddha's encounters with the four messengers (sickness, old age, death, and the ascetic), his unsuccessful attempts with jhānic absorption states and extreme asceticism, and the pivotal childhood memory that led to his development of vipassanā meditation.

The teaching emphasizes how the Buddha's awakening naturally flowed into compassionate action, encapsulating his entire 45-year teaching career in three Pali words: "dukkha and the end of dukkha" (suffering/unsatisfactoriness and its cessation). Bhante explains the deeper meaning of taking refuge in the Three Jewels—not as external authorities, but as recognition of our innate capacity for liberation, the teachings that guide us, and the community supporting our practice.

The talk concludes with the traditional ceremony of taking the Three Refuges (tisaraṇa) and Five Precepts (pañca sīla), which Bhante presents not as commandments but as training rules (sikkhāpada) that support both ethical purification and wisdom development. He emphasizes the interconnection between virtue (sīla) and awakening, explaining how right intention naturally manifests through right speech, action, and livelihood. The ceremony includes the chanting of vipassanā verses on the Three Characteristics and a traditional blessing for the welfare of all beings.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and fully Self-Enlightened One.

So just an opportunity to reflect on the Buddha's life. We all know, I think most of us know the general outline of the life, but just to contemplate it a little and to see how it fits in with this taking of refuges and precepts.

Remember that he belonged to this warrior class, the Kshatriya class, which would be landed gentry really and with plenty of time on their hands unlike the workers of course in those days. They lived according to the seasons. There was always one season where you don't do much, like the dry season and the winter season and all that, but

even so he would have had a much more relaxed and easy life than most people of his time. If we try to match it with ourselves, our society, seeking for distraction, seeking for pleasure all the time.

And this comes out in one of his little tales, remember, when he wakes up in the morning after an all-night revelling and just sees all these people in disgusting positions and whatnot, and he turns him off. I mean, that's one of the things, the evanescence or the emptiness of sensual pleasure.

The other story, of course, is about meeting these four messengers from the gods, as they're known. Basically, he becomes much more aware of sickness, old age, and death, and the fact that there are people who seem to be sitting under trees, and he wonders what they're about. And there's a suggestion with the ascetics that there may be a way out of this constant rebirth. So remember in his day, the idea, well, as in India and the East today, it's taken for granted that there is a rebirthing process from life after life.

So that had a very poignant feeling for him because what was up for a being was this constant being reborn into lifetimes and lifetimes of being born, growing, sickness, old age, death, being born, grown, sickness, old age and death. And it seems to have been an obsession of the times. And there was a movement of the times where more and more men, mainly, were just leaving the home life and going off to do these various practices. And there were various practices which were on offer.

But when he left home, the one that he seemed to move towards were what came to be known as the *jhānas*, these absorption states. That was seemingly his first effort. And the idea there was that you can create this internal happiness without anything from the outside. So, practising *mettā*, for instance, we can keep making that intention until the heart responds, and eventually you're just filled with this inner bliss, this inner ecstasy, you might say. And once you can do that, well, it's all right, isn't it? You can sit under a tree. You don't mind eating rotten sausages, anything like that, or cold chips. Doesn't matter, does it? You can just sit under a tree and be happy any time you want because it's there within your power to create a beautiful mental state.

But on both occasions, with both teachers who took him into these various different levels of ecstasy, he always came out and seemingly rediscovered the same old sad, depressed, anxious Siddhartha Gautama, like nothing had really moved at the level of his psychology, nothing had been cleansed, and he was still worried about it all, I presume.

And then he tries mortification exercises and the idea there is that the real problem is the body. So if you think about it, if the body never felt hungry you wouldn't feel greed. So basically you stop eating and you just eat bits of rice and stuff like that, and as

long as you keep your body appetites down then you don't get the problems with sensual pleasure. But he discovered that the only thing he gained from that was basically became thin. And it was nothing but more suffering. He didn't actually gain anything from that at all. He said it was unprofitable, ignoble and suffering.

So he left that, if you remember, and to the disgust of his five companions, because they were still all for it. And he's sitting by the roadside there when Sujata comes along with an offering of some rice pudding, which he takes. It seems to have revived him a bit, as you know rice pudding can.

And this is when he remembers this occasion in childhood, and this is why we say he's self-enlightened. Up until then he's tried all these different means and ways and it's not really got him anywhere. But it's this memory from childhood which opens up for him a possibility of investigating his condition. And the memory is of watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. But it's the manner of watching, you see, that childlike curiosity, which he then takes with him under this tree, making a very clear resolution that he was either going to crack this one or die. That's a pretty heavy resolution, isn't it? And luckily for us and for him, six hours on, he makes this wonderful insight, this wonderful understanding.

And that curiosity, that awareness and curiosity, the way of looking, then becomes the very technique that he passes on to other people, and we call that *vipassanā*. What we're celebrating on a day like this is the effort that this person made 2500 years ago to seek the end of suffering. And when he came to encapsulate all his teaching, you know, 40 years of talking to people about his understanding, he could draw it down in the Pali just to three words: suffering and the end of suffering, *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*.

So this dukkha, remember, is a very wide meaning. It's not just suffering as we would normally call it. It's dissatisfaction, it's existential angst. Even the mildest discomfort all happens to be dukkha. And he spends the rest of his life teaching this.

So this is, I think, very important to grasp that the awakening that came to him didn't pull him out of existence, didn't make him sit there like a useless log or something. He then got up. There was a movement of that wisdom down into an attitude and into an action. So the wisdom became compassion, just as an outward flow. Logically speaking, there's no reason why he should have done it, apart from the fact of that empathy with all beings.

And as you know, there was a moment of doubt as to whether anybody would understand it. And some people translate that as a doubt as to whether he would teach or not. But I don't think that's right. I think it's the doubt really as to whether anybody

would understand it or not. He definitely wanted to pass on this message. And he walks quite a way, doesn't he, from Bodh Gaya to Isipatana Park to catch up with his old companions.

When he gets to his old companions, of course, they think he's just become lax and he's lost it. So they don't really greet him with any friendliness or anything. But as he comes towards them, they see something's different about him and actually prepare a seat for him as if he's a teacher.

Now, it's very interesting because when he talks to them in the first beginning, what is recorded is he asks them, he says, have you ever heard me talking like this before? So in other words, he's asking them, having displayed his teaching as best as he can, this is his first effort, you might say, and he's asking them, have you ever heard me say anything like this before? And that's what convinces them to practice with him. And the four of them eventually become fully liberated through his teachings.

So when we take the refuge, in terms of taking refuge in the Buddha, that's what we're taking refuge in. We're taking refuge in a personage and the truth of his message, which is the Dharma. And those people who after him were able to liberate themselves and become witnesses of that very teaching. So those are your three refuges in, shall we say, the traditional way. The tradition is that we're taking refuge in this personage.

And this personage is not only our exemplar, remember, he's actually an archetype, in the sense that we all have to travel through that same path in our own way to become fully liberated. So we have to eventually renounce the world as a place where we can find permanent happiness. So long as there's a part of us seeking happiness in the phenomenal world, there'll be no escape from the problems that indulgence brings to us. So at some point through our practice, there has to be this renunciation.

That scares people because you think, well, I'll just end up being a prune-like ascetic. I'll end up being just a dried prune. That's not very attractive, is it? But it wouldn't be if it weren't that, of course, as you give up something, you receive something back, which are the spiritual gifts. And the obvious ones are the seven factors of enlightenment which include calmness, equanimity, this joy that comes with interest. And the heart then responds, begins to express in its attitude the wisdom you have and you end up with this beautiful heart, this beautiful mind, especially in the four illimitables: love, compassion, joy and peace. And then that flows outward into the way you speak, into what you do and into your livelihood.

So, it's not as though we're giving something up for nothing. We're actually giving something up for something which is far greater. The problem is that you don't know really what you're going to get until you give something up. So remember, it's not like getting rid of your old TV or something and you know which one you're going to get, the new plasma. I mean, that's pretty strange. There's no angst there, is there? But unfortunately, in the spiritual life, you don't quite know what you're going to get when you give something up. And you have to actually give it up before you get something. And it's not as though you can half give it up. You know, say, well, I'll give it up a little bit and just see what's coming. But then nothing much comes. There has to be a renunciation of seeking happiness in the sensual world. But again, we all do it in our own time. There's no rush about this. According to the Buddha's understanding, so long as there's a self, there will be some form of becoming. There'll be some form of existence. So we're never going to be short on time. So we can relax.

Now, in terms of taking refuges and precepts as our personal process of liberation, the Buddha here, taking refuge in the Buddha, really means having the understanding and the confidence that there is something within us to be liberated. That's what you're really spiritually taking your refuge in. And the Dharma is that specific teaching which will help you to attain that liberation. And the Sangha, really you can extend it to anybody and everybody who is actually helping you on the path. So that's the purpose of taking these refuges and precepts.

Now, for those of you who haven't taken them before, who might like to take them, remember that it's not that you have to take them for life or anything like that. One takes them with an honest heart. It's interesting because when you join the order, when you become a monk or a nun in the Buddhist order, in the whole ceremony, there's no time mentioned. There's no question about how long do you expect to stay, or there's no vow that I will be in the order until death do us part. There isn't anything like that. So that means that it's a constant reaffirmation every day. You have to reaffirm, reconfirm your commitment to the monastic order. And that's exactly the same with these refuges and precepts. So it's like every day there should be a point where you reconfirm your commitment to the spiritual life.

So what we'll do is just take a little bit of silence and during that time, just contemplate what taking refuges and precepts means to you and give it your own particular meaning, see? So that when we take it, it's actually something that is directly impinging and affecting, hopefully for the better, your life, your lifestyle. So if we can just sit quietly for a few minutes.

The next part is to undertake the five training rules. So the understanding here, the *sikkhāpada*, the footsteps of training, they're not commandments, they're not thou shalt not, they are I undertake the training rule. And what I think we have to understand is that virtue and the awakening come together. You can't have the one without the other. You can't have a Buddha caught shoplifting. It just doesn't strike you as true. There's something odd about that. So this purification of our morality, purification of our intention, that's what it basically is. The purification of our intention runs hand in hand with the process of insight.

And one of the effects of insight is to actually see how immoral actions actually cause suffering. We're pretty clear about things like guilt and shame and remorse and all that. But also, whenever we do harm, there's also the pain within us, eventually, of knowing that we've caused, we've been at least a catalyst for somebody else's suffering, and that can be quite painful for us to actually deal with.

What we need to do is to keep making that resolution of following these precepts as best we can. We can't expect to follow them absolutely perfectly because we don't have that perfection of mind. But at least on a gross level most of us I think have stopped murdering and thieving. So it's more on the more subtle levels of doing harm that we can become more aware of our actions.

When it comes to, you know, the one that I think a lot of people have difficulty with is not to take intoxicating drinks and drugs. And we live in a culture where, you know, taking a drop of alcohol is quite acceptable. So it's up to you really to decide as to what you feel is allowable, and to know that whenever consciousness is distorted in any way, then there's always a possibility of doing something which is harmful. So it's up to us to decide at what level we want to take these trainings.

So the conjunction of virtue and understanding come together. You can't have the one without the other. And again the Buddha manifests this by this movement from right understanding to right attitude, and from right attitude into right speech, right action, and right livelihood. And remember that this path reverts upon itself. You can start with right livelihood and it will affect your attitude. So it doesn't really matter what you do. You know that old song, it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.

It's actually having a right intention that your work is of service, and that immediately begins to affect the heart base as compassion. And compassion, when we begin to experience compassion and love that way, we begin to understand it as interconnectedness. And from interconnectedness you begin to understand that this idea of me is

really a composite which is affected by all my relationships. So it takes away this sense of I, begins to undermine the sense of I. And the I is always this sense of self, is always expressing itself, is always trying to find happiness for itself.

So when we go out into work with a selfless attitude, as an attitude of selflessness, of service that immediately undermines the self as something which is always seeking its own pleasure. So this movement from understanding into the heart as attitude and outwards as action, you can take it both ways. And whatever your work is, it's for us to find the reason for doing it, which will be a virtuous reason, and the effect upon the heart and the mind will just naturally arise. Just as the other way, when we sit in meditation with vipassanā and there's some insight, it has an effect on our attitude and eventually into the way we work. So it doesn't matter where you start on this particular path, whether it's as an understanding or as a right attitude or as a right action, the effect will be systemic.

So the thing about the precepts is to just take them at your own level of understanding, at your own level of commitment, constantly just pushing yourself gently towards a more and more virtuous life. Don't put unnecessary pressure on you. There's no need to put unnecessary pressure on ourselves. You always work from the base where you are and you gently lean. So this is the Buddha's words, to incline towards *Nibbāna*. So if you lean forward fine enough, you take a step. See? All you've got to do is just lean in the right direction.

So let's just spend a few minutes, just a couple of minutes there, just reflecting upon our virtue and what it means to take the precepts.

Thank you.

So what we can do now is actually take them. We'll also read the verses at the back of the sheet, which is basically our *vipassanā* verses, and then some inspiring verses from the Buddha. And then before we say *sādhu sādhu*, we'll get Mickey to pour this water while I do a little chanting. And that's the basic chant of offering goodwill to all beings, and during that time you can offer whatever merit you have for the benefit of whomever you wish, but it's always good to end off with all beings, that's all.

Okay. So, in the fashion of taking refuge and precepts, you have to chant it after me. Okay.

Namo tassa bhagavato— Hold on, stop. You have to chant it after me, because I'm passing it on to you.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Surāmerayamajjāpamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Surāmerayamajjāpamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

So we can read these Vipassanā verses:

"All conditioned things are impermanent. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

All conditioned things and the unconditioned are not self. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

There is the unborn, the undying, the uncreated, the unconditioned, refuge, harbour and home, perfect contentment and peace.

Just as the great ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, so Nibbāna has only one taste, the taste of freedom.

All conditioned things have the nature to decay, work diligently for your liberation."

So we can ask Mickey to pour the water for us. And while I do this little chanting, bring to mind your goodwill, and offer it to yourself, to whoever you wish, and to all beings. Okay.

Puratthimāya disāya, dakkhiṇāya disāya, pacchimāya disāya, uttarāya disāya, puratthimāya anudisāya, dakkhiṇāya anudisāya, pacchimāya anudisāya, uttarāya anudisāya, hetthimāya anudisāya, uparimāya anudisāya, sabbe sattā, sabbe pāṇā, sabbe bhūtā, sabbe puggalā, sabbe attabhāvapariyāpannā.

Sabbā itthiyo, sabbe purisā, sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe vinipatikā.

Averā hontu, abyāpajjā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu.

Dukkhamuccantuyad aladdhasampadā na vimuccantuyad aladdhasampadā mā vimuccantu.

CHAPTER 133

Daily Rhythms; Fetters, Hindrances and Inclinations; Rebirth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1h02

> *In this comprehensive Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses three interconnected aspects of Buddhist practice and understanding. He begins by examining our natural daily energy rhythms in meditation, distinguishing between physical tiredness and the mental hindrance of sloth and torpor (thīna-middha), offering practical guidance for working skillfully with dullness and lethargy during practice.*
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> *The discussion then moves to the Buddha's systematic categorization of mental states: the anusaya (underlying inclinations), the five nīvaraṇa (hindrances that arise during meditation), and the ten saṃyojana (fetters) that bind us to cyclic existence. Bhante explains how these different frameworks help us understand the path from stream-entry (sotāpanna) through to full awakening (arahatta), emphasizing that liberation requires constant vigilance while maintaining a relaxed, non-forceful approach.*
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> *The final section explores rebirth from both traditional Theravāda and the innovative interpretation of Ajahn Buddhadāsa, who understood the dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda) as describing the moment-to-moment rebirth of the sense of self rather than literal reincarnation across lifetimes. This perspective offers Western practitioners a more psychologically accessible understanding while preserving the transformative power of the teaching for immediate spiritual practice.*

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

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

I'm not going to answer these in order because they work better if I jumble them around a bit. The first one is concerning the experience that we have during the day. So the question is: I've noticed over the past three or four days that the same sits each day

have the same quality of energy. So first thing in the morning is good, and late afternoon, early afternoon the energy is low. And late after an evening, it's good again. Is it possible that we have a distinct rhythm of energy like a daily pattern?

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

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

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

I mean, as you know, the usual thing I say is the first three days, there's a natural tiredness that comes because of the imbalance in most people's sleep. They're either oversleeping or they're undersleeping or they're not sleeping well or something. That's normally ironed out. And I do see it on people's faces. That's one of the things that you

see after three days. The face changes dramatically. Partly because, I think, of the sleep business, but also because just for a moment they've dropped the cares and woes of life. They forget about it finally, just for a day. It is remarkable.

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

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

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

So that's the only thing with your rhythm. So it's natural to feel tired at certain times of the day and just to know that that's physical and not an unwholesome mental disposition. And finally, of course, you've got to take that into daily life. You can't make the effort here and then in daily life you just go berserk and sleep all the time. It's just like the practice has to go into your daily life. So that you're always gently lifting your energy. And energy is just like anything else. The more you exercise it, the more you have of it. It's not as though you've only got so much energy and that's the end of it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I like long questions.

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

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

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

Now although this actually is enumerated, I've read that the Buddha used it very generally, the word *anusaya* to suggest that there were these potential conditionings within the system and that they related in some way to actual behavior to the way you think and speak and act. And when they do that then you can actually see them, so that's when he categorizes them in terms of our meditation practice into the five hindrances.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So, in the first stage, what's known as *Sotapanna*, the stream-enterer, the insight there is such that the person glimpses the fact that this personality is not a self, it's not a me or a mind, it's not substantial. The other insight is that all the religious practices

which are not to do with insight but more to do with raising devotion—all the little rituals that we do like the bowing and the taking the refuges and stuff like that—are all supports but in themselves don't produce any awakening.

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

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

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

And the Buddha talks about it like a flash of lightning. And it's interesting because when some people have this experience, it's like nothing. They don't even know they've had it. It's like it's virtually no consequence to them. They don't even know it sometimes. Even though the teacher tells them, they say, well, I don't think you're right. For others, it's a sort of huge, amazing thing that's happened to them. And the way I personally make sense of that is because, of course, in past lives if you have attained that then when you come back to this life you're simply regaining the position where you were.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Restlessness goes. Now this has always interested me. I think what's really meant here actually is that all the old problems are there that are within our personality and that through the practice and over a period of time they just become less and less and less until they're just this little restlessness. They're not disturbing so much, they're not so cloying, they're not so demanding, they just lost energy. See, that's my understanding of it. Technically, it's just feeling restless, you know, fidgety or whatever. But when you look into your own restlessness, you'll always find there's something making you rest-

less, you see. So even that goes now because the heart's completely purified, you know. There's no, for want of a better word, there's no neuroses, there's nothing in there which has a negative effect on us.

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

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

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

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

Spiritually speaking, you're not trying to attain any of this. You're not trying to attain these four paths and fruits. You're not trying to attain *Nibbāna*. What you're trying to attain is moment-to-moment mindfulness. Because once that's attained, the path manifests. You don't have to do anything. And that's the genius, you might say, of the

Buddha's teaching. He doesn't land us with goals in the future. So that everything we're doing now is some sort of Nibbanic bliss in so many hundreds of thousands of years. He says, no, he says, just be aware now and you'll begin to taste it. Just be aware now and those hindrances that are stopping us moving forward will begin to lessen. So the whole accent is upon now, you see. And that makes it easy for us, doesn't it? It's like you don't have to worry about the future. It will take care of itself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this life all the middle section happens—all the business of the desire, the becoming, and so on. Then after this becoming there's this rebirth in another realm of sickness, old age and death—birth, sickness, old age and death. In other words, that's your future life. So that's how it's taught traditionally.

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

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

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

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

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

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

So now that is, I think, a more acceptable way of understanding rebirth, and I think it's a way that allows us to use the concept of rebirth very much as part of our spiritual practice. So here I am being reborn as a greedy person again. You see what I mean? It's like, "Here I go again. It's me again. Hello." And it's recognising that. I say, "You greedy person." Not damning, of course, not judging, but simply no longer enjoining it, no longer indulging in that.

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

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

That's right. A win-win situation.

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

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

So, in terms of rebirth, it's never caused me any problems, the idea that one goes on in some way. But it's necessary to also understand that that belief is not necessary. Often when people come to Buddhism, if they've been brought up in one of the religions, the monotheistic religions—Christianity or Judaism or whatnot—it's like there's a misunderstanding that they have to believe what the Buddha says or else it's not going to work. It's like you believe that Jesus died to save us all. And you have to believe that or else you don't get your comeuppance, you don't get your grace. But of course, Buddhism is very different from that. It is very much a hypothesis, it's a theory that the Buddha puts to us and says, "Well, this is true for me, you'll have to find out for yourself whether it's true for you." It's an investigation. And that process of investigation is the process of liberation.

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

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

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

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

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

And I shall end with a little story. I think I've answered the question. End with a little story about this young girl who turned up at the monastery at Kandalama, which is my monastery in Sri Lanka. And her father said that every evening she would come and tell him that she was going to a particular heavenly realm because she was writing the biography of the Buddha. So she was only a little girl, nine or ten or something. So he humoured her and said, "Oh yeah, very good," and she got to bed. Anyway, one day it would seem—you can only believe what people tell you—she got fed up with her dad and rose up in front of him and disappeared.

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

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

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

CHAPTER 134

Mettā, Applied and Sustained Thought, Buddha Mind

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 45 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses how the four brahmavihāras (divine abodes) complement vipassanā meditation practice. He warns against the spiritual trap of detached indifference that can masquerade as equanimity, explaining how mettā (loving-kindness) draws wisdom from the head into the heart as attitude. The talk explores when and how to cultivate karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy), and upekkhā (equanimity), including their subtle enemies like attachment, pity, and excitement.*
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> *Bhante provides detailed explanations of vitakka and vicāra (applied and sustained thought) in jhāna states, distinguishing between lakkaṇa jhāna (concentration on the three characteristics) and ārammaṇa jhāna (concentration on objects). He shares practical guidance for using mettā to calm the mind and aid sleep, illustrated with a powerful story of helping an insomniac Israeli student.*
>
> *The discussion concludes with an exploration of Satipañña—the union of sati (awareness) and pañña (wisdom) that forms the Buddha mind. Bhante explains how these represent the passive and active qualities of awakened consciousness, emphasizing the importance of open receptivity over goal-seeking in meditation practice.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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

So the question about *metta*: we practice *metta* at the end of the day, could you say something about when and in what circumstances we can and should cultivate *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*, and how they fit in with *vipassanā* practice overall?

One of the problems that may occur with *vipassanā* is an objectivity which turns into an indifference. That's your problem there: taking this stand within ourselves of the objective observer just watching things arise and pass away can become too passive, and you can move towards indifference with the usual phrase, "Oh, it's just *kamma*." So if

somebody falls down screaming with pain before you, you can stand completely calm and say, "Oh, it's all right, it's just a bit of *kamma*." It's like the heart's not drawn because it's found this little place where it's untouched.

And it's often a case of being afraid to get engaged, frankly. There can be fear there of actually getting engaged in suffering. And we do that when we note something and we're actually pushing it away. See, that's the case where we're callousing ourselves, where we're drawing a thick skin in between that which knows, that which feels, and what there is to be felt, because it doesn't want to go there, basically. But it kids itself and says, "Well, I can see it as a process, I can see the *anicca*, I can see it's not me, not mine." But it's not me, not mine in that sense—it's not quite the right "me not mine." It's still ours in a conventional sense; it's our baggage, for heaven's sake. So you have to be slightly careful about that. So that's the right understanding when we do it properly.

But you can see that in the Eightfold Path you start off with this right understanding which has three levels, remember: the level of receiving information from a teacher, from the books and so on; making it our own intellectual knowledge by contemplating it, by thinking about it, so that intellectually we have a confidence in it because it's now become our thought; and making it real through *vipassanā*, a direct experience. So now that's the first step, right understanding.

The next one is *sammāsaṅkappa*, right attitude. So it has to systematically drop from this understanding into the heart as an attitude, or else it remains too remote. And that's why we do *metta*. That's the purpose of *metta*. Because then it draws it. So what is wisdom in action? It's compassion, isn't it? It's love, compassion and joy. That's wisdom in action. That's what it manifests as: some form of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and all the other virtues, as an attitude that is in the heart.

And then it goes right speech. So that's the next thing. It comes out through what we say. Right action and then right livelihood. So you see it flows out into society. And because it flows out into society that way doesn't mean it can't flow back this way. So depending on your job and what qualities your job demands, it will come back up the other way into attitude and into wisdom.

So if you have a job which demands a certain service, a quality of service—and virtually every job does, apart from trafficking in human beings and arms and all the nasty bits—but most jobs can be seen as a service. It's a compassionate thing, it's a loving thing, and that feeds into your attitude, and that gives you that interconnectedness. The more you see yourself as interconnected, the less that is of this "me" on my own, doing my own thing in my own time in my own way, to hell with you lot. So it works either

way. So that's why you can start with love and it'll feed back into wisdom and feed out into action. So there's your three paths: path of insight, path of wisdom, path of love, and the path of action, three *karmas*.

The Hindus delineate that, I think, more clearly than do the Buddhist lineage. They have these three *karmas*. But it's there within the Buddhist teaching; there's no problem with that. But the Buddha is very much inclined to approach the situation from right understanding. Whereas you can see a religion like Christianity approaches it more from love, approaches it from that point of view.

So in terms of the question, how does it fit in with *vipassanā* practice? That's how it fits in. So in a sense, every time you do a session of *vipassanā*, there ought to be a little —one minute, it doesn't take long, one minute, two minutes—of just bringing it into an attitude. So the exercise we did there, the first bit takes about what, fifteen minutes when you do it long ways. There's only a couple of minutes when you just flash through all the different categories. You don't even have to do that. You just give it to yourself and all beings.

And remember, if you want to use it to calm yourself, if you're having difficulty sleeping, that's one of the gifts of *metta*. It helps to relax the mind. It gives the heart a good feeling when you fall asleep. But to do that, you must choose somebody whom you have no problems with. If you choose somebody you have problems with, it excites the mind itself. And definitely somebody whom you love who's passed away or fallen ill or something—then it just brings grief and stuff. So it's basically to yourself and somebody, or to all beings. Simple phrase. And you don't make these complicated phrases because that wakes you up. It's very simple.

I had a very interesting experience with that. There's an Israeli man turned up at Kanduboda. And he said he hadn't slept in his life. He hadn't slept in his life ever. And I said, "No, not since I was a child." Mainly because of trauma, the bombs and all that. I said, "You must sleep." He said, "No, what happens is I lose consciousness for just a moment and then I'm awake again." And I questioned him about it and he said he never slept. He went into this sort of momentary blackout and came out again. He was doing *vipassanā*. So I said to him, "Well, the antidote, according to the Buddha, is loving-kindness." So I gave him the instructions that I've just given you, which is a classic instruction. And he came back the next day and he said he'd slept for two hours. Very joyful, very happy. And by the end of the week he was oversleeping. Sent me a present from Israel.

So that was powerful, wasn't it? So, back to the question. When and in what circumstances? Well, in the discourse on loving-kindness, the Buddha says to do it all the time. It's just a way of being in the world, coming into a situation with that open-heartedness, with that kindness. And remember, you can flavour your own meditation with that when you're looking inward. You can flavour the way that you're looking with a certain kindness, and that's very helpful if you're working with something which isn't particularly pleasant. So in terms of when and where: all the time. That's what the Buddha says. Those who live like that will achieve liberation.

So if you think about it, we're made up of these composites. We're made up of the mind in terms of thinking and that, and the heart with its emotional life, and the body with its actions. So somehow it's got to all work together. And it's just looking upon our lives as that way of being interconnected, which brings up the idea of service. You're never doing anything just for yourself. There's always some—even if you're only doing it for yourself, it's so that you can be healthy and wise to help other people. Do you know what I mean? It's like always trying to make that connection.

I mean the Buddha does say you do things for yourself and others, both yourself and others. But I think you can sort of twist things to make it so that everything you do is in some sort of relationship with the world. So that's when you do it. I mean consciously, when do you do it consciously as a mental effort?

Well, the morning, obviously, and before you—in the evening sometime, with the meditation. That's the two times we're supposed to sort of practise. The morning is setting ourselves in the right frame of mind for the day. And the evening is really letting whatever we've accumulated during the day just give it time to evaporate. And then you end with loving-kindness, and that sets you up for the evening really, the evening TV. It's all right as long as it's football.

But of course there are specific times when the various things are called upon, like *karuṇā*, compassion, *muditā*, sympathetic joy. And these things of course in the literature have their obvious enemy and their very subtle enemy. So the obvious enemy of love is hatred, but its more subtle enemy is attachment. Now so long as we've got a self, there will be attachment. There's no way we can get rid of attachment just because we think it shouldn't be there. It'll be there. It's just knowing its manifestations.

You can always normally tell when you're acting from an attached point of view because you're very pleased that somebody's doing what you told them to do. You're very irritated because they're not doing what you told them to do. And you're very annoyed because, or you're very afraid because they're not doing what you told them to do. You

see what I mean? There's always some negativity comes up which manifests the attachment. Which doesn't mean to say that what you're telling them to do isn't the right thing for them to do, or you're advising them to do.

See, when I started this teaching, I used to get quite irked, miffed, by the fact I'd give these instructions and people wouldn't do them. I thought, "What's the bloody point? I'm the teacher. I said go slow. They should go slow." See? And then I had a long talk with myself. And I thought, "What are you getting miffed for?" See? So now, if people don't do what I ask them to do, that's fine. But I'm very happy when they do. You can move yourself over. See? So it's just a case of recognising that attachment, some form of attachment will be there with relationships and with things, and it's just knowing that that causes us some form of discomfort and sometimes heavy pain really. But it's just knowing it as the product of self.

And then, the way we deal with it is exactly what *vipassanā* is teaching us. You know, we feel it, we let it go, we don't feed into it. And then as it passes away, we feed into the opposite. There's a case in the scriptures where there's three *arahats* living together, the Anuruddhas, as they're called. Of course, they are fully liberated. And the Buddha asks them, how is it they live so peacefully together? And Anuruddha says, "Well, I say to myself, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?" See? Now that's the selfless way. But it only works if everybody else is doing the same. Because if you say that and they're not saying it, you just get abused. See? So you have to be very careful about that one. But at least you can have that attitude of at least first opening up to what the other wants.

When anybody, for instance, came to the Buddha and said, "What do you teach about *kamma*? What do you teach about this and that?" he would always reply, "Well, what's your understanding?" He never sort of launched into his, "Well, this is it and this is the way it should be." So, "What's your understanding?" And then when they'd given their understanding, he would argue with them to show that their understanding had a flaw in it. See? And then when they saw the flaw, they immediately dropped probably their conceited position of "I'm right and the Buddha and this guy's wrong." And because they were that open, then he told them what his teaching was. Not everybody accepted it even so.

Now that's interesting, because when they asked the Buddha, "How do you feel when somebody doesn't receive your teaching?" he says, "Well, it's all right, it's all calm." "But how do you feel when they do?" "They feel joyful." He knows his limits. You can't enlighten somebody, can you, when we say that "Let me enlighten you, let me disabuse you..."

When it comes to *karuṇā*, the opposite, the obvious opposite is cruelty, of course. Instead of wishing somebody's free of harm, you give them some, give them some pain. The subtle one is pity, grief, feeling sorry for somebody. Now, if you think about that, it sounds right to feel sorry, but you're not. See? There's an "I" in there feeling sorry for somebody. There's a difference between that and empathy, isn't there? Because with empathy you connect with that feeling because you've had similar feelings, and that draws you to want to help. But to say, "Oh, you poor thing, you want to hit him, don't you? I'm so sorry for you." "Thank you very much." So it's a subtle one because people think they're being kind by saying, "I feel so sorry for you."

Muditā is joy. The obvious enemy of that is envy, obviously, envy and jealousy. So by developing *muditā* we undermine those two qualities. But the subtle one is excitement, interestingly enough, just getting excited, getting overexcited, sort of moving into an indulgence with it.

And what keeps it from doing that is this *upekkhā*. What stops all these things from sort of going off is *upekkhā*, just that basis of an equanimous mind, the equanimity. And the equanimity is—remember, always begins with that position of openness. So you're not coming from a position. So when the heart resonates with somebody else's happiness, it's at the level of their resonance. You're not overdoing it. Which we often do because often underneath it we're pushing away the jealousy and the envy. "Oh, I'm so happy for you. Oh, absolutely wonderful."

I remember once there was this monk—it was just so painful. And we were opening a centre and he said these lovely things about the centre and all these people who'd been involved and so on. And then during lunch, such a telltale, he turned round and he said, "You know, I meant every word I said." That's a giveaway, isn't it? You have to tell people that you meant every word you said. Anyway, I prayed for him.

It's funny, isn't it? Now, you see, this is something that doesn't really come up in Buddhist psychology. Buddhist psychology, the way it comes from the Buddha—I mean it's there in the sense of the *anusaya*, the potential defilements that sit underneath—but I haven't really come across the Western idea of unconscious motivation which is actually affecting what you do and you don't really know it. People know it because it's in the inflection of your voice, it's in the way that you hold yourself, and what you are trying to make sincere and what you might actually believe as sincere, other people actually perceive as completely insincere. Do you know what I mean?

And of course *vipassanā*—one of the things about *vipassanā* is that you might be sitting here and if you do really note, you'll catch these underlying thoughts because they'll come up. See? All the ones that we don't like to describe ourselves by, that don't

fit in with our self-esteem. The obvious one is envy and jealousy. Envy is just about allowable, but jealousy is the way I would distinguish the two. Maybe it's just my distinction, but envy is basically just wanting what the other person has. And jealousy is the same, except you hate them for it. You hate them for having what they have. And you know that that's basically saying to ourselves "I'm inferior." So we don't like to acknowledge that we're really envious or really jealous. And so these things we hide from ourselves, those things that don't fit into our idea of who we are, our self-esteem.

And *vipassanā* often gives us these little ins to ourselves which can be humiliating, but at least now we know why nobody likes us. Before we didn't understand why people get upset with us. People who say they're never angry and they're fuming—that sort of silliness. So opening up...

Vipassanā opens us up to ourselves, and then we have to translate that. So in terms of when and in what circumstances—I mean there are obvious places where these illimitables manifest, but generally speaking what we're trying to develop is a concurrent attitude that runs with the wisdom we have. That's all it is—it runs concurrently.

So in the morning when I say do these resolutions for the day, try and add... See, I've got four of them now. I keep building up. It's getting ridiculous. But you make a resolution on the wisdom side, a resolution on the attitude, a resolution about your work, a resolution... See what I mean? And just by doing that sincerely, eventually it turns. It actually does work. Things can creep up on you.

I'll give you an example. When you go to the east as a monk, especially as a *suddhahāmaduru*, as they call you in Sri Lanka—a white monk—you get this generally special treatment, because people have their faith raised that somebody of another culture should become a Buddhist. It's not so strange now, but in the old days it would have been amazing. And you get there and people give you food and they ask you what you need and you get the medicine you want, the clothes you want, the shelter and everything.

So I'd gone back to Sri Lanka on one occasion and I was staying at this monastery in Colombo and they were serving this food, and over a period of two or three days I was getting really irritated. I thought, why not? I'm a Westerner, why don't they offer me an egg? See, they don't... Sri Lankans don't offer eggs to monks because it's part of meat, and the order's meant to be vegetarian.

Just as an aside, when I first joined this order in Kanduboda, one of the monks said very proudly to me that we're vegetarians, you see. And on the same meal, all this fish was served. A westerner made a wry comment that fish were automated self-propelling vegetables. Sort of allowable.

And to my surprise, I was feeling really disgusted with this food, which not so long ago I was really delighting in. I thought, this is really strange, you see. And then I just caught this complete lack of ingratitude for the food that was being given me. And I was moaning that they weren't giving me spaghetti and toast. And as I saw that and I came back and I thought, for heaven's sake. So I began to develop gratitude. And of course the food started to taste beautiful again. It just shows how your attitude really governs your relationship to things.

So just to bring it all together: the reason why the Buddha practices *mettā* is because that's your basic attitude to all living beings, and once that's set properly the other two illimitables—*muditā*, this joy, and compassion—arise naturally. You don't have to worry about it. I know that in Buddhist history the Mahāyāna took compassion as their big thing, which is understandable because the Buddha is talking about suffering and the end of suffering. But that was generally a reaction against what was a tradition that had become too vipassanā bound, too head bound really, and somehow was losing contact with the people, it seems. You get this movement, and then it goes right the other way. There's some schools that think that *karuṇā* is more important than wisdom. It's completed a circle, you see.

Any questions come up about that?

Well, I'm only suggesting that. It can be any resolution. Whatever the day is. Like, for instance, if you know you've got a hard day at work coming up, you resolve to endure patiently. If you know it's going to be a day off, you make a resolution to use it to the best advantage rather than just fritter the time away. Anything, anything really. But there may be certain resolutions which are very continuous because you're working with something. I mean, to make a resolution to develop moment-to-moment mindfulness is a sort of basic attitude. And sometimes I find it comes up during the day, quite spontaneously.

Could you explain what is meant when one reads about applied or sustained thoughts and where they appear in the jhānas? Also, how do they differ in quality? I assume that they are skilful application of thought. Can you explain in what way and what's to look out for in case of slipping into an unskilful application?

These are technical terms, *vitakka*, *vicāra*, and in a sense they are slightly mistranslated by "thought." It's more that the thinking mind is directed to an object—it's not thinking about something.

So talking about it in terms of vipassanā: when you note something like, for instance, you're noting the breath—so "rising, falling"—and then if you have a touching point, let's just say, make it easy, "rising, falling." So "rising, falling." You can see that the intellect is involved, but in a sense it's not actually drawn into the object as it were. And that's why, because the effort, the focus isn't there, it flits away. But you keep bringing it back. Keep bringing it back. You see? And that's the process of *vitakka*. The image that they give in the commentaries is a bee flying around a flower. A bee flying around a flower.

As you keep doing that, as you're "rising, falling," there's a feeling of sort of being drawn into it and getting stuck on the object, as it were. It feels like you can't even move off it sometimes, that sort of feeling. That's when the bee's landed on the flower, you see. That's the *vicāra*. And it's a sign to the meditator that their focus, their concentration is now matured, right? And as you know, you've got to do this every sitting. It's not as though it's matured and that's the end of that, like cheese. You've got to keep working at it.

So then it becomes this *vicāra*, you see, *vitakka vicāra*. If you were doing *mettā* practice, you would just do your good wishes: "May all beings be happy," you see. But the mind would be moving all over the place, but as you keep doing it, it's as though the phrase now comes naturally, and you're stuck with it, and it's there in the background, and it's easy to stay with that phrase. So at that point it's become *vicāra*, *vitakka vicāra*.

When that's really nicely developed, the mind's very still, you're probably in what's known as the first *jhāna*. That's the sign of the first *jhāna*. And there are two types of *jhānas* which I have written about on the website. There's one called *lakkhaṇa jhāna* and there's one called *ālambaṇa jhāna*. I'm giving you now the commentarial stuff. I'm sounding very learned, but this is about the limit of it.

The *lakkhaṇa jhānas* are those concentration states which are developed on the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self, and therefore they belong to the Vipassanā tradition. The *ālambaṇa jhānas* are those that are developed on an object, such as loving kindness or the breath, which are to do with the *jhānas*. So what that's saying is that the level of concentration is the same, but with the *jhāna* there's no investigation—there's just the development of that mental state and the enjoyment of it. And the Buddha said that's good because it's developing the heart. With the vipassanā there's always the intelligence, there's always the investigation.

That's the difference, and that's why anybody practicing *jhāna* can even unwittingly slip into vipassanā, and those in vipassanā can unwittingly slip into *jhāna*. They just move between the other. But certain traditions will go down one of those paths—there will be a combination of *jhāna*-vipassanā or just vipassanā. The Mahāsi was the *suddha-vipassanā*, the dry way as it's called—*suddhavipassanā* only. So that's the meaning of this *vitakka vicāra*—"applied and sustained." It's just a funny translation. It's difficult to translate these things sometimes.

Any questions?

Bhante, could you say more about the meaning of *Satipaññā*? Also, I've heard the term *sati-sampajañña* which sounds similar but I don't know the origin or significance of it.

Now *Satipaññā* is not scriptural. You'll not find anywhere in the scriptures the two words *satipaññā* stuck together like that, and I pinched it from the great teacher Buddhadāsa, who taught—because he used to talk about it, at least that's what I remember. And what they are are the two qualities of the Buddha mind, of the enlightened person. Now although we talk about them being two things, actually they're one and the same thing. One is its passive quality and the other one is active.

So first of all, to understand something you've got to look, and when you look then you see or you don't see. So the first is receiving, you see. That's why I try to emphasize this quiet abiding of just being open, of the equanimity of just receiving. You see, that's your *sati*. And in receiving, once in receiving, one sees, one understands.

There's a difference between opening up and letting things come to you as opposed to looking for something, because when you're looking for something you're coming from a position, you're coming from a past experience, a conceptual idea. Now that's going to corrupt the *paññā*. And we can say in general, spiritually speaking, when you're looking for something because you're coming from some idea, some notion—if you get what it is that you've been looking for... well, if you don't get it you're disappointed and you're frustrated, and if you do you're deluded. You go around thinking you are enlightened because it fits in with your concepts of what *Nibbāna* is. Then that's it, you've had it—you're in the state of perdition, there's little hope, at least in this lifestyle.

They say—how do they put it now—the illness caused by the intellect, by conceited intellect, is like the illness caused by a medicine. If you've got a medicine to cure an illness, that's good. But if the medicine itself gives you an illness, then you're really stuck.

So the idea of *sati* is this complete openness, and that's what the Buddha called his discourse on this whole vipassanā thing: *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the establishment of *sati*. And if you go through the opening stanzas of that—you get good translations now, Bhikkhu Bodhi and places like that—you'll see he goes through the stages of just first of all just getting in touch with the breath: "It's a long breath, a short breath." He's just getting in touch with the breath. And then as you get in touch with the breath, you calm the body, you calm the mind. See, that's the *sati*—you're just pulling back from it, just letting it calm itself through the breath.

And then you begin to note the impermanence of it, or the process of it, the beginning and the end and the middle bits. And then he says when... just when there's just enough *sati*, just enough *paññā*, insight will arise. And you can't make that happen. You just slowly develop it through this attitude of placing your attention on the object with that openness and with the presumption, with the faith, that there is this intelligence within that looking.

Now the three things that always come together, the three words that always come together is *ātāpī-sampajāno-sātimā*. So the *ātāpī* is the effort, and it's continuous unremitting effort. It's actually a word which is somehow related to mortification exercises, but it's meant to be that sort of continuous unrelenting gentle effort to remain mindful.

The *sampajañña* is with this intelligence, with this intuitive intelligence—not the intellect, not thinking and being aware. It's an adjective. So that *sampajañña-sati-mā*, the nouns that come from that are *sati-paññā*.

And just as a little aside: what happened was in '98 when I returned from Sri Lanka, and during that year decided I was going to stay in Britain, I wasn't going to go back. And I realized that to stay here meant that I'd have to teach because the support, there wasn't the internal structure for easy support for a monk. You have to teach really. I asked a friend—well somebody said to me, well, you need to set something up. So they set a website up for me. It said you need a logo. So I asked this fellow who's a printer, who worked a little bit in—those early in '98—it's funny how things have moved so fast—to make up a logo.

And I gave him some ideas, you see. I said well I wanted to be a *dhammacakka*, a wheel, and I wanted to have twelve spokes for the twelve links of the dependent origination, cut into four for the Four Noble Truths, eight for the eightfold path. And it had all these—sixteen of them, ten of those—had everything on this wheel, you see. Well, the poor man struggled at it. And when it came out, it was horrible. And I didn't know what to say. We must have spent hours on this thing. And I felt really terrible. I thanked him, of course, and quietly put it to the side. He wasn't a sort of person to hold grudges.

And what it did was, it made me stop and think, well, what am I teaching? That's what it made me do, which is rather good, actually. I said, what is it I'm teaching? And these words came quite spontaneously at the time: I'm teaching *Satipaññā*. And that's how I ended up with this logo I've got.

And the five whiskers—the actual circle, the circle without the whiskers, if you can imagine it, it's just one circle with all those petals. You often get that symbol, especially in Burma, and they're the twenty-four *paṭicchas* that we chant, twenty-four relations. And I stuck these whiskers in for the five spiritual faculties going inward and coming out. They were supposed to be the four illimitables with wisdom pushing them out, you see. And the inner circle, which is free of colour, where the things stop, that was meant to be a symbol for *Nibbāna* in this life, for the Buddha as he was living. And the black spot is *Parinibbāna*, total *Nibbāna*. That was the idea of it. All this you will find written up on my website in great detail.

So, that's the *Satipaññā*, anyway, that's what it means. And as I say, I filched it off a very good teacher, Buddhadāsa, whom I really was following yesterday when I was talking about this business of rebirth. If you look at the text carefully enough, the Buddha is talking about rebirth of self—it's all about the rebirth of self and the suffering of rebirth of self. And there's a phrase which is not quoted so often actually but it should be, and it's in the... it's "a consciousness"—in the Pali it's... That's one of the five quotes that I know. I don't want you to think, oh, this fellow knows Pali. I've learned this one especially off by heart so I can keep quoting it.

And it's "a consciousness"—see, he used the word consciousness. It's the same word that he uses for the five *khandhas*, for the five aggregates. So one is *viññāṇa*, you see. But there it has a different meaning. There it's an act of cognition, right? But then he says there is this consciousness which is not touched by any of the senses, so you can't see it, you can't smell it or anything else, you can't think about it, you can't emote—there's nothing there at all. And he says it's boundaryless because there's no phenomena. It's only phenomena that makes a boundary, isn't it? It's only the walls of this room that give the room a boundary. If there's no phenomena, it's boundaryless. And in all directions, full of light.

And as far as I know, that only comes up once in the scriptures. And it comes up as an answer to a question.

And the question is, where is it that the four great elements come to an end? Now the four great elements, remember, are fire, earth, water and air. So what the question is really saying is, where does the world come to an end? And he says, that's the wrong question. He says, where does the world not find a footing? And then he makes this statement.

Now, the whole of Mahāyāna is basically based on that statement. Because in early Buddhism, the Buddha is much more... the Buddha likes to put the emphasis on the experience of *Nibbāna*. In later Buddhism, the question was asked, well, what is it that experiences Nibbāna? And that's where the thing shifts towards consciousness and the study of consciousness as such. Some very good histories on that, by the way, if you want to read about it — the evolution of Buddhist thinking and practice. And that's where you get the evolution of the practice of Zen and Dzogchen, you see, just the awareness.

So when you trace that back to the original scriptures, whether it's the Theravāda scriptures or the Sarvāstivādin scriptures, you always come across this emphasis on *sati*. You know, if you were to put the whole of the Buddha's teaching — in a practical teaching anyway — in one word, it would have to be *sati*. I can't think of another word that would fit so closely to what he's trying to teach. What is *sati*? How do you develop it? Where does it lead to when you develop *sati*? That's it.

So you can see why I cling to the words Satipanya. You can see why I'm very attached.

So I think that brings us to the end of our questions in terms of what's written there, I think.

CHAPTER 135

Equanimity - Foundation of all Virtue

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this profound talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma illuminates equanimity (upekkhā) as the foundational virtue underlying all Buddhist practice. Drawing on the work of Ñāṇapoṇika Thera's 'Vision of the Dhamma,' he explains how equanimity operates on two levels: intellectual and emotional. The Buddha identified three factors in how we cling to views—diṭṭhi (wrong understanding), taṇhā (emotional grip), and māna (self-identification)—which together create the rigid opinions that cause conflict and suffering.*
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> *Bhante skillfully connects this understanding to paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), showing how avijjā (ignorance) conditions our relationship with the world through the saṅkhāras. He emphasizes that the crucial intervention point is at vedanā (feeling) and taṇhā (craving), before the 'I' solidifies through upādāna (grasping) and bhava (becoming). This 'becoming,' he explains, is the rebirth the Buddha spoke of—not merely life to life, but the constant rebirthing of self that occurs with each identification and decision.*
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> *The practical application is clear: equanimity is cultivated through stopping throughout the day, allowing accumulated mental states to surface and subside. Whether using bells, phone rings, or watch alarms as reminders, these pauses create space for clarity. From this equanimous base, we can investigate experience directly—putting aside our concepts and expectations to see things as they truly are. This, Bhante suggests, is how contentment naturally arises as we become less dependent on pleasant experiences for our happiness.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

This evening I thought I would let my mind wander around the factors of enlightenment and dependent origination, just to see where we go.

One of the things I've been stressing this week—in fact, I tend to stress it a great deal—is this quality of equanimity. It seems to me that equanimity is twofold. But before I go into that, let me say something about its rating in Buddhist virtues: it is the highest. There's a lovely book called *Vision of the Dhamma* by Ñāṇapoṇika. He was a German monk who has since passed away. He points out that equanimity lies beneath any virtue and therefore is of enormous importance to develop.

This equanimity has, as I say, two strands. It is both intellectual and attitudinal, which of course engages our emotions.

In the Buddha's understanding, when we hold onto a view or an opinion, there are three factors involved: māna, diṭṭhi, and taṇhā. Diṭṭhi is the word for wrong understanding. Taṇhā is the emotional grip that we have upon our opinion. And māna is the self or the identity we have with a particular philosophy or idea.

Now you can see this not only in religious circles—fanatics, fundamentalists—but you see it in political life as well. People identify with their opinion, with their understanding, and they label it the truth. "I'm right, everybody else is wrong. It's perfectly obvious to me. I can't understand how other people can't see that I'm perfectly right."

In the early discourses, the Buddha is constantly telling his monks and nuns not to get involved in these debates, which are not about determining what is truth but about who wins. He says if you lose, you go away feeling ashamed and hurt. And if you win, you're full of pride and absolutely more sure that you're right and everybody else is wrong.

So there's an intellectual level to this equanimity. The emotional level is the pain that we have when, as the Buddha points out, we're worsted in an argument—the holding onto our belief systems. And that's all entwined around the sense of who I am. "I am a socialist, I vote Labour." "I'm a conservative." All these "I am" statements. What this does, of course, is create opposition. Just talking on political lines, the fact that people align themselves to a party means you've always got this conflict going on, all the silliness of politics.

If politicians were to think of their opinions, their views, their beliefs more in terms of a perspective, you'd have a very different politic. Because the word "perspective" presumes that there are other perspectives. If you take politics to be a circle moving from left to right or right to left, you can see that you're a dot on this circle looking at the object within—whatever the problem is. And if you see it as a perspective, you're very open to seeing what the person on the opposite side of the circle actually sees. In this way, at least, we can formulate a more correct truth—although you've always got to watch the majority. I think it was Gandhi who said, "Truth can be in a minority of one." He was saying: don't trust the majority. It's a sort of atrophying brain.

So within ourselves, we have all these opinions, all these understandings that perhaps we've never questioned. We've just believed that this is the way it is. You might be an eternalist. You might have been brought up in a religion and felt that you've been in contact with God, and you're simply an eternalist who believes there is a very caring

creator who looks after us. On the other hand, you might have been brought up in a more secular, scientific society in which everything can be reduced to atoms and subatomic particles, where the human being is just neurons and such. Because you've settled into that view, because we define ourselves by that view, everything we see is from that standpoint. To shake it, to actually change that view, is extraordinarily difficult for us—at least as a conscious activity.

People say that being brought up in something like Catholicism is a real awful indoctrination, and you end up completely cramped. I dare say some people do. But I'm always surprised by my own experience. I was brought up Catholic, and I woke up one morning—I think I was twenty-one or twenty-two—and said to myself, "I won't go to Mass this Sunday and see what happens."

Now, in those days, not to go to Mass was mortal sin. If you happened to die on Sunday or Monday morning, not having gone to Mass purposefully, well, you were in for hellfire. It was an awful punishment for missing Mass. They've repealed all that now, thank heavens.

But I remember not going, and then saying to myself afterwards, "Well, nothing happened." I sort of broke through this mythical idea that if I didn't go through with Mass, something really horrible would happen. And nothing happened. From that moment on, I never went back. Never. Never stepped into another church for years and years. I went in afterwards for various reasons, but I never went back.

And the year was 1968.

Now, 1968 was a pivotal year. There was a lovely Canadian film—I can't remember the name of it, I've been racking my brains—about a man in his early sixties who is dying of cancer. It's really a film about him dying, about his family during that time. At one point, his son comes back with his girlfriend. The son works the stock markets in London, and the girlfriend is an art dealer. She gets invited by a priest to come and see various artifacts. When she walks into the room, it's all those dreadful plaster statues that used to be everywhere in Catholic churches.

As art, I mean. As religious objects, of course, they work.

The priest wants to know what she might consider their worth. She looks at him rather sadly and says, "I'm afraid you might find an individual collector who's interested, but artistically they're of no value whatsoever."

And then he muses. He says, "You know, it began in 1968. The churches just emptied."

That was the year of the great uprising in Paris, the student revolution. So that's just a little aside, but it says something—that in my case, letting go of old philosophies came easily, partly because it was in the atmosphere of the time.

For most people, I think, it's quite the opposite. They take on rigid opinions, rigid views, and find anybody else's views simply wrong. I know somebody who calls all religions apart from Christianity "man-made." The only one that's God-made is Christianity. It's a bit damning, but there we are. He doesn't feel negative about it. It's simply: this is the real one, and the rest is made up.

When you think about these different opinions, when you think of the awesome wars—the last century was really the century of ideologies, which is exactly that. An opinion lifted to the point of belief, to which people adhere both emotionally and intellectually. There's an intellectual backing for it. And before you know it, you've got catastrophe on your hands. That's still going on, you know—these Islamists and others who simply can't let go of their vision.

Now, what equanimity is asking us to do is disidentify. To see that any particular view is just a perspective. It's not a case of it being wrong or right. It's just a perspective. No human being can hold the whole truth. It's as simple as that. And therefore there has to be some sort of conversation, some sort of communication.

The Buddha himself, having come to his realization, never went around shouting, "I am the enlightened one!" Actually, there's a charming little story around this which some of you might know. He was on his way to meet his five old companions when an ascetic saw him and was taken aback by how he looked, by the radiance of him. The ascetic said, "Oh, venerable one, you look quite radiant. Who is your teacher?"

And the Buddha goes into this enormous panegyric: "I am the fully enlightened one! I am the one who knows!" And on and on.

The ascetic said, "Oh, there you go, yes," and walked off.

I find it funny how that little story hints that perhaps the Buddha had to wake up to the fact that this wasn't quite the way to teach—establishing oneself as some cosmic leader. You do get this feeling that he had to learn how to teach. These skills don't come with awakening. They're abilities you have to develop yourself.

So his doctrine, if you read the early level of the scriptures, you can see it's very spontaneous—replies to people, not really a fixed system. The idea is all there, but it's not yet arranged into "four of these, ten of those, one of these." That formulation comes later. The structuring of his teaching into the Four Noble Truths and such—that develops over time.

But his normal approach, when somebody came to him and asked, "What's your teaching on karma?" or "What's this or what's that?"—he would always ask, "What's yours?" He would invite them to speak their understanding first. And then he would discuss their understanding with them.

Of course, the scriptures only record those understandings that didn't accord with his teachings. Otherwise it was simply, "Very good, come and join me"—no problem. But those who disagreed, he would then argue his point. And most would then be able, as it were, to let go of their hard opinion—their stance of "I'm right, you're wrong." In so doing, he would lay out his own doctrine, which they would take up. Not always. Some didn't take it up. There are cases where he argues the point with somebody, but they're not convinced, and off they go.

So there's that whole business about entering into the meditation, entering into this experience, from a position of don't know, or not sure. And that's always a bit frightening for us, because we're always coming from a sort of stable base about "I know." But unfortunately, those concepts, those ideas, those opinions—even when they're right, you see, even when they're right—they undermine your meditation. One expects.

Now, if one has an idea of nibbana, having read the books and formed some notion of it, one begins to meditate with the idea of achieving nibbana. The problem with expectation is this: if you do achieve what you're expecting, because it's simply an expression of a concept, you'll be absolutely deluded. And if you don't achieve it, you're deeply disappointed. Whenever we're chasing a concept, it necessarily cramps the direct experience. It gets in the way.

We can see this in very simple things, like looking at flowers. You'll pass a shop and see a flower you recognize—roses, you see. And as far as we're concerned, in a sense, we've experienced that rose, that bunch of roses. We tend to be satisfied with that. There's something in the mind that says, "Oh yeah, that's roses." Or, "That's a greenfinch. I know a greenfinch." And it stops us looking at the rose, at the greenfinch, as an individual phenomenon.

When you look at something and keep looking at it—and I hope you've been experiencing this a bit—when you lose that sort of definition of what it is, suddenly the object brightens up, as it were. It takes on certain qualities, because that perception has been gently pushed aside by the mind.

We do it with people too. We do it most obviously when we fall in love. When you fall in love and there's this wonderful romantic tune playing, one sees only the beauty of the other. One cannot see the cracks. It's not possible. Three months, six months, at best nine months down the line, the thing begins to go off. Well, then we may find a deep relationship, or we may not. But the fact is that romantic aura, that lovely surround we put onto a person, is in itself deluded. It's two hearts meeting, two persons meeting at that lovely level.

So this idea of coming from a particular position of knowing—any form of knowing—must necessarily cramp the experience we're having. We're not fully, fully open to it. And one of the benefits of noting is to make that label obvious to us. When you note, you can see exactly what it is—it's like a recognition. But that's always a halfway house. The point of it is to then allow that word, as it were, to recede as our attention grows upon the object. Until hopefully, occasionally, perhaps today, some of you have experienced just that still gaze upon something—a total absorption into the object, even if only for a small time.

Now, when we let go of something, when we start letting go of definitions and treasured opinions and all that, the heart revolts. It doesn't feel safe. It doesn't feel safe at all. And that's the fear, you see, which is based on this definition of who I am.

It may be that somebody who's a theist, who believes in a personal God, coming to, opening up to the fact there may not be one—that's horrific, isn't it? I mean, think about it. If all your life you've believed there's this wonderful loving being who's going to greet you upon death, and you open up to the possibility that there might not be one—well, it's pretty awful.

Much in the same way, somebody who had already settled into a nihilistic point of view—an annihilationist point of view, meaning that upon death everything goes away—the idea that in fact they might reappear in a farm shed as a cow is equally horrific. Of all things! The possibility is stunning.

So how can we approach the Dhamma—and we're talking here about the Buddha's Dhamma—how can we approach the Dhamma in that very open-hearted, open-minded way? That's our big problem. So when we begin to sit, and we're beginning to investigate these three characteristics...

it's good just before you begin to say, "Well, just for this time being, I'll put aside"—that's easy, isn't it? Not "I'll get rid of" or "I'll change everything," but simply "I'll put aside my understandings for a while and just see if in fact what the Buddha is talking about is true." That at least opens us up to the possibility of experiencing things.

Even when we experience things directly, sometimes they may be wrong. Every day we experience directly, perceptually, the sun rising and then falling. Now we know—or at least I believe—that it is us going around the sun. I've no proof for that. My proof is that the sun rises and the sun sets, and he's definitely going around us! So at the perceptual level, it doesn't mean that just because we perceive something, therefore it is right.

In much the same way with meditation, just because we perceive something once doesn't mean that's the end of it. One has to keep on until one is absolutely sure that yes, indeed, everything arises and passes away. That everything I'm experiencing does not constitute anything permanent, substantial, a self. You have to keep seeing it, keep seeing it, until you're sure of it.

Is all desire to be banished? What sorts of desire are allowable? What sorts of desire do lead on to liberation, and what sorts don't? All these things are left up to us to discover ourselves. Nobody can put that in you. There's that very often quoted statement that the Buddhas only point the way. That's all they can do. They can only say, "Look, there's the door"—for us to actually go through it.

So this whole investigation is always coming from a point of not sure. Even when we've experienced something which we feel is absolutely right, it's only when we have repeated that experience often enough—it's like the scientific method in that sense—do we then become pretty sure about where truth or where liberation lies.

So all this week we've been looking at pleasure around food. We might have experienced a few things during that time. Experienced how the body and mind fire off each other—pleasant taste, pleasant mind, pleasant heart. We might see that process of desire. We might know that some of it is to do with appetite, some to do with greed. And we may have experienced just letting go of greed—greed in that very wider sense of seeking happiness in sensual pleasure, confusing sensual joy with real happiness. That's where the problem lies. And we might have seen it in the way the mind constantly seeks distraction.

But really, even though we see it—even though we see it and we might be fairly clear—the fact is that unless it begins to move into behavior, we haven't really seen it.

Often you'll get these stories of people who've had catastrophic happenings which have changed their lives, and that tells us that often that's what it takes for us to wake up. You get people who've had near-death experiences whose lives have been completely changed around. People who've been shamed in public. I was just reading somewhere along the line about the old Profumo case, way back in the fifties or sixties, where there was a scandal around this minister of the government. And he became then the head of some big charity, and he spent the rest of his life guiding this charity—and seemingly very good at it.

So often, for a real change of behavior, it takes quite a thump. And that shows us that, oh yeah, we've seen it, but we're not going to change.

Perhaps a more obvious example is people who smoke. They've seen pictures of it, they cough, all the signs are there that they might have a heart attack, they might have cancer—but it's only when you get a heart attack that they say, "Oh, I'd better stop now." I have a case in point of a friend's father who smoked all his life, had a heart attack, and just stopped—ba-boom—like that. He had a good constitution, went on to live quite a lot into old age.

And the Buddha puts it rather nicely when he says some people wake up even upon the hearing of the word "death." Some people don't wake up until somebody famous dies, somebody whom they've had some sort of relationship with through television or something. Other people don't wake up until somebody close dies. And then there are those unfortunate ones who don't wake up until it's their time to die. It's a bit late, isn't it? "What's my life about?" Well, I've got about six weeks. It's not very helpful, is it?

So at least we're a bit ahead of that one. Coming here to do this meditation is asking that question: What's my life about?

So this equanimity, you can see, first of all puts down the conceptual world. This conceptual world, remember, contains all our history. All our experience is entwined in words. So if you say "apple"—when you see an apple, when you take an apple at lunch—you're not taking that apple. You're taking every apple that you've ever eaten. That's what you're taking there with that apple, because you presume this apple will be the one that you want to taste. If it tastes too bitter or too soft, well, it's not an apple, is it? This isn't an apple. It doesn't fit into my definition of apple.

So all that has to go away, you see. All that has to be put aside. And the purpose of the noting is to make that obvious to us by the singularity of a single word, and then to be able to put the word aside by attending entirely to the feel of the experience.

And then there's the emotional bit, which is our prejudice. We get emotionally involved in our understanding and the way things are. On one retreat, a guy came who was a scientist at Oxford, studying for his PhD, and he'd had some idea of meditation. The gist of it was, I think, that he thought it would just calm him and help him in his studies. And when he came on this retreat, he came across belief systems that he just couldn't handle. After about a day or so, he said to me, "I just can't handle all this business about the body and mind and stuff." So off he went.

So he wasn't at all open to the experience that he might have got through vipassanā, which may have changed his opinion. And that's where you get the scare coming up. Of course it's blocked—it's blocked by "I'm right, everybody else is wrong. What do I need to investigate you for? What do I need to investigate this for? I'm perfectly right, and you're perfectly wrong. Full stop."

So putting all that aside, you can see, is the basis of very clear investigation, isn't it? Even in science—we're not only talking here about spiritual practice—scientists have to do that as well. They can't come from a creed. There was that dreadful case in Russia of that agriculturalist, the one who created all the famines. The reason Stalin liked him was because it fitted into communist ideology, and of course it created huge famines.

So even the scientist—anybody investigating anything—has to come in with that sort of clean slate. A judge: what do we expect of judges? We don't expect them to have preconceived ideas of the case.

We don't expect them to be politically motivated—and they were at one time, weren't they? The 18th century was full of judges who acted purely for political reasons. They hanged you because they didn't like you. We don't expect them to be judging from a position of fear or favor. We don't expect them to be prejudiced. All these things we expect of a judge because the judge has to be equanimous. He has to be in this position of noninvolvement, detachment from the case.

So you can see that equanimity is the ground of our practice. Whenever we begin a meditation session, we actually start by establishing that—the calmness of the heart, stillness of the mind, just a moment of letting go—and then that curiosity to determine whether we can see things as they really are, not as we would want them to be.

And to do that we need faith. Now, faith here isn't belief—that's very corrupt. Faith is more like trust. We have to trust. It's not only trusting in the Dharma, in the teaching of the Buddha. We must trust ourselves. We must trust that investigation of truth will actually bring liberation. To see ourselves as we really are will bring at least liberation from delusion.

When the Buddha went and sat under that tree, he had to let go of everything he'd learned, because none of it—and he'd tried everything as best he could—none of it had led him anywhere. So he was ready, as it were, to let go. He was ready to restart the investigation. And all this is undermining dependent origination.

In dependent origination, we begin from the point of view of delusion, of ignorance—not knowing. What this creates is a wrong relationship with the world. That's when we say *avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*—dependent upon this not knowing, upon a mistake, we create these conditionings. We create our conditionings, and the purpose is to make us feel safe, to make us feel happy. That's what you want to be, isn't it? You want to be safe and you want to be happy.

Through the next section, where the Buddha points out the body and mind through the six senses and through contact—which is a given, we're dependent on this body for our relationship to the world—we express those delusions, those misunderstandings. And those misunderstandings develop into certain conditionings within us which manifest as relationship. So when we see food, as we say, there is that greed for food. It comes up as a pleasant feeling. That's a condition that's arisen from past behavior.

So that's the given. Then we have this reaction of wanting and not wanting. It's at this point that this original delusion manifests. That's why the Buddha points to this desire business—it manifests there as desire. And it's knowing that desire for what it is, being able to sit with it and not run with it, not just give in to it, which is the process of drawing out or releasing or allowing that conditioning built up from the past to die away. That's the drainage point of the whole process of delusion, of creating this constant delusion.

If we miss that point, the next point is this *upādāna,* this grasping—that's when the "I" comes in. "I want." And once that's happened, it's very difficult to stop the next process, which is the empowerment of that wanting. That's the becoming, the *bhava.* We see the object, it strikes us, it comes to us, and we have the relationship come up—very pleasant. So it starts off with just that contact: very pleasant, very nice, want, I want, I get. That's the psychological process. In our language we think the "I" comes first, but actually the "I" comes quite late in that process. And that's why we can step in, because once there's the identity, it's very difficult to stop yourself doing something.

So it's catching the wanting at this emotional level, at that power level of wanting, that allows us to have that wisdom to see it as something unwholesome for us—not skillful, not virtuous. Virtue here meaning that which does us good. If it's not doing us good, then it's not virtuous. And then we have to create the will to let go of it, to endure, to be with that craving until it passes away.

While we're practicing this, remember, the other side of the spiritual life is being exercised. We call that the *pāramī,* translated as the perfections, which isn't quite right. *Pāramī* just means those things that lead you to the other shore. One of the ways the Buddha often talked about Nibbāna was as the other shore. You have to swim across to get to the other shore, and that effort to get there is the path.

So these *pāramī*—one of which is this determination that I put on the door there—determination is one of those things we have to develop. "Perfection" gives you the idea that you get to a point where you don't have to develop it anymore. Well, in a sense, that's not quite right. It's more that it has to be continuously developed. Patience, constancy, determination—all these are qualities we get naturally from this process.

Now, that business of *bhava,* that business of becoming—that's what the Buddha means by rebirth. Indeed, there's this process of rebirth when we die, but unless you yourself have had a past life experience or something, that will always have to be in some sort of belief system somewhere, which you may or may not believe. But that's not kernel to the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha's teaching is that right here and now, we keep rebirthing into this self—a new self every time we make a decision. The self has moved; the self has become another self.

Take for instance, say these days one might find oneself unemployed. Before, you were working in an office, and now you're working in a chip shop. So you've rebirthed. You've moved out of an office into a chip shop. It's probably a better move. Probably a very good move.

So this business of rebirthing applies to the self, and there are many times we're not rebirthing. The most obvious one is when we're asleep—that's not a process of rebirth. We're not rebirthing in that sense of a self becoming all the time. Sometimes we are not rebirthing the self when we're acting from the pure heart of generosity, of compassion and love. That's not rebirth in the Buddhist sense of rebirthing the self. So when he became enlightened, he had stopped rebirthing.

See? It says in that little phrase that we chant in the morning: "I've seen the house builder."

This is what he says: "I've seen the house builder, I've broken the rafters, I've smashed the house, there's no more rebirthing, there's no more going on for me. Painful has been this rebirthing."

Now traditionally, that's understood as life to life. But spiritually speaking, that's every time we become a self. We're rebirthing into some sort of suffering. And the worst of the sufferings is when we think we're happy—that's the worst. Because when

your happiness is dependent on something which is transient, then you're looking at some form of suffering because of it. What this practice is making us do is find a deeper sense of happiness which is not dependent on whether something is pleasant or not.

We know we're experiencing that when we begin to experience contentment. Contentment is probably the greatest of all virtues that comes with this process of liberation from happiness which is dependent on the world. One is content with the way things are. This is the way it is. That doesn't mean you don't change something or try to better something, but it's coming from the position of contentment, not from the position of *more*.

This word "more" in our culture is a noun, isn't it? It's not an adjective. "I want more sugar" or "I want more this"—no, "I just want more." Full stop.

The virtue of equanimity is something we need to develop constantly, and we do that by stopping. All the time—not just on retreat, but all day long. There's a fairly renowned teacher called Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese teacher who lives in France and has a center there. I went to stay at his monastery for a couple of days, and he had instituted this idea that somebody had a bell, and every time the bell rang, you stopped. It didn't matter what you were doing. And the phone as well—when the phone rang, you didn't lurch at it as if your life depended on it. One waited for three rings. You had to wait for three rings.

That's something I took on. I always wait for three rings. Most people will wait three rings anyway, just to give you enough time to grab hold of the phone. But I find that a really helpful little trick. Little tricks like that. I have my stopwatch set on my watch, every forty minutes. It varies, but forty minutes tends to be it. When that watch goes beep beep beep, I just know where I am, and I just stop.

And when you stop, you can catch what it is that you've been gathering.

Very early on in my meditation experience, I woke from a dream. In the dream I was running, running, running. And behind me was this huge avalanche of darts and spears heading for me. I was running and running. And then I stopped. And these things just went into my back.

That's what meditation is, you see. You stop. And everything you've accumulated just comes straight at you. And so you know: this is what I'm running from.

So there you are at work, and the break comes. Instead of just going on and carrying that energy into the cup of tea and into the chat and all that sort of stuff, just sit quietly somewhere. Let things subside and see what it is that's been mounting behind your

back—a little bit of anxiety, a bit of irritation, all that sort of stuff. Just wait for it to subside. You've only got to wait for it; you don't have to be there for hours. And then the next thing to be done. Then you can join the party.

Same when you come home that night after work—just find a little bit of space. It doesn't take long, five or ten minutes. If you can make forty minutes, all good and proper, but even ten minutes. Just sit quietly and see what accumulations have come through the day. Just let them go. It opens up the evening for you.

So this business of stopping is probably the most skillful way to bring that sense of equanimity into your lives. And remember that from that equanimous base, you just see things more clearly. There's greater clarity because you're not running with an attitude, you're not running with an emotion, you're not running with a thought. This has a direct effect on our lives if you just bring that little practice into it.

You can use this little standing exercise that we do at the beginning. Just for a minute, fall into that. When the stuff has come through and you've let it drop for a little while, you can then open up into that pure awareness of things around you—achieving nothing, going nowhere, being nobody. Just for a moment. And then somebody shouts, "Hey, what are you doing? Get on with it!"

All these things that we're doing here, you can take in some way or other into your daily life. That's how the practice begins to saturate your life and hopefully turns it for the better.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 136

The Mahāsī Method

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

> *In this overview of the Mahāsī method, Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how meditation techniques serve as preparation for insight rather than guaranteeing awakening. He explores the three core practices developed by Mahāsī Sayādaw: noting (to contain the thinking mind and develop objectivity), deliberate slow movement (to observe the minutiae of body-mind processes), and catching intentions before they manifest as conditioned actions.*
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> *The talk emphasizes understanding these techniques as tools for developing moment-to-moment awareness rather than goals in themselves. Bhante discusses how noting helps create distance from experiences, allowing investigation without identification, while slow movement reveals the multiple processes underlying what appears as continuous experience. Special attention is given to observing intentions - those crucial moments of choice before desire becomes conditioned action.*
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> *Drawing from his own intensive retreat experience in Burma, Bhante illustrates how repetitive routine creates ideal conditions for observing the subtle workings of consciousness. The ultimate aim is developing the relaxed alertness that characterizes awakened awareness - being completely present without struggle or resistance to whatever arises.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this evening I just want to revise a lot of what we've said about the skills, these skills of meditation, and see if any questions arise from it.

I think one thing, well the first important thing is to recognise what these techniques are. Often we think it's, we might make the mistake of thinking that it's the technique which is creating the insight. You might say if you get the technique perfectly right, insight is bound to arise. But if you look at other areas such as sports, tennis, things like that, or instrument playing, you know these musicians and sports people spend hours practising the backhand over and over again or going up and down the scales. But then when it comes to actually playing the game, playing the instrument, it's a different situation, isn't it? Because if they are thinking about their skills, then it's going to sound pretty turgid. They're definitely going to miss being in the moment. When the shot comes over, they're more worried about what their backhand is like.

I had a friend in Bangkok who was Chinese and he was Australian champion for table tennis. And he said before he got this, and he actually on one game beat the world champion, which was very good, he thought, for himself. But to do this, he'd gone to Japan and he said the Japanese know how to train you. And he's Chinese and he said they have a really rigorous training programme which really lifts your game. But the Japanese don't win. And he said the reason for this is that they can't stop practising. They can't actually just play the game, let the practice go and just play the game. They're still too bothered about getting the shot right or something like that.

So these techniques are the same. All they're doing is laying the ground, preparing a basis for insight to arise. But the insight itself arises because of the power of your attentiveness. So all these exercises, all these techniques are doing, are just helping you to attain the right sort of attentiveness, the right sort of focus, and pointing you in the right direction.

And of course, this intuition that we talk about, this *satipaññā*, this intuitive awareness, is beyond the control of me, you see. I can't sit here and say, well, I'm going to meditate now for an hour and I'm going to have an insight into *Nibbāna*. Of course, it doesn't work like that. It's very frustrating.

Again, I'm reminded of somebody I met who, this is going way back when *vipassanā* was just coming in, as a practice in the 70s or something. And he said he'd heard about this course: meditation, *Nibbāna*, you see. So he joined a week's course. And it's like anything else. If you do a course in cookery or something or whatever, they tell you what you'll achieve by the end of the course and you get a certificate. So he'd presumed that, you know, one week he'd get *Nibbāna* and get his certificate. It gave him a huge disappointment when he realised it wasn't quite like that.

So these techniques are to be seen for what they are, just simple techniques preparing the ground for the real, an actual moment-to-moment mindfulness that the Buddha talks about. And you can see when you're getting caught up in that, when you're getting too worried about whether you're doing the technique right, whether you've got it perfect. It's like there's something wrong there if somebody is really getting anxious about, am I doing it right? Have I got it perfect? So be careful of that idea of perfection as such.

The other thing to say about techniques is that it's not so good to mix them, because these various *vipassanā* techniques do have their own pros and cons. They've got their own drawbacks and their own advantages. And if you mix it, it's sometimes confusing for the teacher, especially if you don't tell them what you're doing. So it's good to keep on one line because the teacher generally can spot or can see when something goes wrong from the report that the meditator gives, you see. But if they're mixing stuff, it

doesn't work. It's like these alternative medicines, isn't it? You're not supposed to do acupuncture and homeopathy. It confuses both the acupuncturists and the homeopaths because you're getting the effects in both. So this is much the same.

All these techniques have arisen out of some teacher, so this is the Mahāsī. And these techniques, you can find all of them, you can find in the commentaries. It's not that he made them up, but somehow he put them together in a way and he himself was an inspiration where it began a new school. That's basically what happened. And it usually happens when there isn't much meditation about, it's faded, and then you get this revival.

And the Mahāsī probably, he and a man called Ubākin, who began a system also, mainly, we know it mainly through Goenka and his centres in the West. And these two really did affect the whole Theravādin world with their methodology.

He himself was interesting because he was actually a scholar, a renowned scholar, and this meant that he was the sort of person who was very much up in his head. So the technique he uses of noting is specifically good for those people who are head-bound, just to keep the thoughts from wandering away. And I've always presumed that's why he developed it. I've never been able to determine whether that's right or not, but it definitely works in keeping the mind still on the object.

I think the other thing you have to be careful of when you come on a retreat is again this business of gaining something. If you have in mind a goal, then of course all your efforts move towards that goal, and in doing so you miss everything. It's like people who go for walks in the country and their idea is just to get to where they're going, and they're like that and they get there but they've missed out on the country. So be careful that you don't have any goal. It's best just to be completely open and let the practice itself manifest what it has to offer you.

It's like going to a country, a strange country for the first time, and you've got no particular idea of what it is you want to see. Well, of course, when you go there, you're very open, you see, and you tend to see much more. But if you go there with just the idea of seeing ancient sites or tasting the food and whatnot, that's all you get. So have that sort of attitude of just open exploration and then you'll see it offers you quite a lot.

So it offers you an understanding of your physicality, of your body. It offers you an understanding of your psyche. And by the word psyche, I'm referring to the heart and mind. We've lost the word which combines those two ever since. And we can blame Descartes, blame somebody. Because he split off the mind, didn't he? And everybody got head-bound. But in the old way of explaining the human being, there was a word which

conjoined both the heart and the mind in one. So we had the word soul, psyche. And we've lost that a bit. So now we have to keep saying the heart and the mind, or emotions and thoughts, but in a sense they're both one and the same process. They're just two sides of the same process.

So it's an ability to recognise just how the psyche works, how these two things work, and how we create the world. And of course there's spiritual insights. In Buddhism a spiritual insight isn't to do with some sort of transcendental communication with another being or something like that. A spiritual insight in Buddhist understanding is the final level of consciousness. That's what it is.

So if you look at the evolution of consciousness, not just in terms of the beings that you see like animals and all that, but just in ourselves, from the point where we are born to where we are now. We don't think like a newborn baby, I don't think it's possible. We've all lost that. We don't think like a three-year-old anymore. We don't have the magic anymore. To about the age of seven we live in a world where we believe what we imagine. That's why Father Christmas can come down the chimney. No problem.

So all these things manifest a different relationship to the world. And what we're trying to do is to take that process of consciousness, that process of relationship, to the very end. And what manifests at the very end? The very end is in a complete accommodation with the way it is. There's no struggle, there's no wanting for other than is given, and there's no attempt to destroy or annihilate what we don't want. So it's a contentment with the way things are, whether they be pleasant or unpleasant. And that's the state of non-suffering.

It doesn't mean to say you don't have physical pain, it's just natural to the body. But in terms of the heart-mind, the psyche, it manifests a very different relationship. And for that to happen there has to be this pulling out, as it were, of its confusion with the body and the psyche, this psycho-physical organism of our intelligence, this intuitive intelligence. And now all these techniques are to do with that. That's all.

All these, when I talk about distancing, I mean objectifying. I mean being able to turn the inside as objective as we now see the outside. You know, you don't come into this room and say, this is me. You'd be put away. Inside, that's all we're doing. We're turning all this inner furniture, this inner environment, these inner walls that we see, the body and all that, we're turning it very slowly into an objective world. And in so doing, we're no longer reacting with it. And that's what produces this inner peace. Even when you're disturbed, even when you're angry, when you're stressed, you can still find a still small point within that storm, you see.

So that's what these techniques are hoping to do. And of course, not just here, but to actually take them into daily life. It's something that is contiguous. You can't stop spiritual practice like climbing a mountain. If you stop, you can stop so long and then you get cold and you want to come down at the end of that. You've got to keep going. So it's the same with spiritual practice. Well, you can't stop it. You've got to keep going once you're in it, you see.

In other words, now that you know, or for some of you beginning to intuit this level of consciousness, you can't go back on it. It's a piece of knowledge, you know it. And this awareness that we have, this intuitive awareness that we have, will always be in some way or other wanting to seek its own liberation. So this is beyond the idea of some sort of me or mine. It's something deep within us which seeks liberation, and that's what we really mean by the Buddha.

So if we just consider some of the techniques now, this noting. The noting is primarily, as far as I'm concerned, to contain the thinking mind. But it also has the effect of pointing you to actually look at something. And the Mahāsī talked about it like throwing a stone at a wall. So it's like making you. So as you say, rising, rising, rising, it's like it's pushing your attention to where you want to see. It's like a push towards it.

Now one of the problems that might come up is that the word seems to get in the way of what you're looking at. It seems to be very loud in the mind. It seems to in a sense obscure what it is you're looking at. Now when that happens, you see, what does that tell us? It tells us that our intelligence, this *satipaññā*, is locked into the intellect. In other words, it's always seeing things through the intellect.

Now, in our daily life, this is sometimes quite obvious to us. I mean, even if we take a flower, these, I've forgotten the name of them. No, no, this one here. Oh, orchid, thank you very much. You see, when you look at an orchid, if you've seen lots of orchids, you don't really see that orchid. What you're seeing is fitting into your conception of an orchid, from all the other orchids you've seen. It flips into a category of orchids. And we trick ourselves in thinking that we're actually seeing that orchid. But it's only when you begin to place your eye on it and really see it, really actually see the delicacy of it and the different little bits and pieces that in a sense the word orchid begins to disappear because what you're seeing is something quite unique.

And this is something you can practise while you're here. The flowers are coming out and you can just place your eye on it. And you'll see that by just doing that, by saying the word looking rather than naming the flower, you'll see that very slowly you just become quite concentrated upon what the flower is offering you. The flower doesn't want to be categorised. And that's clarifying this ability to see things as they really are. That's

one of the phrases that you get throughout the scriptures. To see things as they really are. To see and understand things as they really are. Not as I would wish them to be, as I think they are. And thinking that we know something is one of our big delusions, isn't it? We confuse the thought with the actual experience.

So a word actually helps us to just stay there so long as the word is reflecting more the process that we're doing like looking, seeing, touching, feeling. I don't mean to say that in certain things we can't use a noting word to describe what it is we're experiencing, which is pain or something like that.

And the noting word also just helps us as it were to keep a distance because it's in a sense anyway pushing the object away so that we can actually note it. It's all part of that process of pushing something away to look at it more clearly. When we get involved in a pain or an emotion, that falling into an identity with it, we can't see it because in a sense we're suffering it. We're more concerned with how I feel about it rather than seeing it objectively. So when for instance pain comes from the posture of your back or your knee, see that's an opportunity to just say pain, pain. And the more you say it, you see, the more it pushes away. You can see it objectively. So the word does have an effect on the way that you're looking.

And if it does have this effect of being in between you and the word, see, just keep the noting going, but keep putting the attention on the object, and very slowly the word, as it were, disappears. It begins to move into the background, as it were, and it's like a background note which is pushing you forward. And this tells a meditator that this intelligence they have is slowly emerging out of its confusion with thought. So if you find that, just keep gently working at it.

Now the other thing about noting is it has to be deliberate because it's actually an act of noting. So that's why some of you have already noticed that you can be happily sat here saying rising, falling, your mind's miles away. When you come back you're still saying rising, falling. And that tells us how mechanical it can become and how easy it is to create a habit in the body.

I mean, again, going back to sports and musical instruments, you know, just running up and down the scales of a piano, the fingers just do it. They don't have to think about it. Even for us, when we walk across the road, we don't have to think about our legs. You'd have to think about your legs. It's terrible, isn't it? But you just go, and the legs follow you, moving up and down flapping away underneath you and you don't notice that. And if you consider lots of things that you do, it's all automated. It's all automatic. And

thank heavens for it, thank heavens for it. Here however we are trying to be mindful even of the minutest movements because we want to really catch intention and we'll come to that the importance of catching intentions towards the end.

So that's the noting business. And the other thing is of course to keep it going until it becomes quite habitual and it just stays there. Now one of the reasons it becomes habitual is because every day we're doing the same thing.

It's really boring. Seven days of doing exactly the same thing. You walk from here to the dining room, you eat, then you go to your bedroom, you go back, then you come back here. You're always doing the same thing. And this makes it very easy to really make very clear to ourselves the process of thought, of intentions, of actions.

When I did this long retreat with my teacher in Burma, all day long I was stuck in a room like this. We didn't go out because the windows are open, there's no point. And it's too hot anyway, and the sun. So all day long I'm in this room, sitting and walking, never going out. And then there were two times, or three times we went out. One for breakfast, one for lunch, and one for a drink. And it was just down the stairs, across the yard, and you sat at a table. And the breakfast was always the same. Lunch was slightly different. And the drink was always the same, this sort of dreadful chemical orange juice. And then you went back up, up the same stairs, across the same way.

And what that does is, of course, it begins to make it very, very simple to watch the most minutest movement of the body and mind. Because you're not thinking. There's no choice left. You don't say to yourself, now, shall I go down this way or shall I go down that way? No, you go down this way. There's only one way to get there. So by sweeping away any idea of choice and confusing choice with freedom, you're simply doing what you have to do. And the more you restrict yourself, the less the mind has to think about what you have to do. And this means that you can really, really settle down to observing the minutiae of how the body and mind work.

Now, the reason for that, of course, is that when you see how it works, and we're specifically interested in how we create suffering for ourselves, then, of course, you see the way out. Unless we can see how it is that we create problems for ourselves, we're not going to see a solution. But when you see how we create the problem, then the solution manifests at the same time. That's all the Buddha did. Remember, we're following the same path as this ancient personage 2,500 years ago. He just sat under a tree and walked about a bit and sat under a tree and walked about a bit and he began to see where the suffering was arising from.

So that habitual practice and the noting allows us to go deeper and deeper into the process of mentation, the process of the body. I think that just about covers noting. Does anybody else have any questions or something about noting as such? Have I missed something? I suppose one thing is not to worry about the word too much. Sometimes there are many experiences we have for which there just isn't a word. Just a general word, feeling, thinking. Always remembering what the word is trying to do. If we find ourselves getting caught up in, is this the right word or the wrong word, and we're searching for a dictionary, then we've definitely lost the plot.

"Can I ask a question? Is there sort of tension between the benefit of noting in objectifying whatever it is, but at the same time the desire to actually experience it? But at the same time you're trying to also be fully conscious of the experience."

No, that's a really crucial point to understand. The word helps us to push away so that we get some objectivity, some sort of witnessing, some sort of ability to be objective with what it is that we are trying to experience. Then, once you've got that position of being objective, once you've got that position where you know that you're not being caught up in the feeling or the emotion, one then goes towards it. And hopefully, through the power of that curiosity and the power of that focus, there's a collapse into the object, the word disappears, and there's just the pure experience.

Now that's really your true *vipassanā* moment. But that you can't make happen. This is the point, because then at that point the self also disappears. It's like when you fall asleep. Where are you? Where have you gone? And who wakes up? So it's like you're moving towards that just by this noting, but it's the interest and the curiosity which will draw you towards the object you're trying to understand and feel.

"Presumably the moment that you do achieve that kind of being in that experience, the moment you notice that, you've lost it."

Exactly that. Yes, that's right. It's one of these paradoxes that you're most happy when you don't know it. As soon as you know you're happy, you've lost it. It's like when you watch a film. You're perfectly happy, completely enthralled by the film. And then it ends. That's it, you've lost it.

But our aim is really to become very intimate with the body, heart and mind, and not to be too concerned about that business of losing, becoming, collapsing into that process, because that happens naturally when the conditions are right. Even at the level of objectivity, you can still be having insights, spiritual insights, because you are observing impermanence, you're observing your reaction to things, and you're also, by creating that distance, recognizing that what you're looking at can't be what's looking, because

you're looking at it. So these themselves are true spiritual insights. And again, remember, what we mean by spiritual insights is a change in the way we relate to the world. These are radical changes in the way that we see the world.

"So if you notice a pattern of thinking, say judging for example, so if you notice that the thoughts that come into your mind are judgmental of either yourself or of other people on a repetitive basis, on a frequent basis, you notice a sort of habit of that. Then what's the process for reflecting on that which doesn't involve... Is there a process for reflecting on it?"

Well, if, for instance, something like that is coming up, as a constant judging, judging, the first thing to recognize is that you can't change that. It's a conditioning. It has to run its course. And it'll run its course and empty itself of its energy so long as we don't identify. And by noting it as judging, you're not identifying. Otherwise, you'd be judging. But you can hear these little judgments going on. I'm no good. She's no good. They're no good. They're better than me. I'm worse than them. And you just hear that going on. But by just observing it and noting it, it no longer has power over you. That's the point. But we'll deal with those things more clearly tomorrow when we talk more about the hindrances.

So sitting. Remember that your sitting posture is the very physical representation of the enlightened mind because there is that alertness in the posture, the energy, but there's also to be the relaxation. And those two are the qualities of your observation, a relaxed but alert looking. And of course that's difficult for us because one way we either fall asleep or the other way we get tense. And it's just being aware of that and just bringing, it's always starting with that calmness. Starting with the calmness and then raising the curiosity. That's the way to do it.

And don't struggle with pain. The tell-tale is, as soon as pain, whether it's physical or emotional, has actually made it difficult to investigate, then that's it, you cut, you go for a walk, you take a break. There's no point, because this is a process of investigation. If you can't do it, what's the point of suffering it? And then, of course, one builds up a resistance. You can take a bit more pain and all that sort of stuff. You can hang around with very difficult emotions more. And I think you have to be slightly careful not to push that because you can frighten yourself. That's one of the problems. And just go easy with things.

In the long-term view, in the Buddha's understanding, so long as there's a self there's going to be an existence. So we have an eternity of time to sort this one out. There's no need to get into a panicky rush about it. And even if we are more inclined to believe in one life, then the meditation works in that it's at least sorting out this present moment,

and hopefully we'll make our future life a bit more easy to live with. That's the important thing about the sitting posture. Don't struggle with pain to the point where you can't do the investigation.

Now, the walking is really important. People tend not to see its importance, but it's extremely good for developing this calm attentiveness. It's very calming, and you don't have to go so slow. When you're going so slow like that, like we do in the evening, that's really also to investigate. Because the feeling of the foot rising is different from the feeling of the foot moving forward is different from the feeling of the foot falling and it's different from the feeling of the foot pressing. And it's these discriminations that are making, that are sort of tuning this intelligence, making it more sharp to see things that previously would have just seen as just one feeling, the foot moving through the air. But you can also use walking gently up and down just to develop this calm abiding. So it's a very powerful exercise. So don't try and do as much of it as you can.

I know there's a tendency to rush off for a cup of tea, and there's nothing wrong with having a cup of tea, you understand, but often it sort of lengthens out to 40 minutes, and then you do a 10-minute walk and come back and sit. But it's much better if you do want to have a beverage and make it short and sweet, and really just keep walking up and down.

Going slow, so that's his other big technique, the Mahāsī's technique. Really try to, if you find yourself rushing anywhere, just stop. Just stop in your tracks. And just let the energy fall away. And then just take your time. I don't think you ought to be going faster than left, right, left, right. That's about it. If you're going faster than that, you're rushing.

And try to find little things during the day when you can really take your time. Now this door for instance, you can actually open and close it completely silently. You don't have to bang it to or push it, and you can make the opening of that door a specific exercise. I always know where people are by how they go out through that door. Pushing the door open to your bedroom. Just do it very slowly and just sort of communicate with the spring.

Certain things you can't go so slow. You can't brush your teeth at that speed. You'd never finish. But there are many things that you can do where you're not actually holding anybody up. That's the other thing about the bathroom. There may be people waiting. But there are many things that you can do which you can go really slowly at. And just observe it. And the main place, of course, is when you're eating. If you finish before me, you're definitely going too fast. Because I'm eating at what I would consider to be an ordinary pace. An ordinary pace.

And of course, the more you go slow, the more you see. We've all seen these films on TV of nature, like a butterfly or these hummingbirds, how their wings flap and you can actually see it. And it's just slowing the film down frame by frame. So that's all we're doing. The slower you go, the more you'll actually see. You'll see the connection.

So we chant this dependent origination in the morning. The Buddha there is showing us that although we experience life as one continuous thought process, thought emotional process, actually there's myriads of little processes going on. And what we're catching are sort of end products. And these processes are going on continuously throughout the day. Even to see something, there has to be a process whereby what hits the retina has to be sensed in the mind, it has to be categorized, it has to be put into some sort of picture. And what we see is the final product, the picture. Same with hearing. There's a whole process going on from the point where all there is is pressure on the eardrum. By the time we get to alarm bell or bell to sit, that's gone through a whole load of mental processes to get there. But what we're always aware of is the end product.

And what we're also specifically interested in is not just the way that we produce a certain concreteness about our existence, a certain substantiality, whereas in fact it's all these myriad processes going on, is to see it as something transient. But also we're interested in this relationship we have, wanting, not wanting, wanting, not wanting, wanting, not wanting. And that's another level of this mental process, which for the most part we're not really aware of.

Just watching people around supermarkets, they don't distinguish the product that they're looking at and the wanting of it. It's already my product. As soon as they see it, it's my product. They've already bought it. And that for us is very important, to see the distinction between liking something, disliking something, and wanting and not wanting. Pleasant, unpleasant. Wanting, not wanting. And that will become more and more obvious to us the more we slow that process down. So make an effort over the next few days to just take your time, basically. Take your time.

So finally there's this intention. Now first of all what we mean by an intention here is a desire. Right? It's not been empowered, so it's a desire which is arising. This is a very important moment in Buddhist psychology because as a desire it's not having a conditioning effect, it's not an action, it just lies as a potential in the mind. But if we act on it, or as they put it in these awful committee speak, if you action it, then it immediately becomes an act. And once that happens, it will have a conditioning effect within us. And of course, it will produce something. If it's wholesome, it will produce something wholesome within us. If it's unskillful, it will produce something unwholesome.

So that's why the accent is always on when you're sitting and you hear the bell go or you've done the reflections and it's time to go up. Intending to rise. So now you're empowered. You're not acting like an automaton. You're watching the intention arise. Intending to rise. Now that's the moment you can reflect and say, is this a good thing to do or a bad thing? Is it skillful or unskillful? Virtuous or unvirtuous? That's the only moment you've got in terms of choice. Once you rise, you've lost it. You've already created an act.

That's why in the standing meditation, you can stand there and say, intending to walk. Nothing happens. You can stand there all day, intending to walk. Now these intentions, remember, they're not huge, strong desires. We're not talking about cravings. We're just talking about a simple intention, a wanting to walk. And you can stay there with intending, nothing happens. And then suddenly there's a decision and your foot moves.

So this is a magical moment isn't it? How does something move out of potential into an actual? Now that moment of actuality the Buddha actually calls will, and at that point an act is created. And then you can't stop its problem. It's already gone into the system. And if it's something out there, it's gone into the world, and you'll get your response.

And again, we'll talk about karma in that larger sense towards the end of the week.

So that's why when we're eating, rather than get caught up in this natural appetite that we have, just get lost in it, turn it into a greedy thing, just by noting the intention "wanting to eat", having made a previous intention that you're only eating to nourish the body, and you're reaffirming that intention every time you eat. So these are conditioning acts. And the more we condition ourselves to eat to nourish the body, the less we're going to find ourselves with some eating problems. And that's of course one way to come out of an eating problem if we find we have one. It's just not reinforcing the intention to eat for comfort's sake or for happiness.

And so intention is a really important thing to note, and if you can at least begin by noting main intentions, which is the intention to rise, the intention to walk somewhere, the intention to start your sitting, the intention to eat, if you can start by noting those, they create a natural break. You're actually stopping for a moment. They're a natural stopping. And in that moment there's this ability to reflect.

And what this is showing us is that if we were to take this full time, then we'd become in charge of our lives. Begin to be in charge of it rather than behaving by old conditionings or coming under other people's influence, right? We gain our, you might say, autonomy.

So you'll be hearing me constantly encouraging you to note your intention. There's a little passage in the Visuddhimagga which is a later commentarial work in which a teacher is teaching his students and at one point he raises his hand and he stops, stops talking. And then he just puts his hand very gently back there. And his students say, "What happened there?" He said, "I didn't note the intention." It was just an old automatic thing that he did. But if you're quite wide awake, if you're really awake, you'll see it come across the mind: "move your hand", intention to move your hand, intention to scratch.

So that's the same with when you get an itch. So you note your intention. You try and handle the itch as much as you can, right? And you see this enormous desire to scratch. And when you can't take it anymore, say "intending to scratch", and then just watch how the mind reacts to it, how it becomes relieved of its tension once you've given yourself a good scratch.

So, these are your basic components of your practice. This continuous noting as best as you can, going slow and slower, and trying to choose certain actions during the day where you really do things very slowly, so that you've got a standard. That's why we walk together in the evening. There I hope to create a sort of standard for you of going slow. And then try and do that as much as you can during the day and noting intentions.

Just as when you're intending to eat there's a sort of back story about the intention, which is your bigger intention is to only eat for healthy purposes, then I suppose for many other intentions, in order to decide rather than simply noting that you're intending to do it and then doing it, if there's a possibility of saying "I'm not going to do it", you need a kind of back story of intention about what's the bigger intention behind the intention. It helps to have a sort of large intention. So the intention here behind this whole retreat is to develop moment to moment mindfulness. That's the purpose of all these techniques: to actually be completely awake to the presenting moment.

And of course our nature is not to stay there. We like to live in the future or live in the past. We don't like to be completely in the present moment unless it's really happy. Unless we're really, really enjoying it.

Is that it? Any other questions? We'll meet of course tomorrow in case something comes up. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Now your response is *sādhu, sādhu*. Which means "well done". Now you can imagine how I feel if I don't get *sādhu, sādhu*. It's desperate, isn't it? Very good.

So we have some walking and then at quarter past come in again and I'll come in to do the walking meditation with you. And we'll sit the last period together and finish with me.

CHAPTER 137

The Sufferings of the Pleasure Syndrome

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 49 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the first of the five hindrances: kāmacchanda (sensual desire). He reveals how our society's "pleasure syndrome" - the belief that happiness comes from getting what we want - creates a cycle of craving, temporary gratification, boredom, and renewed seeking. Drawing on both Buddhist psychology and modern understanding, he explains how this leads to addiction, meaninglessness, and chronic dissatisfaction.*
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> *Bhante emphasizes that the path requires purification of the heart alongside insight development, following the traditional sequence of sīla-samādhi-paññā. He distinguishes between wholesome appreciation and unwholesome attachment, showing how grief measures our clinging rather than our love. Through practical exercises like mindful eating and deliberate renunciation, practitioners can develop dhammachetanā (spiritual will) and discover contentment - the mind without craving.*
>
> *The teaching offers hope: these mental patterns can be transformed through patient attention and kind awareness, viewing hindrances as "patients" needing care rather than enemies to defeat. This approach builds the inner strength necessary for deeper spiritual development while maintaining engagement with life's genuine pleasures.*

Namo tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So yesterday evening we went through the various techniques and reminded ourselves that there's nothing mystical about these techniques, they're just skillful means, that's how they're referred to, *upāya*, skillful means to bring ourselves into the present moment. And just like all skills, you've got to work at them. And slowly they work for you. They start working for you, slowing down, getting in the habit of just noting. These two especially are really quite powerful in terms of centering that attention on what it is you're actually experiencing in this present moment.

So tonight we can have a look at these hindrances. That's the Buddha's word for them. They're more hindrances in the sense of stopping us from concentration. They drag us away from the moment because that's what they do, that's their job. Their job is to keep us occupied on something else. But when we're doing *vipassanā* as such, then

we can see them really as ways to get to know ourselves. And it's often the case that when we begin to meditate we get in touch with emotions that we might not have fully accepted about ourselves before. Often our family history has forbidden us to feel things - crying, being angry, being jealous. All these things in your family history, depending on the situation, have taught you to push things away, not to really look at them. But unfortunately, of course, they remain at that subliminal level and affect our actions. It puts a pressure on what we're doing.

So, for instance, in jealousy, if we're jealous of somebody, but we've never looked at it, and we've pushed it away, and we've felt this subliminal guilt about that, we might be over-praising. We compensate for it. All these things, I think, were very well understood by Freud, actually. He captured all that very well.

So one of the things about our meditation is really to open up to ourselves and to receive whatever we have been suppressing. Often when you come to Eastern teachers - in fact I've just received an email - if you ever work with Eastern teachers, they tend to push effort and concentration. And this often means that the meditator ends up suppressing stuff. In this particular email that I've just received, the instructions from the Burmese teacher was: if an emotion comes you note it like anger or happiness and then you immediately go back to the breath. And the aim of that really is to center the whole attention on the three characteristics, but especially the idea of impermanence. And in this way a person can be pushed towards some sort of deep insight, but it's at the expense really of not purifying the heart. And in the Buddha's teaching, the purification of the heart has to go hand in hand with insight. You can't leapfrog into liberation.

There has to be a complete clearance of the heart. We say the path is *sīla-samādhi-paññā*. *Sīla* is your conduct, is your behaviour. And this manifests your attitude, this manifests your virtue or lack of it. The *samādhi* is the training of the mind to be still, which is just part and parcel of the *vipassanā* process. And the *paññā* is the insight which liberates. So, whether we like it or not, we have to go to hell before we get to heaven. It's just one of those things. There has to be a process of purification.

And what we discover is that the only way to purify the heart is to let it speak, is to let it manifest its feelings. And that's painful for us, we don't like doing that. It's hard to be with depression, anger, the whole gamut of human suffering, which everybody has to some degree or other, I think.

So when the Buddha delineated these emotional attitudinal states he just called them the hindrances. And the first one, not surprisingly, had all those things to do with desire. And looking at the process of desire, we find that when something comes up that we like, that we want - you see, when we like it we want it. Very simple. You like it so you want it.

You see that in little children, don't you? When they see something like a toy, they want it. It's quite natural. So that never leaves us, the wanting because, you know, liking something. Now why do we do that? It's because when we get what we want, we're happy. It makes us feel happy. It gives us a certain gratification. And what happens is then that there's an underlying belief, you see, that if only you can get what you want, you'll always be happy. And you're into the great consumerist society.

And of course adverts play on that to the nth degree, don't they? And they stick desires together. So you always get these beautiful men and women standing next to the car you want. The suggestion of erotic and romantic happiness which goes with a Jaguar. So these desires that we have are not just simple - I want something. They're part of a root theology. They're part of a way that we look at life. It's our relationship to our lives.

Happiness, for heaven's sake. I mean, what do you want if it's not happiness? If you ask somebody, what do you want to be? They want to be happy. And they'll define that - good job, nice relationship, etc., etc., a big list of things. But basically, everybody wants to be happy. And the mistake, the great mistake, is to believe that the world, the sensual world, which is all we experience, is what can deliver that happiness.

As far as the world exists out there is in a sense irrelevant. It's how we experience it which is relevant. And it comes through our senses. Therefore we live in a sensual world from the inner point of view. And when the senses deliver those very pleasant feelings, pleasant states of mind, then we're happy. And the confusion, of course, lies in the fact that happiness is an emotional state. So therefore we're always chasing the next emotional state, the next high.

And in our society that's become a disease. It leads to compulsive action, addiction. The whole of life is about what are you going to do this Saturday? Where are you going to do this Sunday? Where are you going to go for your holiday? Have you seen this film? Have you read that book? It's always, what's the next thing which is going to bring me this little high?

And the downside of that, of course, is when there isn't one. So because we like living on these little highs, on these - what's the next thing to be done - and they're not there, there's that disappointment, there's a sense of loss, a grief. Like, what am I going to do? Worse than that, because of the inbuilt obsolescence of these pleasures, the fact that they can't maintain that same buzz that you got the first time, they lead to an easy boredom.

I read this article where this woman described the first go at crack, as she called it, "riding the dragon." And then she said, after that, you're always chasing that primary experience, but you never get it. And that's the problem with addiction. You're always trying to get the primary wow experience you had. And of course, when it comes to things like drugs and whatnot, the body becomes immune to it, it becomes hardened to it, it finds a way of absorbing the shock.

And when a person comes off drugs they often - they sometimes forget how resistant the body was to the drug they were taking. And often when they slip back into the old habit for one reason or another - they could be rejoicing - they kill themselves. They overdose. Now in a little way, in a less dramatic way, that's what we're doing all the time.

All the time we're seeking happiness in sensual pleasure and we're getting to a point where we're bored. So boredom says, seek, seek more pleasure. Variety is the spice of life. Off you go. And there's incessant search. We don't want to feel boredom. Boredom is not a very pleasant state to be in. And if it gets too much, if it gets really bored, you lose the purpose of living. It moves towards despair.

It can be on a professional level. If your work has always been very interesting and it disappears, what are you left with? You're left with this hole. What are you going to do now? Because you can't gain that same intensity of experience, life becomes boring, becomes empty, meaningless. And it's only because we've defined life as being something which is exciting, something which is always going to deliver this very pleasant state. So there's a real heavy consequence from indulgence.

Indulgence here, by the way, is referring to all types of attachments. So we're not just talking about missing your tea in the morning. I mean, that's pretty disastrous. But we talk about heavy stuff like the loss of your job if you enjoyed your work, the loss of a relationship, the death of somebody close. All these are very extraordinarily painful experiences for us. And the pain is the measure of the attachment. Pain is the measure of the attachment.

So when somebody dies, for instance, there's this - we call it grief. But it's like a huge sore in your heart. It's extraordinarily painful and a real lack. And we like to think of it as our love. This is how much I really love the person. I miss them so much. That's the confusion, you see, because we've confused love with this attachment. But the grief is the measure of attachment.

And if we don't see that, then the grief becomes chronic, because every time the grief begins to lessen, you think you're losing the love of the person. You've got to re-grieve to make sure you're still really loving them. And it's only when you begin to realize that grief - in this sense grief of loss - is actually a measure of attachment that you can let it go. And you begin to realize that love is something of a higher nature. Love allows things to be. If it was the time for the person to die, one is easy with it. You don't indulge in the grief. You see it as something which is unwholesome. It's a product of that attachment.

At a lesser level, you see, objects that we own - it could be something quite costly, like a car, or a computer, a laptop, or something that's not so costly, like your mobile. Somebody thieves it. You feel angry about it. Bloody thief. And there might be some grief. And you go around saying, do you know what? Somebody stole my phone, my mobile. It isn't your mobile anymore. It belongs to the thief. They're using it. They're the ones who have the mobile. But there's still this figment in the imagination that it's still mine.

Which is a social construct. It's a legal arrangement that we've come with each other, that if I say this is mine, it belongs to me. And there's somehow a feeling that it belongs to me in a deep - like it's attached to me in a visceral, emotional way. Whereas when we look at something like a clock or something, or a mobile, actually all you can do with objects is use them. To own them is a painful thing, emotionally I mean. We might legally own it, fine, that's not a problem. I mean if you own something which you actually want to get rid of and you get compensation if somebody does thieve it, you leave it in obvious places. That's not a problem. Put your four and a half year old computer, which is guaranteed for five years, and leave it out in the park somewhere. Oh, fiddle these poor companies.

So, one of the first things is to begin to see that psychology within ourselves. That's why I'm so intent on this business of eating and when we drink something, because right there we can see it. I mean, supposing tomorrow, for instance, when it came to five o'clock, you said to yourself, well, I won't have any tea. I won't even have the whiskey. I'll have a cup of cold water and I'll sit here and watch the pain.

And what we're watching is the attachment. Now the great thing about these attachments is that once you stop indulging them they actually do die away. There's a whole process there of deconditioning. And very quickly you become accustomed to a new order once you've set your heart to it. So here for instance, you've come into a very strange sort of regime. You get up at 3:30, breakfast, lunch, sit here, walk. Crazy, really, when you think about it. If you describe it to a person who knows nothing about meditation, they think, well, they must be a bit off. Must have gone off. But I think you'll see that even within three or four days, you just get up, you just do it. You just re-habituate to something.

And really that's the trick when it comes to habits that we find difficult for ourselves is to know that actually all you have to do is go through the pain of detoxing. And replace it of course with something which is more wholesome. Because unfortunately we have time, we keep moving from one moment to the next. You've got to fill it up with something. And if you can find something more skillful than what you were doing, then of course that is going to have a psychological effect. It's going to create a certain contentment.

And contentment is a big word in the spiritual world. Contentment is the mind without desire. The mind without desire. When we say desire here, remember, we're translating this one word, *taṇhā*. There is another word in Pali, *chanda*, which can be either wrong or right, can be a good desire or a bad desire. So that if we want to sit, that's a good desire, and we should reinforce it. The desire that we're talking about in terms of what causes problems is the desire whereby we believe that something sensual, something of this world, this phenomenal world, is going to deliver perfect happiness.

So when we're eating, you see, we're trying to make that distinction. So we're not seeking happiness in food, but we find that when we eat food, a certain appreciative joy arises. And that's natural to that process. It's natural for the body to feel good when you feed it something, and it's natural for the mind to resonate that goodness.

Even at a level, should we say, of just relationships, there's a case where the Buddha is asked, when people listen to your dharma and they don't receive it, they walk away from it, how do you feel? He says, fine, I don't feel unhappy or anything. And the reason for that is this understanding of *kamma*. The person isn't ready to move that way. And it's no skin off his nose. The Buddha's all right. He's got his food and he's under a tree and he's happy. His personal happiness is not dependent on somebody believing or following his instructions or not. But when somebody actually accepts the teaching and begins to train, he's filled with joy. And that's that sympathetic resonance.

I think some people think that when the Buddha was liberated, he turned into this hardened blob. He no longer related to the world. He walked around as an automaton who spoke the Dharma and didn't have an emotional life. But it's quite plain that he did. He was quite charismatic. And we talk about the four illimitables, which we can go into more detail towards the end of the week. In a sense all beautiful emotions, beautiful mental states are illimitable, but the four of them as it were capture a great deal of them: love, compassion, joy and peace. So it's not as though we're trying to get rid of the joy of life.

It's very important to grasp that, because if we make that mistake, if we make the mistake of thinking that it's the body which is the problem - if I didn't eat, then I wouldn't get attached. That's the mistake of the self-mortifier, of the great ascetic who looks like a famine victim. They don't eat, they don't go anywhere near something that's lovely or beautiful.

Again, the Buddha, you see, when he is on alms round, he comes away, he's got his food, and he's with Ananda, his attendant, and he says to Ananda, let's go...

to this shrine to this beautiful shrine and eat our food. Why doesn't he eat just down there on the side of the road in the dust, or find a donkey and be a real ascetic? He doesn't. He wants to go somewhere beautiful. When he goes off to meditate by himself into the forest, leaves the crowds, and they say to him, "Why do you do that now that you're fully liberated?"

And he says, "I do it for my own quiet abiding, and for the benefit of others, as a good example to others." But you notice, it's the quiet abiding that comes first. He doesn't say, "I do it for the benefit of others, oh, and for my own quiet abiding." He says, "No, I do it for my own quiet abiding." So one can imagine that there were times when there were just constant visitors. He was of that caste, the Kshatriya caste, the warrior caste, whereby he knew all these kings, he knew them as children. His father was a local ruler, subordinate to the local king—Kosala, king of Kosala, I think I'm right, doesn't sound right, but I think I am—Pasenadi, who was a great supporter of the Buddha. And the other king, Bimbisara, who was down in Magadha, where now you get Benares, Varanasi on the Ganges there. So all that was another kingdom.

And the Buddha moved around the whole area. Wherever he went, he knew these rulers. And where he went, he would be offered great food sometimes. Even monks in the East, you know, if somebody has a birthday and wants to create great merit, or a marriage or something like that, and they always feed the monks very well, and you get

a few dishes. And of course then, if you're an ascetic, you don't want to really enjoy it, you see. So there becomes this negative feeling about your life, that this isn't to be enjoyed.

So it's really important for us to make that distinction very clear to ourselves, that the pleasures of life, the sensual pleasures, and the pleasures of relationship, of art, even the joys that come up in meditation, are not the problem. The problem is coming from a deeper part of ourselves—this consciousness, this awareness which is misunderstanding and attaching to it as a way of creating this internal happiness which we call an emotional state, and thinking that that's it, that's me.

So all these things that come up around pleasure are really quite important. And a lot of this stuff that we get from misbehaviour of youth is to do, I think, with that frustration of really not finding anything which is truly engaging. So they're always being taught—even at school when I was leaving the profession in FE—there was all this talk about making education more entertaining. It's painful, you see. The teacher then becomes a performer. You've got to perform. And the children expect to be entertained, always to be on this lovely high.

So they forget—it's completely forgotten—that education, the word discipline, is about work. It's about learning your timetables. I know they don't do that anymore. And it gives children the wrong idea of what life's about. And when they hit the reality of work, and for the most part it's not the sort of work they had imagined themselves doing, like fitting tyres onto cars, it's just boring. There's not an acceptance of it.

So a lot of these things that we see in our society is to do with this consumerism. And if we look into ourselves, we'll see the same syndromes, the same psychological states that are arising because of that wrong understanding. So this is a real opportunity, you see, to engage with that and to keep letting go of desire.

When I say letting go, you're not pushing it away. It means to allow it to arise and pass away. You have to be very careful on that. Sometimes this noting technique is used to sort of bat things out of the mind. Like greed—get out, poke in the eye. So be careful, because aversion is very subtle. Not wanting is very, very subtle sometimes. But it's not. The idea, this phrase that you get in meditation circles, this "letting go, letting go," is allowing something to arise and pass away.

So this is an opportunity to do that. And the important thing is to sometimes wait until that desire has completely and utterly passed away, and then just taste that moment that comes after that, where the mind just hasn't got that energy in it, hasn't got that slight turbulence in it which makes it always move towards what it wants. And what we're experiencing there is contentment.

And the distinction between gratification and contentment is very difficult. So every time we indulge a desire, there's always a point of gratification, there's always a point of feeling "oh great!" But unfortunately, all it's done is reinforce that cycle, is reinforce that habit. And then we're off again seeking, seeking, searching.

So when we're working with hindrances here, this is something you can take directly into your daily life. And it's about strengthening the will—the will that is called *dhammachetanā*—the will for spiritual practice, the will for spiritual development. And it has to be exercised, it has to grow. And you do it by the process of renunciation.

So renunciation isn't this self-accusation and self-mortification. It's allowing some desire to rise and pass away. So you're renouncing it in order to see how attached you are to it. And you keep letting that rise and pass away until there's no pain. And then the renunciation has done its job. And then one tries to re-engage with that in a more skilful way.

So one exercise that I always set to people, and probably you've heard it from me before, is to get yourself a nice cup of tea, or if you prefer coffee, and a biscuit, and just sit in front of your TV when your favourite programme's on. And don't turn it on. Just watch the blank screen and feel the pain. And that pain of letting go of Coronation Street and Match of the Day—oh my God—just sitting there with that and knowing that it's on is a wonderful exercise. And if you do that every week until it's completely gone, you see, then you think, "What the hell was that about? What was I getting so upset about a stupid program for?"

Years and years ago I watched this program. It was an Australian series. It was a storyline, three episodes. And it was about these young women who were travelling in Spain and in Morocco. And there they got fiddled by these two rather handsome men to get into drugs. And they didn't realise they were carriers for these drugs. And when they landed in Spain, they were caught by the police and stuck in jail, you see. And the whole drama is about that predicament.

Well, of course, I missed the third program. And still in my mind, I still get like, "Cripes, what happened? What happened?" And this is a total fantasy. It's a total fantasy. It didn't happen. It's somebody's head. But so often when I think about it, I think, "Oh, one day, one day." I must say, it doesn't cause so much pain these days.

So really work on that and just, and after you leave the course and take into daily life, just find something, one point of the day, or one habit that you have which you know you can do without, and just sit with the desire and let it fade away. And there are two things that when we do that, there's always two things happening: we're letting go of something which is unwholesome for us, but we're also growing in that will for the *Dhamma*, the *dhammachetanā*, which is your spiritual empowerment.

And it's the same when you practice the meditation. So when it comes to doing a morning sitting and hopefully an evening sit, sometime in the evening, there are always a hundred thousand excuses, a hundred thousand reasons, very good reasons why you shouldn't be doing it. There's always something more important. And it's really, and it's sort of catching that, the sort of negativity of the desire of wanting to do something which is more pleasant, you see. It's not just that you don't want to sit, it's that you want to do something which is more exciting, there's something more capturing than just sitting here watching the painful emotions coming up all the time. And it's the ability to let go of that, you see, which is creating this will.

And will in Buddhism is that which is your power. Power means to be able to do something. Like when you walk, there's a power, there's an ability to walk—we call it an ability, but it's a power, it's an ability. And so when we empower ourselves through these exercises, we're becoming stronger within ourselves. And the strength grows, you see, the strength grows to let go, to let go. So that when you get to the, when we get to this point where we're just going to approach the final liberation, we should be as strong as the Buddha, you see.

So remember when the Buddha had finally had got this inkling of perhaps this was what was going to make the break, what was going to bring about liberation from suffering? Remember, he'd been through a bit of despairing there when he gave up the ascetic practices. So he was despairing, he didn't know what to do. And suddenly a memory of childhood comes and it sort of inspires him. And on reflection he says, he thinks, "Well, this is it. If this doesn't work, then nothing will." And he has enough of this *chetanā*, he has enough of this willpower—willpower isn't bad in itself, it's what you put it towards. He has enough willpower to say, "I'm going to sit under this tree and I'm going to sit here, and either I will make this insight, I'll actually understand things and come to the end of suffering, or I'll die."

Now, of course, that wasn't tested because he actually did make a break. But it took him six hours. He sat there for six hours. That's what the scripture tells us.

And so when we use this renunciation, when we actually practice renunciation, it has this added quality of building up this inner strength within us. And we see that in people. We see that in strong people, in people whom we really admire. People like Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, people like that. Mother Teresa. These people have a deep inner power which comes from that place where they've lost a lot of attachment to life. They don't care anymore about their life. They're there for another purpose beyond themselves.

I always remember this case where in that dreadful time in Lebanon—I can't remember, but I remember all that stuff about the camps and the shootings and the killings and all that. And it would seem that right in the two firing lines, which weren't that far apart as far as I remember, there was a school, and it was full of children, but also handicapped children, or children with disabilities, as we say these days. And nobody knew what to do. It was very strange from what I could see, that this school was stuck. Nobody had the guts to go in and do anything. And they didn't know what to do. It was in a firing line.

And they brought Mother Teresa to this point. And what the clip of the film showed you was them explaining to her that there were all these children here and they didn't know what to do about it. They were stuck in these firing lines. And after explanation, seemingly without second thought, she just walked over to the school and let all the kids out. I mean, like nobody had thought of that. Nobody had thought, "Well, I'll just go over there and bring them all out." Why? Because they're afraid of being shot. They're afraid of being in the firing line.

But this, I believe, diminutive little woman, just this enormous strength of the power of her spiritual practice. If she was shot, I don't think she would care. So that's the sort of strength that comes to us when we begin to practice this renunciation.

And as a sort of another way in which that willpower of renunciation is expressed is through generosity. Because every time we're generous, we give something away which we ourselves could have enjoyed for ourselves for the benefit of somebody else. I'm not here talking about social bargaining, you know, where at Christmas you give a piece of cheese and they send you a piece of cheese. You know, and "Yes, I'll come and help you decorate" with an underlying text which says, "Well, I'm going to do my gardening next week."

But that generosity where you actually give for the benefit of others completely, not expecting any return. I mean, that's what we try and practice here, isn't it? This is the idea here that when we come here to do a retreat, everything is already received. It's already paid for. What are you paying for? It's already here. So that when it comes to making a donation, it's always done in the spirit of entirely for somebody else. So what we're doing is saying, "Well look, this little bit of wealth that I have, I could have enjoyed this. I could have gone to the Costa del Sol and drunk a bit of sangria and enjoyed myself. But instead I've sent it off to this charity for the benefit of somebody whom I don't even know."

So that's a letting go of desire, you see. That's your renunciation. Same with time. You know, just helping somebody out, helping somebody, doing some charitable work, not for any reason apart from just helping. So that time you could have spent yourself, could have been watching a decent film, or going out with a friend. Who knows what could have been, we might have enjoyed that time, but instead we've given it. And we might not be doing something we particularly like doing. It might not be something that we particularly want to do, but we do it for the benefit of somebody else.

And in that way, this self, which is always self-centred, you see, it's always looking after itself, understandably so, is slowly being undermined, slowly being undermined. So when we get to this doctrine of not-self, see, what does it mean, not-self, you see? Does it mean that there's no personality, there's a sort of breakdown, sort of schizophrenic, sort of an amorphous block? You end up with no self, no personality, nothing?

No, not at all. All this self that the Buddha is talking about, he's describing, is the relationship we have to the world, to this body. "This is me." All we've got to recognise slowly is that it's not me, and then we have a different relationship to it. So every time I look at "my wealth, my wealth," then it becomes painful. But if I look at it as wealth, then I can do something with it. I can do something for myself, something for others. And I can make a distinction towards myself between that which is selfish and that which is self-care.

So going back to eating, there's a great difference between preparing ourselves a nice meal, which is with the attitude of self-caring, rather than getting in there and just eating for the sake of enjoying ourselves and becoming a glutton. That's a word you don't hear these days very much. With all this obesity about, it's a no-no word, isn't it? Nobody's a glutton, they're all suffering from obesity. They're all just obese. Nobody will actually say, "You greedy pig." You know what I mean? I mean, it's not quite done, you see. It's not politically correct anymore to call a spade a spade. It has to be an illness.

Not to say that some people don't put weight on because of metabolic reasons and whatnot. But most people — I mean, I was shocked myself. I found I had put on half a stone. It was a great shock, I can tell you. And then it got worse. I thought, oh, there's something wrong here. But I put it down to age, you see. How easy it is to be obese and self-forgiving and all that.

So this evening we've just looked at just one of these hindrances. We'll be at it all week, I think, just centring on this business of desire, because I think it's very crucial in our day and age. Tomorrow I'll do the rest of them. I won't hang about so much, but just as a general attitude.

There are those states of mind which are agitated, and they're caused by these sorts of desires — all the negative desires, hatreds and angers and irritations, all that sort of stuff. There are things that cause agitation in the mind that make it restless: anxiety, guilt, shame, all those sorts of things.

And there's doubt, and we'll go into that a bit more deeply, which creates a sort of disturbance in the mind. Doubt makes a person constantly think about it, think about things, and be worried.

So whenever we come across the mind being like that, remember, you always come off the thought pattern. The narrative is irrelevant. In here it's irrelevant. Out there it may be relevant. In other words, if I doubt whether this is the job I ought to take or not, out there it's relevant. Here it's not relevant, because here you can't do anything about it anyway. You're not supposed to be using your mobiles. You're not supposed to be on the phone. You're not supposed to be writing. So here it's irrelevant. That's the point.

So by making all this mental agitation irrelevant and just keeping it to the side, we can go into the actual mental state that's driving these states — the attitude, the emotional state that's driving it — and we can begin to feel it and get a hang of it and see how it works.

And the other one is, the other side is when the energy begins to fall. And that's what we call dullness and lethargy. And over the next couple of days, I hope that the business of sleep imbalance will have been sorted and you'll be very clear to yourself that any sleepiness that comes during the day is in fact dullness and lethargy and is not tiredness. One can be quite strict about that.

And there, of course, the attitude is simply to stay awake and to be with it, to feel it. Remember, it is an energy. It doesn't feel like an energy because it's a sort of collapse into nothingness. Something's dragging us down. It's a dullness, dull, heavy feeling. So

the attitude there is basically to stay awake as best one can. That's why you open your eyes, you stand up. And if in a sitting it just becomes ridiculous and you just find yourself nodding and banging your head on the floor, then go for a gentle walk.

And none of this stuff do you fight. You're not trying to annihilate it. You're not trying to get rid of it. You're not trying to overcome it. You're not trying to beat it. You're not trying to be better than it. You're just trying to attend. See them all as patients. They're all little illnesses. And they just need attending to, that's all.

And that's the quality of awareness. Attention. And you can flavour the attention with kindness. You can look upon these things with compassion. And that often softens the process, by the way. It undermines a negativity towards them by seeing that these are little illnesses, little dis-eases. And that's, I think, a very skilful way to look at it.

Are there any questions? Anything come up? Sounds as though I've perfectly described the problem of desire. May my words be of assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later. Thank you.

CHAPTER 138

There is No Separation Between Vipassanā and Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53 min

> *In this comprehensive dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma weaves together the Buddha's life story with the Four Noble Truths to demonstrate that there is no separation between formal meditation and everyday activities. Beginning with the Buddha's journey from privileged prince to awakened teacher, Bhante explains how the Buddha's experience serves as an archetype for all practitioners—we too must investigate inwardly, gain insights, and then re-engage with life.*
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> *The talk explores the three characteristics of existence—impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā)—showing how understanding these truths transforms our relationship with desire, attachment, and the self we construct. Bhante offers practical examples of how attachment to self-definition causes suffering, whether through loss of a job, physical ability, or loved ones. He explains that genuine spiritual progress manifests in shifting attitudes: from selfishness to generosity, from aversion to love, and from cruelty to compassion.*
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> *Crucially, Bhante emphasizes that the Noble Eightfold Path includes right speech, right action, and right livelihood—active engagements with the world. The meditation cushion prepares us to bring right attitude into every activity, from the most mundane task to our life's work. Whether putting cherries on cakes or sweeping monastery paths, the spiritual practice lies in giving ourselves completely to what we're doing with the right intention. As Bhante concludes, from waking to sleeping, every moment offers an opportunity for practice, moving us toward genuine contentment.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble, and fully self-enlightened one.

Listening to the Dhamma requires a certain comportment. Generally speaking, one has to adopt a proper posture. If you want to rest from your sitting, bring a chair in—that's not a problem.

Tonight I thought I would range around the Buddha's teachings, framing them around the Four Noble Truths, and try to make a link for you between what you're actually doing here and practice in daily life, making that as clear as possible.

In the Buddha's life, he begins as an ordinary person. He belongs to the ruling caste, the Kshatriya. His father was a local governor, a local king—a potentate of a particular tribe, the Sakyas, just south of Nepal. He would have been tutored to be a warrior. In his mid-twenties, he goes through what you might call an identity crisis, which manifests as recognizing that youth is over and ahead of him lies sickness, old age, and death.

Mythically, it's portrayed that he's out riding and sees these particular people, and each time he asks, "What is this?" because he's been guarded from such realities. And then: "Does it happen to me?" That's the big one. He also sees an ascetic sitting under a tree, which suggests that perhaps there was a way out of this suffering.

So he does what seems to have been something like the hippie movement of the 1970s—what everybody was doing—which was to abandon the lay life and wander about as an ascetic. He went to two teachers who both taught him how to establish those very beautiful states of mind that we call the absorptions, or jhāna. Each time he was invited to stay and teach with them, but each time he refused because something in him had not been answered.

Then he tried the mortification exercises—eating very little, all that sort of thing. After about four years of that, he simply found it was more suffering. It was unworthy and a waste of time.

In his despair, he left his companions, who thought he'd gone soft. Sitting by the road, a woman came along with a bit of rice pudding, saw this bedraggled, poor ascetic, and instead of offering it to the god she was supposed to be honoring, she offered it to him. It revived him. But something else happened: he remembered an occasion in childhood when he was watching his father perform the ploughing ceremony. There was something about that memory, something about that quality of watching, which awakened in him the possibility of another way of approaching his problem.

The first approach—getting into those jhānas—had been like an escape from life, from the reality of ordinary daily existence, just escaping into yourself into these beautiful states. The problem is you have to keep coming out. The second approach, self-mortification, was really based on the idea that the body was to blame—that we feel greed because the body feels hungry. If you could push down all those appetites, then you'd enter into these rather relaxed, beautiful states of mind. Those of you who've done a ten-day fast or a two-week fast know that after the first two or three days, you do enter into this very easy, happy state. The body doesn't seem to need food, mainly because it's eating itself. It's definitely a good way to purify the body. But putting that aside as a spiritual practice, it was with that childlike investigation, that childlike curiosity, that he sat under a tree and made the breakthrough.

He leaped from being an ordinary person to being fully enlightened. We say self-enlightened because, after trying everything that was on offer, it was his own experience from childhood that brought up this new way of investigating—probably the only way of investigating as such. That's why we call him self-enlightened. There was nobody to show him that path. He was the one who discovered it and then propagated it.

Once he became awakened, he spent a couple of days—probably more—working out the ramifications, the consequences of what he'd seen, of what he'd experienced. Just like we do: we have an experience and then we think, "What was that about?"

He then went in search of someone to teach. There was doubt in his mind when he realized what he'd achieved, something so subtle that he didn't think anybody would really listen to him. He was at a loss. Mythically, this is portrayed as the great god, Brahmā Sahampati, coming down and saying that there are a few people with just a little dust in their eyes. That was his reflection, his encouragement to try.

He thought first of his teachers, but they had both died. So his next destination was his six companions. He walked all the way from Bodh Gaya up to Varanasi, to Sarnath—a couple of hundred miles, perhaps. He walked all that way to have a chat with these old friends, who at first didn't greet him warmly because they thought he'd gone soft. But then they recognized that something had changed.

As he was talking to them, he said something very interesting: "Have you ever heard me talk like this before?" They'd had chats about the Dhamma, hundreds of talks, met many teachers, and knew him well. After he began to explain the path, he asked them, "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?" And it was after those first couple of talks that these ascetics, these old companions, also made their insights.

The important thing about the Buddha is that he's not only the founder of this particular spiritual tradition and an exemplar—he's also the archetype. Everybody who follows this path follows in the Buddha's footsteps.

There has to be a point in our lives when we reflect and think, "What's all this about?" We wouldn't be here—none of us would be here at all—if we hadn't woken up one morning and thought, "What am I doing here? Who am I? What is this about?" There's that questioning about the purpose of life.

And the training is this process of self-investigation. Very simple. The investigation isn't out there.

The answer doesn't lie out there for our internal problems. It lies within us. And once we begin to practice, it affects the way we are.

Now, after he had made this great effort and awakened to the truth—the Dharma, as we say—he then goes out, he re-engages in life. He doesn't sit there under the tree feeling happy for himself, telling people to get on with it while he just wants to be left alone. "Not available," sign up. Far from it. He's out there, and for the rest of his life—forty-five years—he's tramping up and down.

And it's not so easy. At the beginning, he seems to gather people around him who are fervent, probably already existing ascetics who've known him for years because he's been around. Two of the great ones, of course, were his companions Sariputta and Moggallana, both of whom had been ascetics—Brahmins by caste—who had been practicing for quite some time. Not satisfied with their teacher, they had gone wandering.

It was Sariputta who met Asaji, one of the Buddha's companions. He said, "You look bright." And Asaji replied, "Yes." Sariputta asked, "Who's your teacher? What does he teach?" Asaji said, "He teaches that for whatever arises, there is a cause, and there's a cause for whatever passes away"—something like that. We chant it in the morning; I should really know it. Anyway, that aside, Sariputta's curiosity is awakened. He goes to see the Buddha and eventually becomes his primary disciple. He's the one credited with understanding the Dharma second only to the Buddha himself. He was given the title General of the Dharma.

His companion Moggallana is the magic guy—he's the one who can do all these magical things. He becomes the patron saint, you might say, of the Mahayana tradition. Just as a little aside, Moggallana had a big problem with sloth and torpor. He asks the Buddha what to do, and the Buddha gives him eleven things he can do before he sleeps. He's got to rub his eyes, rub his legs, open his eyes, stand up, chant, do all sorts of things. Only after eleven different procedures can he say to himself, "I am tired, I will have a rest." Now, he becomes fully liberated in one week, for heaven's sake—it hardly lasted that long. Sariputta, who didn't ask any questions but just got the basic grip of the practice and went off investigating, took two weeks. Well, there's something in that, I think. The intellectual person is often at a disadvantage because he just can't get beyond the thinking mind.

The reason I tell this story is to show that the Buddha's life is the exemplum, the archetype, and it happens to us in small stages. We go on retreat, we clear some things up, we get little insights about things, but then we've got to go back, we've got to re-engage.

In time—not immediately—in time he formulated these Four Noble Truths. And these Four Noble Truths form the basis of all forms of Buddhism. If a Buddhism doesn't have the Four Noble Truths, it's simply not Buddhism. Although there are doctrinal dif-

ferences that develop over time, they tend not to concern the root of the teaching, which is the Four Noble Truths. They tend to be concerned with the nature of consciousness and things like that.

So the first noble truth is stated very clearly: it's simply the truth of suffering, the truth of dukkha, the truth of unsatisfactoriness. This word dukkha is very hard to translate because it includes the joy that we get from pleasures and the happinesses of life. It's a word which catches any form of discontent—from the most minor dissatisfaction to the most horrific anguish and despair possible to humankind—whether dependent on pleasure or direct painful suffering. It's the whole gamut of human misery. It's translated in various ways: unsatisfactoriness, lack. Somebody translates it as "lack." It used to be translated as suffering, but that's too narrow a word, really.

And he points to three reasons as to where this suffering comes from and how it arises. These are the three characteristics. It's the fact that things arise and pass away that makes it impossible for us to hold a moment of time, to stop the world and say, "I'm happy now, don't move." It just doesn't work. You can't do it. Even when you've had a great party and foolishly people say, "We must have another one"—no, no, no. I'm a real damp squib, you know. But that's what we do. We try to hold on to it.

We hold on to what gives us pleasure. And that grip—that's the cramp, you see. As we've been discussing throughout the week, it has its consequences, its aftermath. It has its diseases that come afterwards: the sense of addiction to something, a compulsiveness about something. Even silly things like tea and toast, for heaven's sake, can cause enormous misery. Can't they? Absolutely.

And the grief at loss, which gets worse and worse the more you're attached to objects—and especially people. A lot of grief, my heavens. And frustration if you don't get what you want, especially if a person doesn't do what you want. That's very frustrating. And of course, this constant underlying anxiety.

That's the basic position of the self. The self knows it's going to destruct. It knows death is up there somewhere, ahead of it. Therefore, underneath everything we are experiencing, there lies this anxiety, whether we're aware of it or not. It surfaces when something horrible happens to us, or nearly happens to us. Anxiety is just part and parcel. We talk about this age being the age of anxiety, but that's because this age does push us to the edge of it.

We've become such a sophisticated civilization that we don't know what we'd do if the electricity went. If you go to New Guinea and live with a tribe, they don't have electricity. They live perfectly well. But for us, it's like the end of the world if the electricity

goes off. We become soft in that sense. We become entirely dependent upon a standard of living which is fragile—really fragile. And that's what we're coming to learn, aren't we?

So these emotions, these mental states, all hang around this idea of pleasure. The reason we go to pleasure is because at least at that point we feel happy. Ice cream makes you happy—great. Anything that lifts us out of the misery of life is great. And of course, why not? You go for it. That would be the general culture of a consumerist society. It plays on that—it plays on the fact that pleasant things, pleasant experiences make you happy.

And at the extreme level, you get these extreme sports where the person puts themselves in a position where they're right there in the moment. You miss the moment, you fall off the cliff or your canoe goes under. To live at that level of absolute moment-to-moment awareness is quite a breathtaking thing—as long as you don't think you're going to die. You wouldn't do it otherwise. But of course, that's one heck of a way to live. I presume you die of a heart attack in mid-life, trying to live at that level of intensity. But that's why they do it, because at that intense level, there's a real being alive, being aware.

What we're trying to do is get to that without extreme sports. We don't have to be an extreme sport person to be absolutely alive in this present moment.

And apart from impermanence—when we actually see impermanence, when we begin to grasp it, when it begins to sink into the heart, when it begins to be digested at that deep attitudinal level within the heart—then we begin to see the truth of the Buddha's phrase: there is nothing in this world worth holding on to. There is nothing in this world worth holding on to. You keep repeating that until it sort of sinks in.

And as it sinks in, all sorts of things can come up, because there are so many things we do hold on to. Our spouses, our partners, our children, our parents—there's a whole load of relationships that we have in which we're deeply entwined. When these people disappear one way or the other, through death or whatever, it just leaves this gaping wound in the heart. You're left there with this gaping wound, and what can you do?

Now, we make the mistake of thinking that this is love. But in fact, it's only because of that self-definition—who I am. "I am somebody's spouse. I am this person's mother, father." Those definitions of "I am," you see.

Have you read Kahlil Gibran? That beautiful Lebanese poet.

Well, you know, he talks about, just in this one case, that children don't belong to you — they come through you. They come by way of you into the world. And that's a lovely way to see our relationships.

So that's what seeing impermanence does. It releases us from the suffering of that grasping nature we have, which is deep within us because it's to do with me, to do with my self-definition. It's like when on a level of the body itself we define ourselves by this body we have now. So if by accident we lose our sight, it's a catastrophe for us. If you lose your legs, if you have an accident on the road and you become a paraplegic, it's like the world disappears for you. Who am I now?

We had recently, didn't we, that young lad who got injured in the rugby accident, and his parents finally took him to Switzerland. He'd lost his reason for being. Completely lost it. And I'm sure everybody tried to give him good reasons, but he just couldn't find it. Because he defined himself as "I am an active sports person and I win, I score tries." These definitions that we have, they go very deep. And so when something happens to us which drags that away, which pulls us out from that self-definition, it's a catastrophe.

Losing your job. I mean, losing your job is hard enough, it's painful enough in terms of your economic situation and all that, but it's even worse when you've defined yourself by that identity. I've just been listening to the news about this nurse who led a Panorama program about looking after the elderly. They filmed it in a hospital. Well, anyway, she's been struck off the list of nurses on the grounds that she didn't put the privacy of the patients first. But from her point of view, of course, she'd been complaining about the situation, nobody was listening to her, and so she went undercover with the Panorama team. And you can hear from her voice — she's only just heard, I think, today sometime — she's in this huge state of shock because what's she going to do now? She's been kicked out of her own profession.

So that sense of impermanence rebounds back on this sense of self. And that's the other characteristic — this idea that things are compounded. We perceive a whole, an entire thing, but in fact whatever we investigate in our lives, whether it's what we do, whether it's the body, whether it's the mechanisms of the mind, the emotional life and all that — it's all bits and pieces, all compounded bits and pieces. We do have the capacity to hold it all together into a concept of me, but then we believe that that's what I am, which is very different.

I mean, the Buddha didn't go schizophrenic when he became fully liberated. He didn't split up into pieces and collapse. In fact, if anything, he became very charismatic. There was coming out of him this entire personage which people met, obviously very impressive. But he wasn't fooled by that. He didn't think "I am this guru" or something.

So something about our relationship to the way we are, to how we experience ourselves, is to do with this self. And remember that the Buddha is not saying there is no self. He doesn't go into metaphysics. He just says, look, ask the question: Who am I? Who do you think you are? And then look inward and see if there's anything there which holds, which sustains, which you can say "Oh, well, this is me." And that's the technique of "not me, not mine." Whatever I'm looking at is not a self.

You know, like the pain in my knee definitely feels like me, but when I look at it and distance from it, it's just "there is a pain in the knee." And the pain in the knee is not substantial either, because I can go into it and it dissolves into all sorts of little bits and feelings. Not only that, I haven't a clue what's happening at the chemical level anyway, or the electrical level, the nerve level. There's a whole load of stuff that the self in terms of "I" seems to take for granted, but when it actually looks into things, it discovers it actually knows nothing. It knows very little about the body.

We know it as a science. People tell us that when we breathe, oxygen comes in and carbon dioxide goes out. Well, who's experienced that? I don't believe a word of it, frankly. They'd have to prove it to me. Put a plastic bag over my head — if I'm dead in four minutes, they were right.

So it's a case of: what do we know? What do we really, really know?

And all we're left with is our basic experience through the senses. That's what we're left with. And then we have to begin to investigate as to whether this is actually something real, whether it's not also made up.

Now, because of these two positions—I am, and the fact that everything I am seems to be changing—it manifests in the characteristic of suffering, which is the third one. It's usually rated second, but I'm doing it this way.

In the dependent origination, you see, suffering comes in as thirst, desire, wanting for this sort of happiness in a wrong way. What the Buddha points to in the second noble truth is that this is the cause of suffering. This is the manifest cause of suffering. The underlying cause of suffering is this ignorance, this delusion about who we are and about continuity and all that business, but it manifests as desire.

Any time we find ourselves desiring something in that compulsive way—and we know that it's a wrong desire because if it's not satisfied we feel unhappy for it in one way or another—as soon as we see desire, we know that this is a manifestation of this essential delusion as to who I am. It becomes really clear to you.

So he's not pointing at some metaphysical thing about not-self, you know, "I am not-self." My old teacher used to say he met this fellow in India, this Indian monk who was into not-self: "I am not a person, I am not a thing." He had an elephant, and he didn't like to use the word "me" or "mine," so when he talked to my teacher he would say, "your elephant." He always put everything in the "yours" or "his." He wouldn't use "me" or "mine." It's all really crazy stuff, actually. A very strange thing.

So this second noble truth of desire, the cause of suffering, makes it very simple for us actually. Every time we can feel a lack, every time we can feel a yearning—which comes up in all sorts of ways. It's not just yearning for food and money. Loneliness, a sense of yearning, nostalgia—there's a whole range of these desires that come up into the mind. If we're sharp enough, if we stay at this level of awareness, we can see it and we can name it. That's one of the better points of noting: you're straight on it, you say, "That's wrong desire."

That noting, that labelling of it, that actual recognition of it, does allow us a moment of reflection. We might just say, "To hell with it, I'll have that piece of toast anyway." But it does allow us a moment of reflection. And then we realise the importance of intention.

We've got a choice. That's the point—we call it a choice because there are two roads open to us. We can either indulge it and keep going down the road towards suffering, or we can let go of it and move towards the road of liberation. But in a more realistic sense, once we know where the path is, there isn't a choice. Really, we ought to do that which is going to lead us out of suffering, and build up the commitment to that particular path.

So that's his second noble truth.

Now the third one is a very clear, direct statement: there is an end to suffering. He doesn't use the word nibbāna, you see. His whole teaching is about suffering and the end of suffering—I'm using suffering now with that huge gamut of understanding. When he reduces his teaching, he says, "All I teach is dukkha and dukkha nirodha." In the Pāli it's three words. He reduces his whole teaching to three words: dukkha, dukkha nirodha—suffering, unsatisfactoriness, discontent, and the end of that.

So the third noble truth is not phrased as "there is this mythical place called Nibbāna," you know, this Shangri-La which you can head towards, east of Birmingham—no, west, sorry, west, we're here. No, it's not that at all. He says there is an end to suffering. That's just a great, straightforward statement, and that's it.

One of the words he uses in the approach to this is nibbidā, which is weariness. That's not being fed up. That's not being bored. Weariness—it comes to you when, in a sense, you've had enough. Very old people sometimes just die because they've just had enough. They just let go. They've had enough.

One example I like to use is with little children. You've got a four or five year old and they want to play tiddlywinks or snakes and ladders, and you say, "Oh yeah, come on, let's play." So you have one great game and then they say, "Let's have another one," and you say, "Well, just a minute, I've got to get off." I've played snakes and ladders once with a kid and that's about it. So it's that sort of weariness—one wearies of things.

That's a good sign. That's a spiritual sign, a spiritual indicator to the person. It's not that they are losing their desire to live or anything like that. It's just that that way of life no longer attracts.

If we think about the stages of sainthood, there are four paths and fruits, four levels. The third level is known as non-returner. You can think of that in the traditional Buddhist way, that when they die they don't come back to this realm. But in terms of the spiritual life, what it's saying is there is nothing in this world which attracts them anymore. They're living in this world where attachment is not possible to the sensual life because they've become weary of it. They've gone beyond seeking that sort of happiness. Which doesn't mean they don't eat and drink and do all the other things. It's just that they're no longer attached to it as a form of happiness.

When they say of somebody who's achieved the end, there's a lovely phrase: "They've laid down the burden." I really like that phrase. They have laid down the burden.

And then, of course, he lays out the path.

And these four things, the way he laid them out, was the way that doctors in those times worked with diseases. The disease was mentioned, what the disease was, what was the cause of the disease, what was the prognosis, and what was the medicine to be used for the end of the disease. So he very much sees himself as a doctor of the mind, as a psychotherapist or a psychiatrist, and he sees himself in that role because he's addressing suffering.

Then we have the Eightfold Path, which he delineates, and it starts off with Right Understanding. This Right Understanding is exactly what we've been talking about—it's beginning to understand the three characteristics. That's mainly what it's about. And included in those three characteristics, remember, is this whole business of suffering, the

cause of desire being the cause, and therein lies all that teaching about the dependent origination that we chant in the morning. Perhaps there'll be time to look into that tomorrow.

So this Right Understanding begins first of all with what you hear, and then what you think for yourself, and then what you yourself experience through the teaching. It becomes a deeper understanding, a deeper knowledge, until it becomes your own personal experience. And that's when it has obviously a greater effect. But if it stays only at that level of understanding and thinking, it never really drops, it never really moves into the attitudinal base, which is where your will lies. And the will expresses itself through the heart.

How does that attitudinal base express itself? It's always the three same examples. It's always from selfishness to generosity. Once you lose the self, you're not always feeding into the self. Remember, this selfishness is not to be confused with self-care. One has to eat. But whether it has to be beef stroganoff every night is another matter. Or cheesecake. Yes, cheesecake.

So it's a case of recognizing that there's a shift in our attitude, and that's another telltale to the meditator—that they're moving spiritually because their attitudes change, the way they're actually behaving changes.

There's a lovely scene in the scriptures of three fully enlightened monks living together. They're known as the Anuruddhas. They have three separate names, but the Buddha approached them as the Anuruddhas because that was the name of the chief monk. And he asks them, "How do you live so peacefully together?" The reply is, "Well, I say to myself, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?"

Have you ever tried that? What if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do? Now frankly, that only works if the others are saying the same thing. You can tend to be abused. So you have to bring a bit of nous to this practice, you know. But they live peacefully by being open to what the other person wanted to do. And then obviously there was some discussion.

And this other lovely thing that he says—he says they go off on alms round, and whoever comes back first sets up the table. So it's not, "Well, you said you were going to do it and I was waiting for you." You know, it's like there's a cup that needs to be washed and everybody's waiting for somebody else to do it. Instead, whoever came back first had the table and the preparation for the meal ready. And then whoever was last cleaned up. Obviously, if you didn't want to be last, you had to be quicker.

So this expresses itself through this lack of selfishness and a movement towards generosity. And remember that generosity demands you lose something that you are treasuring, that you thought you would use for yourself. You're giving away some time, some time of your life for the benefit of somebody else. Or you're giving away some wealth which you've spent time earning, which you had earmarked for this special treat, and you're giving it away for somebody else. So even through the act of generosity, there's a loss of self. Every time we do it with a proper, clean, full-hearted purpose for the benefit of the other, we're undermining the self. We're undermining the self.

And the most dramatic expression of that is of course when somebody gives their life away for another. I went to Auschwitz last year. Just amazing, really. But in the context that we're speaking of, there's a particular Catholic priest, Father Maximilian Kolbe. The SS there decided to starve to death ten men because of some partisan activity. And one of them was crying—he had a wife and children, all this sort of stuff. So Maximilian stood forth and said he'd take his place. And they allowed him to do that. They just shut them up in this room until they died of starvation.

So that's the greatest of all. "No greater gift has man"—that's Jesus, isn't it? "No greater gift has man than to give his life for another." So that's how far generosity can go. And I mean, to do that, you really mustn't think of yourself.

Something has to go. And the other transformation is to move away from hatred towards love, from aversion towards love. That manifests in our relationships to each other. And the third movement is away from cruelty towards compassion. We're not particularly talking about torturing people, but just getting our own back—a nasty word, a cutting remark, all those little ways that we diminish other people. All that disappears as we move towards compassion.

So these are your three big ones, but actually you can take any negative attitude and the meditation will move you towards its opposite. For instance, loneliness. Loneliness is a feeling that you're not loved, you're not wanted, you're abandoned—all that sort of stuff. It can become very self-piteous. But if you sit with it, if you sit with that feeling of loneliness, of being unloved, all that "poor little me"—when it dies away, the gift comes, you see. Whenever you let go of these things, there always comes up a gift. But you don't know what the gift is until you let go. It's not like you've got an old TV and you think, "Well, I'll kick this out," because you know which one you're going to get—the new plasma. It's not quite like that because you don't quite know what you're going to get. You have to give something up first.

So there you are, bearing with this sense of loneliness, which for some people is of course a very deep, profound feeling driving them towards despair. To just sit with it—and when it begins to disappear, you see what arises. What arises is solitude. And solitude is to be perfectly happy just on one's own.

We experience it in little bits and bobs when we've had too much of people and need to be on our own for a little while. But that's a poor solitude. To get that solitude, you've got to have lots of people around you annoying you, and an escape route. But real solitude is when you've discovered, you have engendered, you've found the love for yourself. You don't need anybody else to love you, for heaven's sake. You're all right on your own, thanks very much. And that's the purpose of sometimes being on your own and bearing with those sorts of feelings.

So this process of understanding, of changing our emotional and attitudinal base, comes through the practice. But it doesn't just come through sitting here. The sitting can make you sit with that loneliness, and it can help begin to allow it to dissipate. It can sit with the aversion and allow it to dissipate. But then you get these next three active qualities: right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

Here the Buddha is saying that you've got to completely re-engage. In the meditation, we found this place within ourselves, this sort of observation post, which is a strange place to be because we've found a place within ourselves to look at ourselves, to look at this psychology. Now, you can't hold that position if you engage. It's a sort of split. You're looking at yourself doing something. It might work for simple physical activities, like when you're doing the garden—you can become aware of yourself. But even there, it's not quite right. That's not what we're trying to do when we're washing the pots or doing little jobs around here or in our life. We're not trying to be aware of ourselves doing something. We're trying to actually lose that. We're trying to give ourselves entirely to what we're doing.

And before you do that, you have to make sure that you're entering into that experience which is going to be conditioning you with the right attitude. So before we go to work in the morning—you'll be getting this in my monthly tip—before you go to work, there has to be a moment when you just reflect on what it is you're going to offer. Probably the best time of your life, the best energy of your life, goes into work of some sort, doesn't it? The work society demands—the thirty to forty, sixty best hours of your life. You get the weekend off. So you may as well make hay of it. You may as well make something of it instead of going in there like a real old grump.

What you do is sit there and say to yourself, "Now, what is my attitude? What attitude do I want to engender for this work?" And it's really finding that right attitude which turns the work into a spiritual exercise.

One of the examples I used is from when I was at school. We went off to work in the old—well, there were still cotton mills then, believe it or not. But there was one place I got to work, which was a cake factory. Confectionery and all that sort of stuff. And they had this conveyor belt, and these little cakes came along, quite speedy. It was lined by all these women, and they stuck me in this line. My job was to put the cherry on top of this cake.

Well, they did move very fast, you know. And these women, of course—their hands were flying all over the place—were having a great chat of the day. They were talking about this and talking about that. And I was going, "Whoa, where's the next one?" And once or twice, they had to stop the machine.

The foreman got absolutely sick of me and kicked me off.

Now, for me coming out of school after all that studying, it was actually quite a relief. It was lovely, you know. You didn't have to think for the moment. You just did this very easy job. And unlike school, you came out with money at the end of the week. But of course, after a few days, jobs like that got really, really boring because you were doing the same thing all the time.

Now, of course, if I ended up in a job like that, I would see it very differently. I would say, "Well, this is a great opportunity to develop concentration—moment-to-moment concentration. What more do you want? Get the machine to go faster so I can really just be there, keep my mind absolutely on that cherry, don't move off it."

So it doesn't matter, actually, when you think about it. It doesn't matter what you do or what you end up doing in your life in terms of your work. Even the most so-called menial task becomes meaningful depending on your attitude to it.

There were some years ago—I don't know whether they still exist—but there were some Christian friars of some sort who began to do the menial tasks around the city as part of their practice. You see, from a spiritual point of view, there's no menial task.

If you're in a monastery, somebody has to clean the toilet, somebody has to sweep the paths. And in fact, every morning in some monasteries that I was in, everybody got out there. We swept leaves every morning. Every morning and every afternoon, because the leaves are always falling. There was this large park area with these trees, and the reason for that was because it would give you a lovely shade to do your walking

meditation. Every morning we'd start at one end and go to the other end. And after lunch, one end, and we went to the other end, sweeping away. Just the same old routine.

And you had to make sure that your attitude was right. If your attitude was wrong, it was absolutely boring, terrible, miserable. "I didn't come here to sweep! I came here to become enlightened and liberated! I came here to study the Dharma! What the hell am I sweeping for?"

So it's the same with anything you do. The importance of this teaching is that the Buddha is not separating out the meditation from daily life. He's saying it's right in there. You've got to go right in there, and somehow you have to give yourself—no matter how unwanted the job that you're doing feels, no matter how much you think it's not me—the point is that this is it. This is the way it is.

That's a lovely phrase that you'll see in a lot of Buddhist writings: *this is the way it is*. Stop trying to think that this is the way it should be, or the way you want it to be. This is the way it is. And it's when we accept a situation as it is that the potential arises. So long as we're fighting the situation, insisting it should be different, then we don't get anywhere.

Now, that's not to be confused with resignation—"This is the way it is, what the hell." It's not that at all. It's a case of very positive seeing: "Well, this is the way it is, and let's make something of it."

The connection between meditation and daily life lies in the fact that meditation is a time—early morning—when we set ourselves in the right mode for the day. That's what we're doing. We're recognizing that there's a level of consciousness, by which I mean a way of relating to the world, which we can establish in the morning by first establishing it within ourselves, whatever mood or state we find ourselves in.

And then to engage—so that when you're eating breakfast, you know, like the old Zen teaching: when you're eating, you're just eating. That's it. You're not trying to observe. You're just eating. And when you meet people, before you go to work, you put the right attitude into your heart and you run with that attitude.

That doesn't mean to say that during the day it doesn't drop or fall off, or you wonder where it's gone or where you've hidden it. But every time you wake up and realize how miserable you are, you say, "Hold on, stop. Something's gone wrong here."

And the last three factors of the Eightfold Path are this: right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—right focus, you might say. This Eightfold Path, you see, is all one practice, and there's a hair's breadth of difference between the sitting posture and brushing your teeth and doing your job of work.

If there's any point during the day where you think, "Well, this isn't spiritual practice," then there's something wrong. You haven't clicked. You haven't made the connection. It's all spiritual practice. From the moment you wake to the moment you sleep, it has something to do with establishing a right relationship which will, going back to our Noble Truth, eventually undermine the amount of discontent we feel. And that way we're slowly moving towards a relationship with the world which is no longer causing us any problems.

The Buddha says the world argues with me; I don't argue with the world. Let the world argue with us. Why should we argue with the world? Just get on with it.

So that's the basic platform of all Buddhist teaching. It doesn't matter what strain of Buddhism you go to; you'll find those Four Noble Truths. And I think the more you investigate them, the more you contemplate them, you see they are rooted in action. They're not rooted in philosophy. They're not rooted in some highfalutin theology or anything like that. They're rooted in an actuality of how to engage in life which is going to make us content.

I think that's really the place we're moving towards—this contentment. That's a real sign of spiritual development: when you find somebody who is content, happy with the way things are, whether they are not so good or wonderful. Just a state of contentment.

I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 139

Q & A: Rebirth, Identification, Emotions, and Daily Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38 min

> *In this comprehensive Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores rebirth not as a future event but as the constant process of arising and passing away happening moment to moment in our bodies, emotions, and thoughts. He explains how every cell in the body is replaced every seven years, illustrating how we are continuously 'rebirthing' rather than reincarnating as the same entity.*
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> *The discussion delves deeply into identification as the root of suffering - how we become what we identify with and thus experience pain. Through practical meditation examples, Bhante demonstrates how stepping back from identification with pain reveals it as merely sensations like heat or pressure, while the mental construct of 'pain' creates resistance and suffering. He emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between 'what I am' versus 'what I do' in daily life to reduce attachment and potential for suffering.*
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> *Key topics include grounding awareness in direct physical experience rather than mental constructs, maintaining present-moment awareness in conversations and daily activities, the difference between attached love and genuine compassion, and discriminating between skillful and unskillful desires (taṇhā). Bhante addresses common spiritual concerns about the ethics of seeking happiness, fear of death as rooted in false identity, and practical methods for cultivating equanimity through moment-to-moment awareness.*

It's like the dumbest point in arguing about that. But this teaching about rebirth, we should be able to experience it now. Everything of the Buddha is known as *diṭṭha* down there. It's something to be seen here and now. If it's not true here and now, it won't be true in the future. That's all. It's as simple as that.

So let's just take the body. Is it reincarnating, or is it rebirthing? Reincarnation, the word suggests, is the same body arising moment after moment. Now, I think all of you know that every cell, every atom in the body is replaced every seven years. That's what they tell us. So tomorrow, when you look in the mirror, just remind yourself, this face wasn't here seven years ago.

Now the fact is that every seven years the face looks approximately the same. I mean, it is getting worse, but it looks approximately the same. So there's a feeling that it is the same face, but we know it isn't. It's rebirthing. Every cell is rebirthing in its own way. Every atom. That's the process of rebirth.

Think about your emotional life. And when we say the body, by the way, I'm here meaning also the sensations that come from the body. So the sight of our eyes probably get a bit weaker as we get older and things like that. So even though the eyes are rebirthing, they're also getting worse, but that's the way it is. But every moment, every moment, you can't say this is the same body as the last. And yet here it is. That gives us an idea of the distinction between reincarnation and rebirth.

If we go into the mind, just consider your emotions, your emotional life. Sometimes peaceful, sometimes not so peaceful. It's constantly birthing, isn't it? There's constantly this process of emoting all the time. All you have to do is just stop still and place your attention inward and there's some mood there, there's some emotion there, but it's constantly changing. There's this constant state of rebirthing, re-arising into the present moment, but it's never the same emotion.

What about thoughts? Just think about how our thoughts have developed over the years, say from the age of two. It's changed, hasn't it? So you can see, we're still thinking, the thought we arrived at, but it's never the same thought.

So now, when we die, well, let's see what happens. Now the Buddha points out, if we live according to our spiritual aspiration, if we live according to goodwill, generally it will make our inner life more happy, more settled. I mean, if you're in a war situation, no matter how much goodwill you have, it's still not a pleasant place to be. But inwardly, you can begin to have a certain peacefulness about yourself. And by doing that, we are forming relationships, so it helps the relationships around us.

So by practising peace, by developing spiritually, we're actually making this life, right here and now, something more pleasant for us, more happy, more meaningful. Now, according to the understanding, we're developing conditionings. So if there is no rebirth after death, if we just annihilate, fine, but at least we've had a fairly decent life. I mean, we've been gentle. If we happen to be reborn and find ourselves in another place, another time, then these conditionings come with us. Because you don't arrive there with nothing. So these conditionings come with us and then we'll be very happy that during the last life we did a bit of practice. So it's a win-win situation.

But these concerns about rebirth... What's the point? Our attention spiritually, from a spiritual point of view, is right here and now. It's the only moment we've got anyway. The whole of our practice, the whole of our effort should be getting this moment right. There we are.

You talked earlier about the link between identification and the arising of suffering. Could you say a little bit more about identification as a phenomenon, as a process?

Just for those of you who've been into Buddhist practice for some time, historically speaking, when the Buddha talks, he's very careful to talk about experience. He's very careful to keep his language mainly about experience. So when he talks about *nibbāna*, he's talking about an experience. As Buddhism developed, the action changed away from the experience to what is it that experiences the experience, and that became what's known as the consciousness-only school.

When we're practising and we are pulling ourselves out of this body with its sensations, when I say that I mean they become objects. You can feel feelings. When you pull out of your emotions, you've found a position where you can feel emotions. You're aware of your emotions all the time. This awareness is beginning to disidentify with what it previously would have identified with, and this backwards step leads to the realisation of what this awareness is.

And the word I prefer for that is the knowing, rather than consciousness, because these days that word's been used in all sorts of ways. The knowing is a rather good word in English, because it's one of these gerunds which has a verbal meaning, knowing, so it doesn't coagulate so much into some thing.

So this knowing has the capacity of being aware, and it is our intuitive intelligence. That's what it is, and it's prior to thought. Thought isn't intelligence. It's prior to thought, it uses thought to express its understanding. It's prior to emotion, it uses the emotional life to express its understanding, and it's prior to the body, it uses the body to express its understanding. So these are three so-called intelligences: our physical intelligence that we see in sport, our emotional intelligence and our intellectual intelligence. But these are simply expressions coming from this knowing.

And this knowing becomes more apparent to us the more we distinguish between that which knows, the awareness, the looking, the observing, and what is actually experiencing.

It sounded like intuition to me, some kind of deep intuition, what you just talked about. I was down at the dinner table, and there was this pot of hummus, and I wanted to take something inside me and said, don't do it. And I thought, that's stupid, I really

like hummus, why shouldn't I eat it? And it said, don't do it, and I thought, oh, bother. And I took my spoon and lifted it up, and the lady across the table reached over and I smacked the spoon again so I had it on hold for a moment. So I think I had some intuitive inkling, well I shouldn't do it, but I didn't understand it and I didn't listen to it either.

I'm not sure I would take that as a great example. What I would say is that there's a confusion between intuition and the feeling of intuition. Now you've got to be careful because this intelligence in Buddhist understanding is deluded, so you may feel something is right but it's not necessarily so, just as we may think something is right and it's not necessarily so. Everything that we feel and think has to be questioned.

Don't think that just because I have a feeling it must be right. Sometimes these feelings come in other ways, like voices from God, like that guy who went and swam across the lake to see Aung San Suu Kyi. So you have to be very careful about, the intuitive feeling must be right. You have to question it too.

Now this process of stepping back out of the body with its sensations and so on is the process of disidentification. You're redefining yourself: I'm not the body, I'm observing the body. I feel the body but I am not the body. I'm not emotions, I feel them, I know them but I am not that.

So you're constantly stepping out of previous identification. And as I mentioned, I think this morning, the observer is the most difficult one to overcome because you can't step out of that. If you step out of that, you simply create another observer observing the observer. It's a sort of endless mirror process. So that is beyond our control. That happens when the times are right.

So every time we fall into an identification, we become what we identify with. That's why it hurts. That's where the suffering is.

So this pain in my knee, so long as I can observe it as pain, so I'm saying pain, pain, and there's this push away from it. I don't want to, right? Now, in meditation, I'm observing this resistance not to be with the pain in an equanimous way, not to open up to it. And because of that, this reaction, it's only a reaction, begins to die away, and I find myself peaceful with pain. This is on the presumption that it is not about to explode. We're not trying to defeat pain. We're not trying to be better than pain. We're just trying to investigate what pain is.

So now this resistance has gone, and I'm sitting just with this sort of ache in my knee, and I'm saying things like pain or aching. Then, as it were, I drop into the pain, I drop into those sensations. And as I drop into it, deep into it, I actually begin to feel the sensations, my noting work changes. I begin to say things like heat or pressure. And at that point, there's no suffering.

Suddenly, as I move my awareness upwards, as it were, and it becomes pain again, then I get the resistance. Then I realise that pain is a mental construct. It doesn't actually exist. What exists are sensations coming from the knee. So these are your investigations. And so, in so doing, you disidentify with the idea of pain. And that helps you to find an equanimity with it. Now, as I say, you only do this to a certain point.

So every time we fall into an identification, suffering will come. Even in everyday life, as soon as you identify with your job, right? I am a nurse, I am a whatever. As soon as I am something, there's potential of suffering. You lose your job, who are you? You go through an identity crisis. Rather to say to yourself, this is what I do, rather than this is what I am.

And at the more subtle level, there's the relationship of possession. When you possess something, you possess people. So that relationship is one where this object, or this person, is being held by you, clasped, grasped by you. So there there's tremendous potential for suffering. If the person goes, disappears, dies, whatever, then you're left with this burning ache in the heart, which is that grasping. If you lose something, you get very angry. If somebody takes it, you get even more angry.

And some of you will hear me say, if somebody steals something from you, you still go around saying, they stole my car, they stole my purse. It's theirs. Of course. It's about the living in the delusion that is yours. And as soon as you click onto that, then you see compassion arises. You say, well, they can have it. Just like that. You've got insurance anyway.

You can only use objects, you can only do your work. As soon as you identify or possess, problems will arise.

Can you talk a little about how to remain grounded in meditation and why this might be important?

Well, I think I mentioned it again this morning. The process of insight, real insight, can only happen when this intuitive intelligence can completely pull itself out of, disidentify with thought. So thought here includes not only words but images. Words and images contain our history. They contain our past experience. And they are like col-

oured glasses that make us see present experience from the view of the past, and therefore we're always in a state of comparison or contradiction even if it's a very subtle thing.

So you meet a friend and you expect them to be like this because of your past experience with your friend. If they're not like this then you get upset. When you have some food, an apple or something, we always take the apple and we're always eating all our history of apples. Every time you bite that apple it's in comparison with all past apples, so it's either not sweet enough or it's just absolutely perfect this is the apple. But actually to taste this apple as this apple is, you have to get rid of all that.

Now how do we bring this intelligence back to direct experience of things as they are, to understand and see things as they really are, the Buddhist way? So you have to bring that intelligence out of thought and you do that by grounding it in your physical feeling experience. So if you want to taste the apple, put your attention on your tongue. If you want to see a tree, keep looking at it until, as it were, you're absorbed into the tree, rather than just seeing it as another tree.

So in the meditation, that's what we're doing. We're constantly trying to unshackle, disentangle this intelligence from its identity with thought patterns, ideas, and these things are very subtle. So in your breath, when you're watching the breath, for instance, the rising and falling of the abdomen or at the nostrils, wherever you're watching it, you'll see there's first of all some idea of movement, something coming in, something coming out. There's somewhere a picture in your mind of your nose or your abdomen, and there's sensation.

Now what there is is sensation. The idea of it rising and falling and the picture of the nose or the abdomen are mental constructs. So by drawing our attention into the breath of sensation, this intelligence begins to let go of that and begins to see sensation as sensation. And in this way it's clarifying itself, unshackling itself from these thoughts and images as a direct experience.

Now it's not as though we want to get rid of that capacity. Remember that after the Buddha was awakened, I mean, he spent forty years teaching, walking around, talking, all these miserable people. And walking up and down and being ordinary. He wasn't a schizophrenic or anything. He didn't become a sort of amorphous blob under a tree with a sign, I am fully awake. I mean, he's an ordinary human being. He's going around in contact, speaking.

So we don't lose the capacity of thought, we just want to gain the capacity of letting it go, being able to be directly in contact with experiences as they are, not as we think they are or would wish them to be. And that's part of the liberation that comes with *vipassanā*.

So how do you ground yourself? You ground yourself in your physical felt experience. What's an emotion before you give it a name? That's what you want to find out.

You talked about staying with the emotions in meditation. Is there a time for this in daily life?

Sometimes you might find a bit of space to stop, just to stop and just as it were contact your present condition. But if our awareness, if our mindfulness is spacious, just generally loose, easy, then as you're talking to somebody, you can be aware of what's happening inside of you. You can even be aware of the breath on the periphery of your attention. If you concentrate too much, then you lose it. But it's a case of feeling at ease and just relaxing into a present situation.

When you walk into a room, just stop for a minute and just receive the room. When you're with somebody and they're speaking, we tend to already be preparing our answer, but if we just receive what they're saying and feel what they're saying, that's a mode of openness, receiving. There's always a little break while the thing switches and we have to respond. In that way the person really feels that you're really listening to them, rather than trying to defeat them in an argument or something.

So keeping in contact with just our general feeling gives you a greater sense of control over your life, rather than just be driven by emotional states. You might be talking to somebody and you got a bit irritated. But before you walk towards somebody else, you just try and find a little space there to let it dry out a bit. And then turn with that goodwill, open-heartedness towards the other person.

And you'll find stopping, constantly telling yourself to stop. It's a really lovely, powerful little word. One of those four-letter words. Stop. Stop. Get good at it. You just say stop and the next thing to be done. So if you can create that little gap before you do anything, you see the intention. So at that point you can say to yourself, should I be doing this or not?

Should I take the hoops?

Be careful of this ability that we have of generating further and further like a whirlwind of emotions throughout the day that by the end of the day you feel exhausted. And you do that again by just stopping and whatever's come up you just let it begin to drain

away. You don't have to wait till it totally goes but begin to drain away. I think you'll find you reserve a lot of energy. We use a lot of energy in these emotional states. Anything else about that?

"I consider myself a reasonably happy person. Rewarding though it is, should I be concerned with the ethics of putting so much effort into being happier?"

The purpose of the practice isn't to be happy. I remember once when a teacher arrived, and somebody said to him, "Oh, I'm so happy to see you, Sayādaw." And Sayādaw said something in Burmese. And the translator didn't translate it. And later on, the person who said, "I'm so happy to see you, Sayādaw," went to the translator and said, "Well, you know, what did he say?" And he said, "Well, he said, I'm not here to make you happy. I'm here to make you aware."

So our purpose is not to be happy. Happy is a consequence of the practice. If you try to make happiness your aim, then you're into a struggle. Happiness is a consequence. Peace is a consequence. You can't peace a situation. The active ingredients are love, compassion, sympathetic joy.

"Death. What is it that scares so many so much? Where is thy sting?"

Well, this goes back to our problem of identity. If I think I am this body, and it goes off, and it's going to die, then heck, I'm going to be afraid, aren't I? It's me. It's me that dies. So that identity has, at its deepest root, a real basic fear. And our problem is that we know we're not real, but we don't accept it. We know we're not real. You can walk out of here and that'd be the end of that. You might get knocked over by a car. Boom, boom, that's it. And what happens to your body? Stick in the box and off it goes. We know we're not real. But we insist we are. And our feeling of reality comes at its most painful when that reality is denied. And it's denied most obviously by our death. No wonder so many of us are so scared. I am.

So that's what we're trying to do. You could say that the practice of *vipassanā* is a preparation for a peaceful death. That's what you could say. One of these phrases: "You have to die before you die." Spiritually speaking, that means die to this self before you die. And Jesus put it another way, slightly more joyfully: you might say you have to be reborn. So to be reborn something must have died. Spiritually speaking, that's what it's talking about. It's not talking about jumping up and down for Jesus.

"Gardening. You mentioned joy being the way of love and a way of love and being akin to desire for gratification. The right way for true love of being – can you explain please?"

With all these virtues that we have, they have obviously what's known as in the commentarial literature an obvious enemy. So the obvious enemy of love is hate. But they always have a subtle enemy too. So love, as we've said, is attachment. That means that you want, you need something. Some of your happiness is dependent on something out there. That's what attached love is. In other words, you need to be loved. It's that sort of feeling.

Loneliness is the need for somebody to say they love you, or to express their love – you feel alone. You don't feel alone, you feel lonely. And they're not very nice feelings. In fact, in some cases, it can lead people to despair, even suicide. But the more you demand that people feed into this loneliness, paradoxically, the more lonely you feel. Because you know it's a demand, it's not coming from them, it's not natural, it's not given from their heart.

So how do you deal with something like that? You have to sit with the loneliness, feel it, get in touch with that feeling of not being worthy, self-hatred, whatever comes up with it. And as it begins to die away, you begin to see these little, little arisings. It's beginning to transform. And the transformation is what? From loneliness to what? There you go. Solitude.

Solitude is being perfectly happy being on your own. Now if you're perfectly happy being on your own, you can see that there's a lot of energy there to love somebody else, and you don't expect them, you don't need them to fill the hole within your own heart.

So whenever you find yourself in a position of loving or compassion and you can feel these subtle enemies – like grief for somebody in compassion. How does that help? Grieving for somebody. Compassion should be a joyful emotion. You are helping somebody. Sympathetic joy becomes excited so that it's feeding into your need to be happy. All these are very subtle things that happen within us and we get confused and say, "Well, this is true love, this is true compassion."

But as you know, if I start doing things in order to be happy, going back to this other thing about "I'm happy, why should I be more happy?" – if I start helping you so that I can be happy, then I get into this classic do-gooder position. And I define a do-gooder as a person who wants to do you the good they want to do you.

So true love – how would you go about establishing true love? It's always beginning from where the other person is. You're trying to relate to this person. So you know where you're coming from, right? And then you try and put yourself into their position. And you do that by asking them: what do they want?

There's a lovely scripture – I can't remember what it's called now – but the Buddha approaches these three arahats. They're fully liberated beings, they're three monks who are living together. And he asks them, "How do you live so peacefully together?" And Anuruddha replies, "Well, I say to myself: what if I put what I want to do aside and do what the others want to do? And in this way we live peacefully."

Now that really only works if the other person is saying the same. You get to be used and abused. But you can see the attitude: let me just put aside what I want to do for the moment and let me hear what you want to do. Ask. True love, that's open. Then you can buy and do what you want to do. So it's a case of putting yourself in somebody else's shoes, and that's when you get this feeling of relating – real communication with somebody.

Joy being the way of love. Well joy, as I say, joy arises naturally as another type of relationship of rejoicing. So you're rejoicing in somebody else's happiness. And what it undermines – the subtle enemy of that is of course envy and jealousy, where you want what the other person has. Jealousy – you hate them for having it as well. These states, they arise naturally, you know, once you get that basic platform right – the one of love.

"Can you discriminate a bit between skillful desire and unskillful desire? I thought all desire was to be wary of."

It's the English, really. The word he's trying to translate is *taṇhā*. This taṇhā is a specific word. It means the desire that – it's wrong desire. It's the desire that arises of seeking happiness in the wrong places. It's not a skillful desire. There is another word, *chanda*, which is used to mean both good and bad desires.

So for instance, the desire to sit is a good desire – we should develop that. And all desires that come from these attitudes that we've been talking about – love, compassion, joy, equanimity – they are to be developed. What we want to be able to discriminate against are those desires that are coming from misunderstanding. And to try and do that, you'll see translators translating this taṇhā as craving, which is – you know, there's no English word really. You'd have to say an unskillful desire, put two words together. Craving is a bit strong.

So all you have to do is, again, this general awareness. When you see an intention arise, a desire arise, if you're still, you can see: is this wholesome for me or not? And then what we have to do is build up enough willpower to resist that temptation, if we see it's not good, and just wait for the – you know, just stay with the agony of letting it

go. And when it goes, you're disempowering it all the time. You're disempowering that condition. And when we see a desire which is good and we want to develop it, every time you practice it, you develop that particular conditioning. That's how it works.

So, you know, in Buddhist psychology, everything begins with a desire, with an intention. And these intentions produce actions. Speech, body, mind, thoughts. Thoughts are actions. And through these, we create conditionings, habits. And the whole compendium, the whole collection of habits that we have is our personality. That's what the personality is. Our character, personality. And it's that which is driving us to a destiny.

So it's becoming aware of those things which are driving us to unfortunate destiny and those which are driving us to happy, happy hunting ground. So it's a case of discriminating for ourselves what's good for us and what's not bad. And in this way we change this conditioning. This is the way we experience life – we're changing the way we experience life. Any comments? Criticism?

"Have you toured it?"

Yeah. I don't know what's wrong with it.

CHAPTER 140

Why Didn't the Buddha Return to Lay Life?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 57 min

> *In this wide-ranging talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma begins with an intriguing question: why didn't the Buddha return to lay life after his enlightenment? While practical reasons played a role—the formation of the Saṅgha and disciples seeking his guidance—the deeper answer lies in the nature of liberation itself. Yet the Buddha clearly taught that lay people could also achieve full awakening, as evidenced by his delivering the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) to the lay community of the Kurus, not to monastics.*
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> *The talk's heart addresses how meditation practice translates directly into daily life. Bhante explains that the same quality of attention we bring to observing our own mental states on the cushion—attending without indulgence or resistance—applies when facing others' emotions like anger or anxiety. He illuminates the crucial distinction between vedanā (feeling) and taṇhā (craving), showing how this understanding transforms our relationship to pleasure and pain. The teaching on dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda) becomes practical wisdom for navigating relationships and difficult situations.*
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> *Bhante emphasizes how the three characteristics—impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā)—must saturate our being as attitudes, not merely intellectual concepts. When impermanence is truly grasped, grief loses its reverberating quality of injustice. Understanding dukkha leads to contentment rather than endless wanting. Recognizing anattā releases our compulsion to control. The talk concludes with the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta's instruction to maintain mindfulness saturated with goodwill in every posture—standing, walking, sitting, or lying down—making every moment an opportunity for liberation.*

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

Just roving around the topic of meditation, daily life, practice and all that, I suppose one interesting question we might ask is one of these "if" questions: Why didn't the Buddha return to lay life once he'd become fully self-realized? Good question, isn't it?

Well, I think practically he'd become used to the wandering life, and the first people he taught, remember, were his old companions who were also wandering ascetics. They very quickly became members of his order. Very shortly after that, people wanted to

follow him and become his disciples. The first ordination, as it's called, was a simple word: "Ehi" – come. So when somebody said, "Well, I'd like to follow your teachings, be with you, join your sangha, your community," he just said, "Ehi, come along."

When the sangha was established, then the second type of ordination was established, where people took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha – which has now become the lay way of determining your commitment to the Dhamma. And then by around about, I suppose, twenty years – for twenty years the people who joined were of high caliber, and then it began to slide down the slippery slope. The ordination then became quite a long one, maybe half an hour or so, in which certain questions had to be asked, such as: Are you still in government employ? Are you in debt? Are you a man? A very interesting one: Are you a human being? So various sorts of people tried to join the order.

One of the reasons, just as a little aside, was that the great court physician would treat the Buddha's monks free of charge. And of course, occasionally people would join the order in order to be treated without charge. So one of the questions is: Are you sick? And the rule is you can't ordain somebody who has certain illnesses. I remember a sorry case that happened with somebody with AIDS who came wanting to join the order, but they weren't ready.

So very quickly he formed this particular grouping. But early on, very shortly after his realization, he did go home and embraced his mother – or his stepmother – and met all his family, his extended family. And of course that was the moment when his wife said to their child, Rahula, "Go and ask your father for your inheritance." So obviously there's some feeling that the Buddha's not going to come back to lay life, and she wants to make him the heir to his grandfather's fortunes and so forth. But the Buddha, of course, ordains him – that was his inheritance, the Dhamma.

And there are two charming discourses. The one given when Rahula is about twelve, maybe something like that, and the Buddha's giving him all sorts of reasons why he shouldn't tell fibs. It's a lovely little one. And then later on when he's eighteen, and he's obviously struggling with perhaps leaving the monastic life. Eventually he also becomes fully realized.

So, apart from perhaps that practical reason, it would seem that generally speaking, once one moves towards end game, really nothing remains to draw one back into lay life. And that's just one of those things that happens, I suppose. But on the other hand, there are lay people who become fully self-realized. One that I remember is a cobbler – an ordinary old cobbler who becomes fully self-realized.

So why is it that there weren't more people who were self-realized who were lay people? I think the reason is the ambience that you're working in. The Buddha talks about lay life being dusty – that's the word he uses. And if we just look at our society, you can see that most people just aren't on the spiritual wavelength. So when you work with people like that, there's always a drag. They're not supporting you. It's like there's a constant negativity towards what you're trying to do.

Consider being in, say, somewhere like Saudi Arabia or one of the virtually all Muslim countries, and you yourself want to do the five times a day prayer and all that. Well, you wouldn't be considered silly or stupid – right there in the middle of the office they'd all join in, probably. And that's what we lack in today's society: this sort of support from other people in our ordinary lives.

I'm always at pains to say to people that the jewel of the collection, the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse – which is the fullest discourse on how to become liberated, the actual techniques, what we are practicing now, not in its detail but in its general format – was given to the people of Kammāsadhamma. They were a tribe, you could call them, or a clan, called the Kurus, and they lived in what now you would recognize as round about Delhi. So he traveled quite a bit, you know – he was all over the place on that Gangetic plain. He'd been up there and given them some teachings, and when he returned on this occasion, he was taken by the fact that they were actually doing what he suggested: very mindful, no idle talk, no gossip, no argumentation – none of that sort of stuff. So he delivered to them this "ekāyano maggo," this one-way path leading to liberation, which we now call the Vipassanā-only path. He gave it to them, the lay people – not addressed to the monks or anything.

So he himself had no doubt that a lay person could become liberated. He wouldn't have done that otherwise. He would have given some general discussion, which he would normally begin with for people who hadn't met him—about good and bad, karma, the gods, living the good life. And only when he felt that they were ready for it would he present them with the Four Noble Truths. He didn't start with that. So here he's addressing an orderly people. We're talking about pre-industrial societies, farmers living communally with a sort of committee ruling—a more pastoral society. Although there was a great movement at that time towards cities, towards monarchical rule; the politics were changing. And there was a rise also of the merchant class, which hadn't existed before. So he lived in times which were changing, not as viciously as ours, but definitely changing. And it was felt by a lot of people, I think—that dislocation when you get times of change. That was one thing that I think fueled the number of men who went into the forests and lived a solitary life. There weren't that many women, partly because of the sexism, of course, and partly because of the danger as well.

So I think there are practical reasons why he didn't want to return, but I think there are also spiritual reasons—that at that level nothing attracts, nothing attracts back into that form. But he gave very clear pointers as to how we can turn the lay life into a spiritual life. In my e-reminders, which I think all of you get and read diligently—yes, thank you—I'm going through a day in the life, delineating how it's possible to turn everything into a spiritual practice. You're doing the same things, you see. You're still getting up, still dressing, still brushing your teeth. It's not like you're doing anything different, but somehow the attitude with which you do it is what changes, and that's what turns it into spiritual practice.

So even here now, I keep stressing this business of eating. Before, we're just eating—either our minds are reading the newspaper, or we're just gobbling, or we're overeating. But suddenly, eating becomes a real spiritual practice in itself, both by way of developing a certain attitude towards food—seeing it as medicine, seeing it as nourishment—and yet not denying the pleasure. This is the point: not denying the pleasure. There is pleasure, that's fine. But not doing it for that reason. Not doing it for comfort's sake.

And the important thing to remember is that the psychology of this runs through everything. It's not just with eating. We're talking about dependent origination. We're talking about the distinction between the point of vedanā and the point of taṇhā. Vedanā is the point where we experience sensations, feelings in the body, as pleasant or unpleasant. That's a given. That's what the psycho-physical organism does—it experiences things and gives us feelings. But then there's this other business, this taṇhā, which we talked about this morning. So that psychology can be translated to all areas of pleasures and joys in our lives.

This is the great thing about the spiritual life: nothing is ever destroyed. The only thing the Buddha said was destroyed was greed, hatred and delusion. So everything is handed back, purified of its kinks. Because of his style of talking about his Dhamma in a more negative sense—really to undermine concepts about the self and rebirth and all that reincarnation—he tended to favour the negative approach. So he says, and we quote it in the morning: "There is a not-born, not-done." What does that mean? There is a not-born—what is it? He won't go that far. Well, he does actually, occasionally. But that's his preferred method.

So of course people would say, "Well, you're an annihilator, you're a nihilist. There's not this, not that, so there's nothing. Therefore you're a nihilist." And he would constantly say no. He said no, the only thing that's annihilated is greed, hatred and delusion. And by delusion, fundamentally he means this idea, feeling, notion of a self.

So when we're looking at pleasure, we're not trying to get rid of pleasure. We're trying to take something out of our relationship with pleasure, trying to reform that relationship. And it's the same with suffering. It's not as though we can ever get rid of physical suffering—it's just part and parcel of the body's way of being in the world, pain. But we can do something about our relationship to it.

Same with relationships. We have difficult relationships. You can't do anything about the personality clash itself. But you can find a way of being with it where it's not so painful. Take the pain out. Just accept the person as they are. And that process we call the process of liberation. That's what we're doing—the process of liberation.

So when we go back and start with actually, you know, how do we bring it into daily life? How does the practice that we do in sitting meditation relate to our daily practice? Then that's really what our task is.

And if we can't relate it, if there's a hair's breadth of separation between the practice of meditation and the rest of our lives, we've lost it. Because the Buddha's teaching is centered upon a type of being in the world that we call mindfulness. So you're here all the time, you're bringing yourself back into the present moment all the time.

And the big trick of that is this business of relaxing. Can't sort of overstress that, really. This relaxing into the present moment, you see, stopping—it just allows you to recognize what's there, what's actually driving you at this present time, and allowing it to become very conscious. And you can let go of things that have been accumulated, and that way, you not only reserve your energy, you actually take control of your life.

For instance, sometimes one is late for work. You find yourself late for work, so there's this anxiety about being late—you miss the bus or something. And you can see that anxiety sort of building up inside you. And you can't stop it. This is the point. You say to yourself, "Oh, I'm getting anxious. I won't be anxious. I'll just get there and start doing the work." But to do that is to deny your anxiety. You're up against what's actually happening in your body.

So you have to recognize: all this is an old conditioning of getting anxious about being late. If you're going to be late, you're going to be late. What's the point of being anxious? You have to argue yourself out of it, get a different perspective on it. You can't do anything about the feeling of anxiety because that's coming from a different conditioning. That's happening. But at least one can stop stoking it. That's the point. One can stop stoking it.

And you do it by turning it into an object. There's your meditation right there—sitting on the bus or running for the train or driving like mad. Right there you're with the feeling of anxiety. You know it's there. That's enough. You're doing your meditation. And your attention is on that, if you're sitting in a bus; or if you're driving, of course you're turning into the traffic.

So by making that your object and relaxing—that takes a relaxation. You have to relax into the present moment. You have to be with it. This practice of relaxing when you begin your meditation, of actually stopping and being in touch with your breath and relaxing into the present moment—here it's easier because you're feeling pleasant, neutral feelings. At least it's good to see them as pleasant, neutrally pleasant feelings. And you're developing the attitude of just sinking, of just collapsing, you might say—just stopping in the present moment and accepting what's there.

Normally speaking, we get this anxiety up, we get this rush up, we get to work and we keep going. It's like it hasn't clicked that we've arrived. Even if we arrived early actually, we're still rushing, we're still moving at this tremendous pace that we've set ourselves on the perception that we're going to be late.

Then when you're here, now we've got beyond the stage of just watching the breath and you're open to these negative states within you. So let's say you think a bit depressed, a bit anxious, and you're just sitting with the feeling. Now it's very interesting because in the discourse on how to establish mindfulness, the Buddha always talks about the inside and the outside, the inside and the outside. And often this outside is commented upon as being aware of other people's states.

So you get to work and somebody else is anxious. I mean, you're okay, you're calm—it's worse if you're anxious, but they're anxious too. So they start putting this stress on you. Our normal reaction is to respond with stress ourselves. I remember this phone call on a mobile in a train, and this woman—her voice is rising and rising and rising. And then there's suddenly this wonderful statement at the end: "I'm stressed out!" I wanted to go over and say, "Look, have a cup of tea or something. Relax." There was a sort of total desperation in it. I thought, oh boy, she's in for a little breakdown or something.

Now, here we are sitting with these negative emotions. What we're doing is attending to them—we're attending to them like a nurse attends. We know they're there. We're neither pushing them away nor indulging them. So somebody comes to us with stress—that's what you do: you attend to their stress. There's no need for you to get stressed because they're stressed. What's the point of that?

So as somebody approaches you with stress or anger or their depression, you attend to it. Your attention is on them, and by doing that, by placing your interest into their state, you undermine old habits of reacting the way you used to react before. Old reaction, not response. You're undermining that process.

But it's very quick, isn't it? It'll flip very quickly. Things happen just in a second. You might be calm for a moment with somebody who's angry, and the next minute you've lost it—you've got yourself angry. So you've got to keep that real sharp awareness, and in order to do that, it has to be backed with the right attitude. If we haven't really grasped the right attitude, then it's very difficult to stop that reaction, even though we might be good-willed.

So we know that when we react to somebody who is in a negative state, it simply compounds the whole situation. The way the Buddha put it is that hatred is not overcome with hatred, but anxiety is not overcome with anxiety either. And depression is definitely not overcome—it doesn't help a person who is depressed if you become depressed. You both sort of be depressed. Isn't that lovely?

I can never remember the name of this comedian. He was round about mid-century, that Second World War time. And there's this scene—it's in black and white on the old TV, and I always remember it. He's about to jump off a London bridge. And the policeman sees this and goes up to him and says, "Oh, excuse me, sir," in that old way. "Excuse me, sir. I do believe you are trying to..."

And there's this conversation about why he's jumping off the bridge, and the policeman's all very up and saying all this stuff about why life is despairing. And of course the sketch ends with them both jumping off. That was brilliant. And that's what happens, isn't it, when you get caught up in somebody else's emotional state.

So in our relationships, both in our personal, more intimate relationships and in work situations, it's just maintaining that attitude of knowing that if one reacts in a negative way to somebody else's negativity, then you both jump off the bridge. It's as simple as that. So when that's actually been saturated, when that's really saturated your being, then you've established a different attitude. That doesn't mean to say that the old conditionings aren't going to be there. So if somebody comes to you in anger, you can feel the old conditioning want to bite. But because you've established this attitude, you very quickly know that all the person wants is for you to listen to them, isn't it? When you're angry, isn't it all you want—for them to listen to what you're saying? Not only listen in the sense of what you're saying, but what you're feeling. Like, I am angry with you. And it's being able just to stay with that in that attending way.

Not in this sort of—I think the word is passive-aggressive, isn't it? Or aggressive passivity. It's like you're standing there, all "you're not touching me." Well, I mean, that's really aggressive. That's going to make them really want to bite. But if you manifest the fact that you feel their anger, and there's that empathy with their anger, then there's not that aggressive response. You've always got that magic word—sorry—that drains people's anger. And then after you've done that, of course, you prove it was their fault anyway. You win anyway. Be careful of that. It's a one-up. Gotcha.

Now, can you see the link between sitting with your own mental states and sitting with somebody else's? The inside and the outside. You're taking the practice directly into your daily life.

When it comes to insight—so all this really is about creating peaceful states around us—how is it that we have this special practice called vipassanā, which is about seeing these three characteristics? How does that work? How does that translate into your daily life? Because it's only with those sorts of insights that there are radical changes. These are root changes. We can change our personalities, we can change our attitudes, we can do a lot to change the surface psychology. You can even change your body—you can do a bit of exercise and stuff like that. But it's not getting to the root of it. The root problems are to do with these wrong ways of seeing things. So where we see permanence, there is impermanence.

Now you might say, well, I can see impermanence everywhere. But the fact is, when we're struck by crises, then of course we find it a big shock. It's the level of shock, it's the level of fear which shows us our relationship to a situation which we thought was steady, permanent, unchangeable. And then there's that business of the wanting and not wanting. So yeah, that's a bit more obvious, taking that into daily life, and we'll come back to that.

And then there's this other business of anattā, not-self. When you're sitting like this, of course, it's a privileged position because you have found this objective observer place, this observation post, as Ñāṇapoṇika calls it. He's a pretty famous writer in Theravāda, a German—he's died now. An observation post. You've found this observation post within yourself. So this is a fairly privileged position, you might say, because you're not moving, you're not doing anything, so now you can watch. You can watch the psychophysical organism in action. You can see the body feels, the heart emotes, and the mind thinks. What else is there? What else is there? That's it.

And you can see that things are changing. You can see how you're relating to what's inside you, and that's something coming from this wrong idea of indulgence and resistance. And you can see this business of not me, not mine, as you become very clear in

your seeing that these are objects. So what's an object can't be the subject. It's as simple as that. Even the feeling of self-awareness, as we said, is an object. You're aware of a self, so you can't be that either. But it's actually looking at that and constantly re-experiencing that which makes these things very obvious to you.

So now, how can you have spiritual insight in daily life? When you're washing the pots, or when you're talking to somebody, or when you're doing a job? Well, the understanding is that this intelligence that is the knowing—this intuitive intelligence which is prior, prior to the mind with its thoughts—it's prior to emotions, right? Most people think of intuitive intelligence as a feeling.

Sure, it manifests, it sort of communicates its understanding through feeling, but it's not feeling, it's not emotion, and it's not the body either. And that's what we're discovering every time we access this observation post.

Now, that intelligence is being primed every time you sit to begin to see life from one of these three perspectives. Every time you sit, every time you make the conscious effort to see these three characteristics, it is being informed, it's informing itself, and that manifests in your daily life in various ways.

When the tsunami struck Sri Lanka, there were some very well-meaning counselors who went there to help people overcome their trauma, and they were surprised to find that they'd overcome their trauma. For them, for people of Eastern mentality, it wasn't such a huge trauma as it would be, say, to a Westerner, because they accept, they have the attitude of karma, they have the attitude of impermanence. Everything's impermanent—what's the problem? It doesn't mean to say they don't suffer the loss of loved ones, but there isn't this ongoing post-traumatic stress. All that's gone because of that easy acceptance of the way things are.

So now, you see, constantly reminding ourselves that there is impermanence, everything is impermanent—you simply do not know what's going to happen in the next moment. You just don't know. Just recently we've had these Israeli attacks on Palestine and on the West Bank. There were people there. I mean, they're in dangerous positions, they know they're dangerous, but some innocent people, their lives have just been blown out. That's it. Same with the Israelis. Not so many, but these bombs come over and three people have died in a day just from these rockets going over the fence.

And so you're there, frying your chips, getting your sausages ready, you've got your HP sauce out, and that's it. You're up there looking down at all these sausages splattered all over the place, and you're floating in mid-air.

I have a very strange sense of humor, but there was somebody I know, she's about seventy-odd, and she met an old-time sweetheart going way back to her early days. I got this story secondhand. Well, they fell in love and they got married, and she brought all her stuff over from America—a couple of thousand pounds—and they set up in this beautiful place. I went to visit them, actually. They set up in this lovely little cottage in a nice little tweed country village, English country village. Not so long married, and I mean, when you come of a certain age one has to accept things, it seems as though he was just going for the toast out of the toaster when he collapsed.

I've always thought of the horror of dying as you're grabbing hold of a piece of toast. As you're lifting the piece of toast with marmalade to your mouth, unable to clamp your jaw over it. To me, it's a nightmare.

So it's a case of, once we grasp the impermanence, it takes away the reverberation of disaster. It takes away the reverberation of loss, of grief. There is just the grief, there is just the loss. There's not behind it some feeling of injustice. Human beings are always clever at making themselves a center of the universe. It was such a clout to our ego when we realized that the earth actually went round the sun. And it was even worse when we were told that we were just animals, that we just rose up from the animals. We were just fitter, that's all. That was a hit, wasn't it, to the old ego.

This sense of what we do as humans—we project our sense of justice onto the universe. There's no justice in the universe, there's only laws. Tsunamis happen because earthquakes happen under the sea, or a tectonic plate shifts. Nothing to do with justice, nothing to do with morality—to do with the way the earth is, to do with that sort of law. So when people say, "Oh, it's a shame he died young," as if it was something unjust—no, it's a law. The body runs along different laws from human justice, and that's the way it is.

So just getting the idea of impermanence saturating the way we look at things—everything's impermanent. Even to get up in the morning and say to yourself, "Everything's impermanent. I don't know what's going to happen today. I think I know what's going to happen. I've got it all planned. I actually don't know what's going to happen." That puts us into this framework, you see.

And the Buddha's great statement about impermanence is that when we actually grasp impermanence in its real fullness, we realize there's nothing in the world worth holding on to. Nothing in the world worth holding on to—not even ourselves. This is the point.

Now, at first it might strike as a bit frightening. But it's tremendously relaxing, isn't it? We don't have to hold on to anything anymore. Yippee! So it's like when somebody thieves something from you—we have this idea that we possess something.

So I possess my mobile. It's my mobile. I can prove it in law. This belongs to me. I'm attached to it. And then somebody steals it, and I'm still going around saying it's my mobile. But it's the thief's now. The thief owns the mobile. And I'm suffering like mad because they've got my mobile. I didn't give it to them.

And suddenly, when you realize you actually can't own anything—what you can do is use it—ah, what a relief. And then you think, well, you know, the thief might need it more than me. And you're happy to give it away, just like that.

So that impermanence, you see, it seeps into an attitude. And that's important to understand. The Eightfold Path begins with right understanding, and the second one is right attitude. And if it doesn't drop into an attitude, it just remains at this nice intellectual level: "Oh yes, everything arises and passes away." But there's no transformation, no catastrophe prevented when something does arise and pass away.

So it has to sink in, and that's a heart state. When I say heart state here, I'm not talking really about an emotion. An attitude isn't an emotion. You have to be clear about that. An attitude is a way of relating. An understanding that everything's impermanent—right, now what does that mean in terms of my relationship to objects, my relationship to people, my relationship to myself, my own body? How does that relate? And that's your attitude. And then of course it manifests in the way we behave, in the way we actually relate moment to moment.

Now the next one, you see, which seeps into our daily life is this business of dukkha. Dukkha, remember, is one of these big words in Buddhism. It sort of covers everything that makes us unhappy in the widest sense of that meaning—from the most trivial thing to catastrophes. The whole gamut of human misery is contained in this word dukkha, which actually means "a hard place." That's what it means: this is a hard place. And when the Buddha says go into this, where is the suffering, then it's to do with this psychology of wanting and not wanting.

Now, just a very sort of change of attitude, a change of words—like not getting what you want, but wanting what you get. Even that flip, wanting what you get, and you think, "Oh!" And suddenly you're contented. To actually develop the attitude of contentment with what I've got.

And of course it's difficult in a society which is driven by consumerism, because consumerism depends on your constant discontent. As soon as you're contented, that's it. Consumerism collapses. The whole industrial base. "I don't want a car, I'm content, I'll walk." You can't do that. You've got to be discontent. So this whole feeling of constantly being discontent—the whole purpose of advertising is to make you feel discontent, so that you want whatever it is.

But constantly saying to ourselves, constantly beginning from the platform of "this is okay, this is the way it is, it's fine, it's not a problem, it's good, it's the way it is"—content, you see. And what you do is you begin to separate need from want. Sometimes you need—you need a new pair of shoes and that's the end of it. So you go and get a pair of shoes. And then there's that dividing line. You now know this is need, this is want. Wants come up sometimes for various reasons. Say, to lift your spirit, you might buy yourself something rather pleasant, or ask somebody else to do it. But at least there's not this churning of the heart to go out and constantly exercise this retail therapy. Seeking comfort in shops, for heaven's sake. Ridiculous. I don't feel comfortable unless I'm in Marks and Spencer's.

Where do I go when I'm sad? Marks and Spencer's. When I feel depressed, I go to Marks and Spencer's. It's been a disaster—Woolworths has gone! Like it's a catastrophe, Woolworths has gone. Oh my God. These are weird ways of relating to the world.

So you can see that even now, we're watching the suffering of wanting, not wanting. A desire comes up—we want to think about this, we want to plan our holiday—and we're constantly pulling ourselves off and feeling that strong desire, that willfulness in us.

When it's something unpleasant, that's even more difficult. But to be able to be easy with unpleasantness—now it's cold, and the difference between room temperature and outside is vicious. Our attitude is to resist the cold. We rush from the bungalow to here to get out of the cold, instead of greeting it. Ah, cold! Great! Just feeling the freshness of it. I'm not suggesting you catch a cold, you understand. But to take that attitude into daily life—you can do it. You can do it. And again, it's this constant self-reminder. So as soon as we see ourselves passing a shop and wanting that—hold on. Just pull it back. Pull back that energy.

And of course, all that energy we're using in getting what we want, it's not being wasted. You can displace it. You can take your interest elsewhere. In the old days, they used to talk about sublimation—a religious idea of sublimating your desires. You don't hear that word often these days, and that's because, really, through the agencies of

people like Freud, people think there are certain instincts and desires that are blocked or locked into certain things, like our sexual appetite. They're just stuck there and you can't get rid of them.

But in spiritual terms, sublimation means that you guide that energy and put it somewhere else. That's all it is. The mind and body, as we know from our great quantum physics, is just energy. So if you decide to displace the energy away from, say, eroticism, and you put it into art—that's your sublimation. That's what you mean by sublimating. And that transference, that transformation of energy away from desires which you see are unwholesome, to desires which you see are wholesome, is part and parcel of that process.

I'm not suggesting that erotic desires are per se unwholesome—they obviously have their place in time. But if you find them encroaching on the mind, becoming obsessive, then it's a case of slowly displacing them, putting our interests elsewhere. It's the same with shopping. People put a lot of interest in shopping, in fashion and all that sort of stuff. All they have to do is draw their interest elsewhere, just re-educate themselves. That's all it is—a process of re-education.

But they won't do it unless they see the suffering. That's the point. And the problem with pleasure, the problem with indulgent joy, is that while you're in it, it's great. That's the problem. And you're often prepared to suffer the consequences so you can have this bit of joy.

It's only when you get the comeback. I was just thinking there of a friend's father who always smoked. Then he had a heart attack, and he suddenly stopped, just like that. He got the comeback. It's unfortunate that it was so strong a comeback, but it just shows.

Now, the comeback of all indulgence is the craving. The possibility of grief, if you lose what you treasure. The anxiety that once you've got something—the anxiety of losing it. That's why we've got a massive insurance industry. And of course the frustration—not getting what you want when you want it.

So by taking this inner understanding of wanting, not wanting, into daily life, it moves you towards contentment. That's the joy, that's the subtle joy. And that's another reason to develop this calmness on the breath and to begin to see there's actually a very delicious place to be. Often we find it, but we do it in contrast to agitation, in contrast to stress.

We'll go home and just flop in the chair, and just for a moment there's no radio, there's nothing—we just sort of sink into the quietness of the moment. We might walk into a park or come out into the country or sit in the garden, and just for a moment we actually sink into that space, that little bit of peace. But we do it as a sort of antidote to something else.

Whereas what we want to do is develop it as a prime condition, something we can return to at any time, something that remains a substrate beneath our psychology. There's always this deep sense of calmness within us, no matter what we're doing on the surface. And again, it's just training—training ourselves to do that.

So the breath, watching the breath, feeling the breath, seeing it as a place where we can develop this calmness and peace, is directly related to daily life. Because you can always come back to your breath. When I say stop every so often, come to an end of what you're doing and catch what you've accumulated—some anxiety, some stress, whatever—and allow it to pass, there's always the breath. The breath will be a place that you go to, just like your garden or the park. It's a place where you find that inner peace for a moment.

Now, the sense of not-self is one of the key factors, and it appears in the Buddha's second talk—the second talk he gives to his five disciples, at the end of which they're all fully liberated, by the way. He says clearly that which arises and passes away cannot be under your control.

Every time you get into the self, one of the ways the self manifests is through the desire to control, to have power. Every time you see yourself wanting to control a situation, control a person, you'll know it's coming from the self. It's not the same as being in charge or being an authority in which you are given the power to make decisions—that's an occasion where you take on responsibility and try to make the wisest decisions you can.

But in terms of this other business, where things are not going your way and you're getting angry, where you're getting angry with your spouse, your partner, because they're not doing what you want them to do, or your kids, and you're getting frustrated and anxious—all that is to do with this sense of wanting to control.

So again, it's this business of taking that understanding into daily life and recognising that our control over things is pretty limited. Things happen outside our control, and in the old phrase, you've got to go with the flow, you've got to be in harmony with what's happening. That harmony is not always pleasant, but you're actually moving with it. You're not trying to control something which is actually outside your control.

I think this becomes most obvious when we get involved in politics—politics in the wider sense of the meaning, people's issues, like the business going on with climate change, the economy, and all that sort of stuff, which are not to be confused with small party politics. One can see what has to be done; everyone can see what has to be done. But there's not the political will. You can see it. So there arises in people a certain frustration, and that's really not accepting these two rings that are around us.

The first one is the ring of power—what you can do to help the situation. If you step beyond that, you're into frustration, into despair. Accepting this takes an act of humility. Humility doesn't mean humble, humble—it just means seeing yourself as you really are. That's what humility originally meant.

The other ring is influence, whereby you can get other people to do what you think is right. Beyond that, there's nothing you can do—nothing in any physical sense. But we do have another outlet which allows us to feel at least that we are in communion. And that, of course, is to offer mettā.

That's the joy of mettā—that even when you can do nothing, at least you can send out thoughts of goodwill, intentions towards a situation. Even if we don't believe that they actually affect people, at least it's a way in which we might feel within ourselves that we're doing what we can, full stop, developing goodwill.

Now, such is the quality of this intuitive intelligence that it can have insights at any time. It's well known in the Mahāsī tradition that insights don't normally come when you're sitting. It's when you get up and do something that the insights come. The reason is that often when we're sitting, we're very subtly trying to achieve something, trying to see something. Then when we get up from the posture, we sort of say, "All right, nothing happened there, forget it," and off we go. But we retain that mindfulness, and lo and behold, there are these sudden insights that come. Because this intelligence has been released from craving, released from the self, just for that moment.

So it's not as though insights can't come at any time of the day, any time you're awake, once this mindfulness is established. In fact, the Mahāsī's teacher—when he was about fifty, I suppose—is said to have intuited anicca, impermanence, as a direct experience of momentary arising and passing away, as a dog passed by. There wasn't a dog; there was just a dogging. The dog arose and passed away momentarily.

Because that's the teaching of anicca. It isn't something which is changing in the sense that you might take a piece of clay and make a cup, then screw it up and make a saucer—the same clay taking different forms. The Buddha's teaching is quite radical.

It actually collapses into potential—or nothing. I can't say nothing. It collapses into a potential. It's not there. And out of there, it arises again. That's what's happening. The universe is stroboscopic; it's not continuous in the Buddhist teaching. So for him, that was a deep enough insight for what we call one of the paths and fruits—stream entrance, or whatever level he was at.

So I hope I've made fairly clear the intimate connection between your meditation and daily life. If I haven't, you can leave little notes of complaint. Kindly. Notes of complaint.

And remember that the root thing is this constant establishment of mindfulness. Just as a last word—in the Discourse on Loving-Kindness, which we chant in the morning, the Buddha is urging us to develop this loving-kindness. And at the end, what does he say? "Whether you are standing, walking, sitting, or lying down." So those are the same instructions for mindfulness: sitting, walking, lying. In other words, in any posture, doing anything. So long as you're awake, so long as you are mindful, you should develop this mindfulness. And here, he's talking about a mindfulness saturated with loving-kindness. Saturated with goodwill—that's a bit better, goodwill—because it's not meant to be an emotional thing, is it?

"This, they say, is the noblest way to live, and if you do not fall into bad ways, but live well and develop insight, and are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, then truly you will never need to be reborn to this world again."

So there you have it. Mindfulness saturated with good wishes.

In the morning, after chanting, I say, "Make your resolution for the day." That's an important moment, because that's going to set the underground tone of the day. So find a little phrase for yourself—to live consciously with goodwill, or something like that which strikes you as the way you want to be. It's also good to create something that you're not going to do. You're not going to go down that road today.

Keep it in today. Don't go beyond today. It gets depressing. "I think I'm going to be like this for the rest of my life." But if you do it day by day, it's manageable, isn't it? Just today. Today I'll be good. Tomorrow I'll play hell. But today—if we keep doing that, we should arrive.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 141

Revising the Principles of Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma revisits the core principles of vipassanā meditation, offering practical guidance for dealing with challenging mental states. He begins by exploring dukkha as 'a hard place' and explains how our conditioning through thought and imagination creates cycles of anxiety, depression, and suffering. The talk examines how we unconsciously project our internal states onto the world, creating a feedback loop that reinforces our conditioning.

Bhante emphasizes the crucial practice of establishing an 'observation post' within ourselves—a transcendent position from which we can witness thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations as objects rather than identifying with them. This shift from 'my knee hurts' to 'pain is there' represents a fundamental reorientation that breaks our habitual patterns of attachment and aversion. He explores the Second Noble Truth through the lens of our constant wanting and not-wanting relationship with experience, showing how this creates perpetual conflict.

The talk addresses practical meditation challenges including working with emotional states like anger by experiencing them as pure sensation rather than story, and dealing with sloth and torpor without suppressing these energies. Bhante emphasizes that liberation comes not through changing our conditioning but through developing a new relationship with it—allowing these energies to naturally exhaust themselves through mindful observation rather than mental indulgence.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

So it's just an opportunity to revise the principles of meditation and go over the problems that we come across in terms of dealing with certain mental states.

One of the core words of the Buddhist teachings is this word *dukkha*, which translates as a hard place. So we're in a hard place. And the idea is that if we get it right, it'll become *sukha*, it'll be a happy place, an easy place. And the process whereby we bring that about is a dual process, both of allowing old conditionings based on wrong understandings to exhaust themselves and developing new conditionings.

So from an ordinary relative phenomenal point of view, the Buddha—Siddhartha Gautama, when he was fully self-enlightened—the personality, the character, was still conditioned, conditioned by the situation he found himself in. But according to him, he was always happy. Happy or calm, equanimous. "The world argues with me, I don't argue with the world."

Now if we investigate how we create these conditionings then hopefully we can go back on that process. One of the things we do is to use our intellect and our imagination to create within ourselves and to develop within ourselves a particular conditioning. So if for instance we have already a disposition within us which is anxious, then through our thoughts and through our imaginings we'll create an anxious world around us. We'll worry, worry about this, worry about that.

And with all these things there's a presumption that the more you worry the less you'll have to worry about, but the opposite tends to be true. The more you worry the more you worry, and then suddenly you begin to wake up and you begin to perhaps ask the question: am I the one who's creating the worry?

If you have a disposition which is depressive, always looking at the negative side of things, we tend to find more and more things to be depressed about and there's a relief in that because you're always proving yourself right. "I am depressed, the world is depressing, everywhere I look it is depressing." And what we get ourselves into is a lock situation where you don't see the end of that spiral. You try to break out of it, you try to buy some ice cream or something, but then you worry whether the ice cream is doing you any good and you get depressed about it.

So when we realise that it's thought which is actually creating the world for us—thought and imaginings—information comes in and we play with it inside the mind, as it were. And we play with it from a particular disposition, a particular position that we've taken in life, and then we project it, we deposit it on the world. And the world funnily enough mirrors it back to us. So if you go around feeling depressed, looking depressed, everybody else around you gets depressed, and if they don't want to get depressed they don't want to see you. So you end up getting more depressed because now the world is truly depressing.

Now, all the Buddha is saying is, if you stop for a minute and try to take a position within ourselves to observe the mind, to observe what it's actually doing, then we'll come very quickly to understand that all we have to do is stop this form of indulgence. And that's really the training of *Vipassanā*.

So we're discovering a place in ourselves, rediscovering a place in ourselves and constantly trying to re-establish it, a place where we can observe what's going on. And we start with placing the attention on the body itself because that's the most obvious. You can sense the body, you can feel the body, it's not that difficult to get in contact with it. And one of the main reasons for doing that is to try and release this intelligence, try to draw it out of its confusion with thought. That's the first thing.

This intelligence we have, this intuitive intelligence, generally speaking defines itself as thought, as imagining—"I think therefore I am," that statement. But when we take this position in ourselves of the observer, of this observation post, we can actually see the images in the mind; they can become very clear to us. Thoughts are often too quick for us and we wake up after a sequence of thoughts and then reflect on it as some form of thinking or worrying or whatever. But in some good states of concentration when the mind is really steady, when this attention is really clarified, you might even see a thought passing in front of you like a neon sign. And these experiences are telling us that there is something as it were prior to or beyond the thinking process.

When we go into emotions normally or often we find ourselves hijacked by a particular mental state—suddenly you're angry, suddenly you're anxious, whatever. But when you actually sit like this and find that observation post, when a mental state arises you can, as it were, feel it as an object. You can investigate it as if it were something you had in your hands, a piece of putty, a dough. You can actually begin to investigate the feelings, the sensations that we would normally call anger or depression or anxiety. So you're becoming intimate with your psychic life in a way that you wouldn't normally be.

Normally the ordinary person wouldn't make a distinction between that knowing and what they're experiencing. They are what they feel, they are what they're experiencing, they are their thoughts, they are the body. If the body hurts, it's me, it's me that's hurting. But here, by taking that observation post, when we find pain in the body, discomfort in the knee, whatever, it becomes an object. We've distanced ourselves from it. That's our first position, as it were.

As soon as you do that, as soon as we make any of this stuff an object, whether it's the thoughts or imaginings, emotions, feelings, sensations, we've created a very different relationship to it. Before I would have said my knee hurts, but when I'm sitting in meditation here like this and the pain comes and I say pain is there—it's not mine—there's a break in my relationship with it and I can begin to see it as just sensation.

When I can begin to distance myself from these things like this, I become aware of this other relationship that I've had, which at the moment I'm not indulging. And here we're coming to this second noble truth. So the first one is that there is this unsatisfactoriness or suffering that we've created, and the second one is the role of desire. Now we have to be careful with this English word "desire" because it doesn't hit the nail on the head. It's really a relationship we have with the world where we're constantly trying to be happy with it. We're constantly trying to find a way of being in the world which makes us happy so that this happiness is dependent on the world. When I say the world here I mean on what we experience.

So how does that manifest within us? Well, whenever I get something pleasant, a pleasant feeling in the body—say a nice joy comes up or a calmness—I immediately want to disappear into it, absorb into it. I may want to indulge it, I want to maintain it there.

Sometimes we're sitting here and finally we can say we've got some steady attention and we feel that we're calm and peaceful and we're really watching. And then somebody comes in and bangs the door or sneezes into the back of our necks. And all hell's let loose inside. You want to kill somebody. And what that shows us is that we've entered into this beautiful space and unwittingly we've tried to hold it, we've tried to contain it, we've tried to not let it move. And in that way, whether we like it or not, we find ourselves in conflict with the world. So when somebody sneezes, we feel irritated by it. But if we were in that easy state of open awareness, there would just be the sneeze and the sneeze would disappear. It would just be like a bird flying across your sight. Just one thing happening after another.

Now, when we are maintaining that, we'll also see that whenever something unpleasant arises, there's always this resistance to it. You just don't want that. And that resistance is a relationship of wanting to get rid of, destroy, annihilate anything which I am experiencing as undermining my comfort, undermining my particular state. So again I find myself in conflict. I'm always in conflict with what's happening. Either I'm trying to hold on to something and stop something entering into that experience because this is the way I want to be, or I'm trying to get rid of something which I find upsetting. It's exhausting. And if of course this pain or whatever that comes up begins to get a bit too much for me, then the anxiety comes, the fear comes. So those are our three basic positions in the world.

We're either holding on to something, we're either being greedy, we're either trying to maintain a particular situation, or we're trying to get rid of it. We're trying to get rid of a situation. And if that situation is too much for us, we run for it. That's it.

If we observe ourselves, even if you're just sitting watching TV, if you watch yourself, you're constantly shifting your position, moving around the armchair. You just can't maintain any place which is slightly uncomfortable.

Now that wouldn't be so bad in itself, I suppose, were it not that it was based on a wrong understanding as to where we're going to find happiness. I mean, if happiness could be found by playing this wanting-not-wanting game, then we ought to keep playing it. Because, well, we want to be happy. Very simple. But it's when we realise it's not going to deliver that, and we look at our fundamental position.

There's an unspoken presumption that happiness is based upon the sensual world. In other words, I've got to find happiness within this mortal frame, within this body, within this mind. And all the time, the messages I'm getting from the world is, it's not possible. And it's not possible because things are changing anyway. I can't maintain anything. As soon as I try to hold on to something, I just find that it slips out of my grasp. It's like holding water. And then I find I've not got that much control.

So to define myself, to define a self, surely it's about—if this is me, I should be able to control it. If this is my body, if this is me, if my body is me, then I should be able to do what I want with it. I should be able to make it grow a bit more, hopefully. I should be able to eat as much as I want and not grow fat. I should be able to do whatever I want with it, but I can't. I find myself in a peculiar situation of being in a body over which I've got minimal control. I mean, I can wave my arms about and all that. I can't stop it aging. I can't stop it dropping dead. That's the important thing. I don't mind the aging bit, I just don't want to drop dead. I don't mind the body as it is, it's great, I just don't want it to fall ill.

So here we have, we're in this peculiar state where there's a drive within us to be happy in the world and the world just isn't playing ball. It's just not responding in a way that it ought to really. So maybe I've got it wrong.

And this is the Buddha—remember, the Buddha's own life story mirrors this same path. The Buddha isn't just simply the exemplar, the one who actually sets an example. He's the archetype. All of us have to follow this particular path if we want to find this liberation.

And what we begin with through this meditation is this process of renunciation. Now, renunciation is not self-mortification. We're not trying to make ourselves suffer. There's no point in that at all. And this is also something that the Buddha discovered. He went through a period of self-mortification. And he ended up by saying it was just

suffering, more suffering, unprofitable, and well, ignoble really—beating yourself up. So whatever renunciation is, it's not a case of putting ourselves into painful situations just for the sake of it.

Renunciation is that process of beginning to let go of those things that we find ourselves attached to, those things that we are depending on for happiness, because we begin to realise that that isn't true happiness. Any happiness which is dependent on something is fragile. If my happiness in the evening is dependent on watching Coronation Street, it can be very upsetting if the TV isn't working. I then get quite excited. I have to phone friends and ask to put it on DVD and stuff like that.

So the idea of renunciation is to find out where the attachments are. You don't have to go the whole hog, drop everything and live under a tree. But you can do it in simple ways. You can find out where you're getting stuck, where you're holding on to something, where you find yourself getting upset over what is logically a rather silly thing. And you can begin to, as it were, withdraw your indulgence in that. And just feel the pain, the pain of letting go.

And that pain of letting go isn't something which is bad, it's something which is good because it's releasing us from that attachment. That process of experiencing the pain of release is kernel to spiritual growth, because what is it that we're releasing? We're releasing that—not simply that attachment to an object. I mean that would be just too restricted. We're actually releasing ourselves from a wrong view, a wrong understanding. That whatever happiness is to be found, it can't be found in an ephemeral, transient, unpredictable world.

So by letting go of things as best we can, we're actually repositioning ourselves in the world, finding a different relationship with it. And it's beginning to discover that which has the effect on us of developing a sense of calmness with it, of developing a sense of patience—just bearing with things without irritation, not seeing that as a suffering.

Now that's really one of the main things that we're learning when we sit in this meditation posture. Finding that observation post within us, we've already discovered a transcendent position. What we mean here by transcendent is that it is no longer involved or drawn into any confusion with, any identity with, any possession of whatever is being experienced.

So at a very simple level, if I'm sitting here and pain comes to my knee, in normal daily life I'd say my knee is hurting and I would try and do something about it. But here, this is an opportunity to release myself from this relationship of "my knee."

If you were walking along the road and your leg fell off, you'd look at that leg and you'd say, well, is that my leg? It was my leg, but now it's on the road. How can I say it's my leg? That's a fiction. If somebody says, "Whose leg is that?" "That's my leg. It's just fallen off." Now because you've reached this perfect equanimity, you would simply note that your leg had fallen off. And then you would hop merrily into Costa's for a coffee. It would be of little concern.

But that's not what would happen really. I mean, one would be in a state of shock. And that's really the problem with this identity. If it's me, if it's me we're talking about, then I lose a piece of me. That goes deep. That's why anything which happens to the body—we might be glib about it, we might say "oh it's only the body" and all that—but when something serious moves in the body then you come across this huge fear, this shock. And that's the measure of our delusion about who we are.

But it doesn't take that much reflection to realise that we can't be the body, even on a simple level. Well, have you any idea what's going on in your liver at the moment? Do you know where it is? Do you experience your toenails growing? Do you lose a part of yourself when you cut them off? So just reflecting on the body as body, as an actual physical...

piece of mechanism, an organism, you begin to realise actually you don't know it. We can't even see our own faces, for heaven's sake. When you look in the mirror, you think everybody sees you that way, but actually, have you done the double mirror thing? It comes as a shock. You never thought your ear was that big.

Have you done that? Get two mirrors and look into the one that's looking into the mirror that's catching your face. And that's how people see you. It's always the other way around. Don't get too depressed when you see it. Even when you see yourself in the mirror, even in that way, it's only a representation. We can't see our own face as we can see other people's faces.

So this definition of who I am, you see, then you draw yourself into yourself with emotional states. And we find that there's not much control over that either. These emotions arise and pass away themselves. And they're often attached to certain things like meeting people and Coronation Street, things like that. To say to myself now, at this moment, "I will be happy," to command happiness—can't do it. You can pretend, you can jump up and down and be happy, but the heart won't respond on command. You don't go to bed thinking, "Well, tomorrow I'll wake up depressed." You go to bed with the expectation that you wake up refreshed, but you're not. Sometimes you're depressed.

Thoughts. There we seem to have some sort of ability to guide our thoughts, to put our thoughts in a particular way and guide them, as it were. But often it's the thoughts that overtake us. We find ourselves dominated by compulsive thinking. We can't escape the little boxes that we've created for ourselves.

So what the meditation is trying to make us do is to form a different relationship with it. And what we find to our joy is that actually we don't have to do anything. We don't have to change anything of the conditioning that we have. This is quite a relief. You don't have to do anything about our depressions and our guilt and our feelings of embarrassment and all that. You don't have to do anything about it. All we have to do in that sense is this passive ability, this ability to stay with what's arising and give them the time, give them just that time and that inner space to express themselves.

And we find that when you just watch it like that, it evaporates. It begins to expend its energy. And in so doing, it'll eventually draw those things to an end, because it's only when they creep up into this thinking mind, into the imagining mind, that they develop themselves. It's only through thought that an emotion develops itself. And that's a really important insight to make into our psyche. That if you stop thinking depressing thoughts, the depression cannot develop. On the other hand, if you don't feel the depression, then the depression stays in the body as a turbulence, as an energy which isn't doing us any good, creating discomfort, illness, headaches, and all that sort of stuff.

So it's not as though we can get rid of these conditionings at once, but we now know that we don't want to indulge them through thought. And so we're left with just this situation of sitting with them and allowing them to express themselves.

Now when you contact an emotional state—say anger—you feel irritated about something and you've cut off this avenue of constantly going over what it was that upset you, and you come into the body and you feel the anger within your body, and you're still saying to yourself, "This is anger, this is anger," not "I am angry." See? You've separated it. This is anger.

As you, as it were, drop into that emotional state, so you're getting intimate with it, you want to find out what constitutes the emotion of anger. As you go into it, you may be surprised to find that all there is is heat and movement. There's nothing there. The only thing that made it substantial was your positioning of saying, "I am angry." As soon as you say "I," "me," it becomes solid. It becomes something. Whereas when you experience it as just an emotional state, as just a sensation state, you find there's nothing there.

And eventually that little flowering of anger begins to just fade away, fades out. Now it's not as though that's the end of it, because there are these deeper dispositions which take their own time to purify, and that purification of the heart shall we say goes on automatically as soon as you're in this position of observing, of feeling, of experiencing. That's automatic. You don't have to work at it. You don't have to do anything.

And to maintain that objectivity, to maintain that position where you're not going to identify with this stuff, you're not concerned with the therapy of it. As soon as you do that, you become your own therapist. And that's always a danger, isn't it? Because it's the deluded trying to fix the deluded. So abandon that, it's absolutely hopeless. Instead, you see, the Buddha says, don't worry about that. Just let that burn itself out. We don't have to worry about that. That'll happen naturally. What we need to do is to correct our relationship to it.

And he points to these three positions. So the first one is this impermanence. So we begin to see that this solid thing that we used to call depression, anxiety and all that is actually nothing but just an amorphous blob of sensations. There's actually nothing there, there's no substance to it.

And you begin to see that clearly when you experience it just as arising and passing away of sensations—heat, pressure and so on. And by doing that, you come to the second understanding that if that's so, then there's no substance to it. It is insubstantial, it has no entity of itself, it's not an integer, it doesn't have any being, it doesn't have any existence, it's just energy. And in fact I tend to look upon my own emotional life as just weather patterns.

I mean, what's a storm? It's just a couple of clouds coming over and a couple of bangs and flashes and then it moves on. It just blows itself out.

And the third thing is this position that we have caused by that wrong relationship of wanting and not wanting, wanting and not wanting. So we're trying to access this transcendent point. We're at the apex of a triangle and we're looking down upon what is happening as it were beneath us. And on one side we're getting all those things that we've defined as pleasurable and on the other side as unpleasurable, just a longer continuum. And that's your baseline, that's the given of human life. You can't not be alive and not know that things are pleasant or unpleasant. That's never the problem. Things are always going to be pleasant or unpleasant.

Then you get this line that runs parallel to it, which is our reaction to it, which is wanting what is pleasant, not wanting what is unpleasant. And that reaction to it is causing the conflict. And when that reaction passes, there is only the pleasant and the

unpleasant. And having abstracted ourselves, having uprooted ourselves from an identity with the pleasant and unpleasant, we find ourselves in this transcendent position, you see, where there is just experience.

So the Buddha, when he died of a stomach disease, even right towards the end, he's asking, "Are there any more questions?" I mean, the man's dying. He's got gastroenteritis. And he's lying there and he knows he's dying. He knows he's dying and he says, "Is there any more questions before I go?" And then just before he goes, he gives that salutary command. He says, "All compounded things are transient. Work diligently for your liberation." And then he dies, peacefully.

What will be our last words? "Why me?" Why not you? Just the arising and passing away of the human body. And then when he died, there were those younger monks around who weren't so trained and they began to cry. And the elderly monks and the monks who were more advanced said, "What are you crying for? Didn't you know that everything arises and passes away?" And their attachment to the Buddha, you see, was based upon that wrong view.

So that's all we're doing, in a sense, through our meditation, is discovering a new relationship with the world. And the core practice of just being able to turn inward and to this introspection, just to be able to observe ourselves, you see. So this intelligence that we have, this intuitive intelligence, it just begins to understand. And that understanding then begins to change our attitudes. And that attitude then begins to express itself in the way we speak, what we do, how we act, and through our livelihoods. And that's how this thing flows. It's a systemic effect on our lives.

So that's what you might say the more passive side of the practice. The active side is what we'll come to this afternoon, which is, of course, developing the beautiful mind, developing love, compassion, joy, peacefulness, and then through that to move into the world.

So just to recap that: when we're sitting and the mind is wandering, the mind is thinking, unwittingly we're developing the old conditioning, we're making things worse. So we've got to be really right there with it. As soon as we wake up, we have to acknowledge what the mind is doing. If the mind's worrying, we're not worried about content. Just don't give an ounce of interest to content. Just worry—worry about the attitude. So if you see that you're worrying about something, so "worry." When you come into the body, see if you can feel the worry as an emotional state within the body. And if you can't find it, you go back to the breath. And if you can find it, if it's there quite obvious to you, then stay with it, wait for it to die out. And you'll see the thoughts die out, and then that connection between thought and emotion becomes more apparent to us.

If you're sitting there and you feel a disturbance in the body, a tension in the stomach, something like that, you see, don't guess. Don't say to yourself, "This is anxiety," or "This is worry," or "This is grief" or something. See? Just feel it as feeling. That feeling, which may very well be an emotional state caught up in that part of the body, may rise to the point in the heart, into the heart centre where you can recognise it as an emotion. Or it may dissipate itself through the body. So that when that tension goes, that particular mental state has also been exhausted. This is also true of illnesses that are caused by the mind. Psychosomatic illnesses. Not all illnesses are caused by that, of course.

And the only other thing that I'll mention just towards the end is the other side, which is this disappearing into sleep. So remember, the mind needs rest, sure. The body needs rest. But if you've had a good night's sleep and you feel generally rested, you see, then in your meditation, if this dullness comes and this feeling of lethargy, so you don't fool yourself. Don't say, "Well, I must be tired." Because this is sloth and torpor.

And the instruction there is to remain awake at all costs. So whether you open your eyes or stand up, or if it gets really bad, do some walking meditation. But be absolutely steadfast in your commitment and refuse to be annihilated.

And when you do the walking meditation or your standing, you see, don't try and get rid of it. See, this is the thing that we tend to do. You feel a bit lazy and you go jumping up and down, you see. But actually all you're doing is suppressing that conditioning which is drawing us into oblivion. So when you feel the heaviness and the dullness, stay with it. Make that your object, you see. Allow that energy to dissipate itself. We don't see it as energy because it's drawing us down into something. But it's like black holes. You get drawn into the inner black hole. So it's a real energy, it's a force that wants us to move towards oblivion.

And we teach ourselves that every time the alarm goes and you turn over and wait for the snooze button. Every time you do that, there's another little weight just drawing us down into oblivion. And of course the attraction of oblivion is that there is no suffering. There's no suffering in oblivion. Wonderful. But unfortunately we keep waking up. So that's our problem.

So when we come across this other side, the bit that is lacking energy, when we feel that sort of heaviness and the dullness of the mind, just open your eyes, stand up, stretch yourself. But you're not trying to get rid of it. Don't get into a battle with these conditionings. Just give them the space and time to just burn themselves out.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 142

Dukkha: Unsatisfactoriness and the Path to Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma unpacks the Buddha's central teaching: "In this world there is dukkha and there is the end of dukkha." He explains the three levels of dukkha - ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha), suffering from impermanence (viparinama-dukkha), and the subtle suffering arising from conditioned existence (sankhara-dukkha). Through examination of the five aggregates (pañca-khandha) - form, perception, feeling, mental formations, and consciousness - we discover how we actively create our experience of the world.*
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> *The talk reveals how the fourth aggregate, saṅkhāra (mental formations), contains our power of will (cetanā) that generates karma through our responses to pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Bhante emphasizes that while we cannot control the first three aggregates, we can transform our relationship to experience through Right Awareness practice. He distinguishes between intention and will, showing how vipassanā meditation creates liberating distance from our identifications.*
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> *Drawing from the Dhammapada's opening verse that "everything is mind-made," Bhante clarifies that while Buddhism isn't idealism, we can only know reality through our consciousness. This understanding empowers us to take responsibility for our psychological suffering while developing the wisdom that naturally flowers into compassion. The talk concludes with guidance on balancing insight practice with loving-kindness to avoid spiritual indifference.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

One of the phrases that the Buddha uses is "In this world there is *dukkha* and there is the end of *dukkha*." And this word *dukkha* is difficult to translate well—difficult in the sense that there's no single word that covers its meaning. *Dukkha* in itself just means a hard place, so we're in a hard place.

It also seems to have been used at the time for various ways of describing things. But one of them was an axle in a cart which didn't quite fit right, and so it scratched and made noises and went along. And that's an image of the way we are in the world. We haven't quite got it right.

This *dukkha* is not only described as just the ordinary pains and suffering of life—all the stuff that we experience here, for instance, the emotional stuff—but also remember the suffering that comes from attachment. And all that he calls *dukkha-dukkha*—that's the unsatisfactoriness of ordinary suffering, ordinary pain, ordinary unsatisfactoriness.

And then there's a suffering that comes from the idea of impermanence, the fact that we can't hold on to anything, that everything is disappearing, a lack of control. With certain things it doesn't really matter to us, but when it comes to our bodies, old age, sickness and death, then it gets a bit close to the bone, as you might say. So there's a whole suffering around impermanence simply because we prefer things not to change, especially when you've got it just right. You know, the perfect day, ice cream, it's all there and you just don't want it to move.

And then there's the more subtle suffering that arises because things are compounded. And what the Buddha means by that is that nothing has any self-reality, nothing exists of its own. Everything is dependent on something else. And that's this interdependency.

So even here now, we're breathing, we're dependent on the breath, we're dependent on the air in this room. And when you actually begin to just contemplate how dependent we are on the world around us, not just simply in terms of food and air and stuff like that, but companionship, relationship, transport—every part of our lives is always something dependent on something else. And that dependency shows that actually what we experience ourselves to be, how we define ourselves, is always in terms of a relationship, a relationship with something else. And that's the part of it that is compounded.

It goes deeper than that in the sense that everything within us is also compounded. There's parts of our body that give up before other parts. You'd think the whole thing would just go all together but it doesn't, so then you realize that actually parts of the body also have their own little life form and are doing their own little things. When you look into the body and you ask yourself what is it you know of the body, I think it can be quite surprising how little we actually know of the body.

Just, we've been talking about air and breathing. Have you ever experienced the exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide? If nobody told you that, would you know? Skin—all the cells in the body have their own little life form and they're all dividing and dying and whatever. Do we ever experience that? Have any control over it? Your toenails, what about that? That's growing, it's growing right now. You have any idea it's growing? You have any idea what your liver's doing?

So there's a whole—once you begin to ask yourself, what do I actually know about the body as an organism? Quite surprising, we know very little. We can move it about. You've got to go up and down, smile, make it laugh, all that. But actually what we know, what we directly experience with the body is quite minimal. And it's minimal because the only thing we can know is through the mind.

Now, that goes back to this earlier statement: "In this world there is suffering and the end of suffering." So what the Buddha is saying is that this relationship that we have, it can be straightened out. We can actually get to a point where we don't suffer anymore. There's always going to be pain. The body's always going to deliver pain. But it's not going to make us suffer.

Now, this word that he uses, "in this world"—when he defines "in this world," he defines it as the five aggregates. And that's the way he split up the organism that we experience. So first of all there's the body, and we'll come back to that because it's not the body in the way that we just explained it. Then there are all perceptions, all the perceptions that we have. Then there are all the feelings that we have. Then there's what he calls these *saṅkhāra*. *Saṅkhāra* are the emotional and thought life that we experience. And then there's cognition, the act of holding something to know it, an act of cognition.

And the reason he splits it up like this is because he's always pointing to where the problem lies. The problem doesn't lie in the body. The body does its own thing. It's an organism, it feels, it sees, etc. It doesn't lie in perception. Perception meaning those first things that we cognize in the mind. So color, shape, sound, before it takes on a particular meaning. So when I look at the statue, what I see as the beginning percepts are just its shape and color. And it's an internal process that tells me it's a statue and it's a statue of the Buddha. What he's talking about when he talks about this perception process is just that beginning process where the mind is like a sense base.

And then there's feeling. Feeling, as we discover in our meditation, is just sensation. In his language, there's only one word for feeling. We've got sensations, feeling, emotions, moods. But as far as he's concerned, it's just all feeling. This word *vedanā*—and these feelings he splits into two kinds: they're either pleasant or they're unpleasant. There is a neutral—he also points to neutral feelings—but when you actually really go

into a neutral feeling you'll see it sides slightly with being unpleasant or slightly with being pleasant. And there's a further split in the sense that he says that some of these feelings are coming from the body, what we would call sensations, and some are coming from the mind, what we would call emotions, emotional feelings.

So this *vedanā* is simply telling us that those first three are telling us that there's a contact with the physical world, and this physical contact allows us to create percepts in the mind. These percepts are also memory—it's a memory bank as well—and it creates a certain feeling tone to the world, pleasant and unpleasant. All that is given. That's part and parcel of being a human being. But as you know, depending on our faculties—if we're blind, that's one avenue of experience that's not open to us. And we can develop certain senses. A painter, an artist would develop the sense of sight, a musician, a sense of sound, of hearing.

The fourth one—these *saṅkhāra*—he separates that out as the point where we create, because in the midst of that *saṅkhāra* we have this power called will. And the core thing about *saṅkhāra* is will, *cetanā*. Now will is not intention. So this is something that you can investigate yourself when you're doing standing meditation, for instance. Just to stand still and establish that stillness, and then allow the intention to arise.

Sometimes when I say intention, people think it has to be some big emotional thing, like intending to walk sort of overpowering me. But actually, it's just an intention. It's just like, I want to open the door. It doesn't have to be a big emotional explosion. And you know it by simply saying "intending to walk"—that's the intention. So when you say to yourself "intending to walk" you can feel a push in the body as it were, you feel a certain energy coming up: intending to walk. But nothing happens. Just try it yourself. You can stand there forever saying "intending to walk," nothing ever happens. And then something quite magical moves you—something happens, the foot moves.

So something has brought an idea, a wish, out of potential into the actual. It's actually produced an action. Now that power is what the Buddha calls the will. And it's through that power that we create these *saṅkhāras*, which is our emotional thought life. And he equates this will with *kamma*, with action.

Now, I'm not using the word here as it's normally used, in the sense of karma, like your comeuppance. This is what you deserve. *Kamma* here just means an act. And the technical word for the comeuppance, for what you get as a response to what you do, as a consequence to what you do, is *vipāka*. Those are the two words. So it's cause and then the effect or the result.

And then there's this act of cognition, which you can take to mean—the way I visualize it or the way I understand it is all the electrons hit the screen of a television. Before it hits the screen of a television it's completely nonsensical, but when it hits the screen of this television you've got a picture. So all this information is coming into the brain mind complex and it's somehow being held as a picture which we then know. So when you are—when in your mind you're seeing these images—though to see them, that primary knowing of those images, that's the act of cognition.

Now this is where we begin to understand the Buddha when he's in the opening verse of the *Dhammapada*. So the *Dhammapada* is a little collection of verses which is like a—in the Buddha's Bible you can say—that it's something that everybody reads. They're just little verses pointing to certain truth. And the first one is that everything is mind made and mind is the forerunner.

Now what this means is in the Buddha's understanding is that everything we're experiencing is created by the mind's contact with the outside world and of course with what it has engineered within itself. So you have to be careful here because Buddhism isn't an idealism. It moves towards that way in later Buddhism in the sense that nothing exists, it's all in the minds of people as it were. The Buddha doesn't deny the reality of the trees that you're looking at. What he's saying is you can only know the trees in your way. You can't get beyond your own consciousness. It's you who are actually creating the tree that you know.

Now when we take this into the problem of suffering, the problem of unsatisfactoriness, the problem of a certain lack, a certain existential angst, whatever we're suffering from. When you take that into—then you realize that actually it's not being created by the world. It's being created by the way we are relating to what's coming in and to our lives. So all our suffering is made by us. Nobody can make us suffer. So this is a real breakthrough when we actually realize that nobody can cause us psychological pain. They can give us a hell of a lot of physical pain, but they can't actually cause the psychological pain. That psychological pain is being produced by an internal mechanism which we have learned within ourselves. We've probably been taught how to do it by our parents etc., but it's something that we're creating in ourselves.

From a process of awakening point of view, if we weren't creating our suffering and it was somebody else who was doing it, then you'd have to get rid of that somebody else. And if there was anybody in the world whom you thought was creating suffering for you, before your suffering would end you'd have to get rid of them. So there'd be no way really to full liberation until you annihilated everybody. If somebody out there can cause you suffering, then there's always that potential of suffering.

What the Buddha is saying is that he attained a state where, as he puts it, the world argues with him, he doesn't argue with the world. He's not in contradiction with the world. It's not that people didn't hate him. Devadatta, the dastardly fellow who was a monk, he went to the Buddha and thought he was getting a bit old and he was getting all loose and losing his grip. So he said, what we need to do is get back to the originals, back to the original order—living in a forest, vegetarianism, just rag robes, sleep under a tree, back to the old hard stuff, because they've all gone soft. So the Buddha actually allowed it. He said, well, if you want to do those—they're called *dhutaṅgas*, those extra special exercises like never taking a lying position—he can do it. But I think Devadatta had in his mind that it was his time now to take over the order. He was a cousin actually. So he tried to kill him, didn't he? Three times, for heaven's sake. Rolled a boulder down a hill, caught his toe.

So it wasn't as though the Buddha didn't create enemies, but his relationship to Devadatta, we can presume, was not angry, hateful, vengeful, etc.

So, if we now take the position that the world I'm experiencing is the world that I'm creating—the world I'm experiencing is the world that I am actually creating—this allows us now, gives us a way of, if I'm creating this world and I'm not experiencing happiness, I'm not experiencing peace, then I must be doing something wrong. So we then have to look at the mechanisms within our own psychology to see how is it that we're creating this suffering. And that's what we're doing with *vipassanā*—that's the purpose of *vipassanā*—is to see how we create suffering and how we begin to undermine that suffering.

And there's two ways in which we better our situation. The first one is dealing with the suffering that we have, and the second one is increasing our bank of joy, love, compassion and peacefulness. And the two go hand in hand.

So what we're practising is allowing any feelings that we perceive as being unpleasant—downright painful and horrible—we're allowing them to just manifest. When they're mental feelings we can begin to realize that just in their manifestation, just in their expression, is their healing. And this is a real radical way of looking at therapy, because normally speaking we would be trying to do something about our psychology. Whereas what the Buddha says, all you got to do is endure it, all you got to do is sit in the midst of the flames and have the patience to allow them to burn out.

Now if it were just that, it would only be psychology, it would only be something that might help people to become a bit calmer, less stressful, all the usual stuff. But in seeing the mechanism, in actually perceiving how the flames were built in the first place, allows us to undermine that whole process of continuously making further flames, further bonfires for ourselves. And that process is this business of desire.

Now it's sometimes translated as craving, which is sometimes a bit over the top. Desire—in English, of course, has a good meaning. The desire to be compassionate, what's wrong with that? So this *taṇhā* is the desire which is coming from a wrong understanding of seeking happiness in the wrong place. It's a specific desire. It's a desire based on believing that we can create some sort of permanent happiness—permanent emotional thought happiness—by using the world around us: tea, biscuits, all that. And that desire is coming from this misunderstanding—a misunderstanding of where we can seek this happiness.

And what that does is, the misunderstanding creates the idea, creates the notion of a me. So this is where we get a bit—shall we say, it confuses people, this teaching about not-self. And often people turn it into a metaphysics like there is no self. But the Buddha never says that anywhere. He's simply using it as a tool, as a way of exploring what is real about what I'm experiencing.

So all he's saying is whatever arises and passes away necessarily can't be a self, because what we mean by a self is something substantial, something that continues, something that doesn't arise and pass away, isn't born, doesn't die. It's the same definition as somebody might call a spirit or a soul.

So in our meditation, when we are looking at what we're experiencing and we're creating that distance and we're seeing that it's arising and passing away, whether it's an intellectual reflection or not, we're actually experiencing the process of not me, not mine. As soon as you distance from something, as soon as you make it an object that you're looking at, then it can't be that which is looking.

And that distance, that separation is a liberation, no matter how small it might be. It's a liberation at some point from the notion of the self as feeling, the self as an emotion, the self as thought. I think therefore I am, I feel therefore I am. Every time we say something like "Oh, I'm really depressed," you're lost. You are depressed. What can you do about it? Now you're in there, you've defined yourself as being depressed. But as soon as you distance from it within yourself and you say "there is depression" through this technique of noting, just being able to distance yourself from it, you're liberated from it. That doesn't mean to say it's not painful — it's still depression — but there's something missing from "I am depressed."

The I that identifies with something falls into a hell state, and that's what, if you define a hell state, what is it apart from thinking that you are the suffering you're experiencing? When you come out of that and it becomes an object and there is depression, then we can say that's purgatory. I've always believed in Catholic doctrine. Hell is hell, whether it's a place or not, is immaterial. Hell is a place where you don't see an exit. That's it. If you get completely panicked, that's it, you're in hell. Whereas purgatory is where it's all very painful, but at least things are going to come to an end.

So our position in *vipassanā* is to allow things to arise, but also to create that distance so that we know that this is not me, it's not mine, and itself is not a self. An emotion is not a self. Does an emotion know itself? I mean, does an emotion go around saying, "I'm depressed"? Does a knee know it's hurting? Does a knee know anything? My knees don't know anything at all. So there's something in us that knows this stuff and then makes this wrong relationship.

So at fundament, you could say, the basic position is that our relationship to the world is wrong. It's all to do with relationship, and what I discovered is that everything that I'm creating now, no matter what it is, whether it's beautiful or sad or whatever, is actually being created by me. And if I can get that relationship right, then I should end up somewhere different. I should be experiencing the world in a different way.

So that's what this whole process is about — it's about changing our relationship to the world. And when the Buddha awakens from that delusion, his first thought is "Who can I help? Who can I tell this to?" — the good news. So it's not as though the meditation, this process of purification, the process of insight, is actually isolating us. It's not that it's drawing us into this little cave where we can be happy by ourselves. We're a horde of little peanuts and things like that. It's something which immediately reconnects us with the world. And this is really important for us to do because that's the practice of *mettā*.

And the *vipassanā* has a danger to it. The danger is that in finding this position of the objective observer, that objectivity which in its virtuous form is equanimity — it's the ability to receive, to bear without reaction — turns easily into a sort of disinterest. I'm looking for the other word, not callous. No, no, you're jumping ahead of me there. Indifference. Thank you very much. It's an indifference.

And I always like to tell the tale about these two little experiences I had. I was in one monastery with this monk, and there was a cat, and it was playing around with a mouse, which it had obviously killed. And I just said, "Didn't you stop that?" And he said, "No," he said, "cat karma and mouse karma. I mean, it's just the way it is, that's life, you can't stop it." So I said, "Fair enough."

And I was in another monastery where we were sitting on a bench, a couple of monks, a few monks. And suddenly this cat jumped out and jumped on this bird. And this monk, a flash of lightning, got up and gave this cat one hell of a kick. And got hold of the bird, but its lungs had been punctured. And very, very beautifully, he just held it up with its wings sort of splayed out, and chanted the verses that we do when somebody dies: "All compounded things arise and pass away."

So he didn't believe in cat karma and bird karma. And the distinction there was of course the relationship, that connection, that connection which comes through love, compassion and joy.

So you must make sure that whenever you do *vipassanā*, there's always some point at the end where you reconnect with the world. And that's in the Eightfold Path. So the right understanding begins with reflecting about our lives, and the *vipassanā* takes it into an experiential understanding of the way things are. But somehow that has to reconnect, and that's done through the second of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is this right attitude. And you build up your attitude through your intentions. So as soon as he'd understood what he'd experienced, the intention arose just naturally: "Who can I help? Who can I teach this to?"

So if we can do that at the end of a sitting and translate what we've understood into an attitude, then it's easy for it to be translated further into the next three steps of right speech, right action and right livelihood.

Now what we find is that these steps also, as it were, turn back on themselves. So what in *vipassanā* we come to understand — this relationship, this interrelatedness of things — so long as it stays as some sort of understanding, even at an experiential level, although you can argue that once it's become experiential it's got to move into an attitude. The Zen would say that: with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. You don't have to play at it. You don't have to work at it.

But even so, if it remains at the level of just an understanding of interrelatedness, it doesn't actually affect the world. But when it moves into the heart, the expression of interrelatedness is love. That's what love is. It's knowing that interrelatedness. And when that attitude is set, then it moves easily into right speech, right action and right livelihood.

Now having said that the world we experience is within this little bubble that I call my awareness, the fact of the matter is that this little bubble does have a relationship with all the other bubbles and with the big bubble that we call nature. There's some connection there which we have. So that when we look into ourselves and want to

know what our karma is — meaning what is our conditioning — that conditioning manifests in us as emotions and thoughts and feelings. But of course this resonates back out into the world, and that's why the world begins to mirror back to us our conditioning. So if a person is an argumentative type, then he shouldn't be too upset if people don't go near him. If a person is a loving type, then she shouldn't be surprised that people congregate around her. And that's pretty straightforward.

But you have to be careful here, because once we put an action into the world, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to have the effect that we wanted it to have, because it goes into a set of situations over which we have no power whatsoever. So even though you might do something out of the greatest charity of your heart, don't be surprised if somebody hates you for it, because in doing so unwittingly you've stood on their toes.

Because what we're doing is we're putting an action, we're putting an action of thought — even of thought actually — but especially of speech and action into a situation over which we do not know the consequences. So it wouldn't be right to think that things that happen to us are entirely to do with our karma, are entirely to do because of my past actions. But we can say that the way I am inside myself is the product of my own karma, is the product of my own manufacturing.

When the Buddha talks about "in this world there is suffering, in this world there is the end of suffering," he's actually talking about the karma which is to do with our state of happiness or lack of it.

So I turn the light on and begin to talk to ghosts. Now I think you have to press one of those, the middle one. The middle one. I sit and turn it. Hey. Enlightenment. Just like that.

So we started off by understanding that the Buddha has defined or deconstructed this human being into these five different areas, three of which we have no control over because it's a given. So the body is a given, and our contact with the body is a given. You can't do anything about that. It's the way that the mind contacts the physical world. So for instance, even when as you go around you might hug a tree — now the feeling that you get of a tree, the feeling you get of wood, is something that the mind is making up from its contact with wood. It's not necessarily true that the wood actually feels like that. Somebody else might come along and think it's soft or hard. It doesn't really matter. But even in basic percepts, we're always creating the world that we are living in. And somewhere along the line we're making this mistake.

And we create these conditionings within ourselves, this emotional thought life. And then we project this onto the world. And that's where our contact is. And because we're projecting it onto the world into an unknown, we don't know the consequences of what will happen if we do something. What comes back to us may seem to be unjust. Or it may seem to be just pure luck. Like when you buy a lottery ticket. I mean, why should you win? Why you? Why not me?

So you don't know what the effect of an action will be, but you can know about it within yourself. And that's the important thing, because it's within ourselves that we either create this happiness or unhappiness. If we move from an intention which is wholesome, it will have a wholesome effect upon our inner life. And that's the important thing. And if we move from intention which is unwholesome, it will have an unwholesome effect upon our inner life. And it's our inner life that we're actually experiencing. It's our inner life which is either causing us pain or causing us joy.

So the meditation is actually taking us inward to find these mechanisms, to find the way that we're creating this world. And hopefully we begin to undo them. And the positive side is the development of the seven factors of enlightenment: the calmness, the steadiness of attention, the curiosity to want to know how things happen.

But you'll notice that in the seven factors of enlightenment, love is not included. Love is not, because love is to do with the secondary part as to the relationship the enlightened mind has with the world. In order to get that, there must be this purity. So that purity is partly to do with the state of the heart in terms of getting rid of all these impure emotions, allowing them to burn out. But it's also to do with the way we see things, to see things as they really are. And so in a sense you might argue that love or compassion for oneself underpins the whole process, because in a sense we're having compassion for ourselves in wanting to get out of suffering.

But it's not as though in order to be enlightened we have to develop *mettā*. *Mettā* is the word for love. That's something we do afterwards in order to cement, you might say, the new understanding we have into a new relationship.

So that's the process, that's the spiritual process. We are inwardly looking to see where we're doing things wrong. Part of that process is to bear what is already wrong, to allow it to burn out. And then when we come out of that, to re-establish or to try to refine our relationship with the world on a more positive level. As simple as that. Just like that.

If Buddha said that mind creates the nature of the world outside, what does Buddha say? Well, no. Now, the thing about the Buddha is that he doesn't get into metaphysics. So if you were to ask the Buddha, "Is the world eternal?" or "Is it finite?" or "Who creates the world out there?" — he's just silent, because it's not something that you can directly know. He's only interested in what you can directly know. Everything else must necessarily be inference. And remember that the Buddha's — the arrow, the point of the arrow of his teaching — is simply this word *dukkha*, this word that we translate as unsatisfactoriness. That's all he's concerned with. He's quite clear about it. He says in the Pali, in the language, he reduces his teaching just to three words: *dukkha*, *dukkha nirodha* — suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and the end of it.

So trying to — I mean in later Buddhism it does become a bit more metaphysical and stuff. But in the Buddha's own specific teaching, as it comes through in our tradition anyway, it's always grounded in individual psychology. It doesn't really move off that.

So even when he's asked what happens to him when he dies — what was known as the quadrilemma. In the West we only have a dilemma, but in the East they have a quadrilemma. So does he exist? Does he not exist? Does he both somehow exist and not exist? And does he neither exist nor not exist? It's a killer, isn't it? And he's silent. And wouldn't you be?

No, there's no God. He won't go into that. He doesn't answer questions like, "Who created the world?" No, he doesn't. No, there is mind. What are you going to do with it?

So does he see mind as separate to what is not mind? Well, now that is the question about what is the definition of *nibbāna*. And our tradition tends to be very coy in describing it. And he tends to follow the Buddha's pattern of saying what it's not. I think in the religious tradition it's called the apophatic. Not this, not that. So he's not born, he doesn't die, he's not compounded, and he's not conditioned. But what it is, well, who knows?

But he definitely says that is not annihilation. Now the Buddhist at his time — or his teachings was often confused with annihilation because there were nihilists at that time, there were materialists, nihilists. I don't know whether they were socialists, but there was all sorts of beliefs. And when he's approached, he says, "Well, you're just teaching a form of nihilism." He says, "No," he says, "the only thing that's annihilated is greed, hatred and delusion." And it must have got very confusing for people who listen to these other teachers who would either say "Yes, there is" or "No, there isn't." And the Jains have a lovely comment on Buddhism. He says, "Well, these people say that there is no soul and there is no afterlife, and we say there is a soul and there is an afterlife, and the Buddhists can't make their mind up."

So was Buddha alive around the same time as the beginnings of, say, Judaism, as an example? Yeah, Moses. Around the same time? I think it was Moses. I'm not sure what the right word is.

Well, it was the Axial Age, wasn't it? Moses, Socrates, Lao Tzu. Out of interest, what's her name, the writer? *The History of God*. Karen Armstrong. She's written a wonderful book on the Axial Age. It's worth reading.

Well, that's this business of rebirth. And yes, there's rebirth. We understand rebirth when you understand what's happening now. What's happening now is that we're being reborn every moment into the next moment. And we're not different from the past moment, but we're not the same. And all Buddhism says is that upon death it's just the body that goes and the mind gets reborn, seeks another place to be reborn. And from the Buddha's point of view, it's this rebirth, this constant going on, this *saṃsāra*, which is the product of this misunderstanding.

Buddhism does split off into two different ideas when somebody is fully liberated. In our tradition nothing is really said. It's more like nothing can be said. The *Tathāgata* - that's how he referred to himself - translates as "the transcendent," the one who's transcended. And he himself doesn't say much. There is a passage where he hints at what happens to him after death. Unfortunately, it doesn't come to mind, so I'll look it up one day. But you don't know. I mean, it's very nice to think about those things because it comforts, but actually we don't know.

Well, the word soul has a lot of meanings. It's best just to think of it as mind. When we say mind here we mean the whole everything that we talked about - when I was talking about the five *khandhas*, how the mind contacts the physical world, percepts, feelings, our volitional conditionings caused by acts of will and cognition. All that's reborn. And it's being reborn now.

So mind in the Buddha sense is actually different to how we would describe it in the literal sense in English, in the sense that mind in English means brain, intelligence, intellect. It's the heart, it's the heart-mind, it's the whole psychic - it's the psyche. You see, in the old definitions, in the Greek definition, there was *soma* the body, there was *psyche* which did not split mind off from heart - it was one thing - and there was *pneuma* which was the unknown, it was spirit, the unconditioned. This was translated into Christianity as *corpus* the body, *spiritus* and *mens*, mind.

And it's only, I think I'm right in saying, Descartes who split the mind off from the heart. "I think therefore I am." And we've been stuck with that split. So often in the East, when somebody says to you, "I think this is so," they don't point here, they point here.

They point to the heart. It's easy once you've separated the mind from the heart to realize or to begin to believe that animals who don't have a mind must be machines. You divest them of any soul, soulness or whatever. So that's how we got to this position with nature, you see, abusing it.

I was trying to say that it's a sort of tautology really, but you can only know what you can know. You can't go beyond your own awareness. So if you want to understand the result of hunger, you have to experience it. Really. Otherwise it remains a conceptual idea, doesn't it? Everything. And what we do is, we presume that because we have a concept of something that we actually know it. We often make that mistake. If you can describe it, if you can give it a sentence, you think that somehow you know it.

We do it on very basic things. Like you might pass, say, one of these flowers and you might name it Primrose. And you think that because you've named it, because you've recognised the Primrose, that you've actually experienced that Primrose. But you haven't looked at it, you haven't smelt it, you haven't felt it. So you haven't a clue what that Primrose actually is. You've simply deposited your concept on it and have been satisfied with that as an experience of that primrose. And that's why you'll find all Buddhist insight meditations are always trying to ground people back into the body. To re-contact our physicality.

Well, as I say, it remains in Theravāda Buddhism: *Nibbāna* is only described in its negative form. But interestingly enough you do find in our own scriptures a definition of something which is full of light, awareness, no boundary. And remember that although we talk about this experience as being full of unsatisfactoriness and that it's changing, and *Nibbāna* is described in the opposite - there is no unsatisfactoriness and there's no change - but it's still not a self.

That usually throws us, because we still think there's going to be some sort of being, some sort of something that you can describe in *Nibbāna*. So, for instance, when Sāriputta is asked, "How can you talk about the bliss of *Nibbāna*, the joy of *Nibbāna*, when there's no emotions there?" He says, "Well, it's the very absence of emotions, which is the bliss of *Nibbāna*."

Now how can we begin to understand that? When you're in a good meditative situation within yourself and you've become the observer and you're observing emotions and you're observing thoughts and you're observing feelings in the body, and when everything drops to a calmness and you can still feel these things as objects - ask yourself what's the mood of the observer? What's the mood of the observer?

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 143

Encouragement: The Principles of Meditation and Right Awareness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma elucidates the Buddha's teaching on Right Awareness (sammā sati) and its role in liberation from dukkha. He traces the Buddha's own journey from his training in absorptions (jhāna) and ascetic practices to his breakthrough insight through investigative awareness—a childlike curiosity that transforms ordinary absorption into liberating wisdom.*
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> *The talk covers the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana): impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā), explaining how direct investigation of these through meditation leads to freedom. Bhante emphasizes the importance of relocating awareness from identification with body, emotions, and thoughts into the position of the objective observer, while warning against the hindrances (nīvaraṇa) that pull the mind into either excited states or dullness.*
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> *Practical guidance is given on working with resistance and desire during meditation, the healing power of feeling emotions directly rather than getting lost in mental proliferation, and the crucial distinction between suppression and skillful postponement. The talk concludes with clear instructions on establishing concentration through breath awareness and maintaining the investigative quality that characterizes true Vipassana practice.*

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

For posterity, it's just an opportunity I take as a reminder to some, but also as an introduction to a few of you, about the principles of meditation and the difficulties we come across and why we do what we do basically.

When the Buddha talks about right awareness, when the Buddha talks about awareness, he talks about a certain type of awareness. It's not as though awareness ever leaves us in a sense, because even in sleep there is a residual awareness. Something must hear the alarm clock or else we'd be dead. So it's this particular type of awareness that the Buddha is talking about.

The point of the awareness is to take us out of what he called *dukkha*. This word *dukkha* is very central to his teachings and it translates as "a hard place." We normally see it translated as unsatisfactoriness, or at worst unhappiness—just a feeling of life not delivering what we hope it would. That's at its most subtle: meaninglessness, existential angst, all that. But also just the ordinary pains and horrors of daily life—all that comes under this wonderful word *dukkha*. And he said that his teaching was basically about *dukkha*—about this situation within and the end of it. So a bit of hope there, you see. And this right awareness was something that he himself discovered.

We say that the Buddha was self-enlightened—not because he didn't have teachers. He actually went to two of them we know of and practiced what we now call the absorptions under them, these very beautiful mental states that we can get through our meditation. And he also practiced some heavy mortifications which we think was through the influence of the Jain leader who was his elder contemporary, the Nigantha.

But although these gave him techniques, it didn't actually help him to really answer the question that was eating away at him as to whether there was an end to suffering. And in his day that would have meant, as it does to people who believe this, just constant rebirth, just repetitious rebirth. We experience it every day: you wake up and off you go—wash, breakfast, work, back, eat, bed, up, breakfast, bed, back. So it's like a machine. We do it every—you know, then weekend, Monday, off we go. Monday, what do you do? You get up, you eat, you go back to bed. So that's it. When you take that on a more cosmic level, like every lifetime, it's really boring, you see. So this idea of rebirth was pretty horrific in his time, and for those of us who understand that, it's pretty horrific to think about it too. So that was the core of his unsatisfactoriness really.

Remember, he'd left his home life which had delivered all the pleasures that in those days you could achieve. He was from a fairly well-to-do family, a governing family, the ruling class, and left that. And then he did all this other stuff with beautiful mental states, but they disappeared and he just ended up being the same old depressed Gautama. And then he tried this self-mortification which he said was just painful and ignoble—so you've got nothing but unprofitable, painful, and ignoble. So you can't get worse than that. So you can see he comes to a point where he's pretty despairing, and I imagine him really at the end of his tether.

As the story goes, somebody's passing by—a woman's passing by with a bit of rice pudding—and offers him some, and it revivifies him. And we all know the salvific effect of rice pudding. So something happens at that point. It says that he remembers something in childhood, and I think this is really the kernel. He was watching his father doing the ploughing ceremony. He's a child watching his father, and there was something

about that watching which was different. He was in an absorption, he was absorbed, but there was something different about it from all the absorptions he previously experienced.

And that difference was this enquiry. That difference was this sense of "what is happening," this "what is it," the question in the mind, just that wonderful childlike curiosity. And it was that that made him think, "Well, maybe this is it. Maybe I've got to investigate. I've not got to try and achieve happiness. I've got to investigate the way things are." And then with the insight there comes the liberation, and that's exactly what happened.

So once he was liberated he began to teach, and again the core word is this *sati*, right awareness. And when he talks about right awareness, he's talking about a way of looking at something, a way of investigating something. And those were the three characteristics that we did during the sitting meditation: it's seeing the impermanence, radical impermanence; it's seeing how we create suffering for ourselves; and it's seeing that whatever we experience does not constitute me—it's not a me, if only because it arises and passes away.

So the idea is that when we sit, we first of all have to draw the attention into a direct experience of what we're actually experiencing, which means that we have to come off thought. Remember, thought is a big barrier because words, concepts—they hold our history, and what it does is it makes us look at things from this prejudicial point of view of past experience. It stops us experiencing things as they are in this present moment, even at a very simple level. And I'll be reminding you of this when you go and eat.

Just eating a fruit, an apple or something—as soon as we see an apple, as soon as we taste it, we put it into a category. We measure it against all other apples that we've had. We compare it, and it's either a great apple or a useless apple or a tasteless apple. But we never actually taste this apple as apple, as itself. It's always in comparison with other apples.

And to do that, you've got to really let go of the mind, and you do that by putting your attention directly upon your taste. Because the taste doesn't lie. What I mean by that is that whatever your taste buds are giving you, that's what they're giving you. You don't have to layer it on top with some sort of comparison about past apples—it's not going to help the tasting of this present apple.

People who are wine tasters do that in a natural way because they've really got to taste it, and after they've tasted it they can compare. But not while they're tasting it—it would destroy the actual direct experience of the taste of wine. Not that I do it these days—it's only an example.

So when we understand that, there's this real effort in the meditation to draw the attention, to draw this intelligence that we have out of its confusion with the intellect. Most of us would, before we come to meditation, think of ourselves as being the intellect. "I think, therefore I am," that sort of thing. But actually, what the meditation primarily has to do is to bring us out of it.

And it does that by centering upon the body. And the body is giving you sensations and feelings, and they don't lie. They're not comparing themselves to anything. They're direct experience of sensations and feelings coming into that intelligence. And what we have to do is put this question mark in the mind.

And this question mark, this curiosity, is not coming from this place of "Oh, I know—yeah, everything is impermanent, I know that, so I'll see if I can see it. Of course I can see it. The breath rises and falls away." That's a problem, because the thing is, to do that is again coming from this conceptual level of transiency. It's not actually drawing us into the fact that this me is also arising and passing away.

The mind is capable of joining all these things together to give us this sense of continuity. We have that example in a film. I mean, we know—well, in the old films, we don't have DVDs, but in the old films when you had those little frames and they all shot off at different speeds—we know that they're all separate frames, but we don't see that. What you see is continuous action and continuous sound. That's the magic of the mind.

But unfortunately, it confuses us at this very deep level of thinking that I'm always existing. So I know my body's changed. I have pictures of me as a little baby, so I know it's changed, but I haven't changed. And my emotions are not the same as they were when I was three, but I haven't changed. My thoughts are not the same as they were even a few years ago, but I haven't changed. There's always something in me that says, "Well, I haven't changed."

So where's that coming from? Where's this sense of "I" coming from? This idea that, well, in the midst of all this change, it's quite obvious to me I'm not changing. I'm there all the time. Where is it? Where are you going to find this "I"? By investigating, by really looking into what we're actually experiencing, we're also undermining the way that we create out of these experiences this continuous sense of "I."

So that radical sense of impermanence is achieved through very closely observing everything which arises and recognizing that, in fact, even the process of cognition, the process of moment-to-moment consciousness, only arises with an object. You can't be conscious of a non-object. So if there's a non-object, where's consciousness gone? Now that's one thing that we very much associate with—our act of cognition, our act of consciousness.

So that's one way of achieving it. The other way, of course, where we see transience and it really hits deep within us, is when somebody dies—especially when somebody close to us dies and it really hits us hard. As the Buddha says, people don't really wake up until it hits you hard, until the doctor says you've only got six weeks to go. And then you hit this business of "Well, who am I?"

So this "Who am I?" is a very deep question which is actually one of the core questions of Korean Zen Buddhism. That's the koan for those of you who know the koan system of asking a question. That's their question. They don't do all that funny stuff about "What's the sound of one hand clapping?" They're just happy with saying "Who am I?" If the mind answers, you know it's deluded—that's the point. As soon as the mind tells you who you are, you know it can't be that. But you're really stuck.

So the actual grasp of impermanence is one way of breaking through the delusion of the world we create as something constant, something continuous, something substantial. And it is said that even that would take us to the end. Even just constantly being aware of impermanence would actually bring us to the end of our suffering and unsatisfactoriness.

In fact, there's a nice little tale which I'm sure some of you know about a monk who was so dull-minded that when, in those days—remember, they had to learn the teachings; there was nothing written; it's very hard to understand because the Buddha was illiterate—whenever he learnt a phrase of the Buddha's teaching, it would knock the one he'd just learnt out of his mind. So his brother said to him, "Look, you're just not going to get anywhere. You'd better go back and dig the fields."

And when the Buddha heard this, he went to see him and he said to him, "Look, don't worry about that. You stay a month." And he said, "Just take a piece of cloth, a clean cloth, and just keep wiping the sweat off your face and rubbing it. And as you do that, just keep looking at the cloth and saying '*Anicca*, impermanence, impermanence.'" Well, he was fully liberated just by doing that. Now it didn't work for me—I didn't last long enough.

But that's a little story that tells us that actually, just to see one of these characteristics and take it to its depth, to its real depth, you'll come across the others. By seeing *anicca*, by seeing impermanence, you see it's ridiculous to hold on to anything. And the Buddha says that's one of his greatest gifts: when we see *anicca*, when we see impermanence in its real deepest sense, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—in the world worth holding on to. That's the Buddha's word.

That's the liberation that comes with seeing *anicca*. And by not holding on to something, you release yourself from a lot of suffering. But also, by seeing *anicca*, by seeing this impermanence, we also grasp that it can't be substantial. If it can't be substantial, then it can't be me, it can't be mine, etc. So *anicca*, impermanence, is a gateway into the other two characteristics of existence.

The second one is concerned with the second noble truth. So the first noble truth is a very simple, straightforward statement: there is *dukkha*, there is suffering. And the second one is that the cause of it is desire. The psychological level is desire. And this is not all desire—we have to be careful here. The desire to meditate, the desire to be liberated, is not an unwholesome desire.

But the desire which is an expression of our deep delusion is something that we have to recognize. And that deep delusion is that we're seeking happiness in the sensual world. We think this world will deliver, so long as I've got the right partner, right job, right car, and so on. And once you've got it all set up, you think, "Well, that's it. I'm going to be happy forever." And then it all corrupts.

So it's a case of recognizing that whenever we're seeking happiness in the sensual world, it's going to cause us problems. And that's really what we were doing in the meditation when I asked you to observe your resistance to what you don't want—so that's a desire, that's the negative desire, not wanting—and your desire to hold on to and to develop what was pleasant.

So you're watching that process of wrong desire. And even that, if you see that to its very end, you catch this grasping nature. You grasp what it is that's actually grasping, and what we're actually seeing is this relationship we have with the world now.

This relationship we call the self. See, this is the problem with concepts. They coagulate something into an object which seems to be impervious. It seems to be permanent. Even with things like, you know, you say, "Well, this is a dog," and you have a picture of a dog and it has a sort of stillness about it, a substantiality about it. But we know that the dog is in a process of change. We know that something which is very long-lasting is

also in a process of change. We know that these mountains that we see are actually moving. I mean, I've tried to see that, but it's very difficult. But they say they're actually moving.

And it's grasping that that makes us realize: anytime we conceptualize the self, actually what we're doing is we are substantiating, making into something real, which is actually a fluid relationship. If you take, for instance, marriage, you say "marriage"—that points to a type of relationship as though it was something static, a marriage. But you know it's a moving animal. It moves, and it's constantly—this relationship, what the word "marriage" is describing, is a relationship that is in a continual state of change between two people. It describes a certain type of relationship.

This self is the relationship that the knowing has with the world it finds itself in. It thinks, "This is it." And as we meditate, what we're doing is we're relocating. We're relocating out of the body. So the body, a body self, which perhaps we experience most as little children, is something that we find very difficult. Something really big has to happen to get us back into a body self, like, you know, if you catch your finger in the door. See, for that one ecstatic moment there is only the body, and then you shoot out of it and "my finger is hurting." You've lost that identity with the body. So there is a body self.

The one that we find easy to lose ourselves into is, of course, the emotional self. Very quickly: "I am angry," "I am depressed," "I am happy." See, we're quite happy disappearing into an emotion, becoming an emotion. In meditation, we're pulling ourselves out. Instead of saying "I am depressed," we're saying "there is depression."

There's some separation, there's some dislocation from it. And that dislocation means that we must be relocating, so we must be finding another place within us to observe an emotion. So in the same way with thoughts and images. Normally speaking, we are lost completely in those. I mean, just consider: from the moment you wake up to the moment you fall asleep, does the mind ever stop? After all these years of my meditation...

So the mind is in a constant state of offering us thoughts, offering us images, etc. And when we are in this meditation and we see an image, so we're saying we can see imaging, imaging. Or we can—you have to have good concentration—but sometimes you can see a thought actually comes like a neon light just passing through your head. And even when we do that, you see, somehow we've relocated out of the thinking process.

So we've relocated three times, which we can do by an act of will. This is within the power of the self, the so-called self. We've come out of the body, we've come out of emotions, we've come out of thoughts and images, and we've made them objects to observe within us. And we've discovered this very peaceful place. See, when you're in that place, really ask yourself: what does it feel like up here? We're in the position of the observer—the objective observer, the objective feeler, the one who knows, the one who experiences. But there still is the sense of self. We are still aware of yourself being the observer, so you can't be that either, can you? There is another object, you see. So there is yet one more relocation to go, but that becomes completely out of our power. Because as soon as you try and get rid of a self, there has to be another self trying to get rid of it.

You're into a double bind. You can't go any further. So we get out of that double bind by attending entirely to what's happening, and the sense of self-awareness disappears. Now we do that quite naturally when we're very interested in something. It's very easy to lose your sense of self in a film or DVD, and you wake up afterwards and you know that you weren't aware of yourself. You were just watching the DVD.

So why is it that after all these DVDs that I've watched, I've not enlightened? Because I keep losing myself, see? And I lose a sense of time—that's another thing about self. As soon as you lose your sense of self, you lose a sense of time. And it's because we enter into those situations with the wrong intention. So we enter into a DVD saying to ourselves, "I'm going to enjoy this," you see? I'm seeking happiness in a DVD. I'm seeking happiness in ice cream, so I can lose myself in all these wonderful things. But it's actually reinforcing a sense of self. I'm saying, "Now I am happy when I watch a DVD. I'm happy when I have Costa coffee," see? And it's constantly reinforcing a sense of self around an experience.

Now what we're doing through meditation is letting go of all that as a place to find happiness, as a place where we can really seek peace, etc.

And so now, from this position of the observer, from this position of the feeler, the experiencer, we have a very different attitude. Our attitude is to really begin to see that everything that I'm experiencing—which is the world—the Buddha is quite clear about that. He says this world that I'm experiencing is completely made up by me. You have to consider that. You know, what comes into my eyes, what I see, is only what I see. It's not what you see. We can agree on certain things, but basically I experience the world different from you, and this is my world, and I'm creating it. And when I separate out of that world that I'm creating and it becomes an object of my knowing, see, then by putting my attention entirely on that and to see it very clearly as being something which is ephemeral, which has no substance, which is just being created all the time by my

mind, I'm beginning to... that investigation, that curiosity draws me into a concentration whereby I become absorbed in the process of investigation. That's a very different experience because that's liberating.

And in that absorption into the process, I lose that sense of self, lose a sense of time. And when I come out of it, if it's been a proper absorption, there's always a reflection. You'll always find a reflection coming on because—and this is where one of the mysteries... this knowing, this intelligence we have, this Buddha nature within us, doesn't know what it knows until it tells itself. And that's the purpose of the intellect.

So when the Buddha had this amazing experience under that tree, he then spent three nights thinking about it. Three nights he went through the dependent origination one way—those of you who know dependent origination, it's the psychology of the Buddha. He went through it the other way, and then the next night he did it up and down to make sure that he got it right. And then he went out and began to teach. So there's always this reflection about what it is you've actually seen.

And these moments of absorption, they don't have to be days long or something. They can be just snippets, they can be just little moments. Sometimes, especially in the beginning of our meditations, we're not even aware we've done it. But these are little turnings in consciousness, these are little turnings which eventually begin to accumulate into something that begins to penetrate deeper into our psyche by way of an attitude. And it's these little seeings that make us begin to question our attitudes, change our attitudes. And these attitudes then manifest in the way we speak, the way we act, and what we do with our lives. And there's your Eightfold Path. It manifests naturally as the insights come to us through the meditation. So that's what we're trying to do.

Now, in the attempt to do this, we have Mara. Mara is the evil one. Mara is all the hindrances that arise that drag us away from our meditation. And you can generally split it into two types: there are those which make us very excited, and there are those which send us into a black hole.

Now the ones that make us very excited are things like planning my holiday, lovely desires, sex, drugs, rock and roll—great stuff. And then there's all the aversion stuff: the hatred, the irritations, want to wring their necks, all that sort of stuff. Depressions and anxiety: can't do this, can't do that. Self-doubt.

Self-doubts you have to be very careful of because remember that doubt—sceptical doubt—is very undermining. What sceptical doubt does is it stops you from action. It arises from a lack of confidence, a lack of self-esteem. And if you think about that in your daily life, it can really be quite paralyzing. You know, if you have a relationship: is

this the right person, wrong person? Right way, the other person goes—you've missed it. This is the right job, right? The job goes, somebody else gets it. So this sceptical doubt is rooted in fear, it's rooted in aversion, self-aversion.

And when you have that sort of doubt, make sure that you let go of all the fabrications of the mind, all the thinking, and just go into the feel of it. Go into the feel of it. Real doubt—well, not real doubt, proper doubt—wonder, is of course the emotion of the philosopher. It's the philosopher within us that wants to know. And that wonder manifests as statements such as, "Well, I know the Buddha was enlightened, but really I don't know, you know, and maybe... who knows? It's not a cock and bull story. He just wanted to make a new religion and be famous. Who knows what he was doing?" So it's a case of wonder.

The Buddha wants us to investigate what he says because all he's offering us is a hypothesis. He's not saying that he can liberate us. He's saying, "Well, this is what I did, and if you want to try it, this is the way to do it."

So these hindrances which draw the mind away—the real thing that we have to grasp is that every time the mind manufactures a dream based on an emotional state, it is developing itself, whether you intended it to or not. Because as soon as the emotion arises, whether it's some craving, some irritation, some depression, whatever it is, as it comes out of the heart and touches the mind, it wants to express itself. And there's a moment there when we are unaware—and that's why it happens so quickly—when the old habit jumps in and you have a conditioned response. And before you know it, you're off into a dream world. And in that dream world, this emotion is developing itself.

That's why the mind is so pernicious. The more you think about how depressing the world is, the more depressed you become. It's very simple, isn't it? The more angry you get about how the world is and all this business of climate change and all that, the more angry you become. The more you allow the mind to run away on its thoughts, the more it is developing the emotional state, which is the attitude, the attitude that you're developing.

So in our meditation, as soon as you wake up from the thought sequence, the dream sequence, it's telling you what is in the heart. Is it anger? Is it fear? Is it frustration? Whatever it is. Is it boredom? See? As soon as you know that, you come into the body and you contact directly the feeling of your emotion. You bury yourself in it. You feel it.

I often come across people who've done lots of meditation who seem to have been instructed to see impermanence and to see the not-self, and somehow the teaching around *dukkha* has been missing. I've had enough responses from people to begin to perceive that somewhere along the line in the teaching of Vipassana, people are not being taught to actually feel their emotions and experience them. Because I get reports that suddenly something's come up like grief or depression or something, and the person didn't know what to do with it, you know. And then they go to therapy, which is fine—I mean, therapy is very helpful—but this is much cheaper, and all you've got to do...

All you've got to do is just sit with the stuff. That doesn't mean to say that if something comes up very violent, very... you know, where it's actually making you afraid, that you shouldn't seek help. Of course you should. But the healing, the psychological healing, the therapy of Vipassana is in the bearing with, is in the sufferance, the open-hearted sufferance of the emotional state that's arising. And it may be that as you turn inward and you feel your depression and you feel your fear, it becomes much greater. And that's because you're allowing it to manifest. Now you're in control of the process. All you have to do is stop meditating and have a cup of tea, which is the great panacea, as you know.

So it's a case of really, really grasping that. You see, every time—and this is not just in meditation, this is in your daily life. This is while you're having a cup of tea, while you're watching, you know, while you're talking—every time the mind wanders, it's developing a particular attitude. See? And when you know that, when you really grasp what you're doing, then, you know, you get more and more quick about bringing your mind back into the present moment.

And remember, everything you attend to is an act of intention. You know these billboards on the street? Why do they still have them? We've got all sorts of ways of advertising. Why do they still have these silly billboards all over the street while you're riding on the bus? Years ago there was a doubt as to whether they had any effect whatsoever. So I don't know if some of you might remember way back in the eighties—actually, if I remember rightly, early eighties—to prove... the people who had owned these billboards, to prove they worked, they introduced this perfume, and it was from Australia, and it had, you know, the Australian hat with the corks all around it. Does anybody remember that? And it had a special name, and everybody thought, "That's fantastic," and everybody wanted to know where it came from. It didn't exist.

What it proved is that every time you look at a billboard, it goes in. An act of attention is an act of intention. It has an effect. That's why you don't think so much about what you're going to buy when you walk into the shop. You already know. The billboards have told you. The adverts have told you.

So keeping that very clearly in mind: that whatever goes into the mind is conditioning it. And every time the mind goes off on its little dreams, it's reinforcing that conditioning. So there is this instruction from the Buddha to be very careful about what we put into the mind and to practice the virtue of restraint, you see, of not feeding that desire, not feeding into it.

So that's just as a general instruction about what you do when the mind wanders. You just come off it. You acknowledge exactly what the mind is doing—not in terms of its subject. You're not worried about what it's actually doing. You're worried about the attitudinal force behind it. Is it anger? Is it depression? Whatever it is. And you come back into the body, you feel it in the body, and stay with it as best you can, and recognise that that turbulence in the body is actually blowing itself out. See, that's the point. It's blowing itself out. There's a lot of it.

And the other side of the equation is this business of the black hole, you see, the pit, the dullness and lethargy. So again, that's a mental state. We don't tend to think of it like that. It's a mental state, and it's been developed in two ways. First of all, we like sleeping, especially that one on a Sunday morning where you wake up and you're on that little level, and you just about wake up to get a cup of tea, and then you come back down and you lie out and you look at the newspapers, and you... you know that one?

So that's this lovely subliminal state of sleep, which is very pleasant. Then you come and sit here, you see, and you are very still. Well, what does the mind want to do? It wants to get into this lovely subliminal state, and off it goes. So you have to resist that. You have to keep waking up. That's why I say these three basic things about lifting the spine, open the eyes a bit, let the light in, stand up, refuse—you see, just refuse to be annihilated. That's the basic... that's the commandment.

And the other side of it is that we've used sleep to escape things, you know. So when you feel a bit fed up, feel a bit depressed, well, you lay out on the couch, you know. If it gets too bad, this neon light comes on, doesn't it? Head for the bed, and that's it. Lay out for a few hours, you know. And you wake up and it's all been nicely suppressed. Sometimes it doesn't happen like that. You feel even worse. But for the most part, we use sleep to suppress. Remember, all suppression is aversion or fear—aversion or fear.

So that's why in daily life, if you have something come up and you know it's the wrong time to deal with it—you don't want to be at work telling everybody how depressed you are—you can put it to the side. Your attitude is, "I'll just put that to the side and deal with it later." That's not the same as suppression. Suppression has to be something negative. And that force is actually adding more turbulence to the system. Whereas just to say, "I can't handle it at the moment," and just to leave it to the side, is no danger, as long as you give it time later on in the day to actually contact it.

So that's the other side of the hindrances. There's only two actually, dullness and lethargy, which draws us into this topic of the black hole. So all we have to do is just keep making the effort to wake up, and if you can, to make those feelings the object that you are investigating.

One way is to just keep the attention moving up and down the body and just try to find out where you feel the heaviness. If it's in the head, if it's this dullness, you just wander about. The more you keep the attention moving, the more it stays awake. And you may surprise yourself to find that you can be as awake in the most dull states as you would be in one of the brightest of states, because you're drawing your energy back into the process of observing. The motivating force of that is this interest, is this wanting to know.

So just to bring it all together, we have to get ourselves into position in the meditation where we can observe. So we use the breath to establish that sense of the observer, the feeler, the knower. And once you're there, you bring in that quality. I forgot to say that to make the breath somewhere where you want to go, begin to experience it as something pleasant. It's actually relaxing. When we experience something pleasant, not something that we have to do, then you see you want to go there. You want to actually still yourself on the breath more. It becomes a pleasant place to be.

Then you raise this curiosity, and you find this observation post that's still. I think it was reviewed actually in what's that newspaper from America? The Inquiring Mind, do you know it? Yes, it's very good. There's a review there by Joseph Goldstein of The Heart of Buddhist Meditation by Nyanaponika, and it still is the classic book on meditation if you want one that's easily readable.

You find yourself in this position of the observer, and if you want you can consciously raise the intention to observe impermanence, or to be more aware of the process of wanting and not wanting, or to investigate the sense of not me, not mine. The noting is very good at that because as soon as you note something, there has got to be an object there.

Within that process, we get dragged away. So we have to be very clear that every time we're dragged away on something, we know what to do, and we re-establish the process by going back to the breath. That's it.

Remember that if the whole of your regular two-hour morning meditation is this continuously coming back into the present, coming back, coming back, that's the practice. That's not bad meditation. If you say to yourself in the meditation, if you sit there and say to yourself "I'm a little bit fed up with this, I think I'll just relax," that's bad. You ought to feel really guilty. If you sit there and say "I'm going to do a bit past the meditation" and you think "Oh no, what am I going to do this evening? I'll just think about this," that's really bad. You should really feel deeply guilty.

But if the whole of meditation is wandering, thinking, planning, coming back, coming back gently, coming back, make a resolution, stay here, coming back, that's it, that's the practice. You congratulate yourself after a practice like that. If you sat there all day long... well, you've done this before, I'm sure. That's good practice. That's good practice. That's what it's about. It's about waking up.

But if you're down there and you think... then you should really, really feel very bad about it. You've got a confession.

So that's it in a nutshell. What we could do now is some walking meditation, and with those people who are helping out, would they like to go over and help? Then we'll come and do a sit at one o'clock. I've left it a bit late now. Is that alright? Is that alright Paul? One o'clock and we'll do a short sit before we take our meal at half past one. Then we come back about... what would it be? Two? Half past one, half past two is it? You need a bit more than an hour, do you? About a quarter to three. I prefer to work in the morning because after lunch it's good enough for doing loving kindness, just about.

So yes please, I'd like to do some walking meditation. If there's any questions about the practice, just stay behind and ask me them. It's always unique. There's always something. Yes, because I find I learn as I go along a little bit. And the jokes are wonderful. Don't forget the jokes.

CHAPTER 144

The Practice and Pitfalls of Mettā: Developing Universal Goodwill

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 32 min

In this talk on mettā (loving-kindness) practice, Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how cultivating goodwill serves as both a complement to vipassanā meditation and a foundation for ethical conduct. He clarifies the role of wholesome intention in Buddhist psychology, distinguishing beneficial desires from those rooted in selfishness that lead to suffering.

The talk addresses common misconceptions about mettā, differentiating it from romantic love, attachment, and mere emotional sentiment. Using vivid examples, including the story of two monks and their different responses to animal suffering, Bhante demonstrates how mettā prevents the equanimity of vipassanā from corrupting into indifference. He emphasizes that wisdom without heart-engagement remains incomplete.

Practical instruction covers the traditional four brahmavihāras (divine abodes): mettā, karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy), and upekkhā (equanimity). The systematic approach begins with benefactors and extends through dear friends, neutral persons, and eventually all beings universally. Bhante warns against common pitfalls: judging progress by emotional feelings, practicing for personal gratification, and the trap of becoming a 'do-gooder.' He explains how to work skillfully with the five hindrances that arise during mettā practice, parking them gently rather than suppressing them with aversion.

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

As I say, this is just really covering a few major points around this practice of *metta*.

The first thing is to understand the power of intention and the role of intention in the Buddhist teachings, because all the conditionings that we have in the mind begin with an intention. If you think of anything that human beings have done, it always starts with some intention, whether it's the intention to fly or how to fry an egg. It turns up in the mind as an intention and then the mind works on it and then it begins to manifest. It manifests as some language or some action and so on.

Our intention here is basically to develop goodwill. And so long as that remains our main intention, it's actually beginning to condition us. Some of you will know that desire, the Buddha said that desire was the cause of suffering. The English word is a bit

foxing because the original Pāli word really refers to those desires that are based on a self, on selfish, on pride, on thinking only of oneself, on seeking happiness in the world. So it's actually a desire based on wrong understanding.

But this word desire also translates another word which can mean both a wholesome desire and an unwholesome one. So here the desire to develop goodwill is considered beneficial. So you've got to be careful with this intention and desire.

When an idea comes into the head laced with desire, so like you might just think tea, a cup of tea, it comes up with a desire, nothing happens at that stage, nothing has been conditioned, there's no karma, there's nothing at all. But as soon as that thought is empowered and becomes a train of thoughts or becomes a train of speech or an action, then you're producing something in the world. And that's what we mean by *kamma*.

So long as we're saying, may all beings be happy, and we're actually saying it, and we're meaning it, then it's actually producing something within ourselves, something within our minds. And it will affect the way we speak, the way we relate to people and so on. So that's how it works. We're starting the basic psychology of conditioning ourselves, conditioning the heart and mind to think goodwill. That's it.

For those of you who practice *vipassanā*, it's important because *vipassanā* tends to create a very objective stance within us. And it's that equanimity that we need in order to investigate. But equanimity can very easily corrupt into indifference.

I like to tell my usual story, especially for those who haven't heard it, about the time I was in a particular monastery and there was a cat. I was with a monk, and there was a cat, and he'd obviously by now killed the mouse, but he was the sort of cat that definitely didn't need a mouse. It was definitely overweight. So I said, didn't you stop that? And the monk replied, no, it was cat karma and mouse karma. So I said, well, that's fine, I didn't say anything.

Anyway, I was at another monastery, this completely different time, I can't remember the sequence of how long it was, but I was sitting with a group of monks, and a cat jumped out and caught this bird. And this monk, as quick as a flash, came up and just gave this cat one hell of a bat, and then picked up the bird and lifted it and realised it had been killed, and just lifted it very beautifully by the wings into the air and chanted *anicca vata saṅkhārā*, all compounded things arise and pass away.

Of course the difference between, and that cat also didn't need a bird, and of course the difference was that the second monk recognized that his awareness was part of their karma also.

Now that engagement doesn't take place unless you've got *metta*. No matter how wise you are in terms of your understanding of the Dharma, it won't actually move, engage wise, unless there's some movement in the heart as an attitude. Now, some traditions, like the Zen, will say, of course, that with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. And I believe that's true. But I think it's good to just move it along a bit. That's basically what *metta* is doing. So it's an antidote really to indifference that can arise with *vipassanā*.

Just as an aside, a woman came to me and said that whenever she sat her partner would complain that he felt she was cold and non-communicative after sitting. So I said, so what do you do at the end of a sit? Well, just get up. So I said, well, you've got to do *metta*, and do it to your partner too, so that you re-engage. She never came back, so I presume everything's all right. Didn't end in divorce, did it?

So this re-engagement through *metta*, through attitude, begins to express itself in our eightfold path into right speech, right action, and then right livelihood. So it's something that saturates our lives eventually.

The next thing is not to confuse it with other forms of love, because we use the word love for everything. You know, you love ice cream, for heaven's sake. It's not to be confused with, obviously with erotic love, because that's very specific. You tend to only have erotic feelings towards particular people. Whereas the love we're doing is universal. And it's also not really to do with touching the essential nature of humankind. It's only really working with physical attributes.

Same with romance. That is also very particular. And it's not to be confused with *metta*. Romance is a whole set of different emotions and a type of relationship which is frankly exclusive. You can't be, it'd exhaust you if you were romantically, neurotically in love with every human being you came across. You'd be dead very quickly.

But it's also not to be confused with attachment. Now, you've got to be careful here because sometimes we think we can fall into a rather negative thing about attachment, but attachments are natural so long as we have a self. You can't, so long as the self is there, there's going to be an attachment. It's just knowing the attachment and knowing how it manifests.

So take the Buddha loves the image of a mother. For him it's the mother which is one way of expressing this *metta*. Now, it's quite natural for a mother to be attached to the child, and seemingly necessary psychologically for the child to be attached to the mother. It's part of the growth of that child's understanding of relationships.

And that attachment will manifest with being overly guarding of the child, demanding the child do what they want to do, rather than listening to the child. So in other words, the attachment always is self-centered. Which doesn't mean the mother doesn't love the child, it's just got this little kink in it. And it's up to the mother to recognise where that's manifesting, that's all. And then there's the antidote to doing the opposite. But if you're not aware of that, then the mother thinks they're doing good, but it actually can be hurting the child in some way.

So, we mustn't look upon that as evil. Some people get, I think, a bit confused with that. They think it's evil, but it's not. It's just unwholesome. It causes suffering, but it's not. The intent is not evil. This is the point.

So our love, this *metta*, this universal love is going beyond that sort of love that manifests with specific attachments that we have, specific relationships rather that we have, be they one of partners, marriage, sons, daughters, mother, whatever. Close relationships will always have that degree of attachment to them and it's just knowing how the attachment manifests that liberates us from it.

Metta is, you could, you know what is it? Well it's basically all the virtues that you would ask of a good friend: kindness, certain empathy, certain caring, also to be able to share your joys, to help you when you need a bit of help. It's just a good friend, and it's very close to the word *mitra*, which means friend. So that's the sort of attitude that we're developing.

But of course it goes beyond that into love your enemy. So don't confuse love your enemy with some sort of emotional delight every time you see them. Here, here just means not to do them any harm. That's a good place to start if you hate somebody. You determine at least you won't do them any harm.

And it also extends to the way we treat objects. You know, just gently closing the door. Just the way we eat, not to be stabbing the plate. Consider the pain of the plate as you stab it with forks and cut into it with your knife. And it's that sort of gentility with objects. Just, you know, just think how you close the fridge door. Catch yourself. There's no kindness towards the fridge and it does us such good service.

So it's a case of extending that even to our actions and the way we treat objects. When I began with Zen Buddhism, we had to treat all our crockery and stuff as it was all mingvas. That's what they taught us. And of course it did bring, it made very clear to me anyway, how I was bashing objects about. And of course that mirrors a certain hardness, you might say.

So if we can be gentle even with the simplest things of life, it's like taking care of your pennies, you know, the big ones take care of themselves. So when you're eating, I'll remind you of this, just take your time and just see it as a process of nourishing oneself, and take care of the plates.

Metta is one of the main teachings of the Buddha, which, as I say, balances the process of insight. And the reason is that it's our basic relationship to the world. So by world we mean not only other people, other beings, but as we say, even objects, even plants and everything is to be treated in a gentle way. And that's how you can call it our default position. That's what we can return to with ease. And from there, these other two qualities, compassion and sympathetic joy, arise naturally.

So if you have a certain *metta*-love for somebody, obviously if they fall ill or something, the idea of wanting to help them just arises naturally. You don't have to work at it, shall I help or not? It's just there, you want to do it. And if a friend is successful in something, one rejoices in their success, in their happiness. And so *metta* is that default position. So that's why the Buddha puts a lot of stress to it.

These qualities, and we need to add a fourth one called equanimity, which we'll come to in a minute, are considered to be illimitables, by which we mean that there are a limitable number of beings, so there's no way you can stop at some point and say, well, I've done enough. And also, in terms of our development within ourselves, it's indefinite. Developing love is a bit like counting. No matter how big your number is, you can always add one. So it's not a case of thinking that you ever come to an end of developing *metta*. It just grows and grows and grows, until you become a great charismatic leader, and then thousands will follow you. I'm trying to develop that. Must try harder.

They're also called the *Brahma-Vihāras*, so the *vihāra* dwelling place of the highest gods. This is the most beautiful states that we can create within the mind. So they're the most beautiful states that we can create within ourselves, these particular states. And so the Buddha equates them to the most beautiful of places, the bountiful heart and the beautiful mind.

Equanimity is trying to come from a place of no judgment. It's like you're completely opening up to the person as they are and not allowing judgment to distort your ability to receive what the person has to offer, even if it's negative stuff. So that equanimity is based upon a certain calmness and a certain understanding that if you want to engage with people, then first of all you have to be completely open to them.

And that's often a fearful thing for us because we think we're going to be overtaken or somehow controlled if we do that. But in a sense you can't give a proper response unless you've listened and felt what the other person has to give you.

When we're listening, for instance, to somebody, if you catch these politicians, I don't know about you, but you can hear yourself saying, a lot of rubbish, and they're lying as usual. And it's a case of that you come from these set positions which we never question. And we're doing it all the time because the judgmental mind is always with us.

But it's recognizing that it's there, and then just putting it to the side, and just opening up, and letting the other person express themselves into your mind and heart, and not feeling that that's a sort of takeover bit. And to do that, you have to have this position of equanimity. And because you're equanimous, although you're feeling and understanding, it's not actually entering into you, because your base is equanimity, you're not reacting, you're not saying yes, yes, yes or no, no, no.

And because of that little gap which equanimity creates, you're able to respond rather than react, that's all. So whenever you're coming from a position, you're necessarily reacting. But if you take no position, if you're completely open, then there's a much better way of understanding what the person is saying, what the person is trying to communicate. And this allows for genuine communication, which again is part of *metta*.

So equanimity, and that's what we'll be practicing when I'm finally done, just to develop this very open, spacious awareness.

The practice is basically the use of a mantra, a verse or sentences which are meaningful to us. Now the four classic ones, the four usual ones that are used are may you be safe. Everybody wants to be safe. They want to be safe from dangers outside themselves, but dangers from within ourselves. Dangers, safe from economic crises for a start. So it's a case of recognizing that safety is really the basic platform for human existence. Everybody wants to be safe. When we're safe, then we feel we can, we're free to do. So, offering people safety, may you be safe.

The next thing is physical health. Everybody wants to be healthy. So may you be well.

The next one is happy. Everybody wants to be happy, free of distress.

And the final one is to have an ease of living, which is very difficult in our times today. But that's really something which allows us to have a deep sense of happiness if we have ease of living, in whichever way you want to describe that. It could be economic ease, it could be social ease, it could be relationship ease. It's just that the ease of living allows us to live in harmony.

So it's partly to do with an attitude of contentment, which is more about wanting what you get rather than always trying to get what you want. And it's being content to what one has. It doesn't stop one also having aspirations.

So to be contented and to live in harmony, even when the person you're trying to be harmonious with is not particularly in tune with you, the point is that you're always trying to find this nice, this peaceful, this ease, even with people whom you don't get on with.

So those are your four blessings. And you have to take your time with them because they have to be meaningful in terms of their deliberate well-wishings. They're not like when you pass people and you say, how are you doing? I'm doing all right. Cheers, okay. Which is just a social pleasantry.

When I started doing this sort of practice, I went to work one morning and I actually said to a colleague who was coming down the corridor. I said, how are you? And I obviously said it in a way that made him think, well, this guy's really interested. So he kept me for ten minutes telling me how he was. And I got late for my class. So then I thought, no, this is not the time to really ask people how they are. So there's nothing wrong with pleasantries. It's just that what we're doing here is actually really meaning it, not just the passing hello.

Also, when we're doing it, we're doing it for the benefit of the other. Of course, we do turn it towards ourselves.

But when you say may so-and-so be happy, may so-and-so be well, may so-and-so be safe, well and happy, when you're saying that, you are meaning for them to be happy, for them to be safe. It's not like a throwaway line.

So if you can imagine the person in your mind — it doesn't have to be a strong visualisation — and re-establish some relationship with that person, and you're offering them that goodwill. Now whether it touches them or not over space and time, well maybe — some people say it does — but in terms of our practice, that's not relevant, because what we're doing is just developing the inner heart. That's what we're doing. So that when we meet the person, hopefully they'll see it, they'll feel it. I'll come to that other stuff a bit later on.

So let me just go through very quickly, because we'll do it as a practice at the end of the evening. We start with the benefactor. And over the first at least half day, try and work with — it could be just one benefactor. You don't have to seek hundreds of thousands of them. But you could actually just go through your life and realise how many people have helped you in your life. And every time you think of somebody, offer them these blessings.

It's good to start with somebody whom you don't have any problems with, if you can find somebody. It just helps to start at an easy base. And then you can extend it. An uncomplicated relationship. Somebody who, when you think of them, naturally warms the heart.

Now having said that, this *metta* practice is working even when you have no feelings in the heart, even when your heart, your emotional life, is dull, is dead, is not responding. It might be depressed, it might even be bored — it doesn't matter. You keep, as it were, meaning these phrases, and eventually the heart will begin to resonate with those phrases.

Now it doesn't mean to say that just because we're practising metta, we won't be suffering all the hindrances. They will definitely come up. So there'll be wandering mind. Your mind will start planning. It'll be thinking about past things, future things. It'll be suddenly you're saying "may you be safe, may you be well," and you're off, you're strangling somebody. Then you know there's aversion. Then you suddenly fall asleep and you're walking around like a zombie. And then you can't handle it anymore because you're so restless and your mind's all over the place. And then you start having doubts: "Well this is no good for me. I can't be bothered doing this. It's a waste of time." So all these hindrances, Māra, the evil one, will definitely arise.

But what we do with these is unlike in vipassanā where we actually work with them — here we just park them. Now make a distinction here between pushing something away with aversion or fear, which is suppressing, which is not doing us any good, and just saying "I'll handle you another time." You're just gently parking them and then you bring your attention back to what you're doing. And then you find that they're all waiting for you next weekend!

So it's not that they go away, but you're not adding any aggression into the system. So you're very kind. You say, "Now that's a bit of hate. I see you there. I just, you hang on there for a minute. We'll deal with you afterwards," and you keep back and practise metta.

Now let me give you an image which I've got from Assagioli — some of you may know the Italian therapist. He uses it in a different sense, but it's a good image. So if you think of the mind like an egg, the bottom part is all nicely fully developed. So that's our usual stuff, the stuff that we've developed both negative and positive. But the top bit, the top part of the egg slopes away and needs to be blown out a bit. So what we're doing is we are developing the beautiful side of the mind.

But remember that in so doing, we're not treating with the underneath of the egg. That, as it were, remains untreated. But at least the mind on top of this swamp is actually growing and becoming beautiful. And it's a strengthening thing. So that when you come to practise vipassanā, those of you who've done it, you can actually imbue your investigation with kindness. You can actually give it a flavour of kindness as things come up inside you.

But for the purpose of this course we're just going to park the stuff. Deal with it another time. Now sometimes of course it does come up and you can't get rid of it. It's just full in your face. In which case, if you haven't done vipassanā then come and tell me and I'll give you a few hints before you run away. If you do, then do vipassanā on it. Just sit with it in vipassanā and wait for it to pass, wait for it to pass. And as soon as it begins to pass, just park it and start again. And in that way, on a longer retreat, you can actually develop this metta with vipassanā. And they both actually are very supportive to each other, very supportive.

So we begin with the benefactor and then usually we move to a dear friend. Again, not too complicated a relationship. And then to a neutral person. You can bring in, of course, family. You can bring in pets — dogs and cats deserve a bit of love. And then finally, at some point tomorrow, when you're doing the benefactor also guide that loving-kindness towards yourself.

So when we remember a benefactor we remember the good things they did for us. So we begin by thinking about the good things we've done in our lives. And as you remember one thing that you've done, which may be just to open the door for somebody — doesn't have to be some huge heroic act — as you remember that then you offer yourself the blessing.

So we're building up a very positive image of ourselves in connection with the benefactor. And then we begin to introduce into our practice these other people: those who are near and dear, dear friends, neutral people, people whom we see probably every day almost on the way to work, neighbours whom we see but we don't know. And we begin to offer the same goodwill towards those people.

Space outwards in a more general way — and we'll go through that this evening — to ourselves, to our neighbours (you can relocate, you don't have to do neighbours around here), and then to the country, to all people in Europe, all people on earth, and all beings in all directions. So eventually the heart is just opening out to develop an attitude. So this is what metta is.

You're developing an attitude of goodwill no matter who stands in front of you. That's the point. So whatever being stands in front of you, there's an immediate goodhearted relationship set up from your side toward them. And that's what we mean by universal.

And that's sometimes you get this non-attachment. You'll find the word "detached" used, which tends to be misunderstood. Other people are using the word "non-attachment." But all that means is that your goodwill is not dependent on whether you like the person or not. That's all. And then it becomes universal.

I think that's enough of that. Any immediate questions about that?

"I'm just curious that you don't include the difficult person as a stage."

I will do. In a sense, that comes with the forgiving as well, the forgiveness that we do on the third day.

"When you said about... do you mean specifically towards the benefactor? You don't mean reflecting on your good deeds generally, you just mean towards the benefactor?"

No, what I'm suggesting is that I might think of somebody who's done me good. So I then offer that person my goodwill. And then I might think of something that I've done good. And then I say, "May I be well, may I be happy." So there's a connection there.

And as I say, don't make the mistake of judging your metta by the emotional value that arises. That can be a big mistake. And the other big mistake is that once you start feeling beautiful within yourself, you start doing it for that reason. So you do your metta in order to feel good. So then you become a do-gooder, which is a terrible thing. So be careful of that.

Take it more — it's a gift. So suddenly you're landed with this very beautiful state within your heart, and it's very lovely and peaceful. So receive that as a gift, but don't do it for that reason. Do it in order to develop a good attitude.

CHAPTER 145

How Vipassanā Relates to Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 57 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the essential question of how vipassanā meditation relates to everyday life. He begins by examining why the Buddha didn't return to lay life after awakening, noting that the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) was actually given to laypeople, demonstrating that liberation is possible for householders.*
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> *The talk explores how the three characteristics of existence—anicca (impermanence), dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), and anattā (not-self)—can be directly applied to daily situations. Bhante explains how mindfulness transforms ordinary activities like eating, working, and relating to others into opportunities for spiritual development. He emphasizes that there should be no separation between formal sitting practice and daily life.*
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> *Particular attention is given to working with difficult emotions and challenging relationships, showing how the 'inside and outside' awareness mentioned in the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse applies to both our internal states and others' emotions. The teaching concludes with practical guidance on maintaining mindfulness saturated with mettā (goodwill) throughout all postures and activities, as described in the Karaṇīyamettā Sutta.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa three times — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Just roving around the topic of meditation, daily life, practice and all that, I suppose one interesting question we might ask is: why didn't the Buddha return to lay life once he'd become fully self-realised? Good question, isn't it?

Well, I think practically he'd become used to the wandering life, and the first people he taught were his old companions who were also wandering ascetics. They very quickly became members of his order, and very shortly after that people wanted to follow him, become his disciples. The first ordination, as it's called, was a simple word: *ehi*, come. So when somebody said they'd like to follow his teachings, be with him, join his *sangha*, his community, he just said, *ehi*, come along.

When the *sangha* was established, then the second type of ordination was established, where people took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *sangha*, which has now become the lay way of determining your commitment to the Dhamma. And then by around about twenty years — for twenty years, the people who joined were of high calibre. Then it began to slide down the slippery slope. The ordination then be-

came quite a long one, maybe half an hour or so, in which certain questions had to be asked, such as: Are you still in government employ? Are you in debt? Are you a man? That was a very interesting one. Are you a human being? So various sorts of people tried to join the order.

One of the reasons, just as a little side note, was that the great court physician would treat the Buddha's monks free of charge. And of course, occasionally people would join the order in order to be treated without charge. So one of the questions is: Are you sick? And the rule is you can't ordain somebody who has certain illnesses. I remember a sorry case that happened with somebody with AIDS who wanted to join the order — they weren't ready.

Very quickly, he informed this particular grouping early on. Very shortly after his realisation he did go home and hugged his mother — or his stepmother — and met all his family, his extended family. And of course that was the moment when his wife said to their child, Rahula, "Go and ask your father for your inheritance." So obviously there's some feeling that the Buddha's not going to come back to lay life, and she wants him to make him the heir to his grandfather's fortunes. But the Buddha of course ordains him — that was his inheritance, the Dhamma.

There are two charming discourses. One when he's given when he's about twelve maybe, and the Buddha's giving him all sorts of reasons why he shouldn't tell fibs. It's a lovely little one. And then later on when he's eighteen, and he's obviously struggling with perhaps leaving the monastic life. And eventually he also becomes fully realised.

So apart from perhaps that practical reason, it would seem that generally speaking, once one moves towards end game, there's really nothing there to draw one back into lay life. And that's just one of those things that happens, I suppose.

But on the other hand, there are lay people who become fully self-realised. One that I remember is a cobbler — an ordinary old cobbler becomes fully self-realised. So why is it that there weren't more people who were self-realised who were lay people? And I think the reason is the ambience that you're working in. The Buddha talks about lay life being dusty. That's the word he uses.

If we just look at our society, you can see that most people just aren't on the spiritual wavelength. So when you work with people like that, there's always a drag. They're not supporting you. It's like there's a constant negativity towards what you're trying to do. I mean, consider being in somewhere like Saudi Arabia or one of the virtually all Muslim countries, and you yourself want to do the five times a day prayer and all that — well,

you wouldn't be considered silly or stupid. Right there in the middle of the office they'd all join in probably. And that's what we lack in today's society: this support from other people in our ordinary lives.

I'm always at pains to say to people that the jewel of the collection, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, which is the fullest discourse on how to become liberated — the actual techniques, what we are practising now, not in its detail but in its general format — was given to the people of Kamasadhamma. They were a tribe you could call them, I suppose, or a clan or whatever called the Kurus, and they lived in what now you would recognise as around about Delhi. He travelled quite a bit — he was all over the place on that Gangetic plain — and he'd been up there and given them some teachings. When he returned on this occasion, he was taken by the fact that they were actually doing what he suggested and were very mindful, and there was no gossip, no argumentation, all that sort of stuff. So he delivered to them this *ekāyana magga*, this one way path leading to liberation, which we now call the *Vipassanā*-only path — to them, the lay people. Not addressed to the monks or anything.

So he himself had no doubt that a lay person could become liberated. He wouldn't have done that otherwise. He'd have given some general discussion, which he would normally start with for people who hadn't met him, about good and bad, *kamma*, the gods, living the good life. And only when he felt that they were ready for it, he'd hit them with the Four Noble Truths. He didn't start with that.

So here he's got an orderly people. I mean, we're talking about pre-industrial societies, farmers living communally with a committee ruling, a pastoral society. Although there was a great movement at that time towards cities, monarchical rule — the politics were changing. And there was a rise also of the merchant class, which hadn't existed before. So he lived in times which were changing, not as viciously as ours, but definitely changing.

And it was felt by a lot of people, I think, that dislocation when you get times of change. That was one thing that fuelled the amount of men who went into the forests and lived a solitary life. There weren't that many women, partly because of the sexism, of course, and partly because of the danger as well.

So I think there are practical reasons why he didn't want to return, but I think that also there are spiritual reasons — that at that level nothing attracts, nothing attracts back into that form.

But he gave very clear pointers as to how we can turn the lay life into a spiritual life. And in my e-reminders, which I think all of you get and read diligently, I'm going through a day in the life and just delineating how it's possible to turn everything into a spiritual practice. So you're doing the same thing — you're still getting up, you're still dressing, you're still brushing your teeth. It's not like you're doing anything different, but somehow the attitude with which you do it is what changes, and that's what turns it into spiritual practice.

So even here now, I keep stressing this business of eating. So before, we're just eating. Either our minds are reading the newspaper, or we're just gobbling, or we're overeating. But suddenly, eating becomes a real spiritual practice in itself, both by way of developing a certain attitude towards food — seeing it as medicine, seeing it as nourishment, and yet not denying the pleasure. This is the point: not denying the pleasure. There is pleasure, that's fine, but not doing it for that reason, not doing it for comfort's sake.

And the important thing to remember is that the psychology of that runs through everything. It's not just with eating. I mean, we're talking about dependent origination. We're talking about the distinction between the point of *vedanā* and the point of *taṇhā*. *Vedanā* is the point where we experience sensations, feelings in the body, as pleasant or unpleasant. That's a given. That's what the psycho-physical organism does. It experiences things and gives us feelings. But then it's this other business, this *taṇhā*, which we've talked about this morning.

So that psychology can be translated to all areas of pleasures and joys in our lives. See, this is the great thing about the spiritual life: nothing is ever destroyed. The only thing the Buddha said was destroyed was greed, hatred and delusion. So everything is handed back, purified of its kinks.

Because of his style of talking about his Dhamma in a more negative sense — really to undermine concepts about the self and rebirth and all that — he tended to favour the negative approach. So saying that there is — we quote it in the morning — "there is a not-born." What does that mean? There is a not-born — what is it? So of course he won't go that far. Well, he does actually. But that's his preferred method.

So of course people would say, "Well, you're an annihilationist, you're a nihilist. There's not this, not that, so there's nothing. Therefore you're a nihilist." So he would constantly say no. He said no, the only thing that's annihilated is greed, hatred and delusion. And delusion — by delusion, fundamentally he means this idea, feeling, notion of a self.

So when we're looking at pleasure, we're not trying to get rid of pleasure, we're trying to take something out of our relationship with pleasure, trying to reform that relationship. And it's the same with suffering. It's not as though we can ever get rid of physical suffering — it's just part and parcel of the body's way of being in the world, pain. But we can do something about our relationship to it. Same with relationships. We have difficult relationships — you can't do anything about the personality clash, but you can find a way of being with it where it's not so painful, or take the pain out, just accept the person as they are. And that process we call the process of liberation. That's what we're doing: process of liberation.

So when we go back and we start with actually how do we then bring it into daily life — how does the practice that we do in sitting meditation relate to our daily practice — then that's really what our task is. And if we can't relate it, if there's a distinction, if there's a hair's breadth of separation between the practice of meditation and the rest of our lives, we've lost it. Because the Buddha's teaching is centred upon a type of being in the world that we call mindfulness. So you're here all the time, you're bringing yourself back into the present moment all the time.

And the big trick of that is this business of relaxing. Can't overstress that, really. And this relaxing into the present moment — stopping — just allows you to recognise what's there, what's actually driving you at this present time, and allowing it to become very conscious. And you can let go of things that have been accumulated. And that way, you not only reserve your energy, you actually take control of your life.

For instance, when sometimes one is late for work, you find yourself late for work, so there's this anxiety about being late for work — you missed the bus or something. And you can see that anxiety building up inside you. And you can't stop it. This is the point. You say to yourself, "Oh, I'm getting anxious. I won't be anxious. I'll just get there and start doing the work." But to do that is to deny your anxiety. You're up against what's actually happening in your body.

So you have to recognise: all this is an old conditioning of getting anxious about being late. If you're going to be late, you're going to be late. What's the point of being anxious? You have to argue yourself out of it, get a different perspective on it. You can't do anything about the feeling of anxiety because that's coming from a different conditioning, that's happening. But at least one can stop stoking it. That's the point: one can stop stoking it.

You do it by turning it into an object. There's your meditation right there, sitting on the bus or running for the train or driving like mad. Right there you're right there with the feeling of anxiety — you know it's there. That's enough. You're doing your meditation, and your attention is on either that, if you're sitting in a bus, or if you're driving of course you're attending to the traffic.

So by making that your object and relaxing — that takes a relaxation. You have to relax into the present moment. You have to be with it. So this practice of relaxing when you begin your meditation, of actually stopping and being in touch with your breath and relaxing into the present moment — here it's easier because you're feeling pleasant neutral feelings, at least it's good to see them as pleasant, neutrally pleasant. And you're developing the attitude of just sinking, of just collapsing, you might say, just stopping in the present moment and just accepting what's there.

Normally speaking, we get this anxiety up, we get this rush up, we get to work and we keep going. It's like it hasn't clicked that we've arrived. Even if we arrived early actually, we're still rushing, we're still moving at this tremendous pace that we've set ourselves, on the perception that we're going to be late.

Then when you're here, now we've got beyond the stage of just watching the breath and now you're open to these negative states within you. So let's say you're feeling a bit depressed, a bit anxious and all that sort of stuff, and you're just sitting with the feeling. Now it's very interesting because in the discourse on how to establish mindfulness, the Buddha always talks about the inside and the outside, the inside and the outside. And often this outside is commented upon as being aware of other people's states.

So you get to work and somebody else is anxious. I mean, you're okay, you're calm — it's worse if you're anxious — but they're anxious too. So they start putting this stress on you. So normal people's reaction is to respond with stress themselves. I remember this phone call on a mobile in a train, and this woman — her voice is rising and rising and rising, and then there's suddenly this wonderful statement at the end: "I'm stressed out!" I wanted to go over and say, "Look, have a cup of tea or something, relax." There was a total desperation in it. I thought, "Oh God, she's in for a little breakdown or something."

Now, here we are sitting with these negative emotions. What are we doing? We're attending to them. We're attending to them, like a nurse attends. We're attending to them. We know they're there. We're neither pushing them away, nor are we indulging them. So somebody comes to us with stress — that's what you do. You attend to their stress. There's no need for you to get stressed because of their stress. What's the point of that?

So as somebody approaches you with stress or with anger or with their depression, you attend to it. Your attention is on them. And by doing that, by placing your interest into their attention, you undermine old habits of reacting the way you used to react before. Old reactions. You're not responding. You're, as it were, undermining that process.

The mind's very quick, isn't it? It'll flip very quickly. Things happen just in a second. You might be calm for a moment with somebody who's angry — next minute you've lost it, you've got yourself angry. So you've got to keep that real sharp awareness, and in order to do that it has to be backed with the right attitude. And if we haven't really grasped the right attitude, then it's very difficult to stop that reaction, even though we might be good-willed.

So we know that when we react to somebody who is in a negative state, it simply compounds the whole situation.

The Buddha's way of putting it is that hatred is not overcome with hatred, but anxiety is not overcome with anxiety either, and depression is definitely not overcome by becoming depressed. It doesn't help a person who's depressed if you become depressed —then you're both depressed. Isn't that lovely?

I can never remember the name of this comedian from around the Second World War time. There's this scene in black and white on the old TV that I always remember. He's about to jump off a London bridge, and a policeman sees this and goes up to him and says, "Excuse me, sir, I do believe you are trying to..." And there's this conversation about why he's jumping off the bridge, and the policeman gets all caught up, saying all this despairing stuff about why life is hopeless. Of course, the sketch ends with both of them jumping off. That was brilliant, wasn't it? And that's what happens when you get caught up in somebody else's emotional state.

So in our relationships, both in our more intimate personal relationships and in work situations, it's just maintaining that attitude of knowing that if one reacts in a negative way to somebody else's negativity, then you both jump off the bridge. It's as simple as that.

When that's been saturated, when that's really saturated your being, then you've established a different attitude. That doesn't mean to say that the old conditionings aren't going to be there. So if somebody comes to you in anger, you can feel the whole condition—you want to bite back. But because you've established this attitude, you very quickly know that all the person wants is for you to listen to them. When you're angry, all you want is for them to listen to what you're saying. Not only listen in the sense of what you're saying, but what you're feeling—like, "I am angry with you."

It's being able just to stay with that in that attending way. Not in this passive-aggressive way, or aggressive passivity. It's like you're standing there saying, "You're not touching me." Well, I mean, that's really aggressive. That's going to make them really want to bite. But if you manifest the fact that you feel their anger, and there's that empathy with their anger, then there's not that aggressive response.

You've always got that magic word, "sorry." That drains people's anger. And then after you've done that, of course, you prove it was their fault anyway. You win anyway. Be careful of that—the one-up, the gotcha.

Now, can you see the link between sitting with your own mental states and sitting with somebody else's? The inside and the outside. You're taking the practice directly into your daily life.

When it comes to insight, all this really is about creating peaceful states around us. How is it that we have this special practice called *vipassanā*, which is about seeing these three characteristics? How does that work? How does that translate into your daily life? Because it's only with those sorts of insights that there are radical changes. These are root changes. We can change our personalities, we can change our attitudes, we can do a lot to change the surface psychology. You can even change your body—you can do a bit of exercise and stuff like that—but it's not getting to the root of it. The root problems are to do with these wrong ways of seeing things. So where we see permanence, there is impermanence.

Now you might say, "Well, I can see impermanence everywhere," but the fact is, when we're struck by crises, then of course we find it a big shock. It's the level of shock, it's the level of fear which shows us our relationship to a situation which we thought was steady, permanent, unchangeable.

And then there's that business of the wanting and not wanting. That's a bit more obvious, taking that into daily life, and we'll come back to that.

And then there's this other business of *anattā*, not-self. When you're sitting like this, of course, it's a privileged position because you have found this objective observer place, this observation post, as Nyanaponika calls it. He's a pretty famous writer in Theravāda, a German. He's died now. An observation post—you've found this observation post within yourself.

So this is a fairly privileged position you might say, because you're not moving, you're not doing anything, so now you can watch. You can watch the psychophysical organism in action. You can see the body feels, the heart emotes, and the mind thinks. What else is there? That's it. And you can see that things are changing, you can see how

you're relating to what's inside you, and that's something coming from this wrong idea of indulgence and resistance, and you can see this business of not-me, not-mine as you become very clear in your seeing that these are objects.

So what's an object can't be the subject. It's as simple as that. Even the feeling of self-awareness, as we said, is an object. You're aware of a self, so you can't be that either. But it's actually looking at that and constantly re-experiencing that which makes these things very obvious to you.

So now, how can you have a spiritual insight in daily life when you're washing the pots or when you're talking to somebody or when you're doing a job and all that?

Well, the understanding is that this intelligence that is the knowing, this intuitive intelligence, which is prior—prior to the mind with its thoughts, prior to emotions. Most people think of intuitive intelligence as a feeling. Sure, it manifests, it communicates its understanding through feeling, but it's not feeling, it's not emotion, and it's not the body either. And that's what we're discovering every time we access this observation post.

Now that intelligence is being primed every time you sit to begin to see life from one of these three perspectives. Every time you sit, every time you make the conscious effort to see these three characteristics, it is being informed, it's informing itself, and that manifests in your daily life in various ways.

So when this tsunami struck Sri Lanka, there were some very well-meaning counsellors who went there to help people overcome their trauma. And they were surprised to find that they'd overcome their trauma. It wasn't for them—for people of Eastern mentality—it wasn't such a huge trauma as it would be, say, to a Westerner, because they accept, they have the attitude of karma, they have the attitude of impermanence. Everything's impermanent. What's the problem?

It doesn't mean to say they don't suffer the loss of loved ones and all that, but there isn't this ongoing post-traumatic stress. All that's gone because of that easy acceptance of the way things are.

So now we constantly remind ourselves that there is impermanence. Everything is impermanent. You simply do not know what's going to happen in the next moment. You just don't know. Just recently we've had these Israeli attacks on Palestine and on the West Bank. So there were people there—I mean, they're in dangerous positions, they know they're dangerous—but some innocent people, their lives have just been blown out. That's it. Same with the Israelis. Not so many, but these bombs come over and three people have died in a day just from these rockets going over the fence.

So you're there, you're frying your chips and getting your sausages ready, and you've got your HP sauce out, and that's it. You're up there looking down at all these sausages and they're all splattered all over the place, and you're floating in mid-air.

I have a very strange sense of humour, but there was somebody I know—she was about seventy-odd. And she met an old-time sweetheart, going way back to her early days. I got this story secondhand. Well, they fell in love and they got married, and she brought all her stuff over from America—a couple of thousand pounds—they set up in this beautiful... I went to visit them actually. They set up in this lovely little cottage in a nice little English country village. And not so long married—I mean, when one comes of a certain age one has to accept things—it seems as though he was just going for the toast out of the toaster when he collapsed.

And I've always thought of the horror of dying as you're grabbing hold of a piece of toast. As you're lifting the piece of toast with marmalade to your mouth, unable to clamp your jaw over it. To me, it's a nightmare.

So once we grasp the impermanence, it takes away the reverberation of disaster. It takes away the reverberation of loss, of grief, and that sort of stuff. There is just the grief, there is just the loss. There's not behind it some feeling of injustice. Human beings are always clever at making themselves the centre of the universe. It was such a clout to our ego when we realised that the earth actually went round the sun. And it was even worse when we were told that we were just animals. We just rose up from the animals. We were just fitter, that's all. That was a hit, wasn't it, to the old ego.

So this... What we do as humans, we project our sense of justice onto the universe. There's no justice in the universe, there's only laws. Tsunamis happen because earthquakes happen under the sea, or a tectonic plate shifts. Nothing to do with justice, nothing to do with morality, nothing to do with the way the earth is—it's that sort of law. So when people say, "Oh well, it's a shame he died young," it's a law. The body runs along different laws from human justice, and that's the way it is.

So just getting the idea of impermanence saturating the way we look at things—everything's impermanent. Even to get up in the morning and say to yourself, "Everything's impermanent. I don't know what's going to happen today. I think I know what's going to happen. I've got it all planned. I actually don't know what's going to happen." That puts us into this mindset, this framework.

And the Buddha's great statement about impermanence is that when we actually grasp impermanence in its real fullness, we realise there's nothing in the world worth holding on to. Nothing in the world worth holding on to—not even ourselves. This is the point.

Now that, at first, might strike as a bit frightening and whatnot. But it's tremendously relaxing, isn't it? We don't have to hold on to anything anymore. Yippee! So it's like when somebody steals something from you. We have this idea that I possess something—I possess my mobile. It's my mobile. I can prove it in law. This belongs to me. I'm attached to it. And then somebody steals it, and I'm still going around saying it's my mobile. But it's the thief's. The thief owns the mobile. And I'm suffering like mad because they've got my mobile.

And suddenly when you realise, actually, you can't own anything. What you can do is use it. Ah, what a relief! And then you think, well, the thief might need it more than me. And you're happy to give it away. Just like that.

So that impermanence seeps into an attitude. And that's important to understand. The Eightfold Path begins with right understanding, and the second one is right attitude. And if it doesn't drop into an attitude, it just remains at this nice intellectual level. "Oh yeah, everything arises and passes away." So what? There's no catastrophe when something does arise and pass away.

So it has to sink into—and that's a heart state. When I say heart state here, I'm not talking really about an emotion. An attitude isn't an emotion. You have to be clear about that. An attitude is a way of relating—it's an attitude. An understanding: everything's impermanent. What does that mean in terms of my relationship to objects, my relationship to people, my relationship to myself, my own body? How does that relate? And that's your attitude. And then of course it manifests in the way we behave, in the way we do actually relate moment to moment.

Now the next one which seeps into our daily life is this business of *dukkha*. So dukkha, remember, is one of these big words in Buddhism. It covers everything that makes us unhappy in the widest sense of that meaning—from the most trivial things to catastrophes. The whole gamut of human misery is contained in this word dukkha, which actually means a hard place. This is a hard place.

And when the Buddha says, "Go into this, where is the suffering?" then it's to do with this psychology of wanting and not wanting, wanting and not wanting.

Now, just a very simple change of attitude—just a change of words—like, not getting what you want, but wanting what you get. So even that, wanting what you get, there's a flip, and you think, oh! And suddenly you're contented. To develop the attitude of contentment with what I've got.

And of course it's difficult in a society which is driven by consumerism, because consumerism depends on your constant discontent. As soon as you're contented, that's it. Consumerism collapses, the whole industrial base. "I don't want a car, I'm content, I'll walk." You can't do that. You've got to be discontent. So this whole feeling of constantly being discontent—the whole of the advert is to make you feel discontent. That's why you want that, whatever it is.

But constantly saying to ourselves, constantly beginning from the platform of, "This is okay, this is the way it is, it's fine, it's not a problem, it's good, it's the way it is"—content. And what you do is you begin to separate need from want. Sometimes you need—you need a new pair of shoes and that's the end of it. So you go and get a pair of shoes. And then there's that dividing line. So you now know this is need, this is want.

Wants come up sometimes for various reasons. Say to lift your spirit, you might buy yourself something rather pleasant or ask somebody else to do it. But at least there's not this churning of the heart that goes out and constantly exercises this retail therapy. Seeking comfort in shops, for heaven's sake. Ridiculous. "I don't feel comfortable unless I'm in Marks and Spencer's." Ridiculous, isn't it? Where do I go when I'm sad? Marks and Spencer's. When I feel depressed, I go to Marks and Spencer's. "It's been a disaster, Woolworths has gone. Oh my God." Weird ways of relating to the world.

So you can see that even now, we're watching the suffering of wanting, not wanting.

A desire comes up—we want to think about this, we want to plan our holiday—and we're constantly pulling ourselves off and feeling that strong desire, that willfulness in us. When it's something unpleasant, that's even more difficult. But to be able to be easy with unpleasantness—see, now it's cold. The difference between room temperature and outside is vicious.

Our attitude is to resist the cold. We rush from the bungalow to here to get out of the cold, instead of greeting it: "Ah, cold, great!" The freshness of it. I'm not suggesting you catch a cold, you understand. But to take that attitude into daily life—you can do it. And again, it's this constant self-reminder. So as soon as we see ourselves passing a shop and wanting that—yeah, hold on. Just pull it back, pull back that energy.

And all that energy, by the way, that we're using in getting what we want—it's not being wasted. You can displace it, you can take your interest elsewhere. In the old days they used to talk about sublimation, a religious idea of sublimating your desires. You don't hear that word often these days. That's because, really, through the agencies of people like Freud, people think that there are certain instincts and desires that are blocked or locked into certain things, like our sexual appetite. They're just stuck there and you can't get rid of them.

But in spiritual terms, sublimation means that you guide that energy and put it somewhere else. That's all it is. The mind and body, as we know from our great quantum physics, is just energy. So if you decide to displace the energy away from, say, eroticism, and you put it into art, then that's your sublimation. That transference, that transformation of energy, away from desires which you see are unwholesome, to desires which you see are wholesome, is part and parcel of that process.

I'm not suggesting that erotic desires are per se unwholesome—they obviously have their place in time—but if you find them clinging on the mind, obsessive, it's a case of slowly displacing them, putting our interests elsewhere. So it's the same with shopping. People put a lot of interest in shopping, in fashion and all that sort of stuff. All they have to do is just draw their interest elsewhere, just re-educate themselves. That's all it is. It's just a process of re-education.

But they won't do it unless they see the suffering. That's the point. And the problem with pleasure, the problem with joy, indulgent joy, is that while you're in it, it's great. That's the problem. And you're prepared often to suffer the consequences so you can have this bit of joy. It's only when you get the comeback.

I was just thinking there of a friend's father who always smoked, always smoked. Then he had a heart attack, and he suddenly stopped, just like that. He got the comeback. It's unfortunate that it was so strong a comeback, but it just shows. Now, the comeback of all indulgence is the craving. The possibility of grief, if you lose what you treasure. The anxiety, once you've got something, the anxiety of losing it—that's why we've got a massive insurance industry. And of course the frustration of not getting it when you want it.

So by taking this inner understanding of wanting, not wanting, into daily life, it moves you towards contentment. That's the joy, that's the subtle joy. And that's another reason why to develop this calmness on the breath and to begin to see—it is actually a very delicious place to be. Often we find it, but we do it in contrast to agitation, in contrast to stress. We'll go home and just flop in the chair, and just for a moment there's no

radio, there's nothing, we just sink into the quietness of the moment. We might walk into a park, or come out into the country, or sit in the garden, and just for a moment we'll actually sink into that space, to that little bit of peace.

But we'll do it as an antidote to another thing. Whereas what we want to do is to develop it as a prime condition, something that we can return to at any time, and as it were, remains a substrate beneath our psychology. There's always this deep sense of calmness within us, no matter what we're doing on the surface. And again, it's just training. It's just training ourselves to do that.

So the breath there—watching the breath, feeling the breath, seeing it as a place where we can develop this calmness and peace—is directly related to daily life. Because you can always come back to your breath. When I say stop every so often, just come to an end of what you're doing and catch what it is you've accumulated—some anxiety, some stress, whatever—and allow it to pass, there's always the breath. And the breath will be a place that you'll go to, just like your garden or the park. It's a place where you just find that inner peace for a moment.

Now the sense of not-self is one of the key factors. In his second talk, the second talk he gives to his five disciples—at the end of which they're all fully liberated, by the way—he says clearly that which arises and passes away cannot be under your control.

Every time you get into the self, one of the ways that the self manifests is the desire to control, power. Every time you see yourself wanting to control a situation, control a person, you'll know it's coming from the self. It's not the same as being in charge or being an authority in which you are given the power to make decisions. I mean, that's an occasion where you take on responsibility and you try to make the wisest decisions you can. But in terms of this other business, where things are not going your way and you're getting angry, where you're getting angry with your spouse, your partner, because they're not doing what you want them to do, or your kids, and you're getting frustrated and anxious and all that—that's all to do with this sense of wanting to control.

So again, it's this business of taking that into daily life and just recognizing that our control over things is pretty limited and that things happen outside of our control, and that there's—in the old phrase—you've got to go with the flow, you've got to be in harmony with what's happening. That harmony is not always pleasant, but you're actually moving with it. You're not trying to control something which is actually outside your control.

And I think this comes most obvious when we get involved in politics—politics in the wider sense of the meaning, people's issues like the business going on with climate change and the economy and all that sort of stuff, which are not to be confused with small party politics. One can see what has to be done, everyone can see what has to be done, but there's not the political will. So there arises in people a certain frustration.

And that's really not accepting these two rings that are around us. The first one being one of power—what you can do to help the situation. And if you step beyond that, you're into frustration, you're into despair. And that takes an act of humility. Humility doesn't mean humble. It just means seeing yourself as you really are. That's what humility originally meant. And the other ring is influence, whereby you can get other people to do what you think is right. Beyond that, there's nothing you can do in any physical sense.

But we do have another outlet which allows us to feel at least that we are, shall we say, in communion. And that is, of course, to offer *mettā*. I mean, that's the joy of *mettā*, that you can do nothing, but at least you can send out thoughts of intentions, goodwill intentions towards a situation. Even if we don't believe that they actually affect people, at least it's a way in which we might feel within ourselves that we're doing what we can, full stop. Develop a goodwill.

Now, such is the quality of this intuitive intelligence that it can have insights at any time. And it's well known in the Mahāsi tradition that insights don't normally come when you're sitting. It's when you get up and do something that the insights come. And the reason is that often when we're sitting, we're very subtly trying to achieve something, trying to see something. And then when we get up from the posture, we sort of say, "All right, nothing happened there, forget it," and off we go. But we retain that mindfulness and lo and behold, there are these sudden insights that come. Because this intelligence has been released from this craving, been released from the self just for that moment.

So it's not as though insights can't come at any time of the day, any time you're awake, once this mindfulness is established. In fact, the Mahāsi's teacher—that's the Mahāsi, in case you didn't know, when he was about fifty—the Mahāsi's teacher is said to have intuited *anicca*, the impermanence, as a direct experience of momentary arising and passing away as a dog passed by. There wasn't a dog, there was just a dogging. The dog arose and passed away momentarily. Because that's the teaching of *anicca*.

It isn't something which is changing in the sense that you might take a piece of clay and you make a cup and then you screw it up and you make a saucer. So it's the same clay. The Buddha's teaching is quite radical. It actually collapses into potential or nothing—I can't say nothing. It collapses into a potential. It's not there. And out of there, it arises again. That's what's happening. The universe is stroboscopic. It's not continuous in the Buddhist teaching. So for him that was a deep enough insight for what we call one of the paths and fruits—stream entrance or whatever level he was at.

So that's—I hope I've made fairly clear the intimate connection between your meditation and daily life. If I haven't, you can leave little notes of complaint. Kindly. Notes of complaint.

And remember that the root thing is this constant establishment of mindfulness. And just as a last word, in the discourse on loving-kindness, which we chant in the morning, the Buddha's urging us to develop this loving-kindness. And at the end, he says, "Whether you are standing, walking, sitting, or lying down"—so those are the same instructions for mindfulness. Sitting, walking. In other words, in any posture, doing anything. So long as you're awake, so long as you are mindful, you should develop this mindfulness. And here, he's talking about a mindfulness saturated with loving-kindness—saturated with goodwill. That's a bit better. Goodwill. Because it's not meant to be an emotional thing.

"This," they say, "is the noblest way to live. And if you do not fall into bad ways, but live well and develop insight, and are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, then truly you will never need to be reborn to this world again."

So there you have it. Mindfulness saturated with goodwill. And in the morning when I, after chanting, I say make your resolution for the day. That's an important moment, because that's going to set the underground tone of the day. So find a little phrase for yourself—to live consciously with goodwill or something like that which strikes you as the way you want to be.

It's also good to also create something where—something that you're not going to do. You're not going to go down that road today. Keep it to today. Don't go beyond today. It gets depressing because I think I'm going to be like this for the rest of my life. But if you do it day by day, it's manageable, isn't it? Just today. Today I'll be good. Tomorrow I'll play hell. But today... We'll keep doing that. We should arrive.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 146

Samatha and/or Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51 min

In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the two fundamental approaches to Buddhist meditation—samatha (tranquility) and vipassanā (insight)—by tracing the Buddha's own spiritual journey before his awakening. He describes how the young Siddhattha Gotama, facing an existential crisis in his mid-twenties, left home to seek the end of suffering. The Buddha-to-be mastered the jhānas (absorption states) under two teachers, reaching the highest formless attainments, yet found these blissful states insufficient—they created beautiful mind states but failed to purify the heart or end dukkha. Similarly, his extreme ascetic practices proved painful and fruitless.

The turning point came when the Buddha recalled a childhood memory of watching his father perform a plowing ceremony—that pure, open awareness of simply looking without grasping. This quality of natural, uncontrived attention became central to his awakening. Bhante explains how the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), given to ordinary villagers among the Kurus rather than monastics, presents the 'ekāyāna magga'—the direct path—as opposed to the two-way path combining samatha with vipassanā. This direct approach emphasizes the seven factors of awakening: mindfulness, investigation of dhamma, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.

The talk clarifies that vipassanā practice naturally includes concentration but is distinguished by investigating the three characteristics—impermanence, suffering, and not-self. Bhante describes how the Mahāsī Sayādaw brought this direct approach to modern practitioners after World War II, making liberation accessible to laypeople without requiring extensive jhāna development. The key insight is that awareness itself perceives naturally when we get out of the way—we don't need to try to see; intelligence understands when the self stops interfering with the process.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and fully Self-Enlightened One.

I want to make a distinction between the two types of meditation that we find in all forms of Buddhism: Samatha and Vipassanā. Samatha means peacefulness, quietening. Vipassanā means insight. To get an angle on this, it's always good to go back to the Buddha's own personal experience and how it comes across to us through the scriptures.

Here we have a young man, probably in his mid-twenties, slowly becoming disillusioned with life. He's living the good life, belonging to a ruling family—although in later commentaries he's elevated to some huge eastern potentate. Really, he's just a local boss, a local head of a tribe who actually has to pay tribute to the king of Kosala. He's what you might call upper middle class. He has a wife and an ordinary extended family life, lots of cousins, many of whom join him when he starts the order. And of course the women join him eventually.

He leaves just about the time his son is born. From a psychodynamic point of view, from our Western psychology viewpoint, it's rather interesting that his own mother died when he was only a week old. That must have had some psychological effects on him, even though it was his mother's sister who became his stepmother. And somehow he leaves just as his child is born—a rather interesting coincidence of facts. Freudians or Jungians might say something about that.

One perhaps could say that this trauma, even at that young age, the loss of your mother, does create some imbalance in the psyche which begins to manifest in his early twenties as what we would call an existential crisis, leading perhaps to an identity crisis. What brings it about is a sudden growing realization that once youth has passed, once you've come out of the fantasy of youth where things like sickness, old age, and death are very far away—when one isn't concerned with these things anyway, concerned only with good living—around about twenty-five, there is a change of view. Something happens within most of us where we realize that youth is passing, and we're looking ahead to a hopeful middle age. We start taking things seriously. We tend to think about pensions, getting married, taking up a career. We move away from the easiness of youth.

Within that context, he comes to realize that actually, in the end, there's just sickness, old age, and death. It's a crisis which builds up in him to such a degree that it makes him leave.

But there's another side which reinforces that search. He's experienced what Blake would call the road of excess—the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. At some point, when he's had all his parties and a good time, he sees the vanity of it. He sees the other side, the emptiness of it. It's expressed in a visual sense: he wakes up at the end of a big carousing and just sees disheveled bodies, perhaps the smell of sickness. That gives him the other side of pleasure, the downside of pleasure.

Psychologically, remember, this indulgence brings about frustration when you can't get what you want, grief when you lose what you've got, and anxiety when you've got what you want and you're afraid to lose it. All that psychology is in there. We can say

that he was waking up to the fact that the life he was leading had this deeper emptiness to it. He hadn't found any real purpose in the family life he was leading, in the career being offered to him as a kshatriya, a warrior caste, a ruler. And so there comes this crisis point. We know about crisis, don't we? A financial crisis. He's having a psychological crisis. And so he leaves.

Now, he wouldn't have left if he didn't have somewhere to go. Just as in the 1970s there was a great movement of hippies searching for love, in those days there was quite a movement of people searching for the answer to life. In what we call Hinduism, the Vedas, there was this slowly growing new literature, the Upanishads, which manifests this questioning of the age. It was also an age of cultural change—a movement away from pastoral societies dotted here and there with local rulers, toward a city-based civilization in which there grew a merchant class that had not been there before, a rich merchant class that began to have power. And kingship, which the Buddha didn't particularly like. He preferred the more democratic meetings of the pastoral societies. So there's ferment, there's change happening in society, not perhaps as vicious as we've experienced, but definitely some dislocation.

There were groups of men—very rare for women to do it because of the dangers involved, and of course the sexism too—who went out into the forests and tried to find the meaning of life. That was their job. One of the strains of understanding which empowered them was the belief in rebirth, the belief in reincarnation. There were many answers to it, but central was the horror of having to be reborn again into this life.

Remember, these times were a bit harder. There were no videos, no DVDs, no cars. It was dog work—out in the field digging, and when you come back, what do you do? The only entertainments, you might say, were occasional military parades, and believe it or not, the holy men who would turn up in their parks and shrines. Everybody would go out on a full moon night, ask questions, do some chanting. That was, in a sense, the fullness of their entertainment, apart from playing games.

The idea that one had to be reborn again and again and go through this horror—because in those days sickness, old age, and death weren't something that happened in hospitals or shut away somewhere. The dead were taken to charnel grounds. You could see the bodies rotting. When the wind changed, you knew where it was coming from. It was there, in the open, as you might still see in India when you go there. That's one of the great things about India—it doesn't disguise these things.

This whole idea of having to come back to this again—one was looking for an escape. Where was the escape? That was the atmosphere in which the Buddha left home. And I dare say that when he left, he didn't say, "I'm off for good."

He probably said, "Well, I'm just nipping off for a little while to check this thing out, see if I can find an answer to my deep disturbance."

I remember when I told my mother that I was going to become a monk. She collapsed into such a deep weeping that came from the deepest part of her heart. Even I started crying. So I gave her a hug and said, "Mum, it's only for three years." And she stopped just like that.

You have to put it in the context of Catholicism, because priests are around—you can see a priest there. But if you become a monk, that's it. You cut your ties. You enter the monastery and nobody ever sees you again. I think they've softened up on that now; I believe they can see people once a month or something. But in the old days, that was it. You left. Hence her collapse.

So I dare say there was a lot of gnashing of teeth when the Buddha left. In later tales they describe how his parents wept at his leaving. His wife wept. Everybody wept. And I'm sure he said, "Well, I'm only going for a bit. I'll be back. Going to see what it's like."

So he goes off and joins these ascetics living in the forest. The first two teachers he goes to teach him what we now call the jhānas, what we now call absorption meditations. When you practice this samatha type of meditation, you're creating a state of mind. But the beauty of it is that although you begin with an outside object—either a candle flame, as you all know, or a circle, or an inner object like a mantra, or an inner object like your breath—it's still an object. You're only using it to bring about a certain laser quality to the mind.

I think you'll know that when the mind begins to concentrate, bliss arises naturally. It's just the quality of the mind as it concentrates—a sort of energy in it—and we experience it as a certain type of inner happiness. The first teacher really took him right through what we now recognize as the jhānas: the rūpa-jhānas and the arūpa-jhānas.

The rūpa-jhānas are those states that you get by deepening your concentration until, as it were, the mental state leaves the body, goes inward, and finds its own joy—and then even leaves that to find a perfect peace. This is not the equanimity of the seven factors of enlightenment. They use the same word, you see. These words are used variously. It's the same word, but they have slightly different meanings.

Then, leaving that, as it were, one enters into a stranger place where there's no object at all. Right up until that point, there's always an object—a light, the feeling, a sense, something there. But when that disappears and this consciousness, as it were (if I want a better word), flips into a different state, there's nothing there. Those places are called infinite space, infinite consciousness, infinite nothingness.

These relate—I'm talking now to people who know the Dharma a bit deeper—these relate to the four khandhas, you see. When you're in that area of nothingness, it's out of that nothingness that the saṅkhāra arises, the manifestations of mind. When you're in that space of consciousness, you're at the beginning of the viññāṇa process of consciousness, which manifests eventually as one of the aggregates. When you're in the space where everywhere there's just space, you're at the subtle level of vedanā, feeling. And when you're at neither perception nor non-perception, that's the beginning level of perception as consciousness descends into the mind and finally coagulates into what we call physical body.

So that process a person might go through has its own insightfulness as you pass through it. The Buddha undertook this with his teacher and became an adept. The teacher said, "Please, join me." But he said no. He said, "Although I've done all this and they're very blissful states and all that, it hasn't really answered my question: is there an end to suffering?"

Now that's the core thing which I should have mentioned earlier. The quest was: is there an end to suffering? That eventually puts his whole teaching in just three words in the texts—dukkha, dukkha nirodha—suffering and the end of suffering. This dukkha, of course, has a very wide meaning. Here I've translated it as suffering, dissatisfaction, sense of lack, meaninglessness. It's the whole gamut of human suffering, from the smallest little disturbance to the deepest despair and horror.

So he leaves that teacher and finds another one who takes him just one step further than these arūpa-jhānas. There he becomes an adept, and again he's asked to teach, but he says no—he leaves. Although he's practiced these concentration meditations, although he's taken them to the fullest development recognized by his own teachers, there's just something lacking. There's something which has not been undermined, which is still causing him suffering, still causing him some feeling of dissatisfaction.

So now he tries a different tack, which seemingly he gets from an elder teacher, a contemporary teacher: the Niganṭha, the leader of the Jains.

Now his understanding was that bad karma was accrued even when one didn't intend it. This is why Jain monks go around with a whisk, making sure there are no bugs that they might accidentally tread upon. Their understanding is that even accidentally, you still cause suffering, and therefore there will be a karmic comeback.

And the real problem lay — and this runs right the way through Indian literature — in desire, trishna. So one had to live the absolute ascetic life, deny the body any pleasure because there was danger in it. He didn't seemingly make a distinction between

pleasurable sensations and the attachment or desire that you have to them. So one had to, as it were, undermine that whole process. And if you think about it, pleasures come through the body, don't they? So you begin to blame the body for your problems. And you fast, you sit in front of very hot fires. You do all sorts of ascetic practices meant to steel you against the pleasures of the body.

So he took this, again, seemingly to his own personal limit. He couldn't go any further with it, and basically he just got thin. He said he could hold his spine through his stomach — that's how thin he was. And still he wasn't achieving anything. This fundamental question about suffering, about meaningfulness, had not been answered.

And he's with five companions at this time, remember. They're going for it, helter-skelter, really whipping themselves and getting into it in a big way. And so he leaves.

Now, in the opening stanzas of his very first talk, he says that the life devoted to sensual pleasure is base, ignoble, a waste of time, leading nowhere. And the life devoted to self-mortification — which is not renunciation; renunciation is not doing something to see your attachment, while self-mortification is based on self-punishment, self-negation in that bad way, rejection of life as it is — that self-mortification was also just painful, he said, and led nowhere. At least the first path was pleasant and led nowhere, but this was painful and led nowhere. But he doesn't say that the jhanas, the other things he learned about developing the qualities of mind, were a waste of time. That becomes part of his system.

But we can — at least I can — get a sense of his despair when he leaves his companions. What was he going to do? He couldn't go home because he would just fall back into that emptiness, bad emptiness. He'd been to all these teachers and he'd talked to so many people. You can see from his teaching that he knew all the local philosophies and psychologies of the time. He'd learned them. And he'd tried everything, and he had nowhere to go.

So I imagine that when he sat on that road along which Sujata came, he was in a state of real existential despair. And when Sujata comes along with her rice pudding — or rice cakes, rather — she takes pity on this man. Now, in the scriptures they soup it up. She's going to offer this to a god and sees the Bodhisattva who is resplendent and believes that this is the god. But actually, he must have been looking miserable. She thought, well, maybe he needs it more than this god. And we all know the salvific effect of rice pudding — enormous in its power.

So having tasted it, he sort of feels better. And around about that time he has this memory of his father doing a plowing ceremony. He's a child, and there's something about the way he remembers, something about the way he's looking at his father doing the plowing ceremony, which offers him another way of seeking the end, seeking the answer to his predicament. And that's why I've got these pictures. The little baby at the back there on the board was on a poster, an advert in Birmingham Station. I came out of the train, saw this — it was part of an advert. And I went home, came all the way back to Birmingham Station to take that picture. I've probably broken some sort of publication rights, but... I thought it was fantastic. Make sure you have a look at it, because what it expresses is that way of looking and the moment of seeing.

And the little girl in the other picture was given to me by a friend in Dublin, Dennis. This was a picture that came into the Irish Times. There was an opening of a nature reserve. And you can see that she's reaching out to a plant to see what there is there, but the look on her face, if you look at it, has both an intense interest and also a sense of trepidation, a sense of fear of the unknown — like, if I see this, what will happen?

So that comes first, and the baby face comes second.

So here's this child watching his father doing a plowing ceremony, and there is a tremendous interest in what his father is doing. And that interest draws him into an absorbed state. He's just looking. And you see it in children, don't you? You see it when their jaw drops and their eyes become fixated, and you can't shake them out of it unless you give them a clip on the back of the head. And that's it — that's the pure openness of that intuitive intelligence just receiving.

So that's why I try to stress this quiet abiding. Because there you drop your preconceptions, you drop your ideas, you drop your concepts, you drop your history. Dropping your history. And you lay yourself open — just observing, feeling, experiencing what's happening right now.

So there was something in that looking which raised again, that encouraged him to have another go. And he was so certain that this would actually be the answer that he makes a determination. He sits under the tree and will either die or find the answer to his existential problem of suffering.

Looking for him, looking for us, he does six hours. It seems there's an interesting moment which is worth pondering. The great doubt arises. I'm sure you've seen that posture of the Buddha where he's putting his hand touching the earth to ground himself, and Mara the evil one attacks him. And although it's put in pictures of all sorts of things attacking him, what it is is the great doubt. It's known as the moment of great doubt,

and the doubt is: Who are you? Who are you to try and work this out? There's no single human being you know of, nobody's ever worked this out. Who are you? How come you've even started on this quest?

And with it there comes the temptation of going back into the ordinary life. That's what Mara is. Later on in Buddhism, Mara is put across as sort of an evil figure, a bit like the Christian devil, trying to kill you and do all sorts of bad things to you. But he's much more the tempter. The god Mara is actually the chief of a most delightful heaven. So what he symbolizes is the attraction of the sensual life.

It's interesting that when he touches the earth and the earth goddess appears, it's his perfection of generosity which makes him continue to sit. Now what is generosity? Generosity is doing something for somebody else, and I presume that what came to him at that moment was that this wasn't just for him. This was for humanity. It wasn't a selfish thing, that he wanted to get out of suffering, that he was trying to save himself. It was in the greater context that this was the question, and it was for the benefit of others that I think gave him that strength to sit there and continue that investigation.

This is my own interpretation, by the way. The commentaries just say it was the quality, the perfection of generosity that gave him the strength.

So when he began to teach, he taught these two things in tandem, and the absorption states were something that he really pushed. The thing about the mind is that if it's very concentrated, very open, very still, obviously it sees something. Obviously it's more capable of seeing something, rather than a mind that's scattered, unable to be gathered onto a single point. One can develop that sort of single-pointed mind through various exercises, and you can do it, as it were, just by repetition.

But remember that when you do that, there's a tendency to be able to block, to stop the purification process. And that's what the Buddha found. When he was in these beautiful states, fine. But when he came out again, he was still the same old depressed Gautama. It hadn't done anything to purify the heart. It had built another mindset which as an adept he could enter any time. So he could always go to this place when he felt a bit depressed, push it away, do his mantra, in he goes, blissed out. But it never actually dealt with this problem. That's what he came back to. It can't do, because these jhānic states are about developing the mind.

Now we see this, and this is the distinction between a charismatic who is not wise, and somebody who is wise, and somebody who is charismatic and wise. Somebody who's charismatic builds up this huge love and it can become a radiance. You can be attracted to it, and then one day you stand on their foot and they go berserk. So that's why

the Buddha says you can't tell how wise somebody is until you live with them for quite some time. Then you suddenly see these little defilements, these little odd bits of behavior come out, and you know that something has not been purified.

That doesn't mean to say that in that charismatic form the person might not be doing a huge amount of good. But even that person may be confusing their charisma with wisdom. And the great enemy, the Buddha points out, of the leader are the followers. Because they keep telling you how wonderful you are.

The person who is fully liberated might not be charismatic at all. Might be quite an ordinary person. Even though the Buddha definitely had some charisma, there's a lovely moment in the scriptures where somebody, a monk or perhaps a lay person, comes into a group of monks and has to ask which one is the Bhagavan. So it's not as though he displayed this huge charisma, or it doesn't seem to have done. But then again, you can have somebody who is charismatic and who is fully liberated.

Now what the jhāna does, all these jhānas, is to produce charisma, depending on what you practice. So if you practice love, that's the charisma you'll get.

In my travels in Thailand, I met about four or five people really. Five monks, because you only get to see monks as a monk. Who were all highly developed, and all of them were generally considered to be liberated monks. They all had very different atmospheres around them.

The two I remember most is Ajahn Sim, who lived just up beyond Chiang Mai. There were three of us traveling together, a couple of Americans. When you sat in his presence, you were immediately drawn into his sense of peace. It was a tangible feeling. It immediately affected you, and you sat in peace. Just like that.

When I went to Ajahn Tate, who had this beautiful monastery up on the borders of Laos, on the Mekong, I went to see him. It was just me at the time, I think. You were just enveloped with this very, very lovely, loving kindness. He might just have been feeling that at the time, I don't know. But it was tangible. It was a real tangible feeling. Immediately softening. Immediately you felt this open friendship.

When he died, something like a couple of million people turned up for the funeral. He was pretty famous, Ajahn Tate. He's the one I quote, by the way. I've said something elsewhere, but when I do a day of resolution on the retreats: make it simple, take it easy, stay with the one who knows. That's Ajahn Tate.

Make it simple. Take it easy. Stay with the one who knows.

Now, when people began to join him—all the members, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis—they were people who had left the worldly life. So what were they going to do? What do you do all day? You haven't got to go to work. What do you do? And you can't grow anything. You're not allowed to grow crops. You can't cook. You don't have any money. You can't buy anything. You can't get into retail therapy. So what are you going to do? You've got to do something.

These jhānic exercises are specifically for those people who have time. And if you find yourself with time, it's something you might want to practice. It's beneficial—it creates beautiful states of mind.

But the Buddha was traveling once, later on in his teaching, out towards Kammāsadhamma amongst the Kurus. It was a village of the Kurus, and the Kurus lived in what we would now recognize as modern Delhi, that sort of area. He'd been there before. These were ordinary village people—people who looked after cows and sheep and fields. There was nothing technological. This was drawing water from the well, cutting wood, all that sort of thing.

He'd been there before and had given them teachings. When he turns up again, he's quite taken by how they're actually practicing the Dhamma. He says, for a start, there's no well talk—no gossip around the well. Everybody was doing things mindfully, and they were all practicing meditation. He was so moved by this that he gave the talk known as the Discourse on the Establishment or Foundation of Mindfulness, which is recognized as the jewel of the whole collection. Because here he actually tells you how to become liberated. This is it—he puts it all together in one discourse.

And he says it to these ordinary people in Kammāsadhamma. He doesn't give this talk to his monks or anyone else. Now, this for me is highly significant, because normally he's going on about the jhānas and vipassanā, how the one leads to the other and so forth. There are teachers who teach that now. But this, you see, is directed to lay people who haven't got the time to sit there and get into these blissful states. They've got to tend a family and all of that.

It starts off by telling them clearly. The word he uses is *ekāyana magga*, which means "the one-way proceeding path" or "the path that proceeds in this single way." The commentary normally puts that as opposed to the *dvāyana*, the two-way path, which is the combination of samatha practice with vipassanā.

Those are his first words—*ekāyana magga*—and it's translated variously by scholars depending on their particular viewpoint. So you'll see in Nyanaponika, in his really still the core book on meditation, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, he says it's "the only

path." That's a bit fundamentalist. Then there are people who are friends down in Devon who translate Pāli as a sort of hobby, and they call it "the sure path." But Bhikkhu Bodhi, the American monk who is the doyen of Buddhist studies, makes it quite clear that this *ekāyana* means the one-way path as opposed to the two-way path. To me that makes a lot of sense.

So this is the one-way path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for reaching the end of suffering and discontent, for finding the true way, for the realization of emancipation—namely, the four applications of mindfulness. Not a bad translation, really.

So when we practice vipassanā, there has to be included in it a certain concentration content. What the Buddha does is pull out for us seven factors which, when developed, lead to this natural insight process. The first one is simply this awareness.

But it's right awareness, and right awareness always means the observation of the three characteristics—because that's where the delusion lies. It's seeing impermanence. It's seeing how we indulge or resist what is happening, whether pleasant or unpleasant. And the quality of not-self.

This not-self is not a philosophical statement. The Buddha doesn't say there is no self. It's a teaching tool in which everything you experience you make clear to yourself is an object you're aware of. So if you're aware of something, it cannot be that which is aware.

Think of how as children we began to distinguish, out of that mass of sensation, the world out there—object relationship, I think they call it. Out of this mass of sensations, mother starts to loom, your first object, something separate from you that separates out of the mass. Until eventually you're quite clear that this is me and everything else is not me.

All we're doing is taking that process inward and making the inner part of our experience as objective as this room is. This room has a body—walls, ceiling—and it has atmosphere; it has a kind of mind. So it is the same within us. As we begin to push out, push away, objectify the inner world as we've done the outer world, that process is the process of detaching from it, undermining that relationship of it being me or mine. That's why we feel this process of liberation. That's why the Buddha says the taste of Nibbāna is freedom. It's liberation from that wrong connection with what we're experiencing.

But this awareness has to be supported, and the split is between those qualities which are passive and those which are active.

When we practice this quiet abiding, we are practicing those qualities which are passive—which, for us, are not highly developed in our society. It's the active qualities that are developed. Those passive qualities are calmness. Be calm. Not to be excited all the time, not to seek a high level of energy, but to bring ourselves to a real, deep calm.

And interestingly, that's linked with this interest. Because interest can get excited. If you're interested in something you can feel yourself getting all worked up, but that excitement then becomes—that interest becomes tainted with trying to achieve something, trying to see something. And once there's a trying to see something, that self is taking over the process.

To see something at this level, one has to let go of the idea that I'm achieving it. There has to be this business of just having faith, a real confidence that there is within us that which will make insight without us trying. That's the abstraction—that's the taking away of this self which manifests as a sort of over-effort, a trying to see something. You won't relax and just let the eye look.

So tomorrow, when you're wandering around the paddock or the garden or you go for a walk, just rest your eye on something and watch the way the eye perceives. You don't have to try and perceive. Put a leaf in your hand, or just look at a tree, and watch how the eye itself is perceiving. Stand back from that process, and then you gain confidence.

Oh, the eye perceives. I don't have to try and perceive.

So it's the same with intelligence. If we get out of the way, intelligence works naturally because that's the quality of intelligence. It understands. It perceives. It has insight. It doesn't think. This is the thing. Thought is another process. The insight is immediate. You either see it or you don't see it.

Then there is this passive quality of a steadiness of attention—just the steadiness of attention, concentration, focus. Just steadiness. Just keeping the attention steady. And that has to be coupled again with right effort. The effort is just to maintain the focus. You put too much effort and you start getting restless, you start getting a shaking, putting too much effort into it. Too little effort and the concentrated mind very quickly falls into sweet oblivion. Sleep. Because that's what happens when the mind's nicely concentrated. It's calm. And off you go. Sleep.

The passive quality of equanimity—that's so difficult for us. In this sense it's coming from a position of don't know, which means that you're looking at something, investigating something, without any preconceived ideas, preconceived notions that this has to be this way. Very difficult, because on one side we're being fed these three characterist-

ics. And then we're told, just look. Forget about that. Just look and see for yourself. And there's no prejudice in the sense that the heart isn't involved in any over-desire. It's a calm heart.

All these factors we've talked about are natural to daily life. Everybody has these. What turns them into factors that lead to liberation is the investigation of the Dhamma. So these same factors would be present in anybody involved in science or some active research—they're all the same sort of qualities that you need. But once you turn all that to investigating the Dhamma, which here means these three characteristics, then this leads to a change in the way that we relate to the world we live in.

All that is within this discourse, you see. This is what he taught lay people.

And just as a little aside about the Mahasi, whose picture you see here: after the Second World War, when Burma gained independence from us—oh, pity—the elected prime minister, the only one unfortunately, because in 1963 there was the military coup which they're still suffering from... A group of people were looking for a meditation teacher. And the Mahasi was a sort of well-known teacher up in middle Burma. And they brought him down and set him up in a meditation center. And by all tales, a virtual immediate success. He was teaching this. He wasn't teaching jhāna and absorption, for which you need time. He was teaching a direct path—it's ekāyāna. And he sort of created the parameters whereby people could move quickly, so it was great effort, as you know—it's sitting, walking, sitting, walking, eighteen hours a day. But it was never to try and attain something. It was always trying to relax and to watch and to see, to explore.

So his effect on the local society in Rangoon was immediate. And eventually, you know, it expanded so much that by '56, which is not many years after, he's doing his first world tour around the East. He didn't come West, I don't think, for a while.

So that's the specific place that the Mahasi holds in the vipassanā scene, you might say—that he teaches this ekāyāna magga, this direct path.

So there we have it. What makes the Buddha an especially great person in spiritual history wasn't just simply the amazing insight that he had, but also his amazing ability to get it across—to actually produce a systematic way and a systematic teaching which people could understand. And not just the intellectuals—this is the point. Ordinary people. People of Kuru. Siddhaṃ.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance.

May you be liberated from all your suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 147

Mettā: Developing Goodwill

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 56 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddhist understanding of how we condition ourselves through intention and will, emphasizing that all our suffering is self-created. He explores mettā (loving-kindness) as an attitude of goodwill that serves as our default relationship with all sentient beings, distinguishing it from attachment-based love and romantic feelings.

The talk covers the four Brahmavihāras (divine abodes) - mettā (goodwill), compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity - explaining how mettā naturally gives rise to the other qualities. Bhante discusses the relationship between vipassanā and mettā practice, warning that vipassanā without mettā can lead to spiritual aloofness and callousness.

A significant portion addresses forgiveness - of others, seeking forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. Drawing on the Buddha's psychology, he explains how all unwholesome actions arise from the fundamental mistake of wrong understanding about our true nature. The teaching emphasizes that recognizing our actions stem from ignorance rather than inherent evil makes forgiveness possible and necessary for spiritual development.

Practical guidance is offered for integrating mettā into daily life, using spare moments throughout the day to cultivate goodwill toward all beings. This foundational practice supports both formal meditation and ethical living in the world.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully Self-Awakened One.

So there's quite a bit to get through for an evening. I just want to cover at least three areas. The first one is to revise, and for some of you it may be anew, the teaching of the Buddha on how we condition ourselves. And then to talk a bit about *mettā* and what we call the illimitables. And then finally to say something about forgiveness which we'll be practicing tomorrow.

There are two things about the Buddhist teaching in terms of our conditioning. All our conditioning is self-made. That's a bit difficult to grasp at first, but all the information and all the experiences that you have in the world come at you as it were, and there's an inner process where you begin to react to it within yourself and create the conditionings that you end up with.

So all these things that we tend to suffer from—the depression, anxiety, all that—and on the positive side, over-excitement, indulgence, all that part is actually self-created. You can go further and say that the whole world is self-created if you include your body, because your body filters out what comes in. So if you're blind, you obviously don't live in a visual universe. And then of course the society you live in also filters things out by its own prejudices.

But everything that comes to us is then worked upon within ourselves, and although people influence us and our society influences us, the very language influences us, the fact is that we end up creating our own worlds. Even here now in this room, Theravāda Buddhism isn't an idealism—it doesn't say that this room doesn't exist, like when we all walk out it doesn't disappear, it has its own reality, inverted commas—but it does say that the room that we experience is peculiar to us.

So actually speaking, there are ten different rooms here, because each one of us has a different perspective on it, different feeling about it, and so on. And in that way you begin to understand that we're actually living in our own world. And they're parallel. They're not always harmonious. But when we realize that we're living in our own world, then of course the accent is to throw the responsibility upon us to do something about it.

So that gets rid of all blame. So you can't blame. And there comes a point of, shall we say, maturity where you realize that you can't continue to blame your parents, your society and all the rest of it for the state of mind that you actually have to bear with. And that taking a personal responsibility about oneself is actually the true beginning of the spiritual path because that's beginning to take a hold of your life. That's the beginning where you decide what changes you're going to make and how you're going to make them. And this *mettā*-practice that we're doing is part and parcel of that.

So where does that begin? Where does that process begin? It begins with an intention. That's why, for those of you who've practiced Vipassanā, seeing your intentions is that crucial point where you have the space to see whether this intention is wholesome or unwholesome, whether it's doing you any good or not. And it's in that little space that you can say, no, I won't go down there, or yes, I will.

If for one moment you lose that moment of intention, it very quickly moves into identification. So what was a wanting becomes "I want." And at that point, really, it's virtually impossible to stop the action flowing out from the intention. So every time you walk past Costa Coffee and Starbucks and the coffee grabs hold of your nose, there's want. If you're not quick enough, you're in there, having a cup of coffee, whether you liked it or not, whether you wanted it or not, whether you needed it or not. And it's those habitual actions that we get caught up in that we have to come back on. And the way we do it is by having this very sharp mindfulness to see intentions as it arises. So the role of intention is crucial in our conditioning.

The next step that we've already touched upon is the process of it being brought from a potential into an actual. So if I stand outside Costa Coffee thinking I'd like a cup of coffee, nothing's happening. That's the power of that old conditioning of wanting coffee. And as long as I stay there with it, no matter how uncomfortable it may feel, actually nothing's happening. Nothing's happening in terms of it being developed. But if we stay with that and wait for it to die away, then some energy within that conditioning has been released. Some energy has been destroyed because it's not been re-empowered.

So there is a moment when having decided to, having had the intention come up to have this coffee, there's a moment of impulsion, there's a moment where an energy goes into that intention and it manifests. That energy is your will. And the Buddha goes as far as to say that it is will that he calls action. So what you do is not so important, but how you do. You know, it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it. You know that one?

So it's a case of catching the intention and holding it so that you don't fall immediately into willing it whereby you reinforce that old habitual action. So that's a crucial understanding in terms of the Buddha's psychology, and it comes in—those of you who know the psychology of dependent origination—where he's putting his finger very clearly on where the problem lies. It lies at that point of *taṇhā*, some of you will know that word, of desire.

These words that come from Scripture, translated from one language to another, is always difficult. And it's translated normally as craving, which seems to me always a little bit over the top, because sometimes you just want it and you just do it. You can't label it as craving. But what they're trying to do in these translations is distinguish between a desire and intention which is wholesome and one which is unwholesome.

So there is a word in the Buddha's language which is also translated as desire but there's a choice of it being wholesome or unwholesome. Whereas this other word that you get in dependent origination is always unwholesome because it's always coming from the self.

Now, this self that we talk about, the teaching about not-self, it's not a—you have to be careful—it's not a denial, it's not a metaphysical proposition. The Buddha's not saying, there is no self. It's a teaching tool. He's saying, whatever you experience, if it's arising and passing away, how can it be you? And it's that way of looking at things that begins to make you realize that all these things that you've identified with are actually immaterial, they're not substantial. They don't account to anything, any substance in the universe.

So we're in this flow of events. And it's most obvious is this body. I mean, this isn't the body we were born with. It may have a regular blueprint running through it, but it definitely is not the same body. And if we're to believe it, it's not the same body we had seven years ago. So next time you look in the mirror, look in your eye and say, now you weren't here seven years ago, and just keep acknowledging the fact that the body itself is in a constant process of change, and yet we identify with it in very deep ways.

So when death approaches, it's freak-out time. And that freaking out, that terrible shock that comes when it's our turn to go, is the measure of that attachment, is the measure of that identity. So this *taṇhā* is those desires which come from wrong understanding, those desires which arise out of greed and hatred.

Greed here is that whole business of acquisition, and hatred is that whole business of aversion. Actually it's translated as aversion, because again we don't have a word which grasps the total meaning of the original Pali word, but it also includes fear. When you come across something which is threatening you, you either want to obliterate it, annihilate it; if it's too big you run for it. So you've always got this fight and flight syndrome, and that's included in this word. So whenever you hear people talk about greed and aversion, this aversion includes the fear that we have.

So understanding the role of intention in the process of our psychology, and understanding that nothing actually happens until we empower it, until we actually do something, either as a train of thoughts or a process of speech or an action—has it got a conditioning effect? If we don't empower an intention then the energy with which it comes is just allowed to dissipate, and that's basically how you get rid of habits and mental states that you don't want. And that's what we learn very clearly through the process of Vipassanā, but it's something you take out into daily life. It's not just something you do on the sitting stool.

Whenever something negative comes up, it's the acknowledgement of it and just bearing with it, acknowledging it, feeling it, but not doing anything. That's the point—not doing anything and just allowing it to dissipate, the energy dissipate.

Now here of course we have another thing that we're doing, which is the good side of desire, which is coming from another center. That's the important thing to understand. There is within us a different center—call it Buddha, call it your wisdom center, doesn't matter what you call it—but it's coming from a different place than the one which is self-seeking. And *mettā* is what you're developing from that center.

And it's important if you practice vipassanā always to do *mettā*. Although in, say, the Zen tradition, they'll say that compassion arises naturally with wisdom, which is true, but it does help to have a practice which, as it were, just eggs that little movement on. And in the Buddhist teaching, we've got this eightfold path. And the first one is this right understanding.

It's in right understanding that vipassanā is placed, so vipassanā is seeing things as they really are. And then there has to be this attitudinal change. It has to drop systemically—it's a systemic movement from understanding into the heart as an attitude. And that's where it begins then to manifest outward through your thought and your speech and your actions. And that's your next steps. Right speech, right action, right livelihood.

If it stops anywhere on that path, then the spiritual life gets stilted. It becomes twisted. People who practice vipassanā without *mettā*, the danger is that this aloofness that you must have in vipassanā, this equanimity which, as it were, you find from that observation post within yourself, where you can feel and see things and you're watching things, very quickly—or the danger is—it slips into indifference. And once it becomes indifference then it moves to callousness and basically you've lost the path.

So somehow to keep this equanimity there has to be another practice which re-engages that observer within you into the psycho-physical organism and then into the world. And that's what *mettā* does—it helps you to re-engage.

"Can I ask a question? Would samatha have that effect as well?"

Samatha is slightly different. This is a samatha practice, but it's more pointed to the outflow, to the engagement, the illimitables. Samatha itself is really more to do with us finding this calmness, this peace within us, which again is a great help, and it's definitely of advantage if you're going to do vipassanā to have that easy basis of entering into a very quiet, relaxed, focused state.

But it's not necessary in itself to do vipassanā. And again, samatha, just like this practice, can become very selfish. You can practice this to the point where you begin to really get blissed out. And one of the things about doing that is that you realize that these internal blissful states are not dependent on anything out there. Then you begin to understand why people can just live in rags, live under trees, eat what they're given, because it doesn't matter anymore, because their bliss is within them.

The problem with that of course is that it's not connected to the world, so when such a person enters the world and stands on their foot, an enormous amount of anger can arise, and that's the danger of doing something like this without the purification process of vipassanā.

Living in ordinary daily life, living in the world, that really becomes impossible because you have to engage with people. So you have to put this into practice. And the heart will grow quite naturally with that. And it actually, to my mind, grows much better because of that interconnectedness.

Samatha—there's two types of meditation. Vipassanā is this investigation of ourselves. And the samatha practice is to do with establishing, creating and establishing beautiful states of mind. So I'm sure you've heard of people looking at candles and breathing. Regulated breathing. All those are little tricks to get this very one-pointed singleness of attention. And the mind becomes like a focus, like a laser beam. And it creates this lovely energy within you.

"Is that like what mantra is?"

Yeah, mantras are the same. Anything like that. Coloured circles, gazing upon the beloved's face, all that. Anything which produces a beautiful state. But remember, if that beautiful state is dependent on something out there, then that something out there always has to be there for this to arise. If it's created from within ourselves then of course it's always there when we want it. And that's the difference between what you might say is a worldly practice as opposed to a spiritual one.

So now recognizing *mettā* as a practice which re-engages us both with ourselves—it re-engages with ourselves and through ourselves into the world—we have to be clear as to what this *mettā* is. And we touched upon it yesterday. So it's an attitude. Now attitudes pre-exist emotions. It's the heart's way of relating to something, and then the heart as it were begins to resonate, and that's what we call an emotion or that's the emotional feeling part of the attitude. But the attitude is prior to that.

Now during your practice you will have been moving from that attitude of wishing people well but your heart isn't responding—it just feels tired or fed up—and then you realize, ah, this attitude is coming from somewhere behind or before the heart actually begins to resonate. And the big mistake is to confuse those lovely feelings with goodwill. Because then you make the mistake of thinking, I'm not practicing goodwill unless I feel loving. And that's where we get confused between an emotion and the actual attitudinal state, which is being in a state of goodwill with people.

So you can see this is very different from love which arises from attachments. So you have to be very careful here. Attachments gets a bad name in Buddhism. But you have to make a distinction between something which is unskillful or unwholesome and something which is evil. Attachments aren't evil in the sense like murdering somebody, but they are definitely unwholesome.

So an attachment, say, a parent, a mother, to a child is absolutely natural. I can't imagine a mother not having an attachment to their child. But what happens is, of course, is that attachment puts a certain pressure on the child, because the attachment is always wanting the child to be as the mother would want the child to be. And that's where the problem lies, and that's why you get kicked back at teenage because of that contradiction.

Now to separate out the pure love that the mother has—which she also has for the child—from the attachment is very difficult, but it's there. And the wise person will slowly distinguish between the one and the other, knowing that the one is actually turning the person into an object. And that's what an attachment does. Every time you do something out of an attachment, that person is being used to please you. They become an object. They've lost their humanity. No matter how little it is, you're dehumanizing them.

So the way that you overcome the attachment is always to be open to their point of view, to their state. And that stepping into their consciousness, their way of looking at life, is the act of love. That is the act of compassion. And it's obvious, so attachment has a bad name, but it's not to be seen as evil, it's just to be seen as a consequence of delusion, of the way that we are relating to the world that we're in.

And it's a case of recognizing it, recognizing what we're doing when we're with friends, when we're with our relatives and so on. When you see them, just ask yourself, what do you want? What do you want from them? There's your desire coming from some place where they have to feed into your lack.

And this word lack is very important. It's often used as a translation for *dukkha*, which is translated as unsatisfactoriness or as suffering. But what this word lack tells us is that there's an emptiness there and we're seeking to fill the emptiness with things from the outside world. And of course they don't deliver, they don't deliver.

So the word attachment in a sense is a one-way process, and in fact the word connection is both. Both. That's right. And as I say, you connect by being open to the other, by just listening full-heartedly, open-heartedly to what the other has to say, and so on. And that cuts through, you see. And then of course you can feel perhaps a certain disappointment or a certain frustration or a certain fear when the person is not going to feed into your emptiness. So that's the bad emptiness, that's not the emptiness of Mahayana, that's something else.

So you can see it's also not romance. See? Romance is very specific, isn't it? You can't fall in love with anybody and everybody. And that is also a form of attachment. That's the joy, that's the deliciousness of two personalities meeting at that point. And it's very delicious, you know? But as you know, it's often three months down the line you wonder what the hell you were doing. There's a lot of faded... And then there's, and of course, but it starts there, remember, and of course if the relationship develops, and of course it develops into a true love.

And it's obviously not erotic love, but that's very flimsy and transient and empty. If you just practice making love just for making love, it becomes an empty experience because the whole of the human being is not involved. Basically, it's a prostitution. And I always love Woody Allen's little comment on this. He says sexual pleasure by itself is an empty thing, is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go...

So what is this metta then, you see? Well, just ask yourself, what would you want from a good friend? And just as those qualities come to you, then that's what metta is. Whatever companionship, open-heartedness, and so on, all the pleasant things that you would want of a good and close friend, that's metta. That's all it is. And metta is actually connected to the word mitra, which means friend.

Now you can see this metta is your basic relationship to all sentient beings. Last night we practiced that awareness of just relaxing into the present moment. And I pointed that out as your default position. If we can keep coming back to that state of just being in the present moment with an empty mind, what do I mean by that? I mean no thought. When you hear in Zen, no mind, they don't mean that you've lost it. They just mean no thought.

So if you can bring yourself every so often during the day, not just in meditation, but every day, just to collapse, as it were, just draw yourself into the present moment, and you do that, I find the easiest way to do that is by putting my attention on hearing. Just by putting my attention on hearing, I immediately come into the present moment. And because I'm hearing and listening, I'm not responding. So it's a position of real equanimity. It's a position where I'm very open.

And the other trick I found was to put your attention on the left side of the body. Your right eye on your left side of the body. And that cuts out speech. It draws energy from the speech center of your brain. It's quite magic, actually. You'll be surprised. It'll stop you talking.

So, if we consider that to be the default position of the whole of our lives, out of which we rise, out of which we can see an intention, know it to be wholesome, and then to move into action, right? The default position in terms of our relationship to sentient beings, but specifically to human beings, is this metta. Because it's from that basic position that the other two illimitables arise.

If you have a friend and they fall into bad times, you naturally want to help them. It's not a problem, is it? It just rises naturally out of your friendship. And if your friend has good fortune and is happy, you're naturally happy for them. So sympathetic joy, reciprocal joy, all that joy in other people's joy arises naturally. You don't have to work at it. So that's why the Buddha really pushes this metta.

I know that in later Buddhism they began to develop much more the idea of compassion. One can understand that because the Buddha's teaching is about suffering and the end of suffering. So the end of suffering, wanting to put an end to suffering, is compassion. But in his original teachings, as it comes out in the original scriptures, he's very much into this metta as a way. And the discourse on metta really lays it out. And he's asking us to constantly develop that attitude throughout the whole day.

whenever we have a moment of time, and think of how much time we have when you consider things like going from here to there, or waiting for a bus, or waiting at the lights, or climbing up stairs, or waiting for a friend. If you add all those little bits together by the end of the day, I think they come out to a couple of hours frankly. And what we do is we just tend to let the mind wander, let the mind go here and there and just complete waste of mental energy. It's during those times that you can bring these thoughts to mind and it has that effect. It's constantly developing this heart of goodwill.

You would be. That's what I'm saying. It's a natural thing. No, what I'm saying is that once the base of metta is there, and you have a friendship with somebody, then you can understand that you don't have to try and be compassionate. It just arises naturally when you see them in a bad state. You want to help.

So, these are called illimitable because there's meant to be innumerable number of beings. But more interestingly, it's a bit like numbers. You can always add ones. No matter how big your number is, you can always say, and one. So it's the same with love, compassion, joy, equanimity. Their development is indefinite. You just keep on developing it, developing it, so long as you're awake. And in fact it says that, so long as you're awake, develop this attitude, you see.

Now, we haven't practiced the compassionate part, but basically it's very simple. You bring to mind people whom you know are suffering, and the phrase is, may you be free of suffering. It's as simple as that. And with joy, may you be joyful. May you continue to be joyful. May your joy increase. We can't do that this weekend because we don't have the time for it. But you might... You might add it on to one of your blessings, if you wish. Completely up to you. But at this stage, I would really suggest that you keep it just as pure metta, because, as I say, these other two things arise naturally.

Now, just as metta has its dark enemy, what's called its close enemy, as attachment, compassion has a close enemy too, and that's grief. We very quickly fall into a grief for somebody, pity for somebody, instead of what compassion is. And again, that grief comes with attachment because this person fulfills a role in your life. And when they go, it leaves a gaping hole. Whether they fall into misfortune or whether they die or something like that, you're left with this sore within your heart. And that's your grief.

But compassion is actually a joyful emotion. It fills the heart with joy because of the help you're giving people. But if you still feel about some terrible suffering, like at the moment in the combat, if you feel compassion for me, you can feel grief for me, but it's not because... No, but what I think it fills you with is a desire to do something, and that's when we get stuck with this business of impotence, where we don't realize that we only have two rings around us: one of power where we can do something, one of influence where we can get others to do something about a situation. And finally there's only, you know, you can't do anything. And if you can't do anything then the frustration arises driven by this, you know, the sense of grief and wanting to do something. But that's actually based on a wrong appraisal of ourselves. It's actually an ego thing.

And it's only when you bear with your impotence and you realize that's it, that's the only thing you can then do is offer these goodwill practices towards them. And that's where you overcome that first because this is what you can do. And hopefully it affects.

But you'll know that grief is a subtle enemy of compassion, especially when, say, somebody dies and you grieve for them. And because you equate your grief with the amount of love you have for that person, you can't stop grieving. Because every time your grief diminishes, you think you no longer love them. And you get yourself into this swirl down to a deep depression. But when you realize that the grief you're feeling is actually the consequence of the attachment, then love allows the person to go. I mean, love is very liberating.

And these are sometimes difficult for us to grasp because of that lack of distinction between compassion, love and grief. The obvious enemy, of course, is cruelty. That's why cruelty is the worst thing you can do in the Buddhist thing. If you're cruel, the worst of hells is reserved for you. You go down to the Avici hell where you really get thumped about. Because cruelty is the exact opposite of what the Buddha is teaching.

And it's the same with joy. Sympathetic joy also has a subtle enemy and that's this excitement where actually you're getting over joyful, over excited over something. And to recognize that means that you don't get the aftermath of indulgence. So this runs right the way through just the ordinary joys of life.

Remember that there's two things that we have to do. First of all, we have to take the suffering out of pain. So there's always going to be physical pain. And for as long as we're not fully liberated, there'll always be some form of emotional pain. But that's not suffering itself. Suffering comes because of our relationship to that. Our not wanting to be there, our aversion to it, fear of it, and so on.

But the other side of the coin is, of course, to take the indulgence out of pleasure, the indulgence out of the joys of life. And if we don't do that, then we end up with the aftermath. While you're enjoying something, fine, it's heaven, it's not a problem. It's afterwards. Afterwards, where you get the craving for it again, the desire for it, the frustration when you can't get it, the grief when you lose it, and the underlying anxiety of losing something that you're attached to. I mean, that's what a lot of our insurance industry is based on. Like when you go to what was Dixon's, or what is it now? I can't remember. Yeah, that's right. When they con you into buying a three-year guarantee and you fork out more money for the guarantee than you do for the electrical equipment you bought.

So the importance of metta is that it reconnects us, connects us properly to ourselves and to the world, and it's the default position, it's the basic position we have for all these other beautiful mental states to arise. And this is underpinned because they're also called Brahma-vihara. And that means the dwelling place of the highest gods. And

what we're saying by that is that it creates the beautiful mind and the bountiful heart. And that's how the gods live. You know, whether they exist or not is not a problem. That's the ideal, that's the idealism towards which these practices are taking us.

And we've talked about how often we should do it. You should do it all the time, whenever you can. But especially after the passing of the sitting. To re-engage with the world. So that's the metta side of things.

And included in that, we have to practice this forgiveness. So now... going back to that original statement that all the suffering that we are experiencing is self-caused, then the things that come out through doing things which are harmful to others, harm done to us, and the harm we do to ourselves, all the suffering around that is also self-created. And when we realize that, it's much easier to ask for forgiveness, it's much easier to forgive, and it's much easier to forgive oneself.

So, when we harm somebody, it creates within us a certain turbulence. The human heart cannot see another person's suffering without itself falling into some negativity. And the worst one, of course, is callousness. where you're no longer connected to the suffering of another human being. And we've had that with, you know, going right back to the Nazis, right up to present day. As soon as you dehumanize somebody, you have the wherewithal to create enormous suffering for them, physical suffering. And that callousness comes back on us and it turns our hearts into stone, you know.

So once we open up to the fact that we've done harm to somebody, then there has to be those feelings of guilt and shame. Guilt is the fear of consequences. We're not talking here about existential guilt, that I am essentially evil. It's more like if you do this sort of practice, if you do that sort of thing, then the comeuppance will come at some point. And shame, shame is just letting ourselves down, it's a loss of self-esteem.

And when we recognize that these are the consequences of doing something which is harmful, and we actually feel the guilt, we get in contact with it, we let it manifest, and we feel the shame, the embarrassment, let it manifest, then they actually become our guardians. And the Buddha actually calls them our guardians of society. Because when we enter into, get close to an act which we feel is unwholesome, these two come back to remind us of our consequences. So they become our guardians. In the old word, they're our conscience. So our conscience is made up of the knowledge of what happens when you do something harmful.

So how do we overcome that? Well, tomorrow we'll be practicing it, and that is just by, through the power of our own imagination, through the power of our own imaginative thinking, we just set up these internal dialogues and just bring ourselves round to

asking for forgiveness. And then hopefully, if it's possible, to actually do it in real life. But often, of course, we may find that people have disappeared whom we've harmed years ago and all that. People die and we've still got something on our hearts that sort of rankles us. And then you make this insight that you don't need another person's forgiveness to be forgiven. That's a really important insight to have.

What you need to do is to work with these inner states and make that attitude of wanting to be forgiven or asking for forgiveness. And that in itself is the forgiveness.

When the order meets, we meet every, when there's a group of four, there has to be four monks, four nuns, when we meet every half moon, we confess. And most of the transgressions of our rule are forgiven on the confession. There's no tied to the post and whipped confession. It's just having stated what you've done. But the response is, do you see what you've done? In other words, do you accept what you've done? And your response is probably, yes, I do. And then the response is, do you undertake not to break that rule again? So there's a commitment to try and change your ways. So just the ability to state clearly that one has done wrong is in fact the process of self-forgiving, of being forgiven.

If you can put it right, if you've done something wrong which you can actually put right, all the better. Then you stop the karmic flow. So for instance, if you said a sharp word to somebody and you know they're glowering, they're sort of using it behind you and all that, then just to go up and say look, I'm sorry for that. It immediately cuts the flow of that bad karma.

Very simple to do. But if you've got too much pride, if you feel you were righteous, you should have been even more cruel, and of course it just keeps going. There's no end to it.

When it comes to forgiving those who hurt us, we're on the receiving end. So just consider that point where somebody has said something which has annoyed you a bit, and how we keep repeating the insult over and over again until it really builds up into this huge fire, and you have to take an aspirin. And then what you realise is that you're creating your own mental state. This is the point. And as soon as you realise that, well, you say, do I have to do this? Do I have to turn something like that into a huge sort of drama?

So it's again this ability to forgive. And it helps to understand forgiveness, because now, having forgiven somebody, you realise that their suffering either from callousness —which leads to things like being lonely because nobody wants to know somebody who's sarcastic and audible—or they're suffering themselves from feelings of guilt and

shame. So that's your compassion. That's where your compassion comes in. So you also want to release them from their guilt and shame. So you offer them that opportunity by saying, look, let's forget that. Sorry it happened, but I forgive you and all that.

And we do that when we realise that in the act of forgiving, we completely empty the heart of all that rubbish that we've burned up in there. And that the more you do it, the easier it is to do. It just becomes a habit so that there comes a point in our lives when even as the insult is given, the forgiveness arises with it. So there's never any pain around that.

I mean, there's a lovely image the Buddha gives of somebody set upon by thieves and cut from limb to limb with their machete. And he says, if at any point hatred should arise or anger, they're no disciple of mine. When I once said this in the group, somebody said, well, the Buddha had a great sense of humour. I said, he might have had, but I think it actually means what he says.

There is a way of receiving harm from somebody which doesn't bring that energy of anger from us. And that is where we begin to understand, really, the psychology of nonviolence. It's only when you realise that nobody can actually make you angry—they can hurt your body, sticks and stones may hurt my bones and all that—but nobody can actually cause you internal suffering. And therefore, you're ready to, in a way, absorb their anger. You absorb their anger.

And I'm sure you've experienced that in your life where somebody's come at you angrily and you've just said, oh, I'm sorry. And that I'm sorry, just actually taking responsibility for that moment just drains the anger out. Whereas if you'd have stood your ground and sort of butted them, then you'd have got into some sort of rage, a road rage or something. Now you may not have been guilty, it might have been somebody else who did it, but you prove that afterwards. But the important thing is to undermine the anger by receiving it, which is difficult. Our normal reaction is to defend ourselves.

So this business of forgiving somebody, you see, we get confused. We think we're trying to forget it, but trying to forget something is just another way of suppressing it. And we know that suppression doesn't do us any good. It just lies there as a turbulence within the mind, within the heart.

Sometimes we think we have to excuse them. But if somebody's robbed from us, they've robbed from us. It's stopped, not to excuse it—they've been robbers. They've done an evil thing. You don't have to lessen their act, but you can forgive them for it. And you can ask for compensation for heaven's sake, if you feel it's right, without feeling that you're being vengeful.

And sometimes we get a feeling of letting them off, almost in a sense condoning what they did, because we get into this business of punishment. You often hear these politicians saying, you know, they're putting people in prison for punishment and all that. Punishment doesn't hold any water in Buddhist understanding, because whenever you do something harmful, there's always some harmful results. So punishment is coming from some other centre. It's coming from some centre where you're trying to frighten the person, so they'll never do that again. A sort of deterrence—you cut your hand off if you steal. I mean, that works, is the point. But the punishment can't fit the crime. If it's the crime, then you'll have another go. So if the punishment is to be a deterrent, it's got to be something which really doesn't make the crime worth it. And they found this in these psychological tests where they've done this business of punishment and crime on a very low level, of course. And they found that the punishment has to really exceed the proceeds of the crime. It doesn't work.

And of course, the other thing about punishment is that it's a way of slaking our vengefulness. And that doesn't work either. You know, people in the United States, in some states, you can see the murderer or the person who's murdered and all that. You can actually be at their execution. And the case is that people come out—like, if one of your family members has been killed and all that—they come out, they've not been satisfied. They wanted it to be more painful, because that's the problem with revenge, isn't it? You can't satisfy hatred. Hatred eats on hatred. It feeds itself on hatred. So these people who actually want to see somebody suffering are simply growing in cruelty. They themselves are becoming more cruel than the criminals. So punishment doesn't hold water.

So now, if you come to the understanding that you can't punish somebody, there's no point in eating your own heart out because somebody's harmed you, even going back to childhood, remember, then that process of forgiving somebody—and it helps to stand in the person's shoes. And we can do that more when we move into that third category, which is forgiving ourselves and for what we've done to ourselves through whatever it might be—overeating, sex, drugs, rock and roll, all that sort of stuff.

And forgiving ourselves is probably the most difficult thing to do. And it helps to understand that all our unwholesome actions have arisen because of a mistake. This is really a crucial, important understanding. The Buddha's word, he begins the process of our psychology with the word *avijjā*, which is translated as ignorance. But ignorance gives you the impression that you're at fault. You know, you should have known, you're just ignorant. But it's not. The word is neutral. You simply don't know. And out of that not knowing, there's been a mistake.

And the mistake is who we really are. And the mistake is to believe that we really are human beings, that we really are this body, this mind, this heart. And by doing so, we then have to seek happiness, which is what all the heart wants—it wants peace and happiness—in the world. And how can you do that apart from accumulating things? The self has to feel safe. So it feels safe by having big bank accounts and having a very secure job and a very secure relationship. That's how it feels safe.

But of course, as soon as you accumulate something, you're in conflict with other people who want what you've got. So the accumulation leads you immediately into a conflictual relationship with life. And then you find that you have to guard what you have and there's your fear and anxiety. You have to get rid of people who seem to be undermining your happiness, and so the whole battle is—you enter into this whole battle that we call life.

Now once you realise it's been a mistake, then it takes away this feeling of being essentially evil. And the knowledge is that just as this not knowing through the practice of *vipassanā*, through the practice of spiritual practice, ends up at knowing—what we call wisdom—from the heart's point of view, it's begun at a point of innocence. It didn't know it made a mistake, just like a child might light a match and burn a house down. It's a bit cruel to put it in jail.

And that innocence is corrupted because of this wrong understanding, and then we end up with all this suffering. Then we get to a point where the suffering is so great we think, I'd better do some meditation. So then you start meditating and you come back on the process, you devolve, but that process is not back to an original ignorant—sorry, not knowing—innocence. It now returns to a purity which matches the wisdom. That's why in the spiritual life you cannot grow in wisdom without growing in virtue. The two go together. The one depends on the mind and the other depends on the heart.

So when you find yourself balking against the precepts, that is a measure to us of our delusion, of our mistake. So recognising that is the first step. And the second one is this business of there's no need to punish ourselves. All we have to do is bear with the consequences of things that we've done wrong, and that's all we have to do.

So I know somebody who just by a simple mistake—it wasn't anything evil or wrong or something—he just wanted to listen to music and he actually put the musical instrument he was playing right next to his ear. Well of course over a period of time it actually damaged his ear and gave him this terrible tinnitus. And then he had this struggle of hating it and fighting it and whatnot. And by undermining that process and just bearing with it and seeing it as a consequence of delusion, then it's just there as this little background whistling. It doesn't impinge upon his life anymore.

And that's the same with people who are suddenly disabled in some way. See, if the disability is not accepted, if they're constantly fighting it, then they're just driving themselves into despair, and as you know, in some cases, suicide. But once it's accepted totally and it becomes part and parcel of the way they live, then it just doesn't undermine the quality of life. Simple as that.

So this process of self-forgiveness is really important. So that's the process that we're going through. We're developing the heart of goodwill, developing the heart of compassion, and then we turn it through the process of forgiveness to correct our relationship to the world where there's been harm, either done to us or by us to others or by us to ourselves.

And remember that you can't do all this in a weekend. This is a process that you have to take with you into your daily life. And I think you'll find that the more you practice it, you get the benefits—tremendous, tremendous benefits. And it's not as though you have to go at it all the time. It's the constant little bits, like in the morning, and during the day when you feel a bit upset about something, to immediately go into the process of forgiveness. And it's just those little points that just very slowly, over a period of time, just change us completely. It's the persistence of practice that's important, doing it whenever the occasion arises.

So I think that draws me to the end of my little homily. A bit longer than I thought, but there we are. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 148

Kamma, Paṭicca Samuppāda, Virtue and Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma presents a comprehensive teaching using the Buddha's fundamental schema of gratification (assāda), danger (ādīnava), and escape (nissaraṇa) from the Assāda Sutta. He explains how our natural tendency to seek pleasure and comfort, beginning from birth, creates the psychological patterns that bind us to suffering. The talk explores how attachment and identity with experiences lead to the inevitable disappointments of loss, fear, and frustration.*
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> *Drawing from the Buddha's own spiritual journey, Bhante discusses how recognizing the dangers inherent in seeking gratification in the sensual world becomes the motivation for liberation. He addresses the purification process that occurs in meditation when suppressed psychological material surfaces, explaining this as necessary healing rather than regression.*
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> *The teaching emphasizes that escape (nissaraṇa) doesn't mean destruction of the world, but rather a fundamental shift in our relationship to experience - from identification and attachment to the observer awareness that transcends suffering. Practical guidance is offered for balancing samatha (peaceful abiding) with vipassanā investigation, encouraging sustained effort throughout the retreat journey toward awakening.*

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I wanted to bring all the teachings a little bit together for you using a schema that the Buddha himself seems to have liked very much. In fact, he said until he'd understood the world this way he hadn't attained the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment, so these three moments are important. They're translated as gratification, danger and escape.

I'll read the discourse. It's only a little thing. "O monks, I set out seeking the gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is in the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the gratification in the world extends. I set out seeking the danger in the world. Whatever danger there is in the world, that I found. I

have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the danger in the world extends. I set out seeking an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is from the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom how far the escape from the world extends."

And then to complement that in another discourse, he says, "If monks, there were no gratification in the world, beings would not become enamoured with the world. But it is because there is gratification in the world, beings become enamoured with it. If there were no danger in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with the world. But because there is danger in the world, beings become disenchanted with it. And if there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from it. But as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from it." So this little schema: gratification, danger and escape.

None of this will come to you as a surprise. It's what you've been listening to all the time you've been here. This word gratification — I looked it up because I think it's a good translation. I tended to use the word satisfaction, but Bhikkhu Bodhi uses this word gratification. I mean he does translate this particular Pali word with it, but I think it's actually a better word in some ways than satisfaction. And I looked it up in the dictionary and it gave two examples: "She was gratified to see the shock in Jim's face," and one that shouldn't surprise us — "A thirst for sexual gratification." So this word gratification I think has a slightly stronger meaning than satisfaction. It suggests that compulsive behaviour or a demanding nature about the desire that we have, and so I think it's probably a slightly better word for us than satisfaction.

Now if we go back to the Buddha's own particular life story, there is that time, there's a little incident which comes up when he's having a good time — sex, drugs and rock and roll — and he's just had a party, and he wakes up in the middle of the night and he sees all these men and women, all dishevelled and saliva dripping from their mouths. He goes into great detail of how disgusting it was, and it's then when he wakes up from the gratification that he's had from the party before. So there's something about the search for gratification in the sensual world. Now why is it that we seek happiness there? Why is that?

See, there's no denial on the Buddha's part that there is gratification in the world. I mean, there is gratification in ice cream and Costa coffee and all those things that we enjoy. So there is gratification. It's not that he denies that. It would be foolish of him to do so. And what is it that draws us to that then? Why is it that we seek it there?

So if we go back a little bit into the sequence of our psychology, remember that we're born into this frame, we're born into this body. And right from the beginning we're seeking milk because it's nice to taste and it comforts us. We seek the touch of our

mothers. So there's an immediate connection right there, even in the womb they say, with the voice of your mother and things like that, where that unborn and the born child finds pleasure. And this pleasure isn't just physical, is it? It's actually an emotional well-being, a well-being of being protected and of being close to some other being.

So it's right there at the beginning of our experience, I think. Now, it shouldn't be strange for us to realize or to accept that right there, even though it's not an intellectual thing, there's an immediate, there's a total identity with that experience. There's an identity with it. I mean, obviously the child's not saying, "This is me." It's just the way they experience life. It's a total identity with what they are experiencing. And I think that goes on. I would say an ordinary person would say that they are what they experience in that total identity way.

What we tend to do, isn't it, is to try and develop comfort around us. We want to be comfortable. Even in our sitting posture, if it gets a bit uncomfortable, there's that urge to move. If you watch yourself watching TV sometimes, there's a shuffle here and there. As soon as it becomes slightly uncomfortable, we move the body. Even at that basic physical level, we're always trying to be comfortable.

And when it comes to the more delightful things — what we eat and our friendships and all that — then of course there's an added factor of a real delight. There's loveliness in life, there's beauty in life, there's all the things that we enjoy. All these things the Buddha wouldn't have denied. There is gratification.

So if you go through the whole gamut of your experiences in life where you've been happy — from just ordinary basic things like eating to lovely times in relationships and being out in the country and listening to beautiful music, and in the meditation sometimes these beautiful states of mind arise — all that is given. They're going to come hopefully till we die. It's not that we're going to disappear because we meditate, I hope not. So there's always that part of life which gives us comfort, pleasure, joy — all those things.

And even in our meditation, we're trying to develop these factors of enlightenment to the point where they are just the way we are. So there is that calmness and there is that equanimity and openness. And what that means, of course, is there's no fear. It's fear that stops us being open, isn't it? And there's just an attention, a quiet attention to things. And then there's the four great *Brahmavihāras*, the dwelling place of the Brahmās, the great gods — perhaps better understood as the illimitables: love, compassion, joy and peace. So that's the Buddha mind, or the Buddha heart shall we say, is always in that state.

I think sometimes we get the impression through the coolness of *vipassanā* meditation that you end up being soulless or emotionless — a little bit like a dried prune, I suppose, but very wise. Well, I mean it isn't like that, is it? The Buddha says he feels joyful, he feels happy, he feels compassionate. So his experience of life at the emotional level is always in these lovely beautiful states, always in these beautiful states. But somehow he's not fooled by it. In this sense, he's not gratified. He's not gratified. So what is it that makes this gratification in the joys and pleasures of life gratifying?

Unsatisfactory. Not in the end gratifying. So basically very simple, isn't it? The fact they arise and pass away. Just when you think you've got everything sorted, it chucks a spanner and that's the end of it. You try and build up a life which is meaningful and fulfilling — good job and relationship and all that — and then your partner dies or they leave or the job suddenly disappears. So there's nowhere you can rest.

I love the sayings of Jesus on that: "The birds have their nests and the foxes their holes, but the son of man has nowhere to put his head." And I think that's it, isn't it? There's nowhere in this world that a human being is going to be comfortable in that total way.

And then when we come to investigate the psychology around pleasure, then we see all these downsides: the frustration, because of the attachment that you've built to it, because of the dependency on what's giving you happiness. There comes that frustration when you can't get it. And there's the fear of losing it, all the insurance that we have to buy in order that just in case we do lose it we can buy another one. And then there's the grief, of course, when you do lose it. So there's a whole messy psychology in the aftermath of having indulged in something that's very pleasurable or joyful.

And that connection, that identity, you see, is the root cause, isn't it? It's because I'm saying I am. I am, or I have. There's that peculiar connection with things that we have, which is very subtle, but it manifests mainly in these negative emotions and that indulgence, right? So it's catching that, it's understanding that, that we begin to see the danger. See, there's the danger of it. In fact, these things hurt.

And then, having seen that danger, one seeks for the escape. So that's the Buddha. So he saw the danger of the emptiness, the vacuity of sensual pleasure. It wasn't going anywhere. That's when he leaves and he's prepared even to leave his wife and his child that was just born. So I mean those decisions wouldn't have been taken lightly, would they? I mean people are called away from their families for various reasons, for war. And in this case the Buddha felt — or the Bodhisattva he would have been then — just compelled to go and try and work out what was at the core of his deep-seated unhappiness.

And I think when you get to that level, you're really at an existential level of suffering. And what I mean by that is questions of why am I alive and why am I conscious? And in the Buddha's more immediate experiential question: why am I suffering?

Why am I suffering? Couldn't work it out. When we do in the evening when we go through these recollections on sickness, old age and death — which refer back to the mythical way that they explain that the Buddha slowly came to awoke, really, to these factors of life — seeing somebody who was sick, old and dying while he was out in his chariot. Remember he also sees an ascetic. He also sees this ascetic sitting under a tree, and that awakens in him: is there an escape? Is there a possibility of an escape?

Now just going back a little bit on the psychology of this, remember that because of this deep identity that we have with this life form, with being a human being, there isn't just that side of greed, there isn't just that side of lust and seeking happiness in the sensual world, and indulgence — you can put it all as indulgence or acquisitiveness. As soon as we've done that, remember, as soon as we hold on to something, we put a fence around it, we put a barrier around it, and that defines what our pleasures are. So anything beyond that boundary becomes unpleasant. It becomes something that we don't want or we don't need. So our attitude to something which is unpleasant but which is neither here nor there is to ignore it. That's what we mean by neutral feelings. We don't get particularly angry about it, we just don't notice it.

But as soon as these things outside this fence, outside this boundary, begin to look a bit dangerous to us, look as though they're undermining what we own and what we identify with, then you start getting these negative things: aversion, the pushing away and the anger and the hatred and the spite and all that. And that all comes under aversion. And in our meditation, it's boredom. That's an aversive state: boredom.

And included in that, remember, is that when these things that seem to be undermining us, seem to be overpowering us, then we start getting this other side of anxiety and fear. And it all comes down to this basic position of seeking gratification in the world.

And then once we've established in childhood this way of behaving, then you can see how it moves into another layer of psychology when we hit the whole problem of good and evil. So when we do good and we attach to it, then of course you get into the business, the downside of really using compassion, using love, using sympathetic joy in order to make yourself happy. So when the other person, for instance, doesn't appreciate what you've done, then you feel hurt, you feel broken, you feel angry. Things like that. "What I've done for you," and all that.

And on the other side you've got the evil — evil in the sense of doing what is harmful. It can be something rather unskillful, which is neither here nor there. But we're capable of doing great evil, really doing something which is tremendously harmful both to ourselves and to other beings. And then you get into all that other psychology of guilt and shame and remorse and all that. And you can see how all this builds up and up and up until you get this massive human suffering stuck in this fathom-long body, as the Buddha would call his fathom-long body.

And it all begins from this mistake, this unfortunate mistake we make at the beginning of seeking gratification in the world, in the sensual world. So all those things are all linked, they're all there. And of course when you suppress them, when you push them away, when you don't want to look at these turbulences, these negative turbulences within us, well that's when they manifest as feelings of depression. See, depression and tiredness and lethargy and all that. All those are when I push them away. I don't want to see them. Keep them away.

So when you're meditating, of course, all this starts to come up, doesn't it? It's like, I think I say on one of the tapes, like lifting a lid off a dustbin. See, suddenly it all comes up. So suddenly the depression comes up now, and you've got to see it as a consequence of past conditioning. See? You've got to see that actually we've manufactured this. This hasn't come because your mother hit you around the ear with a banana when you were three years old or something, as you might have done, but it's how you reacted to this banana which is causing all this problem.

Now that doesn't mean to say that childhood is fraught with both ecstatic joy and disaster. It needn't be that any parent has actually physically or purposefully done you harm. You can just fall off a bed and it would be a catastrophe which remains as a trauma inside you. But even so, that is how the child has reacted, and there's that continuation of all those things that we learn in childhood throughout life, you see, until we get really bad and then we look and we try and find an answer. We come to meditation.

So when we are meditating, you see, we're opening the gates. We're opening ourselves up to all the stuff that's been suppressed and all that. But also from this understanding we're beginning to see the danger of this wrong relationship we have to the world. And it's seeing that danger, you see, which is painful. It's hard to sit with it. It's hard to bear with some of the stuff that comes up. But there's no other way. There doesn't seem to be any other way of curing our psychology except in this conscious way.

Drugs don't help. They just suppress the physical frame, don't they? And then you feel good, but when the drug passes, oh it's even worse. See, there doesn't seem to be — I don't know of any spiritual practice whereby you don't have to go through this purging, this purgatory, the process of purification. It's just a matter of fact.

But if you understand it as a growth in consciousness, as a growth in wisdom, then you see there's no other way. Because how else would you know that the gratification is wrong? How else would you know that there is danger? How else would you seek the end of suffering?

So if you see your life as more to do with an evolution of wisdom or an evolution of consciousness—perhaps the word wisdom is far better, actually—an evolution of wisdom, and not to confuse wisdom with knowledge. Wisdom is a relationship. It's how you relate to the world you're in. That's your wisdom.

And if you see that that's what you're doing through your meditation, is to discover a wiser way of being with the world, then in a sense you're prepared to go through the purgatory. And also I think when you actually go through the purgatory, when you actually see that it is a process of healing, you're more and more open to actually going through it. And that's important.

It's important that you actually see that there is gratification and that somehow something goes wrong with that. And this is what we mean by indulgence, whether it's indulgence in something which is pleasant or indulgence in something which is outwardly unpleasant, like anger. But it is pleasing to let go of your anger and bang the door and bump somebody on the nose. That's gratification. To finally get your own back. But it's not particularly skillful, it's not really wise.

So it's actually beginning to see that, that we begin to see the path out, you see, and that's the next business of it, the *nisarana*, the escape.

If there were no escape in the world, then, boy, we'd be miserable, wouldn't we? And people who get themselves into these dead ends, these sort of dead ends of the meaninglessness of life. Or a religious person—I've met a few people who think they're damned. What do you do? They're damned. Now, in Buddhist terms, that's to really believe that there's no escape from *samsāra*. That whether you like it or not, you'll be reborn and reborn and reborn—first as a shrew in a meditation room and then you get chucked out with a bit of cheese out in a paddock, and then you're reborn as a human being picking up a shrew and chucking it out, and there's this constant *samsāra*, this onward going.

And in the Buddha's day that was the horror. It wasn't ecological disaster. It was this thing about having to be reborn and reborn and reborn again. And there's a lovely conversation in one of the scriptures—I can't remember the details now—where two of the Buddha's cousins, if I remember rightly, decide that, discussing whether to actually take up, whether to follow Gautama and take up the robe and bowls. And the argument goes something like, "Look, what is life? You've got to go out there, you've got to plow the ground, you've got to harvest the seed, you've got to eat it, and then you do it again next year, and it's really boring."

And one of them gets really into this and says, "Yeah, you're right." And he goes off with the other fellow and says, "No, it's for you. I'm still enjoying this." So he doesn't leave, you see. He's still getting something out of the life form. But it was this fellow who was pointing out to this man who finally leaves how terrible life is in this boring, repetitious way, which I think would have been perhaps more obvious to people in those days, in some ways anyway, because there wasn't this huge entertainment industry.

It reminds me of an old pre-war comedian. He's gonna jump—he's on London Bridge and he's gonna jump in—and the policeman sees him and he calls him over, you see. And they start having this big discussion about life, you see, as to why suicide. And the policeman's arguing that life's worth it, and the comedian is arguing how useless it is, and the conversation goes on and on, and they finally jump—both of them jump off the bridge! That's brilliant—"Yeah, you're right!"

This finding of the escape—so that's the Buddha's great thing, isn't it? And he says that what he's discovered, he's not invented it. He says this is an ancient path. He's just rediscovered it. It's not as though he's the first human being that's ever done it. He doesn't claim to be that. In fact, in the mythology of Buddhism, there are Buddhas previous to him. Going back, I don't know how many times—there are twenty-eight previous Buddhas named in previous huge eons of world systems. It was just the way that you begin to think when you think of time being cyclic.

I think I mentioned it this morning, that the years just roll over, just keep going, and the whole universe is expanding and then it'll collapse, and then it expands again and collapse. So there's that idea that this has been going on ever since. He says that he doesn't see the beginning of *kamma*. He doesn't see that there is a beginning. It's always been like this. And presumably in that sense he doesn't see the end of that process, but as an individual he found an escape.

Now this escape is—be careful here—because this escape, as hopefully you've all come to realize in your meditation, is not the destruction of the world. There's a very interesting discourse in which somebody asks him, "Where do the four *mahābhūtas* come to an end?" Now the four *mahābhūtas*, the four elements, the four great elements, they are earth, fire, water and air. And they constitute the physical universe. So what the person is asking is, "Where does all this come to an end?"

And he says, "It's the wrong question." He says, "Where do they not find a footing?" It's very interesting. Where do they not find a footing? In other words, is there an experience, is there something experiential where you will not find these, but it doesn't deny their existence or destroy them or annihilate them?

And then he goes on to say there is a consciousness which is not touched by the five or six senses. So there is a consciousness which is not colored by the six senses. So there's no hearing and there's no seeing and there's no—there's nothing there, there's no thought, there's nothing. And yet it is without boundary, and the reason it's without boundary is because there's no phenomena. You've got to have something to create a boundary. If there's nothing in this universe, then it's empty space—there's no boundary in it. It's what we have, it's the things we have that create boundaries for us.

And he says there is this consciousness which is without boundary, and in all directions full of light. So he's pointing there to an experience which is a total escape from the world. Now remember that when we say an escape, he's still there. It's not as though he's disappeared in a puff of smoke and there's just this mystical voice arising from nowhere. So this escape is not the destruction of anything.

So again, when they ask him, "Does he believe in any form of annihilation?" he says, "No." He says, "Everything arises depending on something else and there's no annihilation." He says, "The only things that are annihilated are greed, hatred and delusion." And greed, hatred and delusion are this way of expressing this wrong relationship we have to the world, which in a psychological sense is this seeking gratification. And that's what he means by this desire. When we chant in the morning this *taṇhā*, that's what he's referring to.

But remember that there's a completely different psychology, and that's the psychology of the Buddha. That's the psychology of the enlightened beings, which doesn't have that downer, it doesn't have that gratification, it doesn't have all the downers of gratification—the grief, the fear, the anger, the frustration, all that sort of stuff—it doesn't have that. It doesn't have any anger, it doesn't have any fear. The fearless one—that's one of the epithets of the Buddha. He's fearless. What's he afraid of? There's no connection to

the world whereby suffering could arise. How does suffering arise? It arises through the connection of attachment, identity, possession. If that's all gone, what then is our relationship to the world? What might it be?

So that escape is suggestive of all the teachings of the Buddha concerning the practice which leads us to this point of liberation. It's an escape. It's like escaping from prison. It's like you're finally released.

So now this is where our practice comes in, because it's a fundamental practice. And what we're learning is not only to see that gratification is wrong because it has these dangers, but we're seeing this escape. And that's all we're doing—we're just seeing where the escape is. And the more the escape becomes clearer to us, then the more we'll practice, because it's like when you see the finishing line, you really want to go for it.

So even in our practice when we're confused or when we don't think we're getting anywhere or we don't think we're progressing—that's a regular one for meditators, because you still keep doing these pratfalls and you think, "Well, I'm still as I was before," you see—so if you have those sorts of feelings, those sorts of ideas about yourself, remember that all those come from this gratification. You're now seeking gratification as it were in the spiritual life, meaning you're seeking a certain type of comfort there. And that comfort usually comes from the sense of achieving.

But if you abandon those ideas of trying to achieve anything and draw that word simply into moment-to-moment mindfulness, then you're always achieving, as long as you're mindful. You're always here. And that mindfulness, that sharp mindfulness, is a guard, because as we begin to realize, the problem begins or starts with these intentions. So when we see these intentions and we're awake, we're bright with it, we're not caught up in it, we're not suddenly dashing off and doing something, then that gives us that moment of choice. And then we begin to see, "Oh, here's the escape, here's the escape."

And when we access that point within us, which is the observer—so that's not the fullest escape because there's still a sense of me there—but we can see that that's an escape from all the pain that the body might offer us, because from there we can feel the pain, we can see the reaction to pain, we can allow the reaction of fear and aversion, all that, to die away, and we can find this equanimity, this peacefulness with pain, just this patient forbearance. And that's an escape. It's an escape from all the fear and the anxiety that we have around the body.

It's the same with these emotions. When you distance them, when you can feel them there, rather than being them, it's an escape, isn't it? You've transcended them. You're in a different position. You're not identifying with them. You're not possessing them. You're saying, "Oh, look, there, there's anger. See, there's grief. There's depression." And it's seeing that clearly that we begin to say, "Oh, here's the escape. Here's the escape."

That doesn't mean to say at all, does it, that it's easy. It's very difficult in fact, to stay with these mental states as they arise. But the more we see that this is the escape, the more we'd be happy to stay there. The more we see it actually as a place where there's healing going on.

And then finally, all this takes a long time. So there's always going to be that little bit of self left right to the bitter end. It's not going to let go. So there's always going to be these pratfalls on the way. There's always going to be moments when we feel we've slipped back and we're not moving forward and all that. But we have to keep reminding ourselves that this is an onward going. This is a long-term commitment. In the Buddhist sense we're talking lifetimes, not just talking this life. So it's a whole process that we're going through.

So there we have it—these three ways of looking at our practice: to be aware of where we're seeking comfort, where we're seeking gratification; to see that greed, that lust, the avarice—we've got lovely, great big words for all that—all centering around the four great lusts: power, riches, fame, to be famous, powerful and rich. Everybody wants to do that. That's pretty simple. And what do you want to be? "I want to be famous, powerful and rich." And sensual pleasure. They're your four main areas, aren't they? And it's just to see how the mind is constantly moving that way. It's always trying to achieve that particular state. And that renunciation is the point where we allow that desire to just fade away, to just begin to release itself.

And as I've pointed out in the morning, to let any desire fade away and then just to stay with it long enough to see what the mind is, what the heart is when there's no desire there. See that lovely contentment. And then with it comes the peace. And hopefully you're beginning to experience that even during these times of quiet abiding where we're trying to develop the more passive side of the factors of enlightenment: the calmness—calmness of the body, just being still; calmness of the heart, stillness, the silence of the mind—all that comes under calmness in a way.

And the attentiveness, just the ability to just be attentive, focused, not particularly focused on any one thing, but just to be here, and to focus on whatever arises and passes away, that very spacious, open awareness. And the equanimity, just that ability, just the openness to what's coming into our field of awareness.

And just every so often to be like that and just to rest within the present moment, you see, relaxing into the present moment, wide awake. And then as you do that, when it passes, to ask yourself, "Now what was that like? Was that a pleasant place to be?" Now fair enough, we can get attached to that too, and then our practice becomes a sort of quietism, that we're just seeking this lovely quiet place—"Leave me alone. Get out of my way."

But then, of course, that's balanced because we then bring in these other factors, the more active factors of the process, which is that interest, the interest of wanting to see, the effort to begin to see things, and the effort to remain at that point of interest, and the investigation of the Dhamma.

So, during your day, try to balance those things. Just go through your day and say, "Well, this is when I'm practicing this *samatha*-type meditation, peaceful abiding, and this is when I'm doing *vipassanā*." And get to know yourself. Know where your weak points are during the day. Say, "Well, now here I've got to—I mustn't fall asleep again. Or here I just let my mind go, I give up effort at this particular point in the day." And just catch your rhythm. They're probably also to do with just the natural rhythms of our bodies, the circadian rhythms as they call them. So there's all those rhythms going on too, you see. So once we've attained, once we've got to this point of observation, then we can see all this happening.

Let's just pause for a moment and just whatever thoughts come up, let them come up and pass away.

So, let me encourage you to keep putting in that little bit of effort. For, Nick and Sarah have been here now for two weeks, you see. It's coming to the end, so you have to be careful that your energy level doesn't drop. More like the long-distance runner when you see that wire. You've got to put on that little extra spurt to get there. So that's important. And this is about your fourth day, isn't it, Haji? So in a sense, hopefully, you'll be more at ease with the schedule, with the regime. So with that, there's a danger of, "Well, this is now easier now." And there's a drop of commitment, a drop of energy.

So you've got to keep lifting it. You've got to keep seeing where the effort begins to drop, and you just very gently push yourself. That's what one of my teachers used to say: push gently. And then you'll see the energy comes, the energy comes. So keep going. That's all there is to it.

May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 149

Saṃvega and Other Questions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 54 min

> *In this illuminating Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the crucial spiritual qualities of saṃvega (enthusiasm/urgency) and pasāda (confidence), explaining how they work together to propel us along the path to liberation. He traces the Buddha's own journey from initial disenchantment with sensual pleasures through his existential crisis to his final awakening under the Bodhi tree. The talk examines the three characteristics of existence—dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), anicca (impermanence), and anattā (not-self)—showing how our misguided search for happiness in the changing world creates suffering. Bhante explains the vipassanā practice of making objective what we normally take as subjective, creating space between the observer and the observed. He addresses how emotions can be transformed through direct experience rather than conceptual thinking, and how liberation leads not to withdrawal but to compassionate re-engagement with the world. The discussion includes practical guidance on working with difficult emotions and understanding the difference between solitude and loneliness.*

Just for those of you who have not yet studied enough Pali, *saṃvega* is translated as enthusiasm. And *pasāda* is confidence. Like *saddhā*. The "pa" is just a reinforcing word there. Great confidence.

The Buddha talks about these four ways of coming to know something. One of them is through what we hear or what we see, something coming towards us. There are instances in the scripture where even hearing his name, the Buddha, would say somebody like Anāthapiṇḍika, just that word arose, this enormous interest, enormous *saṃvega*, this enthusiasm.

When you hear something, and we'll talk just within the spiritual field, but it works with lots of things, when you hear something, it raises an interest in you. After you've received that information, you would think about it yourself. So that somebody else's thought, through your own interior dialogue, becomes your own knowledge, in a sense, your own intellectual knowledge anyway, and understanding.

So you hear something which draws your interest and then having heard enough of it, you think about it yourself. So the Buddha may have introduced you, shall we say, to his Four Noble Truths. You might have just been talking about suffering, the cause of suffering. I'm translating the word *dukkha* as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, whatever, we can come to that later. And it might have raised your interest, so you go away and

you think about it. And that becomes your own intellectual knowledge, as it were. It becomes part of your internal thinking. But it still hasn't got the ring of truth in terms of experiential truth.

And that's where the Buddha would have offered the system of investigation that we call *vipassanā*. Now all the way along that line, this enthusiasm has to be there. Enthusiasm is perhaps a bit too big a word really, and so it grows into an enthusiasm and that enthusiasm comes out of this *saddhā*, this faith. Now it's translated as faith but it's just confidence, putting one's trust in.

So it's a gradual process for somebody, shall we say, who's coming to Buddhism for the first time or indeed any religious tradition. If you're born into it, it's a given. As a child you're already developed that way. There's no questioning or there's no need to raise faith because it's within you as a child. But when you come to Buddhism at a different time in your life, then there has to be this rather slow process of receiving that information.

As you hear it, as you hear the Buddha's teaching and there grows in you an interest towards it, that desire to take it further, that's your *saṃvega*, that's your energy behind it. And the energy behind it rests on this slowly growing confidence in the teaching which you're developing through first of all listening to what people have to say about the Buddhist teaching and then thinking about it yourself. But at some point it has to mature into your own personal experience really, or else it just remains at a head level. It doesn't actually begin to flower within the heart as such.

The Buddha gave a particular methodology that he called meditation or *vipassanā*. But it's not just that, it is actually a fullness, a discovery of the path in everything we do. So this develops into an understanding of what he then called the Eightfold Path. So the first part of the Eightfold Path, this right understanding, develops through these three particular ways. So the right understanding comes because you've listened to something, you've thought about it yourself. And this draws into your attitudinal, it sinks into the heart as an attitude. And then there's that search to make it real. So that's your *saṃvega*.

And the joy that you get from that, from investigating. And the investigation then is both this process of introspection, this process of examining your own psyche really, and we'll come back to it in a minute. And then it has to begin to express itself in the way that we speak, in the way what we do and in our livelihood. So it has to be a systemic thing.

And this systemic effect of our understanding, as it were, coils back on itself to deepen our understanding of the Buddha's teaching and a greater desire to keep investigating. And the method of investigation in terms of the actual practice is through this *vipassanā*, which is, I suppose, the easiest way to describe it, I think, at least to myself, is that you're making objective everything that you thought was subjective. So just as when you walked into this room you didn't associate with it as being you, I mean it wasn't that psychosis, and you didn't also develop an attachment to it as mine.

So as you walked in the room you might have looked around and caught the atmosphere of the room and all that and the windows etc. So in a sense you're trying to find a position within yourself to turn this interior room into something objective so the outer walls of your body and what you get from your body, your sensations and feelings and the atmosphere of the room, your emotional life and the thoughts that come through. And as you begin to investigate that from the Buddha's perspective, which is always to try to understand where the mistake has been made, which is actually causing us to feel either severe suffering in our lives, mental suffering or even just discomforts. Something is wrong with what we're actually doing. And that's what we're trying to investigate, the technique that we're using which is causing us problems.

As we begin to delve deeper in that, two things are happening. First of all, you begin to actually see the Buddha's teachings for yourself and this then becomes your own personal experience. And with that, you get this greater *saṃvega*, this greater enthusiasm to keep on your investigation.

A lot of our scientific discovery is driven by people who have that interest and then are driven by a real desire to want to know. So that's your *saṃvega*. So the one, as it were, sparks off the other. The more you hear which raises your interest, the more you want to know. The more you get to know, the more your faith and confidence grows. The more you have confidence, the more you empower decisions to continue your investigation. And so it rolls on, just continues to roll on like that until hopefully we're all fully liberated.

What the Buddha, shall we say, what set him off on his path, on his own personal quest, was two things. First of all, there seems to have been some time in his young manhood where there was a weariness, a disenchantment with the pleasures of the world. It's put in the story that he's had a big party and he wakes up in the morning and he just sees people disheveled and they've all got drunk. You know what it's like. And he thinks, well, this is an empty thing, just pleasure. An empty experience.

Usually, there are questions about sexuality and whatnot, and I always bring this up because when it comes to just sex, as a pleasurable experience, I always like to quote Woody Allen, who said, just sex on its own is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go...

So the Buddha, one of the things that happened to the Buddha was, as a Bodhisattva, before he was enlightened, before he was liberated, was this feeling of the vanity of trying to seek happiness in just sensual pleasure. That's the first thing.

And the next thing was a much more, it was a deeper experience, which was more existential in the sense that it was about the basic path that we take towards sickness, old age and death. So again this is put in a mythological way where he comes across somebody sick, old and a corpse. But it's really the end game of aging and especially death which, as it were, puts the rest of our lives into a certain context. And what with his feeling that all the pleasures that life could give him had an emptiness to them, added to the fact that he knew that death was at the end of the line, threw him into what we would call these days an existential crisis. And it was this existential crisis that really drove him to seek some answers.

He was part of a wave of what was happening, a bit like the hippies of the 70s, where there were lots of men mainly, few women because it was a bit of a dangerous occupation to be wandering about on your own, trying to seek liberation of one sort or another. And he was part of that movement. In fact, the Jain, the founder of the Jains, the Nigantha Nātaputta, he was a contemporary elder of the Buddha.

So there was a whole movement of the time, and it is said it's because, you know, this is what the academics tell you, is because society at that time was in a bit of a turmoil, much in the same as ours was. Moving away from a pastoral, easy-go-lucky, more democratic society to a monarchical, city-based, armies with elephants, all that. And a merchant class making money. It was all a big change going on and that feeling of dislocation, alienation, all these lovely existential words.

And so he himself is part of that movement and goes out to seek liberation. In his words, to seek the end of this *dukkha*. That's the other big word in the Buddhist teaching. This *dukkha*, actually its root meaning, it just means a hard place. So life's hard and then you die. That's what the comedians say, isn't it? And he's trying to find the reason for it and whether there's an escape.

So he works with various teachers and one of the things was to create an internal happiness which was not dependent on an external object. So it's easy to get happy on a good film, ice cream and all that, but through the practice of absorption meditation and various techniques one can build within oneself an ecstasy you don't need to have an external object.

The techniques for that vary, but one of them would be a mantra, something repeated. Not just repeated, but actually greatly intended. And it's much the same as the technique that we use to get ourselves depressed, really. Where you say to yourself, I am depressed. I am so depressed. I am really depressed. May all beings be depressed. Eventually you just feel so depressed. If you say, may I be happy. May all beings be happy. I'll lift you a bit.

Then there's other techniques which we needn't go into at the moment, but the point was that when he learnt these things, although they created these beautiful spaces, internal spaces within him, interior loveliness, they came to an end. He later incorporated these practices within his teachings but he saw them as unsatisfactory, they weren't actually leading to or weren't answering his deep question about how is it that we are conscious beings and we've ended up being unhappy? Why is that? And was that the way it was?

So having left both of his teachers and then tried a form of self-mortification and the understanding behind self-mortification is that the problem lies in the body. So all our appetites, greed for food, lust, all these things you can say derived from the body itself. So the idea was to reduce the appetites of the body. And he went through these rather long period of mortification, it would seem. And he said all that did was made him suffer more. So he abandoned that.

And it was really after that, when he's quite, he must have been feeling quite depressed, having not found any answer to it, that he is sitting by the roadside, and a woman comes along with some rice pudding, and offers him that, and it vivifies him. And of course, you all know the salvific effect of rice pudding.

So with that bit of energy, interestingly enough he remembers this incident in childhood. Now in childhood he's watching his father doing a plowing ceremony and he falls into one of these absorption states. But it can't obviously be the same of these absorption states that he's learnt from these other teachers. There was something a little, there was something in that absorption state which was something different. And what it was was this sense of curiosity. And it was from that position of curiosity that he then, this *saṃvega* arose, this enthusiasm.

Suddenly he realized that maybe this was a way of investigating which would actually make him understand where the core problem was. And because of his past practice, and this tremendous *saṃvega* that now came, he found a lovely place, which we now call Bodh Gaya, and under the fig tree, the religious fig tree, he sat and was clear enough to say that this is it, I can't see anything else apart from this, and I'm going to sit here. And either I'm going to make it or I'm going to drop dead. I'm going to die. Which is one hell of a resolution when you think about it.

Luckily for him and for us, he actually makes it within about six hours. That's what it says. And within that insight he cracks the problem really as to where the root mistake has been made.

And just for those of you who don't know, just to finish the story, he then of course goes through it and he's very clear about what it is that he's come to understand. And then there's that desire to teach. That's the compassion that arises, the *anukampā*, which translates as moving towards the other. And then of course begins his career.

There's a moment of doubt, which is again put mythologically as the Brahmā Sahampati comes down and asks him, that there are people with little dust in their eyes who can understand. And then off he goes to seek his five companions who'd left him when he'd given up those mortifications and that's it and that's the beginning of his teaching career.

So this word liberation, he's liberated himself from what he calls this *dukkha*. And this *dukkha* has three components to it. It's first of all the relationship that we have to things that we don't like anyway. And if you observe yourself you'll see that you're constantly moving towards comfort.

Even sitting here you might just catch yourself, as soon as there's some small discomfort in the body, there's a shift, there's a move, there's a constant effort to try and move away from what is uncomfortable. Now you might say, well, of course, that's absolutely understandable. Why would I want to sit in discomfort? Well, obviously we should not sit in discomfort just for the sake of it, but it's the underlying understanding which is making us do that which is at fault here.

And the fault lies in, you could say, psychologically anyway, is in seeking happiness in sensual pleasure, seeking happiness in this world that we experience. And what we find of course is that that happiness is entirely dependent upon what you experience and you can't control your experience. So you might feel happy at this particular point and then somebody says a rude word to you and then you feel unhappy.

So because we're living in a world which isn't following our dictates, then we're constantly finding ourselves having to try to manipulate the world, try and do something with it in order to establish this happy mind. So this constant seeking happiness in the world actually, paradoxically, puts us into conflict with it.

So you've got two positions there. First of all, those things that we are drawn towards, which we find actually make us happy, calm, peaceful and all that, because we rated happiness as being a mental state. We're therefore dependent upon that which is creating our mental state. And therefore we tend to hold on to it. It's quite logical. You want to hold on to your money and your friendships and all that. So that's what we mean by this sense of attachment. It's driven by this wrong search for happiness. And it lies in this mistake that happiness is some form of mental state, some emotional state. But there's never a time when an emotional state is ever steady.

You can't steady even your emotional states, even if you were to try. They keep changing. There's an obvious reason for that, which is the second reason for this unsatisfactoriness: everything is in a process of change. Everything is moving, everything... What was disappears and what is doesn't hang about much and we just hope that something will be that makes us happy. So when we actually drive ourselves to the immediate reality that we live in we find there's not much there really because it's in this constant movement, constant change.

So the idea of trying to hold something still, get the world to stop, is ridiculous. And the fact that we try and do that, the fact that we try to hold things—this is it, this is the way we want it to be, the way a relationship... We form a relationship with somebody and that's the way we want it to remain. "You're not the person I married," that sort of stuff. All that doesn't take into account that you can't stop change, you can't stop this constant movement.

And the other thing which undermines any hope, really, of trying to establish a permanent happiness in the sensual world is that everything is dependent on something else. So even from that point of view, we don't have any control. So if I get great joy out of DVDs and my DVD player breaks down, it's a catastrophe, isn't it? My TV breaking down, something like that. And a TV is dependent on all the little bits and parts. It's dependent upon the DVD itself. I mean, when you begin to actually investigate the situation we're in, we're totally dependent on something else. So this body is dependent on air, dependent on food, something so basic like that. So trying to establish something which has such an interconnectedness with everything around us, trying to hold that, trying to maintain it, it's a big job, isn't it?

So you can see that this understanding of unsatisfactoriness comes not so much because of the way things are but because of our relationship to the way things are. And that relationship manifests in two very simple ways. You either hold on to what you've got at all costs or you try and get rid of what you don't like and that splits also into a fork because either you try to annihilate that which is uncomfortable or you run for it. So those are your three basic positions: one of holding, attachment, greed, etc. and one of aversion which is either pushing away or running for it.

So the question is from what the Buddha began: How do we get out of that? How do we find, and if you do get out of that relationship, what is the new relationship and what do you end up with? What sort of relationship are you moving towards? So partly with the *vipassanā*, with the practice of *vipassanā*, it's to understand those movements within our psyche which is where the problem lies and we begin to, as it were, having seen more clearly the idea that everything that I'm experiencing, everything that I thought was me is actually in a process of change, never mind the world.

This body is in a process of continuous change, continual change. The mind is in a continual... it's not the same mind you were born with, is it? The one that we've got now. And any relationship I have to what I'm experiencing of holding on and of pushing away, I'm just getting myself into a confusion, I'm just getting myself into a constant conflict. And I try and bury all that, I just fling myself onto the couch, fall asleep, or roll over when the alarm goes, it just gets too much. So even that becomes an escape, trying to find some sort of escape in oblivion, which is great—there's no suffering in oblivion, right? It's just you wake up. That's the problem. You could disappear forever. But in Buddhist understanding, that's not possible.

So understanding that psychology takes us to a deeper level, which is about identity. And that really takes us to the core problem and this is where this teaching about *anattā*, this not-self arises. And the Buddha's technique is not to make some sort of metaphysical statement—there is no self or there is anything like that. What he's saying is when you look into yourself and look at your experiences, can you truthfully say this is me? This is me?

What the meditation is doing is drawing you into a position of the objective observer within yourself. And from that position of an observation post within yourself you can begin to observe what you're experiencing as an object. Now as you look at me now, your vision is filled with me, my face etc. But you can also become aware of the space between us and that space is the detachment, is the distance.

So this also within yourself when you, as it were, sense a sensation in your body or an emotion. As soon as you've made it an object, you've also created a space, a mental space between that which knows, your intelligence, your intuitive intelligence, and what it is you're experiencing. That separation is the experience of not me, not mine because in that space you can point to what it is you're experiencing and say well there is that which experiences or knows and what it is experiencing and knowing and that little separation is an experience of not me, not mine.

As you then pull back to that position and feel yourself to be the witness, the observer, the feeler, the experiencer, there is still a sense of a me, the one who experiences, the one who feels, the one who... And it's really cracking that one that eventually takes us to that position of no self at all. No sense of a me. And in our meditation, when everything's very quiet, you can even make that your object. You can even make that sense of self an object.

The fact that you're aware of yourself. The fact that you have this self-awareness, even now you can be aware of yourself listening to me, see? Even the fact that you're aware of yourself means you can't be the self you're aware of. It's already an object. Even as you sit within yourself and sometimes you clear everything out and you get a great sense of presence, a sense of being, right? So it's a sense of being. You can't be that. We'd like to be that, but you can't be what you're aware of. Tricky one, isn't it?

So then the question arises, well, who the hell am I? And it's driving your investigation to answer that question which allows us to have this final experience of what the Buddha called *Nibbāna*—even if it's only an inkling of it, even if it's only a little insight—and that's your liberation.

Now this word *Nibbāna* is rather interesting. There are various explanations, there are various attempts to try to find its meaning. Etymology is the root meaning. And various writers and teachers plump for one or the other. Some say it's some sort of the losing of heat. It's a cooling process. Cooling the suffering is cooling. But the one that I particularly like is unshackled. And there are two reasons we call that, because it seems as though that is a root meaning of the word *Nibbāna*, but also because in the process of our liberation, we get rid of what's known as the fetters, is what the Buddha called them, the fetters.

And there are ten of these fetters, we don't have to go into them in any great detail, but the one that's of interest is the fetter that this personality is who I am. Now, although we would all desire to have our 15 minutes of ecstatic celebrity, the fact is that when you look into your personality, your character, you find that it's just made up of

particular attitudes, of particular characteristics. The one dependent on the other. A lot of it dependent on the situation you're in. You don't know, for instance, how courageous you are until a situation demands that you be courageous.

Often we think of people who've been caught up in prisons, Tibetan monks and people who were caught up by Islamic extremists in the Middle East a few years ago. And everybody asked them, how did you have the strength to go through it? And invariably they say things like, well, you just find it. Everybody's got it within them. Although I know some people didn't fare so well. But the fact is, you don't know where you are in terms of your virtues and so on, until the situation demands it of you.

So one of the insights that you are released of is that you are not that. Even your personality, your character is something which is developing, changing, dependent on and so forth. The other one is the understanding that rites and rituals won't get you very far in terms of the process of liberation. And although that doesn't mean to say that you can't have rites and rituals, you just put them in the right perspective. They're there really to create an ambience, an effect. So you walk into a beautiful temple and it has a certain atmosphere and ambience, it has a certain scent to it—sandalwood, candles and all that. But no matter how much you bow to the Buddha statue or light many candles, it's not going to get you that far. It might make you feel good, but it's not going to get you that far.

So this unshackling—unshackling of what? It's the unshackling of this intelligence, isn't it? Unshackling the intelligence, this intuitive intelligence, from what? From its misunderstandings, its delusions.

So if we reverse that process, this intelligence finds itself within this psychophysical organism. I like saying that. It finds itself within this psychophysical organism and it's quite understandable that it should say, well, this is what I am. This is what I am. And within that, within the experience of this, of being a human being, we try to make, we try to create heaven. It's understandable, isn't it? And it's only when we fail and end up feeling quite miserable that we think, well, there might be, maybe I'm getting something wrong. And that's, of course, when you search for meditation.

And then you begin to reverse that process of undoing the wrong identities and the wrong search for happinesses and slowly, as it were, pull back from that commitment you had to this life form, thinking that this was going to deliver.

Now you might say, well, that's all well and good, so where does that lead us? You end up being a sort of amorphous blob, having left your body, society and all that. What's the end game of that? Well, paradoxically, it leads you back into an engagement.

So first of all we find ourselves in an engagement which is causing us problems, causing us to suffer, feel alienated etc. We then go through this process of pulling out of that which feels sometimes like a loss—you might have enjoyed a few glasses of wine and then you realize that getting inebriated is not quite the path.

And so you have to pull out of those areas where you were finding at least some sort of temporary happiness. And as you do that, of course, you have to re-establish a new relationship with the world that we find ourselves in.

So this is manifested as a transformation of our former attitudes. So whereas the world was there to feed us, the world was there to make us happy, that's turned around in a relationship of wanting to make the world feel happy. So what was selfishness now becomes generosity. And that's a very different relationship where you're not demanding anything of the world and yet in helping others you find your joy.

Whereas once you've found yourself in contradiction with the world, a hatred with the world, you then re-establish one which is looking upon others and the world itself as friendships, as friendliness, and all the virtues you would expect of a friend. Care and stuff. And that relationship of friendship or goodwill, perhaps that's the best translation of the word *mettā*, goodwill—you can see that compassion, the desire to help where it's needed, arises naturally, as you would with any friend. And sympathetic joy, to rejoice in other people's good fortune and so on, arises naturally from that basis of goodwill.

So whereas once even those acts of goodwill had within them some sort of kink of self-regard—even acts of compassion were driven also by perhaps some unacknowledged desire to please oneself—now become much more true acts of compassion and with it there comes as a return a real pure joy.

So just take a very simple example. If somebody says to you, a friend says, "I've just got a new apartment, a new flat, would you like to come and do a bit of painting for me?" So you say, "Oh fine, love to do it." So you go over there but there's a sort of underlying small print: when I need a bit of help you will come to help me. And of course when your friend doesn't, well what sort of friend is that? And so all the time even when we're actually doing something at a conscious level which feels to us to be compassionate, joyful etc., we're sometimes not aware of these subliminal demands that we're making.

And these more subtle demands, remember, are always turning the other into an object to please us. That's what you're doing, isn't it? Every time I do something with some unwritten contract underneath that you will come to please me, I turn you into something to please me, I turn you into an object. I lose that sense of you being a human being. That's what attachment does, isn't it?

When it comes to things like loneliness. So loneliness is driven by an internal feeling of perhaps not being loved or not being wanted or something like that. It's not a pleasant feeling. Normally speaking we wouldn't want to stay within that atmosphere so we call a friend and say, "I'm feeling a bit lonely tonight," and they're lonely so why don't we go out together and create company. And then our sense of joy of being with somebody is an escape from really looking at the causes of our loneliness and we think that the cure of loneliness is simply more society.

But then you get bored with your mate, with your friend and you get into this seeking company at all costs. Now if we were then instead to sink into that feeling of loneliness, to come to feel it, to come to actually experience it fully within ourselves for no other reason than but to allow it to express itself, we may find to our surprise that once it begins to exhaust its energy, as it were, no matter how nasty the feeling is, it very slowly, as it were, moves towards its own transformation. And that transformation we call solitude, just being at one with oneself.

And that works really with all the negative states that we have. To be able to sit with it, not as a thought pattern, very careful here—if you sit with it as a thought pattern, it is unwittingly developing itself. Because it's through thought and imagination that our emotional states develop themselves. I mean, even on an obvious negative level, if somebody says something to you in the morning which has upset you slightly, but you brushed it away, you haven't really looked at that, you've just brushed it away as being nothing to worry about. And then in one unguarded moment over the morning cup of tea, you're saying, "How could that bloody..." and you're biting your fork when you're eating, stop, stop, stop, and by evening you take an aspirin. You've got to overcome the headache that you've got.

This person's only insulted you once, but you've been at it all day, repeating the insult, making it, churning it over. Then you begin to realize, oh, what the mind is doing is churning, it's just churning, just stirring the whirlwind. So when we want to really heal ourselves of all this negativity within us, we find the answer lies actually within the body, within that emotional state. And it's sinking into it and sitting with it and bearing it and allowing it to express itself no matter how awful it might be.

dreadful anxieties, even at worst things like suicidal feelings, just to stay with that and let the heart speak its pain, as it were, which it does through feeling, and to just stay there patiently, and to attend to it.

To attend to it, you can even attend to it with a sense of compassion. You can even flavor your attention with a little warmth, a little, for want of a better word, a little hug, just to embrace your own suffering. And in so doing, you're allowing this... I mean, what is it? What is it when you go down and feel an emotion and you've taken away its word?

When you've taken away the word depression, when you've taken away the word anxiety, and you go into the feeling of it, what is it? What do you come up with? You come up with very different words. Heaviness, burning, agitation.

And it's coming off that conceptual mind completely and entering into the feel, into the actual feel of an emotional state, that paradoxically allows it to expend its energy. And in so doing, you may be fortunate enough—it's not always obvious—you may actually experience that transformation where suddenly that restlessness drops and you're completely calm, where the hatred has turned and you feel in a very loving state, where the loneliness suddenly disappears and you're perfectly happy within yourself. Not to say that these states do not arise again. I wouldn't want to give anybody false hope.

So that business of liberation is both a conceptual liberation, a beginning to understand where our concepts have led us, where our presumptions have led us. It has to be driven more deeply into the heart base. It must be driven into what we call our emotional mental state life. And there, there's seemingly no other way out than to bear, than to allow the heart to speak its problems. And if you don't, it'll come out through the body anyway, in psychosomatic upsets, back pain, headaches and so on, even severe disease.

And it's only then, through that process, that we begin to experience how it might be, you see. How it might be, if I can just move this different relationship, if I can find a different relationship to life. How it might be.

And that's where, going back to our earlier question, you get this surge of interest, this desire to carry on, to want to take this process to an end. So it's that process of understanding, of the practice, of seeing how the liberation comes, which moves you to further practice, further investigation.

"Just a point of clarification, are you implying that back pain, headaches and serious disease all emerge from the same origin?"

No. The body itself, as you know, has its own—well, intelligence is not the better word. And we can't say that all illnesses obviously come from that. I mean, obviously one of them is asbestosis, you know, the disease you get from breathing in asbestos. Okay.

But the suffering that arises when we get a disease like that is also self-generated. That's not caused by the disease, but by our relationship to disease and life and so on. And really that's where I think the cutting edge of investigation is most profitable, is to see, be constantly aware of our relationship to what it is that we're experiencing. And to just be awake to whenever we're holding on to something, you know, to really catch the conversation that's going on beneath the obvious.

CHAPTER 150

Faith and the Spiritual Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 59 min

In this exploration of faith in the spiritual life, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the fundamental questions that arise in human consciousness: 'Who am I? How do I relate? What do I do?' These questions form the foundation of the three paths enshrined in the Noble Eightfold Path. Drawing from the Kālāma Sutta and various encounters between the Buddha and seekers, Bhante distinguishes between faith (saddhā) as confidence and belief as mental fixation that stops investigation. He explores how faith develops through hearing teachings, reflection, and direct practice, emphasizing that true spiritual confidence must be grounded in personal experience rather than mere acceptance. The talk addresses common obstacles to faith including doubt, expectation versus aspiration, and the importance of ethical conduct in maintaining self-respect. Through stories of disciples like Anāthapiṇḍika and encounters with skeptics, Bhante illustrates how faith can arise both gradually through investigation and suddenly through direct recognition. He emphasizes the crucial role of spiritual friendship (kalyāṇamittatā) and warns against the dangers of expectation that can undermine genuine progress. The teaching concludes with practical guidance on working with doubt and the transformative power of commitment in deepening practice.

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

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

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

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

These congealed over time into what are three discernible paths. Hinduism, I think, has very clearly delineated them. But of course it's there in all the spiritual traditions. And in Buddhism, it's enshrined in the Eightfold Path. So right understanding is trying

to answer the question, well, who am I? Or why am I? And the right attitude is, now that I'm here, how do I relate? What is my relationship to other people, to the universe? How should I relate? And then that moves into action. So now that I've understood why I'm here and how I should relate, what do I do?

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

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

We know just because of the nature of things, because of the nature of transience, the ephemeral nature of things, the fact that things arise and pass away, change—that can't be so. There's still within us this search for happiness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The teacher at the time, it was Ajahn Sumedho actually—some of you will know him—took a break on Thursday, and he thought he was getting too tight or something. I happened to mention this to another man and asked him if this nose was also upsetting him. To my amazement, he hadn't even heard it. He hadn't even heard it. I said, oh, fine. At the end of the retreat, because we had another day to go, he came to me and he says, I did hear it. He said, oh, yesterday. Is that what happened with unwholesome speech? Maybe I shouldn't have said it. I don't know. But he was obviously more annoyed with me than the man's nose. He hadn't heard it.

So, asking ourselves the question, where does the heart want to be? It wants to be content, doesn't it? Isn't that the deepest place you want to be? To be content. And what does that mean, to be content? To accept the way things are, no matter what they are, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant—a acceptance. But not with resignation, resig-

nation suggesting some despair, I can't do anything about it. But more that openness: this is the way it is. And then in seeing the situation clearly, as clearly as we can—always, because we're in a process of time, time moves, possibilities arise.

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

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

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

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

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

There are people who don't need to go through that. Sometimes on seeing a person, they just feel it's their path, it's their way. In my own case, both happened. I entered into the Buddhist path in that gingerly way of investigating this, investigating that, having a go. I mean, there wasn't the choice when I started in the 70s, middle 70s. But I remember at one point, when I was with a teacher, there was a very direct, clear connec-

tion that this was my teacher. And I went to Burma to be with him. I didn't stay that long, but it was very clear. I never had that with anybody else. I've had lots of teachers, I've had lots of people I've been with, but I just knew that this person was going to get me through, was going to really make it for me.

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

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

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

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

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

But here's a case which gives you an idea of how quickly one can take refuge in the Buddha. There's a Brahmin Janusoni and he comes to see the Buddha. It's basically a question about practice. So this Brahmin is obviously a practitioner. He says to the

Buddha, you know, people who go into the jungle, into the forests, and live on their own, they go mad. Is that not your experience, that people go mad when they go off by themselves?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So now we're going back to this: how faith grows. "When there is an acceptance of teaching, zeal springs up." That's true, isn't it? When you have faith in something, there's an energy that comes to follow it through. As soon as you have confidence in the task, this energy comes through. Zeal. "And when zeal has sprung up, then the will is applied. And when the will is applied, there's scrutiny." So this is the meditation now. "And the striving, resolutely striving, realises ultimate truth and sees it by penetrating it with intuitive intelligence."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not by logical reasoning." Now, that might come as a surprise to a lot of people, but where's reason taken us? Our own Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which put reason to the fore and did away with tradition. It had to be reasonable. And of course, out of that grew our whole scientific tradition and our technology. It's been a huge exploration and a wondrous couple of hundred years, really, if you think

about what's been invented. And it produced the wonderful Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration of Human Rights. There's no mention of God in that—that's just human reason: how do we live peacefully together? What are our rights?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So it's all these things, really. He says it's not just by information, not just by listening to a teacher. It's a combination of both the hearing, the understanding, personal reflection, personal practice, personal experience. And then one comes to realise, oh yeah, this is true, this is true for me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

What expectation does is it puts a completion date on things, it puts an ideal ahead of you and therefore you torture life to fit in with that ideal. I remember I met somebody who said they'd gone on a meditation retreat and he'd read the books and it was about achieving liberation, *Nibbāna*. So he went on a meditation course. It's, you know, like if you go on a course to get a certificate for woodwork, at the end you get your certificate. So he joined a week's course in meditation and he'd get *Nibbāna*. Years later. It's a bit of an awakening, you see. It's not quite like that. So that's what expectation is.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But I want to tell you though that this business of expectation is a real killer. When I first started we used to do these long retreats and I met this man who became a friend and it was the way the Mahasi system teaches it — I don't teach it like that at all, but it gives you goals to go for. And this particular friend of mine really got involved in trying to achieve these goals.

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

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

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

So faith is a core, basic attitude within us which we can develop through our practice. And if you feel your confidence declining, if you feel your confidence going, try to see that something is happening there which is undermining, try to see what is actually undermining your confidence. Even not keeping resolutions can undermine your con-

fidence. So often people will say, beginners come to meditation and they make this big determination that they're going to sit for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening, and it lasts till Monday. And then they can't do it. They can't do it. So it's really just being aware of how easily we can undermine ourselves.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 151

Revising the Principles of Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the core principles of vipassanā meditation and how we can work skillfully with difficult mental states. He begins by exploring dukkha as "a hard place" - the unsatisfactoriness we create through our conditioned responses to experience, whether anxious, depressive, or other habitual patterns.*
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> *The talk illuminates how our thoughts and imagination reinforce these conditionings, creating cycles where "the more you worry, the more you worry." Bhante explains how vipassanā practice involves discovering an "observation post" within ourselves - a transcendent position from which we can witness thoughts, emotions, and sensations as objects rather than identifying with them as "me" or "mine."*
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> *Drawing on the Second Noble Truth, he explores how our relationships of wanting (pleasant experiences) and not-wanting (unpleasant ones) keep us in perpetual conflict with reality. The practice involves learning to sit with whatever arises - anger, depression, physical pain - allowing these energies to express and exhaust themselves naturally without the fuel of mental elaboration.*
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> *Bhante emphasizes that liberation comes not through changing our conditioning but through changing our relationship to it, discovering the impermanent, insubstantial nature of what we once took to be solid and threatening. He concludes with practical guidance for working with both mental agitation and sloth-and-torpor in meditation.*

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa

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

So it's just an opportunity to revise the principles of meditation and go over the problems that we come across in terms of dealing with certain mental states.

One of the core words of the Buddhist teachings is this word *dukkha*, which translates as a hard place. So we're in a hard place. And the idea is that if we get it right, it'll become sukha, it'll be a happy place, an easy place. And the process whereby we bring that about is a dual process, both of allowing old conditionings based on wrong understandings to exhaust themselves and developing new conditionings.

So from an ordinary relative phenomenal point of view, the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, when he was fully self-enlightened he was still the personality, the character was still conditioned by the situation he found himself in. But according to him he was always happy or calm, equanimous. The world argues with me, I don't argue with the world.

Now if we investigate how we create these conditionings, then hopefully we can go back on that process. One of the things we do is to use our intellect and our imagination to create within ourselves and to develop within ourselves a particular conditioning. So if for instance we have already a disposition within us which is anxious, then through our thoughts and through our imaginings we'll create an anxious world around us. We'll worry about this, worry about that. And with all these things there's a presumption that the more you worry the less you'll have to worry about, but the opposite tends to be true. The more you worry the more you worry, and then you suddenly begin to wake up to that reality and you begin to perhaps ask the question: am I the one who's creating the worry?

If you have a disposition which is depressive, always looking at the negative side of things, we tend to find more and more things to be depressed about, and there's a sort of relief in that because you're always proving yourself right. I am depressed. The world is depressing me. Everywhere I look, it is depressing. And what we get ourselves into is a lock situation where you don't see the end of that spiral. You try to break out of it. You try to buy some ice cream or something. But then you worry whether the ice cream is doing you any good. And you get depressed about it.

So when we realise that it's thought which is actually creating the world for us—thought and imaginings—information comes in and we play with it inside the mind, as it were. And we play with it from a particular disposition, a particular position that we've taken in life, and then we project it, we deposit it on the world, and the world funnily enough mirrors it back to us. So if you go around feeling depressed, looking depressed, everybody else around you gets depressed, and if they don't want to get depressed they don't want to see you, so you end up getting more depressed because now the world is truly depressing.

Now, all the Buddha is saying is, if you stop for a minute and try to take a position within ourselves to observe the mind, to observe what it's actually doing, then we'll come very quickly to understand that all we have to do is stop this form of indulgence. And that's really the training of vipassanā.

So we're discovering a place in ourselves, rediscovering a place in ourselves, and constantly trying to re-establish it, a place where we can observe what's going on. And we start with placing the attention on the body itself, because that's the most obvious. You can sense the body, you can feel the body, it's not that difficult to get in contact with it. And one of the main reasons for doing that is to try and release this intelligence, try to draw it out of its confusion with thought. That's the first thing, you see. This intelligence we have, this intuitive intelligence, generally speaking defines itself as thought, as imagining. I think therefore I am, that sort of statement.

But when we take this position in ourselves of the observer, of this observation post, we can actually see the images in the mind; they can become very clear to us. Thoughts are often too quick for us and we wake up after a sequence of thoughts and then reflect on it as some form of thinking or worrying or whatever. But in some good states of concentration when the mind is really steady, when this attention is really clarified, you might even see a thought passing in front of you like a neon sign. And these sorts of experiences are telling us that there is something as it were prior to or beyond the thinking process.

When we go into emotions, normally or often we find ourselves hijacked by a particular mental state. Suddenly you're angry, suddenly you're anxious, whatever. But when you actually sit like this and find that observation post, when a mental state arises you can, as it were, feel it as an object. You can investigate it as if it were something you had in your hands, a piece of putty, a dough. You can actually begin to investigate the feelings, the sensations that we would normally call anger or depression or anxiety. So you're becoming intimate with your psychic life in a way that you wouldn't normally be.

Normally, the ordinary person wouldn't make a distinction between that knowing and what they're experiencing. They are what they feel, they are what they're experiencing, they are their thoughts, they are the body. If the body hurts, it's me, it's me that's hurting. But here, by taking that observation post, when we find pain in the body, discomfort in the knee, whatever, it becomes an object. We've distanced ourselves from it. That's our first position, as it were.

As soon as you do that, as soon as we make any of this stuff an object, whether it's the thoughts or imaginings, emotions, feelings, sensations, we've created a very different relationship to it. Before I would have said my knee hurts, but when I'm sitting in meditation here like this and the pain comes and I say pain is there, it's not mine, there's a sort of break in my relationship with it and I can begin to see it as just sensation.

When I can begin to distance myself from these things like this, I become aware of this other relationship that I've had, which at the moment I'm not indulging. And here we're coming to this second noble truth. So the first one is that there is this unsatisfactoriness, the suffering that we've created, and the second one is the role of desire. Now I have to be careful with this English word desire because it doesn't quite hit the nail on the head. It's really a relationship we have with the world where we're constantly trying to be happy with it. We're constantly trying to find a way of being in the world which makes us happy so that this happiness is dependent on the world. When I say the world here I mean on what we experience, what we experience.

So how does that manifest within us? Well, whenever I get something pleasant, a pleasant feeling in the body, say a nice joy comes up or a calmness, I immediately want to disappear into it, absorb into it. I may want to indulge it, I want to maintain it there.

Sometimes we're sitting here and finally we can say we've got some sort of steady attention and we feel that we're calm and peaceful and we're really watching. And then somebody comes in and bangs the door, sneezes into the back of our necks, you see. And all hell's let loose inside. You want to kill somebody. And what that shows us is that we've entered into this beautiful space and unwittingly we've tried to hold it, we've tried to contain it, we've tried to not let it move. And in that way, whether we like it or not, we find ourselves in conflict with the world. So when somebody sneezes, you know, we feel irritated by it.

But if we were in that easy state of open awareness, you see, there would just be the sneeze and the sneeze would disappear. It would just be like a bird flying across your sight. Just one thing happening after another.

Now when we are maintaining that, we'll also see that whenever something unpleasant arises, there's always this resistance to it. You just don't want that. And that resistance is a relationship of wanting to get rid of, destroy, annihilate anything which I am experiencing as undermining my comfort, undermining my particular state. So again I find myself in conflict. I'm always in conflict with what's happening. Either I'm trying to hold on to something and stop something entering into that experience because this is the way I want to be, or I'm trying to get rid of something which I find upsetting, exhausting in it. And if of course this pain or whatever that comes up begins to get a bit too much for me then the anxiety comes, the fear comes. So those are our three basic positions in the world: we're either holding on to something, we're either being greedy, we're either trying to maintain a particular situation, or we're trying to get rid of it. We're trying to get rid of a situation. And if that situation is too much for us, we run for it. That's it.

If we observe ourselves, even if you're just sitting watching a TV, if you watch yourself, you're constantly shifting your position, moving around the armchair. You just can't maintain any place which is slightly uncomfortable.

Now that wouldn't be so bad in itself, I suppose, were it not that it was based on a wrong understanding as to where we're going to find happiness. I mean, if happiness could be found by playing this wanting-not-wanting game, then we ought to keep playing it. Because, well, we want to be happy. Very simple. But it's when we realise it's not going to deliver that, and we look at our fundamental position—you see, there's an unspoken presumption that happiness is based upon the sensual world. In other words, I've got to find happiness within this mortal frame, within this body, within this mind. And all the time, the messages I'm getting from the world is, it's not possible.

And it's not possible because things are changing anyway. I can't maintain anything. As soon as I try to hold on to something, I just find that it slips out of my grasp. It's like holding water. And then I find I've not got that much control.

So to define myself, to define a self, surely it's about, if this is me, I should be able to control it. If this is my body, if this is me, if my body is me, then I should be able to do what I want with it. I should be able to make it grow a bit more, hopefully. I should be able to eat as much as I want and not grow fat. I should be able to do whatever I want with it, but I can't. I find myself in a peculiar situation of being in a body over which I've got minimal control. I mean, I can wave my arms about and all that. I can't stop it ageing. I can't stop it dropping dead. That's the important thing, isn't it? I don't mind the ageing bit, I just don't want to drop dead. I don't mind the body as it is, it's great, I just don't want it to fall ill.

So here we have, you know, we're in this peculiar state where there's a drive within us to be happy in the world and the world just isn't playing ball. It's just not coming, it's not responding in a way that it ought to really. So maybe I've got it wrong, you see, and this is the Buddha—remember, the Buddha's own life story mirrors this same path. The Buddha isn't just simply the exemplar, you know, the one who actually sets an example. He's the archetype. All of us have to follow this particular path if we want to find this liberation.

And what we begin with through this meditation is this process of renunciation. Now renunciation is not self-mortification. We're not trying to make ourselves suffer; there's no point in that at all. And this is also something that the Buddha discovered, wasn't it? He went through a period of self-mortification. And he ended up by saying it was just suffering, more suffering, unprofitable, and well, ignoble really, beating yourself up.

So whatever renunciation is, it's not a case of putting ourselves into painful situations just for the sake of it. Renunciation is that process of beginning to let go of those things that we find ourselves attached to, those things that we are depending on for happiness, because we begin to realise that that isn't true happiness. Any happiness which is dependent on something is fragile. You know, if my happiness in the evening is dependent on watching Coronation Street, it can be very upsetting if the TV isn't working. I then get quite excited. I have to phone friends and ask to put it on a DVD and stuff like that.

So the idea of renunciation is to find out where the attachments are. You don't have to go the whole hog, drop everything and live under a tree. But you can do it in simple ways. You can find out where you're getting stuck, where you're holding on to something, where you find yourself getting upset over what is logically a rather silly thing, and you can begin to, as it were, withdraw your indulgence in that, see, and just feel the pain, the pain of letting go, see. And that pain of letting go isn't something which is bad, it's something which is good because it's releasing us from that attachment. That process of experiencing the pain of release is kernel to spiritual growth, you see, because what is it that we're releasing? We're releasing not simply that attachment to an object. That would be just very restricted. We're actually releasing ourselves from a wrong view, a wrong understanding. That whatever happiness is to be found, it can't be found in an ephemeral, transient, unpredictable world.

So by letting go of things as best we can we're actually repositioning ourselves in the world, finding a different relationship with it, and beginning to discover that which has the effect on us of developing a sense of calmness with it, of developing a sense of patience, just bearing with things without irritation, not seeing that as a suffering.

Now that's really one of the main things that we're learning when we sit in this meditation posture. Finding that observation post within us, we've already discovered a transcendent position. What we mean here by transcendent is that it is no longer involved or drawn into any confusion with any identity, with any possession of whatever is being experienced. So at a very simple level, if I'm sitting here and pain comes to my knee, in normal daily life I'd say my knee is hurting and I would try and do something about it. But here, see, this is an opportunity to release myself from this relationship of my knee.

If you were walking along the road and your leg fell off, see, you'd look at that leg, wouldn't you, and you'd say, well, is that my leg? See, it was my leg, but now it's on the road. How can I say it's my leg? That's a fiction, isn't it? If somebody says, whose leg is

that? That's my leg. That's my leg. It's just fallen off. Now because you've reached this perfect equanimity, you would simply note that your leg had fallen off. And then you would hop merrily into Costa's for a coffee. It would be of little concern.

But that's not what would happen really, would it? I mean, one would be in a state of shock. And that's really the problem with this identity. If it's me, if it's me we're talking about, then I lose a piece of me. That goes deep. That's why anything which happens to the body—we might be glib about it, we might say oh, you know, it's only the body and all that—but when something serious moves in the body then you come across this huge fear, this shock, and that's the measure of our delusion about who we are.

But it doesn't take that much reflection to realise that we can't be the body, even on a simple level. Well, have you any idea what's going on in your liver at the moment? Do you know where it is? Do you experience your toenails growing? Do you lose a part of yourself when you cut them off?

See, so just reflecting on the body as body, as an actual physical piece of mechanism, an organism, you begin to realize, actually, you don't know it.

We can't even see our own faces, for heaven's sake. When you look in the mirror, you think everybody sees you that way. But actually, have you done the double mirror thing? It comes as a shock. You never thought your ear was that big. Have you done that? Get two mirrors and look into the one that's looking into the mirror, that's catching your face. And that's how people see you. It's always the other way around. Don't get too depressed when you see it. Even when you see yourself in the mirror, even in that way, it's only a representation. We can't see our own face as we can see other people's faces.

So this definition of who I am—you draw yourself into yourself with emotional states. And we find that there's not much control over that either. These emotions arise and pass away themselves. And they're often attached to certain things like meeting people and Coronation Street and things like that. To say to myself now, at this moment, I will be happy—to command happiness. Can't do it. You can pretend, you can jump up and down and be happy, but the heart won't respond on command. You don't go to bed thinking, well, tomorrow I'll wake up depressed. You go to bed with the expectation that you wake up refreshed, but you're not. Sometimes you're depressed.

Thoughts. There we seem to have some ability to guide our thoughts, to put our thoughts in a particular way and guide them, as it were. But often it's the thoughts that overtake us. We find ourselves dominated, compulsive thinking. We can't escape the little boxes that we've created for ourselves.

So what the meditation is trying to make us do is to form a different relationship with it. And what we find to our joy is that actually we don't have to do anything. We don't have to change anything of the conditioning that we have, and this is quite a relief. You don't have to do anything about our depressions and our guilts and our feelings of embarrassments and all that. You don't have to do anything about it. All we have to do in that sense is this passive ability—this ability to stay with what's arising and give them the time, give them just that time and that inner space to express themselves.

And we find that when you just watch it like that, it evaporates. It begins to expend its energy and in so doing it'll eventually draw those things to an end, because it's only when they creep up into this thinking mind, into the imagining mind, that they develop themselves. It's only through thought that an emotion develops itself.

And that's a really important insight to make into our psyche. That if you stop thinking depressing thoughts, the depression cannot develop. On the other hand, if you don't feel the depression, then the depression stays in the body as a turbulence, as an energy which isn't doing us any good, creating discomfort, illness, headaches, and all that stuff.

So it's not as though we can get rid of these conditionings on a word, but we now know that we don't want to indulge them through thought. And so we're left with just this situation of sitting with them and allowing them to express themselves.

Now when you contact an emotional state—say anger, you feel irritated about something—and you've cut off this avenue of constantly going over what it was that upset you, and you come into the body and you feel the anger within your body, and you're saying to yourself "this is anger, this is anger"—not "I am angry." See, you've separated "this is anger."

As you drop into that emotional state, so you're getting intimate with it, you want to find out what constitutes the emotion of anger. As you go into it, you may be surprised to find that all there is, is heat and movement. There's nothing there. The only thing that made it substantial was your positioning of saying "I am angry." As soon as you say I, me, it becomes solid, it becomes something. Whereas when you experience it as just an emotional state, as just a sensation state, you find there's absolutely nothing there. And eventually that little flowering of anger begins to just fade away, it fades out.

Now it's not as though that's the end of it, because there are these deeper dispositions which take their own time to purify. And that purification of the heart goes on automatically as soon as you're in this position of observing or feeling of experiencing. That's automatic. You don't have to work at it. You don't have to do anything.

And to maintain that objectivity, to maintain that position where you're not going to identify with this stuff, you're not concerned with the therapy of it. As soon as you do that, you become your own therapist. And that's always a danger, isn't it? Because it's the deluded trying to fix the deluded. So abandon that as absolutely hopeless. Instead, the Buddha says, don't worry about that. Just let that burn itself out. We don't have to worry about that. That'll happen naturally. What we need to do is to correct our relationship to it.

And he points to these three positions. So the first one is this impermanence. So we begin to see that this solid thing that we used to call depression, anxiety and all that is actually nothing but just an amorphous blob of sensations. There's actually nothing there, there's no substance to it.

And you begin to see that clearly when you experience it just as arising and passing away of sensations—heat, pressure and so on. And by doing that you come to the second understanding that if that's so then there's no substance to it. It is insubstantial. It has no entity of itself. It's not an integer. It doesn't have any being. It doesn't have any existence. It's just energy. And in fact, I tend to look upon my own emotional life as just weather patterns. I mean, what's a storm? It's just a couple of clouds coming over and a couple of bangs and flashes and then it moves on. It just blows itself out.

And the third thing is this position that we have caused by that wrong relationship of wanting and not wanting, wanting and not wanting. So we're trying to access this transcendent point. We're at the apex of a triangle and we're looking down upon what is happening as it were beneath us.

And on one side we're getting all those things that we've defined as pleasurable and on the other side as unpleasurable, just a continuum. And that's your baseline, that's the given of human life. You can't not be alive and not know that things are pleasant or unpleasant. That's never the problem. Things are always going to be pleasant or unpleasant.

Then you get this line that runs parallel to it, which is our reaction to it, which is wanting what is pleasant, not wanting what is unpleasant. And that reaction to it is causing the conflict. And when that reaction passes, there is only the pleasant and the unpleasant.

And having abstracted ourselves, having uprooted ourselves from an identity with the pleasant and unpleasant, we find ourselves in this transcendent position where there is just experience. So the Buddha when he died of a stomach disease, even right towards the end, he's asking, "Are there any more questions?" I mean, the man's dying.

He's got gastroenteritis. And he's lying there and he knows he's dying. He knows he's dying and he says, "Is there any more questions before I go?" And then just before he goes, he gives that salutary command. He says, "All compounded things are transient. Work diligently for your liberation." And then he dies. Peacefully.

What will be our last words? "Why me?" Why not you? Just the arising and passing away of the human body. And then when he died there were those younger monks around who weren't so trained and they began to cry. And the elderly monks and the monks who were more advanced said, "What are you crying for? Didn't you know that everything arises and passes away?" And their attachment to the Buddha was based upon that wrong view.

So that's all we're doing in a sense through our meditation—discovering a new relationship with the world. And the core practice of just being able to turn inward and to this introspection, just to be able to observe ourselves—so this intelligence that we have, this intuitive intelligence, it just begins to understand. And that understanding then begins to change our attitudes. And that attitude then begins to express itself in the way we speak, what we do, how we act, and through our livelihoods. And that's how this thing flows. It's a systemic effect on our lives.

So that's what you might say the more passive side of the practice. The active side is what we'll come to this afternoon, which is of course developing the beautiful mind. Developing love, compassion, joy, peacefulness, and then through that to move into the world.

So just to recap that: when we're sitting and the mind is wandering, the mind is thinking, unwittingly we're developing the old conditioning, we're making things worse. So we've got to be really right there with it as soon as we wake up and we have to acknowledge what the mind is doing. If the mind's worrying, we're not worried about content, right? Just don't give an ounce of interest to content. Just worry about the attitude. So if you see that you're worrying about something—so worry—when you come into the body, see if you can feel the worry as an emotional state within the body. And if you can't find it, you go back to the breath. And if you can find it, if it's there quite obvious to you, then stay with it. Wait for it to die out and you'll see the thoughts die out. And then that connection between thought and emotion becomes more apparent to us.

If you're sitting there and you feel a disturbance in the body, a tension in the stomach, something like that, don't guess. Don't say to yourself, "This is anxiety," or "This is worry," or "This is grief" or something. Just feel it as feeling. That feeling which may very well be an emotional state caught up in that part of the body may rise to the point

in the heart, into the heart center where you can recognize it as an emotion, or it may dissipate itself through the body so that when that tension goes that particular mental state has also been exhausted. This is also true of illnesses that are caused by the mind, psychosomatic illnesses—not all illnesses are caused by that of course.

And the only other thing that I'll mention just towards the end is the other side, which is this disappearing into sleep. So remember, the mind needs rest, sure, the body needs rest. But if you've had a good night's sleep and you feel generally rested, then in your meditation, if this dullness comes and this feeling of lethargy, don't fool yourself, don't say, "Well, I must be tired." Because this is sloth and torpor. And the instruction there is to remain awake at all costs. So whether you open your eyes or stand up or if it gets really bad, do some walking meditation. But be absolutely steadfast in your commitment and refuse to be annihilated.

And when you do the walking meditation or your standing, don't try and get rid of it. This is the thing that we tend to do. You feel a bit lazy and you're going jumping up and down. But actually all you're doing is suppressing that conditioning which is drawing us into oblivion. So when you feel the heaviness and the dullness, stay with it. Make that your object. Allow that energy to dissipate itself. We don't see it as energy because it's drawing us down into something. But it's like black holes. You get drawn into the inner black hole. So it's a real energy, it's a force that wants us to move towards oblivion. And we teach ourselves that every time the alarm goes and you turn over and wait for the snooze button. Every time you do that, there's another little weight just drawing us down into oblivion. And of course the attraction of oblivion is that there is no suffering. There's no suffering in oblivion. Wonderful. But unfortunately we keep waking up. So that's our problem.

So when we come across this other side, the bit that is lacking energy, when we feel that heaviness and the dullness of the mind, just open your eyes, stand up, stretch yourself. But you're not trying to get rid of it. Don't get into a battle with these conditionings. Just give them the space and time to just burn themselves out.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 152

The Buddha's Quest - A Public Talk

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25 min

> *In this engaging public talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the Buddha's spiritual quest from his life as a young kshatriya nobleman through his renunciation, failed experiments with concentration practices and self-mortification, to his ultimate awakening under the Bodhi tree. The talk situates the Buddha within his historical context—a time of social upheaval in ancient India when pastoral tribal societies were giving way to monarchical systems, and many were seeking escape from the endless cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra).*
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> *Bhante explains how the Buddha studied with two renowned teachers who taught the jhānas (absorption states), achieving high levels of concentration but finding these beautiful mind states ultimately unsatisfactory—when he emerged, he was still "the same old depressed Siddhartha." His subsequent experiment with severe asceticism proved equally fruitless. The breakthrough came when he remembered a childhood experience of watching his father at a ploughing ceremony, recognizing that concentrated awareness combined with understanding (paññā) offered a different path than merely creating pleasant mental states.*
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> *The talk culminates in an accessible explanation of the three insights on the night of awakening: the vision of past lives revealing the ethical nature of kamma, the cosmic scope of this law, and most significantly, the liberating insight into anattā (not-self). Bhante frames anattā not as a philosophical doctrine but as a practical technique of investigation—stepping back from each experience to recognize "I am not this, I don't own this." He emphasizes that this process of detachment doesn't lead to emptiness but to a purified relationship with life, where wisdom, compassion, and purposeful action naturally arise. The Buddha's journey, Bhante suggests, represents an archetype for anyone on the spiritual path.*

The talk is about the quest according to the Buddha. I suppose the best thing is to relate to you the story of the Buddha himself. I'm sure you know the bare bones of it, but in a sense, his story is the archetype of anybody who's on the spiritual path.

There are lots of legends around what happened to him before, the way he lived and whatnot. But basically he was the son of a local lord, a local chieftain, and a kshatriya. So he would have been brought up in the art of war and government. That was the duty of his caste.

It was a time of great change, moving from pastoral society to the first monarchical systems. Already the Sakyas were subject to the king of Kosala. They weren't, as they were a bit before the Buddha's time, tribes who had their own democratic way of governing themselves—democratic in the sense that the Greeks thought of democracy, just the ruling caste sharing the power.

Within that change there was not only the growth of kingship and local power, with three or four kings around the Buddha, but the cities grew and trade grew, and a new caste you might say arose within an already existing caste: the merchants became very rich. That sort of shifted the balance of power a bit. At the time of the Buddha the castes weren't so solid as they became. The idea that the Brahmins were the head of society had not yet been fully established. It seems as though it had been established towards what we call Bengal, Calcutta way. But where he was in the middle, it was still fairly fluid. So when you read the scriptures, it's always the Buddha telling them what a real Brahmin is, and suggesting that they weren't as great as they thought.

Around about the age of twenty-nine, that's what he said, he left the home life. I'm sure you all experienced in your mid-twenties a growing realisation that youth had actually, or was coming rather rapidly, to an end. That one had better get serious about life. It's normally a time you might, if you're really forward-looking, take out a pension, start to take your work seriously, and even start a relationship with true intent. So it's a shift within our consciousness around about the mid-twenties. For some, it's an early existential crisis.

I suppose you could reduce the spiritual path to maybe three questions. The first one being something like: who am I, or what am I? The second one being: how do I relate? How do I fit in? And the third one being: what do I do? Those are your three paths—the path of understanding or insight, the path of love, and the path of action.

At that time, because of the disturbance in society, there was a growing movement—something like the hippie movement—with a lot of people, men, leaving the home life to live as ascetics, wanderers. They were well accepted by society. They were considered to be worthy of support.

What they were trying to do was to find the end of rebirth. The thing that obsessed the mind at that time was this idea of constantly being reborn, having to come back. It's okay if times are good, but because those times weren't so good, and there was a lot of anxiety in the air, the question arose: how do you bring that whole process, the saṃsāra, the onward-going process, to an end?

Various teachers at the Buddha's time had various answers. Some were what we would call materialists. You just lived this life and you died and that was it. Some thought that the passage of karmic lives was completely set—it was fate. They didn't mind whether you went down one side of the Ganges pillaging and murdering and all that and came up the other side with great acts of compassion. It made no difference at all. Whatever you were supposed to be born in the next life, that was going to happen.

And there were others. The Jain leader, of course, was an elder contemporary of the Buddha. They had the idea, which I think was also within the Brahminical system, that there was stuff sort of clinging onto the soul, the jīva. It was done by action, but it was like stuff clinging. And the way to bring it to an end was to really stop. Just stop. Stop creating karma. So you know the Jains are very wary of stepping on creatures and stuff like that.

Because even if you don't mean it, it's bad news. And the Jain saint basically starves himself to death. You bring your karma to an end by simply ending your life.

So when the Buddha left the home life, he left not only because of perhaps joining the obsession of the age—trying to work out whether there was an end to this rebirth thing. It was also because he had become disenchanted with what society had to offer. One image that comes through the scriptures is that he's at a party, and at the end of the party, all he sees is disheveled bodies and people being drunk. And it's like, "Well, what's all this about?" There's a sort of emptiness to the sensual life, really. That was part of his disillusionment. All he could see ahead of him was this ordinary type of living, just trying to be happy all the time with sensual pleasure.

The other part was a more existential insight, which is put in the myth that he was out riding in his chariot, and he came across a sick person, a very old person, a corpse, and an ascetic sitting under a tree. This just awoke in him the fact that these are the facts of life. You get sick, you grow old, and then you die. As the old comedian said, "Life's hard and then you die."

But this idea of an ascetic under a tree awoke in him some sort of hope, some idea that maybe there was an end to this process. And so he goes off, leaving the ordinary household life, leaving really sensual pleasure. That's what he's left behind—he doesn't see any future in sensual pleasure. And it's very dramatic. He leaves his newly born child; he peeks through the curtain of the door but doesn't look because it would draw him back into the household life, and he leaves.

These days, of course, that sounds like abandonment, which it was. But in those days there would have been the extended family—it wasn't as though she was destitute. And he talks about his mother and father crying with tearful eyes, saying goodbye to him, so it was all set up. He probably did what I did to my mother and said, "Well, I'm only going for three years." Because that's what happened. I said, "I'm going to become a monk for three years." I had never heard anybody cry like that before in my life. And I put my arm around her and said, "It's only for three years." And she stopped. So I presume it was that sort of goodbye—there was a presumption that he'd have a go and then he'd come back.

So the first thing he does is go off, and he hears about these two very good teachers who both say they've achieved nirvāṇa, they've achieved the end of suffering. What they teach him became part of his system of teaching. We call it the jhānas, or the absorption states. The way you attain these is through mantra practice, through watching the breath. Slowly but surely you build up a beautiful state within yourself, and this state becomes quite calm. It can become ecstatic. You lose contact with the physical world, you lose contact with the body, and it's like a little bubble inside you that you can live in. Depending on the strength of your concentration and practice, you can stay there for quite some time.

One of them taught him to go to a certain stage, and the next one taught him to go one stage higher. Both of them—especially the second one—saw him as an equal, and both invited him to be a co-teacher. But his response was that there was something wrong. He hadn't actually completed; he hadn't actually answered his question. Because when you came out of these states, he was still the same old depressed Siddhartha. So he left that and thought, "Well, the thing to try now is the other way," which was self-mortification. And that's where the Jain leader, we think, had an effect on his practice.

This idea that desire is the problem is rooted in the Brahminical tradition. Even Socrates was aware of that. And one understanding was that it was the body that was at fault. It was the body that gave us hunger and lust and avarice and all that—it was rooted in the body. So if you left society and really starved the body, really stopped feeding into it, then that would bring you to the end of karma.

I'm sure you've all done a ten-day fast? No? Well, if you have, you'll know that the first three days are horrible while the body releases toxins. But then after that, you feel very light, very wonderful. You don't want to eat at all. Of course, you're dying, but that's irrelevant. It's a very happy, calm state of mind.

So it does have that sort of effect, and he goes through this business of eating so little that he says he could hold his spine through his stomach. And what he found was it was just painful. That didn't seem to get him anywhere either. Self-mortification was just painful and unprofitable—ignoble, he actually says.

So he left that, and by that time he had five companions. As the story goes, the little myth that surrounds it, he's left them and he's gone onto a roadside, and a woman, Sujata, comes along with a bit of rice pudding. You all know the soporific effect of rice pudding, yes? So this woman offers it, and it sort of revives him.

And for some reason—maybe because it was rice pudding—he remembers this moment in childhood. This is a key moment in his life. He's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. And there's something about that watching which is different from these meditations that he's been doing with these teachers. The meditation he'd been doing had been about creating a state of mind—like we do when, for instance, we're a bit bored and we turn the TV on. As soon as you turn the TV on, you get a different state of mind. And they'd been unsatisfactory.

But there's something about this watching of his father which awoke in him a possibility. This was something different. What it was, was that he was still very concentrated. He recognized that the state he was in as a child had that same level of concentration that he got through these meditative exercises. But he was watching. He was beginning to understand what his father was doing. So something else had come into the equation, which was then what he called the wisdom factor, the paññā, this intuitive intelligence.

If your intent is just to make yourself happy, there's no problem in investigating anything. If it makes you happy, that's fine—why worry? But if something doesn't make you happy, if something goes wrong, like with your washing machine or something, then you want to know. There's that wanting to know.

So although he had this wanting to know—he wanted to know whether there was an end to suffering—the exercises being given were just creating beautiful states of mind, which also came to an end. It didn't occur to him then to investigate those. It was probably because the people he was surrounded with were telling him, "Well, no, this is it. There is no more." There was no inkling as to how to move further with that sort of system. And the self-mortification—that was just painful.

So this memory then led him to decide to continue his practice. He found a nice place near Uruvelā, which is now Bodh Gaya, and a nice bit of tussock grass so he could sit comfortably. You see, you always start comfortable. And he sat there.

He made this determination: now he couldn't see any other possibility. He said, "Now I'm going to sit here. Either I'm going to crack this problem or I'm going to die." It was a very firm determination. Luckily, the bluff wasn't called because he did actually make insight.

Now, the insights were three. He had three insights which gave him an understanding and also liberated him. Because of his very good concentration, he was able to direct his attention to past lives. If you want to do it, I'll tell you where you can get the technique—you have to have very strong concentration. As he went through his past lives, what he saw was that in passing from one life to the next, it depended upon the moral quality of the life before, on the ethical value of the life before.

Now, this was not the way the Brahmins thought at the time. Karma for the Brahmins was to do the ritual properly. Remember, the early polytheistic societies personalized forces in nature—the sun god, things like that. And the first sacrifices were there to propitiate these gods to get what you wanted. It was an asking. Later on, it became more that if you did the ritual perfectly right, the god had to answer. So your karma was getting the ritual perfectly right. It had nothing to do with ethics.

The entrance of ethics into the Indian system was, according to the books I've read, peculiar to the Buddha. It came later on, of course, in Hinduism. So he saw that this was true of his own life—that depending on his moral actions, good or bad in the past life, he would be reborn according to that. It had become a personal truth for him.

Because of his ability to see things, he was able also to see beings passing from one realm to another according to the same law. So what had been a personal law then became a cosmic law for him: that according to your ethical actions, you'll reap the results—good or bad.

And the third knowledge—these first two were deep insights into the way things were, but they didn't liberate him. The liberation came with the collapse of ignorance and the answer to the question: Who am I? And that led to this doctrine that people find very confusing—anatta, not-self.

The first thing to understand is that it's not a philosophical statement, not a metaphysical statement. It's a technique to investigate ourselves. When we're sitting, or anywhere, every time you experience something and recognize there's a split between that which is experiencing and the experience—there's a split in your consciousness—then whatever you're experiencing cannot be you. There's a break.

And this goes back and back. You step back from the body with its sensations. You step back from the heart with its emotions. You step back from the mind with its thoughts. And the final one is this feeling of presence, the feeling of being that we might have occasionally—a sort of self-awareness. Even that, you see, if you're aware of a self, you can't be that either. That's also an object. So this movement backwards from what you're actually experiencing is the process of liberation.

The basic existential delusion lies within that question: Who am I? As a child, I don't think we made any distinction between me and my body. Later on, we begin to use certain language—"I am feeling unwell," where you think you are your illness. But then, "I have a headache"—so we already have a dualistic relationship to what we experience. That process of identity and possession is at the core of all our suffering.

The reason is this: once you have identified something—I am this, I am that—what is your search? Your search is for happiness. So you've got to seek it within what you think you are. If you think you're a human being, you've got to make it right here and now. If you think it's to do with pleasure, then you've got to manipulate the world to ensure it gives you as much pleasure as possible, because only then do you feel happy. If you think it's relationship, then you're constantly dependent upon somebody else for your personal happiness. You form an attachment, and at worst an identity, with what you're experiencing.

It's only when you begin to realize there's an aftermath to these experiences that you have the same inklings the Buddha had—that maybe there's something else, maybe I've got something wrong here. Because in Buddhist understanding, nobody and nothing can cause you psychological pain. It's all self-inflicted. Pain in the body is a given; you can't do much about that. The body has its own life form. But suffering is optional. And we've opted to suffer, mainly because of delusion.

So the process of liberation is that process of detachment. And that's what the meditation is about, the one I've just taught you. It's about beginning to realize: I'm not this, I don't own this. I'm not that, I don't own that.

Now, people think that if you continue this process, you just end up being nothing—a blob. Because you're not this, not that. You just sit under a tree looking enlightened. But what happens, of course, is that in undermining the wrong relationship to the world, we discover a proper relationship. And what we discover is that everything we thought we were letting go of is given back to us.

Once the Buddha was enlightened, all the intellect he had developed through his discussions and arguments at home came into the service of expressing the Dhamma. All the earlier attachments which he would have considered as love, as compassion—these were cleansed of that attachment. But immediately after realizing what he'd understood, there was an immediate desire to express this for others out of compassion. Immediate connection with other beings to bring them out of suffering.

And as soon as he did that, there was a bit of a shake, because he didn't think anybody could understand it. The great god Sahampati came down and asked him to teach, because some people had only a little dust in their eyes.

So then, having determined to teach, off he goes. He walks. And that's his action. Within that enlightenment, these three questions become answered: what he is in terms of his ultimate state, what his relationship is to the world, and what he has to do.

I started by saying that his life was archetypal. So we also have to go through that process. And I think you'll find it right across the board of the spiritual life. No matter what form it takes—Christianity, Islam, and so on—if you look at the mystics, they're all doing the same thing, one way or another. There has to be a leaving of the world to refind it.

So don't look so glum.

In the end, you're happy. He was happy, and he died very peacefully—died on his side. Right before he died, he said, "Any more questions?" Can you imagine? "Any more questions?" What will ours be? "Why me?"

And then he gave his last piece of advice: "All compounded things arise and pass away. Work diligently for your liberation." Just like that.

So that's the end of my little homily.

CHAPTER 153

The Problem Lies in the Looking

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how our suffering stems from a fundamental error in perception—like wearing glasses with the wrong prescription that causes discomfort without obvious visual distortion. Drawing on the Buddha's teaching of Right View as the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path, he explains how we create continuity where none exists and seek lasting happiness in an impermanent world.*
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> *The talk provides detailed guidance on working skillfully with the five hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇa): sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt. Bhante emphasizes that these mental formations are symptoms of our deeper delusion, not problems to be analyzed but energies to be observed with equanimity until they naturally dissipate.*
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> *Using the metaphor of removing an arrow before investigating who shot it, he demonstrates why Vipassanā practice focuses on present-moment awareness of the three characteristics (tilakkhana) rather than exploring psychological origins. The teaching culminates in understanding how this passive purification of the heart prepares the ground for the active cultivation of positive mental states through mettā practice.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

This morning we discussed these three characteristics. What we were concerned with is the first of the Noble Eightfold Path, this business of right view, right understanding. What the Buddha is saying is that it's actually in the way that we're looking which is at fault. It's the way we understand things. The quality of that understanding is deep within the actual intelligence that we are — the Buddha nature within, for want of a better word. We call it a delusion. He calls it a delusion.

The definition of a delusion is that of course you don't know you're deluded — this is the problem. If somebody is deluded, what we're saying is that they don't know how mad they are. So here we are, you see, completely mad and not knowing it. Something awakens us to that delusion, and it's suffering. The Buddha actually says quite clearly that it's suffering, that coming to look at suffering, which leads us to the end of suffering. So although it's not a pleasant thing, it actually is a goal for us to find where the end of suffering is, how we can bring suffering to an end.

I like to tell my sad tale with an optician. I got these new pair of glasses and the left eye felt uncomfortable. But as far as I could see, I saw properly. So I went back and I said, "The left eye feels uncomfortable." She tested me — there's another optician — said it was a wrong prescription. It had not taken into account astigmatism. Now for those of you with twenty-twenty eyesight, astigmatism is a wave in the lens. You know, like the old glass used to have a wave and when you look through it, it would distort the image. So that's what astigmatism does. She corrected it, I had a new lens, and the discomfort disappeared.

What was amazing to me was that I could see no difference between the seeing with the wrong lens and the actual process of seeing with the right lens. It all seemed exactly the same to me, except that there was a discomfort. I think that's a wonderful metaphor for our situation. That somehow being here is *dukkha*. *Dukkha* means a hard place. One of the little epithets they use, one of the little descriptions they use, is of an axle which doesn't fit the wheel right. It's just not quite right. That essential delusion, that essential wrong way of looking is what we're trying to correct when we see these three characteristics.

We're in a better position than the Buddha himself because when he started off, there would seem to be very little information as to where suffering might arise. Through his own efforts, he came to be able to pinpoint exactly where the problem lay. We talked this morning about a mistake, because the process begins at the level of not knowing. It's through not knowing that we presume to know. So as a child, what do we know? There you are. Gurgling. Weeping. You just presume yourself to be this little bundle of flesh. It just continues.

As we said this morning, what we're trying to do is to create heaven on earth. Interestingly enough, no religion predicts heaven on earth. They always say you have to die, then you go. You can't get it here. You get a glimpse of it here, but you can't maintain it here because of the situation of the world.

When we come to see that, our next task, having seen the problem, having seen that we create continuity where there isn't continuity, we create solidity, substantiality, a sense of self where there isn't one, and we try to find happiness in the world which can't deliver — once we begin to understand that, begin to see that in ourselves, then the next question comes up: well, how do we then create the transformation? How do we then become Buddha? Because that's what he did, and he said there was no distinction to be made between himself and anybody else.

Our problem is now, having perceived these wrong views, these wrong understanding, how do we proceed in order to get rid of our suffering and — this is the positive side, remember — to end up with this beautiful mind, the beautiful heart.

Remember that once the Buddha had liberated himself from that delusion, it wasn't as though he turned into some gormless, amorphic blob sat by the road. He was obviously quite charismatic. In fact, very shortly after his enlightenment, his awakening, he actually is wandering to see these five earlier companions to tell them about what he has to teach them, and he meets one of these ascetics on the way. The ascetic says to him, "You look so bright, you're gleaming. What's your understanding? Who's your teacher?" And he goes into this wonderful self-panegyric about how he is the enlightened one, the fully self-enlightened. Understandably, the ascetic goes, "Oh, very interesting," and then wanders off. That was one of his first understandings, that it wasn't quite the way to teach ascetics.

When he actually approaches his disciples, they know him as this Siddhartha who'd been struggling like them. They think he's gone soft anyway because he'd eaten and stuff. They refuse really to acknowledge him. But as he comes close, they feel there's something quite strange, quite different about him and almost unwillingly they prepare a seat for him and start listening to him. He starts to try and convince them and they're saying, "Well, yeah, yeah, yeah." Then he says to them, "Have you ever heard me speaking like this before? Have you ever heard me ever say things like this before?" And they say no. That's when they open up.

Even by the end of the first talks, one of them has become on the first rung of enlightenment, the rung of awakening. So the teaching isn't just about trying to see something — it's about this process of transformation.

There are two processes that we have to go through. The first one is the more passive one, and the second one is the active one. The passive one is already happening when we practice *Vipassanā*. Just by turning our gaze away from the symptoms of our disease, away from the symptoms of our wrong view, these symptoms begin to disappear.

What are these symptoms? These symptoms are the five hindrances. There are all the things that we desire. Desire meaning this drive to find happiness in a central world. There are all those things that we're averse to, get angry about, upset about. There are all those things that we get — that habit we have of going into oblivion to escape problems. You know, like when you feel a bit off, you feel a bit things got on top of you, or you feel a bit down, you get this neon lights: head for the bed, throw yourself on the couch, disappear for a while, using sleep as a suppressant — well it is a suppressant — push it away, push it down.

All the stuff that makes us restless, and that includes things like guilt and shame, which are secondary emotions arising out of wrong actions. And doubts — doubts that doggers, not only spiritual doubts, just ordinary doubts. Should I be in this job, should I be with this person, should I not be with this person? Just doubts that doggers. And doubts that are not honest doubts, for want of a better word, a sense of wonder, but doubts which rest upon fear, fear of commitment.

All these turbulence that we have, all the depressions, all the anxieties, all the guilt and the shame, all the rubbish that slides inside us, these are all symptoms. They're all symptoms of this fundamental mistake. That doesn't mean to say that you can't treat them as symptoms. Often when I speak like this people think that I'm talking against things like therapy and stuff like that — not at all. But therapy itself won't actually get to the root of the problem, although it obviously can be extremely helpful.

There was a book called — you might know it — *Emotional Intelligence*. Well there was another author, a woman, who wrote *Intelligent Emotions* as a commentary. It's an excellent book. Her understanding of how we make these emotions worse and worse is second to none. But the preface tells us quite distinctly that there is no end to suffering. It's a Freudian position where all we can do is accommodate. We can only come to this position of a sanity about life, where it's always going to be uncomfortable and there's no way out of that. Which isn't a particularly — but I mean, as truthful as she, from her point of view, perfectly truthful.

So that we can cut the hard edge of our suffering. We can cut the sharp edge of it. But basically, we simply cannot be happy at all. There's no end to it. At least in this lifetime. The reason is that when you read you see that she hasn't quite perceived where the core problem lies, and the core problem lies in not seeing these three characteristics.

Now when we avert our gaze to those three characteristics, the hindrances still come up. They come up. We can see them in our fantasies. We suddenly get caught up on some erotic, lustful or romantic dream. We're suddenly building a huge business which is going to take the world over. We're suddenly saving the world. That's a lovely one. We suddenly have the answers to our climate problems — all these lovely compassionate ideas.

So that's all desire, even if it's arising out of some sort of compassion or some sort of love, it's still a production of the ego of wanting to save the world. You'll notice that the direction is always to stop the dream, to stop the fantasy. That's your symptom. The fantasy is the symptom of the disorder. Then when you come in, at least you're at a secondary level of the disorder, which is the emotional state that you can experience.

As you descend into the body, and the answer always lies in the body, as you descend into the body and you feel that restlessness, then the questions may arise: why is this, where's it come from, etcetera, etcetera. So that's again treating with the symptom. The Buddha's image for that is of a man who shot by an arrow. We all know it. They come to help him take it out and he said, "Well, hold on. I want to know who fired it, why they find it, who made the arrow." Well, right, well before they know, he's dead.

So it's a case of recognizing that even here the fundamental answer to our problems doesn't lie. Asking those questions may be interesting, might be interesting to have a nice therapeutic session with somebody and find out why that happened, but it won't actually pull the original thorn out of the system.

So again we avert our gaze. We're not concerned with the problem as such, the problem of this restlessness. We're now concerned with either seeing its transient nature or the fact that we distance from it and we create in that distance a feeling of it being not me, not mine. When we do that, to our amazement, the thing begins to evaporate, begins to exhaust itself. That's one way that we come to understand that these emotions, these states don't have any reality. They don't have any substance to them at all. They're just forms of energy. In allowing them to dissipate like that, we begin to see that when it comes to this therapy level of things, the wonder of the system is that you don't have to do anything. You don't have to do a damn thing. You just have to sit there and bear it, sit there and allow it to express itself. In so doing, it's just a force — it just evaporates.

The other thing that we can do apart from seeing it from these two vantage points of it being impermanent, transient, getting into the texture of the feeling, the actual texture, the different little sensations that arise with that restlessness in the heart or in the body, and this other business of creating that distance so that it's quite clear it's not me, not mine.

There's a little warning there that sometimes we're using that to actually gently suppress it. Be careful. When you're noting something like restlessness, restlessness, careful you're not using the word to gently kill it. Because you won't kill it. All you're doing is just gently pushing it away. That distancing is a little technique which allows us to regain a certain equanimity within a situation. But once that equanimity is gained, we have to go into it, we have to feel it, to experience it. At that point, its impermanent, insubstantial quality becomes more apparent, and it's seeing its non-substantial nature which undermines the idea of it being a me, a mine.

The third approach is by way of a very simple psychology which is open to everybody, and that is having experienced this restlessness, to catch our relationship to it — our perhaps aversion to it or our desire to indulge it. Either way we're actually turning the turbulence, we're actually steering the turbulence.

When you suppress it, the very force with which you suppress it with, that negative force of pushing it away, simply feeds back into the system. It's like a spring that's waiting to be sprung. It comes up with the energy of that resistance. As you resist it, your attention is on the feeling of that resistance. Is it just an aversion or is it fear? Or is it subtly moving from fear to aversion? Fear and aversion are two sides of the same coin. They're very close together. Anger and anxiety, fear and hatred are very close. The mind can switch from one to the other almost at lightning speed.

This was apparent to me when I was rather, I confess, cruel to a little pup. I was playing with it and I kept pushing it away and it kept barking at me. But when I pushed it too much, it would whine with fear. I could see very clearly that my same action of pushing it and pushing it away created a dual movement within this little being. One minute it was barking at me fiercely and the next minute it was trying to get away. That's all we're doing all the time with anything that we feel negative towards.

But of course there is this other more — sorry, the great thing about aversion or fear is at least it distances us from the object, at least we can create a not wanting, not wanting that. In a paradoxical way, it does make us stick to the object. You know this, for instance, if you've lived in a place where you've heard next door's music and it's come through just as a continuous thump of the bass. Dum, da-dum, dum, da-dum. This aversion comes. Well, you just cannot get your ear off that wall. The aversion makes your ear stick to that wall more and more and more. As soon as the aversion goes or you're distracted, you don't hear it anymore.

The peculiar thing about aversion and fear is that it attaches you to the object while at the same time distancing it. But it still has to be observed, it still has to be felt. Again, this is a conditioning. So if you try to suppress that, if you try to push that away, you find yourself in the same old situation where you're empowering the negativity within yourself.

So again, it's a case of opening up. See, that's this business of that default position where you allow things to come in their fullness. You're aware of that fear, of that aversion that might come. As it comes up sometimes, it comes up at a speed which is difficult to handle. Sometimes, as it were, our openness allows it to manifest too quickly for

us, and you find yourself perhaps feeling a bit panicky. So when that happens, you just chill out. You just cool the whole system and regain your equanimity. The way to do that, if it's very bad, is just to get up in the posture and just go for a walk.

But if it's not that bad, just put your attention on a neutral sensation, like your breath or your knees or your hands, and that neutrality allows that reaction to begin to diminish.

At a much more subtle level, there is that identity, that indulgence. And that, of course, is extremely difficult to counteract because it's such a conditioned force in us to indulge what we like. But even so, when that feeling comes, something that's desirable, you have to be with it.

Now let's take, for instance, some dream that we have, something that we want to achieve in our lives, and the mind is constantly creating scenarios whereby we can achieve it. Let's say, set up a small business or something. So you see here in meditation we're observing how this desire is constantly manufacturing this inner world. And remember that everything that human beings have done have started with that image. Everything that you see from jet planes to computers to whatever you see has always begun with an idea. It's always begun coming out of the mind.

As you come off that desire and you come back into the body and you may feel that sort of excitement that's around it, keep your attention within the body, but if you can, just feel that energy which is moving out to create the world, which is moving out to create the dream. You can feel it, it's quite a strong pull.

Now, if your attention stays with the original excitement in the body, and with that feeling of wanting to go back into the dream world, if you stay at that level of feeling, and you wait until this power, which wants to manifest the excitement as a dream, and you wait for it to die away, then you'll see, you're emptying the mind of that desire. And that's not that difficult to do so long as you know where to look for it. And the way you look for it is always starting with that physical base. You can't do it in the mind, the mind's too quick. Once you've manifested through a mind, through a dream, you've lost it, you've become unconscious, you might say. You've lost that sort of awareness, that mindfulness.

So that's why when you wake up from a dream, you note, planning, planning, that gives you the in, you know something is in the heart that wants to achieve something. And that's when you come back down into the body and try to contact it. If you can't contact it, fine, you just stay with the breath, it's not a problem.

So anything to do with desire, which is the first of these hindrances, try to find that excitement in the body, whatever it might be. And then that movement that wants to manifest it. And just stay there. And again, remind yourself, you don't have to do anything. You don't have to do a single thing. All you have to do is allow the energy to manifest.

And this is our unfortunate position. These turbulences cannot release themselves except into consciousness. And they've only got two ways to go, either through some feeling emotional state, or if they're too suppressed, too repressed, they'll come out through the body as illness, or at least as some form of discomfort. So that's why in your meditation you get, people get headaches, they feel nausea, they get backaches. And all that is this turbulence manifesting through the body. And once they go, something goes, but you never know what it, for the most part, you never know what the hell it was. All you know is that something's gone.

Even, say, for about four to five weeks, I was just getting this continual pain at the back of my neck for seemingly no reason. I couldn't understand it at all. And then it just disappeared and it's just one of those things. So as your psyche begins to empty itself as your psychology begins to purify itself this process of purification is always a process which is not particularly pleasant and you have to be prepared for that.

So it's the same with these other things such as all the hatreds and aversions, the angers that we've got locked in the system. Once you allow them to manifest as dreams, as fantasies unwittingly, you're developing them. You know that from your just ordinary daily life experience where somebody has said something to you in the morning which has been just a little upsetting. And you've brushed it aside. And then while you're having your cup of tea, you're bloody coming here. And by lunchtime, you're biting the fork. Evening, you're taking aspirin. And it all builds up.

I mean, the person only insulted you or said something slightly hurtful once. You've had them repeat it millions of times just to drive the point home. So the danger, so this mind that we have, which is so creative and has created so many beautiful things, the music, the art and all that, is also incredibly destructive. And we have to see that within ourselves. And we have to see, we have to be very clear that when the mind is wandering off on an aversion or whatever it is, that it's not suppressing anything to pull the mind out, to pull the attention out of it. That's not suppressing it. And it's of little value to investigate the causes of it. If it's an obvious thing, like somebody's upsetting you, say at work, who's bullying you, then obviously one has to investigate that. But in terms of

our inner psychology, something that perhaps has been there from childhood and in Buddhist understanding even before, there's absolutely nothing to be gained by it. And therefore the attention is now drawn back into the body.

And in a sense it's only through your own practice that you become confident that it's staying with the heart, staying with these turbulences at a feeling level, that they're actually beginning to exhaust themselves. I wouldn't want to give anybody the wrong impression that if one works hard enough within a couple of months, one is perfectly... Think in terms of a quarter century, then to see tremendous progress. But I think even in the short term, six months or a year, one can see that at least things might be getting just a wee bit better.

Now it's the same with this sloth and torpor. It's been translated as sloth, which gives it a sort of moral twist. But this sort of dullness, dullness in the head and a lethargy in the body. So remember that that's also a consequence of developing that attitude, that of seeking comfort in oblivion. Not just conking out. And the great thing about oblivion is that there really is no suffering there. It's perfect. There is a place where you can go where there is no suffering. Unfortunately, we wake up. And, in the Buddha's understanding, there will always be a waking up. So long as there's a self, there will be a form of existence. There will always be a seeking of that consciousness to find expression.

So, recognizing that, be careful in your daily life not to enter into that state. Rather go for a walk or do something or just keep awake, as it were, not to begin to develop that lethargy. I mean, in bad cases of depression, I remember a woman. She was sleeping then 16, 18 hours a day, making things worse for herself, really.

Then there's all this business of restlessness, and that can be caused by anything really, just a sense of restlessness. And it's a case of, remember, when, just like dullness, when it's in the mind, when there's restlessness in the mind or dullness in the head, to actually put your attention there, just stay with it, attend to it, as a nurse might to a patient. You don't have to do anything, you just bear with it.

Now when the mind's rushing off all over the place, it's just patiently bringing it back, patiently bringing it back. Now when we do this business of reflection at the end of a sitting and I say, just reflect on your meditation. If the whole of your meditation you've just been coming back off this turbulent mind, that's a good meditation. But if you give in, if you say, well, I will think about that, then that's it. You could say to yourself, that was a really bad meditation.

If you feel that dullness in the head and you're feeling lethargic and you're constantly waking yourself up and stretching the body and opening your eyes and standing up, and even if it stays with you in your walking meditation, but you're constantly just keeping awake, just keeping above it, making those feelings, those sensations, something to observe, something to feel, experience, then that's a good meditation. But if at any time you say to yourself, well, I'll just have a kip, knowing full well, knowing full well that there is not real tiredness, then one can say to oneself, that was a bad meditation. One should feel guilty. One should feel shame.

So that whenever that thought arises, the shame and the guilt arises with it, which one does not want to suffer. And the Buddha puts on the same hindrance, this quality of guilt, shame, remorse. Remorse, of course, is a healing feeling, but it's still not a pleasant feeling, remorse. So remember that guilt and shame are guilt or, I mean here we talk about the dread of consequences, the dread of consequences.

So it's actually beginning to understand that there's a way in which we are creating our own suffering. And the true statement would be that we can only create our own suffering and only we create our own suffering. Nobody can create suffering for us. It's always the way that we relate to what we're actually experiencing.

So when we perceive that, then we need to take full responsibility for our situation. Which at first is disappointing, because it's always nice to blame somebody else. Or blame the system or the government. But actually, when you turn into yourself and you realize that you're the only one creating your suffering. I'm the only one creating my suffering. Taking on that responsibility at least now narrows the avenue of escape to at least just me. Before I had to change the world. Before I had to get rid of my enemies and all the people who were making it awful for me. But now, it's just me. That makes it very simple. Because all I have to do now is investigate myself, my own psychology, to realize where I'm making the mistakes.

And the final one is this business of doubt. So, doubt in the spiritual life is a real, it's a pernicious illness because it stops you committing yourself. If you doubt the practice, then you won't do it. If you doubt yourself, if you say that, well, everybody else can do it but not me, then that'll stop you doing it. So doubt is, this sort of skeptical doubt is something that has to be investigated. And again, it's very simple. You don't get caught up in the mind. You don't get caught up in what the mind is saying. You go into the feelings of doubt, the feelings that surround this so-called doubt. And I think invariably you'll find some form of resistance, some form of fear, some form of fear of con-

sequences or lack of confidence, which is only another form of self-aversion, lack of confidence. And it's investigating it at that level of feeling, at that level of emotional feeling that these things begin to evaporate.

That sense of doubt, don't confuse that with a sense of wonder. Wonder is the philosopher's emotion, isn't it? It's the philosopher within us that wonders. Now that's the emotion, that's the drive that the Buddha actually wants us to develop. That's what we mean by curiosity. That's one of the seven factors of enlightenment, the desire of wanting to know. And it's as though we come from that position of belief, the Buddha said this, therefore it must be right. It's the Buddha said this, now let's see if it's right for me. That's our attitude, that's the attitude that he would want us to develop. So that we go into the investigation always from that position of not sure, don't know.

So now, in your meditation, when you're sitting, that's part of your process of developing the skills of meditation. Whenever a mental state arises, if you're not sure as to what to do, make sure you find out. When a mental state arises, there should arise with it how to deal with it. And it's through dealing with it in a proper way that this process of purifying the heart is taking place.

So that's why that reflection at the end of a sitting is important even if it's only a single reflection even if it's only just looking back and thinking well now how did I fall asleep again, why did I move at that point. It's like going back and just saying well okay next time I'll do this next time I'll do that.

Even if you don't do it, even if you forget, that's fine. Just in your next sitting, when you make the same mistake, note that this has happened before, and that you must make a firm determination not to fall into that same error. And then very slowly, you just train yourself, just train yourself into the skills of meditation.

So, here we have, we've got a technique, we've all got a technique, a basic way of doing it, watching the breath, noting, going slow, I haven't stressed the going slow, I'll do that tomorrow, and we've got that technique, but we also know what it is we're looking at, so we're looking at the impermanence, we're looking at the sense of non-substantiality, the not-me, not-mine, the distance that is between the knower and the knowing. We're looking at the way we react to things, learnt reactions. And in that, we're looking at all those negative things that come up. Negative things to do with those things that we desire that cause excitement, that cause us to dream of a better life and all that. We're looking at all the aversions. We're looking at this dullness and lethargy. We're looking at the restlessness and we're looking at the doubt.

But also, we're looking at our responses to those things and not getting caught up in the indulgence, in the aversion. So we're constantly lifting ourselves out of the mind with its machinations. And we're not getting drawn into any history. Whatever happened in the past, this is a product which is happening now. The product itself is the problem, not the past. It manifests now as this mental state. In dealing with this mental state, the past loses its effect.

So, when we practice *vipassanā*, these two things are happening. We're correcting that initial delusion, that stigmatism in our faculty of knowing, in our intuitive intelligence, in the Buddha within, and we're allowing the heart to purify itself. That's what vipassanā is doing. And that's what we're practicing over this weekend.

The positive side, which we practice at the end of the weekend, is how we transform that energy into its opposite. And that's through the practice of *mettā*. That's the first step in that transformation. So in the Eightfold Path, having got the right understanding of how the whole thing works, the psychophysical organism, we then purify the heart, which is part of the attitudinal, the second step and then we begin to work with attitudes to begin to transform them so from hatred to love from cruelty to compassion and so on and then these are established they are confirmed they are developed through right speech right action and right language so that whole process of liberation is systemic.

If it stops up in the head, there's a danger of it becoming intellectual and callous. If it stops in the heart, there's a danger of it becoming mawkish and sentimental. So that whole process has to be really taken through to its logical conclusion, which is the good life. The wholesome, virtuous life.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later. So, it might be good to do a little walking meditation. About a quarter of an hour. Don't worry about the schedule. If you do some walking meditation. Give me about 20 minutes. And then we'll do another section. The evening will unfold. Now, if there's any questions that arise from that.

If anything arises from that, just put down your questions and all will be revealed.

So let's have a look at this business of looking. We've been talking about investigation, and I said earlier that sometimes the investigation can be, well, let's say problematic. Let me give you an example from my own practice.

I remember sitting in meditation one day, and I was feeling quite concentrated, quite settled. Then I noticed that there was some tension in my shoulder. So naturally, being a good meditator, I thought, "Right, I'll investigate this tension." So I turned my attention to the shoulder, and I started looking at it very carefully. I was really examining it, you know, trying to see what was there, trying to understand the nature of the sensation.

But what happened was that the more I looked at it, the more tense it became. The more I investigated, the more solid and problematic it seemed to become. I was creating more of what I was trying to investigate. The very act of looking was making the thing I was looking at more prominent, more solid, more of a problem.

This is a very common experience in meditation. We notice something - maybe it's a pain, maybe it's an emotion, maybe it's just some mental chatter - and we think, "Ah, I should investigate this. I should look at this mindfully." But then we find that our looking actually makes it worse. The problem seems to grow under our gaze.

Now, this is where we need to understand something quite subtle about awareness. There's a difference between awareness and looking. When we're looking at something, there's often a sense of effort, a sense of focusing, a sense of trying to get something, trying to understand something, trying to fix something. There's a subject here looking at an object over there.

But awareness - pure awareness - is much more spacious than that. It's not focused in the same way. It's more like the sky that holds the clouds, rather than a spotlight that illuminates an object. When we rest in this more spacious awareness, things can be present without being problematic. They can be noticed without being magnified.

So when I went back to that tension in my shoulder, instead of looking at it, I tried to just let it be present in awareness. I didn't focus on it, I didn't try to understand it, I didn't try to make it go away. I just let it be there, held in this broader field of awareness. And what happened? It started to soften. It started to dissolve. Not because I was trying to make it dissolve, but because I wasn't feeding it with my attention in that focused, problematic way.

This is what I mean when I say the problem lies in the looking. It's not that we shouldn't be aware. Of course we should be aware. But we need to understand the difference between this spacious, open awareness and the more focused, effortful kind of attention that we often mistake for mindfulness.

You see, when we're really looking at something - examining it, investigating it, trying to figure it out - there's usually a sense of self involved. There's someone here looking at something over there. There's a subject and an object. And as long as that division is there, as long as there's this sense of self trying to deal with experience, then we're in the realm of *dukkha*. We're in the realm of suffering.

But when we rest in pure awareness, this division starts to soften. The sense of someone looking at something begins to fade. There's just knowing. There's just awareness itself, without a knower. And in that space, things can be as they are without being problematic.

This is why the Buddha said that the highest knowledge is the knowledge of no-self, *anattā*. It's not that we figure out what the self is and then get rid of it. It's that we stop looking for it altogether. We stop creating this division between observer and observed. We rest in awareness itself.

Now, this might sound very philosophical, but it's actually extremely practical. In your meditation, when you notice something - a sensation, a thought, an emotion - see if you can be aware of it without looking at it. See if you can let it be present without focusing on it, without trying to understand it, without trying to change it. Just let it float in this open space of awareness.

This takes some practice, of course. We're so used to focusing, so used to trying to fix things, so used to being someone dealing with something. But gradually, we can learn to rest in this more spacious way of being. And when we do, we often find that the things we thought were problems weren't really problems at all. They were just experiences arising and passing away in the vast space of awareness.

So the invitation is this: next time you're meditating and you notice something that seems to require investigation, pause. Ask yourself, "Am I looking at this, or am I simply aware of it?" If you find you're looking - focusing, trying, efforting - see if you can relax that looking. See if you can let go of the investigator and just rest in awareness itself.

This is the deepest teaching of *vipassanā*. It's not about becoming a better investigator. It's about discovering that there was never really anything to investigate in the first place. There's just this - awareness aware of itself, with no one looking at anything.

CHAPTER 154

There Is No Reason for Being!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 54 min

> *Drawing inspiration from a six-year-old child who declared "there's no reason for being" while playing, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the profound difference between simply 'being' and the process of 'becoming' (bhāva). He examines how children naturally embody the spontaneous, joyful presence found in play—doing something for its own sake without future aims or pressures.*
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> *The talk delves into the Buddhist understanding of how we construct a sense of self through identification with body, emotions, and thoughts, creating the suffering of constant 'becoming' driven by future expectations. Through Paṭicca Samuppāda (Dependent Origination), we see how this process differs fundamentally from the awakened state, where actions arise as kriya (functional karma) rather than driven by self-centered intentions.*
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> *Using examples from the Buddha's life and teaching style, Bhante illustrates how awakened beings respond spontaneously from wisdom without fixed positions or future goals. The talk emphasizes how vipassanā meditation reveals the distinction between the observer and observed, gradually dissolving the delusion of 'I am' through direct investigation of our psychophysical processes. This leads to the natural contentment and joy that arise when we relate to life without the constant pressure of becoming someone or achieving something.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhuddhassa

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

On one of the Tuesday evenings, one of the people who came along told us this tale of a six-year-old child who was playing a game and then suddenly said to her mother, "There's no reason for being," and then went back playing. Six years old. So this being, she must have heard her parents talk about it or friends about the meaning of life and all that. And it must have worked on her mind. She must have understood what she was saying because how can you come out with something like that without having some inkling, some feel for what you actually mean?

And the interesting thing is that, of course, she was playing. So the thing about play is that you do it for yourself. You don't do it for any other reason. You don't play Monopoly to make yourself famous. I mean, a game is just a game. I know that we put a lot of things on games these days, like football—it's become an industry. But when a child

plays a game, or when we ourselves play a game with a child, we're just playing a game. It doesn't have any objective apart from just playing the game. And therefore, all your attention is in just that doing.

I think the second quality is, of course, it's very joyful. It's a happy thing to do, playing a game, playing cards. And I think as adults we might have things like hobbies, which don't particularly have any reason beyond themselves. They're just something you like to do. They don't have any aim or objective beyond just that doing. And usually, a person would say that they enjoy their hobby. It wouldn't make sense to have a hobby that you didn't enjoy. So if you cook, for instance, if you like cooking, you do it just for the pleasure of it. And then you might share it with friends. And you might lose a few friends, but it's a joyful occasion. It's something that you've enjoyed doing.

So this little girl, she's playing with "there's no reason for being." So it depends, of course, what we mean by reason. If we mean by reason that there's something outside the game, something outside we're doing, we're aiming at some future result, some end point that we're moving towards, then that puts a pressure, doesn't it? It puts a pressure on what you're doing now, because what you're doing now is not in itself entire and whole. The action is not completed until some future event arises. So these professional games, these footballers and tennis players, sure, they play the game, but it's not just a game, is it? There's something else. There's an ambition about it. There's the climbing up the ladder of success. There's the money. So the game itself now doesn't have that immediate sense of perfect joy that a game might have for a child. It's got a pressure on it now.

Now as opposed to this word being, we've got this other word becoming. And the word in the Pali for that is *bhāva*, to become. So when the Buddha describes this process of becoming, he really describes it quite clearly in the Dependent Origination, which is what we'll chant tomorrow, the sequence of mental events. And somewhere in that process of play, which ends around about the age of seven or so, when we lose that immediate innocence of life, and thought comes in, and thought launches us out into some future. We've lived long enough to imagine a future. How futuristic can a child of three be? What does it mean to a child of three to say that in two months' time there'll be Christmas? They don't live that long to understand what two months is, really. It's an imaginative thing. But for us, having lived so long, we begin to project, don't we? We know where we're going. We've got an idea of time. It's all blocked out for us. So now somewhere in that process, something goes wrong.

Now as opposed to that, as opposed to that going wrong and living for some future event, you have the Buddha or the enlightened ones who don't do that, but they're still living in time. They know what two months is. They also have a clear idea of time. But somehow they don't suffer. Somehow they don't get this comeback which is in the process of becoming.

In the law of *kamma*, when Buddhism talks about *kamma*, it talks about two types of *kamma*: *kusala* and *akusala*. So this translates as wholesome and unwholesome actions, virtuous and unvirtuous actions, skillful and unskillful actions. That's how you can translate it. But interestingly enough, when they try to describe or when they try to find a word for an enlightened person doing an action, they use another word, *kriya*, which is translated in a funny way as functional, functional action. So there's something distinctive between somebody who is fully liberated and somebody who isn't. It's a sharp line. It's not as though it's a progression. You either are liberated or you're not. You might be a little bit liberated, but you're not fully liberated. There's always that peculiar way of looking at things which causes some form of dissatisfaction.

So what is it that goes wrong within that process which causes us to become rather than to be? So when the Buddha is deciding to teach, that comes out of just the desire to share the goodness that he's discovered. It's a natural thing. They say in Zen, for instance, that out of wisdom, compassion arises naturally, love arises naturally. And there's some teachers in Zen that won't touch practices like loving-kindness. It's off the path. You want to get to the enlightenment, to the awakening, and then everything else just happens naturally.

So when the Buddha was awakened and this natural desire came to teach, he thought, well, who could he teach? And having understood or come to know that his two teachers, those were his first people he thought he might help, were dead, he then walks to find his other five companions, those who had told him he'd gone soft and they didn't want to know him anymore because he'd had this rice pudding. And he walks from where he becomes enlightened, where he becomes awakened in Bodh Gaya, he walks all the way to Sarnath. Now I've got this figure of 400 miles, but I don't think that's quite right, but it's a heck of a long way anyway. It's five hours on the train. So it's quite a long way. So he's off, and he has to ask. It's not as though people have got mobiles in those days. He'll find out where they are.

And then he begins to teach. Throughout his career as a teacher, when somebody comes to him who doesn't accept what he's saying, like there's an occasion when this fellow called Dandapani, which means stick in hand, must have been a nickname, comes and asks him what he teaches, and the Buddha says what he teaches, and he

goes away clicking his tongue, shaking his head, "a lot of rubbish." In fact, there's a lovely incident when he starts off on the teaching to find his five companions and he comes across an ascetic who sees a certain glow around him, a certain brightness. And he says, "My, you're bright. Who's your teacher?" And he launches into this self-panegyric about him saying, "I am the fully enlightened one. I don't need to teach lots of stuff." And the guy says, "Oh, right, OK," and wanders off. And I think that was an early lesson that that's not what you do if you're going to teach.

When people don't accept his teaching, he's not saddened by it, he's not upset by it. And yet when people do accept his teachings, he's joyful. And when he describes the Buddha heart, when he describes how he experiences *Nibbāna* as this present experience, he talks about it being contented and with it happy. Contented and with it happy. And those four limitless, love, compassion, joy, equanimity, but especially the first three, which is about relationship—love, compassion and joy—those contain, as it were, in their various shades, the way the Buddha heart actually responds to the world. And if he's on his own, if he's quiet, or an enlightened person's quiet, they just fall into this state of equanimity.

So you get the sense that somebody who's awakened is living very much in the present moment, doesn't have any particular aim. He's just responding from that wisdom point to a given situation now, without any care for future results. Even when he goes to begin his teaching and men and women approach him to join him, he doesn't seem to have any particular idea of where the order is going. He's just following the general customs of ascetics in those days. And it's only as things go wrong, as certain monks and nuns make mistakes or do something wrong, that he produces a rule. And in the end, by the end of his life, he's produced all these rules and it rests on a particular platform of understanding. That's what you would call an institution. An institution is a given reason, some platform, and then you build up a rule around it to give it some legal solidity. Even say marriage, that's an institution. Marriage just between two people, so there's a basic understanding and then there are rules, spoken or unspoken, which maintain that particular relationship.

And he ends up with that. Not that he had any specific idea as to where it was going, but by the end of his life he can look back and think, well, what's been produced or what's happened is good. He talks about the four sanghas or the four assemblies: monks and nuns, laywomen and laymen. But that happened naturally. He didn't seem to have gone out particularly to establish that. It just happened as he's walking around and people join him.

So you get the sense of spontaneity rather than knee-jerk reactions or some preconditioned idea as to where he's going. So that's another quality of play—it's spontaneous. A child is very spontaneous. Perhaps we can talk about a sense of just being in the moment, moving from one moment to the next, responding to it with wisdom, without any sense of some future success and failure—all that's out the window—without any sense of gain, riches or anything like that, without any sense of power, wanting to control. He didn't particularly want to control monks and nuns. He just wanted to set up a situation where eventually all they could do was meditate and study the Dharma. That's the two duties that he put to the monks. And he set up certain institutions for lay people by taking refuge in the five precepts and general guidelines.

So there's no sense of him wanting to be rich, to be powerful, to be successful in any sense. He's not driven by some future aim. And he's not worried about being famous. There's no hint in the scriptures that he gets upset if people don't recognize him. In fact, there's a point there where a monk or somebody enters into a small congregation of monks and they ask, "Well, which one is the Bhagavā?" So he hasn't got a special hat on, or three stripes on his shoulders. He's just an ordinary person. He just looks like—he doesn't try to lift himself above others.

All these are manifesting a relationship. That's what they're doing. They're manifesting a relationship with what happens, a relationship with time, a relationship with their life. The question of "What am I supposed to be doing?" or "Where am I supposed to be going?" or "Why am I here?" "Who am I?" See, all those questions have disappeared. There is just this moment of this relationship and this response, coming from the point of wisdom. In that moment there's that complete openness to it, because there's nothing negative within the person, something that has to be hidden or repressed—some little dislike or guilt or whatever, the usual gamut of human misery. Because there's nothing there, there's that ability just to be completely open to the situation. And whatever the situation presents, there's just coming out from the heart of wisdom.

When it comes to certain incidents like the woman who comes crazed with grief because she's lost her child, her dead. She's got this idea that these ascetics are magic, have some mystical powers. And in her grief-stricken situation, the Buddha is able to realize that to give her the straight teaching is just going to send her off berserk. He gives a little trick to come to realize the way life is. So he sends it off, doesn't he, to find a mustard seed. So mustard seeds are a million a penny. But he says, "You must get it from a house where there's not been any death." So off she goes, desperate, knocking on doors. "I must have a mustard seed. Well, of course. Anybody died? Of course." And by the end of a certain sequence of hours, there comes this dawning that death is part of

life. It just happens. That's the way it is. So she comes back more balanced of mind. And then she's open to the teachings. And as all these stories go, she enters the order and becomes fully awakened.

So he's able to respond easily to people because he's not coming from a fixed place, a fixed point, a presumption, a view, an opinion. This idea of being totally receptive means that you've got to come from the ability to receive different perspectives and bring them into your general way of seeing things. A perspective suggests that you're not holding on to it. You recognize that there are other perspectives, that you're prepared to have your perspective widened or broadened or somehow changed because you hear other people's views, their perspectives. But the word opinion gives us the idea that, well, this is right, nobody else is wrong. It immediately closes you off, immediately shuts you off. It makes the relationship difficult. You're immediately in contradiction with somebody else who has a different opinion.

So when somebody comes to the Buddha and asks him to give a teaching, he never goes into his teaching. He always says, "Well, what do you think?" And then the person says what they think. And then he undermines their position. Bit of a trick, really, I suppose. And then when they're completely floored and completely lost, he says, "Well, now this is the truth." And off he goes. But he doesn't seem to have been that person who said, "Well, look, if you come to me, this is what it is. If you don't accept it, go away." He's prepared to try and understand where that person's coming from, and in so doing, to show that maybe they haven't got it quite right. And then there's an openness to the Dharma. Then there's a subtleness, there's a malleability in that person's mind, and that's when he offers the Dharma.

So we can see that just in general all these qualities are about being very present, like a child is with play. There's nothing being deposited onto this present moment either by way of some past opinion, some view that we've held onto from the past and that we must see this present moment through. There's no launching of this present moment into some future successful result. So it remains just entire and whole in itself. And you're moving through time in these little blocks. But you're not coming from nowhere. That's the point. The Buddha's not coming from a blank sheet. He's coming from a specific way of relating to the world, which brings with it a specific understanding.

So now as opposed to that, you've got this becoming, which is generally speaking what we do. This becoming. What's the core of the becoming? How do these opinions and views and futures and fame and riches and power—from where do they spring?

Around what do they coagulate? What are they an expression of? So this is what the Buddha refers to as the self. And the self isn't a thing. It's not that you can point to it or pick it up or say what it is. It's a relationship. It's a relationship.

So it's a mistake that we make, which is completely understandable. It's not as though it's a culpable mistake. We're not supposed to go beating ourselves around the head because we made this mistake, because we come from a point of not knowing.

There's a film called Zenoir, and there's a nice little passage in that where the master is asked by this person, "What happens when you die?" And he says, "Don't know." And then he says, "Why don't you know?" He says, "I'm not dead yet." It's creating, it's recognising that what we've done is we've made a presumption, we've fallen into some sort of what the Buddha called a delusion. And a delusion, by definition, is something that you don't know you're deluded about, or else you wouldn't be deluded.

So there we are, this little bundle of flesh and bones. And what do we know? What do we know? And then society comes at us with definitions, gives us a name. Parents tell us this and tell us that. We pick up the history, we get a language. Everything's dumped on us. So is it any wonder that we should end up thinking, well, this is what I am. And this is what I am. I am English. I am a teacher. I am. I am. This am business. This I with its definition, with its being, you might say, with its sense of self in all those definitions that we have about who we are and what we are.

So once we've cornered ourselves, once we've gathered all these definitions about ourselves, you can see how it becomes an imprisonment. And you get these wonderful statements like, the one I love is, "If I did that, that wouldn't be me. If I thought that, that wouldn't be me." And it's a sort of—you can feel the clampness of that. It's like something that's so tight about who I am.

Now this who I am produces a doing. You walk into life with who I am and you start doing something. So very simply, if you say I am a teacher, then you have to teach. But this teaching now isn't like the Buddha's teaching where he's just in relationship. It falls back on a definition. It falls back on who I am. So if I lose my job, who am I? Then I get the depression. I mean, losing your job is bad enough to lose the income. That's bad enough. But then to lose a definition of yourself, well, that's an identity crisis. You might go around saying, "Well, I was a teacher," which is a bit of a downer.

But that business of identity creates a whole psychology of what we mean by an attachment. Now, of course, it goes deeper than that because at the deepest level we think we're humans. I am a human being. That's a pretty general statement most people on earth would agree with. I am a human being. But when you say, "I am a human being," what do you mean? Are you the body?

If you say, "Well, I am the body, I am this body," how long are you this body for? When you talk about this body, I think every—I don't know, I read it somewhere, but every atom is exchanged in your body something like every few days or something. It's quite remarkable how quickly the body is changing. The cornea on your eye changes every week. I know that for sure because the optician told me, and I believe the optician.

If you go into the biology of certain parts of your body, you'll be quite amazed how they're not actually in unison. Bits are falling off without you knowing. Bits take time to fall off. A bone, I think, takes about three months to renew itself. So even now, you walked into that door with this body, but it isn't this body anymore. It's moved on. It's changed.

So this idea of a self, it has something static about it, it has something solid. This is what I am. But when we investigate the body, we find this am-ness can't be static. And if it's moving, if it's changing, then which am I? Am I the body that I was born with, or this body, or the future body? So the sense of I begins to corrupt, it begins to fall apart.

But if I say I am the body, you can imagine—well, we know, don't we? We know the suffering of I am the body. It comes out when you fall sick, when somebody close to you dies. Then you know, oh, well, if that body went that way, probably mine will follow in the same way. And we all dread the moment when the doctor will tell you you've got six weeks to go. That's not a laughing matter, is it?

So this sense of self, this identity with the body, manifests when the body moves into danger. And that fear that we have, that real fear of death, of dying, of severe illness, of being crippled, of losing our minds, Alzheimer's—all that fear is the measure of that delusion.

See, when the Buddha died, he was in pain. He had gastroenteritis or some sort. He would have been in pain. But by how it's come down to us, he's just lying on his side. And there's even still that desire to make sure that he's said everything. He asks, "Are there any more questions?" And when there are no more questions, he says, "Well, all compounded things arise and pass away. Work diligently for your liberation." And off he goes.

What will be our last words? Why me? What will be our last thoughts? Will they be as equanimous as that? As easy? Will we let go as easy as that? So the reason we can't let go as easy as that is because it's what I think I am. I'm losing a bit of me.

You think about your emotional life. That's changed, hasn't it? That's constantly changing, probably faster than the body's changing. All these intentions we make, all these, the way that we create this inner life within ourselves, all the depressions and anxieties, etc. And the happinesses, the loves and all those, the joys of life. They seem to come and go, don't they? And even more fleeting is thought. So which thought are you? And would you want to go back to being a three-year-old, the three-year-old's thoughts?

So when we begin to investigate this self, this I am, this I am—and you finish it off, I am, I think therefore I am, I feel therefore I am, I walk around therefore I am, I brush my teeth therefore I am. When you investigate that as something solid, entire, whole unto itself, it begins to crumble, doesn't it? It begins to crumble.

But we find that when we're in that state, what it makes us do is to hold on to the present moment tightly or make sure this present moment has some sort of sense to this ongoing feeling of self and it creates this future. You've got to be going somewhere. What's the point of just being here if you're not going somewhere? What's the point of meditating if you're not going to get some results? That's a hard one, isn't it? You've all come here for some result. Very disappointing.

And this self, this becoming, this process of being me all the time, me all the time, is driven by this desire to be happy. That's what we want, isn't it? To be happy, for heaven's sake. I don't want to be rich, I just want to be happy. So being driven by this want to be happy, I've got to manipulate, I've got to actually struggle against the way things are to make me happy because my happiness is defined by what's made me happy in the past. If crumpets and cocoa have made me happy on Thursday, then next Thursday I've got to have crumpets and cocoa. I won't be happy. Simple as that. So I begin to try and manipulate the future.

Now when we say the future, that's not some abstract idea. That means people. I've got to manipulate you to make me happy. If you get in my way, I've got to manipulate you. I've got to play around with you. If an object gets in my way, I kick it out. I burn it. I get rid of it.

I mean, we have these ideologies, don't we? When a group of people take on a similar idea, you get these vast ideologies. Christianity, communism, capitalism. And you can see what it does. It destroys people because they all have to fit into this future idea, this thing that's created only in somebody's head. And if you don't fit in, well, you get shot.

So this self has a way of collecting other selves to support the idea this self has. And then you have a movement. Oh my goodness. That's what happens to religions, isn't it? From the first inspiration, it becomes locked into a series of beliefs and attitudes and then it becomes a movement. And it loses that original spontaneity. And every so often a teacher comes along and reforms it and you get that burst of energy again. But often it will just solidify into rites and rituals, customs. Rules and regulations.

I mean, Jesus, with the Jewish tradition, "Sabbath was not made for—what is it—man was not made for the Sabbath, Sabbath was made for man." That's what he's saying, these rules and regulations are not there to bind us.

So all these problems that we come across, all these conflicts, all the emotional turmoil, all of that, it all falls back on this I am.

Now, that's the crucial importance of *vipassanā* meditation or these other forms, in other forms of Buddhism like Zen, Zazen or Dzogchen. It's all about getting down to that root level of the problem.

Now, I often quote every evening, I quote this business of those who are mindful are in the presence of *Nibbāna*, in the vicinity of *Nibbāna*. So what do we mean by that? Well, when you sit still, and so you've steadied the body and stilled the body, and you've found this observation post within yourself, and you've become an observer within yourself, a feeler, an experiencer, and you're looking into the so-called self, this body, this psychophysical complex organism—that's a very different position from "I am the body," isn't it? Because you're saying, "There's the body."

I mean, when somebody has a headache, they say, "I have a headache, I am ill." But here, suddenly from this position, you're looking at the knee, you're feeling the knee, and you're saying, "Well, there's pain." There's somehow a separation, there's a gap has appeared between this knowing and what it knows. And that gap is a loss of self. It's a loss of a relationship. It's no longer my knee, my pain. It is, there's pain.

When you have an emotion come up, depression comes up, or joy, or some sort of excitement, or this dullness and lethargy—see, normally you'd say, "I am tired." And that's good enough reason to go to bed. "I am depressed," and that's a good enough reason to go to bed. Lots of amazing good reasons to go to bed, but here you can't. If I go to bed, no, I'll be very upset. You have to say, "Oh, there's dullness. There's dullness in the head. It feels like porridge. And there's tiredness in the body."

But somehow this "there is" has made whatever knows, that which knows, separate itself from—it's formed a new relationship with it. It's not me. It's not mine. There is this. It's just like a property that you've sold or a car that you used to have that you've

sold. You have a very different relationship to it, don't you? It's not yours anymore. It's somebody else's. The fact that all the pipes burst, well, you're very compassionate, but it's not your problem anymore, is it? But if it's your house, your car, it's very upsetting if things go wrong.

So can you see that if we can develop a relationship with the body where this is the body, not me, not mine, when things go wrong, why should fear arise? It's not me, it's not mine. Why should I get depressed? It's not me, it's not mine.

Emotions, you see, we find out that they're just these volitional conditionings. That's a sort of translation of the word *saṅkhāra*. They're just conditionings. A mental conditioning. What is it? What is an emotion? What is it before you give it a name?

So here you are, you're meditating and this feeling comes up. And you can see it's not a physical feeling like pain or pleasure. It's a mental feeling. It's more of a subtle sort of energy. And as you look into it, you say, "Oh, that feels like depression or feels like anxiety or it feels like joy, feels like excitement." But to do that, you must have separated yourself. To investigate something, you've got to be outside it. If you want to look at cells, you've got to find an instrument and you're looking at it. If you want to look up in the sky, you've got to get an instrument and you've got to look at it. You can't be the star. You can't get lost in some sort of romantic emotion if you want to study the star.

So here, in order to find out what an emotion is, we've had to separate from it. And that separation, that distinction, is a loss of self because you're not saying, "I am depressed." You're saying, "There is depression." You're not saying, "I am excited." "There's excitement."

And we can take this as far as thoughts and images. When you get into a really good quiet state, you can see a thought coming. You see an image beginning to grow. Sometimes a thought passes through your mind like a neon light. And when you have those sorts of experiences, you know, well, I didn't think that. It just arose and passed away.

So, very slowly, through the practice of *vipassanā*, we are distinguishing, we're finding out that, well, this is not what I am, this is not me, not mine. And that process, of course, leads us backwards. This is the unfortunate thing. You don't know where you're going. It leads us backwards to the knowledge of who I am. That's the koan. That's the big question, as I understand it anyway, of Korean Zen. It's just that. Who am I?

And it's the moment after you've asked the question which is the potential moment. After that the mind rushes in to tell you who you are and what you are. But just to hang on in there, who am I? And that moment of not knowing has all the potential of breaking that essential delusion that hangs around the word I.

So from the Buddha's teaching, this becoming, this constant becoming me, this arising out of one moment into the next, is the fundamental problem that is creating this wrong relationship with the world. And it puts us into a conflict with it. Whether it's a subtle conflict or a major conflict, it doesn't matter. It's always a conflict. Because we're always trying to manipulate things to fit in with this sense of me.

Now when that goes, there's a whole new relationship. Now there is no future. There's no past. You're not coming from a fixed position. You're not going to a fixed position. Our ability will be to be completely receptive, without any sieve, without any separation of what we don't want, what we don't like. And in that, there's that very open communication.

And in that open, immediate communication, whether it be with a person or with an animal or with just nature, with a tree, just an openness to a tree, to a leaf, there's that sense of just being here in a very total way, for no other reason than just to be here. And with it there arises just a natural joy. This is what the Buddha says, just a natural joy. That contentment is that being with the moment, not wanting anything more than what the moment is giving us. And the happiness comes out of the response to that moment. Contentment and happiness.

So that's where we're going. And we should be happier. That's what we mean by hope as opposed to expectation. Hope is the knowledge, that inner knowledge, that inner feeling, that intuitive understanding that there's an end to suffering. There's an end to that wrong sort of relationship. And what the *vipassanā* practice is doing is making us see that, yeah, there's a possibility of an end to this. It doesn't make it any easier, but it does lift the practice a bit to know that there is an end to suffering.

See, becoming has to have this objective.

Becoming has to have this expectancy, which is slightly different. Making a distinction between hope and expectation. Hope is a fundamental position to life, that life is good. It has meaning. There is a reason for suffering. And the reason for suffering is this wrong relationship. And that once the wrong relationship is corrected, happiness, perfect peace, all that arises.

Expectation would want to put a date on it. The expectation would want to achieve it. But what we realize in the meditation is that it's not achievable by you. That's another thing that you recognize, isn't it? That it happens. Once you find yourself in that position, the heart begins to purify itself. You don't have to do anything. It's like the body heals itself.

You can't have a spiritual insight. You can't say, well, I'm going to sit down now and I'm going to have a spiritual insight. You can't do it. You can have an intellectual insight. You can think about something. You can have an aesthetic insight. You can set yourself a task to understand something aesthetically or that way. But you can't make yourself have an insight. In fact, you might argue that when it comes to certain problems, even insights of that nature are beyond the self. You know, scientists will talk about how the answer just came. They'll go to sleep. They'll sleep on an answer, and then they wake up with it. Who thought that one out?

So how do we bring ourselves, how do we begin to train ourselves in daily life to get this sense of being rather than becoming? And the trick there is to really get your intentions right. So when you're eating, you're just eating to nourish the body. You're not asking for it to make you happy. It's as simple as that. If you're asking for it to make you happy, then you've formed a different relationship with food. But if the food is there just as medicine for the body, what's the problem? The fact that it tastes nice is a plus, a little gift.

When you want to help somebody, make sure that your intention is right, that you're just doing it for that person, you're just doing it out of the goodness of heart, that there's no subliminal reasons for doing it, that you want your kitchen decorated too and that you expect them to come along and do it, things like that.

When you do whatever job you do to get it right, that you're doing it as a service, of course there's pay. And of course there's hopefully the enjoyment of the job. But those are to be seen as merit. We have this idea in Buddhism of merit. You get merit, you get something added on because of your good heart. So the merit of doing your job is you get a wage and you get a certain joy out of it. But that's not why you're doing it. The reason we should be doing work is out of a service. You're doing it for the benefit of the other.

It doesn't get rid of the idea of ambition. You don't have to not be ambitious because you've decided to live the spiritual life. But your attitude is, well, these are the talents I've got and I can see that a job, I could do that job, so I'll offer these talents as a service. So if you find that somebody else got the job, there's not that disappointment. Because it was an offering. It's like, you know, you give a present. I mean, if you give a present and the person says, well, it's all right, no, I don't want it. You shouldn't feel bad about it, should you? You only feel bad about it because there's some ego, there's some self involved in the giving of the present. It's like they've not accepted you. You've been rejected. So you feel dejected.

So in terms of our meditation, we're trying to make this distinction as to what is me and what is not me. And mainly the technique is to see not me, not me, not mine, not me, not mine. And then when we go out into daily life to see, to be aware of any selfish, any self-centered intention.

Now you've got to be careful here. There's a difference between selfishness and self-regard, self-care. I mean sometimes you've got to look after yourself. But in terms of what you're doing, you're doing it with the right attitude for the benefit of the other.

So there are three positions. You do things for your own benefit, you do things for the benefit of the other, and you do things both for your own benefit and the benefit of the other. That's how the Buddha states it. And then you see the result. Not the result out there, because you never know what happens when you do something out there. But you see the result inside. Has it caused attachment? Has it caused disappointment? If anything negative comes up from an action, then you know there's something crept in there.

So let's presume that that little girl who said there's no reason for being is already there. She might be fully and completely liberated. You never know. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 155

Towards a Whole Life Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47 min

Building on the foundations of vipassanā meditation, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how insight practice naturally transforms negative mental states into their positive counterparts. He discusses how wisdom leads to compassion, hatred transmutes into love, and loneliness becomes solitude through the cultivation of equanimity (upekkhā). The talk examines the four brahmavihāras - mettā (loving-kindness), compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity - showing how these boundless qualities arise from the platform of balanced awareness.

Bhante addresses common obstacles in each practice: how attachment corrupts love, how grief undermines pure compassion, and how the "do-gooder" mentality can distort genuine service. He emphasizes that true compassion comes from equanimity rather than pity, and explains how generosity becomes a form of renunciation that weakens self-attachment. The teaching concludes by showing how these qualities integrate with the Noble Eightfold Path, creating a systemic transformation where every aspect of life becomes spiritual practice - from livelihood to moment-to-moment awareness.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we've either refreshed our understanding or been introduced to a particular practice, a particular methodology to investigate our situation. That's the *vipassanā*. We've gone into the characteristics which is what it is we're trying to actually see more clearly. From the Buddha's point of view, remember, it's the way we're looking which is our fault. We're not seeing things, as he would put it, as they really are. And he points to these three avenues of investigation: the impermanence, the idea of not-self, not-me, not-mine, and the psychology around desire, sensual desire, desire which basically says we're seeking happiness in the sensual world—as the three avenues of investigation which should eventually correct our view and have an effect on us. In the Eightfold Path, the effect is meant to be systemic, and we'll come to that this evening.

And then we talked about the various hindrances, the mental states that arise in meditation, which we have to work with. But from the importance of this suffering business it was also recognising that even though we're investigating these three characteristics, the actual process of purifying the heart—what would these days be called therapy—is actually happening quite unwittingly. It's just happening of itself, and the

main technique there you might say was to depersonalise it. And we depersonalise these emotions when we take the stories away, the stories that turn them into a continuous sense of me or mine. When we just bury our attention into just the feeling, just the feeling sense of an emotion, the sensational sense of an emotion, then it becomes a very different sort of experience. And at that point we have to be aware of our reaction to these things, where another story starts up. You know, I can't take it, I want this. The I always appears somewhere.

So now, this evening, it's really the time to talk on the more positive side of how we bring about a transformation. If we stay just there, you know, there might be an understanding, well, you just end up without greed or without hatred, and it's a sort of flat state, or a nondescript state of not being anything. But according, again, to the Buddha's understanding, what happens is almost a natural transformation of those particular attitudes into their opposites. In the Zen tradition, they'll tell you that compassion arises naturally with wisdom. And there was one teacher in London, she died recently, her name's just slipped my mind, who wouldn't do any loving-kindness practice—it was a waste of time. Because from her point of view, with wisdom, compassion arises naturally.

And in a sense that's what you might say happened to the Buddha himself, because his great intention was to seek some sort of answer to his own problems, even at that most existential level, the angst of the question of why am I here in the first place and who am I in the context of the cosmos and all that. And having answered all those questions and understanding what he'd come to realise, quite naturally, you know, the desire to pass on this information to other human beings just arose naturally. There was a doubt, a doubt arose in his mind at the time as to whether anybody would actually understand it, so subtle had been his experience. And as it's put in the mythology, the great Brahmā Sahampati came down and said to him that there were people with only a little dust in their eyes. So that's when he started off on his teaching journey.

So how are we already generating in our practice, in the actual sitting, and with the work we've been doing this weekend, the foundations for this transformation? So when we talk about transformation, we're just talking about this energy that we experience within ourselves that we call emotions and mental thoughts. How do we move them over to the opposite of the more negative states that we experience? How does hatred transmute into love and cruelty into compassion? How loneliness transmutes into solitude? Things like that. How stinginess and selfishness transmute into generosity?

So the first thing is to recognise how important this quality of equanimity is. That's what we've been developing when we're practising this quiet abiding. The thing about equanimity in this sense is that it's the platform, you see, upon which these other qualities can develop more purely. It seems to balance them out. It seems to give them a pure basis to arise from. And that's really the importance of this quality of equanimity.

What is that quality? From the mind's point of view, it's coming from a position of don't know or not sure. So we're open. We're actually open. We're ready to receive some information. And from the heart's point of view, it's not coming from a prejudicial situation. It's not being discoloured by whether you like somebody or don't like somebody. It's an open-heartedness and an open-mindedness. That's the qualities of this *upekkhā*, equanimity. And you'll see that some writers, like Nyanaponika in his book on Vision of the Dhamma, quite clearly states that this is the greatest of all virtues, because of that, because it sustains the balance of the others.

So when it comes to something like the other three illimitables, there are four qualities that are called illimitables: love, compassion, joy, and this equanimity. And they're illimitables in the sense that there's no end to which you can develop them. It's an indefinite development. We can't say infinite or eternal, but we can definitely say indefinite. And because there are innumerable numbers of beings in the world, there doesn't seem to be an end to the amount of beings that you can offer your good will towards.

So these three illimitables starting with this idea of love, you see, *mettā*—so after this when we do, after the walking period, we'll do an extended practice of *mettā*—and those are all the qualities that you would expect of a good friend: companionship, interest, gentleness, openness, companionship. All the qualities that you would expect of a good friend would be included in the idea of *mettā*.

And when it comes to the active qualities, so you've got this passive quality of equanimity and you've got these active qualities of love, compassion and joy. When it comes to those three active qualities, love again becomes the basis of your relationships. Now, in later Buddhism, in the Mahāyāna Buddhism, they stressed compassion a great deal. And that really was a historical development because it was felt that the early schools had been too self-centred, too much about saving themselves. And one of the adjustments that was made during that time was to bring in the idea of compassion. So often if you take refuge with the Mahāyāna school, you take the vow not to enter into Parinibbāna until everybody else goes in there. Which wasn't, luckily for us, the Buddha's own decision.

So this *mettā*, the Buddha himself, we talk about now his own teachings, that was what he reinforced. That was one of his teachings and he would balance it really with the *vipassanā*. In the discourse on loving-kindness he says that we should develop this open love and it should be balanced with insight meditation. There's a very good reason for that, because if you only do *vipassanā*, there's a great danger that it remains a sort of heady thing, and it doesn't move. It doesn't move. The wisdom can become a sort of indifference.

Have I told you the story of these two monks? Did I mention that? Because I always tell these stories. I never know when I've told it and when I haven't. Well, a couple of things happened when I was in the East which sort of really showed this up, you see. Because I was with one monk and there was a cat and it obviously killed this mouse and it was still playing with it. And I said to this monk, I said, why didn't you stop that? Because this particular cat was well fed. He said, well, it's cat kamma, it's mouse kamma.

And I was at another monastery and there was three or four of us just sitting on this bench talking and this cat suddenly leapt out and jumped on a bird. And one of the monks, who was fairly elderly, shot up like lightning, got a hold of his cat, gave it one hell of a belt, and then saved this bird. But unfortunately, the lungs were punctured, it had died. So he very beautifully held it up by the wings and chanted the sort of death chant: all compounded things arise and pass away.

So what was the difference between the first monk and the cat kamma business and the second monk and his jumping up in an attempt to save a bird, you see? And the difference was that the second monk realised that his consciousness was also part of their awareness, part of their kamma. There wasn't that indifference to suffering. There wasn't that separation between that knowing, as it were, and what it knew.

So when we're sitting in *vipassanā*, we create this distance. We have to do so in order to see things more clearly. And we go into it. Sometimes, of course, you can lace your looking with a sense of kindness. I haven't mentioned that over the weekend, but you might find that also softens things. So like when you're investigating, say, feelings of depression, you can still investigate them, but you can bring a sense of kindness to your investigation. And that has quite a softening effect.

So here we have, you see, two incidents where the one, you know, was practising, or at least had understood that there was no connection to be made, and the other one found an immediate connection with the suffering of the bird, you see. I remember a woman came to see me in one of the interviews and said that her partner found her cold and unresponsive after she'd meditated. So I said to her, well, don't you do any

mettā after you meditate? She said, no. I said, well, you've got to do *mettā*. And you've got to bring your partner to mind, and often a bit of *mettā*, you see. And, well, that cleared that one up. So you have to reconnect, you see. You have to reconnect with the world.

And once we've developed that reconnection, it's a specific quality, *mettā* is a specific quality of having the same relationship with everybody, in fact with all beings—a friendliness with all beings. So that means it goes beyond this like and dislike, and that's where the attachment is. The attachment isn't in the friendliness, the attachment is in just this personality thing of like and dislike.

Now, I'm not so sure we can ever get over that. It's just knowing that it's there. Even when you read the scriptures, there's definitely for me a feeling that the Buddha had his inner crowd. Obviously, the earlier disciples who stayed with him, Moggallāna, Sāriputta, they seem to form a sort of inner group, you know. And there's a man called Kassapa who actually leads the council after the Buddha dies, who is definitely considered to be an Arahant and worthy of respect and all that sort of stuff. But there's a feeling that whenever he arrives, everybody goes... And he's one of these hard forest-blowing monks, you know, hard on the Vinaya and all that.

And after the Buddha's death, he meets Ānanda. Ānanda was the Buddha's companion for the last twenty years. And also an awakened being. And when he meets him, he calls him like a little kid or something. He talks to him as somebody below him. And Ānanda, who's with Ānanda, gets angry with him. So there's some sort of, even at that level, there's just a natural quality of the way personalities touch each other. But that shouldn't be a barrier to our way, to the way that we actually treat somebody. This is the point. In other words, that you like somebody or dislike them is probably a personality issue, just the way we are. But that doesn't mean to say that we should therefore treat somebody any the less friendly because of that. And it's making that distinction which creates this quality of universal love, you see. And that's the *mettā*.

Now, the reason why I say that *mettā* is the basic relationship that we have with each other, with all beings, is because you can see that once you're a friend to somebody, the other two illimitables arise quite naturally. So if a friend falls ill or into misfortune, there's a natural desire to help. It's not a problem, it just arises naturally out of that friendliness. You don't have to work on it. And if somebody, if a friend has good fortune, you tend to congratulate them and you're happy for them. You feel there's a resonance, a resonance, a joyful resonance. It's called sympathetic joy or reciprocal joy. It's a resonance. You feel their happiness and you're happy for them. If they win the lottery, you're extremely happy. You don't want a penny. You're not upset when they don't even buy

you a drink. It's that sort of, and you're still gleeful that they're having such a good life. So that love, you see, that Buddha asked us to develop is the platform for all these other qualities.

Now, when it comes to love itself, as we've pointed out, the big obstacle there is affection. The obvious one is hatred. I mean, that's pretty straightforward. But the more subtle one is affection or attachment. And you can see this often in the case of a parent. You know, like if their little child comes home with a black eye, you know, it's the end of the world, you know. But if it's a cheeky kid from down the street, well, it deserves it. There's that sort of attachment which sort of creates a speciality around the person whom you have that relationship with.

Now, as I say, you can't do anything about that. It's just like when we open up to ourselves and we find these various states. It's a case of making ourselves aware of that and making sure that we're making decisions, intentions that go the other way. Now one of the things this weekend was really trying to catch these intentions a bit, because remember it's at the point of intention that we have this ability to choose and we can see the quality of that intention. And if you see that the intention you're making is flavoured or is laced with some sort of attachment, then just make sure you make the right intention and work from that intention.

So it's just like with food, you see. With food, as soon as we make the intention to eat to nourish the body, it creates a different relationship to food. But as soon as you seek their happiness, then that's it. It doesn't mean that the food doesn't make you happy. It's just that your intention corrupts your relationship to food. It then becomes, you know, sort of a dependency. Your happiness becomes dependent on a particular food that you like.

When it comes to compassion, that again is, I mean the opposite is obvious, cruelty. We don't have to work too much on that. But the subtle one is grief, you see, pity, pity, grief. That's a bit difficult for us to grasp really, because the association of compassion with grief is quite intimate. We think that the more we feel sorry for somebody, the more in a sense we're compassionate. But if you think about it, to move from the heart of compassion is actually a joyful moment. A heart is filled with joy when you're helping somebody.

Let's take a very simple case: if a blind man wants to walk across the street, and you just do it out of kindness, and you take his arm and lead him across. A sense of joy, isn't it? If you grieve for the blind person, then what is it you're adding to that? And is it necessary? Sometimes it's easier to understand that when you actually think about your-

self. Supposing you were, shall we say, struck down or something, and everybody around you started weeping and wailing. I mean, would that help you? It's like it just makes you more sad, you know, go away. I've got enough grief.

If you take, for instance, which is, you see, these things are completely understandable. And I think you have to make a distinction here between good and bad in the sense of evil and skilful, unskilful, wholesome, unwholesome. We're not saying that grief is some sort of great evil. We're just saying it's unnecessary suffering. It's not necessary. We can relieve ourselves of the need to grieve for somebody else. It undermines the purity of our compassion.

If you take for instance somebody who's feeling ill and they go to the doctor and they have a diagnosis and the doctor tells them that they've only got six weeks to live, but they just can't contain their grief and they're blubbering and saying, how would you feel about that? You think, this is highly unprofessional. So, of certain professionals, we're quite happy for them to tell us, you know, in a kind, sympathetic way.

We're not asking them to be brutal, but in a kind, sympathetic way, in an understanding way. But we would hate for them to collapse into tears. As a surgeon, if he's weeping while doing his job, it wouldn't help, would it? It means there's something definitely wrong.

If you really look into pity — and pity is perhaps a slightly better word, although it melds easily into grief — going back a little bit to love: when somebody dies, you're left with grief. Now, what is that grief? Is that a measure of your love or a measure of your attachment? That's the point.

I had an old lady come to me whose son had died, and she'd been grieving over this son for years. It just wouldn't leave her and depressed her all the time. When we discussed it, and she came to realize that actually the grief was a measure of her attachment and not her love, it just lifted. I could see it lifting even then and there when I was talking to her. She actually wrote me a letter later saying that all her grief had gone once she'd separated the idea of grief from love.

Remember that attachment is like that word — it's a rather nice word — it's like you're glued. When somebody you're glued to is ripped out of your life in death, you're just left with this wound, this inner wound. Just because you might now think this is because of my attachment doesn't mean it hasn't to be suffered and allowed to heal. That's the grieving process. But as soon as you say to yourself that this grief is a measure of

my love, every time your grieving begins to lessen, you have to say to yourself that you don't love that person as much as you did. So you've got to grieve again. You've got to keep pumping it up, because you can't handle the guilt of not loving the person.

But love is easy, isn't it? Love allows people their destiny. If a person has had to die young or whatever, that's it. You let them go. It's just the way it is, as we say.

Now this compassion — one of its things is grief. But there's an even more subtle problem, especially with compassion, and that is the do-good factor. It makes you feel good when you do good, especially when somebody thanks you and obviously appreciates your help. There's a very subtle shift, often without a person knowing it, that in fact you start doing good in order to feel good. Then you become the classic do-gooder, and the do-gooder is the person who's going to do you the good they want to do you, whether you like it or not.

You can always catch that little do-gooder in ourselves, because if you've jumped the gun — and this is where equanimity comes — because with equanimity, one goes to the person who needs help with that open-minded, open-heartedness, and you say, "What do you want?" When they tell you what they want, then you can say to yourself, "Can I do it or can't I do it?" It's a very simple choice. If you can, then you help. If you can't, you can't. But if you jump the gun and suggest to them what they need and they brush you off and you feel hurt, then you know there's something else going on in this transaction. You have to be careful with that one.

The other thing about compassion that I think people feel these days is a feeling of impotence, of not being able to do what they know has to be done — even about big things like the disaster in Burma or in China, or the fact that we now have a food shortage for no reason other than the futures market. People get into that emotional involvement with the world and what's happening to the world, and then they get this terrible feeling of frustration, complete impotence, feeling unable to do anything, unable to do enough. That really is not a pure compassion. That's not coming from equanimity. That's coming from pride. Pride here doesn't know the limits of power and influence.

When we do something, it's within our power. You have a ring of power around you — what you can actually do. Then there's another outer ring of influence — what you can get other people to do. Beyond that, that's it. That's the end of what you can do and can get others to do. It's just being able to accept that and being equanimous with it, that one has done what one can do.

I went on a retreat once where there were four different traditions. There was a Chan teacher, there was me doing the old *vipassanā*, there was an Orthodox monk, and there was — would you believe it — the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. We were supposed to be sharing these teachings. On the koan, he gave us all these koans to do, and some of them just don't make sense to me at all. But the last few at the end were very modern koans, and one of them really struck me. It said, "What can you do when you've done everything you can do?" It's that point where we think we can always do more than we can. That's where the frustration comes. That's where the sense of impotence can come. We have to be realistic about what our role is in any given situation.

Even when it comes to giving to charities — they're constantly coming to the door, and it always says fifty pence or fifty cents, and you think, well, by the end of it, if you're giving fifty cents to all these charities, you end up being a pauper. So it's a case of recognizing that this is what I can do, this is what I can get other people to do, and then you just rest in that. That's the quality of equanimity.

Muditā, sympathetic joy — that's a lovely quality, isn't it? To be able to rejoice in other people's good fortune. It undermines the obvious thing, which is envy and jealousy. Those are two things that we don't like to see in ourselves. Envy is not so bad — you can say to somebody, "I envy your lifestyle" or something. But jealousy is one of these traits within us which we don't particularly like to see, because when we're jealous, we're actually saying to ourselves that this person is better than me. So it's often a very subconscious thing which comes out in all sorts of ways.

In our meditation, if it comes up, really catch it and get the feel of it. It's not a pleasant mental state at all. There would have been a time when I would have gone around saying I'm not jealous of anybody. But I remember — this is a little while back — I used to try to write plays at one point. By this time, I was beginning to recognize that I wasn't quite going to make Shakespearean standards. But there was this young fellow who got a play on, and one of the few times I really caught my jealousy. It was a really nasty moment. I thought, "Oh my God!" It really is a nasty emotion. But it really undermines joy. This is the problem with all these negative things — they kill your own joy. You can't be joyful and jealous and envious at the same time.

The more subtle thing about joy is overdoing it, getting excited, jumping up and down a bit too much, so that it takes on a false character. You have to be careful of that too. But it's probably the easiest one for us to enjoy more purely anyway, especially with friends.

Going back now to this fundamental position of love — this *mettā*, this goodwill. It's translated sometimes in a slightly mawkish way as loving-kindness, which they take, I think, from a fourteenth-century mystic. But to me it just means goodwill, which I think translates it very openly. Then all the other things that we suffer from, trying to find a way to generate the opposite.

You'll see this evening that whereas in *vipassanā* we try to stop the thinking mind, try to stop the imaginative mind completely — it's a hindrance to actually seeing things as they really are — when it comes to developing these qualities within us, we actually begin to use the imaginative mind to reinforce and to develop certain qualities. When we practice the *mettā*, as we did a little bit last night, you bring people to mind and you offer them your goodwill, your blessings. Whether these things actually affect them or not is up to you, whether you want to believe that or not. But what it's doing is developing an attitude within us. As we widen that scope out to include all beings, we're slowly developing an attitude of goodwill to all beings. We're using these very faculties that in the past have become hindrances. It's the same with the compassion and the joy.

If you look at other things like loneliness — sometimes you might feel lonely. What do people do when they feel lonely? Normally, you'd ring up a friend and say, "I'm lonely tonight." "I'm lonely too." Two lonely people watching a film or something. But to feel the loneliness, what is it? What is the feeling of it? This is how you begin, just like in your meditation. You begin by sinking into that, the feel of loneliness. It's a lack of self-love, isn't it? That's basically what it is. You don't like being on your own.

As you sink in there, you might get all sorts of things, little blips arriving. "You're unlovable. Nobody loves you anymore." All that rubbish comes up. But if you stay with your *vipassanā* and you go into the feeling base of it, as it begins to evaporate, then the opposite begins to appear. When loneliness disappears, what can you expect at the end of the line? Solitude. Solitude is being perfectly at peace and at one with yourself.

To develop that, you have to give blessings to yourself. You have to start turning this *mettā* and this compassion towards yourself. That's how you begin to undermine these feelings of depression, loneliness, lack of self-esteem. You don't get caught up in the usual fantasies and the thinking around those negative feelings. You do your *vipassanā*. You could be on a bus, you could be standing under a tree — doesn't matter — and you just sink into that feeling. Then as it begins to loosen up, you don't have to wait for it to completely end, though best if you can, but it's not necessary, then you start offering yourself these blessings. In that way you're developing another conditioning.

Remember, a lot of our opinions about ourselves we've picked up from other people. It's when teachers have told us we're stupid or our parents have told us they'd rather keep a rat. Things like that. We pick this up from people and ingest it, and it becomes part of our own mentality. Don't get into blaming them, by the way. That's just something that naturally happens to us as children. It's just recognizing that. But again, always not to get caught up in the fantasies, in the way we talk to ourselves.

That gives you some hints as to how we can generate the positive side. There are many other qualities, and the final one I'd like to mention is the one that the Buddha always began his talks with whenever he talked to lay people. Whenever he introduced himself as a teacher and what his teaching was about, he always talked first of all about generosity. Then the nature of good conduct, wholesome, ethical conduct. Then he would talk about the heavens and future life births and all that. When he felt that the audience was malleable, ready for the thing, he'd smack them with the old *dukkha* — the Four Noble Truths: "There is suffering." But he sort of softened them up first with a couple of nice things.

Generosity is, from the Buddha's point of view, a really important quality to develop. When you're generous, it's an act of love. It's an act of compassion. You're giving something for the benefit of somebody else. But in doing so, you have to give something up. You either have to give up some of your wealth or some of your time. To do that means an act of renunciation. Every time we give, every act of renunciation, we actually are cutting into the solidity of the self.

Somebody might say, "Can you come and help me?" and you want to watch your favourite program on TV. You have to give that up — that's the attachment to this program. Every time you make an offering of your wealth, you're giving up something which you could have bought for yourself, which you could have enjoyed for yourself. Every time you do that, especially in an act of generosity which tweaks a bit — you don't have to really suffer, but where you know you're actually giving something up — that's undercutting this attachment to yourself, this idea of the concreteness of the self, just being able to let go of something for the benefit of the other.

When you give, whether you give to a charity or to a friend or whatever, it's always getting this intention right, being very clear about your intention. At the point of saying yes or the point of giving something, your intention is very clear that you're giving this for the benefit of the other and you do not want any return. It's a complete letting go of the gift, whatever it might be.

If your friend says, "Can you come and help me do a bit of decoration?" and when you ask them if they could come and do a bit of decoration for you, they say no, that's fine. There's no pain, no sorrow. You've completely forgotten, in fact, that you'd helped them do their decoration. It's that sort of giving.

You've got to put that clearly in your mind, just like with food. You say to yourself, "This is just to nourish the body." Then you do the act, or you give your donation or whatever. As soon as you've done that, of course, you're bound to get these little comments: "You are such a generous person. You really are wonderful, amazing how wonderful you are." Or, "Too much — take a bit back. You can't spend a whole day doing that." But you know them — you say, "Ah, that's old Mara." You've caught her, you've beaten old Mara there. Very slowly, those voices, those little negative conditionings, they die away and this more spontaneous action comes.

That's what we want, isn't it? We want to live spontaneously, not by way of just some reaction, some old habit. That's what the qualities give us. They give us this feeling of spontaneity in our lives where joy just arises naturally out of any action that we do. That's one of the gifts of developing these particular qualities.

You can see here the development of the spiritual life.

The *vipassanā*, the right understanding, getting things right, turning it into intentions. There's the Eightfold Path, right intention, right attitude. Turning them into clear intentions, clear intentions.

And then the way we speak, the way we act, even our livelihood. So how do we turn our livelihood, what we actually do within society, how do we turn that into a spiritual practice? And again it's turning it into a service. Again it's that generosity, it's the offering.

And then that whole spiritual practice becomes systemic. There's not a part of you which is not involved in that progress. If you stop at any point, there'll be a block, there'll be something, something won't pass, something won't happen for you. It just has to be like that.

And the last three of the Eightfold Path, the right effort and the right mindfulness and the right concentration, those follow us wherever we go, see? That's this business of just being in the moment, relaxing into the present moment, wide awake. That's your default position. And you can do that all the time. You don't have to do it just when you're on retreat.

Anytime during the day when there's a break, when you're not doing something, you remind yourself just to fall into that state. It doesn't matter how long. It could be a second. It could be just a second. And always in that state you can see the next intention. That's the importance of it.

When you're in a rush, when you're always moving, you get grasped by old conditionings. But if you can keep collapsing everything into this state of just being here, you can see the next intention. And it gives you that sense of control, you see, over your life. You're actually guiding yourself. You're actually moving the way you want to move.

So I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

You have to say sādhu! I feel really bad. There were talks that the Buddha gave where the monks did not respond. I don't know how he felt. There were others where the monks were delighted and the listeners were delighted, and there were other discourses where the listeners were delighted. They always said things that they didn't want to hear.

So if we do some walking meditation until about half past seven. And during this one, in order to support the *mettā*, the loving-kindness practice, do more just relaxing, just being with the walking. Don't worry too much about the investigation. Just develop that quality of calmness. And just that momentary attention, just momentary attention to what you're doing. And then we'll come back and do the next one.

CHAPTER 156

Evening Lockdown Meditation: Compassion and Loving-kindness Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 59 min

> *During the challenging times of the 2020 coronavirus lockdown, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a deeply nourishing evening meditation practice combining traditional contemplations with loving-kindness (mettā) meditation. The session begins with the five daily recollections on mortality and impermanence, reminding practitioners that 'this body is subject to disease, aging, and death,' while pointing toward the 'unborn, undying, uncreated, uncompounded' refuge of Nibbāna.*
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> *The heart of the practice focuses on systematic compassion meditation, beginning with self-forgiveness and extending loving-kindness to those who are suffering, including the sick, dying, homeless, and all beings caught in various forms of dukkha. Bhante guides practitioners through traditional mettā phrases: 'May I be free of physical pain, may I be free of mental distress, may I be liberated of all sufferings.'*
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> *The session concludes with a complete recitation of the Mettā Sutta in both English and Pali, emphasizing the cultivation of boundless goodwill toward all beings. This practice offers profound comfort and connection during times of isolation, demonstrating how Buddhist meditation can provide stability and compassion even in uncertain circumstances. The evening format includes gentle guidance for carrying mindfulness into sleep, making this an ideal practice for end-of-day reflection and peace.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

So we can begin our sitting. Make sure you are comfortable, feeling comfortable. Settling on the breath.

We can begin our sitting with these evening contemplations, which the Buddha says are there to make us more enthusiastic, to give us some real purpose as to why we're practising. So just repeating these phrases to ourselves:

This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. This body is subject to ageing. This body has not gone beyond ageing. This body is now in a process of ageing. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

There is the unborn, undying, uncreated, uncompounded. The unconditioned. True refuge, harbour and home. Perfect peace and contentment. Those who are mindful are in the presence, in the vicinity of *Nibbāna*.

So a moment's reflection, just looking back at the time, picking up on something, working with tiredness. Was it restlessness? Was some emotional stuff came up? Wandering mind? How did you deal with it? Don't forget, if you thought you were rather skillful, we should congratulate ourselves. If we thought we could have been more skillful, we should encourage ourselves. And we can make a resolution, either specific or general or both.

So we can just begin our contemplations always beginning with compassion. Again, it's a case of turning this goodwill compassion towards ourselves. And if we find that difficult, just to put our hands over our hearts and just consider some of the things that we've done to ourselves, which has caused harm, physical, mental, emotional. Something comes up for you and just allow yourself to forgive yourself.

Then just turning that compassion towards our own hearts, speaking gently into the heart: May I be free of physical pain. May I be free of mental distress. May I be free of all my sufferings.

We can bring to mind now somebody whom we know is not having a good time one way or the other. And as you picture them in your mind's eye, just drive your goodwill towards them: May you be free of physical pain. May you be free of mental distress. May you be liberated of all your sufferings.

And we can bring to mind all those at this moment who are sick and or suffering from mental illness. People in the process of dying and those who have died and left grieving family, relatives and friends. People going hungry, homeless and destitute. Those having to deal with severe personal and interpersonal difficulties. All those

caught up in wars and repressive regimes, those being tortured, and there are those suffering from natural disasters and climate crisis. All the sentient beings have been cruelly treated and unnecessarily slaughtered, and all who find life meaningless.

May you be free of physical pain. May you be free of mental distress. May you be liberated of all your sufferings.

And we can radiate this goodwill, compassion to all beings in all directions: May all beings be free of physical pain. May all beings be free of mental distress. May all beings be liberated of all their sufferings.

Bring to mind now some moments during the day when you've experienced love or peace, joy, some level of happiness. Just bring it to mind. Be grateful for it. Then just let's wish ourselves this joyfulness, again speaking joyfully into the heart: May I be joyful. May my joyfulness increase. May I experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

We can bring to mind now somebody whom we know has cause to be joyful. As you picture them in your mind's eye, drive your goodwill joy towards them: May you be joyful. May your joyfulness increase. May you experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

And there are people at this moment who are happy and content with their lives, enjoying the warmth of friendship, the support of friendship, enjoying the delights of art and nature, enjoying the work they do, finding it meaningful, fruitful. And there's also the fruitfulness of those practising spiritually. And there are those who are joyful because they rejoice in the joy of others.

May they be joyful. May their joyfulness increase. May they experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

And radiating this joy to all beings in all directions: May all beings be joyful. May their joyfulness increase. May all beings experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

I shall read again the Discourse on Goodwill, *Mettā*. If you are wise and want to reach the state of peace, you should behave like this: You should be upright, responsible, gentle and humble. You should be easily contented and need only a few things. You should not always be busy. You should have the right sort of work. Your senses should be guarded and you should be modest. You should not be exclusively attached to only a few people and you should not do the slightest thing that a wise person would blame you for.

You should always be thinking, may all beings be happy, whatever living beings they are, be they weak or small, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who've already been born and those who have yet to be born. May all beings, without exception, be happy.

You should not tell lies to each other and do not think anyone anywhere is of no value. Do not wish harm to anyone, not even when you're angry, just as a mother would protect her only child. So you should let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings. Let your thoughts of love go through the whole world, above and below, without any fear, with no ill will and no hatred.

Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, so long as you are awake, you should develop this mindfulness. This, they say, is the noblest way to live. And if you do not fall into unskillful ways, but live well and develop insight and are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, then truly you'll never need to be reborn into this world again.

So I'll chant the discourse. And if you wish, those of you who know it, of course, can chant with me. But you can also send out these blessings, the normal *mettā* blessings, may you be safe, well and happy. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented in harmony with the world.

Karaṇīyamatthakusalena yantaṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca. Sakko ujū ca sūhujū ca suvaco cassa mudu anatimāni. Santuṭṭho ca subharo ca appakicco ca sallahukavutti. Santindriyo ca nipako ca appagabbho kuleśu ananugiddho.

Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ. Sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā. Ye keci pāṇabhūtatthi tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā. Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā majjhimā rassakā aṇukathūlā.

Diṭṭhā vā ye ca adiṭṭhā ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre. Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā. Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha nātimaññetha katthaci naṃ kiñci. Byārosanā paṭighasaññā nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya.

Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttaṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe. Evaṃpi sabbabhūtesu mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ. Mettañca sabbalokasmiṃ mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ. Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyañca asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ.

Tiṭṭhañcaraṃ nisinno vā sayāno vā yāvadassa vigataṃ middho. Etaṃ satiṃ adhiṭṭheyya brahmametaṃ vihāramāhu.

May all beings be happy. *Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu.*

Very good. Thank you very much. You might be interested to know that 64 of us were there. Well, with me, that's 65, isn't it? Practising meditation together. How wonderful is that?

So I don't forget from now until you fall asleep is also part of your practice, our practice, don't forget myself. And it's good to put something beautiful in the mind so you sleep more peacefully. If it's the *mettā*, remember, make it very simple, just a blessing to yourself, to somebody you have little problems with, and to all beings. And you can also just put the attention on the breath, but not to investigate, that might wake you up, but just to feel this gentle waving motion wafting you into deep sleep.

May you have a peaceful night.

CHAPTER 157

Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9): Right View, Wholesome and Unwholesome Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9), the Discourse on Right View, delivered by Sāriputta rather than the Buddha himself. The talk focuses on the first of five ways to develop right view: understanding wholesome and unwholesome actions and their roots.

Bhante explores the ten unwholesome actions - three of body (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct), four of speech (false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, idle chatter), and three of mind (covetousness, ill-will, wrong view). He explains how these actions arise from the three unwholesome roots: lobha (greed), dosa (hatred/aversion), and moha (delusion), particularly emphasizing how our false sense of identity drives us to manipulate situations for personal comfort.

The discussion extends beyond the heavy transgressions mentioned in classical texts to include everyday experiences like feeling down, anxiety, anger, and the five hindrances. Bhante reframes morality as ethics - the way we relate to everything in our experience. He explains how developing ethical conduct serves as a measure of spiritual progress and is so fundamental that accepting the law of kamma qualifies one as a lesser stream-entrant (cūḷa sotāpanna). The talk concludes with practical guidance on cultivating right speech through kindness, timing, and gentle honesty.

Good evening, everybody. I messed up yesterday. So that's the way it is sometimes. What can you do? So I shall begin.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Even though I wasn't here, I know you all kept to your practice. There can be no doubt about that. I have three options when I go on. I can go private, which is just for me, or I can go for only those people whom I've personally invited, or I can go public. So I made the mistake of going private. Well, it wasn't so much a mistake. I thought you'd all be able to beam in because of your extranormal powers, but I was mistaken. I had many emails asking me whether I'd died or not. I haven't died.

What I'm going to do in the evening is try to choose a discourse from the Majjhima Nikāya. It's a great big book. There's 160-odd of these discourses, and just try to make our way through them. What I mean to do is reduce the discourse to a simple formula and then maybe address some of the things.

Now, you may have questions, questions which are not related to what I'm talking about. So it's best to email them and I'll answer them that evening if it's before lunch, because after lunch, I'm preparing this. There were a couple of questions actually that came through. I haven't put their name, unfortunately. "To what extent can it be argued that the Four Noble Truths was the Buddha's most important teaching?" And then, "Are all the stages of the Eightfold Path equally important?" So I'll tackle that tomorrow, if I may. What I'm going to do is chop off the first half hour, which will be these little discussions or talks, and separate them and list them on YouTube so you can have a listen to them later if you can't be here for that.

The discourse is called *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, the discourse on right view. The person who's giving it isn't the Buddha himself, it's Sāriputta. Now Sāriputta was known as the general of the Dharma. The Buddha gave nicknames to about 80 of his disciples. So Sāriputta was known as *Mahāpaññā*, the great wise one. Moggallāna, whom I'm sure you know, was a second great disciple. He was called *Iddhimanta*, which means psychic power.

Some of you will know the story of Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth, who asked for instructions while the Buddha was on his alms round. The Buddha said, "Can you wait till later?" And he pleaded with him and said, "No, I'm an old man." He's over 73. He gave him this teaching, and he was immediately enlightened, but later on gored by a cow. He's known as *Khippābhiññā*, which is the most speedily enlightened person.

There was also Sīvali, that's a story that goes with that, which I might tell some other time, who was known for his ability just to get alms, even when there was a famine. So he was called *Lābhī*, which just means receiver of gifts.

Two women, two nuns that you may know, are Kisāgotamī. She was known as wearing rough robes. She was the one who had lost a child and was crazed with grief. The Buddha sent her to find a mustard seed from a house where there'd been no death. That brought her back to her senses. She ordained and then became fully liberated.

There was also Paṭācārā, which is another terrible story where she lost all her family. If you remember, on the way back with her husband, her husband died from a snake bite. The two children were taken away by the great river. By the time she got to

her village to visit her parents, the house had burnt down with her parents in it. So she was in a pretty bad state and she also joined the order and became fully liberated. She was known as *Vinaya-dhāraka*. She was pretty heavy on the old Vinaya, the rule.

The two great lay supporters, Anāthapiṇḍika, so he was the one who bought the first monastery for the Buddha. That's where this actually takes place. This discourse takes place in Jeta's Grove, Sāvatthī. Sāvatthī was the capital of the Northern Kingdom, whose name I forget. That's a senior moment. He bought this field off Jeta, Prince Jeta, and he said he's covered it with gold, meaning he got done for that, because he wanted the grove so much that Prince Jeta could ask for anything he wanted. So he's known as *Dāyaka*, which means supporter. It's a special title that the Buddha gave him. That's a word we use for anybody now who supports the Sangha, the *dāyaka*.

And, of course, there was Visākhā, who was also a very famous supporter of his. The reason I remember it is because she once turned up at the monastery and all the monks were bathing in the rain, in the torrential monsoon rain, completely naked. Well, she was very upset. So she went out and bought all this cloth so that they could cover themselves. It became one of the requisites, one of the eight things that you get when you ordain.

So this is Sāriputta who's been asked this question. The question is, "Is there a way? Is this way the one right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dharma and has arrived at the true Dharma?" In other words, what do you have to have the right view about, the right understanding about, in order to achieve the true Dharma, the true teachings?

And he gives five ways. The first one is unwholesome actions and wholesome actions and their roots as to why we behave like that. Then there's nutriment. That's very rarely taught, the nutriment. And then, of course, there's the Four Noble Truths. And then he goes through dependent origination backwards. So he goes from ignorance all the way through to the end. And then finally, the taints, which, again, some of you might know.

The word is *āsava*, which is like the sap coming out of a tree, which can make frankincense. It oozes out of the tree. But it's also the oozing of pus from a boil. And I think that's the image we have to have when we think of the *āsava* that we have to get rid of.

So what I want to do this evening is just talk about these unwholesome actions. The list of unwholesome actions, I mean, they're pretty straightforward. The physical ones, you have to stop killing people. And then you have to stop thieving from them. And then, of course, there's sexual misconduct. Now, those things are pretty heavy. They're pretty obvious.

Speech is just a bit more refined. You've got to be on your guard because we're always speaking. If we're not speaking to somebody, then we're speaking to ourselves. False speech, you have to stop telling lies from now on. Malicious speech, that's to do with intent. Remember, you might say something which is not giving somebody a good name for a very good reason, but your intention is to put somebody straight about them if they're employing them. Something like that.

Then there's abusive speech. Sometimes it's translated as gossip, but gossip can be more like malicious speech, can't it? It's more like idle prattle. That's the best translation. We're just talking for talking's sake. Now, those are to do with speech. So the Buddha is asking us to be guarded with that.

And the mental ones, which are covetousness, wanting what other people have, envy. At worst, jealousy. You hate them for having what they have. And there's ill will, of course. You don't want any of that. And, of course, wrong view. Wrong views about things.

Now, these actions have their roots. And I'll give you just one second to guess what the roots are. You won't be surprised. Yes, you've got it. It's greed, hatred, or aversion, and delusion. So this *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*. *Lobha* is really just indulging. It's just wanting stuff. It's not a case of "I want these days." It's not a case of "I want more TV or more money." Most people, what we want these days is more. It becomes a noun. How much do you want? You want more. So that's this business of indulgence.

The aversion, which is a word I prefer, is that you're averse to something and your reaction is either to get rid of it or to get away from it. So it's the old fight-flight syndrome. But it's always about manipulating the situation in order to make yourself feel comfortable, most times at the expense of somebody else.

And the delusion, now this digs deep, because it all begins from this false identity, the false identity of who I am. So remember, this business of "I am me" means that I'm seeking my own happiness. I'm seeking happiness in the world. And when the world doesn't fit, then, of course, I get this ill will. And when the world does fit, it's like me, me, me. It's all trying to get more and more of what I have.

So it all roots back always to this problem of identity, always roots back to this problem of identity. And in our practice in vipassanā, we're constantly rediscovering that place within ourselves, which is separating out of these desires and these ill wills and all the rest of it. That's the process of liberating ourselves from this wrong view as to where we can find happiness.

Now, that's not to deny the natural joys and pleasures of life. It's just the relationship we have to them. That relationship is variously called attachment, indulgence and so on. And so that's why we end up always trying to manipulate the world. So it's important to understand that.

Now, one distinction to be made here, which is pretty important, that whenever you read the discourses, it's always about these pretty heavy stuff, like murder and thieving and malicious speech. And what seems to be missed out, of course, is all the stuff that we generally suffer from in a way, feeling down. I don't like the word depression. It medicalizes it. You just feel down. I felt down today. So I felt down today.

And then there's anxiety. I mean, that's right, isn't it? Especially now with this coronavirus, the anxiety, the fear that's being generated is quite remarkable. And rightly so, if it stops people from being silly. Fear. And then you've got anger, anger which comes up, frustration and all that. And then you've got all the different hindrances. So dullness and lethargy, restlessness, doubt, lots of doubt, things like that.

Now all those come under the umbrella of unwholesomeness. And so, in a way, a better word than morality, which tends to sink us into this "thou shalt not and thou shalt," it's more to do with ethics. It's more to do with the way we relate to the world. We relate to people. That's what it's about.

And everything you have, everything you touch, everything you see, we have a relationship with. As soon as you see a tree, you find you have a relationship with it. You like it. You're enjoying its shade and so on. Even a door, as soon as you see a door, you have a relationship with it. It's something you want to go through or shut behind you. It's one of those.

So you can see, to think about *kamma* at its wider perception of *kamma*, we've got to think about ethics. That's what it's about. And of course, what we're trying to do is to get to the opposite of all this. And of course, that's often stated as non-stealing, et cetera, et cetera. But of course, what we're moving towards is a refinement.

So once we've stopped killing and we start respecting other people, then you get this idea of protecting them and protecting ourselves, protecting life. The Buddha's clear that this is a very treasured, precious life form that we have. It has this dual misery and

happiness, joy and woe. But it also has, we have this intelligence, we have this ability to discern. And that's what's going to liberate us, this ability to discern. So we need to be very careful with our bodies.

When it comes to speech, of course, what we're trying to move towards is a kindly speech, a pure speech, a truthful speech, an ability to speak from the heart, to be open, to be honest. Those are the important things about right speech. And the other slightly important thing about that is often to be guarded when you say something. There's a right time to say something and a right time and a wrong time. And choosing the wrong time to say something can cause a bit of upset, especially if it's something you want to say that the person might not like. So you have to be very careful.

I remember when there was all this business of free speech came up. It was a while back with Islamists. And there was this idea that the right to abuse somebody, that was part of this free speech business, which I can understand, but it's a bit of a hard way to put it. You have a right to state what you understand and believe, even though you know other people might be insulted by it, but then one has to go very gently with that. You don't go around smashing people on the head with your views and opinions. So it's a case of being gentle, kind. So that's the right speech business.

When it comes to the covetousness of will, then, of course, that's as soon as you see it come up in the mind to acknowledge it. I mean, that's the great thing about one of the things about noting that you get in the habit of saying, "Oops, now that's a bit of cheek, that's cheeky." You see what I mean? You point to it, make sure you're aware of it.

So that's this business of morality. Now, it does go. This business of morality is understood to be of prime importance to understand this business of ethics and morality. Some of you may know that there are four stages to liberation. What we call the stream entrant. And that's somebody who's broken through this wrong view of self. It's only a lightning understanding of it. The sense of self is still very strong.

And then the second level is when somebody has such an insight that their greed and hatred is much undermined. And in the third level, the greed and hatred aversion is completely gone. And that simply means that the person is no longer attracted to this level of existence. But there are still five things to go. Restlessness, well, the main one is conceit. And that includes the sense of "I am."

Now, such is the importance of understanding or accepting the law of *kamma*, the law of consequence, that if you do something harmful, something harmful will arise. If you do something wholesome, something wholesome will arise. Somebody who actu-

ally takes that on is known as a *cūla-sotāpanna*, so a lesser stream entrant. That's how important the commentaries put to it. I don't think it's in the scriptures themselves. It's the beginning. It's the beginning.

Because why is that? Because our ethics, our morality is an expression of this original delusion. So the purer we get is a feedback to us of our progress. Often in our practice, we often wonder whether we're making any progress. It's a constant question for meditators. "I don't feel any progress." But if you look back five, ten years, maybe 50 years, you should be able to see some progress in your ethics, some progress in the way that you relate to people, that you relate to your work, things like that.

So I'm going to finish there this evening. And I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I've not caused even greater confusion, and that you will, by your sincere practice, liberate yourselves from all suffering sooner rather than later. Very good. So don't forget, if you have any questions, to email me.

The email is on the website, but the simplest one is bbodhi at gmail.com.

So I'd like to begin the meditation and we'll follow the practice that we did two days ago, which I did by myself here talking to nobody yesterday evening.

So settle yourselves into a good posture. For those of you who haven't been here, this is the meditation room. The Buddha that you see up on the lotus, I've had with me since I went to Gaia House in 2001. Oh no, it was before that. It was when I set up a centre in North London, and Venerable Vajirañāṇa, who was then the abbot of the London Buddhist Vihara, offered me this when I set up that centre.

CHAPTER 158

First Three Noble Truths

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 32 min

> *In this teaching from the Coronavirus Lockdown series, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses whether the Four Noble Truths represent the Buddha's most important teaching. Drawing from the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, he examines the first three Noble Truths in depth.*
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> *The talk begins with dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) - not just obvious suffering like birth, aging, sickness and death, but the deeper existential suffering arising from not obtaining what we want and the five aggregates affected by clinging (upādāna). Bhante explains how clinging manifests in four ways: to sensual pleasures, views and opinions, rules and rituals, and most crucially, to identity or sense of self.*
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> *He then explores taṇhā (thirst/craving) as the origin of suffering, including craving for sensual pleasures, becoming, and non-becoming. Using practical examples, he shows how our habits and compulsive behaviors stem from trying to manipulate mental and emotional states. The third Noble Truth - cessation through the complete letting go of craving - appears simple but proves extraordinarily challenging in practice.*
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> *Throughout, Bhante emphasizes how lockdown conditions offer unique opportunities to observe our compulsive patterns when normal habits are interrupted, making them visible as choices rather than automatic responses.*

Greetings all. Very good. There are, at the moment, 66 people, all looking at me, for heaven's sake. That's very lovely.

So, I just start in my usual way. *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.* Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I'm presuming you can hear me. So it's good to have a little test there. Somebody could say, they could just give me a nod to say they can hear me. That would lessen my sense of overwhelming anxiety. Nobody's answering. Well, I'm just presuming you can hear me. Yes, I'll have to presume. So I hope you had a fruitful day. Very good. Loud and clear. Thank you so much. Very good. Audio is great. Right. I'm with it. That's enough. Thank you very much.

So, yes, hopefully you've had a fruitful day. Just to reiterate, if you want to have, if something comes up which is a bit heavy for you to handle, feel free to get in touch. Use my email, bbodhi at gmail.com. Sometimes it's good just to talk to somebody. I'm thinking, obviously, especially for those people who find themselves locked in by themselves, that can be a bit of a miserable state. Although these days it's lessened with all the social media. It's a blessing, really.

I wasn't plugged in properly. I've got to get used to all this stuff. So I just wanted to... Oh, by the way, the little talk I give in the evenings, you'll find them as separate little items on the channel. So that if you happen to miss some of my pearls of wisdom one night, you can always check it out in the daytime.

So I wanted to answer these questions that were sent to me. To what extent can it be argued that the Four Noble Truths was the Buddha's most important teaching? Sounds a bit like one of these A-level questions. And are all the stages of the Eightfold Path equally important?

This discourse, which is the *Sammādiṭṭhi*, the right view discourse, where Sariputta is being asked, basically, what do we need to understand? What right view do we need to have in order to become liberated? And he gives various answers to that. And there's a suggestion that if you understand any of these fully, that would lead to liberation. Now, that only makes sense when we realize that the teaching, the Dharma, is all one piece, really. Once you investigate one part of it, it naturally leads you to other parts.

Anyway, he's being asked again, but friend, might there be another way in which a noble disciple is of right view and has arrived at this true Dharma. And he says, yes, there is. And then there is what you might call a regular expression of the Four Noble Truths. So I'll read those out. What is the noble truth of suffering? What is the origin of suffering? What is the cessation of suffering? And what is the way leading to the cessation of suffering? So there's your Four Noble Truths.

Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Sickness is suffering. Death is suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering. Not to obtain what one wants is suffering. In short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering.

Now, that's pretty straightforward, isn't it? I mean, the whole business of being born is not particularly pleasant either for the child and the mother. And then aging and all. So all of it is pretty straightforward. But then there's this little sentence, not obtaining what one wants. Now, there's your frustration, your anxiety that you might not get it, all that sort of stuff.

Now, this word *dukkha*, that's what it's translating, suffering. These days, people prefer unsatisfactoriness. The word *dukkha* itself means just hard to bear. Du is like, it just means bad, not good. And ka means to bear something. So it's something that's difficult to bear. And it's used figuratively, for instance, to describe an axle in a wheel, which doesn't quite fit. So you get the grinding noise, it doesn't quite fit.

And what *dukkha*, what the Buddha is saying, the way he's using the word is not just on these obvious things like ordinary sufferings and pains and all that sort of stuff. But there is this business of not getting what one wants. And that's to do with our desires, our expectations. So that obviously causes us a lot of suffering.

But the next sentence goes a little deeper. It says the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering. Now, those of you who know dependent origination will know the middle links, which connect, which expresses how we create this suffering. So remember, there is this point of contact. Then there's the discernment that what we're experiencing is pleasant or unpleasant. Liking, disliking, and then of course we choose to grasp at or desire rather, desire what's pleasant and push away what's unpleasant. And that's the reaction. But it's the next one where we *upādāna*, which means to cling, to get hold of.

Now this *upādāna* is manifest in four different ways. It's first of all a clinging to the pleasures of the senses. That's the sort of clinging. And of course, if you are not being pleased, then your response is to get rid of it. So there's always this duality of aversion and desire. And the aversion, of course, splits into two. You either get rid of it or run from it. And then there's this holding onto views, opinions. I'm right, everybody else is wrong. That's also clingy.

Then there's this one about rules and regulations. This is really going back to an understanding of the time when ritual was a way of appeasing the gods or demanding the gods to do something. So if you think that, for instance, bowing to the Buddha, lighting candles and all that sort of stuff actually is going to liberate you, then you are definitely deluded. So that's the rules and regulations.

But the one that I particularly reinforce when I'm talking about this is identity, because that's where the root cause is. The root cause is the sense of I. And that's really where the suffering becomes existential. It becomes a position of me. And that comes most obvious when death approaches us, but also serious illness or indeed the death of somebody we love or the serious illness of somebody we love. It impinges upon us. It begins to question our identity because this identity, this self, this feeling of me has a

feeling about it of permanence. Even though we're quite happy to get rid of it when we fall asleep, there's the presumption that next morning I'm going to wake up and say, oh, here I am again.

So that's the suffering. So it's pretty straightforward unsatisfactoriness, not being able to get fully satisfied with life. It's always going to let us down a bit, even when we've got everything, the right house, the right car, the right partner, the right children, et cetera, et cetera, at some point it just begins to disappear. And that's the way it is. Then there's the suffering, which is not getting what you want. And then there's the suffering, which is to do with this existential, this sense of self.

So this word *dukkha*, which is very difficult to define, very difficult to translate, because it has such a wide meaning. And what the Buddha is really saying is that the whole of life, the whole of human life is unsatisfactory. And I always like the quote from Jesus on this when he said, the birds have their nests, but the son of man has nowhere to rest his head. So I think that's put it very poetically, very beautifully.

So then, of course, there's the origin of suffering, or the cause of suffering. And that is, it is craving, which brings renewal of becoming, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming. This is called the origin of suffering. It's translated here as origin, but I would probably prefer the word cause, the basic cause of suffering.

So the word here that's being translated is *taṇhā*, which some authors, I think, probably are closer to the mark when you translate it as a thirst, a lack, a sense of lack. That's another translation that some authors use. And those get close to it. Craving is a bit too strong, although we do have cravings. It's actually covering all desires, even from the simplest thing, like when you're watching TV and you feel a bit uncomfortable, there's a desire to move. So if you watch all your intentions, you'll see that they're all, normally speaking, desires to get rid of something you don't like or get something you do like. And so we're constantly manipulating the world to make ourselves feel comfortable.

And it's accompanied with delight, and it's got lust here, but it's more like an indulgence, delight and indulgence. So the question that we have to ask ourselves, when I want something, when I want something or someone from this position of trying to escape suffering, because that's what we're doing when we're often indulging things and also enjoying it, what is it that we really want? Do we actually want the object we're desiring or the effect that the object has on us? Have a guess. What do you think? What is it we really want? I mean, do we really want porridge or do we want what porridge does to us? Toast, that's another one. Yeah, I know I'm a bit obsessive about toast.

So it's trying to establish or trying to develop a certain mental state, isn't it? A certain emotional feeling state. And that's what this craving does or this thirst. And it produces habits, produces habits. And what we discover in meditation and even now with this lockdown is that when you interrupt a habit, when you stop a habit, it suddenly becomes a choice. Normally we're running with habits. You get up, you do this, you do that. You want a piece of toast. See, I'm at it again. And off you go.

But when you can't, when there's no bread, or when the toaster's broken, the habit's broken and it comes back at you. And now most times we would fight that and run out and get a toaster. But it also gives us a choice, a choice to bring about an end to that compulsive behaviour. So if we look upon this lockdown, some of us are having to stay in, in rooms, can't actually leave. This is an opportunity, really, to see where these obsessive-compulsive things are. And, of course, it can be difficult. It can be very difficult. But that's the whole reason for practicing this *vipassanā,* that you find a different relationship with it so that you allow the heart to express its turbulences, no matter how difficult that may be. And what we discover, of course, is that that's the way it heals itself. So that's the origins, or the cause of suffering.

There's also the craving for becoming. So there's yourself, always wanting to become. And you'll notice how you're always ahead of yourself. You're always thinking about what you're going to do in a minute or in an hour or this afternoon or when you go to work or when you don't go to work or when you retire. What are you going to do? So the self never feels safe just being in the present moment. He can't hold that position because it's unsafe. He doesn't know what's going to happen next, for heaven's sake. So this craving for constantly becoming and the other one is craving for non-becoming. So that, of course, takes us to the dark side to put an end to this because of the suffering that we're having, leading towards suicide. That's the worst. Or if you're angry with somebody, murdering them because they're stopping you getting happy. But we've given that up, remember, because we take the five precepts.

So that craving for becoming and craving for non-becoming, that digs deep again to this existential problem about who am I? And that's the question, who am I? Or what am I?

And then finally, the third one is cessation of suffering. How does that come to an end? How does all this stuff come to an end? So this is the regular formula. It is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting of that same craving. Just this is the end of suffering, the cessation of suffering.

Now that sounds really simple, doesn't it? Just to give up the craving, give up all these obsessive desires, this compulsive behavior, and voila, you've made it. But of course, what we discovered is that that's no easy thing at all. And that comes very obvious when we go on retreat, just the difficulty of changing our habits completely. The first three days, as you know, are all blood, sweat and tears. And then it eases off a bit, but never a lot. And it's always been a struggle. So the practice is hard. The Buddha doesn't pull punches on that. I'm sure you've heard me quote from the scriptures there. Somebody says to the Buddha, this training is very hard. And he says, well, it is hard, but in the end, you're liberated, you achieve *nibbāna*. And the questioner says, yeah, so what? And the Buddha says, well, at the end of it, you are happy and with it, contented. *Tutti sukha wahati*, *tutti*. That's the word for contentment, *tutti*. Tutti frutti. So that's this business of the cessation.

And the final one is, of course, the Eightfold Path. Now, the question is, can it be argued is the Buddha's most important teaching? Well, if you can imagine, when the Buddha had his awakening, and it was said he spent a week thinking about it, especially dependent origination, the psychology that he had discovered. And then he began teaching. The first part of the scriptures, which you'll see in, some of you might know the Nipāta Sutta, which was translated by my Upajjhāya, Dr. Saratissa, Venerable Dr. Saratissa was the chief monk at the London Buddhist Vihara in the 80s. And when I ordained, he was my preceptor. So although all my meditation teachers were Burmese, my order was into one of the Sri Lankan orders. And he's translated it. It's a lovely translation, that, the Nipāta Sutta. And Bhikkhu Bodhi has done a great big, huge volume, which translates the commentary as well.

Now, the interesting thing about the Nipāta Sutta is that it's pretty original. And that always surprises me, really, because you can see the original teaching wasn't so formalized. He's answering individual questions. And slowly, the teaching becomes formalized. And that's when you get these, four of these, ten of those, nine of them, and so on and so forth. And that formalization is the middle bit. And then it becomes, towards the end, it becomes very listy, like, to help you remember things. And it begins, you can see it begins to be a bit like the Abhidhamma, which was a later development, which takes away all that, what would you call it, not humanity.

When you read the scriptures, you do get the feeling of a person, the Buddha talking and people who are talking to him. And as the teacher becomes more and more intellectualized, that begins to disappear. And it really does become lists. So there's these three waves of development. And it's interesting, I think, or surprising, shall I say, that the oral tradition maintained those very early teachings. They're there. And then, of course, you get this more formalized, the Four Noble Truths.

So when he has finally formalized it, these Four Noble Truths are the foundation of the whole teaching. And you could say that if you come across any teaching, so-called Buddhism, which doesn't fit into the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, then it's not right. It's not particularly right. And each of these noble truths, of course, launch out into various other teachings and we'll come to some of them very much in this particular discourse. And so whenever you start, whenever you start to talk about *kamma*, start talking about the body, doesn't matter where you start talking about what it is you start talking about, you always end up really investigating the whole of the Dharma because it just leads from links one to another until you've virtually covered it.

And you'll always come down to this root level about *dukkha*. If you were going to encapsulate one word which expresses the Buddha's understanding of the human condition, that's the word *dukkha*.

If you wanted to choose one word which encapsulates the fundamental problem that we have, it would be *atta*, self, teaching around not-self.

And if you were to choose one word which expresses the way out of it, the actual practice to get out of it, it would be *sati*, awareness. But you'd have to put *sama* in front of it. It's right awareness, yeah? It's a specific definition. So in other words, if you're thieving, you're fully aware, you know, but it's not going to get you liberated. It might make you rich for a little while.

So that's the Four Noble Truths. I'm just looking at the time. Oh, it's going on. So I want to leave it there, and then tomorrow we'll have a look at the stages. And the question is, are all the stages of the Eightfold Path equally important? So we can have a look at that tomorrow.

Very good. So yesterday I forgot to take the refuges and precepts for those of you who would like to do it. And then once I've done that, we can sit and as usual, towards the end, I'll do these contemplations.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your devotion to practice, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Very good. So I shall now do the chanting. That's odd. My computer says twenty-five minutes past eight, but my clock says half past eight. I don't know. Okay, we can begin.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa, Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa, Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa. Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gac-

chami. Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami, Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami, Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami. Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami, Tatiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami, Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami. Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, Suramerayamajja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.

So we can begin our sitting. So make sure you are comfortable, feeling comfortable. Settling on the breath.

We can begin our sitting with these evening contemplations, which the Buddha says are there to make us more enthusiastic, to give us some real purpose as to why we're practising. So just repeating these phrases to ourselves.

This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. This body is subject to aging. This body has not gone beyond aging. This body is now in a process of aging. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

There is the unborn, undying, uncreated, uncompounded. The unconditioned. True refuge, harbour and home. Perfect peace and contentment.

Those who are mindful are in the presence, in the vicinity of *Nibbana*.

CHAPTER 159

Coronavirus and the Contemplation of Death

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

> *In this teaching from early lockdown 2020, Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the coronavirus pandemic as a doorway into maraṇasati—the contemplation of death. He begins by reading contrasting letters about society's response to the pandemic, highlighting our collective denial of death and fear-driven behavior.*
>
> *Drawing from the Buddha's teachings on death contemplation, Bhante explains how practitioners should bring awareness of mortality directly into each breath, recognizing that death could come at any moment. This isn't morbid thinking but a powerful practice for confronting the fear that underlies much of our suffering. He emphasizes that the real problem isn't fear of death itself, but our "fear of fear"—the panic and paranoia that arise when we avoid facing mortality.*
>
> *The talk includes inspiring accounts of arahants who faced death without fear, demonstrating how liberation transforms our relationship with mortality. Bhante guides listeners through the practical application of this contemplation, encouraging direct engagement with fear rather than avoidance. This teaching offers both timely wisdom for pandemic anxiety and timeless instruction in one of Buddhism's most transformative practices.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I was going to tackle this question of the precepts, which was — let me see if I can find the question. Are all stages of the Eightfold Path equally important? I might get around a little bit to that. But I came across a couple of interesting little articles here, letters actually, which you might be interested in.

So this one is written by a man called Darrell Davis from Denbighshire. And he says, "As well as being 66 and in poor health, I also have three sisters in the at-risk category for coronavirus. I therefore feel qualified to say this. We are demolishing our economy and small businesses and wasting many billions of pounds to protect an at-risk category comprising about 1% of the population. The science suggests that the rest of us may get a mild form of virus but will recover. The best estimate states that 250,000 people will lose their lives. This accounts for less than half of 1% of the population." You see where he's going?

"This is extremely sad and awful for those affected. But while governments should be caring, they must also be pragmatic. Many of these people, including myself, will succumb to something else in the next few years. How can we justify the impact of this path? We're spending effectively 1.2 million per expected death on people whose life will be taken soon anyway. Yet we cannot find the tens of thousands of pounds, only tens of thousands, for specialist cancer treatment for much younger people. It will take years to recover from this regression."

Just while you're thinking about that, there's somebody replied to an article that the journalist Matthew Parris had written. He appears to feel that younger citizens should be allowed to continue their lives almost as normal and that over-70s should be sacrificed. Say no. "I suggest he completely misses the point. If the over-70s contract the virus, they will obviously take up valuable capacity in the NHS. However, without some restrictions on the less vulnerable, the very nature of their lifestyles is likely to spread the disease, infecting a high percentage of the population, young and old. As a member of the over-70s group, I realise that we are more expendable. The facts, however, are that without restrictions on everyone, the consequences for the country could be catastrophic for us all." So you have an opposite view there.

Actually, when I looked at the death toll for coronavirus, most of them are over 75. So I'm all right. I'm only 73. It reminds me of Boris Johnson. Yes, that's right. That was the herd immunity business. Let everybody have it and then eventually everybody's OK. Young people are dying too, though. That's true. It's very occasional. It's not at the same rate as the old. People are living to 100 nowadays. That's true enough. That was the one young boy I read of, this young boy in Brixton who died yesterday. He was only 13.

Anyway, you can see there are varying views and opinions as to how the government ought to have reacted. But the more cynical reaction to this has been governments moving towards authoritarianism. Even in Europe there, this fellow in Hungary, Viktor Orbán, he's basically become a dictator. He can govern now without any restriction on his authority or, in fact, any criticism. You can get to jail for five years if you don't agree with what they're doing or write about it. And it's interesting because we thought the EU, Brussels, was all powerful. But actually, when it comes down to nation states, they eventually can do what they want. You can't do anything about it because it's a very small country, Hungary, and they're absolutely paranoid about being swamped by immigrants.

I did hear a funny story, though. There's a nun I know from the Czech Republic, and the Czechs also don't want any immigrants whatsoever. And this businessman actually set up a few jobs for the immigrants coming through Czechoslovakia. But nobody wants to stay. Everybody wants to go to Germany. So that was a bit of a downer.

A neighbour here celebrated a 102nd birthday. He was born in 1918 when the Spanish flu — we're reminded of the Spanish flu in 1918.

So anyway, I thought you'd be interested in that little article. Now, of course, what this brings up for us is this denial of death. And what do we mean by the denial of death? Everybody knows they're going to die one way or the other. It's not facing it. It's not turning round to find a relationship with death. And that brings about this fear, this running away from it.

You can see that constantly in the way that the society has become so risk averse. It's just become absolutely ridiculous. I came across this when we put the block up. All the windows that look out from a height, you can't open more than six or seven inches, just in case somebody jumps out of them. Well, I mean, that's all very fair. But it's like a meditation centre. And I was arguing to them that these rules and regulations are not statutory. They're advice. And you're supposed to safeguard a building according to the purpose of it. So obviously, if you had children, then you put up all sorts of necessary safeguards. But I told him that we were completely sane meditators, 100%. Not a single person comes here who's suicidal or anything like that, I said. Anyway, he was a young fellow and he wasn't going to take any chances.

But on that point and this inability of this fear of death, just to show you a difference in the way people have reacted way back — in the '80s, when I was at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, we laid a new path from the door to the gate and very stupidly lay a pavement on top of another. So that was about a gap of a couple of inches, that's all. And one dark evening, you could never have seen it, one dark evening, a woman came, tripped over it and broke her nose. So, of course, when she told us that, we said, "Look, we've got public liability. Why don't you claim and we'd look after it?" And she wouldn't. She wouldn't claim at all.

Many years later, in the year 2001, something like that, I was asked to go to a group of depressives. It was a depressive support group. And there were about 30 people in the room. It's a bit of a downer because it seemed as though all they were doing was making each other more depressed by telling each other how depressed they were. And there was one guy there who wasn't. And he was full of life and full of vim. And you could see one or two people were snarling. I didn't think the atmosphere was very supportive.

Anyway, the man who was running it, he gave his life story for the day, how he'd been during the week. And he said he'd been walking on a pavement and he tripped up. And he'd hurt his knee or something, nothing particularly serious. So he decided to claim from the local government to sue them. And they said he didn't have grounds to sue them at all. And then he said, "I got very angry about that. And then I got depressed." So you see, there's various attitudes out there in society.

But this whole problem of denial of death. See, the Buddha gives us an exercise which you can try. It's extremely powerful, extremely powerful, because I've done it myself. I know what I'm talking about. And he's talking to certain monks who are practising contemplation of death. And as he goes through, I'm just paraphrasing now, one monk will say, "I have set myself up an imaginary point that when I finish this three-month retreat, three-month seclusion, I'm going to die. And I'm approaching it, I'm getting the feel of death." The Buddha says, "No, no, no. That's not how you practise the contemplation of death."

And then as he goes along to different monks, the time gets shorter and shorter until somebody says, "I'm sitting here contemplating that I might die during the night," something like that. And he says, "No, no, no, that's not the way to contemplate death." He says, you have to contemplate death by recognising as you breathe that every half breath you could die. You've got to bring it right up in front of your face. You've got to really recognise that we're on a tightrope and that you can fall off any moment, any time.

And if you really work on that for a few minutes, a few seconds, and really, really convince yourself how fragile life is, then you begin to get that contact with the fear of death. Now, this fear of death is a measure, of course, of our deluded self. I mean, that's what it is. The Buddha would not have had any fear of death. In fact, there are one or two tales of the Arahats who died. And they died quite peacefully.

Perhaps the most dramatic one was a man called Dabba. Dabba was a Malian local ethnic group just north of the Ganges Plain. And he had certain abilities. And one of them you'll all know from E.T. He had a control, it seems, over the fire element, over heat. And when he became liberated, he said to the Buddha, would he mind if he just took care of lodgings in the monastery? "That's fine," you see.

So it says that as the monks came in, he would ask them what they wanted to study or something like that, and he would put them in various sections. So the people who wanted to study the Vinaya, the rule, he'd put them with those people, the ones who

studied Dhamma with those people, and the ones who meditated with those, and he would put the athletic ones on another side, which is just a nice way of saying that they're just messing about.

He could, if they came late at night, show them the way to their lodgings by the light at the end of his finger. Now, these days, we don't believe things like that, but you'd be surprised. And it seems as though when he died, he just rose up in the air and exploded into light. That's how it's described. So that's just a little story, just to keep you happy.

This fear of death, you see, is something that we can — because it's all around us at the moment, people are quite paranoid about it — is to recognise that it really drives us to paranoia, to unrealistic fears. I mean, here in Shropshire, there's only about, I think it was about 200 cases. In Powys, I think it's about the same. So although we have to be careful, it's really getting in touch with that sense of fear.

There's a really good time to do it, especially if you're living in places where there's quite a lot of cases like London, Birmingham, Manchester, places like that. And that's what you do. You just sit there and you breathe and you just keep saying in one way or the other, "Death can come now." Breathing out, "Death can come now." It's just getting used to the fear of death.

And now the problem isn't the fear of death itself. It's the fear of fear. That's what's causing the paranoia. It's what causes the panic. And it's a way of getting used to the feeling of fear. Whenever that comes up, the feeling of anxiety, of fear, is to sink into it. This business of — remember the Buddha in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse is always saying to get feelings in feelings. You have difficulty getting people to get into a feeling. So you've got to sit in the midst of the bonfire and feel the fear. Feel the fear.

And what you're doing is you're accustoming yourself to the fear. And that means the reaction of fear of fear is disappearing, is going away. And when that comes, you can ask yourself, well, if I no longer fear fear, what's going to frighten me? And then eventually, of course, this is end game, that fear disappears entirely because the fear is based on the delusion of thinking that we actually are this psychophysical organism. We're just this organism, but the Buddha's quite clear that there's something in us which transcends it.

So have a go at that and see how you get on. You can drop me an email if you think it's been worthwhile. But I myself found it a very powerful meditation, contemplation.

Some little comments here. In the animal world, the weakest are left to die. Decisions during this extraordinary health crisis will reflect our humanity or compassion or our greed. The problem is we don't know what happens after death. No, you want to stay

with that. I mean, of course, there is this teaching of rebirth, but you don't have to come to a conclusion. You can actually stay with that, with the thought that you will be utterly annihilated. That's where the fear is. That's where you'll contact the fear.

CHAPTER 160

Contemplation of Death: Living More Awake

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's instructions on death contemplation (maraṇasati) through a discourse from the Numerical Āgamas. The teaching reveals how various monastics offered increasingly shorter timeframes for their death meditation practice—from seven days down to one day—only to be told by the Buddha that they were still being negligent. The true practice, the Buddha explains, involves contemplating death in the space of a single breath: the gap between the out-breath and in-breath.*
>
> *This radical teaching demonstrates that authentic death contemplation brings us completely into the present moment, recognizing that each breath could be our last. Bhante emphasizes how this practice dissolves our attachment to the body and our sense of a permanent self, revealing the impermanent nature of all formations (saṅkhāra). The talk also touches on practical questions about the current pandemic, economic considerations from a Buddhist perspective of right livelihood, and whether we should cultivate mettā toward viruses.*
>
> *This contemplation isn't morbid but life-affirming—it makes each moment vivid and precious, cutting through our usual negligence about the reality of mortality. As Bhante notes, we're always present for beginnings but rarely catch the endings that are happening constantly in our experience.*

Peace and joy. I hope you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy. I say fruitful.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Homage to the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

Last night wasn't my fault. I think I've cured myself of mistakes of a beginner's nature. This was the broadband. It fell down to just one megabyte upload, one megabyte download. And in fact, it's pretty slow at the moment. I don't know why, because we pay for a five megabyte upload and a 10 megabyte download. I can only presume it's because we're at peak time. This is when people are watching Netflix and Facebook and all those games. There was no hope there, was there?

Anyway, the thing is not to expect me to appear. This is important. But to be delighted or at least pleased that I do so. And that way we shall get through this lockdown.

So I'm actually going back now to what we were discussing just a couple of days ago. Some people will have joined who weren't here for that. So I'll just paraphrase what was said because somebody sent me a question concerning this little letter that was written. It was just a letter from a man called Daryl Davis who was basically saying that we were spending billions of pounds and ruining the economy just to save a half of 1% of the population, a mere 250,000 people. And basically, his last line is, it will take years to recover from this ridiculous path, which is ruining the economy.

Now, the question is—the question is that the reason for lockdown is to stop it spreading. But what the questioner, Julie, wants to know is, should we do this just for the sake of the economy? Is that why we're doing it? Whereas this man is saying the way we're doing it is actually going to ruin the economy. The question here, are there illnesses that they could survive? Okay, so, and she obviously asks me what my opinion is.

I'm not so sure about my opinion as such, but I think from the Buddha's point of view, as far as I can tell, remember the importance of right livelihood. So the economy does, if you say to somebody about the economy, I think most people think, well, I can get rich or something. But the economy, a Buddhist economy, as far as I'm concerned, is concerned with giving people right livelihood. Because it's in this way that they create good habits, good *kamma*. And, of course, they can share in the wealth of society. And that's one of the problems, isn't it, with this neo-capitalism business. So that would be the importance of the economy, I think, in a Buddhist setting, the ability to have the right livelihood. But, of course, we have a right to protect ourselves against illness and enemies.

So there is another question here, which is rather delightful. I keep getting a question coming in my head, so I thought I'd ask it. Is it useful or constructive to nurture *metta* towards the virus? Should we try to love the little beast? What do you think?

Well, I don't think I can personally raise to the level of any sense of love for the beast. I'm not so sure it would be considered a being. It's a very strange area. It seems to have agency. I mean, as soon as it enters your body, it knows where to go. I mean, it dives into your lungs and messes you about. And other similar rhinoviruses, the ones that cause cold and stuff like that. I had one a few weeks ago and it went up my nose into my head. So there seems to be some intelligence there, should we say. Whether it has consciousness or not is another matter. Whether it has any sense of awareness is another matter. I don't know.

But if we were to say that it did have consciousness and all that, then, of course, we have a right to protect ourselves. And that's what we're doing. That would be the attitude that we are protecting ourselves from something which can harm our bodies. So it's not a case of developing aversion to the virus, but in a sense, recognizing that they're just part of nature. I read somewhere you can have 500 million viruses on a pinhead. I mean, that's very, very small. And they're just part of the environment. They're just part of the ecological system. You can't get rid of viruses, it seems. But our attitude, of course, I think should be that we want to protect ourselves.

Interestingly enough, monks are allowed to protect themselves. So be careful you don't attack me. In China, where emperors blew hot and cold, sometimes they were all for Buddhism and supported it fully. And other times, of course, they persecuted it. And it was from there that the monks developed this Kung Fu to defend themselves against attack. In those days, of course, it worked very well against bows and arrows and clubs, things like that. These days, I don't think it's so reliable to overcome our modern weaponry. So that answers that.

Do send me questions. Better to do it by email. Partly it gives me a chance to look at them. But also, if I start communicating here, it gets a bit difficult. That's all.

So we're very fortunate tonight. We have about 70 odd people with us. That's rather nice. I was reminded that some people will be with their partners and spouses and elderly children. So there's probably more there than meets the eye.

So what I wanted to do actually was follow up something that we were doing two days ago, which was my favorite topic, death. And I want to read, because we were talking about contemplating death, how to contemplate death, how the Buddha teaches it. And what I'm going to do is read a scripture which has been translated, I think it's been translated by Bhikkhu Anālayo.

Now, if you haven't come across Bhikkhu Anālayo, he's quite a scholar, and his books are based directly upon the scriptures. And of course he makes commentary on them and he's also a meditation teacher and for the most part, well I think very, very practical. So the book that I'm taking it from is *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death: Compassionate Advice from Early Buddhist Texts*.

Now you might not know this but there are two collections—one that the Theravāda line holds, which is the one that we would normally refer to, and they're normally called *suttas* or discourses. But there was a whole load that were preserved in the

Chinese of a line of a school of Buddhism called the Sarvāstivādins, and they're known as the Agamas. And they've now been translated and studied, and they are very, you might say they are compatible with, definitely, and a companion to.

So the Buddha, in the numerical discourses that we have, has two discourses on death, how to do contemplation on death. The one is very similar to what we're going to do. The other one really brings out some other factor, which hopefully I'll get to.

So the contemplation of death is very powerful. And I also like to mention a couple of books, really. There's one called *Living in the Light of Death: On the Art of Being Truly Alive* by a man called Rosenberg. Now, I've read that one, and it really is an excellent book. There are others, but this is the one I've read. And there's also Steven Levine, who died a little while back now. He used to write lovely books. And one of them is *A Year to Live*. So the question is, if you really had only one year to live, how would you spend that time? So it makes you very reflective of how you're actually spending your time, as any meditation on death does. It brings you back into this present moment, makes it very alive.

So that's two books there by Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing*, if you've got a pen or something, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*. Anālayo, A-N-A-L-A-Y-O, Anālayo. And Larry, that's his name, Larry Rosenberg, which is *Living in the Light of Death*. *Living in the Light of Death*. So you might find those useful. Oh yeah. And Steven Levine, of course, *A Year to Live*. I don't think you can get that as an ebook. I'm not sure, but the other two, I think you can.

So this is reflections on death. I'll read this just as it comes. It's not very long, so hang on in there. Remember, the Buddhist scriptures were all handed down in the verbal tradition of remembering the discourses one after the other. So they can tend to be a bit repetitious. But when you read them with the purpose of absorbing, the repetition actually does come through.

Thus have I heard, at one time the Buddha was staying at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove at Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. So that was one of his main monasteries. At that time, the Blessed One said to the monastics, you should cultivate the perception of death and give attention to the perception of death. Although the word is perception here, I think we probably would get closer to the idea of contemplating death, or how you perceive death maybe, how you relate to death.

Then one monastic among those seated there said to the Blessed One, I constantly cultivate giving attention to the perception of death. And the Blessed One said, how do you give attention to the cultivating of the perception of death? The monastic said to the

Buddha, at the time of giving attention to the perception of death, I have the aspiration to remain alive for seven days and give attention to the seven awakening factors. In the Tathāgata's teachings—that's the Buddha Tathāgata, that's what he called himself, the transcendent one, that's what it means—in the Tathāgata's teaching, that would be of much benefit and I will not regret passing away after that. Blessed one, it is like this that I give attention to the perception of death.

So his aspiration is to stay alive for seven days and to contemplate the seven factors of awakening. And the blessed one says, stop, stop, monastic. This is not truly an undertaking of the practice of the perception of death. This is called being of a negligent nature. That's not very nice, is it?

Now, again, one monastic said to the Blessed One, I am capable of cultivating the perception of death. And the Blessed One said, how do you cultivate attending to the perception of death? And the monastic said to the Buddha, now I have this reflection. I have the aspiration to remain alive for six days. And having given attention to the right teachings of the Tathāgata, that might reach the end, then might reach the end of my life. This will thus be my good fortune. And in this way, I attend to the perception of death.

So he's hoping to die after six days, during which he will attend or will contemplate the teachings of the Buddha. And the Blessed One said, stop, stop, monastic. You are also of a negligent nature. This is not attending to the perception of death.

Now, again, the monastic said to the Buddha, I aspire to remain for five days. I aspire to remain alive for five days. And someone said, and then somebody else says, I aspire to remain alive for three days. I aspire to remain alive for two days. And one of them said, finally, I aspire to remain alive for one day.

Now, at that time, the Blessed One said to the monastics, stop, stop, monastic. This is also being of a negligent nature. This is not truly attending to the perception of death.

Now, at that time, there was again one monastic who said to the Blessed One, I am able to cultivate the perception of death effectively. And the monastic said to the Buddha, when the time has come, I put on my robes, take the alms bowl and enter Sāvatthī to beg for alms. Having begged for alms, I turn back to leave Sāvatthī and return to my place. I enter my meditation hut and give attention to the seven factors of awakening. Then I might reach the end of life. It is thus that I attend to the perception of death.

So he's got no idea about one day, two days and so forth. He's just going to contemplate the seven factors of enlightenment and then he's happy to go. And the Buddha says to him, stop, stop, monastics. This is also not giving attention to the cultivation of the perception of death. Monastics, you all spoke of negligent ways of practicing. This is not the nature of cultivating the perception of death.

Now, at that time, the Blessed One spoke to the monastics. Those who are able to be like the monastic Vikālī—that they are indeed reckoned to have the attention to the perception of death. That monastic is well able to give attention to the perception of death, being disenchanted with this foul and unclean body.

Now, the Buddha doesn't look upon the body as something that we should indulge. It's not something that we should delight in. We shouldn't be concerned about how beautiful it is. And to get to that level is to recognize that beneath the skin, there aren't very many pleasant things. So he's always directing us to really be very practical about the body.

So if a monastic gives attention to the perception of death, collecting his mindfulness in front—which means being mindful here and now—with a mind that is unshaken, being mindful of the exhalation and the inhalation for the time it takes for them to go out and return. And during that period, he gives attention to the seven factors of awakening that would indeed be of much benefit in the Tathāgata's teachings.

So it's like one breath. I don't quite know how you can attend to the seven factors. I suppose you're just being aware that you are aware, aware of the breath. So in other words, you're being within the moment. I think that's what this is saying.

This is because all formations are entirely empty. They all become appeased. They rise and cease. They are all a magical illusion that is without any true essence. So again, it's this business of not self. It's seeing that, in fact, there is the breath, but the self, but there's nobody actually breathing. It's just the organism. It's the organism that is breathing in and breathing out. And you can get that sense when you've discovered within yourself that observation post where you're distancing from it and you see it as an object. So remember, the perceiver can't be the perceived. The one who sees an object can't be the object. The object is an object, not the subject.

Therefore, monastics, you should give attention to the perception of death in the interval between the out-breath and the in-breath, so that you will be liberated from birth, old age, disease, death, grief, worry, pain and vexation. And in this way, monastics, you should train yourself.

Now, as I understand this and as I've practiced it myself, as you breathe in and then breathe out, there's a break, isn't there? So that's the end of that process, the end of that breath. And it's bringing that sense of ending more and more into our lives that actually brings you into the present moment. I'm sure those of you who've been here know that I go on about after a meal that this is one less meal in my life. This is one less breakfast. This is one less porridge in my life. I mean, it's a horror story, really, a continual horror story. But it's bringing into our awareness that we are actually moment to moment ending. We're very aware of the beginning of things. That's not a problem. We're always there at the start of something. But it's actually catching the end.

Now, at that time, the monastics, hearing what the Buddha had said, were delighted and received it respectively. Very good.

So that's the—I hope that gives you some indication on how to practice perception of death. The thing is to do it regularly for very small periods of time. You know, after every sitting or the beginning of a sitting, just to bring to mind that we're living on a tightrope. We're living on a knife edge and you can fall off anytime. So breathing in, breathing out, and then recognizing at this moment, death could come to me or there could be death.

So time moves on. If there's any questions, do send me questions. By email, please, by email. And I think that just about does it.

CHAPTER 161

Contemplation of Death (Again) - Living with Frugality

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 32 min

> *In this compelling talk from the 2020 lockdown series, Bhante Bodhidhamma returns to the profound practice of maraṇasati (mindfulness of death), sharing vivid feedback from a practitioner who experienced both the challenging and calming aspects of this contemplation. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) cemetery meditations and Aṅguttara Nikāya teachings, he explores how death awareness brings us into the present moment and transforms our relationship with mortality.*
>
> *The talk then shifts to practical wisdom on living frugally during economic uncertainty, reflecting on the Buddha's four requisites (food, shelter, clothing, medicine) and how previous generations naturally lived with less. Bhante emphasizes examining our true needs versus wants, drawing parallels between monastic simplicity and the necessity many face during difficult times. He offers both spiritual and practical guidance for maintaining dignity and practice while living with reduced resources.*
>
> *This teaching skillfully weaves together the urgency that death contemplation brings to spiritual practice with compassionate advice for navigating material hardship, showing how Buddhist wisdom applies to both our deepest existential questions and everyday challenges.*

Greetings, I hope you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, I say fruitful.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

Some of you who get my email, get the news bite, might have got the news that they had a big meeting at five o'clock on Zoom to offer good wishes, prayers, and so forth for Rob Bia, whom I think most of you know. So I'm hoping to mention him tonight when we do the business of compassion. Just bear with me a second so that I remember to do that. Hopefully I will.

So I did say that I would be approaching the question about the Eightfold Noble Path, but I've been dragged back to contemplation of death. I hope you don't mind. It's always an absorbing topic for me.

So I just want to read an email that came concerning somebody who's been practicing this. He says, "This morning, I managed to catch up with the talk on death and the virus, which I found intriguing. I followed it up with a 20-minute contemplation on the last breath. It's powerful stuff, a quick way of generating a lot of unpleasant feelings. After 20 minutes, I decided to switch to metta, compassion practice for myself and others to balance the exercises. The feelings that came up in the death contemplation lingered through the morning and gave a certain edge to the day."

Get that? An edge to the day, living in the moment.

"Now, in the afternoon, I went on a cycle ride and ended up doing a second death contemplation in a quiet local graveyard, the one about decay of the dead body." Now, that refers to the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse especially, where in the body section on how to develop mindfulness of the body. The last section, of course, is the cemetery contemplations, where in those days the bodies were just being laid out in the charnel grounds, eaten by animals, and so forth. And they were shrouded in white shroud, and the monks would take the cloth. I think this was a general habit for the *śramaṇas*, for those who become recluses of various different teachers, to take that cloth and stitch it into robes, you see. And the Buddha in that discourse really is saying go and sit there and just watch that decomposition, and you're supposed to be saying as this body is, so mine will be. That's pretty heavy.

So anyway, here he's referring to that in a quiet local graveyard, the one about decay of the dead body. "And I found this one surprisingly easy. Maybe it was the ecologist's perspective. For me, there's something comforting about the realization that I'm going to end up as food for something else. Waste not, want not. I left the graveyard with a great sense of calm."

Now that, of course, is the purpose of death meditation, or one of the purposes, to have come to an acceptance of it, a growing acceptance of it. Of course, we never know how much we've accepted the process of dying or the moment of death until we're actually doing it. But at least we can approach it, you see, and just take away its sting. Oh death, where is thy sting? So "I left the graveyard with a great sense of calm."

And then his last paragraph: "I will soon have more cause to observe and contemplate death and its effect on the living as a coffin bearer in a local gypsy funeral. Apparently it's becoming difficult to find four physically fit people who don't have to isolate themselves. There may be a whole new unexpected line of work opening up for me over the next few months." And may that be so.

So there we have an email from somebody who's been practicing it. I would love to know that you have been practicing it and what effect it's had on you. For me, as I said, it was an enormously powerful practice in my youth, actually, in my twenties. That's when it really hit me, this whole thing about death. Now, at that time, I was an annihilationist. I thought that when you die, that was the end of it. So my big question was a really silly question, really, was you know, what was it like to go into nothingness? I mean, it would be like nothing, wouldn't it? But for some reason, it became an obsessive investigation.

So definitely something to practice. You'd have to do it. I mean, he did it for 20 minutes. That's quite a lengthy length of time. And if you want to do it on a regular basis, it can be just that few breaths where you remind yourself, you know, life is on a knife edge. And as I said, occasionally during the day to just acknowledge that the cup of tea is finished. That's it. You know, that's it. It's gone. There is no more. There's another cup of tea, but that cup of tea is completely gone. And the effect of that, of course, is to bring you into the present moment. That's the purpose of it, to live in the now. Whereas, for the most part, we're planning to live in the now. That's ridiculous, isn't it?

And now I do want to follow up that too with the Anguttara Nikāya. See how big it is? You do some damage throwing this at somebody.

I mentioned last night that the discourse I read was from the collection which was only extant in the Chinese and has been translated and is used by Bhikkhu Anālayo. He seems to like those, probably to make us aware of them, really, and read them. But there are parallel discourses in the Theravāda tradition.

So one of them is very much like that, except there's this slightly different way of doing it, you might say. So again, he's been through all these bhikkhus who tell him that they just want enough time to eat half of their alms food so that I may attend to the Blessed One's teaching. "I could then accomplish much." So we could translate that these days, that you would only want to eat half of your alms meal or half of your meal so that you could practice spiritually.

And then another one says, "May I live just the time it takes to chew and swallow four or five mouthfuls of food so that I may attend to the Blessed One's teaching. I could then accomplish much." So they're always doing something in order to, they're always doing this thing, contemplation of death in order to listen to the Buddha's teachings. And as I say, we can translate that these days is in order to continue our spiritual practice.

But at the end of the discourse, the Buddha delineates what in fact constitutes a proper contemplation of death using the similar image. The bhikkhu, remember, refers to anybody who's listening or reading the scriptures, right? It's a figure of speech. I can't remember what it's called now. It's like when you say all hands on deck. We don't expect just the hands to turn up.

But the bhikkhu who develops mindfulness of death thus, "May I live just the length of time it takes to chew and swallow a single mouthful of food so that I may attend to the Buddha's teachings, the Blessed One's teachings. I could then accomplish much. He is one who develops mindfulness of death." And there is one who develops the mindfulness of death thus: "May I live just the length of time it takes to breathe out after breathing in and to breathe in after breathing out so that I may attend to the blessed one's teachings."

And then he says, "These I call bhikkhus who dwell heedfully." We could also say diligently. I think the word being translated here, because I haven't been able to look up the Pāli, is *appamādo*, which is a very favourite word of the Buddha. It's one of his last, *appamādena sampādethāti*, you know, strive diligently for your liberation.

So that one is similar to the one that we read last night. But there's another one, which is a slightly different take on mindfulness of death, you see. So he again tells the bhikkhus, "Mindfulness of death, when developed and cultivated, is of great benefit, of great fruit, culminating in the deathless, having the deathless as its consummation." The deathless is just another word for *nirvāṇa*.

So he says here, "Bhikkhus, when the day has receded, and night has approached." The bhikkhu reflects thus: "I could die on account of many causes. A snake might bite me, or a scorpion or centipede might sting me, and I might thereby die. That would be an obstacle to me." In other words, that's not good. "I might stumble and fall, or my food might disagree with me. Or my bile might become agitated. My phlegm might become agitated." So remember, this was in those days where they had the four humors, the four temperaments, the melancholic, sad people, the choleric, the angry ones, the phlegmatic, the easygoing ones, and the sanguine, the happy ones. There's only one of the lot who are happy. Human miseries.

And then he says sharp winds in the night might become agitated. So I don't know what that is. I did look up winds. It is part of a Chinese thing. But also I couldn't help coming across a medical journal which said this: "While farting every day is normal, farting all the time is not. We have excessive flatulence. You have excessive flatulence if

you fart more than 20 times per day. In most cases, excessive farting can be controlled with changes to your diet and lifestyle." Okay, so I just thought I'd give you that little tid-bit of good advice, okay?

And then finally said people might attack me and wild spirits might attack me and then I might die. So this would be a disadvantage because remember the preciousness of human life. The whole point about remaining a human being as long as we can is that this is the best place to free ourselves from suffering.

Now, then he says. Then when the bhikkhu has reflected on the possibility of death during the night, he's then supposed to reflect and ask himself, "Do I have any bad unwholesome qualities that have not been abandoned, which might become an obstacle to me if I were to die tonight?" If upon review the bhikkhu knows I have bad unwholesome qualities that have not been abandoned, which might become an obstacle to me if I were to die tonight, then he should put forth extraordinary desire, effort, zeal, enthusiasm, indefatigability, untiringness, mindfulness and clear comprehension to abandon those bad, unwholesome qualities.

Now, this actually reminds me of my own upbringing I think in most Christian circles. You would go to bed with an examination of conscience, that's what it was called in my particular form which was Catholicism, and the idea was of course you'd look back over the day and see where you got angry, where you got nasty, where you got greedy and so on and so forth, and of course you would ask for forgiveness for that.

You can extend that, of course, to how you related to a sense of anxiety. Did you get caught up in it? Did you start getting panicky? Did you know what to do about that? So it's not just on a moral level, but the whole of our habits, the habitudes that we have, and to be aware of them when they come up. And then at the end of the day, we can reflect, well, I should have been quicker there. I could have been a bit more kinder there, and so forth. And then made that determination, you see, tomorrow I will be. So that's what he says here.

And then, of course, the opposite of that. He actually gives a nice little example, a nice little image here. The Buddha is always trying to match an intellectual understanding with some sort of imagery, some sort of imaginative way, because, as he says, some people think that way. Some people think in stories, in images, rather than a straightforward intellectual manner. So he said that we should practice like that, just as one whose clothes or head had caught fire would put forth extraordinary desire, effort, zeal, and so on, to extinguish the fires. So somebody should do that, you see.

Now, for somebody who doesn't have... Oh, yeah, excuse me. There's the opposite, of course. But upon review, the bhikkhu knows I do not have any bad unwholesome qualities that have not been abandoned, which might become an obstacle for me if I were to die tonight. Then the Buddha says he should dwell in the same rapture and joy, training night and day in wholesome qualities.

So remember the wholesome qualities. We can also reflect on that. We don't have to be completely free of unwholesome qualities. We can reflect on the wholesome qualities that we expressed during the day and determine that we will continue to develop them. All these mental states can be developed indefinitely, right? You can become as evil as evil and become as beautiful as beautiful. Mentally beautiful, of course, heart beautiful.

And then, as always, these scriptures, they're not only repetitive, but they also, as it were, reinforce. By being repetitive, they reinforce the teaching. So just as we started off by saying, when day has receded and night has approached. So the final paragraph is, when night has receded and day has approached. So again, it's that recollection in the morning. Very good.

So I think we can put death to bed for a little while. But I would love to hear from you if you happen to practice and just see if it did have a beneficial effect on your life, on your sense of awareness.

So I had a question about how to live frugally. Many people now have found themselves without work, either because the firm has dismissed its workers or you've been furloughed. This is a new word for me, furloughed. I don't quite know. It just means that you're still employed by the firm, but you're not being paid. And many of you know Carl, Carl Fuchs, who teaches here. So he works for the Department of Work and Pensions. And the amount of people applying now for the Dole, what we call the Dole, is enormous. So you may find yourself in that position, of course. And the question is how to live frugally.

I think it's good to remember that we weren't always, the society wasn't always as rich as it has been over these past 20, 25 years. Even after the 2008 crash, unemployment stayed pretty high. The bulk of people did get decent wages. I'm sorry about the West now. Or should we say the rich countries in the West. But it's not that long ago. I mean, World War II, rationing was there for 14 years from the beginning of the war to, I've got the date here, 4th of July, 1954. And that was when food rationing came to an end, when restrictions on the sale of the purchase of meat and bacon was lifted. It was 14 years of people having to be careful, were limited in what they could eat.

And as a child, of course, I would have been a child then, born in 47. I'd been about seven years old. You don't know. You're not aware of being poor or not poor. But in those days, you know, you've got a clip around the ear if you left the light on. If you broke a cup, yeah, your dad would be on to you. That costs money. You know what I mean? It's not going to jump at you. And I do remember my aunties, you know, when we used to go and visit, you get a piece of bread and the jam on it was, well, you wouldn't say there was any jam on it. There was a touch of jam expressing itself on the bread. I remember cucumber sandwiches, really thin, thin little pieces of cucumber. So you don't have to die because you're going to be frugal.

Just in my own case, there was a period there in the 80s when I was unemployed and I was on the dole. And I just remember by that time I was practicing. I was into Buddhism, so I wasn't drinking at that time or anything like that. And I remember, you know, I handled it well. Well, I was rather lucky, really, because I went to live in a lodging where they allowed me just to make a donation, basically. I was very fortunate. And I remember eating a lot of awful, you know, liver and kidney and beginning to feel a bit ill about it. It was about that time I decided to go vegetarian. But there wasn't much on the market then for vegetarian food.

And I just got used to living frugally. So you can't go out and just buy stuff, as you might have done at one point. You just live simply. And, of course, we've forgotten that. There's a whole generation that have forgotten how to live frugally.

Even as a child, I remember waking up in the morning. There was no heat in the house. The old man had to go downstairs and build a fire. And on weekends, I'd be down there with him, screwing up paper and putting coal on top. And you'd get up in the freeze, especially winter. There'd be ice on the window, and you didn't bother. You just got up, you washed your face, you went down, and the kitchen was the only place that was warm. And they had three kids, three of us bundling in there and making a bit of a row. And that was the only warm place, the kitchen. By evening, of course, mum had built the fire and all that, so it was a bit more pleasant.

But central heating for us didn't come until the mid-60s, and for many came in much later. So you can get used to a situation. You can get used to that. I mean, it's the same as coming on retreat. You change all your habits. It's difficult the first two or three days, and that's it.

The horror story for me, of course, would be, well, as you know, no toast, but worse. Worse, no soya milk or oatly to put in my tea. I mean, that brings up almost a panicky sort of feeling.

And I remember too kids coming to school with no socks and things like that, a bit scruffy. Even though you had three changes. You had one for your ordinary messing about clothes. You had your school uniform, if your parents could afford it. And you had your Sunday best. That was it. I remember being a student. I only had, I think, two or three shirts. So, you know, it's like realising that you don't need all this.

How can we approach a situation where we find we don't have the money that we used to have? And it really is just drawing up a list of what you actually need, as opposed to want, which might not be particularly greedy. You might want another shirt or another piece of dress. But when you look around, you don't need it. And it's just really bring yourself down to need.

Now, for the monastic life, the Buddha had these, what we call the four requisites. And you had to be happy with what you were given. This is the idea. And in those days, you often ended up with the very simplest of things. So, for instance, we're supposed to be happy with whatever is put into the bowl. And I remember when I was in Thailand once, we went out to the villages. And when we came back, there was only rice. Very poor, extremely poor, just a bit of rice. And I think they put in a bit of the fish to get out of the ponds. It wasn't fish, it was something else, which I won't forget, frankly. But luckily, when we got back to the monastery, the middle class from the towns had brought some delicious food. But if I had lived deep into the places in Thailand at that time, so going back to the late 80s, you'd have had to be happy with just rice. So that was the first thing.

For shelter, that's another thing. So you need shelter. The four basic requisites are food, shelter, clothing and medicine. I mean, that's what the body needs. We're not talking about what the heart or the mind needs, but what the body needs. That's all.

And when it came to shelter was just to be happy under the root of a tree or to build yourself a temporary shelter. Later on, monasteries were built for the Buddha, so they became a bit more flashy. But you're just to be happy with the place you're living in, basically. Now, having said that, we know that there are people out there on the streets, and that's, of course, an abomination, frankly, for a rich country. Absolute abomination.

And then there's clothing. Now, the clothing is just to protect the body from heat, in India from flies and gadflies and mosquitoes and stuff like that. And of course, for modesty's sake. But that's your basic need is to clothe the body so it doesn't get cold in this country anyway. It doesn't matter what you're actually wearing, does it? As long as it keeps you warm. It doesn't have to be fashionable.

And finally, medicine. In those days, you had to be, what the scripture says, the Buddha says is that you have to be happy with fermented cow's urine. Now, frankly, I never tried it. I never got around to doing that. And I'm not so sure anybody else has since those times. But obviously, that was considered to be a medicine. And just happy with the medicine that comes.

Now, it might be that you end up with the NHS with a minor or serious complaint, serious disease. And we know it's actually being so heavily used. It's at breaking point constantly. The nurses, the doctors have been completely overworked. And so you might find yourself not being treated well or not being treated for quite some time. And you have to accept that. There's no point in getting angry about it. That doesn't do anything, does it? Anxiety will be there, of course, if you feel you have something serious. But that's basically what you have to accept. Fermented cow's urine. I'm sure it's good for you.

So thinking about frugality, seeing what the need is. When it comes to the heart-mind, really to keep the mind active, to keep feeding it. Now, these days, there's so much free materials on the websites. It really doesn't have to cost you anything. Free book downloads from, what is it, the Gutenberg Project on Google, things like that. And of course, there are still, I believe, one or two libraries around. And of course, conversation, good conversation with friends.

And the heart needs also to be nourished. There's not just the social virtues of compassion, love and all that, conversation with people, but art, art and nature. We need that sort of feed. I mean, it's one of those things that monasteries, the meditation monasteries, are often way out in the forests to get out there away from the city jungle and into a beautiful place. So one has to accept that as part of a frugality. Now, in the old days, you might have done all sorts of things that cost money, but there's plenty of stuff out there that wouldn't cost anything.

So it's looking after the body, principally, of course, because you can't be here without one. And then taking care of the heart, mind, culture, all that sort of stuff. So in this way, we can live with frugal times.

And I put here, and the least costly of all, of course, is spiritual practice. All you need is the space of your own body and sit down and carry on.

So I hope that these little hints, I always like to have some feedback. If you're doing the actual practices, feedback about what your thoughts are. Email, please, because I don't actually read this stuff coming down. I can't speak and read it. There's a lot coming through. Julie here says there's a detailed description.

CHAPTER 162

Renunciation and the Buddha's First Occasion to Teach

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma begins by addressing how current circumstances offer opportunities for renunciation—not as self-mortification, but as conscious letting go of desires and attachments. He explains how staying with difficult feelings until they naturally transform can liberate energy for compassion, love, and peace. The talk then transitions to the Buddha's own story from the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta (MN 26), recounting his journey from Bodh Gaya to Sarnath after his Awakening.*
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> *Bhante vividly describes the Buddha's encounter with Upaka the Ājīvaka, where his bold declaration of being "the accomplished one" failed to convince—a lesson in how the Dharma must be taught skillfully. The episode follows the Buddha's arrival at the deer park in Isipatana, where he reunited with the group of five bhikkhus who had initially dismissed him for abandoning extreme asceticism. Through patient instruction, all five eventually attained Nibbāna.*
>
> *This talk offers both practical guidance on using renunciation as spiritual practice during challenging times and historical context for understanding how the Buddha first began sharing the Four Noble Truths with the world.*

Greetings, I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, I say fruitful.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa, Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

It's not that I don't wish you had a happy day. It's just that happiness comes and goes, but we can make it fruitful through our spiritual practice.

I just want to share a quote from one or two emails that came through concerning our subjects. Harold writes, "I was on retreat last summer near Glastonbury, organised by Gaia House. Walking out in the evening, I discovered nearby was a cemetery. So a couple of evenings, I went and sat there and studied the gravestones, reflecting on how many had died before my current age, nearly 69, and how their bodies would now have rotted down to skeletons. However, I feel that experience was probably too comfortable to be really effective.

"That probably had to wait until a meditation first thing one morning shortly after the first recommendation to socially distance, when the potential impact of the events I had been attending up to then suddenly hit me with waves of panic which no amount of rationalisation on actual probabilities of anything happening to me could quell. So I just sat with it that morning and the next morning, and it slowly subsided, but not fun while it was happening."

So that's when death strikes, when we feel the horror that we feel of serious sickness and death. That horror, that sickness is the measure of this false idea of who I am, this self.

He also then goes on to say that it was good to hear my reminiscences of frugality. "I can remember about 1960 being tasked with cleaning the grate in my grandfather's house and carefully laying the fire for the evening with paper twists when my parents were staying there. When my parents bought their own house in the mid-60s, this had partial central heating, which heated the ground floor and their bedroom on the first floor, but not mine. Well, I wasn't there all the time. This meant in the winter I would crawl out of bed and switch on the electric fan heater and then get back into bed until the room temperature was high enough for a morning wash to be considered."

Softie! So there we are, a bit of frugality. I mean, these days, people wander about in midwinter in their shirts and blouses, with the house at 24, 26 degrees as if they were living on the Mediterranean. Terrible.

There's a little email here from May, who spent time in Japan at Bukoku-ji, a training monastery there with her teacher. But there was a monk there from Chile called Chiku-san. He had travelled by foot alone in India and became ill with fever. He was in a village, she doesn't know where exactly, and had begun to accept that he would die. However, a herdsman brought him to his hut and treated him with what he believed was cow's urine. And he recovered after a week or so.

There we are. It's meant to be fermented, so any germs or anything like that in it would hopefully be destroyed. But according to Ayurvedic medicine, it's *Gāl-mutra*, that's what they call it. It contains nitrogen, sulphur, phosphate, sodium, manganese, iron, silicon, chlorine, magnesium, malic, citric and taric acids and calcium salts, vitamins A, B, C, D and E, minerals, lactose, enzymes, creatinine, hormones and gold acids, whatever that is. And it says that the urine is actually similar to the human body in some way. So an old Ayurvedic medicine, and it seems to have cured this Zen monk from Chile. So there we are.

Those are just a little bit of replies. But I must say that yesterday evening, I didn't really stress enough that it's an occasion to begin to test our powers of renunciation and what happens when you renounce something. And for a Dharma teacher not to be teaching, that is terrible. I gave myself very poor marks, but I'm going to make up for it now.

So remember that the whole of the spiritual life could be said to be renunciation. And we're not talking about self-mortification. We're not talking about blaming and beating ourselves up. We're talking about seeing where desire, where we get caught up with desire, with reaction, wrong desire, of course.

And this is just an opportunity. If we find ourselves, for instance, out of work, furloughed, or our wages reduced or whatever, it is an opportunity to let go of certain things. Some of us may still be in a job, but we can't fly anywhere. We can't go anywhere. We might be isolated, although I prefer the word secluded. And of course, we have to let go of certain desires that come up through our past habits.

And it allows us to sit with them, sit with them and just feel their energy, feel their power. And the important thing is to stay, if you can, till the very end of that feeling. Because right at the end of that feeling, there's a switch, there's a change, there's a sense of being relieved, a sense of relief from that grip. The more the grip, the more the relief. And then you get that sense of peacefulness.

And remember that in that process, the energy is being transformed. Nothing is lost. So whatever energy was caught up in that turbulence of desire, wrong desire, will then turn into pure energy, which can be used elsewhere. Given a situation, it may manifest as love, compassion, joy, or just being peaceful, just being calm.

So don't miss this opportunity. Every time you feel you want something, really, check it and stop and say, "Ah, yes, this is a desire. Now let me have a look at it. Let me feel it." And then by renouncing those things that we have to renounce anyway—and this is the whole point—in a situation like this, you find yourself having to renounce stuff. So you may as well make spiritual capital from it, if you'll excuse the expression.

Yes, and baths, giving up baths. Somebody's given up having hot baths. There we are. I mean, remember in the old days, medieval days, you only had one bath a year. Yes, it was taken in May or thereabouts. And you only had one big tub where, first of all, your dad got in and then your mum and then all the kids from the eldest to the youngest. And that's where we get the phrase, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." So you know what the water must have looked like by the time they had their baths.

Right up until the 80s, somewhere around about there, people were happy just having a shower a week, a bath a week. Now we find that very difficult. Now you have to have a shower every day. But actually, you don't. You don't need a shower every day. By the way, that's why most marriages took place in June. That was before people began to stink a little.

So you can look at your lifestyle and just see what's actually necessary. What is actually necessary? And then you can add a little bit on top of that, maybe. But you're beginning to define what our indulgences are. It's funny how we need things just because we have them, but you don't need many things that we have.

So I'm putting that aside now. And I am continuing to resolve to talk about the Eightfold Path and to answer the question. But I do want to sidetrack a bit. You have to excuse me just one second. I just want to take a reading, really, about the Buddha beginning his teachings.

There's a whole discourse here, the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, the Discourse on the Noble Search, where the Buddha tells his life story up until how he became fully liberated. And it gives you some idea of the person, how he was.

So he said, "When I was staying at Uruvelā as long as I chose"—so that's where he became fully liberated. That's close to what they think is present-day Bodh Gayā. Some of you will have been there. "I set out to wander by stages to Benares." So that's present-day Vārāṇasī on the Ganges there.

"Between Gayā"—so that's the town near Bodh Gayā—"and the place of enlightenment, the Ājīvaka Upaka saw me on the road." Now, the Ājīvakas belonged to a sect that were fatalists, really. You could call them that. Makkhali Gosāla, who was a fatalist. Everything was predestined. There were many of these, remember, these people who'd gone out, mainly men, but some women, had left society to live as *samaṇas*. *Samaṇa* means somebody who strives for spiritual—or anybody who strives, but in this particular case, it's striving for spiritual attainment.

Anyway, when Upaka sees him, he says, "Friend, your faculties are clear. The colour of your skin is pure and bright. Under whom have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose Dhamma do you profess?"

And the Buddha replies in verses, "I am the one who's transcended all and knower of all, unsullied among all things, renouncing all things by craving ceasing freed. Having known this for myself, to whom should I point as my teacher? I have no teacher and one like me exists nowhere in the world with all its gods because I have no person for my counterpart. I am the accomplished one in the world. I am the teacher supreme. I

alone am a fully enlightened one whose fires are quenched and extinguished." That's the fires of greed, hatred and delusion. "I go now to the city of Kāsī"—that's Vārāṇasī. "To set in motion the wheel of the Dhamma, in a world that has become blind, I go to beat the drum of the deathless."

That's very impressive, eh? But Upaka replies, "By your claims, friend, you ought to be the universal victor. The victors are those like me who have won to destruction of the āsavas." So remember, these are the four basic problems that we have, basic misunderstandings. "I have vanquished all evil states. Therefore, Upaka, I am a victor."

Now, when this was said, the Ājīvaka Upaka said, "Hmm, maybe so, friend." Shaking his head, he took a bypass and departed.

So I think the Buddha realised this isn't quite the way he was going to spread the Dhamma. Now, we also have to accept there's a bit of hagiography here. Hagiography is the story of the saints. And you always build a saint up—legends and myths all surround them and they become much greater in a sense in some ways than they actually were because of this mythology that surrounds them. So I doubt if he came out with a set of prepared verses. He probably said that he felt he was, that he knew himself to be fully liberated, but he didn't convince this Ājīvaka.

Now, that reminds me that when I was living at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihāra in Birmingham in the 80s, early, middle 80s, somewhere around about there, we used to get cards and letters from somebody announcing that the next world leader was living in London, somewhere in Pudding Street or something. And I remember picking these up, about seven or eight of them came to my memory, picking them up and thinking, "Oh, yeah, just like Ājīvaka. Oh, yeah, right, okay." And I never got round to finding out who this person was.

Anyway, he then, of course, is on his way, the Buddha's on his way, to see his old friends whom he'd been training with. So he wandered in stages and eventually came to Vārāṇasī, Benares, to the deer park at Isipatana. "And I approached the group of five.

"Now the bhikkhus saw me coming at a distance and they agreed amongst themselves. 'Friend, here comes the recluse Gotama who lives luxuriously'"—remember he'd given up the path of self-mortification—"'who gave up his striving and reverted to luxury. We should not pay homage to him or rise up for him or receive his bowl and outer robe. But a seat may be prepared for him. If he likes, he may sit down.'

"However, as I approached those bhikkhus, they found themselves unable to keep their pact. One came to meet me, took my bowl and outer robe, another prepared a seat, and another set out water for my feet. However, they still addressed me as friend.

Whereupon I told them, 'Do not address the Tathāgata by the name of friend.'" *Tathāgata* was how he referred to himself. It means the transcendent one. "'The Tathāgata is the accomplished one, a fully enlightened one. Listen, Bhikkhus, the deathless has been attained. I shall instruct you. I shall teach you the Dhamma. Practising as you are instructed by realising for yourself here and now, through direct knowledge, you will soon enter into and abide in that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from home to homelessness.'" So that's a very pat phrase that you get throughout the scriptures.

And then he tries to talk to them, of course, about this. And then there's this lovely passage where the usual thing is everybody tries three times, or a second time, and then he actually says the same thing a third time. And then he asks them, he says, "Bhikkhus"—bhikkhu, remember, is anybody on his list, but here it's his five friends —"have you ever heard me speak like this before?" They said, "No, Venerable Sir." He says, "The Tathāgata is the accomplished one," and then he goes through this business.

"And then he says, 'I was able to convince the bhikkhus of the group of five. Then I sometimes instructed two bhikkhus while the other three went for alms. And the six of us lived on what the other three bhikkhus brought back from their alms round. Sometimes I instructed three bhikkhus while the other two went on alms. And the six of us lived on what those two bhikkhus brought back from their alms round.

"'Then the Bhikkhus of five, thus taught and instructed by me, being themselves subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeking the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, attained the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. Being themselves subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, seeking the unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, they attained the unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna.

"'The knowledge and vision arose in them. Our deliverance is unshakeable. This is our last birth. There is no renewal of becoming.'"

So there you have a nice little passage which gives us some idea of his early movements. But of course, they've been souped up a bit with verses and stuff like that. But at least we can get an image of him, of how he walked—I think it's about 250 miles, he walked 250 miles from Bodh Gayā to Sārnāth—with the sole purpose of seeking out these old companions whom he felt were open enough or developed enough to receive his Dhamma.

Time is passing on and I did want to read the actual discourse, which is what you might call the root discourse of Theravāda, the root discourse of Buddhism, frankly. It's not just Theravāda, it's the root discourse and it's all about the Four Noble Truths. So I'm afraid because time moves on, I shall have to leave that little delight for tomorrow evening. And I will be getting round to the Eightfold Path sooner.

CHAPTER 163

Setting the Wheel of the Dhamma in Motion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 24 min

In this profound exploration of the Buddha's first formal discourse, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11) - the famous "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma." This foundational teaching presents the Buddha's discovery of the Middle Way, transcending both sensual indulgence and self-mortification, and introduces the Four Noble Truths in their classical formulation.

Bhante carefully unpacks each Noble Truth: dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness) encompassing birth, aging, illness, death, and the five aggregates subject to clinging; taṇhā (craving) as the root cause including desires for sensual pleasure, becoming, and annihilation; the cessation of suffering through abandoning unwholesome reactivity; and the Noble Eightfold Path as the way forward. He emphasizes how each truth requires specific action - understanding suffering, abandoning its cause, realizing cessation, and developing the path.

The talk includes the beautiful concluding imagery of the cosmic celebration when Venerable Koṇḍañña became the first to gain the "dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma," earning the name Añña Koṇḍañña ("Koṇḍañña who knows"). This teaching provides both newcomers and experienced practitioners with essential foundations for understanding the Buddha's core message of liberation from suffering.

Greetings, peace and joy. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I also wish you did have a happy day.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

Can I just say that if you've emailed me some questions and I haven't answered them, could you do me a favour and email them again? I've probably archived them carelessly or whatever. And don't feel afraid to ask a question that you think is silly. There are no silly questions. And I don't have to mention your name anyway, so it can be quite anonymous. And if you have a personal problem which you want to talk to me about, I'm quite happy to Skype. And I'll ask your permission if I can discuss it publicly. Of course, I don't have to mention your name at all, so it remains completely anonymous.

So we were still answering this question about the Four Noble Truths and slowly making our way to the Eightfold Path. And yesterday we talked about the Buddha's first efforts to teach there, meeting that wanderer and not really impressing him, and then finding his five companions not really wanting to speak to him, being rude, thinking he'd gone soft, and very slowly opening up with his question of, "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?"

And now I want to follow that through with the discourse called the Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta, which is translated as Setting in Motion the Wheel of the *Dhamma*. So here the teaching is more formalised. It was put together obviously later, but it's still understood traditionally to be his first talk given to the five companions.

Before I go on with that, I just want to tell you a story which illustrates hagiography, how people build up in their imagination somebody whom they think is saintly, just through passing messages from one to another, what is called Chinese whispers. I'm not so sure that's PC anymore, but that's what we call it. I think in the States they call it telephone or something. And of course, the same happens with anybody. If you talk about somebody, they pass it on to somebody else. Before you know it, they're either a criminal or a saint.

So it so happened I was up in Kandy and went to visit Bhikkhu Bodhi up there. Occasionally, very occasionally, I would go up and visit him. And there was a Danish monk with him, whose name, of course, I'd forgotten, whom I hadn't known. And what had happened was that he was living in the forests in Sri Lanka, in a three-sided hut. I mean, he was living there with a three-sided hut. That means that one side was completely open to tarantulas, snakes, et cetera, et cetera. And he's very well known for that. And I do believe there are other monks now living in a similar way.

When he was coming back from almsround, which would have been in the morning, early morning, I suppose, from the local villages, an elephant suddenly shot out and ran over him. Now, if an elephant wants to kill you, I'm told, they will definitely kill you. But in this case, it seems they just wanted to shock him or something. But unfortunately, one of its feet landed on this monk's hip and shattered it, of course. And when I saw him, his leg was still up in the air. He'd been to hospital. They tried to do their best. Hopefully he's had it better seen to. Who knows?

Anyway, I had visited Colombo just before this. It was on my way up. So I used to stay at the International Buddhist Center there, which was established by the Bandranayakas, who were both prime ministers at that time of Sri Lanka, especially

built for the Mahāsi Sayadaw when he visited in about 1956 or something, maybe a bit later, who knows. And there was a Swedish monk whom I knew there, a friend. And again, I've forgotten his name. And he told me a story about this Danish monk.

He said, "Have you heard about it?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, he was sitting in lotus under a tree meditating, and a she-elephant passed with a baby elephant. And the baby elephant was drawn to this figure under a tree and approached it and tried to sit in lotus, fell over and broke his hip."

So you can see what happens when stories are passed along the lines. As the story goes, he actually lay there all night. It was only in the next morning that the villagers recognised he hadn't turned up for almsround and went looking for him. So quite a telling story there about the way we build stories around things.

So putting that aside, let me start this particular discourse. And as I go through, I'll try and make some comments.

"Thus have I heard." Remember, these were all remembered by his attendant, Ananda, who became an Arahant just before the meeting, the big meeting that happened after he died. "And it says that on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Vārāṇasī in the deer park of Isipatana." So this is the place near present-day Vārāṇasī on the Ganges there, in the deer park at Isipatana. I think it's now known as Sarnath. "There, the Blessed One addressed the *bhikkhus* as a group of five, thus."

So he's now with his companions, his old companions. He says, "These two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual pleasure, of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial. And the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct understanding, to enlightenment and to Nibbāna."

Now, these two extremes—"by one who's gone forth into homelessness"—so he's obviously talking to people who are wandering mendicants, but here we can translate this as anybody who's on a spiritual path. This isn't just for monks and nuns. This is for anybody who is on a spiritual path wanting to be released from all suffering.

So what two? He says, "The pursuit of sensual pleasure, sensual happiness in sensual pleasure." So remember, it's not the object itself that we want. It's not the good food, the sex, drugs and rock and roll. It's how we personally feel happy, excited when we have those things. He says this is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial.

So we have to stop it. That's the message there. In fact, it's more than unbeneficial. It produces addiction, doesn't it? That's the problem with depending on sensual pleasures in order to make ourselves happy. They become a dependency.

And the next one is "the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and unbeneficial." Now, this self-mortification is really about blaming the body. It refers, I think, specifically to the practice of those days. The Jain leader was well known for this practice, and he was an elder contemporary of the Buddha. And there's some suggestion that the Buddha might have spent some time, or at least visited him or whatever, but he was definitely practising self-mortifications for years, it's said.

And the main thing, of course, was to draw the body down. Draw the body down, not indulge in any of the senses. He said he got so thin he could hold his spine through his stomach. So if you try that, you can see he's very, very, very thin. And the understanding was that it's the body that's at fault. You wouldn't have lusty thoughts if you didn't have eyes. You start blaming the body for your problems. You wouldn't be greedy if the body didn't have appetite. So you start working with the body to draw down its sensual pleasures. And that way you stop these reactions which lead you to more suffering.

But he, of course, found this to be painful. Well, it's painful, of course, yes. Ignoble, so it wasn't leading on the spiritual path. Whenever the word *ariya* is used, it's always about the spiritual path. And it was unbeneficial. He didn't get anything from it. In fact, he said it was just more suffering.

There was, of course, a philosophy that underpinned this idea. And that was that the body itself was your *kamma*. And that if you could just let go of the body, just let it go, the soul would rise naturally to an eternal heavenly place. And this definitely is true. The philosophy that underpins Jainism—and a saint in Jainism is one who stops eating, basically, and often very elderly people will do so with that understanding. So the Buddha didn't think that was beneficial.

Now, when he says the middle path, it's not in between sensual pleasure and self-mortification. It's not you can have a bit of sensual pleasure and a bit of self-mortification and you'll find the way out. No, it's above. It's transcendent of it. The middle path has nothing to do with either the path of self-indulgence or the path of self-aversion. So this word "middle" has to be understood as a path which is transcendent of these other two unbeneficial paths.

And then he says, "Well, what is the middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata?" Remember that the word Tathāgata translates as "thus gone," which isn't particularly helpful. It's transcendent. He's gone, in his own words, he's gone beyond.

So he says, "What is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata which leads to Nibbāna? It is this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is the middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, leads to peace, to direct understanding, to enlightenment or awakening, and to Nibbāna."

And then now he gives us just these basic definitions of the Four Noble Truths, which are just worth reading through and also understanding how we should approach them.

So the first one is: "This is the noble truth of suffering." So remember that word *dukkha* has a whole meaning going from the smallest dissatisfaction, irritation, to the highest and most terrible sufferings that we're capable of. And it's also an existential suffering, which comes to us when death approaches. "So birth is suffering. Ageing is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. Union with what is displeasing is suffering. Separation from what is pleasing is suffering." So having to deal with something that we don't like and not being able to get what we do like—these are sufferings for people, for those who are committed to trying to find some sort of permanent happiness in this life form. "And then finally, not to get what one wants, of course." So we've done that. "And the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering."

Now, we haven't got time to go into the five aggregates this evening, but some other time. So these five aggregates really refer to what we would call the psychophysical organism. And this is what we identify with. And that identity is, of course, the root cause of our suffering.

"Now, this is the noble truth of the origin of suffering or the cause of suffering. It is this craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. It is the craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for annihilation."

So our general motivation is to keep living. Like we want to wake up tomorrow morning, for instance. And we're chasing this business of pleasure and trying to get rid of what is unpleasant. And that's what this whole desire is concerned with.

So the word *taṇhā* translates as desire or sometimes craving, which is a bit strong. It can be a craving, of course. But there's no English word which gets across the idea of a desire which is constantly unwholesome. And that's what *taṇhā* refers to. There is another word for desire, *chanda*, which can be either good or bad. But *taṇhā* is a specific word which refers to those desires that are unwholesome for us, whether we're wanting or not wanting.

And so the more fundamental desire, of course, is to keep living, to keep becoming, to keep being me. And the desire to exterminate or to commit suicide, basically, is the opposite of that. In a more gentle way, the desire to become is always to put myself first, to make sure that I'm okay. That's how it manifests. And the desire to annihilate can be as simple as not being able to handle something and just falling asleep. And some of the problems of dullness and lethargy we get in our meditation is based upon that attitude, not wanting to be with anything that's painful or upsetting. So you fall asleep. So sleep becomes a way of suppressing it, keeping it out of consciousness. So that's the second noble truth.

"The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving. The giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it."

So that craving, that *taṇhā*, that unwholesome wanting, that unskilful wanting, not wanting, that's what has to go. And a word for it would be reactivity, just reacting to things, not responding from wisdom, not responding from a position where we understand, but always reacting from this deluded place. Now, we don't do that always, obviously, but often we do. And what we're doing is reinforcing an old habit. It's so easy to fall into old habits. Old habits die hard. But in a sense, that sounds so simple, just get rid of this wrong desire. But of course, what we discovered is that that is quite a challenge. It's more than a lifetime's work, if you believe in rebirth.

"And finally, the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of this suffering is the Eightfold Path."

And just quickly before we begin, because I want to do the Eightfold Path finally tomorrow, I'm absolutely determined. The Noble Truth of Suffering, he says, having stated what it is, he says this is what has to be fully understood. You have to understand it. And it's not just basic intellectual understanding, of course, but a direct understanding through personal experience. And part of that is the process of meditation, *vipassanā*. And then he says, "As far as I'm concerned, this has been fully realised, fully understood."

The noble truth of the origin of suffering, he says, has to be abandoned. This is what we have to abandon completely. And then he goes on to say that he has, in fact, abandoned it. The noble truth of the end of suffering has to be realised, a direct personal experience of a Nibbānic moment. And he says that, of course, he has actually experienced that too. And then, of course, the path itself is something that is to be developed. And, of course, he goes on to say that this has been developed. So that's the process of becoming fully liberated from suffering.

So what I would like to do, I've just got time, I'd like to skip over to the ending of this discourse, which then shows you how it's built up into these wonderful images of other worlds, other gods, et cetera, et cetera.

"So long, *bhikkhus*, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects"—that's what we've just been through—"was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world, with its devas, gods, Māra and Brahmā"—those are the higher gods—"and in this generation of ascetics and Brahmins, its devas and humans." Devas are the beings around us.

"But when my knowledge and vision of the Four Noble Truths, as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects, was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world. Unshakeable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence."

"This is the knowledge and vision that arose in me. This is what the Blessed One said and elated the *bhikkhus* of the group of five, delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Koṇḍañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the *Dhamma*: Whatever is subject to a beginning is subject to an end. Everything arises and passes away."

When the wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth-dwelling Devas raised a cry: "At Varanasi, in the deer park of Isipatana, the unsurpassed wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or Brahmin or Deva or Mara or Brahma or anyone in the world."

Having heard the cry of the earth-dwelling Devas, the Devas of the realms of the four kings raised the same cry. And from there to the Tavatimsa Devas and the Yama Devas, the Tusita Devas, the Nimmanarati Devas, and the Devas of the Brahma's company raised the cry: "At Varanasi, in the deer park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed wheel of Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or Brahmin or Deva or Mara or Brahma or anyone in that world."

Thus, at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the Brahma world, and this ten-thousand-fold world system shook, quaked and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world, surpassing the divine majesty of the Devas.

Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: "Kondanya has indeed understood. Kondanya has indeed understood." And in this way, the Venerable Kondanya acquired the name Anya Kondanya - Kondanya, the one who knows.

So that's a lovely poetic remembrance of the effect of turning the wheel of the Dhamma for us poor human beings.

CHAPTER 164

Awareness at Work and Right View, Right Attitude

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a common practitioner question about maintaining awareness during demanding work activities, explaining how formal noting practice differs from daily life application. He clarifies that the Mahasi technique's slow, detailed noting is designed for retreat settings, while work requires absorbed attention without self-consciousness. The key is developing one-pointed concentration where we become absorbed in our activity with care and attention.*
>
> *The talk then explores the first two factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: sammā diṭṭhi (Right View) and sammā saṅkappa (Right Attitude/Intention). Right View encompasses understanding the Four Noble Truths and the three characteristics of existence - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Bhante explains how our preconceived concepts and ideas shape all experience, and why correcting these fundamental misunderstandings is essential for liberation. Right Attitude involves transforming our intentions from greed toward generosity, hatred toward loving-acceptance, and harmfulness toward compassion.*
>
> *This teaching offers practical wisdom for integrating meditation into work life while establishing the foundational understanding and attitudes that support the entire spiritual path.*

Greetings, good evening. I hope you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, although I wish it had been happy for you.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Self-Awakened One.

This evening, I want to start with a practical question that's come through. It's from Danny.

"I have a technical job assembling electromechanical units. This involves reading a drawing, collating the parts, and getting the parts to fit together. I try to maintain a degree of mindfulness, but with all the movements associated with these activities, it becomes exhausting. Instead, I note walking from A to B and standing, but I spend more time at the bench. I have tried to note looking and seeing during these times, and even with this, I'm aware of other actions too, and then note that I'm ignoring these objects

to force my attention on the seeing. This can be followed by frustration, again, noted. My formal practice is one of slow noting, even though, for example, when I raise my heel, I'm aware of the other touch sensations, but do not note them as independent sensations. My question then is, how to maintain mindfulness at work when I'm involved in an activity that needs to be done with relative speed."

Now, this is a regular question that comes from people who practice the Mahāsi technique. The Mahāsi technique is a very specific technique for a particular type of situation: the retreat. The whole idea, of course, is to slow everything down. The noting is a way of stopping the mind from wandering. It has this other purpose, which is to turn everything into an object. You're pointing at something all the time. But in terms of this question, the retreat or the Mahāsi technique is about slowing everything down and noting, especially intentions, and becoming more and more refined in order to see how the mind is creating the world that we're experiencing.

When you go out into daily life, I didn't have this trouble because I had started with Zen and I practised up at Thrustle Hole in Northumberland. There we did things at speed. I mean, really fast, and for long times—an hour, two hours even sometimes. I remember one time, for instance, I was given the job of the dining room, and part of it was polishing the chairs. I had to polish the chairs as if they'd never been polished. You did it at great speed. The understanding is, of course, that the faster you go, the more you've got to keep your mindfulness. Your attention is right there. If your attention wanders, then you'll drop something, you'll trip up, you'll make a mistake. It's not as though mindfulness stops you making mistakes as such, because accidents happen.

So I never had this problem of transferring noting into daily life because, frankly, I never did it. Because of my Zen training, I knew that what I had to do was just put my attention on what I was doing.

When you are doing something, especially something that demands attention—careful attention, such as the work that Danny does—then, of course, noting can get in the way because your whole attention is towards the object. Those of you who've been here know that when I talk about meditation at work, doing the chores in the morning, then yes, the idea is to be with what you're doing.

Sometimes there's a confusion about self-awareness, that you have to be aware of yourself all the time doing something. But that's, of course, a split consciousness in the sense that one minute you're aware of yourself and one minute you're aware of what you're doing. So that's not where we want to end up. Self-awareness arises quite naturally. You can't get rid of it by creating another self. It just creates confusion. But as you keep paying attention to what you're doing, then there are moments of absorption.

This happens to us quite easily when we're watching something exciting like a film. You absorb into the film. You disappear for a couple of hours. When you come out, you say, "Oh, that's a good film." It's the same with hobbies. When we're really interested in what we're doing—gardening or something—time can just fly by. That's when we lose that sense of self, somebody doing something, and with it, of course, a sense of time. It always happens at the computer a lot and other ways like Facebook and all that.

When we're at work, our effort, of course, is to be attentive to what we're doing. Now it might be that some noting helps us just to pay attention to that, but we don't want it to get in the way. We want to pay attention to such a point that I'm just being my doing. That's the trick of it, you see. So it's not a case of being self-aware of what you're doing. It's not a case of being aware of everything else around what you're doing. It's a case of one-pointed concentration work that you're supposed to be attending to.

So it's not a case of noting everything specifically. At times you can just drop that. When you know that your attention is steady, when you can trust it to remain with what you're doing, then you've arrived. That's it.

When you go into an absorption where you lose that sense of self and you're just doing, of course, how you enter into it is the mental state that you'll be developing. So if you go into it with a calmness, a sense of just doing, a sense of equanimity or whatever, or even a sense of kindness—I mean, that's more easy if you're tending to people rather than a machine—or with a machine, it'd be more carefulness, being caring.

It makes everything easy if you can bring your heart into it, give it a good reason for doing what you're doing. If you go into it with care and attention, affectionate awareness, then you come out with more of that because you're developing it. If you go in there with a sense of rush, then, of course, you're reinforcing that attitude and you come out with more rush. That can lead to an early exhaustion.

I'm presuming that what Danny's saying here is that trying to note and do the work, he's found exhausting, and rightly so. So the thing to do is to do the work. If the mind's very jittery, it's going all over the place, then yes, keep noting a little bit just to put your attention there. But as soon as you feel that you're holding your attention, and that you're involved, let go of it. Just be aware—it's enough.

If that didn't answer the question, especially Dan, if it didn't answer the question, just send me another email. Do feel free to send questions about your meditation practice and so on.

I'm finally arriving at the question: are all the stages of the Eightfold Path equally important?

The short answer is yes, but some precede the others. So they have preference in sense of preceding the others. But eventually they're all important in our practice.

The first thing is to be clear as to what the Eightfold Path is actually referring to here. Remember, we've got right view, right understanding, which is followed by right attitude, right intention. Then you have right speech, you have right action, right livelihood. Then you have right effort, right awareness, and right concentration.

Interestingly enough, when you actually talk about this as a practice, you start off with *sīla*, you start off with morality, which is right speech, right action, right livelihood. Then you talk about the meditation. Then finally, you talk about the wisdom, the right view and right attitude. But when you're actually talking about it as a logical process, as to how it actually knits all together, then you talk about it in this eightfold way.

I'm going to follow just the eightfold path, not the teaching way of *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, which is morality, concentration or attentiveness, and wisdom.

When the Buddha talks about *sammā diṭṭhi*, right view, right understanding, he's basically referring to the Four Noble Truths as the basic, as the base of our understanding. From a practical point of view, from our practice point of view, in terms of *vipassanā*, it really is relating to those three characteristics of existence: that the cause of suffering is desire, that everything changes, nothing actually changes into something else. Everything is quite spare, quite distinct, and there's this constant impermanence going on, and that everything is not self. From a human point of view, everything is not self. Everything isn't substantial. Nothing can exist on its own. It's always in relationship, in dependency on something.

Obviously the body's dependent on the air that we breathe and so on. The heart dependent on relationships and the mind dependent on information. So everything has something to feed. It's got to be fed. It's got to be related to.

But the interesting thing is this *sammā diṭṭhi*, this right view, is really about conceptual thinking. If you think about it, everything that we experience during the day, everything we look at, we hear, et cetera, et cetera, it's always fitting it into a particular concept. This process actually has a word in psychology: apperception. So you see something and you've not seen it before. When you look at it closely, and get closer, "Oh, yeah, well, that must be a type of fly." Or if you taste something which you haven't tasted before, it's, "Oh, well, this must be a type of Chinese dish."

So you're always fitting it in to your preconceived concepts, your preconceived ideas, which have been built up ever since we were born. A lot of them are subconscious—we're not fully aware of these concepts that we are always looking at the world

through. The obvious ones, things like freedom. What do we mean by freedom? I remember a few years ago now, there was this whole thing about the right to insult, which is a very aggressive way of saying you can say things which might upset others, but the way it came across was that you had to go and punch somebody with your new ideas or with your view.

So this whole idea of free speech, the whole idea of personal liberty, the whole idea of democracy, parliamentary democracy—all these are great big concepts which manifest our relationship to the world we find ourselves in. There's the negative ones—there's all the prejudices, sexism, racism, ageism. Now I'm very much aware of ageism these days.

So you can see the way we look at the world is always coming from some preconceived ideas. What the Buddha says is that unless we can really correct these ideas, unless we can correct these perceptions, these conceptions, then we're just not going to get out of the mess we're in. That's why he's always keen to deconstruct what we experience and to begin to investigate what we experience.

So the main one is, of course, the one that we directly experience virtually all the time is this relationship we have to pleasure and pain, pleasant and unpleasant. What he's saying is, if you remember from the beginning of the discourse last night, it's neither indulging nor is it being averse to something. So we're trying to lift ourselves out of this reactivity, which comes from a fundamental misunderstanding somewhere as to where we can find happiness. That's where the base of it is.

We all want to be happy. We're all chasing happiness. We've all got our own definition of happiness. It's all coming from this wrong understanding as to where we can find true happiness, or true well-being or true ease with living. An accommodation with life, which no longer is painful for us.

So *sammā diṭṭhi* is that. Included in that would be the very important teaching about *kamma,* the fact that when we act there are consequences. That's a real experience, a real understanding. I mean, there were teachers at the time of the Buddha who said that there was no—there was one especially, Pūraṇa Kassapa I think his name was—who said it didn't matter if you went down one side of the Ganges, full of compassionate act and generosity, and at the other side full of murder and thieving, it wouldn't make a difference at all. It had no consequence.

So there were all these peculiar ideas going around at the time, and the Buddha was clear about action and consequence of action, and that the action had to have some awareness of what you were doing. So killing something by accident—I remember

when I was at Gaia House, I'd be walking in the dark and I could hear this crunch and it'd be a snail I just stood on. Obviously I didn't mean to do it. I've got that natural regard for snails. That wouldn't be considered to have bad *kamma*, except that, of course, one feels guilty anyway, one feels bad anyway. But that's not necessary because there wasn't the intention there.

So the whole teaching about *kamma*, it comes into this right understanding.

When we've got this right understanding, as I say, that comes first. It begins with what we hear, what we're told, what we receive. Then, as it were, it becomes our own personal knowledge, our own personal understanding when we think about it. Often, I'm sure you've found that you've understood something, but when you've tried to explain it to somebody else, you can't do it. So that's the same with this growth of understanding. The first is through your reading, through your listening, et cetera, information comes in, and then somehow you've got to think about it. You've got to activate it within yourself, and then it becomes your own property. Then, of course, it has to be reinforced by direct experience, and that's *vipassanā*, *vipassanā ñāṇa*, knowing by way of direct experience. That's when it becomes your own personal experience. Then you find it has this flowing through the rest of the path.

The next thing, of course, is that it changes your attitude. It changes what you intend. Some people translate it as thought, which I can understand, but I don't think it's quite right. I don't quite get across the meaning of *sammā saṅkappa*. Because when that's described, it's described as moving away from greed and selfishness towards generosity. It's a process of renunciation, renouncing that wrong desire. So moving from greed towards generosity. It's described as moving away from hatred and aversion towards love and acceptance. It's described as moving away from harmfulness, from cruelty, from one-upmanship and all that stuff towards compassion.

So these are attitudes. It's out of these attitudes that these intentions begin to manifest in a given circumstance. From then, of course, you're into right thinking in your mind, which is speech. I mean, you're talking to yourself. Then it goes into right speech, right action, right livelihood. All this is supported by your meditation.

We'll say a bit more about the right speech, right action and all that, and especially right livelihood, tomorrow evening.

So the short answer is that all these sections in the Eightfold Path are equally important, but some precede another. Of course, right understanding precedes them all. It then has the effect upon your attitudes and then the rest flows naturally depending on the circumstance. So sometimes you're talking, sometimes you're doing something, sometimes you're at work.

If any questions arise about that, do send me an email. So I shall leave it there for this evening so that we can get back.

CHAPTER 165

Right Speech, Action and Livelihood

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min

> *In this dharma talk from the 2020 lockdown series, Bhante Bodhidhamma continues his exploration of the Noble Eightfold Path by examining sammā vācā (Right Speech), sammā kammanta (Right Action), and sammā ājīva (Right Livelihood). He demonstrates how these ethical practices flow naturally from sammā diṭṭhi (Right Understanding) and sammā saṅkappa (Right Intention).*
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> *Bhante discusses the four aspects of wrong speech to avoid: untruthfulness, slander, harsh speech, and idle chatter. He emphasizes the importance of timing, listening with humility, and speaking from a heart of mettā rather than anger. For Right Action, he covers the traditional five precepts while highlighting the movement toward refinement - from avoiding killing to actively protecting life, from avoiding theft to practicing generosity.*
>
> *Regarding Right Livelihood, Bhante explains how our work shapes our character and should align with our values, avoiding trades in weapons, slavery, meat, alcohol, and poison. He concludes by illustrating the feedback loop within the Eightfold Path - how ethical conduct reinforces wisdom and compassion, gradually undermining the isolated sense of self through generous and compassionate action.*

Greetings and good evening. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully enlightened one.

I just want to read an email that came through. They say they thank me for the live stream. "I have been meditating with you daily and have set up my evenings around this time. You won't be surprised by this, but it's changed my life. I'm sleeping better, feel less burdened in the day. During meditation, I'm able to stay with painful surface and deeper emotions whilst holding them with metta. Seeing you meditate and knowing lots of others are doing the same at the same time offers a sense of connection and commitment to my practice. Thank you." There we are. Thank you so much. So a little bit of feedback there. I am presuming that that's the same for everybody.

Now, I just want to go back and try to complete a little bit of this Eightfold Noble Path. Remember that my aim over this two months or more, let's hope it's just two months, was to introduce you to the various discourses in the Middle Length Sayings. So I'll try to get through most of this this evening.

Remember, we started with *sammā-diṭṭhi*, right understanding, the Eightfold Path which is transcendental, not in between indulgence and aversion, but rising above it. In that sense, it's the middle, it's transcendent. And remember that this *sammā-diṭṭhi* is to do with conceptual — the way we conceive, the way we look at things and experience things through our concepts.

The big mistake, according to the Buddha, is to seek any sort of lasting happiness in anything to do with this world, that things are impermanent, radically so. They're arising and passing away momentarily. And that this whole concept of me, the self, is causing a great deal of problems. And that manifests through our attachments. Attachments are psychological dependencies. We use things, we use people in order to make ourselves feel happy. That's not the same as *mettā*, compassion and generosity. That's coming from a different place, coming from the place of wisdom, coming from the place of not "me, me, me."

This conceptual, the right concept draws us into these social virtues — the main ones being generosity, love, goodwill, and compassion, the desire to help people. Now, once this is passed into our attitudes, into our intentions, then of course they begin to manifest in the way we think, which is an internal speech, an internal speaking. I speak to myself. Sometimes I'm speaking to myself, but also I find myself speaking to lots of other people too inside this little head of mine.

And it includes, of course, speech in ordinary daily life. And the type of speech we don't want to get into is, of course, untruths. We don't want to do that. We don't want to slander people. Blake says, "A truth told with bad intent beats all the lies you can invent." So that's a beautiful little verse. It depends on your intention, which makes it either slander or having to say something which might undermine somebody's reputation, but it might be for good reason. Abusive speech, using speech in order to upset people. And finally, just chit chat, just talking for talking's sake, just a waste of time, really.

And we hate silence when you're walking with a friend or walking with somebody who's close to you — your partner or a child — there's always this compulsion to have to communicate. You have to speak. And it's a sign of maturity of a relationship that you can be silent with each other. That's my understanding anyway.

So when it comes to free speech, there was a period a couple of years back where free speech came up around this whole business of Islam and not insulting the prophets. And there came this phrase, "the right to insult." And that's a very aggressive way of saying that. Everybody has a right to express their opinion, even though they know it'll upset somebody. But it became very hard. It became a sort of aggressive thing, the right to insult. I don't think you have a right to insult. You have a right to express yourself, your own truths, even though it might upset somebody.

And we normally, when that happens, we normally introduce it, don't we? We say, "I know this is going to upset you. I hope you don't mind," and so on and so forth. So it's a case of being kind, being gentle. That's one of the qualities of right speech, being gentle and being truthful, of course — truthful to ourselves, truthful to the situation, and the sense of being beneficial. You're speaking for either your own benefit, somebody else's benefit, or your own and somebody else's benefit. And with a heart of loving kindness, the Buddha says, coming from a heart of loving kindness.

Sometimes that's difficult, of course, when you're talking to somebody who's being aggressive and whatnot, in which case at least you can come from the heart of no harm. There's no point in upsetting ourselves and getting angry ourselves. That's just a waste of energy.

And it's that distinction between being aggressive and being assertive. That's a very clear way of putting it — that you can actually state your truth coming from a position of strength, a position of goodwill, a position of compassion. You don't have to come from anger. In fact, if anything, anger manifests a certain weakness because sitting underneath anger, there's always fear. You don't get angry unless you're afraid. It's underneath it. It's underpinning the fear. Fear is underpinning anger.

And one of the interesting things the Buddha says, of course, is to say at the right time — to choose your time to say things. There's a right time and a wrong time. And I'm sure we've all experienced dropping a clanger. So it's a case of recognizing a situation and being careful about what we say.

And I think the key to that when we're with people is the ability to listen. And I think we find listening difficult, especially when somebody is expressing ideas or positions which are not the same as ours, even opposed to ours. Then there's a sort of fear, I think, that we're going to be converted, that if we allow ourselves to listen, open-hearted, open-minded, there's this terrible danger that they might change me. But if we come from that sense of inner stability, just that calmness, and with a willingness to understand the world that they are living in.

I mean, we're all creating our own little worlds, and the intention is to understand, well, where are they coming from? Where are they coming from? It doesn't have to convert us. But on the other hand, we may find ourselves that our views and opinions are nuanced by what other people say. And that's coming from the heart of humility. None of this business of "I'm right and everybody else is wrong." I'm special that way.

So there's a whole area of right speech, which we can conduct on a daily basis. And that would be the purpose of an evening reflection, an evening reflection where you look back and you've had a conversation with somebody that didn't go right, or you had a conversation with somebody where it really did go right, where you felt you were skillful, wise, and stuff like that.

And on both counts, you can reinforce, you can encourage yourself. You can congratulate yourself. There's nothing wrong with that. "Well done. Well done, Bodhidhamma." Absolutely. And if you haven't done so well, you can always encourage yourself: "Go do better now. Go do better than that." So there's no need to get angry with oneself, hate oneself. It's a waste, a complete waste of energy, useless. It doesn't go anywhere at all except to more misery, just creates more misery for us.

So that's the position of right speech. And again, it's coming from these attitudes that we've developed because of our different view about life. See, it all goes back to view. And this is what I meant about they're all important. And we'll see why when I come to the end. But some precede others.

When it comes to *sammā-kammanta*, which is right action, that's usually expressed as the moral law, just basic morality — not to kill, steal, offensive sexual behavior, conduct. And, well, there's including in this being untruth. And, of course, the use of drugs and alcohol and stuff, which isn't very good for us.

And the move there is towards refinement. It's towards refinement. So where obviously we've given up killing, at least for a while, and we're moving towards protecting — protecting each other, protecting animals, protecting the wildlife, protecting flowers. It's all so — it's a change of attitude and protection.

Stealing moves us towards generosity. Offensive sexual conduct moves us towards right relationship — treating the other as a person, not as an object to satisfy our personal erotic desires. When it comes to right speech, well, we've done that, of course.

And this idea of non-alcohol, which is very difficult for our society because we are alcohol-based. And it's a case of recognizing that under the influence, especially if we've drunk a little bit too much, we can do things which aren't particularly good. And when

you consider that our purpose is to maintain a sort of bright awareness at all times, as soon as you wake up to the point you fall asleep, we're supposed to be bright. We're supposed to be mindful. Putting alcohol in the system really doesn't help.

I had a very good experience with that myself. I'd given up alcohol and I'd come out of a Zen session. So I was going right back to the beginning of my practice. And just on the way home, I sort of slipped into a pub and had half a beer, half a mild or something. And I did it in order to see what effect it would have. And to my surprise, after I'd drunk it for a little while, I just felt this sort of curtain. It's difficult to describe, a sort of net coming down, an actual physical feeling in my brain. And that convinced me that I had to give it up, which I did.

So when you consider that poison, I mean, this is the point, isn't it? That alcohol is the most vicious of poisons for the body. I mean, it kills brain cells. It messes your liver up. It does all sorts of bad things. And non-alcoholic beer is very good. So there's no reason for drinking alcohol at all.

So those are the sort of things we're moving towards, moving towards refinement. The other thing in that is to do with restraint of the senses. That's one of the big teachings of the Buddha, to restrain, to guard the senses, to be on the lookout for when the senses do get involved in stuff and to be aware of that reaction that we have to what we see, to what we hear. Restraining the senses.

I mean, that sounds like suppressing something. But it's not. It's sort of holding and saying, no, we don't want to keep developing that particular mental state. So, like, for instance, when you see something which draws a certain anger out of you or draws a certain neurotic feeling out of you, to actually catch it at the beginning and just say, no, you don't want to go there. And that way you're undermining an old habit, undermining an old habit. I'm not saying, by the way, that there aren't times when erotic feelings are to the point. That's within a proper relationship.

Right livelihood. Now, the importance of livelihood is an expression of our desire, of the way we see ourselves. If you happen to have the job that you wanted, if you happen to have the area of work that you wanted — your own personal interest, your own personal bent, your own personal special qualities. So people want to move towards helping other people. So they end up being nurses or doctors or involved in some sort of hospital medical staff. But even wanting to be involved in a hospital as a cleaner, that might be it — that desire to be involved in that sort of place of helping people.

Other people want to develop their lives to art, or to nature. They want to be involved in gardens and things like that. Other people want to be involved in artificial intelligence and information technology and all that sort of stuff. And what you do is actually developing your particular characteristic, your particular character. So it's a case of recognizing that the work you're doing is actually affecting your personality and your character. And that's why it's so important.

And of course, there are particular types of trades that we don't want to get involved with. Trading in arms, in living beings, slavery and prostitution, meat, alcohol and poison. So those are the five ones that you try not to get involved with.

So that shows you that there's a flow down from right understanding, right attitude, manifesting in the way we speak, in the way we behave and in our work. And the last three we'll come to at another time. They're basically to do, of course, with our meditation, both in the sitting, both in our sitting practice, but also in daily life.

This mindfulness, affectionate mindfulness. The Buddha, when we chant, when we read or chant the loving kindness discourse, when he talks about we should always live with this mindfulness, he's talking about a mindfulness which is imbued with a sense of kindness, a sense of goodwill. So the heart's always involved. It's the same with your work. I should have mentioned this — that there are these two qualities: being attentive, like you're attending to what you're doing, but you have to give the heart a good reason. So there's attention and care. Attention and care. You can always bring care into anything, a sense of care.

And the important thing is that all of these feedback, they feed back into themselves. Although we began with the importance of conceptual, of getting our concepts right, of understanding how we create suffering, of getting our attitudes right, and from then there's a flow, there's a feedback because as we behave coming from that position of wisdom, it feeds back into the wisdom. It supports the wisdom. And there's a desire to deepen that wisdom. There's a desire to grow in those attitudes — love, compassion, joy, peace, and all that.

They're known, remember, as immeasurables. You can develop them without boundaries. They can just keep going. They can just be developed ad infinitum. There's no limit to how much we can develop mental states. And that's unfortunately true of evil states too. But here we're only concerned with what's good.

So there's a sort of feedback loop in this. And the interesting one is between attitude and understanding. Because if we are drawn to compassionate action, to compassion which is driven by goodwill, action which is driven by generosity, by giving, remember

that is constantly undermining the sense of this isolated me, is constantly reinforcing the fact of we, that we're all in this together, that I am my relationships. And that's what I am.

And that undermines this very isolated sense of self. And every time we give or do something which hurts a little, like what you give through generosity or what is demanded of you from your compassion, all that is undermining that sense of "me, it's all about me, me, me." That doesn't, of course, undermine self-care. It just takes away this barrier of me. And we see ourselves more as interrelated. We know all these words — interrelated, interdependent, interbeing. That's Thich Nhat Hanh, that sort of stuff.

And that manifests through the way we actually speak, the way we act, and so on. So that reinforces again, that changes our concepts, changes our concepts. If, for instance, if you've been a sort of person who's not been very generous, and then suddenly you begin to be generous and you realize the joy that you're giving to people, and when you give joy to people, you find your own heart rejoicing, then that's your feedback. Then you realize, well, this is where I can find some real happiness, which is based on community, based on communication.

OK, so time has moved on and it's time to do our little meditation.

CHAPTER 166

Grief

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

> *In this compassionate talk during the 2020 coronavirus lockdown, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the profound topic of grief and loss. Drawing from personal correspondence with practitioners experiencing multiple bereavements, he explores the crucial distinction between sorrow—our empathetic response to others' suffering—and grief, which arises from our psychological attachments.*
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> *Bhante examines the Buddha's teaching to Ānanda following the death of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, emphasizing the instruction to 'be an island unto yourself' while acknowledging our fundamental interconnectedness. He discusses how grief represents the karmic consequence of unwholesome attachment, not immoral behavior, and must be fully experienced for healing to occur.*
>
> *The talk includes the story of Visākhā, a devoted lay follower who grieved her grandchild's death, illustrating the Buddha's teaching that attachment multiplies our sorrows. Bhante clarifies that diminishing grief doesn't indicate diminishing love, and explains the natural healing process that allows us to reconnect with pure love and joyful memories. This teaching offers profound guidance for working skillfully with loss while maintaining compassionate relationships.*

Evening and greetings. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I wish it has been happy.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I've had two rather sad emails. We've discussed all this business about death, and then, of course, there's the complementary side, which is grief. One writer says these last years has brought to my door a series of griefs: the deaths of close ones and beloveds, some unexpected due to suicide, some through the combination of illness. One, the most beloved, from a cardiac arrest. And she also lost her pet. And they themselves were diagnosed with cancer, but is in remission now. She's found that during this lockdown, a lot of this grief and sorrow arising, particularly in dreams during meditation. So when we're alone, these turbulences, whatever they are, they tend to come back to haunt us.

And very recently, a very sad case: a young man, well youngish — thirty-four from my point of view, youngish — Pete, who had a seizure at night and died, leaving his wife and three small children. So that, of course, is a huge shock to somebody who has to suffer that, to all those close to him.

This problem of grief is obviously coming up for all those people who've lost somebody to this coronavirus. So it's good just to say something a little bit about all that.

First of all, is to try to make a distinction, just using these words, between sorrow and grief. I mean, they're interchangeable. Sorrow is that trembling, as the Buddha would say, in the heart — what we would call empathy — where you feel the sorrow of somebody else. And you can say that when somebody dies in an unfortunate way or they're too young to die, died before their time as we say, that there's a certain sorrow on their behalf as a thing that they could have offered more to society. They could have lived a longer life. But generally, there's a sense of sorrow about it. And that's really looking at it, as it were, from their point of view, not from our point of view.

The big case, of course, was that little boy on the beach, which caused Angela Merkel to allow refugees in. So there was a movement there, a sort of a resonance in the heart with the suffering of others. And that sorrow normally demands some sort of action into compassion, or else it lies as unrequited. It lies as a pain in the heart. And of course, if you can't do anything, then you can at least send your good wishes. You can do the meditation on loving-kindness. And you have to accept that. You can't do anything. There's no point in beating ourselves up about that. So in a sense, that sorrow is part and parcel of our communication, our being with people.

I'd like to read this really lovely poem by John Donne. John Donne was a poet in the Restoration period, James I, all that. And he says: "No man is an island, entire of itself. Each is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod is washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. Each man's death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind. Therefore, send not to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

So in other words, every man's death is also a little death within me. I had a friend down in Cornwall I would visit on occasion, and he died. And of course, I've lost that relationship. So something in me has been lost. And there's a wholesomeness about that because we need people. We need friendships. We need to be able to relate, to communicate. It's just part of that — hopefully next tomorrow I'll be talking about the nutriments and you'll see that this was recognized by the Buddha — that we do need other people.

That's obvious when it comes to meditation. It's so much easier to sit when you know everybody else in the room is going through something similar than just sitting on your own. And I'm especially aware of people who are actually in isolation because of medical problems. So it's difficult just to be on your own. These days, of course, it is attenuated by modern technology.

Interestingly enough, when the Buddha's two main disciples died — that's Moggallāna and Sāriputta — I'm going to read this little bit. This again is taken from the book *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death* by Venerable Analayo. Highly recommend it. There is another book, by the way, which I might have mentioned: *Living in the Light of Death: The Art of Being Truly Alive* by Larry Rosenberg.

When Sāriputta died, Ānanda said, "I declare having myself known them on attaining full awakening before establishments of mindfulness and so on and so forth. These have all been taken away." In other words, Ānanda is grieving the loss of his teacher. And there's a series of questions that the Buddha asks him.

"Has he taken away your ability to observe your mind?" He goes through the discourse on how to establish right awareness. "Has he taken away your ability to investigate? Has he taken away your ability to become fully liberated yourself?" And of course, Ānanda says no.

And then the Buddha gives him his advice, which you also get right at the end of the discourse which tells about the last few days of the Buddha. He reminds him that he himself, the Buddha, the Tathāgata, would go. "Therefore, do not be so very sad, Ānanda. You should know that soon the Tathāgata will also be of the past. Therefore, Ānanda, you should have yourself as an island by relying on yourself. You should have the Dhamma as an island by relying on the Dhamma. You should not have another island, no other reliance."

Now this seems contrary to what we've just read from John Donne, that every man isn't an island. But of course, we're talking about two different things. We talk about our relationship, our necessary relationship with other people, and the fact that the relationship goes wrong. Now, that's the problem. Where does the relationship go wrong? It goes wrong through attachment. We all know this. And attachment is just another way of saying a psychological dependency on somebody for my happiness, for my security, for my comfort, and so on and so forth.

And what the Buddha is saying is when you put that aside, you've got to find your own inner safety, your own inner place. And of course, we're doing that every time we sit in meditation. We're discovering this, the observer, the feeler, the one who knows.

And when that's very clear to you, when you are really the one who knows within yourself and everything else is happening — the body with its feeling and the heart with its emotions, the mind with its thought — when you're quite separate from that and you are the observer, the feeler, ask yourself, what's it like? Is it okay? Is it worth being there most of the time?

The Buddha actually says that when Sāriputta dies, and Moggallāna too — Moggallāna was murdered, it seems, by another sect who got jealous of him or something — when these two main disciples died, and they would have been a similar age, because he was thirty-five when he began teaching, and they became very quickly his disciples, his first disciples. So they would have been late twenties, thirties, so very close to him in age. He said that the *saṅgha*, that's the order of monks and nuns, felt empty without them. So that's the other side. That's the business of no man is an island.

But we've got this more negative side, which is really about the grief that we feel. This grief has to be felt. It has to be suffered. It's what's left. It's the consequence, the *kamma*, the *kamma* of unwholesome relationship. Now, you have to be careful here. This isn't immoral. It's not as though you go to hell forever because you had an attachment to somebody. Not at all. It's unwholesome in the sense that eventually it causes pain and it causes us to suffer.

And grief, especially with sudden death, as we had with Pete who died a couple of nights back, and with this woman who's come with all these series of griefs, really it's extremely difficult to stay with that shock, with the constant death of people in our lives. And of course, as you grow older, as I am, people begin to disappear. And eventually, if you live long enough, it's just you. I mean, you've made other friends, younger friends, whatever. But all those old friends that you've known for years, that maybe even go back to childhood, they've all gone. And you're just left there with all these memories.

So grief is that sore, the wound, which is caused when something from the heart is taken out, is ripped out when it's a shock like that. And there's no other way but to sit with it and to give the heart time to heal and to know that this is the cause of a psychological dependency, but that isn't to take away the fact that there was also love. There was also a sense of care for the person.

Sometimes you get confused about that. And of course the big confusion is to think that as your grief diminishes, it's telling you that you don't love the person as you used to, you're losing their love. Well, if you get into that, you're into a never ending cycle of grief, which lessens and then you have to grieve a bit more. You have to keep pumping it up because you're trying to prove that the grief you have is the measure of your love.

But if the grief process is gone through in its normal passage, which they say is about nine months, and I'm sure you all know if you happen to have grief in your life — there is a charity, Cruse, which helps people — that if you allow the heart to express its pain, then over a period of up to nine months, it begins to dissipate. Not that it doesn't come back in little blips, but at least the terrible pain, especially the first three, six months, begins to dissipate. And slowly one begins to contact that loved one has — that love, that care that one had. And of course, that brings up beautiful memories and joy arises. I mean, that would be the normal passage of things.

This happened: a woman, a lay woman who was a great supporter of the Buddha — it goes right back to his early days — and she turns up one day at the monastery with her hair drenched, weeping, crying out in sorrow. And it says she went to see the Buddha in the middle of the day in spite of the sun. Her favorite grandchild, Datta, who had always helped to distribute alms, had suddenly passed away.

And when she told the Blessed One of her sorrow, he asked whether she wanted to have as many children and grandchildren as there were people in the city of Sāvatthī. That's the capital of Kosala. And she joyfully agreed. "But how many people die in Sāvatthī every day?" said the Blessed One. And she considered and said, "Oh, Lord, in Sāvatthī, nine or ten people, five or three or two people, or at least one, die every day. Sāvatthī is never free of dying."

And being asked whether in this case she would ever be without sorrow, she had to admit that she would feel sorrow every single day. So the Blessed One said, "Those who have a hundred loved ones have a hundred sorrows. Those who have ninety, all the way down to one, have only one sorrow. And those who have no loved ones have no sorrow. Those alone, I say, are without sorrow, without suffering, without desperation."

And of course, he's not talking about love and care. He's talking about what happens when you're attached, when you are dependent on somebody for some well-being, for some happiness, for some comfort. And that, of course, is something that we simply have to work through. And as I say, not to make the mistake between grief and love. Grief is the measure — the way I'm using the word grief is the measure — of attachment.

And we just have to suffer it. And that's something to remind ourselves, too, that punishment is out of the question in Buddhism. You don't have to punish anybody or punish yourself or get angry with yourself. All we're doing that is adding more suffering to the suffering. All we have to do is suffer consequences. That's all we're asked to do. And allow the heart, give it time to heal.

CHAPTER 167

The Nutriments: Food, Contact, Volition, and Consciousness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 24 min

In this exploration of the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's teaching on the four nutriments (āhāra) that sustain all beings. Drawing from Sāriputta's discourse on Right View, he presents the four types of nourishment: edible food for the body, sensory contact that creates feelings, mental volition that empowers desires into action, and consciousness that manifests our experience of existence.

Bhante shares the Buddha's vivid analogies from the Saṃyutta Nikāya—including the haunting story of parents eating their son's flesh to survive crossing a desert—to illustrate how these nutriments can either bind us to suffering or, when properly understood, lead to liberation. He connects these teachings to our modern condition, referencing Ernest Becker's insights on death anxiety and how our attempts to deny mortality drive much of human behavior.

The talk emphasizes the crucial role of volition in spiritual development, explaining why the Mahasi method focuses intensely on noting intentions. Bhante concludes by showing how understanding these four nutriments reveals the mechanics of rebirth and points toward the cessation of suffering through dispassionate awareness of what truly nourishes us.

Greetings. I hope you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I wish it has been happy.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

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

So I want to go back to the original discourse which we started with ten days ago. I'm still making my way through it. And it's called the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, the Discourse on Right View. And we've discussed some of these things. The core question that Sāriputta —remember this is Sāriputta, not the Buddha—answering. Sāriputta, remember, was considered by the Buddha to really have a grip on the Dhamma. He trusted him.

So this is the basic question: In what way is a noble disciple one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at the true Dhamma?

So in this discourse on right view, the first thing he talks about is, if you remember, wholesome, unwholesome. Unwholesome. To know the distinction between those two is of vital importance, or else we end up in a nasty place.

Now the next one is nutriments. And I would think that most people haven't come across the nutriments. So this is the Buddha always deconstructing something, deconstructing our experience and then putting it together again, showing us how it all fits.

And the four nutriments—I'm going to read the actual before that. I just want to give an introduction to them. So first of all, there's food for the body. That's pretty straightforward. The nutriment for the body itself is food. And then there's contact. That's the contact of the senses with the world from which we get our feelings. Those of you who know dependent origination know that that's the point where we contact the physical world—five senses. That's what he's talking about in the present moment, not the mental sense. And then there is the contact of volition. Now volition is the point where we bring something out of the potential, a desire, and through empowering it, it manifests. So that's pretty important. We'll come back to it. And then consciousness is driven by, feeds that desire for constant rebirth.

So if we go back to the business of food, when you think about food, why you're eating, then you recognise that underneath it, there's a great fear. So this is going back to our old friend death. And I wanted to quote from Ernest Becker here, who won the Pulitzer Prize in '73 for his book called The Denial of Death. And he says: "The real world is simply too terrible to admit. We hide the real constant threat of death by fantasies where we survive the idea of death: the illusion of human supremacy, male supremacy, class supremacy, race supremacy, age supremacy." See, it's always trying to make us special. And what he's saying is, of course, that underneath it all, we're just these little animals. We're human animals. At a physical level, there's no distinction to be made between us, between me and the sheep in the field here. We both of us need food and we both of us need protection from the weather, although me more than them.

So this protection makes us quite irrational sometimes. It's interesting to note—this is from a website I picked up on thearrowjournal.com, it's about terror management—and he points out this has also happened here: why, in the midst of this genuine panic, so this is coronavirus, did North American consumers turn first—this is perfectly true for us too—not to rice, nuts and oranges? It wasn't that that people snapped up first, it was toilet paper.

And I might have mentioned this the other day, but I met a neighbour who had been at the local co-op supermarket in Churchstoke. And a woman wheeled out two trolleys, two trolleys full of toilet paper. Seemingly, he made some wry comment, which probably upset her. And the whole thing is that we're just trying to hide from ourselves this animal nature.

So we've got to go back to food to recognise that it is a nutriment for this body, and that this body is part of our nature and it's part of the natural world. The Buddha—we'll come to it at some future date—the Buddha is very anxious for us to actually get in touch with the foulness of the body, to become equanimous with it, to be happy in our skin, as I think it's said.

Now the next is contact. Just consider from the moment we wake up, the senses are constantly bombarded by information. As soon as you open your eyes, you can see around the room; your ears are hearing. You might be able to, when you walk out like I do in the morning—out into nature, very fortunate—there's that lovely smell of humus in the air. The earth coming up from the ground is really quite beautiful. And of course I can hear the birds; the birds are all coming out. We've got a very lovely blackbird who sings to us every morning. And there's of course the taste, breakfast. You have that fullness of taste. And there's just feeling, feeling things, like just brushing your teeth, holding something. So that there's a constant input of information coming in at contact, and these create sensations which we then translate into either pleasant or unpleasant.

And of course, there's a whole area of neutral feelings. But if you really go down into a neutral feeling, you'll see it shades off. It shades off very quietly into either something we don't want or something we don't like, something we do like. So that's the dual world that we live in, the dualistic world of feeling. Some of it's pleasant, some of it's unpleasant. And this of course takes us on to the next position on the dependent origination where we react to it. But because of contact, the feeling arises. So contact is a nutriment; it's feeding us in order to experience feelings.

And what we want to get to is, of course, a disinterest, which doesn't mean, say, a boredom. It just means not to be attached to pleasant or unpleasant sensations.

The third one is volition. So this is the point where a desire is activated. It's our power. It's the power that we have to do things in the world. And it's driven by a curiosity of the world, but also a will to become, a will to live. And that's produced all this science, all the art, all the doing that we do, the huge financial system and all that. It's all driven by this lust for life, this *bhavataṇhā,* the desire to become. And what empowers that is this volition.

And remember that every time you act, there's a field of energy goes out which has an effect and which comes back to you in some way. As you know, if you're angry with somebody, you get a response, you get a reaction. And if you're kind to somebody, generous to somebody, something happens. So remember that passage: between an act of will produces an action, a set of similar actions produces a habit, a set of habits produces a personality, personhood should we say. And that, of course, determines your destiny.

And it's only when we turn round upon it to question the validity of our attitudes—this goes back to the Eightfold Path—that we begin to change ourselves. And it always comes right back down again to volition. That's why here, when people come on retreat here, the Mahāsi was so keen to actually note intentions, note intentions. It's crucial in terms of our development, spiritual development.

And then finally there's consciousness, which is this constant rebirthing now. Consciousness arises and passes away, and we're experiencing rebirthing now. The only difference with death is that the body drops off. That's the Buddhist understanding. Some of you I know are scientific materialists, so forget that bit. It's just recognising that here and now we're actually rebirthing. And that's done through consciousness. So consciousness is the mirror, or should we say the window, which manifests the world, both the inner world and the outer world. And it's through this screen of consciousness that we experience the world. And it's on the screen of consciousness that all this hidden stuff that we don't know is inside us—the old subconscious, call it what you want—begins to manifest. And that's often what we're experiencing when we sit in meditation.

So consciousness feeds experience. And just as an aside, the real spiritual insight is for this *satipaññā*, this intuitive awareness, to realise it is not this consciousness. And it's on the screen of consciousness that you get that sense of self—the observer, the feeler, and so on.

So I actually want to read this discourse, which I think you'll find somewhat amusing. So it's on the nutriments, and it's in the book The Connected Discourse, the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, and there's two of these, for heaven's sake. I have to confess, I've never read the whole scriptures through. I've always centred on the longer discourses and the middle discourses and some of the others. But I've never had the will to get through all the other tomes, not being a particular academic of mind.

So here we are. This is called "The Son's Flesh." At Sāvatthi, the Buddha's talking at Sāvatthi, one of his main monasteries: There are four kinds of nutriments for the maintenance of beings that have already come to be and for the assistance of those who are about to come to be. What four? Nutriment edible food, contact, volition, and consciousness.

Now he says, how should the nutriment edible food be seen? "Suppose a couple, husband and wife, had taken limited provisions and were travelling through the desert. They have with them their dear son, beloved. Then, in the middle of the desert, their limited provisions would be used up and exhausted, while the rest of the desert remains to be crossed. The husband and wife would think: 'Our limited provisions have all been used up and exhausted, while the rest of the desert remains to be crossed. Let us kill our only son, dear and beloved as he is, and prepare dried and spiced meat. By eating our son's flesh, we can cross the rest of the desert. Let not all three of us perish.' Then the husband and wife carry on doing this. They kill the son and all that. And they lament, 'Where are you, our only son?'"

Well, they should know; it's in their bellies, aren't they?

"So now, what do you think? Would they eat that food for amusement or for enjoyment or for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness?" "No, venerable sir." "Wouldn't they eat the food only for the sake of crossing the desert?" "Yes, venerable sir. In such a way, I say, nutrimental edible food should be seen. When nutrimental edible food is fully understood, then the lust of the five senses is fully understood. And when lust for the five chords of sensual pleasure is fully understood, there is no fetter bound by which a noble disciple might come back into this world."

In other words, eat for the purpose of becoming fully spiritually enlightened and not for any other. That takes you off the path. But what a wonderful metaphor.

So now he goes on to say the nutriment of contact—so this is contact, the sensual contact, the eyes, the ears, vision, hearing, that's more precise: "Supposing there is a flayed cow—all the skin's taken off—if she stands exposed to a wall, the creatures dwelling in the wall would nibble at her. If she stands exposed to a tree, the creatures dwelling in the tree would nibble at her. If she stands exposed to water, the creatures dwelling in the water would nibble at her. And if she stands exposed to the open air, the creatures dwelling in the open air would nibble at her. Whatever that flayed cow stands exposed to, the creatures dwelling there would nibble at her."

"In such a way, I say the nutriment contact should be seen. When nutriment contact is fully understood, the three kinds of feeling are fully understood: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. And when the three kinds of feelings are fully understood—that is, they are just feelings, not to be indulged, not to be seeking some sort of permanent happiness there, not to be dependent on them for happiness—I say there is nothing further for a disciple to do."

"How should the nutriment mental volition be seen?" This is the will. "Suppose there's a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals without flame or smoke. And a man would come along wanting to live, not wanting to die, desiring happiness and averse to suffering. Then two strong men would grab him by both arms and drag him towards the charcoal pit. The man's volition would be to get far away. His longing would be to get far away. His wish would be to get far away from that charcoal pit. For what reason? Because he knows: 'If I fall into the charcoal pit, on that account I will meet death and deadly suffering.'"

"It is in such a way that I say the nutriment mental volition should be seen." So in other words, not to get into the fire of wrong will, unwholesome will. "And the three kinds of craving are fully understood: craving for sensual pleasure, craving to become, and craving not to become. And when these three kinds of cravings are fully understood, I say there is nothing further for a noble disciple to do."

"And how should the nutriment consciousness be seen? Supposing they were to arrest a bandit, a criminal, and bring him before the king, saying: 'Sire, this man is a bandit, a criminal. Impose on him whatever punishment you wish.' The king says: 'Go, men, and in the morning strike the man with a hundred spears.' In the morning they strike him with a hundred spears. And then at noon the king asks: 'Men, how's that man?' 'Still alive, sire.' 'Then go and at noon strike him with a hundred spears.' At noon they strike him with a hundred spears. And then in the evening the king asks: 'Men, how's that man?' 'Still alive, sire.' 'Then go and in the evening strike him with a hundred spears.' And in the evening they strike him with a hundred spears."

"What do you think, *bhikkhus*? Would that man, being struck by three hundred spears, experience pain and displeasure on that account?" "Venerable sir, even if struck with one spear, he would experience pain and displeasure on that account, not to speak of three hundred spears."

"It is in such a way, *bhikkhus*, that I say the nutriment of consciousness should be seen. When the nutriment of consciousness is fully understood, body and mind are understood. And when body and mind is fully understood, I say there is nothing further that a noble disciple needs to do."

So it is through consciousness that we become aware of this psychophysical organism. And the image of them is two sheaves of wheat leaning against each other; one is dependent on the other. Without consciousness, as in deep sleep, you're not aware of your body and mind. But as soon as consciousness arises, you're aware of it.

Now, of course, what he's pointing to is that this consciousness is the way into delusion. And it's recognising that. It's recognising that we have to be very careful where we put our attention. Every time you attend to something, it's an act of intention. It is conditioning us.

So let me finish with another little paragraph. This is a slightly different way of looking at it: "If there is lust for nutriment edible food, if there is delight, if there is craving, consciousness becomes established there and comes to grow." So, I mean, that's what we experience, isn't it? The more we feed our greed, the more we want of it, no matter what the greed is of. These days, people just want more. It doesn't matter what it is. It's just more. I mean, that's what we've come to want, just more of anything.

"Wherever consciousness becomes established and comes to grow, there is a descent into name and form, body and mind." Notice that—the descent. I don't quite understand the image there as to why he says descent, but I presume it's a case of...

that it's something which is not to be desired. So remember, *nibbāna* is something beyond all this, right? That's difficult for us to accept.

Where there is a descent into name and form, body and mind, there is a growth of volitional formation. So as soon as we have this psychophysical organism, then we want to do, we want to act, and that's our volition. Where there is a growth of volitional formations, there's the production of future renewed existence, moment after moment, and if you will, life after life. And where there is a production of future renewed existence, there is future birth, aging, and death. Where there is future birth, aging, and death, I say, that is accompanied by sorrow, anguish, and despair.

So he's actually asking us to contemplate our lives from these four nutriment points of view to become aware of what we're actually eating for the body's sake, that we're not getting attached to food, that we're aware of the feelings that arise when we make contact with anything, that we're aware of the process of attention and intention which creates *kamma* for us, and that we're aware of how consciousness is the window or the mirror in which we enter into the world.

So it's very important to recognize where we put our attention. Very good. So I hope my words have been of some assistance there. They've not caused even greater confusion. And it's time to do a bit of meditation, I think.

CHAPTER 168

The Investigation of Eating

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

> *In this Easter evening talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's powerful metaphor about food from the discourse on the Four Nutriments, where parents crossing a desert must eat their son's flesh to survive. This stark image illustrates how we should approach eating with Right Intention—for nourishment rather than indulgence.*
>
> *Bhante guides us through eating meditation, a cornerstone practice for understanding the difference between wholesome enjoyment and unwholesome attachment. He outlines three essential distinctions: between enjoying and indulging, between body and mind, and between desire and action. Through careful investigation of our relationship with food, we learn to recognize the overlay of excitement we project onto simple nourishment.*
>
> *The teaching reveals how indulgence leads to obsession, frustration, grief, anxiety, and boredom—all forms of dukkha. By practicing with something as basic as a cup of tea and biscuit, we develop the insight to see how this pattern of craving and attachment operates throughout all areas of life, from entertainment to relationships. This mindful approach to eating becomes a daily laboratory for understanding the Four Noble Truths and cultivating liberation from suffering.*

Good evening. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, but I wish that it has been happy.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

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

Happy Easter to those of you who are still connected to Christianity.

I thought this evening to make a bit of a meal out of that discourse that we read last night. It's a pun on words, of course. Just to center in on the first metaphor that the Buddha uses there about food, the son's flesh, as it's called. He always teaches, first of all, from a rational, intellectual point of view. Then he makes a great effort to give us a metaphor. So there are literally hundreds of metaphors in the scriptures. And he says that some people think that way. They understand things. They make a better connection. Most of us, of course, would use both.

So we were talking about the nutrients. I just want to read that bit again, and then we'll talk about eating meditation, which those of you who've been here will know is one of my obsessive teachings.

Suppose a couple, so we're back in the desert. Suppose a couple, husband and wife, had taken limited provisions and were travelling through a desert. They have with them their only son, dear and beloved. Then in the middle of the desert, their limited provisions would be used up and exhausted, while the rest of the desert remains to be crossed. The husband and wife would think: our limited provisions have been used up and are exhausted, while the rest of the desert remains to be crossed. Let us kill our only son, dear and beloved, and prepare dried and spiced meat. By eating our son's flesh, we can cross the rest of the desert. Let not all three of us perish. And they do that, of course: they kill and prepare dried and roasted meat.

So cannibalism doesn't particularly appeal to us. But this is a very strong image for telling us that hunger is one of our basic fears. And that when we eat, we ought to eat with the right intention, not for indulgence sake, but we'll come to that.

None of us really have experienced hunger. We've experienced being peckish and then just going for that evening piece of toast. And we might have ended up a day in some peculiar situation where we haven't eaten. And when we get home, we're famished. But actually, we've never really experienced hunger, that annoying feeling. I certainly haven't, where you really do believe that if you don't get some food, you're dying. And you can see some of the gaunt faces in the refugees. And for me, going back to the 60s and 70s, where there were famines, in India especially.

I've mentioned already the myth, the Greek myth of Erysichthon, who upset the goddess Demeter. The Roman name was Ceres, from which we get cereal. She was in charge of all that grows, all the stuff that people eat. And he went and built a banqueting hall over her shrine. So she cursed him with this insatiable hunger. And he ends up eating all the food, everybody, his own family, and finally himself. So this is a myth about what happens when you're actually really hungry. She cursed him with this insatiable hunger.

Now, I did meet a man in Sri Lanka many years ago who told me that he had actually got lost out in the wilderness in the US. And he'd got to this stage of real hunger. And he said, come a point where he caught a bird, a large bird, let's say a pigeon or something. And he actually ripped it apart and ate the raw flesh. So that gives you an idea of how hunger, when it gets right to the point of life or death, becomes utterly overwhelming. The same with thirst, of course.

So I just wanted to take this opportunity to reintroduce some of you, because you might not have worked with me, but remind the rest of you about eating meditation and how we can use it, especially if we're off these two or three days and there's a tendency to have a good meal.

And there are three things when we're eating that we have to try and distinguish in order to liberate ourselves from indulgence. Now, we won't liberate ourselves from indulgence unless we see the consequences. And the problem is that while we're indulging ourselves, it's great. I mean, it's Nibbāna. What's the problem? But it's only afterwards that we begin to realize that there is quite a lot of suffering involved.

And the first one, of course, is just that obsessive nature of indulgence, having to have. We're not, I mean, just a morning cup of tea, try and give that up for a while or coffee and you'll see how obsessive it is. And if you look at any of your habits and you try and stop them, you'll see that there's a real strong desire coming up from that habit, which demands to be satisfied, to be gratified really is the right word: gratification.

And the second problem would be frustration. Frustration always comes when you can't get what you want. So just look at the past week you've been in and see how many times you've been frustrated. Somebody's not behaved the way you wanted them to. A family member, somebody at work, whatever. Some piece of equipment hasn't worked for you. You're frustrated. The shopping didn't arrive at the right time. The bus was late. It goes on and on and on. And what you feel is anger. It's a frustration at not getting what you want. And, of course, once we drop all that, we just begin to establish an equanimity with the way things are. This is the way it is. That's the constant phrase we have to repeat to ourselves. This is the way it is. What's the point of getting upset?

Grief, grief at loss. You know, you've only got to think if somebody actually went off with your mobile phone. That's a heavy grief. That is definitely grief. Our lives are now wrapped up in that little machine. But, of course, grief takes on a much deeper meaning, as we mentioned the other day, when we lose somebody who we're attached to. So grief is always waiting for us when we are possessing something or somebody. At worst, identifying with ourselves.

And then underneath all that, there is this anxiety. There's an anxiety of loss. That's why we have insurance. Some of it's realistic, of course. You want to insure your house. I had a cousin who thought insuring your house was just a trick just to get money out of you. So he never paid insurance for his house. And then there was one very bad storm where his roof caved in. Now, I don't know whether he made up his money, how much that roof cost him, and whether actually over a long period of time, thirty odd years or so, he never paid any insurance. Whether he would have actually saved some money if

he had paid the insurance. But when we buy anything from something like a laptop or something, they always want to give you insurance to make it last three years so you don't worry. See, there's your anxiety, worry at loss, worry at breakage, breaking down. So you can see that the more we have, the more we're in for some level of dissatisfaction, some level of suffering. It's all to do with this attachment, this indulgence.

And the final one is boredom, of course. Boredom is when we are not getting the same excitement that we used to get from what we're indulging in. And that boredom is not a nice place to be. I mean, it's an aversive place. And there's a search for something new. Variety is the spice of life. And that's what we do. We chase things, one pleasure after another, just to keep ourselves occupied, keep ourselves happy. But this happiness isn't true happiness. As we see, it's an excitement based on over-wanting something more than we actually get from any object. And that's when we have to remind ourselves that we don't actually want the object so much as the mental state that it produces.

So the three things that we then have to do in order to undermine all this is to distinguish between enjoying something and indulging in it. It's not as though the Buddha is saying we shouldn't enjoy life, we shouldn't enjoy art, nature, friendship and all that sort of stuff. That's perfectly viable. He himself enjoyed, for instance, going to shrines, just the normal things of life. But that distinction is very difficult because indulgence is so close to enjoyment. I mean, aversion pushes you apart from the object, but indulgence sticks you to it.

The second thing is to begin to distinguish the body from the mind. And that's all to do with beginning to deconstruct our sense of self, our sense of an identity, our sense of being a whole, entire, like an integer, one number.

And the final one, which is just as important, is to distinguish between a desire and an action. So we've looked at that a little bit.

So just to go back on those, to distinguish between desire and indulgence, as I say, is difficult. So the way you overcome the indulgence is by putting a clear intention in your mind. So this food, as the Buddha says with this example of this mother and father who ate their son, there has to be a real purpose for it. That food is something to nourish the body for the purpose of becoming liberated. It has that spiritual purpose to it. If it has any other purpose, then you have to question it as to whether it's wholesome, whether it's actually leading you on the path.

So every time we're with a cup of tea, with that mythical biscuit, with a meal, we have to sit there for a moment and just remind ourselves, okay, this is to nourish the body, full stop, that's all. The fact that I enjoy it has to be received as a gift. You don't have to enjoy food that's nourishing. It can be quite tasteless. Porridge without sugar and all that sort of stuff. So that's the first thing.

And then as you go through the meal, to begin to realize that the excitement that you had at the beginning of the meal is beginning to fade away and there's just this tasting of the food. So there you're beginning to distinguish the overlay of excitement that we have when we have a good meal in front of us, and then very slowly over, say, even as little as ten bites or something, it becomes ordinary. And then that's the chance to really investigate just enjoying, just enjoying.

And to make that clear to ourselves, we separate the body from the mind, the heart-mind, from feeling, from thinking. And you do that by driving your attention, first of all, into the body, into the process of tasting and smelling. And by isolating that physical taste process, you're beginning to realize that this is just the body. It's the mind that is translating it into something beautiful. And when you, as it were, swallow, intending to swallow, and it's dropped, you stop for a moment and you get the afterglow. So that afterglow is the mind. The mind, the heart, the feeling of well-being, the feeling of joy is our habituated reaction to the food we're eating. That's a habit we have. The habit is to become happy and to indulge in the food we're eating. So it's recognizing that these are two different processes.

And then, as I say, as the meal goes on and the excitement dies out, then one can get close to this business of just enjoyment. And you might find that when you're just enjoying something, there's a sense of loss because before you really enjoyed it. See, that's the overlay of excitement. And then you have to remind yourself, well, fine, I can indulge, but then I've got consequences. So it's this constant reminder. And eventually, of course, we find that indulgence is just too much. It's too much sugar, and you just want to taste things as they are without overlaying excitement onto it.

Years ago, when I was teaching at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, there was a young man came and when he came again the next week, he said that he'd been meditating and he could no longer listen to heavy rock. So there you can see how refined this young fellow was becoming.

And then the final thing, of course, is action: the distinction between a desire and an action. And so when you have your cup of tea, and I would suggest you try and do it at least once a day with a cup of tea and a biscuit or a sandwich, it doesn't matter what, just sit with it, get the feel, get the hunger, feel the hunger, know that some of it is natur-

al appetite and some of it is this excitement that we get from indulging, and just stay there with it for a while. And then feel, just feel the force of that desire of wanting to eat. The more hungry you are, of course, the greater that desire will be.

And then at some point, a decision is made. A decision is made. Something, yes, like you're giving permission for the desire to manifest. And that manifests through an act of will. That's your power. The power is to bring something from potential into actual. Now, the will itself is completely neutral. It's just a power. It's the intention which matters. It's the intention which is conditioning us. And it's good to make that distinction and to realize that actually you really can sit with a desire which you don't want until it fades away.

Now, when we sit with a desire which we don't want, no matter how strong it is, and wait for it to fade away completely, you get your little gift. The gift is one of feeling released from it, as if you've been imprisoned or shackled. And with that, there comes a sense of joy. But more than that, we're undermining that very habit that we don't want. And if we keep that going, eventually there comes a point where the habit just doesn't have the force over us, doesn't have that force and we can just see it come and let it pass. And that just comes by constant practice.

If we fail, if we find ourselves chucking ten biscuits down our throats, then it's no point in getting guilty or feeling horrible about that. You just notice that, well, just for that moment there, you gave in, but then you have to make a firm resolution, a resolute resolution that you'll be very quick to see when that desire arises and just to stay with it, suffer it. So you've got to suffer. You've got to stay with the feeling of it until it completely passes away.

And the opposite, of course: if a desire comes up which you see is wholesome, then of course you empower it. Now, just in that very simple way, we can actually change ourselves. We are nothing but a compendium of habits. We're just a collection of habits. And it's a decision to keep some of them, develop some of them, and get rid of the ones we don't want. And that's just that process.

I'm not saying it's easy. The stronger the habit, the more powerful, the more established a habit, the more difficult it is to get the better of it. And eventually, of course, once we're fully awakened, once we're fully liberated from suffering, the traces of that habit might still appear in the heart, the heart-mind, but they just don't have any power over us at all.

So I've tried to put this in a little essay, which I'll post. I'll post it up onto the website there. On the front page, next to videos, because I've gone and posted all the videos up on the website. You'll see that on the front page. But somebody told me that you can't download them from there. It just goes back into YouTube, and you have to pay a fee for it. I'm thinking about how to overcome that. I've just put one on Dropbox because somebody in New Zealand wanted it and just see if she comes back and says that she was able to download it. Very good.

So yes, and the final thing to say is that when we practice this on something so obvious as eating, which we have to do every day. It's not as though you can give up eating. So it's a constant little practice for us, a constant reminder.

When we do that, we begin to realise that actually this cuts across everything in our lives in terms of our enjoyment of art, television, film and all that, our enjoyment of nature, the hobbies we have. Anything you enjoy will have that overlay of wanting something more from it.

And of course, relationship—obsessive relationship, the obsessive part. That often manifests in the way that we try to manipulate the other, demand of the other, try to control the other, feel disappointed in the other, frustrated by the other, and so on and so forth.

So this practice on just having a cup of tea with a biscuit will eventually bring that insight into our lives and begin to change it. Going back to what we said about the Eightfold Path, this is the feedback. This is the feedback from our right understanding through right action. And that reinforces the insight. It makes the insight more and more real for us.

So I think that's enough about food for the moment. I suggest that we now turn to our meditation. I can only trust my words have been of some assistance and they have not caused greater confusion.

CHAPTER 169

Discourse on the Taints (MN 2): Overcome by Seeing

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

In this opening talk on the Sabbāsava Sutta (MN 2), Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the Buddha's teaching on seven methods for overcoming the āsava (taints) - the fundamental expressions of delusion that bind us to suffering. This episode focuses on the first method: abandoning taints through right seeing (vipassanā).

The discourse examines how unwise attention leads to the arising of three primary taints: sensual desire, becoming, and ignorance. Bhante explores six wrong views of self that arise from existential questioning - from eternalist beliefs in a permanent soul to annihilationist materialist views. These speculative views form what the Buddha calls 'a thicket of views' that keeps ordinary persons bound to suffering.

Through wise attention and proper understanding of not-self (anattā), practitioners can abandon the three fetters of identity view, doubt, and adherence to rites and rituals - achieving stream entry, the first stage of Awakening. This teaching offers profound insight into how our fundamental misunderstanding of selfhood perpetuates dukkha and how vipassanā practice can lead to liberation.

Good evening, happy YouTubers. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So, we have been looking at the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, the discourse on right view, and now we want to do the end bit. If you remember, the question that Sāriputta, who is the person teaching here, was asked goes like this: "Might there be another way in which a noble disciple is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma?"

"There might be, friends," says Sāriputta. "When a noble disciple understands the taints, the origin of the taints, the cessation of the taints, and the way leading to the cessation of the taints, in that way he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at the true Dhamma."

Now, fortunately, we have a whole discourse devoted to the taints. This word "taint" translates *āsava*. I think we're closer to the understanding if you think of the word as meaning an oozing, as in sap from a tree, or in this case pus from a boil, because these *āsava*, these taints, are the fundamental expression of our delusion.

The first one is, you won't be surprised, sensual pleasure. The second one is the desire to become, to exist, to continue existing. And the third one is ignorance, but later on, wrong view was attached to it. If we can think of ignorance as delusion, as the way ignorance expresses itself. So we have this triad, this trio of roots. That's something else, the *mūla*. So you've got plenty of categories: three of these, four of those, ten of them, illimitable.

The three roots are those roots that cause all our unwholesome behaviour: *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha* — that's greed, aversion, and delusion. So ignorance has to be translated into some sort of delusive understanding. And as I say, in some recensions, the taints include wrong view.

Okay, so now this is the Buddha: "Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park." So remember, Anāthapiṇḍika was his main lay supporter, bought him this field, covered it with gold, bought it from Prince Jeta.

"There he addressed the bhikkhus. 'Bhikkhus!' 'Venerable sir,' they replied. The Blessed One said, 'Bhikkhus, I shall teach you a discourse on the restraint of the taints. Listen and attend closely to what I have to say.' 'Yes, venerable sir,' the bhikkhus replied." Remember, bhikkhus here is anybody who's listening.

"Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? Wise attention and unwise attention. When one attends unwisely, unarisen taints arise and arisen taints increase. When one attends wisely, unarisen taints do not arise and arisen taints are abandoned."

So it's where we put our attention. Don't forget, every time you attend, there's an intention. So it's empowering. You're conditioning yourself. Every time you pay attention to something, you're conditioning yourself. And what the Buddha is saying is that you've got to have the right attention.

And then he tells us how to get rid of these taints. There are taints that should be abandoned by seeing. There are taints that should be abandoned by restraining. There are taints that should be abandoned by using. There are taints that should be aban-

doned by enduring. There are taints that should be abandoned by avoiding. And there are taints that should be abandoned by removing. And there are taints that should be abandoned by developing.

So that's seven ways in which we can get rid of these taints, this oozing, this pus oozing from our hearts. And they depend on what taint we're actually dealing with.

So the first one — hopefully we'll finish tonight but we might have to go tomorrow — is the taint abandoned by seeing. Now this seeing is *vipassanā*, and with this particular method, what he's dealing with here specifically is what leads a person to the first path and fruit, what we call stream entry, a glimpse of *Nibbāna*.

"So a non-taught ordinary person who has no regard for the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in the Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, does not understand things that are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, he attends to those things unfit for attention and he does not attend to those things fit for attention."

"Now, what are the things unfit for attention that he attends to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen taint of sensual desire arises in him and the arisen taint of sensual desire increases. The unarisen taint of becoming arises in him and the arisen taint of becoming increases. The unarisen taint of ignorance arises in him and the arisen taint of ignorance increases." So these are things that are unfit to attend to. And then he says the opposite for things that are fit to attend to.

So now he goes on to the specific bit that has to do with this seeing, seeing things as they really are, which leads to insight.

So this is how he attends unwisely. In this particular case: "Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future?"

"Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the present thus: Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?"

So these are all existential questions — why am I here? What's the meaning of life? — just put in this way of the self, the me, me.

And then he says when he attends unwisely in this way, six views arise in him. So we have six different ways of defining this self.

The first one is: "The view 'self exists for me' arises in him as true and established." So now this self is the feeling that there's something in me that is eternal. It's an eternalist feeling that there's something in me, this me, this I that I feel myself to be, is eternal.

Next one is: "The view 'no self exists for me' arises in him as true and established." So this, of course, is annihilationism. This is a materialist view of life. Now this self has no reality. I might feel very strongly about the self, might feel myself very strongly, but actually when I die the whole thing disappears completely. And that's the materialist annihilationist view of the self.

The next one is: "I perceive self with self." Now this is the peculiar ability that we have of becoming aware of the body, aware of myself. So there's two there: there's myself and I'm aware of myself. So this is the self-awareness and the body and mind. So that ability of being self-aware, to make the mistake of being — well, what I'm aware of is me. It's another form of eternalism in a way.

"I perceive not-self with self arises in him as true and established." So in this case, the observer, the feeler, what we experience in meditation is the only real, and the body and mind is just experience which arise and pass away, but it's not me. But the observer is me. And the observer will have that sense of eternality about it.

"The view 'I perceive self with not-self' arises in him as true and established." Now, in this case, the person does not believe that the observer is the real, but what is observed: the body, heart, and mind. And this equates really to the scientific materialism, because what's understood is that the body is basic — your cells, chemicals and electrical impulses — and they create the mind and all your subjective experience, and they also create this sense of self.

So all this mind and self are emergent properties coming from the physical base. So the sense of self is not real, but the physicality is real. And of course, that's an annihilationist view because we all know that we die.

So "perceive the self with not-self." To take another example: if you walk into a room and it's full of pieces, mechanical pieces, which you can figure out are the pieces of a car, they're useless. But when you put it all together, the emergent property of a car is that, of course, it can propel itself. That would be an emergent property. It's not within the individual pieces.

So the scientific materialist view is that the body with its cells, with its chemicals, electrical impulses, and all that sort of stuff, create the mind and consciousness. And ultimately, in the human sense, this heightened state of self-awareness.

And the final one is: "It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the results of good and bad actions. But this self of mine — this self that's experiencing all this — is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity."

And that would be somebody who believes that the body, that the mind, or the heart-mind exists after death forever, that they go into this eternal state, and that it's not part of the body. That would be very close to what I understand of Jainism, where the whole idea is to get rid of the body because the body is the expression of bad *kamma*, rotten *kamma*. When you get rid of the body, the soul — which is, I can translate self as soul here — of mind that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the results of good and bad actions. But this soul of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.

So these are the six selves. I don't know whether you want to remember them. But there's something for us to reflect upon about: well, what do we believe ourselves to be? Do we believe that the self, the sense of self — not the body and mind and all that — actually is eternal? Do we believe that nothing of what we are has any more existence after death, annihilationism? So where do you position yourself? Do you think that awareness, self-awareness is the real and the body and mind are not? Or the other way around, that the observer is not real and it's just an epiphenomena, an emergent property from the body and mind? Do you perceive that the observer is the only real, not the body and mind experience? And the last one, and the last of those three: the perceiver, the perceived is not the self, and the observer is not real, except what is experienced. And then the final one, this full-blown idea of a soul, an eternal soul.

Now, the Buddha says: "These speculative views, bhikkhus, are called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

So I think it'd be good if we worked on this, make sure that you've understood it properly. Now, as individuals, we don't have to know all this stuff. We have to really just contemplate: how do we experience ourselves? What do we experience as something real within ourselves? That's the question that we have to ask.

So if at some time you just ponder: what am I? What am I? Not what I have been, that's gone. What I will be is yet to come. But how do I experience myself now? What do I really believe myself to be? Where do I stand on that continuum, on that spectrum? Am I an eternalist or a full-blown annihilationist? Or do I sort of pass along that line?

Now, the Buddha says that we're none of it at all. All that stuff, all those beliefs are completely outrageous. They're completely deluded and they're just leading to more suffering. So it's a case of really being able to define where we think we are, where we believe ourselves to be. And in our meditation, just to hang on in there, just leave the question mark open. Leave the question mark on, because the Buddha is clear that there is something in us which simply doesn't belong to this psycho-physical organism. There's lots of quotes — I won't go into it this evening — where he states that.

And of course, that's the whole teaching of *anattā*. He's not saying that there isn't a self, he's just saying whatever we think is a self or a soul or a person doesn't have any real basis. It is just as impermanent as anything we know, as anything we can experience. And because of that mistake we cause ourselves suffering.

In his words — I love this sort of stuff — "When he attends wisely in this way..." That's right: "Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught person..." Well, let's go back a little bit. "This speculative view, bhikkhus, is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. And fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, and grief, and despair. He is not free from suffering, I say."

And then right at the end, he points to this ability of this sort of contemplation and realisation in our meditation to actually enter the first path and fruit: "When he attends wisely in this way, the three fetters are abandoned in him." This is another way of talking about what is actually keeping us in this round of rebirths: personality view — which means actually it's much better to translate that as identity view — identity view, doubt in the Buddha's teaching, and adherence to rules and observances whereby we think rules and observances are actually going to liberate us.

These are called the taints and they should be abandoned by seeing.

Very good. I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion. And I think now we can begin our sitting.

CHAPTER 170

Not-self Revisited: The Story of Sati (MN 38)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

Bhante Bodhidhamma continues his exploration of not-self (anattā) through the powerful story of Bhikkhu Sati from the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta (MN 38). This discourse addresses one of the most subtle misunderstandings about consciousness and identity in Buddhist teaching.

The talk examines different types of identity we hold - social, professional, and most importantly, existential identity: what we think we are in the face of death. Bhante explains how Sati mistakenly believed that consciousness (viññāṇa) transmigrates from life to life, confusing the dependently arisen nature of consciousness with an eternal self. The Buddha's firm correction emphasizes that consciousness arises only through the meeting of sense base, object, and contact - it has no independent existence.

Using the five khandhas framework, Bhante clarifies how we mistakenly identify with body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness itself. He explores the subtle delusion of confusing our intuitive awareness with the 'screen' of consciousness, comparing it to being absorbed in a film. This teaching offers crucial insights for understanding what the Buddha meant by 'self' and why recognizing not-self is essential for liberation from suffering.

Greetings. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

I wanted to just carry on with this not-self business, just to make it even clearer for those people who feel baffled by it. I have had some questions sent me. I hope the questioners will be patient enough to wait a couple of days, because tomorrow I want to actually go through the core discourse on not-self, which is the second one traditionally that he gave to his five companions.

So it's a case of recognising what the Buddha means when he talks about self. It's translating the word *atta* in Pali or the language of that time. And it's still there, of course, *atta* in Hinduism, the *atta* is your eternal soul, whatever.

So now is to do if we forget the word self for a minute and just talk about identity, identity. What do you identify with? Now, we have all sorts of identities. I'm a father, a son, husband, wife, brother, daughter, workmate, etc., etc. I also have social relationships, which I identify with. My job, I am a worker, I'm an office worker, etc., etc. But what we're talking about is your existential identity. What are you in the face of death? That's where the answer, that's what we're trying to discover or find out.

And there are two major opposite opinions. One is that I exist, meaning me, this that I think I am, exists after death in some way, and me, what I think I am, completely annihilates at death so there's your two opposites. Now in between that you might find people who say I am the body and also have some idea of afterlife.

I was with a friend down in Cornwall, he's died unfortunately. I used to go down there and spend some time with him and he was living with his mother and father, so we're talking about 10 years ago. We were having a discussion, we were sat on the couch, and his mother and father sat on these separate chairs, and of course the TV was on, and we were having a discussion about something. And his father was seemingly listening to what was on the television. Anyway, at some point in our supposedly private, quiet discussion, I said to him, well, we're not the body. And his father suddenly burst into this declaration, yes, we are! And it was such a loud snap that silence and embarrassment descended upon the four of us for a little while before we continued our discussion. So ironically, of course, he died that very year. I don't know what his last thoughts were.

So there are some people who believe in some way that they are the body. They are definitely the body. The most subtle one of course is that no I'm not the body that disappears in death I am my heart mind the old word for that is so as I work for it anima would be the Latin psyche would be the no psycho psychology and all that psyche would be the Greek for it so you have body heart and heart-mind, and then usually have spirit. And that's what most people think. Well, I'm not the body, I'm not the heart-mind with its emotions and thoughts. I am the one who knows. I am consciousness. So that's your more subtle position of those who think about afterlife.

Now the Buddha says, we're not any of that. See, that's the point. And to put it in his categories, he would talk about the five *khandhas*. So there's the body, that's the *rupa*. And the *nāma*, the mind, includes all your feelings, both physical, mental, pleasant, unpleasant, etc. All your perceptions, your thoughts, your images in the mind, which produces your imagination and thinking. And then you have this section of *sankāra*, which is translated as volitional formations, because this is where we create things, create

with the will, volition. But I most prefer, just a very simple word, our habits. It's just the way we perform. And that's what we are, just a compendium of habits, just a group of habits.

And consciousness. Now consciousness, *viññana*, is variously used, so it's quite difficult to find out what this consciousness is when it comes to the *khandha* itself, the actual five heaps or aggregates that we're made of. But the one thing that points to what it is, is the point of contact. Now the point of contact, you must have an object which is coming into the mind. So you're looking at something like a tree. And there must be a sense base that is bringing the information in, which is the eye. And there's consciousness, which of course makes it bright and you become aware of it.

So consciousness, at the point of contact, is just a screen upon which the object and the sense base work to create something on a screen. That's all it is, a screen, something that allows something to appear.

The problem is that this consciousness is arising and passing away with every bit of information that comes in. And you could say bits, just like we say in computers, bits and megabytes and all that, these are bytes. These are just little, tiny little bytes that come in and the mind works on it and produces an image which then comes on the screen.

Now, the Buddha says we're not any of that. The Buddha says, well, not any of that. He says there is something within all that which is confused with it. And that's where the delusion lies. And at the most subtle point of delusion, it is the confusion of this awareness, this Buddha within, this intuitive awareness with that screen.

So that would be the same as, for instance, when we absorb into a film. So if you're in a cinema or watching it on a screen, you absorb into the film. And for a while you live in that imaginative world. And during that time, there's not you or the world or anything. You're completely absorbed. So generally speaking, we're absorbed in the world that is appearing on this screen.

So now, having said all that, if you think about these words that are used here, which sound very confusing. So things like the self exists for me. No self exists for me. So that means he doesn't identify with anything or put it this way. Nothing is it. Remember, self here means identity, permanent identity. So there's no permanent identity existing.

I perceive self with self. So I perceive that I am self-awareness and the body and mind. The two things that they perceive self, so they think both sides are self. And I perceive not self with the self is that the observer perceives is the only real, and the body and mind are what it experiences So the not-self here is the body and mind, the experience that we're having And the true self, the true identity, is with the observer

And then you have, I perceive self with not-self. So here, it's the perceived that is, the perceiver is not the self, but what is actually perceived. So that's this business of the consciousness being an emergent property.

And then finally, there's a full-blown sense of self. It is the self of mind that speaks and feels and experiences here and there, the result of good and bad actions. And this self of mine, this identity I have is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it endures as long as eternity. So that's obviously the self as agent, the feeler, everything you experience now, that's what you are, and that will last forever.

All that the Buddha said, and I love to repeat these things to myself, that is, this speculative view is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, the fetter of views. So fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. He is not freed from suffering, I say.

So I don't know whether that helps to clarify or makes things even more complicated. But I would love now to read the story of Sati. So this is the opening paragraphs of the Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving. That's what it's about. The *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta*, and it's number 38 in the Majjhima Nikāya.

So this is the story of Sati. Thus have I heard, on one occasion, the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthi in Jeta's Grove. So remember, that's probably his most favorite monastery built by Anāthapiṇḍika, the businessman.

Now, on that occasion, a pernicious view had arisen in a bhikkhu called Sati, the son of a fisherman. Thus, as I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another. So he's saying that this consciousness is the consciousness, remember, not the body-mind. It's the consciousness that is the same from birth to birth. It just runs through all rebirths.

Now, several bhikkhus, having heard about this, went to the Bhikkhu Sati and asked him, "Friend, is it true that such a pernicious view has arisen?" "Exactly so, friends." That's funny. He seems to agree that it is a pernicious view. "As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is the same consciousness that runs and wanders through the rounds of rebirth and not another."

Then those bhikkhus, desiring to detach him from this pernicious view, pressed and questioned and cross-examined him. "Friend Sati, do not say so. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One. It is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus. But in many discourses, the Blessed One states consciousness to be dependently arisen since without condition there is no origination of consciousness."

And although pressed and questioned and cross-examined by those bhikkhus in this way, the Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, still obstinately adhered to that pernicious view and continued to insist upon it.

Since the bhikkhus were unable to detach him from this pernicious view, they went to the Blessed One and after paying homage to him, they sat to one side and told him what had occurred, adding, "Venerable Sir, since we could not detach the Bhikkhu Sati, the son of a fisherman, from this pernicious view, we have reported this matter to the Blessed One."

Then the Blessed One addressed a certain bhikkhu thus, "Come bhikkhu, tell the Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, in my name, that the teacher calls him." "Yes, Venerable Sir," he replied. And he went to Bhikkhu Sati and told him, "Friend Sati, the teacher calls you." "Yes, friend," he replied, and he went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, sat down at one side.

And the Blessed One then asked him, "Sati, is it true that the following pernicious view has arisen in you? As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is the same consciousness that runs and wanders through the rounds of rebirth and not another." "Exactly so, Venerable Sir, as I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is the same consciousness that runs and wanders through the rounds of rebirth and not another."

"What is that consciousness, Sati?" "Venerable Sir, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and now the result of good and bad actions."

"Misguided man! To whom have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma in that way? Misguided man, in many discourses have I stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without condition there is no origination of consciousness. But you, misguided man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured yourself and stored up much demerit, for this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time."

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus, "Bhikkhus, what do you think? Has this Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, kindled even a spark of wisdom in this Dhamma, in this discipline?" "How could he, Venerable Sir? No, Venerable Sir."

And this was said, Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, sat silent, dismayed, with shoulders drooping and head down, glum and without response.

Then knowing this, the Blessed One said, "Misguided man, you will be recognised by your own pernicious view. I shall question the bhikkhus on this matter."

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus, "Bhikkhus, do you understand the Dhamma taught by me that this bhikkhu, the son of a fisherman, does when he misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up such demerit?" "No, Venerable Sir, for in many discourses the Blessed One has stated consciousness to be dependently arisen since without condition there is no origination or arising of consciousness."

"Good bhikkhus, it is good that you understand the Dhamma taught by me thus, for in many discourses I have stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without condition there is no origination or arising of consciousness. But this Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit, for this will lead to his harm and suffering for a long time."

Now, you have to have a certain sympathy for poor old Sati. I mean, he sat there, silent, sad, dismayed, shoulders drooping, head down, glum and without response. Well, you'd want to hug him, wouldn't you? Poor old Sati.

And it keeps going on about him being a son of a fisherman, but they all have that sort of name behind them. I put a little twist on it to suggest a bit of class prejudice, son of a fisherman. And that's, of course, how these stories grow. So the next one, it would be, if I were retelling this tale elsewhere, I'd say, but the son of a fisherman, something like that.

So you have to be careful with these stories that obviously played upon over generations, really. 500 years they were handed down from person to person. So they obviously changed. But I think we can take the root thing that there was a monk called Sati,

who was the son of a fisherman, who got it wrong and made this mistake of thinking that the Buddha was talking about consciousness when he said that there was something eternal in us, something that doesn't die, etc.

And when you read the discourses like that, I have the patience to just read them through, then of course the core of the teaching keeps coming back at you. And the core of the teaching is obviously consciousness is dependently arisen since without condition, there is no arising or origination of consciousness. So that's telling us.

Now, unfortunately, then the Buddha goes on about consciousness and dependent origination and shows us how we can come to an end of craving. But he hasn't let go of Sati because right at the end of the discourse, the conclusion, "Bhikkhus, remember this deliverance through the destruction of craving," so he's been talking about how to destroy craving as taught in brief by me. "But this Bhikkhu Sati, son of a fisherman, is caught up in a vast net of craving and a trammel of craving."

Poor, poor Sati. He must have sat through all this. "That is what the Blessed One said, and the bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words."

So I think that gets the message home. Tomorrow what I mean to do is actually look at the core discourse or the main discourse on not-self, which is traditionally the second one that he gave to the five companions when they left, remember, and returned when he was fully awakened. So I'll be doing that.

CHAPTER 171

The Discourse on Not-Self: Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

> *In this illuminating talk from the 2020 coronavirus lockdown series, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides listeners through the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59), traditionally considered the Buddha's second discourse to his five former companions. The teaching addresses a common source of confusion for practitioners: the Buddha doesn't deny the existence of a self, but rather points to its unreality as a fixed, controlling entity. Anattā serves as a teaching tool—a way of investigating experience through the lens of 'this is not mine, this is not me, this is not myself.'*
>
> *Bhante systematically examines each of the five khandhas—rūpa (body/form), vedanā (feeling), saññā (perception), saṅkhāra (volitional formations or habits), and viññāṇa (consciousness)—demonstrating how none of these can be the self because none are under our ultimate control. The body ages and falls ill regardless of our wishes; emotions arise unbidden; perceptions are shaped by culture and experience; even consciousness flashes moment to moment without our direction. This lack of control, combined with the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of all phenomena, reveals the futility of identifying with any aggregate.*
>
> *The talk offers practical insight for meditators who take up the position of 'the observer' and notice how everything—bodily sensations, moods, thoughts—arises as objects beyond direct control. Bhante emphasizes that understanding anattā is fundamentally about investigating identity: when we see that the center of control is elsewhere, clinging naturally releases. This disillusionment (nibbidā) leads to the fading of desire and ultimately to liberation. The teaching points toward nibbāna as that which lies beyond the five aggregates—a theme Bhante notes will be explored in future talks.*

Good evening. I hope you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

I am going to labour the point tonight and carry on with this teaching of not-self, because I remember my own personal confusion when I came across it for the first time. It seemed to be saying that there was a not-self, which felt very confusing—like a denial of a self. But the Buddha doesn't deny that there's a self; he just says it's unreal. And the not-self is a teaching tool. It's a way of saying, well, this is not me, it's not mine, and it's not myself.

The discourse I want to look at tonight is traditionally the second one the Buddha gave to his five friends—those who had been his companions during that time when he was self-mortifying, mainly through not eating. If you remember, he approaches them and of course they don't respect him anymore; he's gone soft. But as he does approach, they see that something's changed. And when he begins to speak, he keeps asking them, "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?" Very slowly they open up to his teaching, and one of them actually becomes what we call a stream-enterer—just the first step of four steps that take us to liberation.

During the days that followed, they would go off for alms round. Sometimes three of them went and came back while the others remained; sometimes it was two of them. But this teaching has been formalized into what's known as the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, the discourse on not-self. In a sense, it encapsulates this whole teaching. So we'll just go through it and you'll see how it works.

Again, he's at Benares in that deer park where he's met his five mendicants, and he's talking to them. He says, "Rūpa is not self."

Now this word *rūpa* is often translated as form, but obviously for us as human beings, it's basically the body. Everything has form, everything has some sort of spatial reality—a cupboard, a table. But as far as we're concerned as human beings, *rūpa* refers to this body.

So he asks: is this body self? This body is not self, he says to them. The identity with the body is an illusion, a delusion.

And he explains: if this body were you, you'd be able to have control over it. You'd be able to say, "Do not fall sick. Do not suffer from any affliction." You'd be able to tell it to grow a bit more—I would anyway—and to have more hair on the head. It doesn't matter to me at this present time, but there was a time when I could have done with more hair on my head. Unfortunately, the center of control is elsewhere.

This is the important point. Where is the center of control? Where is the power? Who controls the body to stop it aging, to stop it dying, to stop it falling ill? Of course, we can move our arms around and shake our heads and all that sort of thing, but it's

very superficial. It's a bit like driving a car. When you're in a car driving, you feel you're in control, but actually the car's propelling itself. It's got all sorts of things going on, and anything can go wrong at any time. When the car breaks down or a tire bursts, you realize you're not in control of the car. The control is quite superficial.

It's the same with the body. And when you realize that, you begin to understand what the Buddha means: this body is not mine. You use it, but you don't actually own it. That's the distinction. Like with all objects, the ownership of an object is a legal fiction. We all agree to it. Like, for instance, this is my laptop.

But that's just an agreement that we have between us as human beings. The fact is I don't actually own it. And of course, this ownership gets very big because then people own their houses, states own their country. And that causes all sorts of problems, this idea of possessing something.

And then: the body is not me. See, there's a disjunction. There's some sort of separation between me and the body because the body won't do what I tell it to do. And I am not the body. So this sense of self that I have is not the body.

So again, we're going always back to identity. This was the big breakthrough of the Buddha, this problem of identity. If identity manifested as delusive action, it caused dukkha. That's why the Four Noble Truths are phrased in what we can actually experience—unsatisfactoriness, suffering. But the root cause is this problem of identity.

So then he goes on to talk about feeling. Now, feelings are both physical and emotional, heart feelings. If you hurt your body, you bump your knee or something, or you bite your tongue, then at that moment you're not in charge of the body. The body actually goes into a spasm of pain. And you can't say, "Well, I don't want this pain." The pain remains. If you've got a headache, you have a headache. And you realize that when it comes to feelings in the body, again, very little control. You can take tablets these days, of course, but that's just covering over the pain.

When it comes to emotions, if you feel sad, you feel sad. You can distract yourself. You can listen to some music or jump up and down and dance or whatever. But you can't get rid of the sadness that way. It's just buried underneath this attempt to escape it. And so you realize that we have very little power over our emotions. They arise and pass away.

This, of course, becomes obvious when you're sitting. You might sit with every intention to get deeply concentrated, have these wonderful insights, and all you have is these emotions coming up. One minute there's all sorts of anxiety, there's all sorts of excitement, and then you're depressed, and then you're angry. It's just a waterfall of uncontrolled emotions, uncontrollable emotions.

And then we have perception. Perception belongs to the mind, that part which thinks. It thinks not only in an abstract sense of thoughts and words, but also in imagery, in imagination. So if I said the word "cat," you not only understand what that means intellectually—it's got four legs and a little tail and all that—but also you have an image in your mind of what a cat is. So you know it's not a dog. We can normally tell clearly that this is a cat, it is not a dog.

And these perceptions are not controlled by us. They arise because we see things, we hear things, we touch things, we smell things, we taste things, and then we make a photocopy of it. The more we experience something that we see every day—a car, for instance—it builds up a concept about it, an image which runs with the concept, a concrete concept. So you know that this is a car, it's not a truck, it's not a train, it's not a plane. And then of course it gets very subtle, very big—like freedom, democracy.

But all these things are given to us. They develop through our experience, through our cultures, and so on. And you can't get rid of it. You can't get rid of your sense of what your personal freedom means to you. You can change it, but you can't get rid of it. It's just there within you.

It's the next part, the sankhāras, where we have some sort of choice, where we do have some sort of power. And all the time he's saying, well, these feelings, these perceptions, this body—it's not right to say this is mine. You don't possess it. It changes of its own power. I was going to say free will, but there's no free will. It changes because of its own power. The eyes have a power to see.

There's a process of vision which comes when the retina receives an object, and you have this mentation going on, the whole process happening within the mind, within the brain-mind. The brain would be the sensitive base for the mind.

Now, when it comes to sankhara, which are the volitional conditionings, our habits—I much prefer just the word habits—you can't get rid of a habit. You can change it. You can draw it down so that it doesn't have any effect on you. But even in an arahat, old habits will arise, even those that belong to delusiveness. They'll arise, but they have no power. They're called vasana—leftovers, traces of past habits. The Buddha is said to have got rid of all of those, but that again is just hagiography, turning the Buddha into

some magical being, some hyper-human being, a beyond-human being. But as a human being, he would have had habits. That's what a human being is: the body and a process of habituation.

And again, when you see these habits come, when you find yourself in or acting out of a habit, you can become an observer of it. You can be aware of it and realize, well, I don't have to possess this. If I have an attitude of possessing it, it's going to be difficult for me to change it. If I identify with it—"If I did that, it wouldn't be me"—I remember an old aunt saying that. If she behaved like that, it wouldn't be her. So a very stuck idea of who I am. And that just produces staleness. It produces stagnancy. Whereas we want to be able to flow, to flow with events and to change with events. And that's how our lives grow, hopefully towards what is beneficial.

By the way, I did see a little cartoon about going with the flow. It just said, "Only dead fish go with the flow." I don't think that's the meaning here.

Then finally we have consciousness. Consciousness is the fifth of the khandhas. So remember the khandhas—we've just been through them: the body, feelings, perceptions, habits, and consciousness. Consciousness only arises when it is impinged upon, when something touches it. It's like a screen, just like this screen that I'm looking at, like a monitor. There has to be an object. There has to be an object that impinges upon a sense base. Light must impinge upon the eye. A sound must impinge upon the ear. Something must come out of, for want of a better word, the subconscious—some sort of image, some sort of emotion—which arises and then touches upon this screen of consciousness.

Now, that screen of consciousness is not always the same because it's being touched constantly by different impulses, by different stimuli. And you can't stop being conscious. You can put yourself asleep—obviously, when we go to sleep, we lose consciousness. You can hit yourself on the head and lose consciousness. But while we're awake, you cannot be not conscious. Your consciousness just arises because it's constantly being awoken by stimulus.

So again, we don't have that control over consciousness. Whenever I put my eye on something, I become aware of it. It becomes part of my consciousness. And now, if the center of control is elsewhere, then it can't be me. That's one of the definitions of "I," of "me." I know I'm not you because I can't control you. I know I'm not something outside me because I have limited control. I can move objects, I can control them, but they're still objects, they're still outside me, so I know it's not me.

Now, when you're meditating, you're taking a position within yourself of identifying with the observer, the feeler. And once you're in that position, everything's an object. And it's not under your control. The body offers feelings, sensations. The heart offers its moods and emotions, and the mind its thoughts and images, whether you want it to or not. It isn't under your direct control when you're in the position of the observer, the feeler, the experiencer—the one who knows in vipassana.

Somebody has actually translated sankhara as "choices." There's a very good website called Sutta Central—that's just one word, Sutta Central. And there's another one, Ancient Buddhist Texts, by Ananda Jyoti, who's an English monk. He lives in Thailand, really. I've known him for a very long time.

He also has a little website I just pointed out, Dharma Documentaries—they're really quite good. I'll post this up at some point.

So now, having explored the idea of control, the Buddha then goes on to impermanence—ever-changing.

"What do you think, mendicants? Is form permanent or impermanent? Is the body permanent or impermanent?"

And the answer comes: "It is impermanent, Venerable Sir."

"And if it is impermanent, is that suffering or happiness?"

Now, those two words—dukkha and sukha—you can translate as suffering or happiness, but I think it makes more sense to ask: Is that satisfying? Is it unsatisfying? Because one of the translations of dukkha is unsatisfactoriness. And of course they say, "No, sir, it is unsatisfactory."

"And if it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded as 'this is mine, I am this, this is myself'?"

Well, the answer of course is no.

So there are your basic questions. Is it permanent or impermanent? All these things are impermanent. And if it's impermanent, is that satisfying for you? I mean, if you arrive at a beautiful state of mind and then it disappears, that's not very satisfactory. You want to try and maintain it, you want to try and develop it.

And then he goes through the rest of it. Feelings—are they permanent or impermanent? Now, this impermanence is not simply things changing all the time. They are completely new moments. Every consciousness is arising and passing away. At that funda-

mental level, the impermanence is immediate. Even now, consciousnesses are arising and passing away in me and in you at a speed such that we're not aware of it, so it gives some idea of continuity. But in Buddhist psychology, these consciousnesses are flashing, moment after moment.

Then of course with perception—perceptions arise and pass away just as quickly. And is that desirable? Is that undesirable? Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't.

Then we have what this particular translation by Sujato Bhikkhu calls "choices." But habits—I much prefer the word habits. Are they permanent or impermanent? They're constantly changing, either getting worse or getting better.

Consciousness is the very seat of impermanence because that's, as I say, flashing and rising and passing away.

So none of this can be satisfactory to a sense of self, because the sense of self wants to be in control. The identity, *me*—I want to be in control, and I find myself not so.

Then he goes on to say: "You should truly see any kind of form—past, future, present, internal, external, coarse or fine, inferior or superior, far or near—all form, the whole material world, as empty." Now, that's the word *anattā*. And the other word he uses in other scriptures is *suñña*, which means empty—it doesn't have any substance. This, of course, was taken into a more metaphysical understanding by the Mahayana, that everything is empty. But in the Theravada discourses, the Buddha is very much centered on the person, on *me*—me and you—trying to really imprint upon us this idea that nothing is permanent and nothing has any substance.

So this is what happens. When you begin to investigate this, then this word *nibbidā* arises—it's translated variously, but the one I particularly like is "disillusioned." Disillusionment grows, and because of that disillusionment, your desire fades away—*virāga*.

And then finally, with desire fading away—when all wrong desire fades away—then of course you are left with the experience of nibbāna, not-self, which is that experience of something beyond the five aggregates. We'll come to that at another time.

And then finally, when a person is fully liberated, there's this lovely way of talking about it: "Rebirth is ended"—this constant production of a self, of a false self, is ended. "The spiritual journey has been completed. What had to be done has been done." That's a lovely feeling about it—what had to be done has been done. And there's no return to this constant becoming of a false self, of a false being.

And so satisfied, the group of five mendicants were happy. And while the discourse was being spoken, the minds of the group of five were freed from defilements by non-grasping, by losing that sense of desire. In other words, they all became fully liberated. So let's hope that bit is true.

I think that virtually concludes my effort to try and get across this teaching about not-self, which some of you may have found quite confusing. So remember, it's all about identity. It's about *me*. Who am I? That's a question you can always ask. Who am I—or what am I? That would be Korean Zen: *What* am I?

Tomorrow I'll talk more about the actual process of meditation. And I have some questions that have come in, which I'll tackle in a couple of days' time.

CHAPTER 172

Investigating Not-self: The Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

> *In this practical teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma moves beyond the intellectual understanding of anattā (not-self) to present three specific meditation techniques for direct investigation. Drawing on the Buddha's second discourse on not-self and the Satipaṭṭhāna framework, he explains how to deconstruct experiences like physical pain and emotions into their basic sensational components, revealing their constructed nature.*
>
> *The first technique involves deconstructing phenomena by examining what pain or emotions are actually made of - heat, pressure, tightness - rather than accepting them as solid realities. The second explores our lack of control over arising experiences, undermining the sense of ownership. The third technique objectifies all experiences, pulling back into the observer position where everything manifests as 'not me, not mine, not a self.'*
>
> *Using the developmental psychology of infant perception and the myth of Narcissus as teaching metaphors, Bhante illustrates how we construct our sense of self and world, and how vipassanā practice reverses this process. He emphasizes that this intuitive awareness naturally knows how to investigate when we step back from trying to control the process. This talk offers practical guidance for intermediate practitioners ready to apply not-self contemplation directly in their sitting meditation.*

Good evening.

I hope you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, but I hope it has been a happy day.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

These past few days we've been looking at *anattā* as an intellectual exercise really, just trying to understand it, trying to understand the way the Buddha expresses it in the scriptures. Hopefully that's become more clear—become more clear to me trying to teach it, frankly. But now we have to get down to the practice. So how do we actually investigate this in terms of our *vipassanā* practice?

Many of you who've worked with me will have heard me speak about it and explain it. So for you, it's a bit of a revision, you might say. But for those who haven't, it might offer you a technique, a way of investigating not-self.

There are three things. First of all, deconstruction—to deconstruct what we experience. The second one is control, seeing what control we have, what control we don't have. Remember that was one of the—in that second discourse on not-self, he starts off by saying, if this body were me, I'd be able to say, don't fall ill, et cetera, et cetera. And the third one is objectification—to turn everything into an object. If it's an object, it can't be me.

When we talk about deconstruction, we can take a very simple object. Everybody suffers from pain in the knee, usually, unless you're a yoga person. It took me years to be able to sit without any pain in my knees. So the pain comes. It draws your attention. And the first thing is your reaction, which is not to want the pain, the desire to move. So you have to wait for that to die away. Just recognise it. Desiring, desiring. Feel it. Feel the desire to move. It's all about feeling.

And then when that's passed and you find yourself equanimous, that's the time to start using the word pain. So we're using the word pain or discomfort, whatever. And we're not trying to get rid of pain or defeat pain—that's a no-no. And if the pain gets too much, well, you move. Make the intention to move and off you go. But let's say that the pain is bearable.

So you've got this pain, pain. And then what you have to do is deconstruct it, by which we mean you go into the pain. You try and see what it's actually made of. And when you get in there, you might find heat. You might find tightness. You might find pressure. You might find little bits of sparkly sensations. All sorts of little things might happen. And your noting word might change. So you might be saying tight, heat, et cetera. And make that very clear to yourself by staying there and feeling it. It's not an intellectual process. You don't want to think about it. It's a direct experience of these sensations, which are the information coming to us, and then the mind does something with it.

Now, at the second level of perception, that's when the word pain comes up. And that's when you realise that pain is a mental construct. It doesn't actually exist. What exists are these sensations. Now, it's not as though you have to forget what pain is. You need to know when to go to the doctor. But there's that clarity now. That pain is basically a concept that we have about certain groups of sensations that arise from the body itself. So that's your sense base. Remember, the retina is for the eye. Sensations in the body are your felt, your sensation base.

So by deconstructing something, you're taking away its substance. And by doing that, you're realising there's actually not much there. And as you go into it, that detail, the quality of impermanence becomes much more obvious. So whatever is impermanent can't be substantial. It can't be a self. It can't be anything because as soon as it arises, it's virtually disappeared.

So by moving between those two perceptions, the perception of sensations, basic sensations coming in—heat, pressure, et cetera—and the concept of pain, we're also beginning to see how the mind builds up the world that we are living in. So remember, we're encased in this little bubble of consciousness. This is our world. And whenever in the scriptures the Buddha says, the end of the world, he doesn't mean the end of the cosmos. He means the end of the world that we constantly are creating.

So that's one way in which we can take away substance from things. And you can do the same with an emotion. So if you're isolating now and you're stuck in a room, et cetera, then say sometime in the evening you might feel lonely, might feel sad, et cetera. So if that negative state comes up, you don't think about it. You don't start indulging this business. If I'm unlovable, nobody loves me, everybody hates me. I've got no friends. But you go into the field, the field of loneliness. And as you take it apart, as you begin to look at it, just as sensation, it begins to lose that reality that we give it when we turn it into an emotion.

And it's at that point that we flip into this, I am lonely. So there's the identity. When it comes to the pain is I have a bad knee, there's your possession. So we're breaking up that mental process and recognising that the I is in a sense the last step in the process. The sense of identity is the last thing that happens in that process of perception.

The one example I use, which I know some of you know, is about ice cream. As soon as you see ice cream, then there's the memory of it. And there's that sense of like, so that's the *vedanā*, like it. So seeing it, it has to go through that process of recognising it as ice cream. And then there's the liking of it. Then there's the want of it. And then there's the I want. And as soon as the I comes in, it's very difficult to stop the empowerment. And that's the getting. So even though I say, I like, want, get ice cream, actually, psychologically, in Buddhist understanding, it's like, want, I, get, ice cream. That's the process. And it's breaking that up that you realise that this identity is necessary. It's just something we put into that process.

You can always do this. You can start your meditation with this. If you find the mind's wandering, you can raise the interest and go through that little exercise.

Now, the second thing is this business of powerlessness. We haven't got entire control of the body. So obviously, pain in the knee is a case in point. You recognise that the pain has arisen, whether you want it to or not. It's not under your control. The control centre is elsewhere. It's in the body somewhere. It's in the brain, whatever you wish. And it's that disconnection with something that's happening that is disconnecting the I. So it's not all mine. It's not my pain. It's just the pain. And when you have something like loneliness or happiness, then it's not me who are happy. There is an emotion of happiness.

Now, in your noting, you can make that plain to yourself. There is pain. There is happiness. There is sadness. And just by objectifying it like that, you're undermining that sense of possession and identity. And when you step back into that position of the observer, the feeler, you can ask yourself, can the perceiver be the perceived?

Now that takes us on to the third point which is the objectivisation of our experience.

The two examples I use is first of all, when we were babies—we were all babies. And the second one is the myth of Narcissus.

Seemingly, when we're born and presumably in the later stages in the womb, for the first four months of our birth, everything we experience is just a shower. It's just a continual bombardment of sensations out of which we can make no sense. So there's light coming in, there's sounds coming in, there's sensations in the body, there's smells, there's tastes. And it's all one. It's not differentiated at all. That's what seems to happen. But of one thing, we're very sure whether something is pleasant or unpleasant. And when we are hungry, we definitely tell our mothers we're hungry. That undifferentiated catastrophe, you can say, of sensation for this poor little baby. No wonder it sleeps for 16, 18 hours a day or something.

Out of that, there looms, you might say, the first object. This is what psychologists tell you. And that object is usually your carer, your mother, usually. And very slowly over time, this differentiation occurs, helps to push the outer world outwards. And so the baby becomes to recognise that there's an outer world, although it might not be so much aware of the inner world, but it's definitely objectifying the outer world. And then there's also the attachment to the carer, to your mother. And so it seems that this business of detaching, pulling out in this too close a relationship with our parent begins to break apart. And there's all this terrible twos and all that. But by the age of three, we seem to be very clear. I'm me and everything else is not me. And that's taken three years. That's taken three years to push the outer world out into an object, into something that exists outside me, as different from me.

Now, if you think about it, that's all that's happening in our *vipassanā*. We are taking a position within ourselves and pushing the inner world outwardly to observe it. And in so doing, we're reestablishing our identities. So sometimes we identify with the body, especially if it's a sharp pain like biting your tongue or when you're hungry or whatever. It's easier for us to identify with our emotions. I am sad. And then you pull yourself out of that identity. It's even easier to get lost in thought. You don't say I am thinking. You are thinking. You are the thinker. And you pull yourself out of that, out of the imaginative thinking, and you find yourself in this very strange position of being the inner observer, the inner feeler, the one who knows, the experiencer.

And when we've really got that position, everything is manifesting in front of us. And that's a point where we can also recognise that all this stuff is arising whether we want it to or not. And that again points to this business of control. And something you can do when you're in that position of the observer is reflect what's it like being just the observer. Because in the observer, there's no emotions, there's no thoughts, and there's no sensations. Keep working on that, because that identity is a fraction of the experience of *Nibbāna*. We'll come to that another time.

So we're into this objectivisation and I want to give you another image that you can work with and that's this myth of Narcissus. Now, remember, Narcissus looks into the pool, this very beautiful young man, and he falls in love with himself, with the image. And he goes to embrace himself and falls in and drowns. Now, in mythology, water is creation. Normally, it's often used for an image for creation. And Narcissus is sitting on the bank. And he looks onto the surface of the water, into the water, and he catches his own image.

Now, that's exactly what's happening with this *satipaṭṭhāna*, with this intuitive awareness, with the Buddha within. It looks into the mind, the heart-mind complex, the body-heart-mind complex, the psycho-physical organism. And what it sees is that surface consciousness upon which everything is rising. And it captures its own image. And that's the sense of the observer, the feeler, the experiencer, the sense of presence. In other words, that mirror, that surface is mirroring back to the awareness its own presence.

Now, what happens is you get lost, you dive into, you go into the world that the mind is creating on that very same surface. And that's what we're experiencing. That's the bubble of consciousness that is our world and it's specific. It's just our world. I can't know your world. I've got some idea of it, but I can't experience your world as your world. And so everything that I experience is very personal to me. It's very subjective. But I'm actually creating it. When I say I, I mean the body, the heart-mind—the psycho-

physical organism is creating the information. And what's happening is that this intuitive awareness is drowning in it. That's the delusion. It thinks that this is where true happiness is to be found. And it fails.

Our practice is to objectify all that, to see it right there in front of our inner eye, you could say, manifesting. And in so doing we're pulling out this quality of intuitive awareness. Now that's as far as we can go by our own practice and act of will. We can determine that. We can just push things away from us inwardly and make them an object. But you can't push that sense of the observer away. That just creates another self trying to get rid of the observer.

So in a sense, you can do two things. You can either, as it were, from that position, just glance back. And what I mean by glancing back is the question, what's inside this observer? What's inside it? We know what's inside the body, the feelings, the sensations. We know what's inside the heart, the emotions, the moods. And we know what's inside the mind, thoughts, images. What's inside the observer? And that's one way of indicating that it's something which is of a completely different order. It doesn't belong to this psychophysical organism.

And the next thing is that you can turn your attention towards the sense of self of that observer—the sense of somebody observing and just keep your eye there, just wondering where is that being manufactured. And after that, really, you just have to wait until the insight arises.

And this is one way of investigating this whole teaching around not-self. So remember, the Buddha is not saying there's no self. He's saying that any self is manufactured. It's being constructed. And our whole purpose is to deconstruct that.

So remember, this is just one avenue of investigation. The other two avenues, which we'll hopefully come to later, because now we've got another three weeks of lockdown, would be understanding desire and looking more deeply at impermanence.

So just to recap there. When you've got your sitting posture correct and you're calm, you can do it with the breath or with a very loud sensation, the knee. It's often actually better with something louder and to actually go into it and deconstruct it. In the discourse on how to establish this awareness, the Buddha actually encourages us to do that. He says to feel feelings in feelings, to experience mental states in mental states. He's asking us to go into it and to deconstruct it. And one of my teachers was talking about plunging. You have to plunge into your experiences and deconstruct it, by which we mean find out what its constituents are.

And the second thing is to recognise that when we've discovered that position of the observer, this observation post, to see that everything's happening of its own accord. It's happening beyond our commanding. It's not within our personal power when we've taken that position. So sensations arise, feelings arise, et cetera, et cetera.

And the third thing is to recognise that everything we're looking at is an object, not me, not me, not mine, and not a self.

So I hope that's helpful. And you might have a go at it this evening's meditation. So it's just a way of practising. And then when we get into that steady position of just observing, just feeling, just experiencing just that, then you let go of all that and have this confidence, this real inner confidence, trust that this...

So I hope that is helpful. You might have a go at it in this evening's meditation. It's just a way of practicing.

And then, of course, when we get into that steady position of just observing, just feeling, experiencing just that, then you let go of all that and have this confidence, this real inner confidence, trust that this intuitive awareness can work it out for itself. It doesn't need us at all. It doesn't need this person talking and guiding it. Just watch. That's enough. Whatever draws the attention within that field of awareness—that's it.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and not caused even greater confusion! So I think it's time that we can begin our meditation again. Very good.

Oh dear me, I've forgotten this little gadget again.

CHAPTER 173

Questions and Answers — Anger, Death Contemplation, and Buddhist Psychology

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 26 min

> *In this Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores several key questions from practitioners. He begins with a nuanced discussion of anger versus assertiveness, explaining how the Buddha viewed all forms of anger as ultimately unwholesome while distinguishing this from skillful assertiveness rooted in equanimity and wisdom. The talk examines how our physical body influences thoughts and feelings, and addresses the powerful practice of death contemplation (maranasati) — both its benefits in providing perspective and the caution needed to avoid spiritual bypassing when strong emotions arise.*
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> *The discussion delves into Buddhist psychology, clarifying the relationships between the three unwholesome roots (greed, aversion, delusion), the taints (āsava), fetters (saṃyojana), defilements (kilesa), and latent tendencies (anusaya). Bhante explains how these various categorizations serve as skillful means for understanding different aspects of mental conditioning. The session concludes with practical guidance on establishing the observer position in meditation, particularly when working with pain, and how recognizing the subject-object distinction supports insight into anattā (not-self). Throughout, the emphasis remains on practical application rather than theoretical knowledge.*

Good evening. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

This evening, we were going to leave not-self for a while and tackle some of the questions that have come in.

The first one is about anger. Is all anger to be avoided and purified? The questioner is thinking of abuses of power and injustice. They were feeling angry at the government for suggesting the public fundraise for the NHS when they already pay it through taxation, yet find money for other things when pressed.

Really all you have to ask yourself is, when you're angry, what's your state of mind? Are you open to the other person's viewpoints? Are you really concerned with winning the argument and not really seeking the truth? What's actually guiding the anger?

Often the case of anger sits on fear. Your identity, your views, your opinions have been upset, they've been attacked, and the response is to get rid of the enemy. The Buddha is quite clear that any form of anger is going to distort our thinking and will eventually end up creating even more anger, one way or the other, even if we overwhelm the person. And they run away with their tail between their legs, they will be thinking about ways in which to get back to us. So anger is, in Buddhist understanding, basically a no-no.

One example that is given here is: How is Jesus viewed in Buddhism turning the moneylenders out of the temple? In Christian thinking, they do often translate that as righteous anger. But in Buddhism, they don't say righteous anger. But what there is is assertiveness. So that distinction between aggression and assertiveness.

If one is coming from a state of inner equanimity and yet knows what ought to be said, then that anger becomes translated into a force, into a form which supports you. And of course, because you're based on equanimity and wisdom, you have the power for that. And the other people feel that. As soon as you're angry, they also feel your fear because if they come back at you and they see that there's a slight bit of fear in you, then they know they're winning the argument.

But when you're being assertive, when you're being correct, when you're standing your ground, you are open to the other person's argument and you may be nuanced. You may be affected by it. It's not a problem. But you are assertive about your particular position. This goes back to this business of free speech, where there was a time a couple of years back where they had the right to insult. Well, nobody has a right to insult anybody. It was a very harsh way of expressing the fact that you can be assertive about your opinion, about your perspective, and I know that the other person's not going to be happy with it but that's their problem not yours. I think that distinction is very valid and it stops you getting into fights, awful situations that can come back at you.

Again, does the Buddhist path separate from all these things? Is it all seen as *samsāra*, not to be engaged with? And that's the other thing that you might do, because you don't want to get angry, you don't get engaged. Well, that's the other negative side of not being engaged. But if you are coming from a point of wisdom, a point of compassion, then, of course, your behavior will engage you. And the Buddha had no problem engaging in serious situations. His people and the Kaliyas, who owned the other side of the river, were going to fight about water rights. And he went up and he said to them,

what's more precious, the blood in your veins or the water in the river? And that cooled them down a bit. And kings would come to him for advice. His advice was always to seek the way to peace not seek the way to war.

The questioner goes on to say, also, I've been feeling sad about all the deaths and the families that have been left bereaved. Am I right in thinking that Sharon Salzberg, in *Loving Kindness*, is saying that that is no longer compassion, but sadness. And is compassion that we need to develop?

Yes. I think we've also touched upon this, the distinction between grief and sorrow. Sorrow is the ability to feel another person's pain and empathy, and it requires us, it impedes us to find a way of helping. Even if we can't help, at least we can send our good wishes or influence somebody else to help them. But that's not to be confused with grief, which is the pain we feel when we lose somebody whom we're dependent on for our personal happiness. It's a different thing. The sensations, the feelings can be very similar, but they have different roots.

The Buddha himself is also known as the Mahākaruṇiko, he's the great compassionate one. Because after all, he spent his life trying to save us from suffering, trying to save all people from suffering, which was a big task, let's face it. So yes, anger, generally speaking, is a no-no. You want to try and redirect the energy towards assertiveness. We do need compassion. We need to be in touch with people, feel what they feel as a resonance. Now, obviously, you can't feel what another person feels, but you can resonate with it and do what we can to help. Trembling in the heart, that's what the Buddha says, a trembling in the heart when you see somebody suffering.

The next one is: are my thoughts and feelings dependent on my physical body? If I had a different body would I have different thoughts etc? Well, of course, many of them are dependent on the body. That's why in the evening we go on about sickness, aging and death. We're very concerned with the body. It definitely brings up a lot of anxiety and all the other stuff. It's through the body of course we're in contact with the material world outside, with the phenomena, with the material world outside through our senses. And it's that which creates this inner phenomenal experience. So obviously if you're deaf then that dimension of experiencing things as something that you can hear is not there for you. So the body has a direct effect on the mind.

But then, of course, there are many things that affect the mind-heart which are not directly coming from the body. We've just talked of one really, our bodies anyway, is that when we see somebody who's in a bad state, we want to help them. It might not be a physical bad state. It might be a mental one, but you want to help. So not everything comes from the body.

If you had a different body, would you have different thoughts? It very much depends, really. When I shaved my head to become a monk, my sister was there. My family were there. And she said to me afterwards, I didn't realize you had such big ears. Well, I was shocked. I fancy somebody saying that on your ordination day. So ever since then, I've been slightly aware of these jugs on the side of my face, these jug handles. And you can imagine, if you had the ears the size of an elephant, then you'd be aware of it. It would affect your self-esteem, probably. I've forgotten that particular remark until just today, actually.

So yes, different bodies. Obviously, if your body's disabled, that's a different situation too. Having the body we have brings its own mental situations. If you've got a healthy athletic body that never falls ill, that's very different from a person who's continuously weak, falls ill, et cetera, breaks their bones and so on. So yes. Don't wish for another body. That's what I say. Just be happy with the one we've got. You never know what you're going to get.

The next one is: I've tried the death contemplation, breathing in as the body's last breath, only for around five minutes of time, tagged on to the normal meditation. First, I was shocked just how attached I was to everything, absolutely everything. Then I realized it was to this body and sense experiences resulting from it. Then when I applied it to wandering thoughts and worries, it put these worries and thoughts into perspective and the realization how unimportant they are. Should I use this when I'm really upset or worried?

I think that's what the contemplation of death does. It puts things in a wider perspective and you get different priorities. Even now through this covid thing where we're having to isolate, it's making I think a lot of people experience life in a different way. And they might be thinking, why am I rushing around all the time? What's the point of earning all that money if I'm going to be stressed out all the time? I'm hoping that's what's happening anyway.

So the contemplation of death puts life into a different perspective. And one of the things is to see what a treasure it is. And one wants to live fully within the present moment. So when one turns to one's worries, you think, well, what's that in terms of death? So little worries or these superficial things might just fade away.

But you have to be careful about using these techniques not to feel what the heart wants to express, especially if the feeling is a strong one, if you've got sadness or anxiety. Doing that, you can fall into the error of what's been called spiritual bypassing, which is just another way of saying suppressing.

So often, for instance, in the tradition, a great emphasis is put on impermanence, *anicca*, *anicca*, everything's changing, everything's changing. And what happens is you're looking or you're feeling, say, some anxiety, and you're stepping back, but stepping back in the wrong way and looking at it and saying, oh, yeah, it's all arising and passing away. It's all arising and passing away. But you're not feeling the intensity of that anxiety, and therefore the heart can't cure itself. It just goes back into the system. You just get as neurotic as you were before.

So don't forget that it's *anicca*, *anattā*, but it's also *dukkha*, right? And that's in the discourse on establishing right awareness. The Buddha's constantly putting us in, to feel feelings in feelings, to feel mental states in mental states. It's the same as a room. It's the difference between being outside, looking in through the window, or at the doorway, or on top of the room, or under the room. It's completely different when you actually go into the room. And that's when you actually experience the room as an internal experience. And that's what you're doing with these emotions, with these mental states. You want to get into them and feel them as they are.

Then when you're inside feeling them as they really are, that's when you can also begin to recognize that it's actually changing. And that's when you're getting down to that level of the different things that make up a feeling, the heaviness, the burning, and all that sort of stuff. So be careful about that. That's when you get teachers saying that you need psychotherapy before you go to *vipassanā*. Or you need psychotherapy after you've done *vipassanā*. And it's usually because of this problem. I can't remember, unfortunately, the name of the psychiatrist who actually wrote this. He was a good meditation teacher too, died recently. But if it suddenly springs to mind, I shall mention him.

So yes, death meditation is very powerful. And as this person experienced, you don't have to do it for hours, just a little bit at the end of each sitting, just a little reminder occasionally during the day. It brings you back to this lovely present moment we've got. Even though it's horrible.

So we'll move on to the next. I have a bit of confusion here. I get the three unwholesome roots. So that's greed, aversion, and delusion. And that they're fundamentally the base of all unwholesome states. But the taints, which we're coming to later, of course, tomorrow, the cankers, also called, the hindrances and the fetters, all seem to have similarities, with some being blockages to insight and some being yokes to the worldly states. The same factors may be in the different groups. Are the taints generally the same thing as the fetters, or is the different way of looking at these items or considering

their arising and passing? The taints may be cleared to allow stream entry. That's the first level of insight. But somehow, I'm sure that I've seen clearing the fetters described as being overcome by the same results. Are fetters and taints interchangeable?

This is where we get into these lists. The three or four taints are also called *ogha*. They're called floods. They saturate everything, right? As an unwholesome saturation. It's like you're painting in watercolours and you have your first wash and that wash gives the whole painting a feel. So these taints, these oozings are like these floods, these color washes that are behind everything that we speak, think, say, and do. They're also called *yoga*, yokes, because they tie us to the worldly thing. And as taints, they are referred to their malignancy, their horrible oozings.

Now, the fetters, there's only four of those, by the way, the fetters are a specific group of 10, which tell you which ones go as you go up the four stages of awakening. And the first three to go are doubt in the Buddhist teaching, belief that any form of ritual or practices will actually bring about liberation, although they have their place. Like, I do the taking refuges and precepts. They have their place. But you could do that for an eternity and it wouldn't actually liberate you from suffering. And the final one is the one we've been addressing, is that insight which undermines, you just get that insight into not-self, into the fact that there's something there which is not changing. And that's, of course, the Buddha calls it like a flash of lightning. You've seen it, but it's not been long enough to really be sustained. It has its effect. So those are the fetters.

Then you've got defilements and latent tendencies. So I used to know some of these lists, but happily I've forgotten most of them. It just weighs on the mind, I think.

Kilesa, the defilement. You've got, none of these will come as a surprise. Greed, aversion, delusion. So there's your three basics. Then you've got conceit, which is to do with me. Speculative views, wrong views. And then you've got skeptical doubt. So that's the doubt that stops you doing something, yeah? If you're on the high board wanting to dive into the pond, if you doubt that you can do it or you're too afraid to do it, then you just don't jump, you come down. Mental torpor, so that's a bit of a hindrance or a defilement. Restlessness, shamelessness, and lack of moral dread. When we lose shame and fear of consequences, then really there's nothing much to stop us doing unwholesome things. So those are known as your defilements. So they're just a group. I don't think they are exhaustive, but at least they give you some idea of what a defilement is. I think that's more the case.

When it comes to *anusaya* or latent tendencies, as far as I know these are not defined as such in the discourses. It's just a way of talking about things that are there which we might not be aware of. So sometimes they're called, they're translated as proclivities or inclinations, tendencies.

And again, you won't be too surprised by what they are. So it's greed, of course, and then grudge, which is rather interesting. Resentment, the inability to forgive. Speculative view again, skeptical doubt, conceit, see, craving for continued existence. So that's the other one of the taints. If you remember, sensual desire, desire for existence, and ignorance.

So all these lists, I think you just take them as indications, that's all, indications.

So the best thing to get is the Buddhist dictionary. Here we are, Buddhist Dictionary. Oh, you can't see it. Buddhist Dictionary: A Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines by Nyanatiloka, and he's got it all there for you. You get it from BPS, which is the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy. I think you can download it as a PDF too. So that'll give you all your lists.

How are we doing for time? Oh dear. OK, it's getting on, isn't it? Getting on. Oh yes, just the last one here.

I also have some thoughts on assuming the position of the observer. I'm not good at staying with sensations for a long time. Rather, I'm at that stage of my development where it tends to last for a split second or so, maybe minutes in some circumstances. I gather from the Mahāsi treatises that this state tends to extend itself with practice until liberation when it becomes permanent. The only exception seems to be, for me, meditating on pain. I work a lot with pain, provides a powerful focus. Eventually, and in the right circumstance, this focus leads to the objectivization of pain itself once the position of the observer is established. This is also one of the most effective ways of managing pain, I find. Pity, it tends to be more impermanent than the pain itself.

Yes, that's what we discover, isn't it? That with things that are unpleasant, when we have dealt with the reaction—see, that's the important thing—not wanting it, to go there, feel the reaction. When the reaction goes and we then turn towards the difficulty, the pain, physical or mental, then we can stay with it. And of course, we realise that the reaction is causing the suffering. Pain is just pain, as it were, and we can be quite equanimous with it.

Now, one thing I did that's brought to mind, which I didn't stress actually in the discussion yesterday evening about not-self, when I talked about the object, the distinction between the subject, the observer, the feeler, the knower, and what is felt, seen, observed, etc. You can make that clear to yourself by making the distance between the two obvious to yourself.

So for instance, if there's pain in the knee, you're up here somewhere looking down and you can say there's pain. So that's there. And then to be aware of the distance that there is between the two, the observer and the observed. So it's like here, now you're looking at the screen and at me no doubt, and I'm filling most of your awareness, most of your attention.

Now, if you become aware of the distance between your eyes and the screen. Now, that's what I mean by recognising the distinction between the subject and object. And you find you can do that with emotions because they're in the body and you're still up here. Images, sometimes you can see them ahead of you and you can at least intuit the space. There must be a space there between them, as it were. It's a mental space. Thoughts, of course, very difficult.

And that again accentuates the whole business of what I'm experiencing doesn't constitute me. Because this me now is felt to be the observer, okay?

So I think that's enough of that for one evening, don't you think? And we can begin our meditation. I just hope, as usual, that I've not caused even more confusion. Very good.

CHAPTER 174

Overcoming the Taints by Restraint

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the second of six methods taught by the Buddha for overcoming āsava (taints or mental defilements): abandonment through restraint. Drawing from the Sabbāsava Sutta, he explains how restraint of the six sense faculties - eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind - prevents the arising of unwholesome states of covetousness and grief.

Bhante emphasizes that every act of attention is an act of intention that conditions the mind, using vivid examples like billboard advertising to illustrate how unguarded senses lead to craving and suffering. He explores the practice of yoniso manasikāra (wise reflection) and explains how maintaining sharp awareness allows us to catch the initial signs of desire before they develop into full-blown mental proliferation.

The talk includes practical guidance for developing sense restraint in daily life, translating monastic examples into lay practice. Bhante explains how restraining desires and staying present with them until they dissolve naturally leads to the bliss of contentment, emphasizing that this lockdown period offers unique opportunities for seclusion and inner awareness. The teaching concludes with encouragement to maintain moment-to-moment awareness throughout all daily activities.

Good evening. I hope you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

It's a bit cold these days. The temperature's dropped a wee bit.

Just to say something about this observer position within ourselves, a couple of questions come up. Remember that so long as there's a sense of the observer, there are two consciousnesses, following the other very rapidly, so rapidly that we get the impression that the observer is constant even though what it's looking at is steady. But that sense of the self, the observer, is a consciousness. It's the feel of awareness on that screen of consciousness.

Now as your concentration goes, driven by interest to see things as they really are, of course that stops and there's that absorption where the sense of self disappears. There's just the awareness and the object that you're observing. You can call that pure *vipassanā*. It's the same absorption you might say when you watch a DVD, but because it's a completely different purpose, it doesn't lead to awakening. So this practice is about leading to awakening. So you have to enter into absorption with that interest.

Unfortunately, you can't make it happen. It just arises when the conditions are there—the seven factors of enlightenment. And it's just practice. Sometimes it comes, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it stays a little bit, sometimes stays a little bit longer. On retreat, of course, it's a bit easier. In daily life, depending how busy you are and so on—I mean, now that everybody's in isolation, you're of course very contented and peaceful and at ease, and therefore it should arise fairly easily, maybe.

So we want to carry on now to the taints. We want to move on. What we've done is we've seen the first way of overcoming taint, which is through insight, and that actually leads to awakening. But the next one is abandoning by restraint. Just let me remind you of the various ways: the first one we've seen—that's we've done that—abandoned by restraining, abandoned by using, abandoned by enduring, abandoned by avoiding, abandoned by removing, and abandoned by developing. So each of these, the Buddha's offering those different ways to overcome unwholesome states. So we're on the second section: taints to be abandoned by restraining.

So we'll read it through and see what happens. What taints, bhikkhu, should be abandoned by restraining? Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, abides with the eye faculty unrestrained, while taints, vexation and fever might arise in one who abides with the eye faculty unrestrained. Now, just this little phrase, "reflecting wisely"—*yoniso manasikāra*, that's a bit of Pali—that's a very regular phrase by the Buddha. He constantly wants us to reflect upon what we're doing.

I'm reminded of a talk, I remember, given by a monk where he was talking about reflection and reflecting on reflection. And the word "reflect" came up every second word. By the end of the talk, I hated the word "reflection."

So we have to reflect wisely, not unwisely. And then he goes on to say there are no taints, vexation or fever in one who abides with the eye faculty restrained. There's no discontent and no fever over wanting something in somebody who abides like that. And then, of course, he goes through the other ones, the ear faculty restraint, the nose faculty restraint, et cetera, et cetera.

Now, if we just go back to the eye restraint, we're a very visual society. If we think of our grandparents, they would have had the radio. There wouldn't have been much to excite the eye, no screens. And their sense of hearing, I think, would have been better than ours, because just from the sound of a voice on a radio, you'd be able to tell what sort of person that was. The voice is telling you a lot about the person. And I got a feeling that we've lost all that because we've become so visual. And the sounds, when we go out in nature, we're often into views and scenes and panoramas, but not so much the sounds of nature.

And that's something that the Buddha's talking about: restraint, of course. It's basically looking at what we're looking at. So remember, every time you look at something, that's an act of intention. An act of attention is an act of intention, whether we're aware of that or not. There's a moment when we intend. Normally we don't notice these things because they're habitual. It's only when you're forced to look at something that you don't want to look at that you might recognize that a decision has to be made. So within any act of seeing, smelling, touching, anything like that, there's always a moment of impulsion. There's always a moment of a decision and an actualization—the will. And that's conditioning. That's conditioning.

One example I have mentioned, which is my favourite example, was that sometime in the 80s, there was a loss of confidence in the billboards. And the people who owned them wanted to prove, in fact, that they did have a big effect on people. So they put up a big poster advertising this new perfume. I can't remember what it was called, but it had a sort of an Italian hat on it, you know, with the corks hanging down, stop the flies in the outback attacking you, and it was given a funny name. And what happened was, of course, there was a huge demand for this new perfume, and they proved that they had an effect.

So just consider: you're on a bus and you're just looking around, you're not really being fully aware, and your eye wanders outside the window, or you're constantly looking out of the window, and your eye hits this perfume, and you think, "Well, I've got to have that." And it's just part of that conditioning. So once we accept that wherever we put an attention, that's conditioning us, right? And that's what the Buddha means by restraint.

So when people go on retreat, especially a Mahāsi retreat, the idea is to restrain your senses. So we stop talking to each other so that we can hear the inner dialogue more clearly. We stop looking around so much so that we can see how impelled we are to see, to look.

Here, of course, we've got things like sheep and cows and a pheasant. We've had a pheasant recently. We actually got a duck on the pond, believe it or not. And she's hidden in the top there just underneath the parinibbāna Buddha, the Buddha in his death posture. And they say there's three ducks—she's attracted three ducks. I haven't seen them personally, but there she is. And so there's, you know, as soon as you hear a quack or a bleat or something, now we've got these little lambs jumping around the place, and you want to look, you see? You want to look.

Now on a retreat, that would be distracting. I mean, you know, living here as I am, I do actually watch the lambs gambolling and all that sort of stuff. But on retreat, you want to restrain the sight because you want to look inward. We're trying to see on retreat how the mind works. That's the same when you're sitting. That's why we close our eyes. Some people like to have them just ever so slightly open like in Zen. It doesn't matter. The point is you're not looking around so you can see inwardly. You've not got music going on. You're trying to be silent so you can hear the inner voice, the inner sounds that are in the body and so on.

So this restraint also, of course, is to do with greed and all that sort of stuff. You know, like you're walking through town and you're looking around and suddenly you see the signs.

So there's another discourse called the simile of the elephant's footprint. This is basically the opening metaphor where the elephant has the largest footprint of all animals, and so the Buddha is the greatest of all animals. He's often shown as, he's often represented as an elephant or a cock or something which is the head of that particular type of animal.

Anyway, this is what he says. This is a bit more detailed about seeing. "On seeing form with the eye, he does not grasp at its sign and features." So a sign would be the distinctive qualities and the features would be the other bits that come up when you look a bit more closely.

So an obvious case is walking through town seeing a coffee shop. Now, you see it. And of course, that's the sign. Whatever it is, there's a sign of the thing, whether it's Nero's or whatever. And that's your sign. And then you've got to, if you're there, if you're right aware and you know you shouldn't be nipping in there to get a coffee, then you avert your gaze, you see.

But more often than not, we hang around there, and visions of Danish pastries and other delights begin to invade the mind. And even though you've made a very fierce decision that you won't be dipping into the coffee shop, you find yourself sitting there wondering how you got to that place. And this is what happens when something grabs you.

So what he's saying is that if we maintain a sharp awareness—you know, just an awakenedness, an awakenedness—we'd catch the sign, we'd catch the desire that comes up with it, and we'd be able to let it go. "So since he left the eye faculty unguarded, evil and unwholesome states of covetousness and grief might invade him. So covetousness and grief are just another way of saying desiring or wanting and not wanting, aversion. And he practices the way of restraint. He guards the eye faculty. He undertakes the restraint of the eye faculty."

And then he goes through all the other senses, of course. And finally, "cognizing a mind object with the mind, he does not grasp its signs and features."

So something might come up in the mind where—I mean, this happens in meditation, obviously, where you remember something. And before you know it, you're planning your holiday, you know, you're off to—well, not at the moment anyway, but normally speaking, you'd be off to Timbuktu or somewhere in your mind. And then you wake up and what's happened is the first sign has come up, some idea that you've seen in a magazine or something or on the old screen. And you've gone into it. Before you know it, you're planning your holiday.

So if we're aware and we catch that first image, we should be able to stop it there, you see, or at least make a decision that we won't indulge it. I mean, there's nothing wrong, obviously, with going on holiday. And there's nothing wrong with planning a holiday. It's just the fantasies that arise with it often create future disappointment. Where you expected sun and beaches is drenching with rain.

And then, of course, he carries on. "Since he left the mind faculty unguarded, evil and unwholesome states of covetousness and grief might invade him. So he practices this way of restraint. And he guards the mind faculty. He undertakes the restraint of the mind faculty, possessing this noble restraint of the faculties, he experiences within himself a bliss that is unsullied."

Now, when a desire arises, if we can stay with it to the very end—in fact, it's more obvious the greater the desire—if you can stay with it to the very end of that feeling, without, of course, indulging it, you're there with the wanting, and you wait for it to completely end. Then you get that sense of release. You get that sense of being released

from this obsessive desire. And with it there arises this contentment, and that's blissful. And it's for us to really recognize when contentment is there and to recognize that that is the consequence of restraint. That's the consequence of letting go.

So when we're sure that that happens, that when we do let go and allow these desires and lusts and all the griefs and the avarice and all that, when we let all that fade away and drop away, the product is this blissful contentment. And if we do it often enough and convince ourselves that is what happens, then of course that makes us want to do it more and not want to get caught up in these desires.

So that's a really important line: "possessing this noble restraint of the faculties, he experiences within himself a bliss that is unsullied." Because every time, of course, you let a desire go, you undermine that conditioning, yeah?

And then he goes into examples of how we maintain that sense of awareness. And now all the examples are usually about monks, because it's the monks and nuns, the monastics rather, who have remembered all this. They've tended to remember it for themselves. So you have to translate this into the lay life.

So for instance, "he becomes one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning." So any journey you're on, you're actually being aware—going to work, going to the shops, whatever it is. It's not as though that isn't part of our practice.

"Who acts in full awareness when looking ahead and looking away." In other words, we're aware of what we're looking at. We will do it when we're crossing the road. That's not a problem. But otherwise, we tend to let the mind just wander.

"He acts in full awareness when flexing and extending his limbs." Basically, when we're doing anything, we're aware of it, whether it's as simple as opening a door or doing some difficult work. It doesn't matter what it is. We're aware of it. It's within our range of awareness. And that's when we're doing jobs, of course. I mean, if you're on the computer and you're typing, well, obviously, often the typing is automatic and what your attention is on is what's actually appearing, what you're actually writing about.

"Acts in full awareness when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl." So it's a case of being aware of how we look going down the street, whatever, even privately, just being aware of what we're wearing. It's not something that you're doing all the time. It's just occasionally you're aware of your presence, of how you look. And what it's supposed to do is make you look dignified, you know. We're supposed to have this sense of dignity.

"Who acts in full awareness when eating and drinking, consuming food and tasting. Who acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating." That's a time we'd rather think of something else.

"Who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up." As soon as you wake up, bring that awareness to bear. "Talking and keeping silent."

So in other words, whenever—and basically it's at all time during the day—we try to maintain this awareness, this awakenedness.

"Possessing this aggregate of noble virtue"—so this collection of noble virtue, this noble restraint of faculties, and possessing this noble mindfulness and full awareness—"he resorts to a secluded resting place, the forest, the root of a tree, a mountain, a ravine, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw."

And this, of course, leads us to the benefits of what we're actually experiencing now, which is isolation. But, you know, in the spiritual life, we call it seclusion. So for us, this is a real opportunity to find times when we just sit in silence. You don't particularly have to practice *vipassanā*. You could be doing *mettā*. You could just be sitting aware of being aware in a chair and just resting, just resting in the present moment. That's enough. That also has an effect on us. Instead of always trying to do something—more being than doing.

So this is what the Buddha is asking us to do: to restrain the senses so that we're not always chasing our desires; to stay with a desire if we can until it completely evaporates and to experience the bliss of contentment; and to do it all the time, to try and be awake all the time. I mean, that's a bit of a task, but that's where we're heading. We're heading for a complete moment-to-moment awareness.

And then, wherever we are, sitting on a bus, waiting for somebody in a waiting room at home, there are these lovely moments of stillness. Where we've gone to the forest, to the jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw.

So that gives us some idea of using restraint to guard our senses and to maintain mindfulness. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that I've not created too much confusion.

And I think it's time now for us to practice.

CHAPTER 175

Overcoming the Taints by Using

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

> *In this third talk on overcoming the seven taints (āsava), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how to abandon mental defilements through the wise use of life's necessities. Drawing from traditional monastic guidance, he explores how clothing, food, shelter, and medicine should be used with clear intention rather than for indulgence or distraction.*
>
> *Bhante explains the Buddha's practical approach to material needs, sharing stories from the early Saṅgha about robes made from charnel ground cloth and the establishment of monastic dress codes. He translates these teachings for householder life, encouraging reflection on our true needs versus wants, especially regarding food consumption during isolation.*
>
> *The talk emphasizes using possessions mindfully - from clothing and shelter to modern technology - asking ourselves: what is the purpose? Bhante addresses how we often use food and other comforts to avoid difficult emotions, suggesting we sit with uncomfortable feelings rather than immediately seeking distraction. He concludes by extending this principle to all modern requisites, encouraging honest self-reflection about our motivations and the development of inner strength through conscious restraint.*

Good evening. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, but I do hope it has been happy. The sun's come out too.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

So we're still struggling through the taints. There's seven of them, the seven ways of overcoming the taints. So we've done the first one, which is all about *vipassanā*, really, and seeing this whole business of the self, of identity. Then we did by restraining. So we're now on to abandon by using.

The taint should be abandoned by seeing, restraining, by using, by enduring, by avoiding, by removing, and finally by developing. So we've moved from seeing to restraining. So we're now on to abandon by using.

What taint should be abandoned by using? Here, now remember that these discourses are remembered by the monastics and basically for monastics. So we have to translate it into daily life.

Using the robe only for protection from the cold, from protection from heat, from contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, the creeping things, and only for the purpose of concealing the private parts. Very forward, isn't he? So here he's given us the reason for wearing clothes, right, obviously for protection, warmth of the body and so on and so forth. But not for really for anything else.

Now, that doesn't particularly work for lay people. You've got to dress according to where you are at work, at play with the family and so on and so forth. But there's an interesting thing that happened when the order was first established. When people joined him both monks and nuns, they would go to the charnel grounds. And dead bodies then were wrapped up in white cloth and just left, left to be eaten by wild animals, etc. And it was the general custom of the *samaṇas*, these people who had left the lay life to live an ascetic life with various teachers. It was the custom to go and take this cloth and turn it into robes, and sew little bits together to make a lower robe and an upper robe.

Now, the first thing was that he himself decided that it didn't look so good. So he asked the monks to cut the pieces so that when the robe was laid out, it looked like paddy fields. So if you ever see a monk's robe laid out, you'll see that there are large patches for the paddy and little passages all around it. And they're all measured out. They're all meant to be of a certain measure. And that way the robes didn't look so untidy.

On top of that, he asked them to dye it in the *arakan*, which gives it a sort of light brown colour. And that's why monks' robes and nuns' robes are all this some form of shade of brown, warm brown, red brown, all that. And it all comes back to the Buddha wanting his order to look neat.

So it's not as though he's saying you should just wear scruffy clothes. You should wear things that you feel comfortable with, both from the point of view of the climate and the situation you're in, but also in terms of how it fits your understanding of, shall we say, natural beauty, not something forced constantly by fashion, constantly changing by fashion, although that has obviously something to do with it. But it's again this wonderful practicality that the Buddha has, constantly asking, what are clothes for?

And then, of course, there's the amount of clothes that we have, and that's to do with what is need rather than greed, or what is, shall we say, allowable by just common sense. So one needs various pair of shoes in the West. In the East, a monk or nun might just get away with slippers. Some actually go barefoot. But here you need, if you want to go walking, you need boots and then you need slippers and then you need shoes, you need all sorts of things. So it's all to do with where we are, but being practical, being practical.

And modesty, of course, runs high in the Buddhist teachings because we're trying to reduce the desire for our sexual appetite. So that's why nuns and monks especially robe themselves in very loose robes so that the body is not so obvious. So that's this business of wearing robes. These paragraphs that I'll be reading are chanted by monks as a reminder.

Then we come to alms food. He uses alms food neither for amusement or for intoxication, nor for the sake of physical beauty or attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body for ending discomfort, for ending discomfort and for assisting in the holy life. Considering thus, I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and I shall be healthy, blameless and shall live in comfort.

So here again, it's just the practicality of eating for the nourishment of the body. Now, you have to be careful. He didn't tell lay people what to offer him. If he went to kings, if he was invited by kings or rich people, they would obviously give him very special dishes. And he never complained about that. That was an offering that they could give. So he was quite happy to receive it. On the other hand, if he was wandering just in ordinary villages, he might have some very basic food. And of course, at that time, they had famines.

When I went out to Thailand, for instance, I was up at Wat Phanana Shack, just for a visit. I was there for about two weeks. And we would go off on alms round. And I also did it with Ajahn Mahabua's place up in the northeast. And we went on our round to the villages in the morning. And basically, all we were offered was what they could, which was rice, with little bits of meat sometimes, a bit of fish or something. Basically, it was just rice. And it was only when we got back to the monastery that the local richer middle class had supplied us with abundant food.

So there's a huge disparity as it is everywhere in the world these days between the rich and the poor. But there would have been times during the Buddha's time when there were actual famines. And the mendicants would have been right at the end of the line, of course, except for devotees. That was the devotee would obviously try to make sure that the people whom they honored would have enough food.

But again, it's not eating for any other purpose. That's the real thing for the nourishment of the body. Now, it doesn't mean to say that the food has to be plain or horrible. It's just that that's where your intention is, to feed, nourish the body for the purpose of spiritual practice. That doesn't mean to say that you can't cook yourself a pleasant meal.

So these days where many of us are in isolation, that's one way of raising your heart, raising your spirit to make an effort to cook for yourself, to care for yourself and to give something which is appetizing. How much you eat, of course, will be determined by feeding your appetite or feeding your greed. So that's the distinction we have to make. What we eat is not so important. And the whole thing is, of course, is to reduce this greed.

Now, remember that often we eat not just because we enjoy it and indulge it because of that, but also we're hiding from ourselves feelings that we don't want. So many, many of you, shall we say, who are living completely alone in isolation, might find the evenings difficult, loneliness might come, a bit of depression, etc. And one way that we seek is, of course, to get up a toast, buttered toast. I mean, well, that is the cure. But unfortunately, it hides from us these painful mental states.

So what is better to do is to sit with that for a while, to sit with it and wait for it to exhaust itself or at least to diminish, to diminish. And then to, as it were, congratulate ourselves that we haven't just given into it to try and get rid of it. We can then congratulate ourselves with a piece of toast. See, you can rejoice that you overcame a negative reason for having toast. You're now celebrating.

Feast days are there for celebration. It's a way of expressing joy or praise or wonder. It's a way of thanking everybody. So in Buddhist countries there are two main times which is Buddha Day where we're celebrating the life of the Buddha and that's coming up. I mean, we would have run a course now at the beginning of May, but for this virus. And that's a place where we would celebrate. So people bring lovely food, not only for the monastics, but for themselves. And the other time is the Sangha Day, the *Kaṭhina*, where the *Sangha* is celebrated. And that's normally a time when people bring things that the *Sangha* might need. So these two occasions are, shall we say, a community effort to celebrate and food is very much part of it. So there's nothing wrong with feasting. That's what I say anyway.

So then we go on to reflecting wisely. It's always a reflecting. Remember this, there's been some *yoniso manasikāra*. It's a very constant phrase of the Buddha, just to sit and think about things, to reflect upon things. He uses a resting place only for protection from cold, for protection from heat, protection from gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, creeping things, and only for the purpose of warding off the perils of climate and for enjoying retreat.

So here he's talking about a place where you stay. So in the East, the monks can be happy with just a little hut somewhere. I was very fortunate when I stayed at Kenda Boulder. I had an eight foot by five foot. That's about two and a half metres by one and

three quarter metres, little space there. It was very comfortable. All I needed was a bed and a chair. And that was about it. And that was enough for that particular time. Now, of course, I need mobiles and all sorts of silly things. But in those days, it was extremely simple.

And that simplicity brings with it a great sense of peace. You don't have to worry about anything. You don't have to worry about whether you have Wi-Fi or not. And again, to be very practical. What's the purpose of your house, of your flat? What's the purpose of your room? What's the purpose of it? And to keep it very simple. As soon as we add things, as soon as we make things more complicated, then the worries come, the worry of loss and all that. So try and keep things simple by reflecting what's the purpose of a dwelling? What is the purpose of this room? What's the purpose of my bedroom?

And enjoying retreats, well, that of course is a monastic thing about seclusion, not isolation. But it's always good, remember, to have a regular place in your house, in your flat, wherever you're living, which you have partitioned off in some way where you go to in order to practice, in order to meditate. That also helps with creating this habit because it's there as a place. It's the same as when we have temples or here where we have the *stupa*. They remind you. It's there. If you have a statue, if you like statues, but definitely some place in the house where you have established a certain atmosphere. So that's important.

And then finally, of course, to use wisely medicinal requisites only for the protection of arisen afflicting feelings and for the benefit of good health. So again, medicine, to use it for the benefit of the body. This one I think is easy enough to understand.

But often we are, these days we've become very neurotic about things. I never used to take vitamin pills. Now I'm taking vitamin pills and quercetin. I'm just piling this stuff into my body and I'm coming to a point where I must, I've determined to stop all that stuff because the body knows how to care for itself. And if it's not in a good way, then it'll tell you. The food we get, people complain about it, this and that in it. But the fact is that generally speaking, we're living longer. And we're living more healthy. So we must have got something right.

And usually a lot of diseases that we have are caused by not eating the right things, by eating sugary things. That's why we've got all this diabetes stuff. So I don't think it's so much to do with the food. I'm sure I can hear many of you complaining about that now. But in my understanding, I have no complaint with the food that we get from the shops.

So seeing food as medicine, that's the other thing too. Food as a nourishment for the body, that's also part of this. Of course, that will remind us of this special medicine, *Ayurvedic* medicine, of which, if you remember, there was the story of the Zen monk who was cured with cow's urine. Fermented, fermented cow's urine, yeah? So make sure it's fermented when you get some, okay?

So the taints which create vexation and fever might arise in one who does not use these requisites wisely. So it's a case of being careful how we use things. Now, you can extend this to everything you use: the television, the mobile, your computer. Why are you using it at this time? What are you looking at? What's the purpose of it? And make sure that it is actually for *Dhamma* purposes. Now, if it's not for *Dhamma* purposes, if it's for something that you see as unwholesome, be truthful to yourself, be truthful to ourselves.

When I'm doing something which I know, I know it's not quite right, it's like, I know it's quite, there will be consequences, there will be consequences. And it's being truthful to ourselves about what we're doing. And if we see that we're doing something which is not good for us, just keep making the resolution, make the resolution, make the resolution. And eventually it comes through, yeah?

But remember, with all these things that are tempting, it's always good to try and just sit with the feeling of it, sit with the feeling of it and wait for it to exhaust itself. And then it gives you a feeling of power that you can actually control these habits. That's also important.

So we've completed today the abandoning of these taints by using things wisely. So this obviously only refers to certain things that we have and use. So we'll carry on tomorrow to the next one because each one has something to teach us.

So I hope that's been useful in some way and that you've not found it completely useless. And I think it's time for us to do some meditation.

CHAPTER 176

Overcoming the Taints by Endurance

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *In this dharma talk from the 2020 lockdown series, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the fourth method for overcoming the mental taints (āsava) - through patient endurance (adhivāsanā). Drawing from the Buddha's teachings, he explores how we can transform our relationship with life's inevitable irritations, from minor daily frustrations to major challenges like illness, loss, and even the current COVID-19 pandemic.*
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> *The talk covers the Buddha's teaching on enduring physical discomforts, harsh words, and painful experiences without allowing taints of aversion and craving to arise. Bhante discusses the four worldly conditions (gain/loss, fame/obscurity, pleasure/pain, praise/blame) and shares practical examples of how impatience and rejection create unnecessary suffering.*
>
> *A highlight is the humorous story of Vedahikā and her maid Kāli, illustrating the difference between genuine patience and suppressed anger. The talk culminates with the profound 'Simile of the Saw' teaching, where the Buddha instructs that even if bandits were sawing off one's limbs, one should maintain loving-kindness without hatred. This radical teaching on forgiveness and endurance offers a transformative approach to dealing with life's difficulties through acceptance rather than resistance.*

This is my new Logitech Fandango and you are now seeing me in my full glory. I only hope you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, but I hope it has been happy.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samā Sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

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

So just as I was getting used to looking at my own face while I'm talking, I'm now looking at an object in the middle of the room. A bit like being on radio, I suppose. So I've got to get used to that now.

Anyway, we're still on the taints. Oh, yes. Can't leave the taints. Just to remind you that we have seven taints here. Let me just read them through. It's good to revise them. There is the taint by seeing, which is through insight, remember. The insight through overcoming the taint, especially on not-self, the false sense of I through *vipassanā*. And

then we had one by restraint, by restraining ourselves. Then we abandoned them by using things better. And now we have to abandon things by enduring. So the quality here, of course, is patience.

The Buddha is big on patience. The highest form of ascetic practice by which he means ascetic practice is renunciation. It's the highest form of renunciation because you are renouncing reaction to what is unpleasant.

So let's read what he says here. What taints Bhikkhus should be abandoned by enduring? Here, reflecting wisely, he bears cold and heat, hunger and thirst, contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, creeping things and COVID-19. He endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words and arisen bodily feelings that are painful, wracking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing and menacing to life. While taints, vexation and fever, so vexation is the aversion, fever is the desire, might arise in one who does not endure such things, there are no taints, vexation or fever in one who endures them. And these are called overcoming the taints by enduring.

So if we just look at one or two areas where we find ourselves getting very irritated, there are those little niggly irritations, aren't there? Leaving the freezer door open and finding that it's all iced up on the door. And then you kick it too. The toaster when you set it wrongly and it's burnt the toast, all these little irritations, an impatience with things too. It's surprising how everything has to be now. Everything has to be now. I read somewhere that Amazon spent millions on getting this immediate delivery, you know, what do they call it? Prime Amazon or something. So that as soon as you've clicked on your box of chocolate, you can hear it drop in your letterbox. That's how we're demanding that everything has to be now.

In fact, I have to express a certain impatience myself here, confess to it. This little gadget I'm looking at, I did actually order through Amazon and after about two weeks gave up on them and went on to eBay. Now, that doesn't mean to say that I prefer eBay to Amazon. It's just that I finally got it on eBay. But I just remember my concern bordering on a certain annoyance that it hadn't been delivered.

Then there are neighbours. Neighbours, oh, my goodness. You know, if you have a noisy neighbour, it can drive you potty. I know it. I used to live in, you know, these two up, two downs. And my next door neighbor had a real love of Elvis Presley. Now, I myself like Elvis Presley, but not all the time and not the volume that she would play it. And I had to go down once and asked her to turn it low. I said, do you mind just turning it low? And her reply was, I pay my rates. I thought, well, OK. Anyway, she did. She was very kind. But yes, neighbours, those little noises from the TV or from music coming to the walls.

And this reminds me of when I used to go to Sri Lanka or the East, but mainly in Sri Lanka. When I first got there and I had this beautiful little hut, this *kuti* hut. And the squirrels were around. And what they used to do was they used to climb along the beams of my walking. There was a channel for walking, a *chaṅkama*. And they were at the wood to get the grubs out. And this, of course, I found tremendously disturbing. And then there was this, what you might call, cartoon moment when I jumped off the cushion that I was sitting on and ran down the corridor waving this flag and beating these beams. I mean, these days, if that had been caught on camera, it would definitely have gone viral.

And, of course, I went back. They disappeared. And I thought, that's that. And, of course, as soon as I sat down again, they were at it, scratching away. So, of course, one has to accept these things, you see. Noises in the east. I only remember real quietness descending around about one o'clock at night. I used to wake up in a real quietness, two o'clock, and then it would all start at about three o'clock. But even in the absolute quietness, there would be no crickets or anything like that, cicadas. So there was always noise.

And I remember I came back once. I had to return to England. My mother and father died during that time. And I came back and noise was just overwhelming. The birds, the squirrels, there were these set of birds that squeaked to each other all the time. They're called the seven sisters and they don't stop talking. And then I noticed that, of course, as soon as I stopped getting irritated, within a day or two, I didn't hear them. This is the point, isn't it? You know, as soon as you're angry, as soon as you're irritated, your ear sticks on it. And as soon as you stop being averse, trying to reject it, trying to get rid of it, the attention moves away from it and it just becomes background noise within reason, of course.

We get angry at people's opinions if they're not the same as ours. You know, this whole Brexit thing, boy, do we see some awful stuff there. And, of course, this is a fear that you're going to be somehow converted to their point of view. And that's, of course, where the pride sits. And so that when you hear something and you feel yourself getting irritated with the person for expressing that view, you know, we have to remind ourselves everybody has their perspective. And if I open up to this person's point of view, I might not agree, but at least I'll understand where they're coming from.

Then you've got things like illness, illness that comes. I mean, obviously now we're suffering this COVID thing, but any illness, we don't want to be ill. That's the end of it. So you can be quite angry with yourself for catching a cold or angry with somebody else

for giving you the flu or worse, COVID. And, of course, there's loss of work. A lot of people, loss of work. And that's another thing. That brings about a sense of depression, a sense of not wanting to bear with it.

So patience, remember, is not resignation. We're not resigned to it. We're not rolled over by it. Patience is accepting things as they are and recognizing that any aversion, any rejection, any trying to manipulate it for my own personal good is just causing more trouble. And it makes us even more angry.

Then the Buddha talks about the four worldly conditions. So there's gain and loss. So every time we gain something, we're happy. When we lose it, then we're unhappy. And we don't like it. And we get angry and we get depressed and all that. And it's recognizing that that's just not necessary. It's not necessary. Loss comes and that's the end of it. One receives it. One accepts it fully. And if one accepts it with a good heart, one always sees potential. You know, when that situation ends you're open and you're ready to see where the potential lies.

Fame and being ignored you see. You walk into a crowd and they all know you and they all greet you and all that. And then you get some high idea about yourself. And you walk into another crowd and they completely ignore you or worse they think they want to ignore you and that's even worse, of course. So this whole idea of having lots of friends. In the Sangha, often you find that they gather together because they feel comfortable in each other's company. But often when they mix in terms of their different nationalities, you find them not so open to each other. It's not so very nice sometimes, but it occasionally happens.

And then, of course, there's happiness and unhappiness. So one minute we're happy, one minute we're unhappy. And you have to bear with that. There's no point in trying to fight it. And whatever is causing the unhappiness, it could be a relationship, it could be the weather, it could be the situation financially, your own personal situation. And again, to get angry with it, to get irritated with it, to try and get rid of it, it's all wasted energy, all wasted energy.

And then finally he talks about praise and blame. We all like to be praised. That's wonderful. But blame, you know, we're always trying to defend ourselves. Even when we've obviously done something wrong, we'll find some way of defending ourselves. But of course it's worse if you're blamed and you know you shouldn't be. I mean, that is hard to bear, hard to bear. But he's asking us to bear with it, you see.

Now I just want to break off here to this delightful story of Kālī. And this is to do with somebody who is pretending to be patient. So, formerly, in the same Sāvatthī, so remember that's where his main monastery was, well, definitely one of his main monasteries, Anāthapiṇḍika, the rich merchant had bought for him. There was a housewife named Vedehikā. Vedehikā should be really, and a good report about Mistress Vedehikā had spread thus. Mistress Vedehikā is kind, is gentle, is peaceful.

Now Mistress Vedehikā had a maid called Kālī, who was clever, nimble and neat in her work. The maid Kālī thought a good report about my lady has spread thus. Mistress Vedehikā is kind, is gentle, is peaceful. How is it now? While she does not show anger, is it nevertheless actually present in her, or is it? Or else is it just because my work is neat that my lady shows no anger, though it is actually present in her? Supposing I test my lady.

So the maid Kālī got up late. Then Mistress Vedehikā said, Hey, Kālī, what is it, madam? What's the matter with you getting up so late? Nothing is the matter, madam. Nothing is the matter, you wicked girl. Yet you get up so late. And she was angry and displeased and she scowled. Then the maid thought, the fact is that while my lady does not show anger, it is actually present in her. It's not absent. And it is just because my work is neat that my lady shows no anger, though it is actually present in her, not absent. Supposing I test my lady a little more. It's a bit cheeky, really, isn't she?

So the maid Kālī got up later in the day and Mistress Vedehikā said, hey, Kālī, what is it, madam? What is the matter with you? You get up later today. Nothing is the matter, madam. Nothing is the matter, you wicked girl, yet you get up later in the day. Now she was angry and displeased, and she spoke words of displeasure. Then the maid Kālī thought, the fact is that while my lady does not show anger, it is actually present in her, not absent. Suppose I test my lady a little more.

So the maid Kālī got up still later in the day. Then Mistress Vedehikā said, hey, Kālī, what is it, madam? What is the matter with you? You got up later still today. Nothing is the matter, madam. Nothing the matter, you wicked girl. And you get up still later in the day. And she was angry and displeased. And she took a rolling pin and gave her a blow on the head and cut her head. Then the maid Kālī, with blood running from her cut head, denounced her mistress to her neighbours. See, ladies, the kind lady's work. See, ladies, the gentle lady's work. See, ladies, the peaceful lady's work. How can she become angry and displeased with her only maid for getting up late? How can she take a rolling pin, give her a blow on the head and cut her head?

And later on, a bad report about Mistress Vedehikā spread about. Mistress Vedehikā is rough. Mistress Vedehikā is violent. Mistress Vedehikā is merciless.

So often you might get somebody who doesn't show anger, but actually it's all hidden in them. I remember one person whom I knew who actually declared that he never felt anger. But of course, it was all over him. I mean, you could tell it a mile off that he was very angry.

So it's a case of bearing up, bearing up what we have to suffer now. It's that sense of endurance. And of course, in our practice, there's a lot of that because when we sit, all this turbulence comes up, you know, the fears and the worries and the angers and the depressions and all the stuff that we suffer from. And remember that we open up to it and we open up to it with loving kindness. We embrace it. And if we can take that attitude to anything in the world that disturbs us, then obviously it just undermines this wrong relationship we have of getting angry, of not wanting to endure things.

Of course, it gets worse because there are severe situations. Victims of violence, and, of course, torture. That's the worst. That really is quite awful, torture. And we know that even our own soldiers were playing at torture. And that's very hard to forgive, especially when you've been really brutalised like that. There was a lovely book, actually, although he wasn't particularly brutalised in a way, by, I think it was Brian Keenan, called "An Evil Cradling." And it goes back to the 80s I think something like that where he was hostage. Some of you might remember, and that is definitely worth reading and his ability to forgive them. This is remarkable. And you'll find that you'll find people who've been terribly damaged and are able just to forgive. And so forgiveness is the way out of this resentment towards them and resentment towards yourself. You know, you have to be able to forgive yourself.

It's often a case of pride, you know. It's an inverted pride. I'm horrible. I'm useless. I'm terrible. I ought to live in hell. So, again, the Buddha gives us a wonderful simile, which many of you will know. It's called the simile of the saw. Because if bandits were to sever you savagely, limb from limb, with a two-handed saw. He who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching.

When I said this at one point, at one place, somebody said, the Buddha had a great sense of humor. But I think he actually means it. Hearing Bhikkhus, you should train yourself thus. Our minds will remain unaffected. We shall utter no evil words. We shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving kindness, without inner hatred. We shall abide providing them with a mind imbued with loving kindness and starting with them we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving kindness abundant exalted immeasurable without hostility and without ill will. That is how you should train yourselves.

Because if you keep this advice on the simile of the saw constantly in mind, do you see any coarse speech, trivial or gross, that you could not endure? No, venerable sir. Therefore, because you should keep this advice on the simile of the saw constantly in mind, that will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time.

That was what the blessed one said and the bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the blessed one's words. So this is our overcoming certain taints. Remember taints are oozings, floods, these washes of negativity, of unwholesomeness that are within us, and they manifest in specific situations, specific incidences. Therefore, we have to have that real awakenedness to catch the first movement of irritation, of anger, of rejection, of trying to change something just to make us feel more comfortable.

But more that sense of opening up to the unpleasant—and then you see there's no suffering in it, there's no suffering in it.

So I think that brings us to the end of that little particular section. I hope that's been useful for you, and I hope you can take that into your practice. Remember, this is not just something to think about intellectually, but something to really apply moment by moment in your meditation practice and in your daily life.

When those moments of resistance come up, when you feel that contraction, that wanting to push away the unpleasant or grasp onto the pleasant, remember this teaching about endurance. Remember that you have the capacity to remain equanimous, to stay present with whatever is arising without being overwhelmed by it.

This is one of the most practical and transformative aspects of the Buddha's teaching—this ability to meet all of our experience with patience, with tolerance, with that quality of endurance that doesn't get caught up in the reactive patterns of the mind.

May you all find this helpful in your practice, and may it lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time.

CHAPTER 177

The Ten Fetters

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 26 min

> *In this teaching from the Mahāmalunkyāputta Sutta (MN 64), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the ten fetters (saṃyojana) that chain us to continued existence and prevent liberation. He explains how the first five lower fetters—identity view (sakkāyadiṭṭhi), skeptical doubt (vicikicchā), clinging to rules and rituals (sīlabbataparāmāsa), sensuous craving (kāmarāga), and ill-will (byāpāda)—are overcome through the progressive stages of Awakening.*
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> *The discussion reveals how these fetters exist not just as occasional mental states but as underlying tendencies (anusaya) that obsess the mind even when not actively manifesting. Bhante explains the four stages of liberation: stream-entry (sotāpanna), once-returning (sakadāgāmī), non-returning (anāgāmī), and arahantship, showing which fetters are abandoned at each stage.*
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> *The teaching emphasizes practical investigation through vipassanā meditation, encouraging practitioners to recognize these binding forces within themselves. By understanding the nature of these fetters and cultivating the position of the objective observer, one can turn away from seeking happiness in conditioned phenomena and direct awareness toward the deathless element (amata dhātu) of Nibbāna.*

Good evening. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Very good. So we shall just finish off the taints. I just, as a last reminder, just in case you've forgotten, what are the taints again? They are all the desires, the sensual desires, all the senses, the longing to keep living, to become, and ignorance, which often manifests as wrong view. Remember that wrong views is often listed with ignorance.

So there are taints that should be abandoned by seeing. So that's your insight through *vipassanā* and specifically around not-self. So that first one will take you directly to full liberation. The next one, by restraining and then by using and then by enduring and avoiding and removing, all those will certainly help, but they will not lead to full and entire liberation. But the last one will, which remember, is the development of the seven factors of enlightenment.

So the first and the last, number one and number seven, are the ones to remember more. But remember that as soon as you see something coming into your heart, into your mind, which is unwholesome, jump on it and then reflect and say, now which one of these wonderful techniques the Buddha has given us is to be used here? And that way we'll find ourselves becoming more pure of heart.

So I just want to read the last paragraph, the conclusion. And when the taint had been abandoned by all the seven that we've mentioned, then he is called a *bhikkhu* who lives restrained with the restraint of all the taints. He has severed craving, flung off the fetters, and with complete penetration of conceit, he's made an end of suffering. So that's somebody who's finally completed the path. And of course, as usual, the *bhikkhus* are very satisfied and delighted in the Buddha's words.

So severed craving — see, that's the end of those wrong desires based on seeking happiness in the sensual world. He's flung off the fetters, and that's what we're going to look at this evening, and he's made complete penetration of conceit. In other words, that whole sense of self has disappeared. So remember, self in this sense is identity with what we're experiencing, an identity.

So we shall now move to number 64, which is the Mahāmalunkyaputta Sutta. So it's the great discourse to Malunkyaputta. Often it would seem people were named the son of their mother. So this is the son of Malunkyā. Like Sāriputta, the son of Sāri. So I suppose in those days, instead of saying Johnson, you would say Jameson and then you'd know who you were.

So the Buddha's back in Sāvatthī. That, remember, is his favorite place. Anāthapiṇḍika's park there. The local king, Pasenadi of Kosala, was a great supporter.

So now he asks the venerable Malunkyaputta, "Do you remember the five lower fetters taught by me?" And I suppose before I go into this, I ought to just go through them very quickly. So the first one is identity, a belief in identity. That's a self. Sceptical doubt. Remember that sceptical doubt isn't the wonder, the honest doubt, the desiring to know for oneself, which is based on "I wonder if it's true." It's the doubt that stops you doing something. We'll come to that another time maybe. Clinging to mere rules and ritual. And then there's sensuous craving, ill will. And then there's craving for fine material existence and fine immaterial existence. That's number six and seven. So those are the *jhānas*, the absorptions. Then there's conceit. That's a big fetter. "I am." It's how you finish that sentence is your conceit. "I am" — see? And then finally there's restlessness. So this refers to any leftover agitation from the defilements and, of course, ignorance. So we'll come to them in the fullness of time.

So here he's asking Malunkyaputta, "What do you remember of the lower fetters as taught by me?" And he replies, "I remember personality view as a lower fetter, doubt as a lower fetter, adherence to rules and observances as a lower fetter, sensual desire as a lower fetter. And I remember ill will as a lower fetter taught by the Blessed One. It is in this way, Venerable Sir, that I remember the five lower fetters taught by the Blessed One."

Now, without the commentaries, we wouldn't actually understand the Buddha's reply. What the commentary says is that the Buddha, from this — or I mean, this is only a résumé, really, of the conversation — has understood Malunkyaputta to say that these fetters only arise here and now, only arise on occasion.

So this is what he says: "To whom do you remember my having taught the five lower fetters that way? Would not the wanderers of other sects confute you with the simile of an infant? For a young, tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion of self-personality. So how could personality view arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to personality view lies within him. A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion of teachings. So how could doubt about the teachings arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to doubt lies within him. A young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion of rules. So how could adherence to rules and observances arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to adhere to rules and observations lies in him." And then, of course, he says the very same thing about desire, sensual desire and ill will.

So then Ānanda steps in and says, "Blessed one, it is time, sublime one, for the blessed one to teach the five lower fetters." So although he's talked about it before, he obviously needs to talk about it again.

"Then listen, Ānanda, and attend closely to what I say." "Yes, venerable sir."

So now here he says, "An untaught ordinary person who has no regard for the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled in their Dhamma, abides with a mind obsessed and enslaved by identity view. And he does not understand as it actually is, the escape from arisen identity view. And when that identity view has become habitual and is uneradicated in him, it is a lower fetter. He abides with the mind obsessed and enslaved with doubt, rules and observances, sensual desire, and ill will. And when that ill will has become habitual and uneradicated in him, it is a lower fetter."

And then he says, of course, there is an escape. That's his usual way of doing it. For the underlying tendency is abandoned in him.

So what we have here is the Buddha telling us that at an obvious level, these fetters, unwholesomenesses, arise through our speech, through our actions, etc. But even when they don't, the tendency is there within us. So that's an underlying thing. There are, in fact, three levels of that. The first one is called *anusaya*, which is a latent tendency. Now in the discourses, they're not actually enumerated, but they were later, especially in the Abhidhamma, the higher teaching. And then the next part is that they obsess the mind. And then, of course, they express themselves in what we say and do. So those are the three things. And, of course, it's occasion that brings them out. It's an occasion that brings them out. We find ourselves falling into some sensual desire when the object of sensual desire arises. Otherwise, it won't manifest, but it's there as a potential.

Again, he gives us some similes. Just as when a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, that's the inner part, it is not possible that anyone shall cut out its heartwood without cutting through its bark and sapwood. So, too, there is a path — we can't get on that path until we go through the process of training. And then, of course, he says that is possible.

He then talks about — suppose the river Ganges were full of water right up to the brim so that crows could drink from it. And then a feeble man came thinking "By swimming across the stream with my arms, I shall get safely across." Remember, the further shore is always a metaphor for *Nibbāna*. Yet he would not be able to get safely across. So when the Dhamma is being taught to someone for the ending, the cessation of identity, if his mind does not enter into it and acquire steadiness, confidence and decision, then he can be regarded as a feeble man. In other words, this has to be truly investigated by us through the process of *vipassanā*, but also just any time of the day the notion of investigating who I am might arise. And of course he says the opposite of someone who is strong — abandoning unwholesome states quietly, secluded from sensual pleasure etc. And in this particular case he takes us through the absorptions.

Now, just before we go on to the last bit, it's good just to go through these fetters. So a fetter, a shackle, a chain is what's keeping us to this form of existence. So one of the definitions of *Nibbāna* is to be unshackled. It's an awareness, the *sati*, which is unshackled, liberated from its delusion with the world, its illusion with the world.

So we have this personality belief. That deep identity with the human being, with our psychophysical organism, with all our thoughts, with all our relationships, etc. Sceptical doubt is this particular doubt which stops us doing things. I'm sure you probably have a memory of being at the public baths and climbing on the diving board and getting right up to the top one and not having the confidence to jump until somebody pushed you and then after that it was dead easy. So sceptical doubt, doubting ourselves,

unable to meditate properly and all that, doubting the Buddha's teaching and doubting the teacher. It's a case of sceptical doubt stopping us doing something. It becomes a barrier even in ordinary daily life. If you apply for a job but you doubt if you can do it, then you never go for the interview.

Mere rules and regulations or mere rules and ritual ceremonies — the mistake is that they are actually important to the path. But no, they're just aids to the path. When we take refuges and precepts, for instance, or when we light candles, they're aids that help us to establish the right sort of atmosphere, the right sort of attention within us. They're just aids, really, but in themselves are, of course, useless in attaining liberation as such. In those days, there would have been lots of rituals to get what you want. The belief in ritual would have been very strong. And of course, it still is in some religions.

Now, those three go when we enter the stream. The Sotāpanna. So remember, there are four levels of attainment. The first one being that insight into one of the three characteristics, either not self, that everything we're aware of is not me, not mine, and itself is not a self. Impermanence, that also will help us to enter the stream, to see that everything actually does perish, does come to an end. There is no continuity. And the third one is *dukkha*, suffering, and that's really seeing how we create suffering. It's a direct understanding of the role of desire. And those insights have to be deep enough to have a change, to bring about a change in our lives. So those are the first three fetters, as they're known.

By the way, that first insight that person might have into not-self, it's a change of view. The sense of self is still very strong. And often people doubt whether they've had that insight because the sense of self still remains very strong, but the actual view has been changed or the insight has broken the illusion. I mean, the example I normally use is about smoking because when my father smoked, you know, pre-Second World War, 1940s, 50s, it wasn't considered to be particularly harmful. But as the science finally got through, when the tobacco companies finally admitted that they'd been fooling everybody, deluding everybody, everybody began to understand that smoking is really, really bad for your health. But it didn't stop them smoking. See, the obsession was still there. The view was changed, but the desire to smoke had not been undermined. It's surprising how when some people actually had the consequence of that — I'm thinking particularly of a father of one of my friends who had a heart attack, smoked all his life, had a heart attack and after that completely stopped.

Now the next two — the sensuous craving, craving that arises on all the senses including the inner sense of the mind, whatever the mind is offering, our dreams, our fantasies, etc. And all the ill will, all the negativity that's in us — they are only attenu-

ated. They're only undermined with the second path. And they lose their power with the third path. And what that really is saying is that the attraction of the sensual world is no longer there for somebody who's a non-returner. So the second path is called a once returner, suggesting that you have to come back for a bit more suffering in another rebirth. But the one who has broken through the delusion of seeking happiness in the sensual world, they don't have to come back to this form of existence. They can be reborn in a particular heaven, it is said, where they attain full liberation.

And then the final ones, the craving for material and immaterial existence, that's really to do with these absorptions, which are in themselves very delightful, beautiful places to be. And often the fine immaterial ones can be mistaken for *Nibbāna*. The conceit of "I am" — remember, that comes right at the end, the breaking of that conceit. And then restlessness is always there. That's the little bits of agitation that's left from old habits that the person has had. And then finally, undermining ignorance as such. And that suggests, of course, that they know what or who they really are. The Buddha within. That's the moment of complete liberation.

So that takes us through the ten fetters. So this is "whatever exists therein of feeling, perception, habits and consciousness. He sees these states as impermanent and suffering, as a disease, as a tumor, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void," in other words, empty, insubstantial, "as not self. He turns his mind away from those states and directs them to the deathless element."

That's really confusing, isn't it? I mean, what does that mean, direct them to the deathless element? It's a way, remember, of the Buddha pointing out that there is something which is not phenomenal, something that doesn't belong to the mind, etc., etc. Now, how do we do that? You can't obviously see *Nibbāna*. If we were to be able to see or experience *Nibbāna* as an object, then of course it would be conditioned. So it can't be that. It's not looking at that.

What he's saying is to turn away from that desire to involve ourselves in the world and to pull ourselves away. So that's why when we're in that position within ourselves of the objective observer, when we've accessed that observation post, to recognize that there is that distance, there is that separation, that everything we're observing is an object. And then, of course, to realize that the very sense of self, the observer, is an object, so we can't be that. And it's just a case of remaining in that position, which is beginning to see the deathless.

And when we're in that state, we can always ask ourselves what's it like, what's it like being the observer where there is no body, no physicality, where there is no emotion, where there is no thought. This comes to us usually at some time on a retreat but

even in ordinary daily life, you know, depending on what's happened during the day, as long as you're calm, as long as you can get concentrated, as long as you can lift yourself up to that position. You can always ask yourself, what's it like being this observer? Because that's what we mean when we say those who are mindful are in the presence, in the vicinity of, in the presence of *Nibbāna*.

And just that little insight tells us this is peaceful, it's sublime, the stilling of all formations, all habits, the relinquishing of attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation. That's the ending of the world as a place where we're going to find happiness and *nibbāna*.

And this is, of course, right at the end of the whole process. This is when we become fully liberated. And standing upon that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But he does not attain the destruction of the taints then. So if he doesn't attain the destruction of the taints then, because of that desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, then he becomes one due to reappear spontaneously and there in the pure abodes and there attain final *nibbāna* without ever returning to this world. This is the path, the way to abandoning the five lower fetters.

And then here's the clincher at the end. So Ānanda says, "Venerable Sir, if this is the path, the way to abandoning the five lower fetters, then how is it that some bhikkhus here gain deliverance of mind and some gain deliverance by wisdom?" Now, deliverance by mind is through these *jhāna* and the purity of the mind. But then, of course, there has to be insight. And there are some who are delivered just through insight. So that's the *vipassanā* only way.

And the answer is the difference, Ānanda, is in their faculties, in how they are. And of course, the Venerable Ānanda was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words, as I'm hoping we are too.

So I hope this describes the fetters well enough for you to understand them and gives us pointers, and that of course you're not confused by it all. I trust that you will devote your meditations to investigating the fetters.

May you be fully liberated.

CHAPTER 178

Refuges and Precepts with Mettā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

> *This episode presents a complete traditional Buddhist ceremony beginning with the veneration of the Buddha (Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa) and the formal taking of the Three Refuges (Tisaraṇa) and Five Precepts (Pañcasīla) in Pali. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides practitioners through the full recitation, establishing the foundation of Buddhist practice through taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, while undertaking the ethical guidelines of refraining from harming living beings, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants.*
>
> *Following this foundation, the episode transitions into guided mettā bhāvanā (loving-kindness meditation), systematically developing goodwill toward oneself, loved ones, neutral persons, difficult people, and expanding outward to all beings everywhere. The practice concludes with a beautiful recitation of the Karaṇīyamettā Sutta (Sutta Nipāta 1.8), the Buddha's famous Discourse on Loving-Kindness, which outlines the qualities of a noble person and the boundless cultivation of mettā.*
>
> *This ceremony serves both as a meaningful ritual for establishing Buddhist commitment and as practical guidance for developing the brahmavihāra of loving-kindness, essential for both formal meditation practice and daily ethical living.*

A moment's reflection. A resolution. And we can take the refuges and precepts. So feel free to make three bows.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Having taken the refuges and precepts, quoting the last words of the Buddha, let us strive diligently for our liberation.

So now we can practice some *metta bhāvanā*, developing goodwill. May you be safe, well, and happy. May you live contented in harmony with the world.

We're bringing to mind some of our benefactors, those who are near and dear to us. Friends, people at work, whomever we wish. A neutral person, turning the stream of goodwill towards ourselves. And into the heart of goodwill, someone we find difficult or having difficulties with.

Radiating outwards, first of all, to each other, may we. To our neighbors and neighborhood, to all the people in our country, to all the peoples of Europe, to all people on earth, and to all beings in all directions.

And we can draw the practice to a close with a reading of the Discourse on Loving-Kindness.

If you are wise and want to reach the state of peace, then develop these qualities. Be upright, responsible, gentle, and unassuming. Be easily contented and need only a few things. Be less busy and live simply. Guard the senses and be modest. Do not be attached to only a few people, to the exclusion of others. Do not do the slightest thing that a wise person would blame you for. And be constantly thinking, may all beings be happy.

Whatever living beings there are, be they weak or strong, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who have already been born and those who have yet to be born, may all beings, without exception, be happy.

Let no one deceive another or disdain anyone. Do not wish harm to anyone, not even when you're angry. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings. Let your love and goodwill spread throughout the whole world, above and below, without boundary, without ill will or hatred.

Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, so long as you are awake, develop this affectionate mindfulness. This, they say, is the noblest way to live. And if you do not fall into unskillful ways, but live well and develop insight and are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, then truly you'll never need to be reborn into this world again.

May all beings be happy.

CHAPTER 179

Faith (Saddhā)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 26 min

In this deeply personal dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma weaves together autobiography and traditional Buddhist teachings to illuminate the nature of saddhā (faith) in the practice. He carefully distinguishes saddhā from mere belief, defining it instead as confidence and trust—a foundational quality that works in tandem with wisdom on the path to liberation.

The talk explores the four progressive levels of faith: serene or clearing faith (the 'beginner's mind' that arises upon first encountering the Dhamma), convinced or anchored faith (deepened through practice and understanding of the Four Noble Truths and kamma), accumulated or aspirational faith (relevant to those who have taken the Bodhisattva vow), and finally realized or unshakable faith (attained upon becoming a stream-entrant). Bhante draws on classical examples from the suttas, including the stories of Cūḷapanthaka, Sāriputta, Moggallāna, and the learned monk Poṭṭhila, to illustrate how both devotional and intellectual temperaments can lead to awakening.

Particularly valuable is Bhante's honest discussion of doubt—both wholesome investigative doubt encouraged in the Kālāma Sutta and the corrosive skeptical doubt that constitutes one of the five hindrances. He addresses common obstacles practitioners face: doubts about rebirth, disillusionment with teachers, and painful self-doubt. His practical advice for working with doubt through body-based awareness and allowing emotions to discharge naturally offers accessible guidance for all practitioners. The talk concludes with an invitation to reflect on one's own relationship with faith and the significance of taking refuges and precepts as a formal commitment to the path.

Faith (Saddhā)

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Let us first be clear about what saddhā means. It is not faith as belief. It is faith as confidence and trust. Throughout this essay, that is what I mean by faith—confidence and trust.

I first came across Buddhism while I was teaching in New Guinea at a Roman Catholic school in Papua New Guinea. I read a book by a Franco-German philosopher and philanthropist called Albert Schweitzer, who argued that Buddhism was life-negating and Christianity was life-affirming. This left me with a residual dislike of Buddhism, since I was definitely life-affirming and prone to bouts of self-indulgence.

After my year's teaching, I went down to Sydney. I cannot remember how I came across a book written by an Irish Jesuit priest called William Johnson, titled *Christian Zen*. It was published in 1971, so we are talking about ancient times. This was 1972, and it struck a chord, so I walked up the road to the shops, being aware of myself all the time. It felt really odd, so I stopped.

It was only on returning to the UK, around three years later, when my life fell apart, that this Zen came to mind. I wrote to the Buddhist Society in London, and after a bit of a story, they put me in touch with Vajra Bailey, who held a Zen class. She is sprinkled in our pond here. She was only living a bus ride away from where I was living in Birmingham.

She led a group in a zendo, which was a large front bedroom she had dedicated to the purpose. We kneeled on benches facing the wall. She came over and gave me, shall we say, a gentle punch in the back to straighten my posture. Then all she said was, "Watch what comes up."

By the end of that forty minutes, I was absolutely convinced that this would get me through my crisis. I became an aficionado. My life took on meaning. I felt elated, purposeful.

Most of you, I am sure, have been through that stage. It is called serene or clearing faith—the first of four levels of faith. I do like Roshi Suzuki's word for it: beginner's mind. Some of you will know that classic book. It is serene because you really feel happy you have found a path, and clearing because it gives you direction where before you were searching here and there.

Now, the greater the effect, the greater the danger that after the initial phase dies down, the meditator stops practicing. Although the effects can change a person's life quite radically, as the sense of progress falters and the practice becomes boring, that is when they leave. But if after this phase there is a continuing interest in the Dharma and a deepening of practice, especially through retreats, then the faith becomes firmer.

Much here now depends upon a guiding teacher and a supportive group. This is all new territory, and we all need support and direction. I was really quite fortunate to find this teacher with a dedicated zendo who was knowledgeable. She was a good teacher. And more, there was a monastery, Throssel Hole Abbey.

At that time, my interests were fueled by reading people like Alan Watts, Christmas Humphreys, and Walpola Rahula—authors I do not think many people know now. The number of books on Buddhism was really small compared to today with the deluge of books, articles, and websites.

As I began to understand the teaching of the Four Noble Truths and karma, my faith grew to a convinced confidence, especially through the practice of Zen. So much so that after a year I took jukai, which means taking refuges and precepts. I still have my wagesa—it is like a collar which symbolizes the monastic robes. This level is called convinced or anchored faith.

One can practice from two bases. There are those who are liberated by faith and those liberated by wisdom. All that means is that everybody has a natural inclination a bit more towards faith and devotion, or a bit more towards the intellect. We all have some of each. Some get connected through the chanting, through connection with a teacher, through a heart connection, through reading and contemplating the life of the Buddha or famous teachers like Ajahn Mahā Bua and Mae Chee Kaew. This inspires them to practice and experience direct experiential understanding without too much—even very little—intellectual knowledge.

The classic example of this is Cūḷapanthaka, who had followed his very clever brother into the order.

However, he was so dull-minded that he said of himself, when he learnt a new verse from the Buddha, it knocked the one he'd just learnt out of his head. So his brother said he may as well go back to lay life.

When the Buddha heard this, he went to see him. Comforting him, he gave him a very simple exercise: to take a clean cloth and keep rubbing it all the while saying, "removing the dust, removing the dust." As he saw the cloth becoming more and more soiled, he realized that his heart was similarly soiled by defilements. He began to purify the heart and regained its original purity, realizing the cause of the defilements was unwholesome desire driven by a false identity of self. He awakened, fully liberated. So there's hope for us all.

Now, there are those who are drawn by understanding the Dhamma, driven by intellectual curiosity. They still have to purify the heart of defilements, but insights come from careful investigation in their practice based upon that intellectual understanding. This is very much like how a scientist might work.

The classical example is Sariputta, whom the Buddha named General of the Dhamma. He was able to discern all the moments, all the little stages in the practice of absorptions, the jhānas, and the practice of vipassanā. It took him two whole weeks to achieve liberation. This is contrasted with Moggallana, the other chief disciple, who was devotional, driven by absorptions, jhāna, heartfelt states. He only took a week. And he gained the six supernatural powers: clairvoyance, clairaudience, mind reading, recollection of past lives, various other powers, and most important, the destruction of the defilements.

Now both paths have their danger. The faith-liberated can become drowned in devotion and be happy just to stay there. And the wisdom-liberated can fall into the delusion that they understand the Dhamma so well—might even have written a book—that they must be liberated.

A classic example is the monk Poṭṭhila. He was an excellent teacher. Many of his students became liberated, but not him. And the Buddha actually called him "Tuccha Poṭṭhila," which means "empty Poṭṭhila" or "useless Poṭṭhila."

Swallowing his pride, he went to one of his students for guidance, but the student realized he was too intellectually conceited and said he couldn't help him. This happened with all his other liberated students until at last one of them directed him to a young boy, a sāmaṇera, seven or eight years old, who was liberated.

Again swallowing his pride more deeply, he listened to the boy, who asked him: how would he get a snake out of an anthill which has six openings? Snakes often live in abandoned anthills. Poṭṭhila said, well, all you have to do is close up five of the holes. And the boy told him, "That's what you've got to do. Close up the five outer senses and watch the mind." In no length of time, Poṭṭhila became one of the arahants.

This is something we can reflect upon. What is my leaning? Am I a devotional type? More the intellectual type? Both demand the practice of moment-to-moment mindfulness and vipassanā. But the relief here is that the devotional type need not be worried if they don't understand the finer points of the Dhamma. And the intellectual type need not be concerned that they don't have much devotional feeling.

At this stage, the possibility of falling away from the practice is still there. If in the first phase it was simply lack of progress after the initial inspiration, here the great enemy of faith is doubt—and a special type of doubt: skeptical doubt.

Wholesome doubt that leads to careful investigation and continued practice is exactly what the Buddha expects us to have. He says all that in the Kālāma Sutta. He tells us not to believe anything whatsoever until we ourselves know by our own direct experience whether it's true or not. And indeed, it's that very exploration that leads to liberation, that cuts through delusion.

Doubts can arise about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, one's teacher or lineage, and of course oneself. The Buddha said he was fully liberated from suffering. He said the end game was Nibbāna. But how do we know there isn't something beyond? And it doesn't sound so good to me. Either it's some sort of unconsciousness, or an awareness aware of nothing. And what about God? Some universal intelligence and heart that we're all part of? What sort of doubts have you come up with in yourself about the Buddha-Dhamma?

The Buddha never presented his teachings as "thou shalt believe." It was always explained, given with encouragement. Whenever people approached him with opposing views, he would listen and point out the weakness of their argument. Once the person accepted that criticism and was ready to listen, then of course he would explain his own understanding.

So it is with us. When we come across teachings we don't agree with—for instance, the usual stumbling block of rebirth—we must approach them with care. We don't use the word reincarnation so as not to be confused with Hindu teachings. Actually, the word reincarnation literally means reborn in the flesh, whereas rebirth simply means life after death.

Now, we may be of the convinced opinion that this is not possible since we're only the body. I was once on a train going out of London and a football crowd came in. They sat right opposite me, these two men, and one of them said to me, "Are you a Buddhist monk?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well, I don't believe in reincarnation." It was as direct as that.

I said to him, "Do you actually know what happened? Whether there is life after death or not?" He said he hadn't had any experience like that, and he tacitly agreed with me that he didn't know. So I said to him, "Well, why come to a conclusion?" And his friend turned to him and repeated, "Yeah, why come to a conclusion?"

When we come across these sorts of teachings that don't agree with our particular understanding, instead of denying them or feeling we have to give them the benefit of the doubt, just leave them on the back burner. Wait for more experiential information through our practice. It might not come till we're dead, you know.

There's also faith in the Sangha. Here the word does not refer to the ordained monks and nuns but to the ariya sangha, the noble sangha—those who've attained one of the paths and fruits. This of course includes lay people. Ever since the time of the Buddha there have always been those who've achieved these attainments. According to the tradition, once the dispensation fails to produce such exemplars, the teachings would become intellectual and devotional and eventually just empty ritual. They are the inspiration that infuses the whole dispensation, such as the Mahasi Sayadaw in our tradition. They're the ones who keep reaching the heights and become assurances for us that we can also achieve that.

When it comes to teachers, there have been some unfortunate, shameful cases—I think I'm right in saying all around sexual behavior, mostly male teachers abusing and taking advantage of women devotees. In general, one tends to idolize the teacher. They are someone special in our lives and we expect them to behave to the standards that they ask of us.

In such cases, the student may be overcome by discouragement and doubt in the teacher. On reflection, if they have doubt in the teacher, they might overcome that doubt when they remember the benefits of the teaching, and they may continue to stay with the teacher, acknowledging them as a good spiritual guide. However, when there's a serious breach of conduct, that can make the student even doubt the Dhamma. Consider how you would feel if information from various sources proved that the Buddha was having affairs with many nuns and monks. There was a case, actually, where it was discovered an abbot had a long affair with one of his students. It just broke the community.

But in general, most overcome their disenchantment over their teachers, just recognizing that they expected too much. That's what happens when you idolize somebody. I did.

Skeptical doubt becomes especially difficult to overcome when it is doubt in ourselves. Whatever the cause within our upbringing and life so far, what we may be left with is a lack of confidence in our own reasoning, decision-making, even how we feel about ourselves—our self-worth. This tends to be projected onto others, so we feel lessened in people's eyes and our self-esteem lessens further.

It can affect our lives deeply. We go for a job, get it, and then doubt we can do it, even though actually getting the job probably means we can do it very well. We have a growing relationship with someone but then can't decide to form a close relationship. The relationship fails and further reinforces our self-doubt. It can be a fear of failure, so the person sets impossible perfections, just reinforcing that self-belief. It can lead to chronic anxiety about everything we do. Is this what I ought to be doing? Is it right? Is it wrong? It can actually become a form of mental illness called imposterism, where the person feels themselves to be false or pretense.

I think we all suffer from some level of doubt, but hopefully it doesn't prevent us from saying and doing what we ultimately decide. In my own life, it took me two years to decide to join the Sangha, and then I determined only three years. I don't know what happened. It was such a radical thing to do. I was building up a career in teaching, owned a house, and had a growing relationship.

So the desire kept scratching at my brain. Finally, I went to see my teacher at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, Sayadaw U Rewata Dhamma, who was a Burmese monk. And he said I was too old. I was thirty-seven.

Well, frankly, it came as a great relief. Right, I thought, now I can get on with my life. But the fact was that the urge just wouldn't leave me. I kept thinking how wonderful it would be to spend just three years in an establishment that supported you to simply meditate, meditate, meditate.

So after six months, I went to see him again. This time he said that since I was now a teacher—I was doing beginners' classes and such—I was needed at the centre. Again I went away, but the relief wasn't so great. Indeed, I think there was a touch of disappointment that time.

Time passed, and again the urge returned. Not a simple desire, but something truly cloying that wouldn't leave me. So I trusted in the practice. I had to stop thinking about it. I hired a bungalow in the heart of Wales that a friend owned and went there for two weeks. I just stopped all that pros and cons business and simply sat. By the end of two weeks, my heart spoke with absolute clarity. When I went to see my teacher again, he just said, "Okay."

But at least it was an exercise in being certain.

Skeptical doubt, of course, is the last of the five hindrances. When we find ourselves in this sort of doubt, it's always wise not to get caught up in those mental proliferations, the ruminating. Rather, as always, just see it as an occasion to heal oneself of that gnawing doubt by feeling it in the body, usually around the chest. Sink into the agitation. In-

vestigate the various tones of the sensations—insubstantial, impermanent, and so on. There's no need to try and fix the problem. By allowing the emotion to manifest, that turbulence is discharged. And remember, no energy is lost. It's always transformed to the opposite, to the wholesome.

When it lessens and passes, just acknowledge the relief and perhaps the equanimity and clarity that arises. Even if only we've learned how skeptical doubt works and operates and fools us.

Of course, positive doubt—curiosity, the wonder of an artist, the philosopher, the scientist—galvanizes our investigation into the Dhamma, both the understanding and the insight practice.

Now, the third level is called accumulated or aspirational faith. This only applies to people who've taken the vow to become fully self-awakened Buddhas. That is, you have to be reborn at a time when the dispensation has disappeared, and the person has all the qualities needed to become self-awakened.

In Theravāda, the Bodhisatta vow is not the same as the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva vow. The Mahāyāna tradition transformed the vow into refusing to be fully liberated until all beings are liberated—a great compassion thing. I'm not sure how that works out since all beings are meant to be innumerable. But I think it's best to see it as an aspiration.

There was a famous monk in Sri Lanka, Venerable Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya. He was on retreat with the Mahāsi Sayādaw when the monastery I stayed at, Kanduboda, was opened in the mid-1950s. During his rise through the vipassanā ñāṇas, you arrive at a place of equanimity just before you have the insight that brings you to a level of attainment. And he remembered that he'd taken this Bodhisatta vow at the time of the Buddha. He said he remembered the faces of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, but not the Buddha. It's a shame.

According to the tradition, he cannot go any further. He has to stop there. He will now take many rebirths during which he will hone all the ten perfections to the point that he'll be ready to be reborn as a human being—as a man, unfortunately. Because in the tradition, time is circular. You always have the same situations repeating. Those of you who know the twenty-eight past Buddhas—they've all got Pāli names and they've all got two famous disciples.

When he's finally reborn, he'll be able to go through the paths and fruits by himself, as Siddhattha Gotama did, and then establish a dispensation. Venerable Ānanda Maitreya was a professor, vice-chancellor of the monastic Vidyodaya University. He was driven by that vow somewhere in his consciousness. But again, it's not absolutely secure because he's not attained one of the paths and fruits.

Skeptical doubt can still arise, yes. And he said of himself that he was honing the quality of understanding in this life.

Now, for those of you who are unacquainted with these paths and fruits, in short, they're all attained by insights into one of the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self. The first is called stream entrant, where all doubt in the Buddha Dhamma disappears. The second insight into one of those three characteristics goes deeper, lessening the power of unwholesome desires over us. Although the stream entrant must go through seven rebirths, the once-returner is almost there. The third one, the non-returner, is no longer attracted to sensual desires and therefore doesn't become a human being anymore—he remains in the higher realms. And the Arahat, of course, is liberated from all becoming.

So we've come to the final, the fourth level: the realized or unshakable faith, which is when we become one of these, when we become a stream entrant. That's the beginning. That's the entrance into the path. Such is the direct experiential knowledge of one of those three characteristics of existence that it dispels all doubt in the Buddha Dhamma. Some are happy and satisfied to have attained this path. After all, it's a great achievement to have risen out of the delusion that has caused persistent rebirth, sometimes into the animal and hell realms. That's not possible anymore for somebody who has achieved this path and fruit. And for some, it becomes an inspiration and a goal to continue.

As faith in the Buddha Dharma grows, there comes a time when a person wants to commit themselves. Traditionally, this is done by taking refuges and precepts. The refuges, of course, are the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. When the first mendicants wanted to follow the Buddha, he simply said, "Ehi Pasiko"—come and try. It's called the First Ordination. After that, when the Sangha started to produce Arahats, it became what we now call the Three Refuges, and it eventually became the Lay Ordination. As people joined the Sangha who were not so pure-hearted, who were not so advanced, the Buddha started to make rules as safeguards. Eventually the rules of the Vinaya grew to 227, so the monastic ordination really becomes quite an intricate ceremony.

Everyone will have their own reasons for taking refuges and precepts. In my own case, it came as a great relief. Having left the Catholic Church, which had given me a sort of moral and devotional basis, I was drawn to the atheistic existentialists and found at least a reason to live—may as well make a go of life. But with my life crisis, that was taken away, and I looked for a way to heal the heart suffused with turbulence. At that time, therapy as we know it today was hardly known, or at least I didn't know about it. I probably would have thought of it more in terms of psychiatry. I think this was lucky, for these days my first port of call would have been therapy or counselling. This may very well have helped me out of the hole I was in, but it would not have given me the spiritual depth of Buddhism. I may never have found a spiritual path as such, but remained happy with just being okay.

Buddha Dharma offered me something more—Nibbāna, transcendence—and taking refuges and precepts gave me a focus. From then on, everything I did had to be in line with the Buddha Dharma. There's no problem with reading other spiritual texts, with yoga, qigong, all sorts of therapies. Anything is viable so long as I feel it is helping me along the path.

Faith is foundational, and it's always brought up together with insight, with wisdom. Faith gives us that courage and commitment to practice. In the Visuddhimagga, the commentary by Buddhaghosa, it is said that faith is like a water-purifying gem, dispelling the fogginess of delusion and doubt. The practice brings insight, which confirms the faith, and there comes a point where faith becomes steadfast on the ground of insight into impermanence, reactivity, and not-self.

So where are you when it comes to faith in the Buddha Dhamma? Is it really established? Have you taken refuge and precepts? If not, why not?

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and have not brought confusion, and that by your devotion to the practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 180

The Kālāma Sutta: Freedom to Investigate

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Kālāma Sutta (AN 3.65), one of the most celebrated discourses among Western Buddhists. The sutta opens with the Kālāmas in a state of confusion, having been subjected to competing teachers who each proclaimed their own doctrines while dismissing others. Rather than adding to this cacophony by asserting his own superiority, the Buddha offers something revolutionary: a method for independent investigation.*
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> *Bhante explores the Buddha's famous criteria for evaluating teachings — not accepting something merely because of tradition, scripture, logical reasoning, the teacher's ability, or repeated assertion. Instead, the Buddha encourages direct personal investigation: when you know for yourself that something leads to harm, abandon it; when you know it leads to benefit, cultivate it. Importantly, Bhante clarifies this is not licence for spiritual 'pick and choose' — ethics provides the essential criterion for discernment.*
>
> *The talk examines how the Buddha addresses the Kālāmas' core anxiety about rebirth and kamma through the four assurances (cattāro assāsā). Whether or not there is a hereafter, living with a heart free from greed, hatred and delusion brings immediate happiness and moral integrity. Bhante also highlights the Buddha's teaching of the brahmavihāras — mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā — as the practical exercise given to establish a wholesome mind. The discourse beautifully illustrates the Buddha's remarkable pedagogical skill: meeting people where they are and guiding them toward deeper understanding without coercion.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So we're going to look at this *Kālāma Sutta*, which is probably amongst Westerners who get converted one of the very well-known discourses. It's probably more widely known than that. Basically, it's really about the right to ask questions — that Buddhism doesn't come at you with "thou shalt believe."

What happens is, in the opening scene, the Buddha arrives at a place called Kesaputta, where he meets these Kālāmas, and they're in a state of confusion. "There are some monks and Brahmins, Venerable Sir, who visit Kesaputta. They expound and explain only their own doctrines, and the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull

to pieces." So it's a case of "I'm right, everybody else is wrong." So the Kālāmas say, "Venerable Sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these reverend monks and Brahmins spoke the truth and which falsehood?"

What we discover, of course, is that they've got this existential terror of the age, which was: what will happen when I die and what will my rebirth be? Just as an aside, the Greeks and Romans, the ancient world, were afraid of fate, by which they meant what these capricious gods felt like doing. They had no power over it. And the horror was to end up in Hades, where when you hear descriptions of it, it's a bit like advanced dementia — you lose your identity, you're just wandering around aimless in this dark place. If you get to see the Odyssey, Homer has a stab at it.

In the medieval ages, of course, it was the sheer existential fear of going to hell. That's when the Roman Catholic Church came up with the idea of purgatory, so that only those who committed really bad mortal sins went to hell. The others could spend their time in a place where they were purified and then go to heaven. And these days, of course, for people who are scientific materialists, it's the abyss — what Nietzsche called the abyss — like death is moving into nothingness. When Nietzsche touched upon that, he called it the abyss.

So here we have it. At this particular time, it was this whole rebirth thing. And there were people at the time who were materialists who said, "Well, no, when your life ends, that's the end of it. You don't have to worry about what happens afterwards."

So now the Buddha wants to help the Kālāmas know the truth, and he doesn't fall into the error of these other teachers — telling them what he teaches and how everybody else is completely deluded. He starts by trying to lead them out of that confusion, to give them some guidelines. And he offers this method of freedom to investigate.

He makes this what's considered a very famous statement: "It is proper for you, Kālāmas, to doubt, to be uncertain. Uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kālāmas, do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing" — and if you think of Trump and the way he keeps repeating his lies until a lot of people believe him — "nor upon tradition, nor upon rumour, nor upon the scriptures" — because just because something's written down in some holy scripture doesn't mean it's true — "nor upon surmise" — to form an opinion or guess without really having the evidence and then believing it — "nor upon an axiom" — something that's universally accepted doesn't mean it's true — "nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over" — and these days we get these information silos — "nor upon another's

seeming ability" — their teaching ability and being drawn into that; if he can teach so well, he must be talking the truth — "nor upon the consideration, 'This monk is our teacher.'"

"Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: these things are immoral, these things are blameable, these things are censured by the wise, undertaken and observed these lead to harm and ill — when you know that by your own personal experience, then abandon them." So he's rejecting the idea of blind belief.

Now, he's not saying that you can decide what you want to believe. It's not a freedom to believe what you want, as if the spiritual life was a sort of smorgasbord and you just choose little bits that you like. And that often happens to Westerners, doesn't it? We can see the process of meditation, we like that, but rebirth — well, that's just an idea.

The test, of course, is to do with ethics. So there's a connection here with rebirth and ethics. He doesn't leave them entirely to their own resources. He says, "Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: these things are bad, these things are blameable, these things are censured by the wise, undertaken and observed these things lead to harm and ill — then abandon them." So that's a direct connection with what a person might feel to be unskillful.

And then he begins this Socratic method of questions and answers. "What do you think, Kālāmas? Does greed manifest in someone for their benefit or for their harm?" "For their harm, Venerable Sir." "Kālāmas, being given to greed and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, such a person takes life, steals, commits adultery and tells lies. They also prompt others to do likewise. Will that not eventually be harmful and damaging to them?" "Yes, Venerable Sir." And of course, he repeats that with hatred and delusion.

So he's continuing this process of questioning them, and in a sense he's teaching them as I think Socrates had wanted to do — to find a way in which they can question themselves. "What do you think, Kālāmas? Are these things good or bad?" "Bad, Venerable Sir." "Blameable or not blameable?" "Blameable, Venerable Sir." "Censured or praised by the wise?" "Censured, Venerable Sir." "Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to harm or ill? Or how does it strike you?" And they say, "Undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill. That's very clear to us."

And then, of course, he does the opposite. "What do you think, Kālāmas? Does absence of greed manifest in someone for their benefit or harm?" "For their benefit, Venerable Sir." And so on.

So the question, of course, is: how do we know that something is genuinely true, wise, or beneficial? Remember that we are prone to confirmation bias — just listening and talking to people who agree with us and always self-affirming our own beliefs. The Buddha talks about the three ingredients that go into freezing us into a wrong place: the initial wrong understanding, the wrong view; our emotional commitment to it; and of course, most entrapping, a sense of identity. As soon as you say "I am a..." — and whatever that finishes with, "I am a Buddhist" — then you're trapped, as it were, into that. Now, of course, some entrapments can be skillful, but he's particularly interested in entrapments that are not.

So in the *Kālāma Sutta,* he's giving them permission to think for themselves. Now, having done that, he gives them the exercise in which they can establish a good mind, a good heart. And that, of course, is the practice of *mettā*. "The disciple of the noble ones, Kālāmas, who in this way is devoid of coveting, devoid of ill-will, undeluded, clearly comprehending and mindful, dwells pervading one quarter with the thought of love, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth." So above, below and across, he dwells, encompassing all sentient beings everywhere in the entire cosmos with the abundant, exalted, boundless thought of love that is free of hatred and malice. And he does the same for compassion, joy and equanimity. Here, of course, he's giving them an exercise which, in terms of rebirth, would angle them towards the happy realms.

So now he offers these four consolations or assurances, having understood what the central concern of the Kālāmas was — which was about rebirth and its connection to your *kamma*. "Supposing there is a hereafter and there is a fruit, result of deeds done well and ill, then it is possible that at the dissolution of the body after death, I shall arise in the heavenly world, which is possessed of the state of bliss." That's your first consolation if you take his arguments.

But suppose, he says, there is no hereafter, and there is no fruit, no result of deeds done well or ill. Yet, in this world, here and now, free from hatred, free from malice, safe and sound, I keep myself. This is the second consolation. So whether there is or not, it's better to live this way.

"Suppose evil results befall an evildoer. I, however, don't think of doing harm to anyone. Then how can ill results affect me, who has not harmed anyone?" You will find this as your third consolation, your third assurance after his teachings.

And the final one: "Supposing evil results do not befall an evildoer, then I see myself purified in any case."

So the teaching here, the basic line, is that the inner happiness of moral integrity surpasses anything which is momentary, superficial pleasure. And this, of course, really settles the Kālāmas. He's given them a way of investigating what they've been told, and he's given them this leeway to decide for themselves whether there are karmic results and whether there is a rebirth or not. And this seems to have inspired the Kālāmas so much that they took the Buddha as their teacher.

So here we have this lovely discourse. He enters into this confusion, into these people who are confused. His intention is to help them out of the confusion, not to convince them that he's right and everybody else is wrong. He seems to have that ability to see where you are and to take you from that place to a deeper understanding. He's a great teacher. He offers them this freedom to inquire. He then gives them ethics as the first criterion of truth, and recognizing bias and distorted judgment. He's addressing their problems around *kamma* and rebirth, and he does this especially through these four assurances. And of course he's given them this *mettā*, these *brahmavihāras*, which will lift their heart.

When he sees that they now see him as perhaps their teacher, you can presume that either later in the day — because perhaps he arrived in the morning and now he's been offered some food and he takes a rest, the siesta — and then he comes back. Then, of course, seeing that these people have been affected by his teaching, he probably hits them with the Four Noble Truths. And if he doesn't think they're ready, then he'll come back and visit them at a later date.

So here we have a lovely story which tells us a lot about the Buddha and just his remarkable ability to teach people.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your devotion to investigating the truth and making sure that you practice, you will arrive at that wonderful place, free of suffering, *Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 181

Restraint (Saṃvara)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

In this practical teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines saṃvara (restraint) not as mere suppression or punishment, but as a skillful spiritual exercise essential for reclaiming control over our lives. Beginning with the Buddha's understanding that suffering arises from our relationship with the six sense bases, Bhante explains why we persist in harmful habits despite knowing better—desires have a hold on us, and we fear losing whatever happiness we have.

The talk outlines multiple dimensions of restraint: ethical restraint when actions harm ourselves or others, mindfulness-based restraint that makes us acutely aware of guilt and discomfort following unskillful actions, and wisdom-based restraint arising from direct insight into the unwholesome qualities of indulgence. Bhante connects this to Right Effort from the Noble Eightfold Path, explaining how we generate enthusiasm to prevent unskillful qualities from arising and to cultivate skillful ones. He emphasizes that restraint must be practiced without self-hatred or annoyance—we simply wait for desires to pass, like waiting for cars before crossing a road, allowing the fuel of craving to be expended.

Bhante offers a concrete four-step practice attributed to St. Augustine: affirming "I can" refrain, accepting "I ought to" take responsibility, cultivating "I want to" as genuine motivation, and finally making the determined commitment "I will." This method addresses the common confusion between "cannot" and "will not," helping practitioners build authentic resolve. The teaching concludes with a guided meditation using this technique, applicable both for abandoning unwholesome habits and developing virtues.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

The topic for this month is restraint. I've written something for this talk, so I'll speak to what I've prepared—it's a bit more organized that way.

The Buddha is very big on restraint, saṃvara, and we need to know why. We need to see how it affects our sense of agency and our self-worth. A sense of agency means control—your control over your life.

Whenever I reflect on the Dharma and practice, I always go back to the starting point, where all the miseries have their root. And that, of course, is the self. This self is a relationship—a relationship with the world we find ourselves in. That world is the

world of the six senses. Remember, the Buddha describes consciousness by the sense base: eye consciousness, ear consciousness. And don't forget, the mind is also understood as a sense base. This is the world we seek happiness in. Not that there isn't any happiness there; it's just that we can't maintain it. We can't trap it, simply because everything arises and passes away.

Now we know all this. We know it through our readings and listenings, and we know it through the practice of vipassanā, where we try not to get caught up in the fantasies and the stories we tell ourselves. We know that attachments and indulgence to anything we enjoy, from lollipops to intimate relations, will cause some degree of suffering or unsatisfactoriness. Yet we persist. We persist because the desires have a hold on us. And there's often also the fear that we will lose some level of happiness if we let go of what gives us happiness.

Let us first contemplate the loss of agency. This means we've lost control over some part of our lives. The desire takes over. Even when we make strong acts of will—"I will not scroll"—in a moment of inattention, there we are scrolling. Even when we're doom scrolling and we know it's cultivating despair, yet we scroll.

This used to be called a lack of self-discipline. But these days, nobody wants to hear about discipline, and it seems to have gone out of our education system. When was the last time you actually heard the words, "Have some self-discipline"? There is a connotation in the word of punishment, of course, but the original meaning comes from the word learning—a disciple. And to learn, we need to put our minds to it. We need to have self-discipline.

Here we have a situation where the ardent meditator knows they need to give up late nights to rise early and practice before setting off to work. Yet for all their determination, they still get caught up in social media and Netflix. What they're actually doing may be wholesome, but it means they miss out on their morning practice, which they give a lot of importance to. Something has to give. And that is the role of restraint meditation.

How does it feel when, after all your effort, you don't seem to be able to get rid of a habit that you know is harmful to you and may be harmful to others? Anger is often a good candidate. It comes out as sarcasm, spite, outright rage, clever digs that spike and wound. Turned inward, it beats you up, despises you, and hammers home how worthless you are.

Here we need that alert awareness, mindfulness, that senses when the triggers come—and not indulge in the rising anger, but actually mentally park it. We're not suppressing it, but putting it to one side and then raising goodwill, laying it over. When we turn inward afterwards, at some later time, we can embrace it with a sense of care and just allow it to manifest. Some part of the heart is diseased.

Here is the Buddha's description of right effort. It's when a mendicant generates enthusiasm, tries, makes an effort, exerts the mind and strives so that immoral, unskillful qualities don't arise. They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind and strive so that immoral, unskillful qualities that have arisen are given up. That's the unwholesome side.

The wholesome side balances it. They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind and strive so that skillful qualities that have not arisen do so. And they generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind and strive so that skillful qualities that have arisen are not lost, but increase, mature and are fulfilled by development. This is called right effort.

You'll find this same structure reflected in the discourse on how to establish mindfulness. So here we have four ways through which the Buddha asks us to exercise our restraint, four pathways that give purpose to our practice of self-control.

The first is, of course, the way of morality and ethics. If what we're doing is harmful, then obviously we should restrain ourselves—harmful to ourselves, or to others, or to both. Consider someone who has decided to become vegetarian or vegan on moral rather than health grounds. Now they have a connection with the suffering of farm animals. Yet because of past habit, they may find themselves buying fish and chips, that iconic British meal.

Fish, curiously, often don't quite make it into people's definition of sentient beings. As a monk in Sri Lanka once quipped, "Fish are considered self-propelling animated vegetables." I've heard people say fish can't feel pain because they're cold—such as when our fingers freeze, we don't feel anything. But accepting that fish are sentient beings, that person may feel guilty while eating, and they avoid the feeling by eating more quickly, stuffing themselves.

The second restraint is by way of mindfulness. While eating the fish, a person who has practiced vipassana will become more acutely aware of any feelings of guilt or remorse—so much so that it almost spoils the pleasure. This is where guilt becomes a guardian, warning us of such behavior. Where there's unskillful action, there will also follow unwholesome consequences.

Allied to this is awareness of the six sense bases. In hot weather, the shapely bodies of women and men come into view, and upon seeing, erotic feelings may arise. This is natural in the sense that it has biological conditioning. But then do we turn away and refuse to indulge, or do we linger and develop lust? Lust can become obsessive, but even at a low level, left ungratified, it leaves a feeling of discomfort and discomposure—a consequence that encourages us to restrain ourselves.

Such practice is a direct way of understanding the second noble truth, the cause of suffering:

The noble truth of the cause of suffering, O monks, is this: it is the craving which produces re-becoming, rebirth, accompanied by passionate greed and finding fresh delight now here, now there—namely, craving for sense pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

And it fulfills one of the right intentions—I prefer the term "right attitudes"—of the second step of the Noble Eightfold Path: namely renunciation, which is gently pulling ourselves away from indulgence and attachments. You could argue that renunciation is the whole of the spiritual path.

Finally, it is the understanding through direct experience—in our sitting practice and our ordinary daily life—of the unwholesome qualities of indulgence and attachment that develops the wisdom to practice restraint.

So *saṃvara* is the spiritual exercise of refraining from fulfilling desires that we perceive to be harmful. There's a holding back of that energy. But as always, if done with annoyance or self-hatred, with self-accusation, that would be merely suppressing it, not transforming it. Any annoyance and self-hatred will simply reinforce those very attitudes.

Instead, we wait for the desire to pass, as when we wait to cross the road for cars to pass. This allows the fuel of desire to be expended, the habit to be weakened. And the more we do this, just like any exercise, it becomes easier. The more we resist temptations, the better we feel about ourselves, simply because we've taken back control. The more we feel in charge of our lives, the more we follow the ways of skillful action, the more we feel happy about ourselves. The more satisfied and contented we feel, the more our self-worth grows. And self-worth is that deep inner feeling and knowing of one's own goodness.

One way to develop strong resolution is to fast. You'll find some kind of fasting in most religions—Lent for Christians, Ramadan for Muslims. In Buddhist teaching, it's included when a layperson takes the eight precepts and undertakes not to eat after mid-

day. This is not to be confused with dieting for health's sake, nor with fasting as a practice of self-mortification, a kind of beating oneself up. Rather, it's to become aware of any attachment we have to eating and drinking. Feelings of hunger are one thing, but the inability to stop ourselves from immediately reacting—hence constant snacking—is quite another.

In my own case, giving up a cup of tea in the morning requires total commitment.

There's also a practice that was developed by St. Augustine. In his autobiography, he tells us that as a young man, he had difficulty restraining his lust and prayed, "Give me chastity and continence, O Lord—but not yet." That's an honest confession.

Now, there are four parts to this practice, and some of you who have been on retreat with me will know them. They are: can, ought, want, and will.

We might sometimes fool ourselves and say that we cannot give up tea and coffee. But when we look a bit closer, there's usually a "won't." So the first step is to speak gently into our hearts, directly into our hearts: "I can. I can refrain from drinking too much tea," and so forth. We can add, "for my own benefit and the benefit of others." And then we must wait. We keep repeating that gently, patiently.

You say, "I can, I can, I can do it" — especially if there's a "won't" in the way. You keep saying that until you feel it's digested. And there is definitely a knowing that one can give up tea.

Then we have to accept full responsibility. That's the next step: "I ought to — for my own benefit and the benefit of others." Once that's taken on, again, you have to feel a bit of digestion there, a bit of acceptance. Once that's done, it's normally not so difficult to get that want. "Yes, I want to do it. This is what I really want to do. It's for my own benefit and the benefit of others."

Then finally, of course, that strong, determined act of will: "I will. I will do it." When the occasion arises — will.

You can practice this with virtue as well. So: can't or won't, will.

I personally find this best done right in the morning. And if I want to get up when the bell goes, I do it before I go to sleep: "I can get up when the alarm goes." I think you'll find it really effective in everyday practice.

So what I'd like to do now is to actually do this practice and then just slide into the meditation. Find yourself in a nice meditative posture.

You can either say "I can refrain from" or "I resist the temptation to" — whatever works for you. Now, what you've got to choose is some habit that you have which you'd like to be rid of, or at least let it have less hold on you. Choose that habit or attitude.

Once you've chosen it, you just very gently repeat into your heart: "I can. I can refrain from this — for my own benefit and the benefit of others." When you're doing this by yourself, you can obviously take more time if needed.

Once you get that feeling that you can, that you can resist the temptation, then we go on to the next one: "I ought to. I ought to do it for my own benefit and the benefit of others."

Once that's been developed within us to a point where we really take on that responsibility, then we can move into cajoling the heart: "Yes, I want to. I want to refrain."

As you feel that this has really built up, we then make that act of will: "I will refrain." You can add "when the situation comes" — it doesn't really matter — but just getting that commitment.

Although this talk has been about refraining from something unwholesome, we can also use these steps to develop a virtue. In the same way, we develop a virtue that we'd like to cultivate more: "I can develop this virtue for my own benefit and the benefit of others. I ought to. I want to. And finally — I will."

And so we can begin our period of meditation.

CHAPTER 182

The Buddha's Use of Similes

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how the Buddha employed similes and metaphors throughout the suttas as upāya (skillful means) to convey teachings that might otherwise be difficult to grasp through purely logical explanation. Drawing on Ian McGilchrist's work on brain hemispheres, Bhante suggests the Buddha intuited that people understand more deeply through imagery and metaphor than through abstract reasoning alone.*
>
> *The talk explores several famous similes from the Pāli Canon. The Simile of the Saw from the Kakacūpama Sutta (MN 21) illustrates the boundless patience and forbearance expected of practitioners, teaching that anger has no place even under extreme provocation. The Simile of the Raft demonstrates that the Dhamma itself is a vehicle for crossing over to liberation, not something to cling to permanently. The fire simile used with Vacchagotta explains the ineffable nature of Nibbāna, showing how the liberated state transcends all conceptual description. The Buddha's Victory Verses from the Dhammapada (153-154) use the metaphor of the house builder to describe the destruction of ignorance and craving.*
>
> *Bhante concludes with the profound teaching on the preciousness of human birth, illustrated by the famous simile of the blind turtle surfacing once every hundred years to chance upon a floating yoke with a single hole. This powerful image emphasizes the rare coincidence of obtaining human existence, encountering a Buddha's teaching, and having the opportunity to practice the path leading to the cessation of dukkha. The talk serves as both an appreciation of the Buddha's pedagogical genius and an encouragement to use this precious human life diligently.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I thought we'd spend at least an occasional meeting on the scriptures themselves. And I thought to start with the way the Buddha constantly uses simile. The discourses are just full of them, cleverly used to make us understand things from a slightly more experiential point of view, you might say.

Those of you who've read this masterwork by Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, about left brain and right brain, will know that the left brain is associated with logical, analytical, linear, verbal, factual and sequential thinking, and that the right

brain is linked with creative, intuitive, artistic, non-verbal, emotional and imaginative abilities. Now, actually, according to McGilchrist, these two sides work very well together. The one needs the other. But really, the right brain should be in charge. That's what he's saying. And in our society, in our culture, it's all left brain stuff—very linear and so forth.

So the Buddha intuited that—I'm sure he didn't know the psychology in the same way that Iain McGilchrist knew—but he definitely intuited that people understand by way of simile, imagery, and metaphor what might be difficult to understand as just a straightforward logical explanation. We call these similes upāya, skillful means.

I've just chosen some, and most of them I think you will know. They're very famous.

So first of all, how much patience and forbearance should we have? This is talking about right speech. There are five aspects of speech by which others may address you: timely or untimely, true or false, affectionate or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, with a mind of goodwill or with a mind of hate. In any event, you should train yourselves: "Our minds will not be affected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare with a mind of goodwill and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading them with an awareness imbued with goodwill, and beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill equal to a cat-skin bag—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will." That's how you should train yourself.

A cat-skin bag—I presume it's made from cat skins. But he's saying that we should develop this affectionate awareness no matter what, even when somebody is very rude, very harsh, saying silly things to us.

But now he reinforces it. How patient should we be? How forbearing should we be? This is a very famous simile:

"Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding, would not be following my teachings. Monks, if you attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw, do you see any aspects of speech, slight or gross, that you could not endure?"

"No, Lord."

"Then attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw. That will be for your long-term welfare and happiness."

This is what the Blessed One said, and gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

So there we have it. I once read this out in a talk and somebody said, "Well, the Buddha had a great sense of humor." But I think he's actually telling us that there's no end to patience. That's it. And that anger has no place anywhere.

Then there's a famous one about the end of training, or what's the training for? Here we have the simile of the raft. He puts this training in perspective to the goal, which is, of course, liberation.

"Supposing there was a person traveling along the road. They'd see a large deluge whose near shore was dubious and perilous, while the far shore was a sanctuary free of peril. But there was no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over. They'd think, 'Why don't I gather grass, sticks, branches and leaves and make a raft? Riding on the raft and paddling with my hands and feet, I will safely reach the far shore.' And so they would do exactly that. And when they'd crossed over to the far shore, they'd think, 'This raft has been very helpful to me. Riding on the raft and paddling with my hands and feet, I have safely crossed over to the other shore. Why don't I hoist it on my head or pick it up on my shoulder and go wherever I want?' What do you think, mendicants? Would that person be doing what should be done with that raft?"

"No, sir."

And what, mendicants, should that person do with a raft? When they've crossed over, they should think: "This raft has been very helpful to me. Why don't I beach it on the dry land or set it adrift in the water, and go wherever I want?" That's what a person should do with a raft. In the same way, I have taught how the teaching is similar to a raft—it's for crossing over, not for holding on to. By understanding the simile of the raft, you will even give up the teachings, let alone what is against the teachings.

Now, I think we have to be slightly careful here. What he's saying is that once we are completely liberated, we don't actually need to remind ourselves about the training, because it has become interwoven into ourselves. In another discourse, he's asked whether he actually thinks about what he's going to say when teaching the Dhamma, or whether it comes to him spontaneously. And his reply is again another simile. He says, "Well, what about a very highly skilled chariot maker? Do they think about what they're doing, or do they just make the chariot?" Because they simply have that know-how, that physical know-how. And he says, "Well, it's like that with me. Whenever I talk about the Dhamma, it comes out spontaneously."

So then we have: what is nibbāna? It is simply beyond words, concepts, images—getting across something that is inexplicable. Here the Buddha uses this famous, very well-known metaphor of the fire.

There are three discourses where he's talking to a person called Vacchagotta. Vacchagotta is, shall we say, very sceptical, and he doesn't really get it often. There was once when he asked the Buddha, "Is there a self, or is there not a self?" And the Buddha wouldn't answer. He was very quiet, you see. And Vacchagotta leaves with a click of his tongue, fed up. Ānanda then asked the Buddha why he didn't reply. One of the reasons is that if he had said there was a self or there wasn't a self, it would just have made Vacchagotta's confusion even greater.

So here the Buddha is again talking to Vacchagotta, trying to explain what nibbāna is:

"What do you think, Vaccha? Suppose a fire was burning in front of you. Would you know, 'This fire is burning in front of me'?"

"Yes, I would, worthy Gotama."

"But Vaccha, supposing they were to ask you: 'This fire burning in front of you—what does it depend on to burn?' How would you answer?"

"I would answer like this: 'This fire burning in front of me burns in dependence on grass and logs as fuel.'"

"Suppose that fire burning in front of you was extinguished. Would you know it was extinguished, that it was quenched?"

"Yes, I would, worthy Gotama."

"But Vaccha, supposing they were to ask you: 'This fire in front of you that is quenched—in what direction did it go? East, south, west, or north?' How would you answer?"

"It doesn't apply, worthy Gotama. The fire, dependent on grass and logs as fuel—when that runs out and no more fuel is added, the fire is reckoned to have been quenched for lack of fuel."

"In the same way, Vaccha, any form by which a realised one might be described has been given up, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated and unable to rise in the future."

Now unfortunately, this passage has often been used as a way of saying that the Buddha is just talking about annihilation, complete extinction. But in fact, that interpretation doesn't take into consideration—which has only come out fairly recently, within the last twenty or so years—the science of the time.

The fire element, like the earth element, the water element, and the wind element, was understood to be all around us, existing as latent possibility. Given the right occasion, the element of fire would come down and grasp the object. So that's why it serves as a simile for grasping. It's not the way we think of it—the log catching fire, meaning there's something in the log that happens. You might say the oxygen in the air grasps the log, something like that. But in their understanding, the element of fire exists everywhere, the element of heat. Given certain circumstances, it will congregate around a particular object, a log.

And in so doing, it will consume it. Once it's consumed, it's not as though the fire is extinguished and gone completely. It goes back into its latent form, and then it can't be described. You don't know where it is. It's just around you, you might say. And this is the way that the Buddha tries to explain that Nibbāna is simply beyond any conceiving, any imagination, anything like that. It's just beyond it.

And now we come to another great simile, the simile of the house builder. This, of course, is what we call his victory verses. They come from the Dhammapada, verses 153 and 154:

Oh, how many a birth in samsara have I wandered in vain, seeking the builder of this house! Repeated birth is indeed suffering. Oh, house builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again. Your rafters are broken. Your ridge pole is shattered. My mind has reached the unconditioned. I have attained the destruction of craving.

This house builder, of course, is the self—this delusion of the self. And he's actually found the core of it.

Then there's another discourse where he uses the same image. This comes from a whole group of discourses known as the Opama Sutta, or the Sutta on Similes, which is devoted entirely to discourses given with similes. It's in the Saṃyuttanikāya, the Connected Discourses.

This one, number one, reads like this: *So have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove in Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There the Buddha said, "Mendicants, the rafters of a bungalow all lean to the peak and meet at the peak. And when the peak is demolished, they're all demolished too. In the same way, all unskillful*

qualities are rooted in ignorance and meet in ignorance. And when ignorance is demolished, they're all demolished too. So you should train yourself like this: 'We will stay diligent.' That's how you should train yourselves."

Here again we have a very obvious little simile about the houses they built. Most of them were just single stories, of course. There was a presumption that you'd be very rich if you had a two-story house, so they were all bungalows. The ridge pole is the one right at the top of the roof, and if the roof collapses, that's real bad news for the house—especially in the rainy season, you're going to be washed out.

So here again, he uses this peak, this ridge pole, to point to the essential delusion of ignorance, which is the self. And when that goes, everything that has been created by the self is also demolished. You can't do anything unwholesome again, because the root cause of the unwholesome is this delusion of being a self.

What do we mean again? Reminding ourselves, what do we mean by being a self? We mean that we think, we believe ourselves, we experience ourselves to be this human being as such. And this human being is seeking happiness, but it does so through the sensual pleasures that the body offers and the mind offers, the heart offers—and that's the problem. So when the self goes, all the unwholesome stuff that's dependent on that also disappears. But you still keep living. The Buddha said the only thing that goes is this essential delusion, greed, acquisitiveness, and aversion—aversion meaning both aversion and fear.

And as a final one, the preciousness of human birth. This again is number two within this collection of similes:

Then the Buddha, picking up a little dirt in his fingernail, addressed the mendicants. "What do you think, mendicants? Which is more—this little bit of dirt on my fingernail, or this great earth?" "Sir, the great earth is far more. A little bit of dirt on your fingernail is tiny compared to the great earth."

It doesn't count. There's no comparison. It's not worth a fraction.

"In the same way, the sentient beings reborn as humans are few, while those not reborn as humans are many. So you should train yourself thus: We will remain diligent. That's how you should train yourself."

And this is supported by another very famous simile about the turtle—the blind turtle. This also comes from the Connected Sayings:

"Monks, suppose this great earth were totally covered with water and a man were to toss a yoke with a single hole there. A wind from the east would push it to the west. A wind from the west would push it to the east. A wind from the north would push it to the south. A wind from the south would push it to the north. And suppose a blind turtle were there. It would come to the surface once every hundred years. What do you think? Would that blind turtle, coming to the surface once every hundred years, stick his neck into the yoke with a single hole?"

"Oh, it would be sheer coincidence, Lord, that the blind sea turtle coming to the surface once every hundred years would stick his neck into the yoke with a single hole."

"It is likewise sheer coincidence that one obtains the human state. It is likewise sheer coincidence that a Tathāgata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, arises in the world. It is likewise sheer coincidence that the Dhamma and the Vinaya expounded by the Tathāgata appears in the world. Now this human state has been attained. A Tathāgata worthy and rightly self-awakened has arisen in the world. A Dhamma and a Vinaya expounded by the Tathāgata appears in the world. Therefore, your duty is to contemplate: This is suffering. This is the origin of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. Your duty is to contemplate: This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering."

So here we have this idea of coincidence, and we can begin to understand this when we realize that every moment is this meeting of all our past causes with present conditions. These past causes are coming, and they meet the present conditions. We never know exactly what's going to happen moment after moment. When we live in a country that is fairly peaceful, we can normally predict that we're going to wake up tomorrow. But not if you're in Ukraine, or if you're in Lebanon, or Gaza. There's a sense of unknowability, of sheer coincidence. And this is how the Buddha gets across to us the sheer fortune of this birth—being born as a human being.

Why is it that as human beings, this is the best place to be to become liberated? Because there is this joy and woe, and there is this awakenedness, this intuitive awareness developed enough to investigate. It's that process of investigation into the three characteristics of existence which is the process of liberation.

There we are. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that by—in the words of the Buddha—through our diligence, we will become fully liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 183

Upādāna: Clinging

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines upādāna—the eighth link in paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination)—explaining its literal meaning as 'fuel' or 'provision' that keeps psychological processes alive. He systematically explores the four types of clinging: clinging to sensual pleasure (kāmupādāna), clinging to rites and rituals (sīlabbatupādāna), clinging to views and opinions (diṭṭhupādāna), and clinging to the view of self (attavādupādāna).

Bhante offers practical wisdom on working with each type of clinging. For sensual pleasure, he distinguishes between enjoying toast versus eating toast to make ourselves happy—the latter being problematic. He emphasizes the Buddha's teaching on restraint, including 'fasting' from compulsive behaviors like social media and news consumption. Regarding rites and rituals, he clarifies that practices like bowing, chanting, and taking precepts are valuable and supportive, yet insufficient for liberation on their own. On views and opinions, he draws from contemporary examples to illustrate how polarization arises when we identify with positions rather than examining issues with humility.

The deepest teaching concerns clinging to self-view, which Bhante identifies as the root from which all other clinging arises. He guides practitioners toward the insight that the perceiver cannot be what is perceived, and shares the Buddha's profound observation that identity actually arises after wanting—not before it, as language suggests. This understanding creates a moment of choice, conditioned by wisdom, where we can observe wanting as an object rather than being swept away by it. The talk offers both philosophical depth and practical tools for loosening these attachments through vipassanā, virtue, and the cultivation of generosity and the brahmavihārā.

We're tackling this word upādāna. It's translated as clinging, sometimes grasping. It's important because it's the eighth link in dependent origination.

Its literal meaning, according to the Pali dictionary, is that material substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive and going—fuel, supply, provision. In other words, its role in the psyche is the same as something like petrol or electricity in a car. It sustains the process.

There are four of these clingings. The Dharma is very good at lists. The first one won't surprise you: clinging to sensual pleasure. Then clinging to rites and rituals as if they were liberating, clinging to views and opinions, and finally, of course, clinging to the view of self.

If we look at the first one, most of you will know this—it's the desire for sensual pleasure. But remember that there are six senses in the Buddhist teaching, and the sixth is the mind itself. So it means all our emotions, all our thoughts, which are usually dependent on some physical base. The problem is that when we're driven by this sort of desire, it's never fulfilling. As soon as we are fulfilled, we rest for a little while and then we want some more. It leads us to manipulating the world we're living in, to make it fit our ends. We're constantly having this little strife or struggle—sometimes quite minor, little irritations and things like that, and sometimes pretty major. But anything that arises out of that desire to seek happiness in the six sensual pleasures is obviously going to lead to some level of unsatisfactoriness.

So how do we tackle that? Well, we know it's through vipassanā—to see it clearly, to see that process clearly is the first understanding. And then there's the practice of not indulging it. We can make a distinction here: when we eat toast, it makes us happy. But if we eat toast *in order* to make us happy, there's going to be a problem. That's the one we don't want.

The other thing the Buddha uses is restraint. He's big on restraint. Whenever we feel that compulsive nature over something—doesn't matter what it is, toast, a cup of tea—just hold back and let go of it. Wait for that urgent energy to give way. And if possible, do without. It's like when you walk on the street and come across a cafe and the coffee sort of hooks your nose and reels you in. It's resisting that and just walking steadfastly past that cafe—at least until the next one.

But it's also restraining everything which is becoming obsessional. And don't forget fasting. Fasting isn't only not eating when that's become obsessional. It's all the social media, the news, the videos, the shopping. Anything that becomes compulsive, we stop for a while just to let go of it. When we come on retreat, the first three days are always difficult. One of the things that makes those first three days really difficult is the change of habits—getting up at a different hour, not eating at the same time. All these things are irritating. We don't like to change our habits.

So that's the first clinging: clinging to sensual pleasure.

The next one is clinging to rites and rituals as a religious practice. Now, some of it is very supportive—for instance, bowing. Bowing can be an expression of surrender, of gratitude, of a sense of offering, like you're offering your day for the benefit of others. And it can be a sense of awe, when you bring the profundity of the Buddha's teachings to mind and say, "How did he do it?"

Lighting a candle—that can remind us of the three paths within the Eightfold Path. The light is the path of insight, the warmth is the path of love, and the action of the flame is the path of wholesome works, good works. And it's important to recite the refuges and precepts every morning, because that just reminds you what your life is about, ultimately.

Chanting, counting beads—all of it serves to keep the mind steady, to prevent it from wandering all over the place. And of course, taking refuges and precepts as a public declaration, committing yourself to the path, has a real strengthening effect. It doesn't mean you might not become a Muslim later on. It's just that at this present moment, you're devoted to this particular teaching.

So all these practices—it's like sealing a particular relationship with the public rite of marriage. There's the christening or naming ceremony, and there's burials. These are all rituals, very meaningful, but in themselves, unfortunately, they don't lead to liberation. Never mind.

Number three—well, this is a big one: clinging to views and opinions. Our whole politics has now become polarizing precisely because of people clinging to their views and opinions. What happens is that you forget about the issue and start to attack the person. These arguments are called *ad hominem, argumentum ad hominem*—a bit of Latin there—which means the speaker attacks the character, the motive, some other attribute of the person making the argument. Forget the issue. As long as they can humiliate the other, they've won the argument.

Interestingly enough, the Buddha, in very early strata of the discourses, tells his monks and nuns not to get involved in these open debates. You just come away either with a big ego or you come away humiliated.

Just my own reflection: right up until Thatcher came in, politics tended to still be gentlemanly—still patriarchal, so gentlemanly. But then the names came out. They started calling conservatives who didn't follow her way "the wets," if you remember. People who were unemployed became "scroungers." The whole thing began to get quite ugly, really. There was Cameron making fun of Farage, mocking his name, his poncy foreign-

sounding pronunciation. And recently Starmer was made fun of because of his teeth. Of course, Trump is a master of it. Once he said "Sleepy Joe," really that was the end of it, I think.

So it's drawing politics down to this real ugly level of just trying to destroy the person. And of course it's happening everywhere—I've mentioned things from the UK, but everywhere you go, this is what's happening.

The antidote, of course, is a little bit of humility. It's realizing that whatever view I have, I can't grasp the whole situation, the whole matrix that the problem sits within, and that I need other people's perspectives. The wider my perspective becomes, the more I can say, "Well, I'm getting close to understanding the situation."

Sometimes people think this teaching tells you not to have a view. But remember, the Buddha had a view. He had right view. So we can have views. It's just the way we relate to them in terms of identity: "I am right. Everybody else is wrong. I'm a lefty. I'm a right-winger"—and so on and so forth. There's no need for it if we simply look at the issues and ask, "What can we do here?" It's as simple as that: what can be done? So this polarization is a big problem, and it all comes from this clinging to "my view."

The final one, of course, is clinging to the view of self, and this is the root clinging. From this clinging, all clinging clings.

The problem with the self is that it only sees the sensual world, and it only sees the sensual world as a place where it can make itself happy. You can't blame it. You can't blame yourself for wanting to be happy in the sensual world. What happens is that it obviously collects a lot of stuff—feels safer for it, more money in the bank, and so on. But then that acquisitiveness has to be guarded. You're always on the lookout for danger—governments, people like that—who might take all your money away. And if they're bigger than you, like governments, you tend to run, tend to hide.

So you've got this basic triangle, this three-pronged movement into daily life: assertiveness, aversion, and fear. From that, all the problems arise.

How do we undermine that? Well, obviously, again, it's vipassanā. And I want to point you to this place we get to sometimes when everything is calm. The mind is still, everything's calm, and you become very much aware of being the—I've got all these words—the observer, the feeler, the experiencer, the knower, the witness. It doesn't matter what you call it. But it's beginning to understand that whatever is perceiving cannot be what is perceived. When I look at the shed in my garden here, I can't be the shed.

So when I go inwards and I perceive a pain, I can't be it. It's an object of my perceiving. Making this more and more clear to ourselves begins to undermine that sense of self.

We can also undermine it by practicing virtues. Anything that weakens that sense of ego, that sense of selfishness—generosity, love, compassion, sympathetic joy. All these, when we're practicing virtues, must be undermining the sense of self. It's as simple as that.

And finally, there's this core insight that the Buddha gives us about the self. He saw clearly that identity comes after wanting. It's language that fools us. I say, "I want a coffee." So the "I" comes first, then the "want," then the "coffee." But psychologically, it's coffee, want, I.

This allows us to distance from the wanting. We can actually see the wanting as an object, some feeling within us. And it gives us just one moment of choice—the only moment we have of choice. Now, this isn't some airy-fairy free will. This choice is conditioned. It's conditioned by wisdom or lack of it.

And what we want to know is: how does wisdom grow? Well, it's the very suffering being caused that makes us seek the end of suffering, which guides us towards wisdom. That's how it works. This is a truly amazing insight that the Buddha had into our psychology.

So there we have it—these four clingings. Clinging to sensual pleasure. Clinging to rites and rituals as if they were enough to make us liberated. Clinging to views and opinions, the conceit of "I am," "I am right." And finally, this clinging to the sense of self. That one, of course, is the most difficult and the final clinging to be unclung.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that by your unclinging, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 184

Adhiṭṭhāna: Determination

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

In this comprehensive teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines adhiṭṭhāna—determination or resolution—as one of the ten perfections (pāramī) essential to Buddhist practice. He breaks down the Pāli term itself: 'adhi' meaning higher or superior, and 'ṭhāna' meaning place or establishment, as found in the familiar compound satipaṭṭhāna. Drawing from the Visuddhimagga, he describes adhiṭṭhāna as an unshakable resolve directed towards wholesome goals, grounded in wisdom and supported by all other perfections.

Bhante skillfully demonstrates how determination serves as a binding force that integrates the other pāramīs—generosity (dāna), virtue (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), wisdom (paññā), effort (viriya), patience (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), loving-kindness (mettā), and equanimity (upekkhā). Using contemporary examples, from raising children to pursuing justice, he illustrates how these qualities must work together for wholesome determination rather than mere willpower driven by ego.

The teaching includes a pivotal account from the Buddha's own journey, where his fierce ascetic determination gave way to a more balanced approach after recalling a childhood experience of natural, curious engagement—what we now understand as the sutta jhānas. Bhante emphasizes that authentic perseverance differs from rigid willpower; it maintains moral integrity, clear understanding of goals, and the ability to endure. He concludes with practical guidance on building this quality through small, consistent resolutions kept faithfully, offering the arahat's liberating declaration as inspiration: 'What had to be done has been done.'

We're looking at this virtue, this parami, this perfection—the word *adhiṭṭhāna*, resolution or determination.

We have many words for this quality: persistence, tenacity, perseverance, doggedness, resolve, resolution, steadfastness, willpower, purpose, purposefulness, grit. All these are life's little nuances to our understanding of determination.

The word itself can be split into *adhi* and *ṭhāna*. *Adhi* means higher, above, superior—you get it in words like *adhicitta*, superior mind, or *adhipati*, a ruler. *Ṭhāna* is used both in a realistic sense, meaning a place or location, but metaphorically it indicates a state, a condition, a reason, an occasion. Most of you will know the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta,

where the *ṭhāna* at the end means establishment, foundation. The *paṭi* reinforces that—a deep and profound establishment of *sati*, of awareness. That discourse teaches how to establish awareness.

I like the word perseverance for some reason—just dogged perseverance.

In the Visuddhimagga, it talks about the resolution to undertake and carry out the requisites of awakening without wavering. It's an unwavering commitment, an unshakable resolve. The text also describes an unshakable resolve directed towards a wholesome goal, grounded in wisdom and supported by the other perfections.

What we'll do is go through these perfections and show how *adhiṭṭhāna* acts as a binding force that brings them all together in order for us to attain a particular goal. Here we're centred on liberation, but these principles also work for making a relationship succeed, for tasks at work, for anything you undertake that requires effort—continued effort. All these factors come into play.

Let's go through the paramis. With generosity, *dāna*, you see that when you set yourself a goal, it's being generous to yourself. You're giving yourself something. You're giving yourself an aim. And because we are always interconnected, involving other people, it's also a gift for them. So generosity comes in there somewhere—the feeling of giving.

When it comes to virtue, *sīla*, ethical conduct, you can see how things can go wrong if this element is missing. Someone who has clear determination, I would say, is Putin. He's prepared to put thousands of young men at the front to be killed and wounded. It doesn't actually affect him—he's probably enjoying caviar. But he has that determination to sacrifice everybody to his final aim of expanding the Russian Federation. You see this in all these authoritarians, these tyrants. We could point to other people too, but we shan't go into that. So in terms of our practice of becoming fully liberated, determination obviously needs to be virtuous.

Now, *nekkhamma*, renunciation. Consider that we've just had a little baby in the family. Many of you will have had children. When you think about having a child, that's a huge commitment, and you have to have perseverance. I think it was Kabat-Zinn—some of you will know all that work on mindfulness training—who said bringing up children was like eighteen years on retreat. That complete devotion. A baby requires twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week attention. And you have to give up something. You have to give up what you would normally have done—go to the pictures, however you amuse yourselves. So determination involves some level of renunciation.

Paññā, wisdom. There has to be a certain devotion to righteousness. I'm thinking here of people who spend an enormous amount of energy trying to get injustices corrected. The example that comes to mind recently, for those in the UK, was this huge miscarriage of justice involving the Post Office, where the powers that be trusted an accounting software. It eventually ended with nine hundred postmasters being dismissed. There were suicides. Some went to jail. A completely miscarried justice.

And it was the actions of one man in particular, Alan Bates, who spent twenty years getting justice. Can you imagine that? Twenty years of perseverance. And that's the sort of wisdom—that idea for justice.

Now obviously, that's going to take energy and effort. But don't confuse effort with perseverance. Perseverance is a mental attitude, whereas effort is the energy you need, both physical and mental. Not having any of these can undermine the whole project.

And then of course there's patience. Like this man—twenty years, for heaven's sake—to actually have the patience and the willingness to endure. That's important too.

And then we have satya, which is truthfulness. It's really being honest about oneself, about one's capabilities. Obviously, if you have an aim that's beyond your capability, you just get burnout and disappointment. I mean, if I started thinking about becoming a professional footballer, got the kit, went training, turned up at clubs—it might be that a good friend would come and tell me that perhaps I was being a bit misguided, not showing enough humility. So there has to be that sense of being real about oneself.

There's method, of course—doing anything that is wholesome. And here we're talking specifically about liberation. It's obviously an act of loving-kindness, an act of care towards ourselves. And because it always involves other people, it's therefore an act of care towards others.

And then finally, there's this quality of upekkha, which is equanimity—being able to bear with things, not getting caught up in disappointment, not going berserk when something wonderful has happened, keeping that even keel. This of course reserves energy and helps us to be more focused when we want something.

So you can see how once you've brought a certain sense of persistence, a certain commitment to something, all your virtues come to support you. Gratitude—once you think about the things that have been given to us, the natural response is to want to give back. Virtues always support each other in some way. Whereas vices—anger, greed—they cancel each other out. You can't be angry and greedy at the same time, even though it might feel like that. They're two mental states that cancel each other out.

So how much determination should we bring to this process of liberation? This is taken from a particular discourse where the Buddha describes the ascetic practices he undertook. He starts off with this clear determination: "Let only my skin, sinews and bones remain, and let my flesh and blood dry up. I will not give up my effort so long as I have not attained what can be attained by human strength."

This took him into those ascetic practices—holding his breath for as long as he could, not eating, almost starving himself to death. And at some point he realized that this was over-efforting, the wrong sort of perseverance. With that realization, he leaves his companions, and then he remembers an occasion in his life—which according to the academics is the only bit of biography you can actually believe—where he recalls watching his father doing an opening plowing ceremony. He's a young child, and you know how young children get involved. He's totally absorbed in what his father is doing, drawn by curiosity, by interest.

This memory not only changes his practice from trying to attain something—trying to attain liberation—to investigating his condition. He realizes that when he was in that state, he was actually very happy.

Now, these experiences have come to be called sutta jhanas—and when I say "now," it's been only fairly recent, perhaps five, seven, ten years, that the whole understanding of sutta jhanas has come to the fore. The older jhana interpretation, normally called the Visuddhimagga jhana, involves becoming completely absorbed and losing all touch with one's surroundings. Those states are beautiful, very enjoyable, but there's no insight in them. Whereas with these sutta jhanas, they're much lighter. You can still be aware of things, but there's that quality of curiosity, and so they become a path to liberation. This is what the Buddha begins to practice, and this is what he refers to when he talks about people doing jhana practice. It's a supportive element to your inquiry.

So it was a case of him realizing this when all the other practices the ascetics were following had failed him.

There's a distinction to be made between this kind of determination and mere willpower. Willpower in the sense of total commitment, but with a narrow vision—you're not aware of the mountains and chasms in your way. You keep collapsing and pushing and pushing. And of course, it upsets everybody around you. That's the willpower approach.

So you know from the reaction of people around you that you might be doing something which is ego-based, pride-based, rather than coming from a sense of humility and of reality—being real about oneself and real about the situation. That often happens

when we're practicing and we move into over-efforting. That's the point where the determination, the perseverance has actually gone a bit wonky. Normally in meditation, if you're sitting and you do that, the meditation just collapses. You just can't do it for a while.

So when adhiṭṭhāna, this perseverance, this resolution is achieved, is developed, there's always that clear understanding about what the goal is. There's a moral integrity about it. There's a consistency about your practice and about what you're devoted to. And there's the ability to endure.

The Buddha reinforces this. When a bhikkhu—that means anybody who's listening—has resolution, has developed it and has made it his basis, the ground of his practice, then he attains the destruction of the taints. These taints, the āsavā, are deep-seated mental defilements. There are four of them. There's craving, the craving for existence—wanting to live, which is understandable, but it's that attachment to life. There's ignorance, ignorance about one's true identity. That's the basic problem. And sometimes wrong view is attached to those āsavā, those taints. They're also called cankers, which is a bit odd. A canker is some sort of white thing on your tongue that hurts. Somebody's called them fermentations. Translators do have a good time, I think.

So finally, how do we actually develop this? It's the small resolutions that you make and keep that builds up the muscle of perseverance. All of us have experienced perhaps being on retreat or on a Zoom or something, and you've made a resolution that you're going to sit every morning for half an hour, forty minutes, one hour, whatever it is. And it works for two or three days. Then it all shrinks, becomes twenty-five minutes, then twenty minutes, and then it just all disappears, and you wonder what's happening. This is a lack of that resolution, a lack of that perseverance.

So one re-establishes it. To establish a habit, you've got to put some energy into it, some commitment. You must do it religiously for three months, and then it becomes ingrained. Not to say that we don't get lazy again and lose it and have to start all over again, but that's the purpose of resolutions throughout the day.

Sometimes—and I've made this mistake myself—you make a resolution to help somebody without real reflection. I remember once a friend of mine said he was moving into a new flat and was going to decorate on the weekend. I just blurted out, "Oh, I'll come and help you." Well, come Saturday morning, the last thing I wanted to do was decorate his apartment. But I was good. I was very good. I determined to go and I went and helped him out for the morning anyway. So sometimes we have to be careful what we resolve. It's a bit like being careful what you wish for.

And we should praise ourselves when we've actually completed something which has taken a little bit of endurance. Often I don't think we congratulate ourselves. We don't have that self-love, that self-praise. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as it doesn't get into ego and "how wonderful I am." But when we complete a task, we should stop and just say, "Oh, that was good. I did good."

In that vein, it's good to remember past times when we persevered with something and achieved something. That builds up confidence. We can do, you see.

To end this off, there are always these little phrases that arahants seem to say when they become fully liberated. One of them is a lovely little thing. It just says, "What had to be done has been done." And you can imagine the relief, being able to say that. We set ourselves a task. We commit ourselves to it. We resolve to complete the task—though you always have to have a little small print.

Save in emergency or extraordinary circumstance, you complete it. And then you can say to yourself: what had to be done has been done. You get that sense of deep satisfaction.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that by your unshakable resolve, you will attain full liberation from suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 185

Dullness and Lethargy (Thīna-Middha)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a thorough examination of thīna-middha, the hindrance of dullness and lethargy, which he argues deserves more attention than practitioners typically give it. He explains that thīna refers to dullness in the head while middha refers to heaviness or torpor in the body, distinguishing these phenomenological experiences from the moralistic terms "sloth and torpor" found in older translations and even among the seven deadly sins of Christian tradition.

Bhante explores how this hindrance develops through habits of seeking "blissful oblivion"—the pleasant drowsiness of lying in bed, retreating under the duvet when bored or upset, or indulging in a kind of "soft suicide" that pulls our energy downward. He references the Burmese Arahant Sunlun, who achieved liberation remarkably quickly and attributed others' slower progress simply to laziness. The talk draws an important distinction between ordinary dullness (a temporary state that responds to energizing techniques) and clinical depression (a persistent trait requiring professional support).

Drawing on the Buddha's advice to Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, Bhante offers practical remedies: changing the meditation focus, pulling the earlobes, opening the eyes to let in light, practicing walking meditation, and being mindful of post-meal drowsiness from carbohydrates. He shares his own experience of spending hours—even ten-day stretches—working through this hindrance. The talk concludes with reflection on the connection between restlessness and dullness as expressions of the same dysregulated energy, and a memorable reminder that the bed may be "the most dangerous place on earth" for spiritual practitioners.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

This moon, I thought I'd have a go at dullness and lethargy. It used to be called sloth and torpor, which are, of course, moral views of them. It's also listed in the seven deadly sins of the Christian tradition. You'll know them all: pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth.

These days, we tend to use gentler phenomenological titles and call them how we feel them. So we feel them as dullness in the head and lethargy in the body. And of course, cognitive science always comes up with its own little definitions—arousal dysregulation. So when you feel very dull and lazy and all that, you can say, "Oh, this is just arousal dysregulation."

Thīna-middha, that's the Pali word. Thīna refers to this dullness in the head, and middha refers to this heaviness or physical torpor.

Now, I don't think we put enough accent on this. The other hindrances, everybody knows about—sensual desire and ill will, anger and all that. And we know about restlessness and we know about remorse and guilt and shame. And doubt often comes up for us. But I don't think we realize how pernicious dullness and lethargy is.

So how does it come about, this dullness and lethargy? Consider certain situations. Sunday morning, and you wake up nice and warm in bed and it's absolutely wonderful. And you think, "I'll just roll over and roast the other side for a moment." You don't need it, but it's just a lovely thing to disappear into this sweet oblivion. Especially when it's subliminal—you're not quite asleep, but you're not quite awake. It just feels very lovely.

Well, of course, that's really bad energy. Everything we do creates physical or mental energy. This energy now is one that pulls us down.

And then there are occasions when we feel a bit bored, or we're a bit upset, or feel a bit depressed—we'll come to depression in a minute. We feel a bit down, and we think, "Oh, you know," and we sort of get on the sofa and disappear, or throw ourselves under the duvet. One way or another we just get rid of ourselves. It's a sort of soft suicide. But it takes an effort. You have to do it. There has to be this intention to disappear, and there's an energy that makes you do that. And of course, when it comes up in meditation or in ordinary daily life, you just get this dullness in your head and this heaviness in the body. So it's just a bad habit, that's all.

There was an Arahant in Burma called Sunlun, and he attained full liberation at record Olympic speed. It seems he was a clerk in an office, and he met someone who taught him how to do breathing meditation. But what they taught him was this very heavy, fast breathing. You can get it on YouTube—S-U-N-L-U-N. And it was something like six months. He just did this practice, and within six months, he'd made it. And then he began to teach the system.

He was asked, "Why is it that people—I mean, you did it in this express speed—how is it people don't?" And he said, "It's because they're lazy."

So there we are. That's coming from an Arahant.

The problem with dullness and lethargy is that it then expresses itself as a sort of apathy, an unwillingness to do something. "I can't be bothered." Boredom sinks in. So it really has a long effect on us in terms of our attitude in daily life.

You have to be careful not to confuse it with depression. I've got some material here which points out the difference.

So in meditation—the dullness—or in ordinary daily life when you feel dull or you feel this heaviness in the body, it's normally just a state. But if it's depression, it becomes a trait. It's with you. It's with you a lot of the time.

And in the posture, it improves with lifting the energy. So if you feel drowsy in the posture, there are a few things you can do. You can open your eyes, let the light in, you can lift your body up, put more energy into it, and it normally will dissipate. The other thing, of course, is to sink into the feeling and just be with it and investigate its qualities—the softness of it, the tingliness of it. You'd be surprised how it feels when you drop into the body. And sometimes if you're dull in the head and you just wake up, as it were, and investigate this sort of porridge in the head, you'd be surprised. You wake up like a light bulb. It's quite remarkable.

But if it's depression, it's a mood. It just doesn't move. So you have to be careful not to confuse those two. And if you do think that you are depressed, then obviously you might need some help.

Just zooming forward to the Buddha. So he had his early two disciples, Moggallana and Sariputta. They were Brahmins. And they became, of course, his two chief disciples. Moggallana went to him for some advice about dullness and lethargy, and he gave these sorts of advice. He says change the focus, put your attention on something which is going to raise your energy. In his terms, it could be reflecting on the Dharma. You can even do some chanting, just something to lift the energy.

He also suggests that you pull your earlobes. So you can always try that. If you really press your fingers in, it really hurts. In the old days, that's what your parents used to get hold of, just to wake you up.

And then there's light, of course. I've mentioned opening the eyes and letting the light in. And then he says walking meditation, of course. You can always do that.

Also, just in ordinary daily life, remember, after you've eaten, even if it's the right amount, if it's carbohydrates, the body does produce a chemical that makes you feel drowsy, wanting you to spend some time resting in order to digest and go through that whole process. But you have to be careful that you don't give in to the sleepiness of it. That's all. And if in fact you are overcome by sleepiness after you've eaten, then you might be eating too much.

And then he says, when all that fails, he talks about mindful rest. So to actually rest and try something like yoga nidra, just to relax and not actually lose consciousness.

So let's go back a little bit to the causes. Just to run over those causes again: there's overeating, sometimes oversleeping—that's when you're indulging in blissful oblivion. Be careful of boredom; that also makes you want to go to sleep, so you have to lift up a bit of interest.

And physical exercise—don't forget physical exercise. It doesn't have to be much, but you've got to take care of the body in terms of its energy systems. Doing things like Tai Chi, yoga, but also some aerobic stuff like walking or cycling or something. All these add to a general feeling of energy.

Now, one thing you can do if you do feel sleepy is to again remind ourselves of the urgency of the situation. Every morning we wake up and I'm sure that we are absolutely certain we will live the whole day. But there's nothing certain about that at all. We can drop dead any time, or we could be caught up in an accident, or fall off a cliff. Who knows? It's getting that feel that we're living on this knife edge, and that brings a sense of urgency of wanting to really bring the practice into daily life. Sometimes you can bring inspiring teachers and teachings to mind.

So basically, it's a hindrance, right? It's one of the hindrances. It's a mental state that I think we have to take quite seriously. In my own practice, I've spent hours dealing with dullness and lethargy. And at one point, it used to last for ten days. I used to just walk around in this fog. And there was a lovely occasion in a meditation room that I was staying in Malaysia at the time. I was working with Upandita.

And everybody, of course, was getting up at half past three. The diligent ones, if they were falling asleep in meditation, were doing walking meditation at the back of the hall. The lights were quite low, and we're all sitting there. Then there's this hell-raising crash—glass breaking. It sounded terrible. This poor meditator, he might have been a monk or a nun, walks straight into a glass picture. That's how dull you can get. He wasn't hurt, but it was a funny occasion.

I think we've covered basically all of it now.

I'd like to leave you with something I haven't said for a very long time, which is to recognize that we were most probably conceived on a bed and we probably were born on a bed. We spend a third of our lives in bed. When we're sick, we go to bed, and we'll probably die in a bed. So it's good to remember that the bed is probably the most dangerous place on earth. Just stay with that. Every time you look at the bed, think of it as the pit—so that you actually regulate how much you're falling asleep. Because any oversleep creates this bad energy, this downer.

On a final note, there is a connection between restlessness and dullness and lethargy. Often in your meditation, you'll be quite restless and then suddenly find yourself dozing. Sometimes you're feeling very dull and unenergetic and suddenly you become restless. As I experience it, it's the same energy—one is coming up and the other is going down. So one trick when you're feeling dull is to start from the feet and just bring your attention up the body, feeling things. It's an exploration. But don't go down—start again at the feet and just keep coming up. That, for me anyway, has the effect of lifting that energy.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that by your diligent practice—never falling into the error of dullness and lethargy—you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 186

Polarisation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this timely reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the phenomenon of polarisation through the Buddha's teachings on identity (attā), conceit (māna), and mental proliferation (papañca). He identifies how the three conceits—thinking oneself better than, worse than, or equal to others—fuel group identity and opposition, transforming policy disagreements into existential conflicts where each side views the other as a moral threat.

Drawing from the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta (MN 18), the Honeyball Discourse, Bhante explains the psychological process by which contact leads to feeling, perception, thought, and ultimately proliferation—the source of judgments that beset us. He shows how this inner process becomes magnified between groups through social media algorithms that feed on threat and opposition, creating epistemic silos where realities become incompatible with one another.

Bhante offers practical guidance for countering polarisation both externally and internally. Externally, he encourages engagement with open debate, citizen assemblies, and careful media consumption. Internally, he teaches how to work with biases—whether explicit or implicit—through acceptance, recognition of unwholesomeness, and the cultivation of mettā. He describes how allowing aversive states to arise and pass away in meditation can naturally transform them toward their opposites, reflecting the Right Intention of the Noble Eightfold Path: from greed to generosity, hatred to love, and cruelty to compassion.

This talk provides essential guidance for practitioners navigating an increasingly divided world while maintaining the Buddha's teaching on interconnectedness and not-self.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I'm going to offer some reflections on polarisation. I've been researching this topic, and I'm trying to understand it within the Dharma of the Buddha.

Polarisation often happens in times of change, when people take positions. This would be fine, except that identity seems to be the primary cause for this polarisation, or the foundation of it. Of course, that's at the root of suffering, according to the not-self doctrine of the Buddha. Each party thinks of itself as morally superior, hence more virtuous, more intelligent and, of course, more patriotic. This is the working of the self that thrives on comparison — not on the various definitions of what virtue might be, but

personalising and criticising the person. Hence the three conceits: I'm better than you, I'm worse than you, and the more subtle conceit, I'm equal. The last one is what supports group identity. You find your companions and that group now compares itself with other groups. That's how it works.

When it comes to immigration, for instance, we have those who accept it and even say we need more of it. And the opposite, of course, who say it's a conspiracy to replace the white race. These people see each other as existential threats because they've personalised it. Disagreements are no longer about policy, but about who you are.

Now we as *Dhammikas* — which was the original way that the followers of the Buddha referred to themselves, followers of the true law — we need to be aware when we're identifying with a group and not lose the objective perspective, which enables us to criticise their stance on any particular topic. For instance, if there's a general agreement in the group that immigration has gone too far, especially since COVID, then we also need to know that there are changes happening in the European Convention of Human Rights, which also protect our own freedoms.

This leads to hardening of positions, moralising of areas such as public health, climate crisis and wealth. They become moral absolutes such that any compromise is experienced as betrayal. Because of the distortion of conceit, such positions fail to see the interconnectedness, interrelatedness, interdependence that we talk about. For instance, withdrawing international aid — in other words, not sharing our wealth — leads to greater poverty. So it should not be a surprise that the numbers grow of people wanting to escape that very poverty and destitution. This fact that richer countries are reducing aid also tells us about this neoliberal order and its economic system, which has allowed the market to rule without any social responsibility and follows the dictum, greed is good. The system has produced such uncertainty that more and more people are feeling their jobs are insecure, causing anxiety about loss of status and wealth. Such unhealthy and unwholesome mental states drive people to believe anyone who says they've got the answer.

All these fears around such areas as loss of work, rising cost of living, immigration and climate are all coupled with the growing despair that normal institutions are incapable of bettering the situation. This leads to a loss of confidence in political parties, unions, religious organisations, and other civic institutions that once were able to mediate and bring needed change. It's no wonder that people start to join mass movements, emotionally manipulated by demagogues and led by populists to deceive them into believing that they are working for the common good.

What has made everything exponentially worse, of course, is social media. From the heady days when it was believed the internet would bring a harmonious world community, we're descending into a worldwide verbal brawl. At the moment it's words, but it soon could become violent action. Witness the storming of the Capitol by MAGA devotees. The algorithms feed on our natural bent for threat and opposition, rather than helping us to welcome and cooperate. They herd people into what are called epistemic silos — isolated groups of like-minded people that go on to intensify the situation, even to the point of conspiracies. This, of course, has happened many times in history, leading to civil wars. Europe's been full of civil wars.

Such an occasion happened in our little tiny village of Whitegrit. A neighbour working for the Shropshire Council in England to bring more wealth to the area won a grant — I think it was a million pounds actually — from the lottery fund. A local eco-warrior saw this as a danger, turning the area into a holiday resort. There were meetings and finally a confrontation with the lottery fund grant receiver. Young men used foul language, happily stamped out by a retired magistrate. Eventually everything calmed down. In the meantime, an email was sent full of expletives calling on resistance. Frankly, the whole fracas was beyond pathetic. To this day, I haven't seen any change and still wonder what happened to the money. But all the markers were there. Moral outrage: what right of the Shropshire Council to do this to us? We're in Powys, Wales. Simplified narrative: it's going to ruin the area. Conspiracy theories: what else are the council going to do? And group validation: I was told the meeting at the pub went very well. It's a wonder they didn't turn up to the meeting armed with picks, shovels and trowels, the local population being farmers and retired well-to-do. But what stays with me is the amount of anger that it generated. Quite weird.

The consequences of these silos is that they are groups that create realities that cannot coexist with other realities. That's the problem with conspiracies. This is also a consequence of the postmodernism that questioned objective truth, declaring we all have our own realities, hence all is relative. So we move to post-truth and, of course, outright lying.

Now, the Buddha taught the whole of the spiritual life was good companionship. We're interdependent beings. And of course, the obverse is also true: a den of thieves. Good companionship, in inverted commas, is also necessary to invoke false narratives and conspiracies. The disturbing fact is that feedback loops intensify, since thoughts feed on thoughts, emotions on emotions, and readily backed by social media and the rewards of finding such friends — the feeling of safety, emotional support and ideological fantasising.

The Buddha tells us about this inner process very clearly and how it produces proliferation. The Pāli word is *papañca*, which I particularly like. Sense consciousness arises from the base of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind-heart, dependent on those senses. When you have an object and a sense base and consciousness, that's what he calls contact. Contact is a requirement for feeling. What we feel, we perceive. What we perceive, we think about. What we think about, we proliferate. What we proliferate is the source from which judgements driven by proliferating perceptions beset a person. And this occurs on all the senses. For those of you who are interested, that's from the Honeyball Discourse in the Middle Length Sayings, number 18.

The same process is magnified between people, so that moral outrage rewarded by groups leads to certainty, and the group reinforces itself by denigrating the opposite groups, leading to a loss of empathy and a loss of communication. This distrust simply leads to a hardening of positions, especially where the others are seen as potential threats. And again, there are the emotional rewards of like-minded friends.

So how can we do something to reverse the process or at least undermine it? We have here the basic cause: identity, how people define themselves. And this identity narrows to a particular cause, creating a barrier that expels anyone who disagrees and then places verbal and other weapons on the barrier to destroy those it describes as enemies. For such an alienated group, one approach is to point to a higher identity that embraces, to some extent, those of other parties. This is the work of politics, of course.

When it comes to immigration, for instance, both sides of the argument need to be lifted to a greater overall view of the situation. This can be done through the very media that supports polarisation by bringing opposing groups to dispute in the open. No matter how distasteful we may find some of the people, they need to be engaged in open debate. There's also the benefit of citizen assemblies that have been used to great effect in Ireland. I don't know why we don't have them in the UK. Perhaps the government finds them threatening.

When we identify with a cause, everything becomes saturated with me, and me is always right. We might refer to this as ego, but I prefer the old word pride. It finds it hard to compromise, and any giving in to the opposition is seen as a sort of shaming betrayal. But once we soften the grip and admit that no one has total exclusive truth and open up to another's views, compromise allows a wise solution. These are perspectives that can accommodate different views. Enemies can become people we can discuss and argue with. And there's our Dharma practice.

As ordinary citizens, we need to make our views known to politicians, to our local MP, and whenever possible encourage the government to control media content. We also need to be sensitive to journalists, to make sure we know who are non-partisan and independent. We need to be able to tell facts from comment. And when it comes to media, to limit the amount and type we allow into our hearts.

We also have to admit to our biases. Biases can be explicit — we're aware of them — or implicit — we're not aware of them. Prejudices, meanwhile, are those biases that we're actively developing. Acknowledging biases allows us to counteract their effect. It's virtually impossible not to have religious, racial, gender and class bias. It's in the DNA of our culture. We may find that difficult to accept, but unless we're aware of them, they'll affect our behaviour. We may be embarrassed by Freudian slips and suddenly become self-defensive or aggressive when accused.

Practising *mettā* is not just a contemplative practice, but approaching people or media we are strongly against with a heart that is open to understanding where they come from. It would really help to find a discussion group — online, or better in person — which is set to bring people of differing views into dialogue with each other.

This leads us to realising that it is destructive to shame other people. Like, for instance, saying they're ignorant. This happened after the Brexit referendum. There's no point in showering people with facts if they don't trust us. The wisest thing is to follow the Buddha's own approach, which was to understand the other's position and question it before launching into our own views and opinions.

Polarisation isn't something new. It can lead to civil wars. It's done so in many countries in the past. It's our task to be sure that we're not fuelling this malignancy that has the danger of metastasising into a general conflict that's of no benefit to anybody.

So what do we do when a racist, sexist, religious, gender or any other biased thought comes into the mind? We might find ourselves feeling guilty and push the thought away without really accepting it. That conditioning has not been allowed to manifest and continues to fester. If we allow the bias to manifest in our minds and hearts, then we can begin to undermine it. First, there's the acceptance: this is a bias in my heart. And once we accept it, we can recognise it as unwholesome. Usually it arises because we've seen or heard someone whom the bias hates. So we can bring that person to mind, see the situation from their point of view. We can apologise to them as an act of Dharma practice within ourselves. Then we can hold the person in a caring embrace. You can't hate and care at the same time.

Sometimes you have to be creative with this process of undermining biases. If we're sitting in meditation and we get one of these biases coming up, we might find it just as useful to sit with the aversion, just the feeling of the aversion. What we're doing is allowing that bad energy to exhaust itself. If we stay to the very end, when that feeling of aversion comes to an end, we stay to the point where it disappears, and we might experience it transforming into the opposite. We might suddenly find our heart full of love or peacefulness or some other positive state. Nothing's lost in allowing these negative states to come up and pass away. They're always changing towards their opposites. This we find in the right attitude of the Eightfold Path, which is stated as going from greed to generosity, hatred to love, and cruelty to compassion. It happens naturally in the meditation, as long as we allow the heart to have full freedom to express itself.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion. Write to me if they do. And may your practice liberate you from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 187

Muditā: Cultivating Sympathetic Joy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *In this practical teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the often-overlooked brahmavihāra of muditā (sympathetic joy), noting that while mettā is frequently taught, the other divine abodes receive less attention in traditional Burmese instruction. He explains that mettā serves as the foundation from which compassion, joy, and equanimity naturally arise, and that all four qualities can be developed illimitably—even to the highest absorptions.*
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> *Bhante examines why we often fail to notice small moments of contentment and happiness throughout our day, emphasising that attention is itself an act of intention that empowers whatever it touches. He draws a crucial distinction between wholesome joy—which is calm, appropriate, and accompanied by equanimity—and excitement, which involves attachment and leads to fear of loss. Using William Blake's verse about kissing joy as it flies, he illustrates how non-clinging appreciation allows us to live fully in the present moment.*
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> *The teaching addresses joy's power to undermine envy and jealousy, citing the suttas: "Envy is abandoned by one who develops sympathetic joy." Bhante also explores the body-mind relationship, explaining how habitual mental states affect our physical receptivity to happiness, providing a physiological rationale for joy practice. The session concludes with a guided muditā meditation, extending blessings of joy progressively from a beloved person outward to all beings, culminating in the wish for the sublime happiness of Nibbāna.*

Some of you who read my tip will know the basic content, but I thought I would speak to that particular tip I did on joy, sympathetic joy. I just don't remember any instructions by my teachers to develop joy, or compassion for that matter, or even equanimity. None of the Burmese Sayadaws taught me that at all. It was always about *mettā*.

Now, of course, there is a certain reason for that, perhaps because once we've established mettā it's obviously easier for us to respond to other people's suffering and their joy, and to be equanimous within ourselves even though we are surrounded by suffering. The joy doesn't move out into excitement or indulgence. So mettā really is the base. Once that's established, we can presume the other illimitables will arise.

What we mean by illimitable is that these qualities can be developed indefinitely. It's just up to us. You can go up to the highest absorption, if you wish, with them. It's also known as the *Brahma Vihāra*. Just to remind you, Brahma was the chief god of the Vedic

system, and so what this is saying is that this is one of the most beautiful heart states we can experience. Actually, you can develop any virtue illimitably. It's just that these are the four social virtues, as we can call them.

It's important for us to balance the compassion, especially now when we can see that the world is beginning to crash. We can have terrible forebodings of what's going to happen economically, politically, and so on. Somehow you have to be careful if you are listening to the news. I know some people just don't listen to the news anymore. It's just too depressing, too upsetting. But if you are, you have to balance it a bit with joy and happiness.

Sometimes on retreat—and I'm going to lead a retreat soon—I'll often say at the end of the day, we do a meditation on joy. And I say, bring to mind moments of the day when you felt joyful. One or two people tell me afterwards that they can't remember any. The reason for that, of course, is that we're not paying attention to it. That's understandable, because unless you're feeling ecstatic joy or big joy, you don't notice the little moments when you feel content, fairly content, when you feel fairly happy, nothing particularly exciting. In fact, we don't want excitement. Not paying attention to it means that we're not clicking on. And when we do start paying attention to these moments of joy, then they grow because of that attention.

Remember, an act of attention is an act of intention. It's an empowering act. Your awareness, your attention, notices what's happening. And when it's a full attention, it fills up your whole consciousness, and in that way it grows. So we have to train ourselves, in periods where we're feeling downcast, to pay attention when any bit of joy comes up. Ah, there's a bit of joy. Fancy that.

Of course, we have to make the distinction between joy and excitement. Excitement is that bit of indulgence where we become attached to a certain joy, which is understandable, but it unfortunately causes consequences. An obvious one is grief at loss, the fear of loss, the anxiety of loss. But joy is very cool. It doesn't have that. It's the difference on your Christmas cake between marzipan and icing. The icing's too much. You should always take it off. It's very bad for you. But the marzipan's fantastic, even though it's only got a bit of sugar—well, compared to icing. So that's your distinction.

Joy is quiet. It's pleasant, at times a very pleasant mental state, even to the point of absorption. It's always accompanied with calmness. This is the point. Always calm. There's always a sense of equanimity there. It doesn't demand that you keep it going. When it goes, it just goes, and that's fine. And it's always appropriate to the joyful situation you're in. We can feel joy for ourselves when we've succeeded at something, and that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. And when we're with somebody who is joy-

ful, we respond with that joy, and it's appropriate to the situation. You've only got to think of parents when they rejoice in their children's successes. It's very natural to do so.

One of the reasons we're not really aware of the little joys that pass through us during the day, the little happinesses, the little contentments, is that we're much more aware of the horrible things that might happen, perceived dangers. I suppose it's all got to do with our evolution. That's what they say anyway. But the fact is that unless we pay attention to these little joys, they won't grow. Simple as that. They won't grow.

I like to quote the mystical romantic poet William Blake on this. He always has a lovely verse. He who binds himself to a joy—I'm sure you know it—he who binds himself to a joy does the wingèd life destroy. But he who kisses a joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise. So eternity here can be understood as the ever-present moment. It's not a matter of time as such.

It also has the positive effect of undermining envy and jealousy. I personally always thought of envy as something when you want what somebody else has. Sometimes it can even be a compliment if you actually don't want it. So if you say, well, I envy your new car, and there's no desire for that car in you, that's fine. That's one way we use it. But envy normally is wanting what the other person has. And jealousy is wanting what they have and also hating them for having what they have. So there's a bit of hatred in there. But I think it also involves, sometimes, a fear of losing what you have to a rival. In a relationship that can happen, and jealousy comes up.

As it says in the actual discourses, there's a lovely line: Envy is abandoned by one who develops sympathetic joy. So that's something to really work on if we find ourselves being envious and jealous. And it has the effect, therefore, of lessening any resentment or selfishness. It undermines that sort of rivalry, especially at work, where you have colleagues or workpeople whom you see are doing better than you. It can get pretty nasty.

I had an occasion with that myself actually. I was offered a promotion, and the funny thing was that it wasn't really a promotion to do with my department. I was in the general education department in an FE college. What had happened was, after the great and honourable Mrs. Thatcher brought in her new rules, there was a huge amount of unemployment in Birmingham. It rose from six to sixteen percent in six months—I remember this. And I had the idea that as an FE college with all our trainings, we could get some of them in. So I started this programme for them. Now, of course, the people who wanted the promotion were the engineers, were the electricians. They didn't ex-

pect me, teaching sociology or something. At the time, I was teaching English to immigrants. So there was this real rivalry there. It was quite horrible. And one man took great exception to me. Anyway, I left and became a monk. So they were all right in the end.

There's an important point here about the body and mind. In Buddhism, the body and mind are two different energies. They're not the same. When you die, it's the mental body that rises out of the physical body. And what the body does is act like a sounding board. The heart resonates against the body. You may actually have the experience, when you are absorbed into an emotion, feeling it and seeing what its characteristics are, where they actually separate, and you can see that the body makes everything worse. Whatever you're suffering from—say depression—it's the body that feels the heaviness. It's the body that makes it really quite difficult to bear. So there is that combination.

This means, according to what I've read—I don't understand the chemistry at all—but basically our cells have receptors for various types of hormones. If you've got depressive hormones constantly coming into the body, those receptors grow at the expense of those receptors that receive the chemicals that make you happy, like dopamine, endorphins, all those things. The receptors are less. I'm not so sure you'd be particularly aware of that, because when you feel depressed, you'd feel heavily depressed. But when you feel joy, you wouldn't know that actually you could feel more joyful if you hadn't developed depression so much. I know this is a very contorted way of talking about this, but I'm trying to get across that there's actually a physical reason for practising joy.

In whatever way you can raise it—walking in nature, in a park or whatever, meeting friends—anything that lifts the heart has a direct effect upon the body. We know that because bad mental states can actually make you physically ill. But it's good to remind ourselves of that. So there's lots of reasons there for developing joy.

We may as well end this talk with the actual practice. If we just sit quietly for a moment, and then we'll repeat these phrases and go through the process that we do when we practise it with mettā.

Make sure that you're sitting comfortably. It doesn't have to be as if you're sitting in vipassanā. Make sure you're comfortable. That's the important thing. And then just drawing ourselves inwardly, recognising the mental state we're in, and just resting with that for a moment.

In the same way that we do with mettā, bring somebody to mind who raises joy when you see them. It can even be a comedian, somebody who brings a sense of joy into the heart. It's good to have a smile on the face. It doesn't have to be a great big Cheshire smile. But a smile does release all the endorphins or whatever. Just feel that on your face, a gentle smile. You're bringing somebody to mind who makes you joyful when you see them.

The blessings are: May you be joyful. May you be ever more joyful. And if you wish: May you enjoy the sublime happiness of *Nibbāna*. So: May you be joyful. May you be ever more joyful. May you experience the sublime happiness of Nibbāna.

We can bring somebody who's helped us in our lives and offer them the blessings of joy. And all those who are near and dear to us. Friends, people at work, whomever we wish. Choosing a neutral person, someone we see but don't know. Turning that joy towards ourselves. We can even bring someone to mind that we're having difficulties with—not big difficulties, but difficult. Radiating outwardly to each other. May we, our present spiritual companions, and our neighbours and neighbourhood, all the people in our country, all the peoples of Europe, all people on earth. And finally, to all beings in all directions.

CHAPTER 188

The Five Remembrances: Contemplating Aging, Sickness, and Death

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 39 min

> *In this practical guided session, Bhante Bodhidhamma leads practitioners through the Five Remembrances (pañcānussati), a powerful contemplative practice the Buddha taught to awaken our motivation for Dhamma practice. These reflections address aging, sickness, death, separation from loved ones, and kamma—topics our death-phobic culture typically avoids.*
>
> *Bhante offers two approaches to this practice: simply repeating each phrase and allowing its truth to penetrate the heart, or using imagination to bring specific fears to mind. He emphasises receiving whatever emotional responses arise—fear, grief, aversion—with care and compassion, as one would comfort a suffering child. This transforms intellectual understanding into genuine heart-acceptance.*
>
> *The teaching draws on the Visuddhimagga's methodology while adding practical guidance on working with resistance. Bhante explains how contemplating kamma has both dark and bright aspects, recognising that we inherit the results of both wholesome and unwholesome actions. Crucially, he balances these sobering reflections with gratitude practice—for our birth, family, teachers, medical practitioners, society, nature, and the precious Dhamma itself.*
>
> *Bhante concludes with the profound paradox: accepting impermanence makes life more precious, not less. According to the Buddha, death contemplation alone can be a path to nibbāna. When we stop denying death, we find equanimity, inner serenity, and freedom from being surprised when difficulties arise.*

These are the five remembrances that the Buddha says will really awaken our desire to practice. The idea is that we're not thinking about it so much as getting into the feel of these things.

In our death-phobic culture, we don't like to think about these things. For instance, every morning I'm sure we all wake up presuming, without any shadow of a doubt, that we will actually live throughout the day. There's no logical reason for believing that, because as you know, accidents happen, things happen, we can die just on a whim. But we don't remind ourselves. What this is trying to do is say, look, every morning when you wake up, the first contemplation is to rejoice that you've actually woken up, and then to

remind yourself that this could be the last day, one way or another, or at least you could fall seriously ill. Definitely you'll be getting older — there's no way you can get around that. The sickness contemplation is a preparation for terminal sickness if we have one, and it's also just basically recognising that the body can fall ill.

There's the ageing contemplation, and lots of things that the Buddha says about death. Death is inescapable. Everybody must die. Remember, the reminder that your lifespan is decreasing continuously — that's a nice little reflection. And death will come regardless of whether or not we have made time to practice the Dharma. Wealth cannot help. All this is little ways in which he encourages us. And then number four is recognising that in the end we part and are separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to us. And then finally, there's the contemplation of *kamma*.

There are two ways of doing this. One way is just to repeat the sentence into your heart, getting the feel of what your reaction is. You might say, "This body is subject to disease. This body, this body is subject to disease. This body is subject to disease." You play with the words to try and get some sort of recognition of its truth value. And what you're interested in is how you're reacting to it — either with a sense of anxiety, fear, and so on.

Now you can up the ante by actually bringing to mind those things that you're particularly afraid of. So "this body is subject to disease" and it could be Alzheimer's, or it could be a paralysing neurological disease, or it could be cancer. We've always got something that really worries us. And if you bring that to mind, again you're looking at your fear. This is the self not wanting to die, not wanting to fall ill, not wanting to age. In getting in contact with that, as soon as those feelings come, be open to them, receive them, accept that this is the way our relationship is to this. And then just allow it to evaporate a little bit.

When the fear, the grief, the aversion comes, it's easier to accept it if you receive it with a sense of care. There's a part of the heart that is not particularly happy and not feeling well, and you would hug it, shall we say, as you would a child who's suffering one of these mental states. So there are two ways — just repeating the phrase, which is what it says in the *Visuddhimagga*, the Path of Purification by Buddhaghosa, or you can also use your imagination to get in touch with how we feel about these things.

We just repeat these things to ourselves — ageing and then death. And then there's that one about parting, being separated from everyone. Here again, you can say it in different ways. You can bring to mind what it is you are most attached to and what it

will be a pain to leave. You can also extend that to being parted from everyone because they're leaving you. People die, people leave. And again, you can use your imagination — what does that mean to you?

Then finally kamma, which has a certain brightness to it. We are the owners of our actions. We do possess our own actions. We are responsible for them — body, speech, and mind. Here we've got the ones that are unwholesome, but also the ones that are wholesome. We get either the upcomings of something we've done which is unskilful, or we get the reward of doing something which is skilful. We inherit the results. We're born out of our kamma. It's always with us. Our relationships are formed through our kamma. In fact, you could say that, relatively speaking, that's what we are — we are our relationships. And you depend on them. You depend on your kamma.

You always have to balance these negative reflections with something positive. Gratitude for being born, your mother, your family, your father, friends, your upbringing and education. We bring that to mind — all the medical practitioners who've helped you, all the gifts of our society, of our culture, the world, of nature. And then finally, just to remind ourselves that this life is precious, that here the Buddha says we have this combination of joy and woe, and the intuitive intelligence sharp enough to find our way out of *saṃsāra*, the world of constantly going round and round. And finally, just the preciousness of the Dhamma.

As we practise this, what we're doing is moving from an intellectual understanding of these statements into a heart acceptance — a sense of them being digested. When we accept the truth value of these things, the gift is a feeling of safety, a feeling of equanimity. That allows us to feel inwardly more serene, just this acceptance of the way things are, and the fact that we have very little control over sickness, ageing, and death. It's just allowing that thought to be accepted within the heart. That's the thing.

If you do this exercise, you don't have to do it for so long in the morning — it can be almost one of the first things you do before you even sit. After a while, just reading them through is enough. It's enough to put you into that right mindset of not being surprised if something goes wrong during the day.

According to the Buddha, just the contemplation of death — never mind all the *vipassanā* and all the other practices — just contemplating death is a path to *Nibbāna*. That's how incisive, how wonderful it can be just to do that. And the paradox is that everything becomes precious. Life becomes absolutely more wonderful because of it.

There's a book by a man called Becker called *The Denial of Death*, and he goes into what happens when we deny it, when we're in a state of aversion to it. It's really interesting how money is somehow connected to the aversion to death, getting as much as we can to preserve ourselves. And the other one, which of course we do know from COVID, is that our going to the toilet is part of death, because all our waste is dead. That's why during COVID everybody went out and bought loads of toilet paper. So that's what happens if we don't contemplate death — we spend a lot of money on toilet paper.

I hope my words or this little practice has been of some assistance and that it will help you in your journey towards full liberation from all suffering.

CHAPTER 189

To Love or To Be Loved: That is the Question!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

In this exploration of mettā (loving-kindness), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a fundamental question that shapes our spiritual practice and relationships: Do we love in order to develop our capacity for love, or do we love to be loved in return? Drawing insights from Eric Fromm's psychology alongside Buddhist teachings, he reveals how our deepest loneliness stems from the self's inherent sense of insecurity and separation.

The talk illuminates how we typically try to fill this existential void through acquisitiveness—seeking wealth, power, pleasure, or appreciation—but these strategies only deepen our dependency and anxiety. Bhante explains the Buddhist concept of anusaya (latent tendencies), the unconscious motivations that drive our seemingly loving actions, and how bringing awareness to these hidden patterns can transform our practice.

Using vipassanā techniques, he guides us toward embracing difficult emotions like loneliness rather than escaping through distraction. When we courageously stay present with these raw feelings, allowing them to run their course, they naturally transform into their opposites—potentially bursting into universal love for all beings. This process of purifying our intentions and developing genuine mettā requires conscious effort, unlike the natural loves that arise spontaneously in human relationships.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So greetings to all you revelers in full moon delights. Some of these months lend themselves to certain subjects, so obviously this one is about love.

I reread Eric Fromm's classic, The Art of Loving. I've read it about five times over the years. Some of you might know it — definitely worth a read anyway. He starts off with something, but I'm going to turn it into a question: when we do something, or say something, or think something out of love, do we do it in order to love, in order to develop our love, or do we do it to be loved? That's a cheeky one, that, right?

He talks about why we need this love. Of course, it's a psychoanalysis thing. When we're born, for those first few months or so, there's no separation between us and our mothers. That's really a halcyon peace, a heavenly state to be in. Then, of course, the separation starts, which is needed for the child to become a little independent being.

But that separation is a sense of loss. According to psychoanalysis, that's what produces our loneliness in life, because we want to get back to that wonderful place we were when we were babies.

From the Buddha's point of view, from the Dharma's point of view rather, of course, it's more to do with the essential relationship that we make with this psychophysical organism that we call the self. The self knows that it is unstable. It comes to know that it's not secure. So the fundamental position from a dharma point of view is this feeling of unsafety.

Because of that, we start collecting things. That's the first thing that the Buddha talks about. It's translated as greed, but it's much better to see it as acquisitiveness. So we acquire things, and there are four major areas where we do that, of course.

Rich — I want to be rich, loads of money, like Scrooge. The more I have, the safer I feel. If I've got a million pound in the bank, I feel really safe.

Then there's power. Control over our lives, control over people makes us feel safe. We're in charge. That can also be a real pain.

Then there's pleasure, of course — seeking people who just want one experience after the other. Been there, got the T-shirt, all that stuff. Foodies who live for the next exciting menu rather.

Finally, there's those who seek to be appreciated, seek to be praised. Usually we're seeking some sort of fame. Here we're dealing with fame or the desire to be loved.

That would be, of course, also a cause of loneliness. The fact that when we feel lonely, then we have these little words going on in our heads about how useless we are and horrible. What we do is reinforce that by forming friendships — padding out our friendships by making sure that they are stable friendships. We don't want to lose them because then we'd feel really lonely.

But that unfortunately is a bad strategy because what it does is make us dependent on them. What it means is that our self-worth or self-esteem is dependent on what other people think about us or what they say about us, how they treat us. Therefore, sometimes you feel pretty rotten if you do that.

Of course, people whom you love disappear. They either leave you or they get fed up with you, and some of them die. Nothing is to be taken for granted. So there's always that little sense of anxiety of loss. Anything you become attached to is going to create some anxiety of loss.

The other thing we do, of course, is to seek distraction. I'll come to that in a minute.

So the best strategy is actually to love, right, to come from the position of love. When you come from a position of love, you immediately fill yourself with good feelings, good feelings about yourself. That sense of self-worth, self-esteem comes naturally when we behave from a position of love and all the other social virtues of compassion, joy, etc.

So how do we purify our love? First of all, it's to recognize that this thing about the self and its feeling lonely and its neediness — that has to be recognized so that when we are doing something, we've got to see these little background voices. In the Buddhist teachings, they're known as latent tendencies, the *anusaya*, the latent tendencies. So they're always there, ready to be fired. In psychology, they'd call it subconscious motivations. That's where we get the idea of Freudian slips. Something's happening in the back of the mind, we're not recognizing it, and it comes out in a slip that makes us feel embarrassed.

When we're about to do something or say something or even think something, you've always got to be aware of this little other dialogue that's going on. So it might be, for instance, "Well, I'm going to do your garden," and the background little voice is saying, "And you'll come and do mine when I need it," or "I know you'll really love me after this. You'll really appreciate my friendship." So there's always these little things going on in the background. It's a case really of making those conscious.

Now, as soon as they become conscious, they lose power over you. If you remember, after the Buddha was fully liberated, there were seven years it said that Mara chased him with his three daughters. Sensual desire, sexual desire... and if you don't know the third one, I'll leave you to guess it. After seven years, he began to go away. He said, "What's happening?" He said, "Well, the Buddha sees me. He sees me." He said, "Well, give us a bit more time." He said, "No," he says, "after seven years, I'm not going to get through to the Buddha."

So as soon as we see these little conversations coming from the self, the neediness of the self, the wanting to be loved, they don't have power over us. We then reestablish our commitment to doing something from the heart of love. That's how we begin to purify our hearts.

Now, the purification of the heart demands a lessening of the self. So therefore, the path of love is a path of liberation. The path of purification is itself a path of liberation. Normally, of course, we put the accent on insight, on seeing things, which is absolutely necessary as well. But with the path of love, this is the process. You're constantly purifying your intentions, coming from the heart.

It's funny, there's always an effort in philosophy to give you reasons. There's not time to go into the way that philosophers think about ethical behaviour, love, compassion and joy and all that. They try to give us rational reasons. But the great Scottish philosopher, Hume — I've heard him called the philosopher's philosopher — says that whenever he looked into an act of goodwill, he didn't find a reason at the bottom of it, but he found a sentiment. That's his word for something that arises out of the heart. Confucius said that the ground of a harmonious society was benevolence and concern, love and compassion.

Everything around love always begins in the heart. Now, the only problem is that it's not always a feeling. You don't have to feel loving in order to act from a position of goodwill. For instance, a surgeon who's operating — I doubt if they feel some great big gushing love towards their patient. I mean, their attention is on what they're doing. They should be equanimous, calm, cool.

So again, when we say the heart, we're really talking about attitude. We're not talking about feeling. The feeling is sometimes there and sometimes it isn't. That's important.

That gives us some idea as to how to make our acts of love, the way we speak and the way we think, coming from the heart of love, more and more pure. But let's just say a word about loneliness.

When we feel lonely, it's a bit of a downer for the self because the language is something like, "Nobody loves me. Who could love me? I mean, I'm horrible." All that really, really upsetting talk. So we try to escape that. As soon as you feel lonely, as soon as it actually just drips into consciousness, off we go. We turn on the TV, get onto social media, open a new packet of biscuits — anything but feel the loneliness.

That's, of course, why we don't like to tell people we feel lonely, because what we're saying to them is that we're not loved. We're not appreciated. So it's a difficult one for us.

Now, by trying to escape it, of course, it still remains there as one of these *anusaya*, as one of these latent tendencies. What it's going to do is make you overact your love to other people so that you can prove that you are appreciated. You're going to be overly joyous at people's success just so they know that you are joyous and that you are to be praised because of that and appreciated and loved.

So you've got to tackle the loneliness in its rawness. This is what Vipassanā teaches us. We go into the mental state, the feel of it. You have to have the patience. You have to be open to it. It helps to have a sense of care towards it, a sense of wanting to heal the heart of it. That gives you a right attitude towards the feeling of loneliness.

But you still have to go in there. You have to sink into it and feel the raw feelings. Of course, what you're doing is you're opening up to your heart. The heart wants to speak to you. It speaks in feelings, in mental states. In so doing, we're letting off that steam. We're allowing that turbulence to manifest as turbulence, as energy. Therefore, it's exhausting itself, just like anything else. If you go for a run, at the end of it, you feel exhausted. So if you give the heart a run, it'll feel exhausted.

Now the really important thing is, if you can — this is a really important thing — if you can stay to the very last sensation caused by that loneliness, because if you stay there, you might see the transformation. That energy is never lost. It always transforms towards its opposite. What you may experience is a sense of wonderful relief and peacefulness. But also, to your great surprise, it might burst out into this universal love for all beings. It's quite remarkable what will happen if you stay to the end.

You don't have to stay to the end for this technique to allow the heart to purify itself. But if you do, it gives you real confidence because now you know that all these negative mental states are always moving towards the opposites. No energy is lost. Of course, that doesn't mean to say that when they are their opposites, when you do feel love, these mental states can be developed indefinitely. In other words, after this year of real commitment, you should be constantly sailing in a sea of joyous love. No doubt about it.

Unfortunately, this universal love that we're trying to get to, this love which is above any love to do with attachments, is something we have to develop. All these other loves, if you think about it, come naturally. I mean, there's a natural loving of parents towards their children. You don't organize yourself. You don't set yourself up to fall in love. You just fall in love. You meet somebody and you like them, and before you know it, you fall in love, or you've developed a friendship because of that connection between two hearts. All these types of love are just part of our natural human nature, but to lift it into this universal love, this *mettā*, takes effort. You've got to lift yourself out of that stuff and really make an effort to open up your heart to all beings in all directions. So that's really the final thing.

So the question then is, to love or to be loved, right? Like Shakespeare in Hamlet: "That is the question." To love or to be loved in terms of our daily activity, in terms of our spiritual practice. If we keep an eye on these *anusaya*, these latent tendencies, we'll get a hang of it.

It means that you've got to have a slightly more spacious awareness, an awareness which is not only about what's out there, but a constant inner awareness. You know all the time how you're feeling. It's just there in the background. When something moves, an irritation or something like that, you become aware of it. Because you're aware of it, it no longer has control over you. You can just either park it — so you're not pushing it away with fear or with aversion. Those are suppressive measures. You're just putting it to the side and reestablishing your attitude, your act of will.

I think that's it. I think I've done it. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that by your sincere practice of goodwill and concern, you will be liberated from all sufferings sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 190

Love and Relationship

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this heartfelt dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines love and relationship through a Buddhist lens, moving beyond romantic notions to explore the deeper foundations of human connection. He emphasizes care as the recognition of our fundamental interconnectedness, contrasting this with the competitive individualism of modern neoliberal culture that COVID-19 has begun to challenge.

Drawing from the Buddha's teachings, Bhante discusses how the Awakened One praised three Arahats who lived in perfect harmony by each being willing to set aside personal preferences for others' benefit. He highlights kindness expressed through affection as essential, while warning against mere sentimentality. The talk explores gratitude and forgiveness as the twin pillars underpinning all relationships, noting how resentment inevitably undermines connection.

Using practical examples including a humorous story about dolphin training methods, Bhante suggests focusing on appreciation rather than criticism. He concludes with the Buddha's profound teaching to Ānanda that good friendship constitutes not half but the entire spiritual life, as it supports development of the Noble Eightfold Path. The talk offers practical wisdom for cultivating harmonious relationships based on mutual care, understanding, and spiritual support.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I've chosen this topic of love and relationship. Well, as you know, huge amounts of literature are written on love from philosophers, psychotherapists, self-helpers, all religions. So I don't think I'll be covering everything, but I just want to mention a few of the essentials, really. So this is just love in general. It's not specific. I'm not going to talk about parental love or falling in love, all that.

I think the first thing that I always find important is just this sense of care. Love is a little bit abused, the word love itself. But it's just understanding that interconnectedness we have. And it's funny that with COVID and all that, a lot of people rediscovered neighbourliness. And I think this is really part of this journey.

Neoliberalism—most people think of neoliberalism as an operating system, an economic operating system based on the market, but actually it's an ideology. It's on the understanding that everything moves if everybody can just be an entrepreneurial individual. And what it does is it excites my greed to get things and have experience, to get lots of money. And by doing that, of course, I see you as a competitor. So this is the system we're in. We're in a system that supports greed and competitiveness. It's not about coordination, it's not about interconnectedness.

And I think this manifests clearly now with this COVID. Because the rich countries, just like individuals, are just looking after themselves and to hell with everybody else. But unfortunately, the interconnectedness is biting back. And I'm hoping that it has some effect on the actual system that we're under at the moment.

But just that sense of caring for somebody. I'm not talking about people who are sick or need help, but just a general attitude of looking after people, being aware of their needs, no matter what it is, caring for them. I think that's a really important part of that whole syndrome that we call love. And if we don't do that, if we don't have that attitude, then I think we can shade off into controlling people, using them. I mean, abuse is at the far end, but you can also just use people for your own benefit. A presumption that they will help you, but you don't have to help them. But I think that really undermines a relationship when a person finds that they've been used.

I think the other thing is kindness expressed through a certain affection. We manifest that with hugging and holding hands and hand on heart, tone of voice, all that. I mean, the danger is it becomes a bit mawkish, a bit sentimental, huggy-wuggy, touchy-feely stuff. But I think it's important that there's an expression of affection. And I don't know about you, but when I remember acts of unkindness that I've committed, there's always a bitter sorrow that goes with it. How could I have behaved like that? And all that really just depends on this sense of being kind. It's a lovely word, kind.

And when we put these two together and we wonder about how to live with other people, sharing spaces, whether it's intimate or just in an office, doesn't really matter. There's this occasion in the scriptures where the Buddha comes across three Arahats living together. I think their name—I was trying to find it, I just couldn't find the passage—but I think they're called the Anuruddhas after the chief monk who was with them. And he asked them, how did they live so peacefully together? And he says, "Well, when I get up in the morning, I say to myself, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do?"

And of course, if everybody says that, then you have this wonderful harmony. But if you're the only one who's saying it, then you'll probably get used. So it's a case of, if you're with somebody, it doesn't matter where it is—the office or an intimate—just to get that feeling in the group that you're prepared to put aside what you want to do for what somebody else wants to do if it's more beneficial. I mean, it could even happen on holiday, where you've decided to go here and somebody else has decided to go there. And there's a big rumpus over which one to do. That doesn't necessarily have to happen if people have the attitude of putting aside what they want. In other words, not being attached to what one wants to do. It's a lovely attitude.

But I think underpinning all relationship, actually, are these two qualities of gratitude and forgiveness. I mean, if we develop this constant sense of gratitude, of being in debt, of wanting to manifest how much we appreciate what's been given to us. I mean, there's always that desire to help, to communicate, to be with somebody in that grateful way.

And you can't have a relationship which at some point isn't going to hurt. They're going to say something or do something which is going to upset you. And if you can't let go of that, if that grudge stays within us, a sense of resentment, that really undermines the relationship. It comes out just in the way we speak and in how we ask them to do things. It's there within our communication. And I think that's really important. And I would have thought that most relationships begin to collapse when one or the other side just holds onto these grudges, these resentments.

I remember somebody telling me who was a lawyer for family cases. And there was a divorce. It was quite bitter. And he kept saying to the husband, "There's no point in going to court for this because you will lose. It'll be a complete waste of time for you to go to court and get all this out in court because you will lose the case." So he tried to get it across to him, but he wanted to go to court. He wanted somewhere where he could explain all over the place. And that's the anger and the bitterness that can come with holding on to resentments.

There's a lovely—I read something quite lovely about this journalist. She'd gone down in America. She'd gone down to see how dolphins are trained. And what she saw was that whenever a dolphin didn't jump through the hoop or play the trick or fail to do the trick, nothing was said, absolutely nothing. And then they did the usual routine and the dolphin would complete the trick. When the dolphin completes the trick, the trainers jumped up and down with great joy, shouting and whooping and making all sorts of great noises.

So she thought, "Well, I wonder if this would work on my husband." So when she went back home, she never criticised him. She never said anything. But every time he did something that pleased her or he did something the way she wanted him to do, she would jump up and down with great joy and blow trumpets. And he changed completely without knowing it. It was very harmonious. And then of course she went and told him. And so he found that also worked, even if it's conscious, even if it's a conscious thing that the other person knows what you're doing. It actually works. So holding back on criticisms and all that and really rejoicing when the person does something which is to your benefit seems to be the trick, really, of getting people to do what you want them to do.

And the final thing is, of course, our spiritual well-being. I mean, obviously, if you're living with somebody who's on your path, then that's a tremendous boost, isn't it? I mean, I've known people who've taken to the Buddhist path, but their partner really just doesn't like it. The spouse doesn't like it. And it's been a point of contention. But if you happen to be living with somebody who's actually practising with you, it's obviously a massive support. And it's the same with any friendship that does it.

And just to end with this lovely quote from the Buddha. So he's Ānanda, who was with him for the last twenty years of his life as a personal assistant. He always thinks he knows a bit more than he actually does. And on this occasion, he said to the Buddha, "Bhagavan, this is half the spiritual life: good friendship, good companionship and good comradeship." And the Buddha says, "Oh, not so, Ānanda, not so. This is the entire spiritual life: that is good friendship, good companionship and good comradeship. For when someone has a good friend, a good companion and a good comrade, it is to be expected they will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path."

So that was his understanding of what friendship was. And of course, if we remember, he was with his five friends when he left them. They all thought he'd gone soft. Remember, he was practising this ascetic asceticism, which was basically not eating, letting go of the body. And he was with five friends, five close friends who were all practising together. And we all know that practising with people in a group is so much more encouraging than doing it by yourself.

So all these points—I mean, there's a lot more, of course, I'm sure that you could think of them—but just bringing to mind that sense of care, affection and kindness, especially kindness. I don't know, it's a big thing with me. These underlying attitudes of gratitude and forgiveness. And then finally, just that ability to be with somebody

without—open to their ideas, to their understandings, even in conversation. What if I put aside my ideas, my views, my opinions and open up to what the other one has to say? So often we don't like to do that because they might change our minds.

So it's a case of looking at our relationships from this point of view of being with another human being who's like us. So I'm a human being and you're a human being. And just remembering that. And that, I think, produces for us that relationship of kindness and care.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and I have not caused any confusion and that you will, by your practice of loving kindness, be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 191

Forgiveness is Fundamental to Purify the Heart

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min

> *In this transformative talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores forgiveness as essential for purifying the heart and advancing on the spiritual path. He emphasizes that resentment is a poison that binds us to suffering, while guilt, shame, and remorse can be healed through compassionate self-awareness and genuine forgiveness practices.*
>
> *The session includes a comprehensive guided meditation on three aspects of forgiveness: asking forgiveness from those we have harmed, forgiving others who have hurt us, and the often most challenging aspect—forgiving ourselves. Bhante teaches how to work skillfully with difficult emotions like anger, hurt, and self-recrimination, using noting practice to develop honest awareness of our mental states.*
>
> *Drawing on the Buddha's teachings on kamma and the interconnectedness of all beings, this practice cultivates the brahmavihāra of mettā (loving-kindness) while addressing the psychological wounds that obstruct our spiritual development. The talk provides practical guidance for establishing genuine reconciliation, making amends, and developing the courage to embrace our vulnerabilities with compassion. This foundational work in forgiveness creates the conditions for deeper meditation practice and genuine peace.*

Okay, so we can begin our practice by just sitting quietly. And once we're a little settled.

So just a little opening *metta*, just to bring someone to mind whom we have a natural or an easy, warm regard for. Just as they come into your mind, just to offer them from the heart your good wishes. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented in harmony with the world.

We can bring to mind those who are near and dear to us. We can bring to mind friends, people at work, whomever we wish. There's also a neutral person, someone we see but don't know.

Turning the stream of compassion towards ourselves. Opening outwards towards each other. Radiating outwards to our neighbours and neighbourhood. To all the people in our country, all the peoples of the world. All people on earth and to all beings in all directions.

So we can begin now with forgiveness. We're working first of all with people who we've upset, we've hurt in some way. So remember, you don't have to go for the big one. It can be somebody who's not so bad.

So as that person, as that event comes to mind, see what comes up in the heart, observe your relationship to what comes up. Someone whom we have hurt. Careful not to let the mind wander. Be honest about what you're experiencing, the hurt, the guilt, the shame, sense of remorse. There's also that self-righteousness, they deserved it. Just acknowledging that all these mental states are unwholesome.

And just as the heart begins to mellow, perhaps you feel it's the time just to ask for forgiveness. Just picturing them in your mind, talking to them, telling them how you feel. And you bring yourself round to saying, please forgive me. I'm sorry. Perhaps you can see them forgiving you if you've got an imagination. And if so, can you let their love back in? And at some point to wish them well. And just allow them to fade away.

Of course, when you're doing these practices yourself, you can take your time. But here we're just touching into them.

So now is the time to forgive others. So bringing somebody to mind who's upset us. And again, just as they come into the mind, that event, just to hold it fairly steady, to get in touch with what comes up. The hurt, the desire for revenge, all that sort of stuff, and how you're relating to that. Somebody has upset us.

I always think noting can be very useful at these times. You sort of say, well, this is how hurt feels. This is how anger feels. Just so that we're very honest with ourselves.

And then at some point to begin to feel that maybe you can forgive them. And you can say, I'm not going to take advantage. I'm not going to get my own back. When we say to somebody, I forgive you, sometimes it feels as though it's coming from a sort of prideful place, like I forgive you, like somebody in high power forgiving you, letting you off. But it is coming from a heart which wants to reestablish that friendship, reestablish that communication. Perhaps you can find another way of saying it.

And perhaps you can see in them a sense of really the desire to be reconciled. And again just wishing them well. And allowing them to fade away.

And so finally we come to ourselves, remembering the little contemplations there on dependent origination and *kamma*. So again, finding something where we've done harm to ourselves. Physically we might have been putting stuff in the body which isn't very good for us, or putting it in dangerous situations. And the heart, what would be

done with what we put into our hearts and through our minds? What have we watched? What have we done which has undermined us, has done us harm? Just choose one that you can sort of feel you can work with.

Just in the same way, just accept totally the harm that we've done ourselves, the consequences. And to speak to ourselves gently, that we're ready to accept the consequences. We can bear them. We can bear with them.

And all these voices that we might hear of self-recrimination and blaming ourselves and all that. Again, you just open up to that. Just receive it. Just allow those voices to express themselves. And then some, in a way, to sort of embrace it. Embrace it with loving kindness. Embrace it with a sense of care. This is a part of our hearts. Our hearts which has turbulence. It's upset. And just holding it in that sort of gentle embrace.

And just speaking to ourselves. Gently. Gently. Sounds a bit odd, but you can just try, I forgive you. I forgive myself. I forgive myself. How does that feel? I'm not going to beat myself up any more. I forgive myself.

And then to sort of formulate a resolution, something that you really intend not to do again. Of course, you might do it again and you have to go through this process. But the intention is not to behave like, not to do anything like that again to myself and indeed to others.

This brings us to the end of the forgiving practice. You'll find the notes are more detailed. And if you go onto the website and go onto resources and e-books, I've written a little book on forgiveness. Towards the End of Forgiveness, it's called. And there's a little monologue, Angulimala, if you've never heard it before, you can have a go and listen to that.

So we can sit quietly now, just resting with the heart, and perhaps it's in a good place now, perhaps it feels warm and happy. If it's not, that's not a problem, we also work with what's there.

CHAPTER 192

The Introduction to Forgiveness Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *In this talk on forgiveness practice, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents forgiveness as one of two essential attitudes that inform all virtues—the other being gratitude. He explains how forgiveness addresses our 'dark side': guilt, shame, and resentment, while gratitude cultivates love and generosity.*
>
> *Drawing from Buddhist psychology, Bhante explores how our emotional reactions are self-created saṅkhāras (conditioned formations) that can be transformed through mindful practice. He uses the metaphor of 'balloons of reactivity' to illustrate how unexamined negative emotions accumulate and eventually burst into harmful reactions like road rage.*
>
> *The talk covers three aspects of forgiveness: asking for forgiveness, forgiving others, and self-forgiveness—often the most challenging. Bhante emphasizes that forgiveness doesn't mean condoning harmful actions or avoiding justice, but rather releasing emotional charge while maintaining appropriate boundaries. He contextualizes the practice within paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), showing how ignorance leads to suffering, and explains karma as simply receiving consequences without added self-recrimination.*
>
> *This practical introduction prepares students for forgiveness meditation, emphasizing that the practice is primarily for our own benefit and healing.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (three times)

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

Excuse me, I'm out of voice. I've not been talking for a while. It's all gone husky.

Tonight we're going to have a look at forgiveness. Most of you, I'm sure, have done exercises on this. So I'll just go through the basics and then we'll practice it.

I think there are two fundamental attitudes which really inform all our virtues. The first one is gratitude. Once we realize we cannot pay back what we've actually received—our life from our mother and father, and so on—then it moves you. You want to give something back. So it moves to all those qualities of love, compassion, generosity, and so forth.

And forgiveness is the other one. That's dealing with all the dark side, all the guilt, the shame, the unforgiveness, all that stuff. So with these two fundamental or basic attitudes, I think we can have a happy life.

The first thing to reckon, the first thing to remind ourselves is that all the emotions we suffer around forgiving—trying to forgive somebody, being forgiven, asking for forgiveness and forgiving ourselves—all the emotional stuff, remember, is all self-made. When somebody says something that is a bit nasty, our response is our response. They didn't cause that. So that's the first thing to remind ourselves. All the stuff we're going to work with has been made by me. And the idea is to undermine them and then they will transform naturally.

So that's the other thing we have to remember: all negative states will eventually transform themselves to the opposite. Nothing is lost. Where there's hatred, there'll be love, and so on.

And the final note on this is, it's for us. So forgiveness is for us, it's not for them. Which might sound a bit selfish, but they've also got the same problem with us. So whatever we're doing here now—asking for forgiveness, forgiving—they also have their own problems. And when they're doing forgiveness practice, they're doing it just for themselves.

So it's basically a practice for our own benefit. If the other person is affected by it, all well and good. For instance, if we apologize to somebody, and they feel moved to respond, that's good. We've been a catalyst for their movement, their heart movement. But they don't have to forgive. That's sometimes difficult to accept.

The next thing is about attitudes. So these are *saṅkhāras*. Most of you know that word, saṅkhāra. It's normally translated as volitional conditions, which doesn't mean very much, but it's basically the choices we make, the habits we have, which are conditioned and conditioning. That's the important thing. So these are energetic conditionings.

The way I think of them is like they're balloons of particular types of reactivity. So, I might, for instance, be very annoyed when people are late. Every time somebody's late, I get irritated. And I don't look at it, I don't think about it. So this balloon of irritation around people being late grows and grows and grows. And then one day, somebody's too late. And it's like a pin touches this balloon and all this irritation and anger just burst out and that's where you get this rage, this road rage and all the stuff we hear about. So what we're doing is we're letting the steam, we're letting the bad air out of that balloon.

So there are three subjects, obviously. We have to make the ability to ask for forgiveness easy for ourselves. It's against our pride, but we have to make it easy. And then we have to ask for forgiveness. That's also something we don't like doing. And then finally, we've got to forgive ourselves, which is often the most difficult.

Now, the process is we remember something and we have an event, and that event carries with it all the loadings that we put on it—the hurt, the anger. So the event comes to mind. Now, we have to be really careful it doesn't shoot up into a fantasy. Once we're up there in the clouds fantasizing, whether we like it or not, we're making things worse. Whatever that emotion is, it's being exercised and made worse by storytelling. So as soon as we see that happening, we just come back. And we try to hold that frame fairly still.

While we're doing that, the attention is drawn to what's coming from the heart. So what might come up is hurt. Somebody said something, so hurt. And the next protocol is how we're relating to this hurt. Now, we don't like to accept that because it's against our pride. So we have to allow that aversion, that not wanting to disappear until we can allow the heart to express its hurt completely. That's the healing process.

So we're using this little image that we've got, this event to get in touch with the hurt. And that hurt is connected to all the hurts that we have, just like the anger in that balloon is connected to all the other angers. And as we let out one little bit of anger, everything else is affected. So it's systemic. Everything we do has a systemic effect on our own hearts and minds.

Now, when we're doing this, as you come to forgive somebody, you can't do it. Fine, you don't worry about that at all. You just keep working on the hurt and then eventually the heart softens and you can do it. And we always start with a bit of *mettā* just to warm the heart up a bit and then we ask for forgiveness. We forgive others and then we forgive ourselves.

When we're asking for forgiveness, the first thing that might come up is the reason why the person did it. And so you've got to be aware of that relationship you have to the person. But basically, you're looking at the hurt. And when that passes, perhaps the desire for revenge, and you have to let that go too.

When it comes to forgiving, that's the next bit we're doing. Again, there's that hardness that's in the heart. It doesn't want to forgive. And there's a story here. When the Islamist blew himself up in London, this is going back a bit, there was an Anglican priest that left the order saying she couldn't carry out the ministry because she couldn't forgive the bomber who'd killed her daughter. But it's actually never a case of can't, it's a

case of won't. And let's just hope that distraught mother has found a way eventually to open up her heart. And if we look around the world at this moment, there must be a lot of mothers who are utterly distraught at what's happened to their children, young and old.

But then you get a story like the mother who went to see her son's murderer and finally took him home when he was let out of prison and treated him like her son.

So we have to remember that to forgive somebody is not to try and forget something. That's suppressive. We're just trying to release the emotional charge. Sometimes when we do that, we feel we're condoning what they do. But that's not so. That's just wrong feeling. We're letting them off. But obviously where amends and compensation is needed, definitely we should ask for it. And especially where there's justice—where we need justice for grievous bodily harm, rape, all that dreadful stuff, which I hope none of you have suffered from. But then you have to seek justice, but not with that anger, not with that desire for vengeance. And sometimes you have to stay away from people who harmed us. You have to protect yourself. That's not a problem.

And then finally, forgiving ourselves. So forgiving ourselves. There are two contemplations that are really helpful.

First one is dependent origination. So remember, in dependent origination, we start off with *avijjā*, this ignorance, which produces a delusive idea about the world. And it's really based along the idea of a self. And we're trying to seek happiness in the world. And we do it in this way that creates suffering. And as we practice, we can see the cause, the psychological cause of that, which is the desire, the wrong desire. And the fact that we're holding on to things which are impermanent, it doesn't make sense. And eventually, to undermine that whole concept of a self we have—it's a feeling concept, it's not just a head concept. And what this does is takes us towards wisdom.

So one movement is from ignorance, delusion, and then the process of insight, which takes us to wisdom. From the heart's point of view, just as the delusion, we cannot be blamed for the delusion. The ignorance isn't culpable. So from the heart's point of view, we're never meant to do any harm. The heart has always been pure in its intentions. But because of this delusion, it leads itself to being acquisitive, to being aversive, to being fearful, and so on. So all these have produced unwholesome actions. And then there's the consequence of that, which we're dealing with now or forgiving.

And when all that's purified, we end up with the pure heart. So that's the process from a pure heart to all this negativity. We work with it and it's basically most—it's the sweat when it comes to the spiritual practice. The other bit's easy. The insight's not a problem. It's just all the gunk in the heart that we're trying to get rid of. And that leads us to purity, immaculacy, back to purity and immaculacy.

So the Buddha talked about it like dirt that gets on a cloth. And when you wash it, the cloth goes back to its original loveliness. So that's the projection that we're on. That's what we're doing.

And the other one is about *kamma*. So that's pretty—I mean, at its simplest equation, you do something which is harmful, some harm will come of it. You never know what. And remember that the harm, if it's outwardly to what we speak and what we do, you don't know what the effect will be. It goes into a matrix of relationships. And the same happens to us when we do something. Every time we say something or do anything, whether it's good or bad, it affects the whole—it's a systemic effect inside us. It affects the whole psychology in some way or other.

So now the bit that I found really relieving was that when we do something wrong, there is a karmic response to it, there'll be something comes back to it. And that's all we have to suffer. All the business about punishment and the way we talk to ourselves and the recrimination, the self-recrimination, the anguish and all that—all that's not necessary. All that's necessary is to receive the consequence of unwholesome action, just to receive it with patience and bear with it until it also will dry up, pass away. So that's an interesting reflection on *kamma*.

So don't feed the critic. That's the big thing.

So we'll do the practice. We'll do the practice together. And then I'm going to put what is actually a written piece here as a PDF on the website with this video so that if you want you can download it and use it.

CHAPTER 193

Karanīya Mettā Sutta

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 28 min

Bhante Bodhidhamma offers an in-depth study of the Karanīya Mettā Sutta (Khuddakapāṭha 9), the Buddha's foundational discourse on loving-kindness practice. This talk explores the traditional verses that outline both the moral prerequisites for developing mettā and the progressive stages of boundless goodwill cultivation.

Drawing from Buddhaghosa's classical definitions in the Visuddhimagga, Bhante explains mettā as friendliness with the function of promoting goodwill and manifesting as the absence of ill-will. He examines the sutta's opening qualities — being skilled (sakko), upright (ujū), gentle in speech (suvaco), tender-hearted (mudu), and without pride (atimāni) — as essential foundations for authentic loving-kindness practice.

The talk addresses practical aspects including contentment (santuṭṭhako), simplicity of lifestyle (subharo), reducing busyness (appakicco), and calming the sense faculties (santindriyo). Bhante emphasizes mettā as one of the brahmavihāra (divine abodes) and pāramī (perfections), explaining how this practice extends boundlessly through space and time to all breathing beings (pāṇa).

With references to Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry and practical guidance for establishing a 'touchstone' for warming the heart, this talk provides both scholarly insight and accessible meditation instruction for developing this fundamental Buddhist practice.

I was rooting around the websites and I came across a course that was written by a man called Andrew Olendzki. He was the director of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, which is an offshoot from IMS, which is the big meditation center in Barre, Massachusetts. That was begun by Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and lots of others. He did a lot of good work while he was there and they produce a very good magazine.

Anyway, he's done a course based on the Karaniya Metta Sutta, which is what we normally go through at the end of this sitting. So I thought I'd just go through it to give you an idea of how the Buddha puts it all together. And then if you want, I'll put the link for that course if you want to take it a bit further.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully Self-Awakened One.

Just in case I forget at the end, I hope you have a joyful Christmas and a great new year. I usually forget to say those things.

So the Karaniya Metta Sutta is the discourse on what we ought to do in order to develop *mettā*. That's what Karaniya means. And it comes from a very early strata of the Buddha's teachings, which was a collection of verses. Remember that in those days, they couldn't read and write. It's a bit odd to think of the Buddha as an illiterate, but he was. And therefore, because it was written as a verse, it's pretty close to what he himself would have developed.

That word mettā comes from the word mitta, which means friends. Now, to translate mettā, we can use the words that you'll see, this loving kindness. So loving is the attitude that you have within yourself and kindness is the way you express it. There's another one called goodwill. That stresses the role of intention and the will itself. And of course, it's in the Christmas greeting, isn't it? Peace on earth and goodwill to all men, or as we would say, all sentient beings.

Bhikkhu Bodhi's definition is a heartfelt concern for the well-being and happiness of others. I think that touches a bit on compassion, really. And it doesn't really mention that there's no self-interest and there's no attachment.

We've got lots of types of love: erotic, romantic, family relationships, friends, people at work. Now, those aren't evil relationships. You would still have those relationships, even if you were fully liberated. But unfortunately, because we're not liberated, there'll be some attachment to them. There'll be some expectations of them, which leads to disappointment and sometimes to control. So that's all to do with the type of unwholesome love.

Now, Buddhaghosa, who was this writer of the Path of Purification — some of you might know, it's a great big tome, which is probably one of the great spiritual manuals of the world — in the fifth century. This was his definition. This is how he defined all virtues. Mettā has the mode of friendliness as its characteristic. Its natural function is to promote friendliness. It is manifested as the disappearance of ill will. That's a bit odd, isn't it? To manifest something that disappears. But it's basically when there's no ill will, you know that it's got to be mettā. And its footing, its basis is seeing with kindness.

Now, here's a line which I like. When it succeeds, it eliminates ill will, because you can't have those two mental states together, right? If you've got good will, there can't be ill will there. When it fails, it degenerates into selfish, affectionate desire. Those are a couple of strong lines there.

Mettā, of course, appears quite often in the Buddha's lists. It's one of the perfections. It's one of the divine abodes, which is the most beautiful mental state that you can develop. It's one of the four illimitables with compassion, joy, and equanimity. It means that you can just develop it indefinitely, right? And it's also a suitable subject to develop these absorptions, these blissed-out states.

Okay, so the first stanza says, "This is what has to be done. One has to be skilled in what is good in order to reach the peaceful state." *Santampadam*, the path of peacefulness. Now, this is about achieving Nibbāna, but you'll find if you do that course that he stretches it into peace in society, peace within yourself and all that. But it's actually, this discourse is actually about achieving Nibbāna. But it is worthwhile to notice when you're peaceful because that quality of peacefulness is a quality of the seven factors of enlightenment. It's one of those things that we ought to develop just generally.

So these are the things that we have, in a sense, he's presuming that we've developed a little bit. The first one is *sakko*, which means a confidence, a capability in doing this work. The next one is to be *ujucha, suhuchu*, which means to be upright, really upright. So this is to do with our moral rectitude, and to get away from the stuff that comes out of delusion, of acquisitiveness, aversion and fear.

The next one is *suvaco*, which means skillful speech when spoken. So it's to be, the speech has to be kindly, it has to be truthful, beneficial, and rather importantly, timely, right? It might be kind, truthful and beneficial, but you shouldn't have said it then. *Mudu* is a softness, a tenderness, and it's normally put with the word for heart. So it's a gentle heart, a tender heart, a gentle person. And *atimāni* is to be without pride, arrogance, conceit, to be unpretentious.

So those are virtues that we need to develop. And then he carries on.

Now, the next verse, he says, to be content, *santusako*, to be contented. Now, this isn't the contentment that you get when you've done a good job and you feel contented or you've found someone whom you like to be with and you feel contented. This contentment is a basic line. It's a basic attitude of contentment. To enter each moment with that sense of this will do, this contentment. It doesn't mean you can't change something, but it underlies everything that we do, a sense of contentment.

The next one is *subharo*, which means easily maintained. This actually probably refers to the monastics. But it's a case of making a distinction between what you need, what you want, and what is actually sufficient. And that will determine on whatever you have to do in your daily life. But basically, it's really needing only little. And these days, of course, with climate change, it has a bit more meaning.

The next one is *appakicho*, which means to be less busy. Well, I think that rings a bell, doesn't it? We're always trying to do too much, trying to achieve too much, burnout and all that. So it's good to reflect upon our lifestyle, just find out where we're actually stressing and to just let go of a few things. I think it's to do with priority.

And there's also, I think what also helps in life is to make the small tasks that we do meaningful. Just washing pots, vacuuming and all that. Normally, we want to get them out of the way and get on with life. But if you see them as an occasion where you can just stop for a minute and do them very mindfully in a very relaxed way, abandoning all ill will... They become little islands, and then from there you launch into your next project. So remember the old Zen saying, when you wash the pots, just wash the pots.

Engaging lightly, *salahuka vutti*. This is not to take things too seriously, to keep mindfulness. Not to be able to relax and to have that wholesome heart attitude. It's actually, just to keep a smile on the face. The background smile really helps, so you don't get too serious about things.

Santindriyo, this is quietening the faculties. We're a very visual culture with all this YouTube and TV and Netflix and social media, and we're always looking for some sensual delight, the countryside. So we're always looking for that excitement. And in a sense, that misses the mark because it's not quite happiness, right? And that's why often excitement doesn't work for us. Whatever used to make us really excited loses its flavour. So it is a case of being more content. It comes back to being content. And to just every so often to spend some time just looking at a blank wall... And just allowing that sense to calm down a bit.

Nipako just means prudent, wise, discreet, thoughtful. So that's a lovely quality, isn't it? To be considerate, basically, to be considerate, to be aware of what other people need. We're always centering upon ourselves.

Apagabho means to be modest, to be courteous and not impudent. So again, it's about not pushing yourself. I mean, the word humility doesn't go down too well these days because we all believe in the sovereign self. But humility actually just means to be natural and to be in communication with people, to see yourself in relationship.

Well, this is, again, a reinforcement not to hanker after worldly things. So when you walk down the shopping mall or something like that, and your eyes constantly gazing at things — the clothes, the jewellery, the computer, the laptops, the phones. It's always looking for something. But if you're there to get something specific, just go for it and then have a cup of tea.

So all this is about calming the senses, just calming down, trying to be much more contented.

The third stanza, so he sums it all up here. He says not to commit even the slightest deeds that a wise person could find fault with. So that basically sums it up.

Now, this wise person is the spiritual friend, your *kalyānamitta*. That could be a teacher. It could be a very close friend, somebody whom you can talk to about things which have a spiritual meaning. And if there isn't one, there's always the Buddha within. I mean, when I have a moral question or, in a sense, any question, if I just sit very still and just ask this Buddha within, just plunk the question into the heart... I normally get a fairly good answer. So we have a wisdom inside us, but often sometimes, of course, we're overcome with doubt and to discuss it with somebody can be very helpful.

And then we get the first well-wishing. So, may all beings live in safety, *khemino*, and in gladness, *sukhino*. The word *sukhi* just means happy. And if you put a D instead, it's *dukkhi*, that means you're not happy. And then it says, *sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā*. So, may all beings develop, may become more happy.

So, that's your first thing, is giving us a hint as to what we ought to say. And it's not about me feeling happy. Well, when you're doing the mettā, it's not about making yourself feel happy. Your intention is about others. I mean, there is a point where you turn into yourself and say, may I be happy? There's no problem with that. But you're not practising mettā in order to be happy. Then it just becomes a self-centered practice. You're doing it in order to establish a relationship with the world, which is one of giving, of offering.

And then he gives us ways in which we can do this, gives us a technique. So he says, whatever beings there are, weak or strong, without exception, long or short, big, medium-sized, small, subtle or gross. Now the word here is *pāna*, which means breathing beings. So I presume this includes insects, but I'm not so sure about bacteria, if they're beings. And what he's suggesting is no matter how a being looks, it's always that attitude of offering goodwill. Doesn't matter what their physical shape is.

In the second verse, he opens it out. He says to those who are visible or invisible, can't even see them. Residing near or far, those who have already been born and those who've yet to be born. This is almost transcending space and time. So, you're really just expanding it outwards.

Now, in the sixth verse, let no one, now he's come back to, well, once you've developed this mettā, you can't do this. You can't deceive somebody. So to deceive somebody really is to take advantage of them. And let him wish no harm. Not to take advantage of somebody.

And then the next one is not to despise anybody. So you have to be careful about that. Not to be excessively, not to be angrily critical. You've got to watch out for jealousy and bad mouthing. And of course, this also refers to ourselves, what they call the inner critic. When you hear yourself lambasting yourself, it's just... Just turn towards it and say, calm down. You have to turn it into a little devil and give it a hug.

So again, it's not wishing harm to anyone. He sums it up with that, not wishing harm to anyone.

And in the seventh verse, he points out, just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so we should cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness towards all beings. Now, that's a very strong image, a mother protecting a child who's being threatened.

And I saw a video recently of a lion and a lioness who were beginning to mate and they were walking at opposite sides of a fence that was obviously a containment in a reservation for them and as the lion moved down one side of the fence he was giving sounds of yawning if you can imagine that like a lion yawning. And she, the lioness, was coming the other way with a companion, yawning as well. So I thought when they get together, there'd be a bit of hanky-panky and smooching. But in fact, as soon as he got close to her, he attacked her viciously. And both of these lionesses attacked him. And then he pulled away.

And I thought, well, that is so strange because there was no comment about it. But what happens is if a lioness has cubs by a particular lion, then the lion goes off. He's done his bit. If a stray lion comes past, he'll try to kill all those cubs, mate with her so that she has his cubs. And she has to defend them. And sometimes she's actually killed. But most times she just comes away with bites and bruises. So what he was doing was testing her fierceness. And then in the video, the commentator says, and now he's showing respect. I couldn't work that out, but seemingly he was showing her respect.

And of course, we have the story of the Buddha calming the elephant that had been set upon him by the dastardly Devadatta, who was a cousin and wanted to lead the order. He had lots of criticism. And that was the picture I had up before. Just in case you didn't see it, I'll just share the screen quickly.

So that's the *mudrā*. That's what we associate with loving kindness, that hand, offering it from love. It's nicely moved there. Normally, it's just a flat hand, which isn't so appealing. And in his lap, I'm taking that to be the Dhamma, the jewel of the Dhamma. It's a Thai statue, that.

So now we have a third way in which we can develop that mettā, and it goes even further, let him cultivate a boundless thoughts of loving kindness towards the whole world. And what he means there is, of course, all the worlds, all the cosmos, above, below and all around. So that's that practice of doing it in the six directions. Normally, it's a compass thing, north, south and all that. And as we do it, all beings in front, behind, left, right, below and above. Unobstructed, free from hatred and enmity.

Now, the next verse, he's saying that this should be developed all the time. It should be just a natural state of mind. So whether you're standing, walking, seated or lying down, so as long as you're awake, you should develop this mindfulness.

Now, whenever I read a translation, I always slip in "affectionate" there. It's not just mindfulness. It's an affectionate mindfulness.

Just now, as we're all looking at each other, put a little kindling of kindness in your heart towards everybody. See, you can do it, can't you? That can be there all the time, even when we're not so aware of it. And that's what he's asking us to do. And he calls it a divine abiding. So this is like being a god.

In the final verse, he sums it up. He says, you don't want to have erroneous views. So these are the views about how we create suffering for ourselves through that wrong desire, understanding impermanence, and the fact that we have to get used to the idea that we're going to grow old, sick, and die. And this relationship we have with the body, heart, and mind of it being me. So that's the identity of having this human form. And our practice of *vipassanā* is trying to make that clear. In fact, what we are looking for is what's looking.

There's also erroneous views about *kamma* — that you can't get away with anything. It comes back in one way or the other. There's a very interesting quote from Jung that I came across. He says, "Whatever has been repressed will manifest as fate." And if you look at your life and you find yourself doing something over and over again, falling into the same sort of mistake, then underneath that, there will be some sort of suppressed or repressed mental state. I think that's really quite an insight.

So then endowed with these virtues and wise with insight. Now, the next line is a bit heavy because you have to abandon all sensual desire. But remember, it doesn't mean you stop eating. It just means to abandon the wrong desire — which is that greed, which is trying to get happiness from the sensual world as a permanent thing. That's the problem. Happiness arises and passes away like anything else.

And then he says, you don't have to be reborn again. The actual translation is "not to be conceived in a womb." Basically, you don't have to be reborn again.

So that's just a quick run through this particular discourse. So how do we practice it? Well, remember that it's good to have a touchstone. It's good to have something you can go back to, which raises that sense of warmth, that kindling in the heart. For instance, I know one teacher talks about holding a baby. You use a pet. We always love pets. Or we normally start with the benefactor — so that's somebody who warms the heart.

Now if you've got that and you've developed it a bit, you can always go back to it whenever we move into a category and you don't feel that the warmth in the heart has gone. You just go back and remind yourself of that kindling by bringing that person or the pet or whatever it is to mind. And remember that you're developing it in order to develop right attitude towards all beings.

The other thing is not to worry if it doesn't come. Because the heart has its own logic, doesn't it? You want to feel loving, you're just not feeling it. So if you obsess about that, then it becomes a misery. But just by doing the practice, I think you'll find...

I have a poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who some of you might know. He's known as the father of modern English poetry. And some of his sonnets are really about his own spiritual development. And there's one that starts, "My own heart, let me more have pity on. Let me live to my sad self, hereafter kind, charitable. Not live this tormented mind with this tormented mind tormenting yet. I cast for comfort. I can no more get by groping round my comfortless than blind eyes in their darkened day or thirst confined thirsts all in all, in all the world of wet."

So those first two lines I've often used — "My own heart let me more have pity." And if you can get that kindling within yourself, then you offer it out from there. I find it extremely strong. "Let me live to my sad self hereafter, kind and charitable," to my anxious self, my angry self, to my guilty self. It doesn't do much for the poem, but you can use it that way so that you can generate a warmth towards yourself. And of course, it's easier to move from that heart. But as I say, if it's not there, not to worry at all — you can use your pet or something to generate it.

Very good. So I thought what we would do is instead of usually ending with the refuge and precepts, we would start with those. And then I would do that guidance through the *Mettā Sutta*. And then we would continue until the end, when I would read the discourse, a translation of the discourse, and end off with our usual chant of *Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu*.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that by your practice of *mettā*, you will generate a beautiful heart that will lead you to everlasting peace and happiness.

CHAPTER 194

Skillful Discussion: The Buddha's Guide to Noble Conversation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a discourse from the Aṅguttara Nikāya that addresses how to engage in meaningful dialogue, particularly relevant in our age of polarization. The Buddha outlines three types of discussion—about past, present, and future—and provides practical guidance on determining whether someone is competent for genuine conversation.

The talk explores four key skills: asking appropriate questions (categorical, analytical, counter-questions, and those to be set aside), understanding conversational conventions, handling confrontation skillfully, and maintaining the right disposition for learning. Bhante discusses the Buddha's famous avyāgata—the ten undeclared questions about the world's eternity, finitude, and the post-death existence of a Tathāgata—explaining why speculative metaphysical questions were set aside in favor of practical liberation.

The discourse emphasizes that noble ones consult "for the sake of knowledge and clarity," avoiding hostility, arrogance, and the desire merely to win arguments. Instead, they listen actively, acknowledge well-spoken points, and engage without intimidation or mockery. This teaching offers valuable guidance for practitioners seeking to embody Right Speech in daily interactions and contribute to more compassionate discourse in society, supporting the ultimate goal of liberation through non-clinging.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

I've just picked up on a discourse and it's concerned with how we discuss things with each other, how we talk to each other. So in this age of great polarization, I thought, well, let's see what the Buddha has to say. It comes from the *Aṅguttaranikāya,* which is a collection of the small discourses.

And it starts off like this. There are mendicants, these three topics of discussion. What three? You might discuss the past. This is how it was in the past. You might discuss the future. This is how it will be in the future. And you might discuss the present. This is how it is at present.

Now, at first, that seems a bit obvious. But of course, there are three very different conversations. The first one is all about memory and about opinions about memory and what we thought had happened. The second one is all driven to some future idea, some idealism. And there could be arguments about that. And the present, of course, is an attempt to see things as they are. But everybody sees things differently. So there's all sorts of argumentation.

What the discourse does is it takes the process of discussion. The first one is the skill in questions. So you can see whether it's worth talking to somebody. Here they would say a person is, the discourse says a person is competent to hold a discussion, but what it means is whether it's worth you talking to them. And remember that at that time when you read the discourses they didn't have recording machines. So the way that you got people to be clear was to ask the question three times and to make sure that is that what you mean. And it was done either as two individuals or in a group so that the position taken was clear, what was said was clear, and that would undermine silly arguments.

And at that time they had a imagination, which is called reproductive imagination, not like ours. If you see a car crash, you'll see it one way and then you won't be sure that you've seen it because you didn't record it fully and there'll be questions asked. In those times, they had what was called reproductive imagination, and they were very good at remembering things.

Even today at the 1956 Sixth Great Council held in Burma, there were six monks who knew all the scriptures, all the Abhidhamma and all the Vinaya, the rule of the monks. I mean, that's a massive amount of literature. They knew it off by heart. And when the questions came about certain passages in the scriptures, which were maybe not quite right or whatever, it was these people, these monks who became the experts who would quote from directly from the scriptures.

Just as an aside, by the way, it seems that the Brahmins, they teach their children the scriptures and learn them by heart and they're concerned with pronunciation. Only when they can learn that do they actually add the meaning of the words, and only when they've got the words and the pronunciation together are they allowed to discuss what the scriptures say.

So here are the sorts of questions that somebody can ask. When a person is asked a question, if it needs to be answered categorically and they don't answer it categorically, then that shows they're not worth talking to. So one of the things that you might say in Buddhism is, is the Buddha impermanent? And if they prevaricate, yes, no, maybe and all that, then what we want is a clear statement. Yes, yes, it is.

Another one is, is UK a European country? Now, I should say, yes. Lots of UK people don't think they are, I think. But that's what should be said, at least geographically.

Now, the next sort of question might need analysis. So one regular question is, is Buddhism a religion? So then you have to ask, well, what do you mean by religion? Another one is when the Buddha is describing this whole idea of not-self, he starts off with control. How much of the body can you control? Is it under your control? Can you make it grow taller, etc.? So then you'd have to say, well, when he means control, he obviously means the body as an organism. But obviously I can move it around. I do have some ability to control it. And of course, what he's really pointing to is sickness, aging and death.

Now, sometimes you ask a question, it needs a counter question. So one Dharma question would be, are the ear and nose the same? So you say, well, in what way? You say, well, in their function. Well, yes, they are. They're the same. They both perceive.

These days, of course, we have this whole thing about immigration. So a question might be, should immigration be allowed to stay? Well, then you say, well, what type, what are the types of immigrants that are coming to the country? And can we make distinctions?

As a teacher, you see, a Vipassanā teacher. So I might say to you, how's your practice going? And you say, oh, yeah, that's good. Now, if I'm a bad teacher, I'll say, oh, very good. I'll take your word for it. But if I'm a good teacher, then I'll say, well, in what way? And you say, well, my mind is more quiet. I'm able to see process more clearly. I say sādhu, sādhu. If you say to me, well, I'm feeling a lot happier. I say, no, it's not about happiness. That's the end product.

And then there are questions that should be set aside. So in a conversation, somebody might ask you a personal question. So you don't have to answer that, even if it seems to be relevant.

Now, in the Buddhist teachings, there were 10 questions that he wouldn't answer. They are known as the *avyākata*. They are the undeclared 10 statements or questions. So first of all, they run like this. Is the world eternal? Is the world not eternal? Is the world finite or is the world infinite? So that he wouldn't answer. I don't think he'd know, frankly. Although I have to say in the commentary on the Visuddhimagga it does unfortunately say that the Buddha knew the world was flat. So this he didn't say anything about the world as something objective out there. His main interest was the world that we're creating moment after moment.

The next one is is the soul the same as the body? Is the soul one thing and the body another? Now, he doesn't answer that. And it's something that I think is worth investigating on another little talk. So I won't go into that particular one.

And then finally, there were four questions around a Tathāgata. Remember, that's how he referred to himself, the one who had arrived, who had gone, who had completed the path. And it refers to any Arahant, really. So does a Tathāgata exist after death? Does he not exist after death? This is known as the quadrilemma. Does a Tathāgata both exist and not exist after death? And here's a headbanger. Does a Tathāgata neither exist nor not exist after death? Well, not surprisingly, he didn't make an answer to that. The real reason, of course, was that people were thinking of the Tathāgata or a liberated one as a person, as a self. So he just, he didn't like those sorts of questions. He didn't like any questions that were speculative, basically.

So now we move on to a different section, which is the skill in the conventions of conversation. So when a person is asked a question, if they're not consistent about their position, or what their position is and what it isn't, about what they propose, and then they change the subject, about speaking from what they know and not from some fake position, and that it's appropriate to the procedure. So this is really when you're having a discussion with somebody, you're not speaking over each other. Politicians are very good at that.

I was watching a BBC interview with Varoufakis, I think that's his name, the Greek economist, some of you may know. And there was an economic lecturer there. She was from some Oxford or somewhere. And of course, the interviewer. And at first, he was asking the questions. They were answering it all, looked very civilized. And then right at the end, the three of them spoke all together trying to crush the other. It's just weird. And of course, I didn't get a word of it.

So when a person is asked the question, if they're consistent about their position, what their position is and what it isn't, about what they propose, about speaking from what they know and about the appropriate procedure, then that person is competent to hold a discussion.

How people engage when being attacked. So you can know whether or not a person is competent to hold a discussion by seeing how they take part in a discussion. When a person is asked a question, if they dodge the issue, distract the discussion with irrelevant points, display annoyance, hate and bitterness, then that person is not competent to hold a discussion. So that's politicians, isn't it? Dodging the issue, distracting it, saying something irrelevant and occasionally getting a little bit uppity about things.

So when a person is asked the question, if they don't dodge the issue, distract the discussion with irrelevant points or display annoyance, hate and bitterness, then that person, we can talk to them.

The next question is how people engage with confrontation. So afraid of being bettered. So you can know whether a person is competent to hold a discussion by seeing how they take part in a discussion. When a person is asked a question, if they intimidate, crush, mock and seize at trivial mistakes, then they're not competent to hold a discussion. In other words, don't talk to them. But when a person is asked a question, if they don't intimidate you, crush you, mock you, seize upon trivial mistakes, then it's worth talking to them.

And often in conversation, it's about winning, not about finding some truth, not about finding some way of compromise, not even coming to a position of agreeing to differ. It's about who wins. I saw really quite a horrible discussion on YouTube between a university professor and Jordan Peterson. And somebody whom you'll know, I just can't bring his name to mind, but it was vicious. It was about woke. And the professor especially was very insulting. But, yeah, what can you do? I think the other two, Jordan Peterson and the other fellow, I mean, Jordan Peterson is a right wing guru. And the other fellow was on the left. If I was any of those, I'd have just walked out. He's just insulting.

So now we have a general disposition. You can know whether or not a person has what's required by seeing how they take part in a discussion. If they actively listen, they have what's required. And if they know what they're talking about, well, actually, the next section is about the Four Noble Truths. But there the Buddha is actually stressing the fact, the ability to listen, not to be afraid of actually what the person might say. Be open to the fact that your own position may be changed, may be nuanced.

Often when we enter into a discussion about something, there's an underlying fear of being changed, of losing.

So the next one is much more to do with the scriptures. It says, for someone who has what's required, directly knows one thing, completely understands one thing, gives up one thing and realizes one thing. That one thing, of course, is *Nibbāna* and the path to *Nibbāna*. And here the Buddha points out that the purpose of all discussion, as far as he's concerned, and consultation, sitting close and listening well, is the liberation of the mind by not clinging, by not grasping.

So finally, there's a coda. Those who converse with hostility, too sure of themselves, arrogant, ignoble, attacking virtues, they look for flaws in each other. They rejoice together when their opponent speaks poorly, makes a mistake, becomes confused and is defeated. But the noble ones don't discuss like this.

If an astute person wants to hold a discussion connected with the teaching and its meaning, the kind of discussion that the noble ones hold, then that wise one should start the discussion. Knowing when the time is right, neither hostile nor arrogant, not overexcited, contemptuous or aggressive, or with a mind full of jealousy, they speak from what they rightly know. They agree with what is well spoken. See, you know, actually praising the other, the person who has a contradictory idea, praising them or at least accepting when they've made a decent argument without criticizing what has been poorly said. They don't persist in finding faults, nor seizing on trivial mistakes, nor intimidating, nor crushing the other. Nor would they speak suggestively, snidely.

Good people consult for the sake of knowledge and clarity. That's a really good statement. Good people consult for the sake of knowledge and clarity. That's how the noble ones consult. This is noble consultation. Knowing this, a wise person should consult without arrogance.

So that's the final section of the discourse. And remember, we shouldn't take these discourses as final statements about these things. Even subjects like dependent origination crop up in various discourses from various angles. So it's not as though we take a discourse and say, well, that's everything to be said about discussion. Far from it. They're just pointers. And our task is to translate what we have understood back into our own lives and, of course, into society, especially these days. When, as you know, there's so much polarization. The Buddha himself, when somebody reported to him what one of his monks or nuns had said, he would say, well, if you'd have asked me that question, I would have said the same thing.

So now just before we finish off, I just want to point to three books and I'll put them on the website. The first one is Nonviolent Communication by Rosenberg. And that is really a very famous book and definitely worth reading about how to talk to people. The other one, I've not read it entirely, but I read little sections of it. It's called Difficult Conversations. Finally, I don't think you'll be able to get this book, but you might do. It's called Bad Arguments. And it tells you all the silly, all the ways that people don't answer your question, don't converse with you in a proper manner and just cause confusion and anger usually. So very good.

I hope this little discourse is of some use to you in your life and in society and is just part and parcel of your path to complete and full liberation from suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 195

Cultivating Joy: Beyond Suffering to Muditā and Daily Happiness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

> *In this uplifting talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a often-overlooked aspect of Buddhist practice: the cultivation of joy. While Buddhist teachings frequently focus on the cessation of suffering, the Buddha himself experienced happiness when students accepted his teachings, and prescribed joy as one of the four brahmavihāras (divine abodes).*
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> *The talk explores the paradox many practitioners face: the fear of indulgence that can destroy our capacity for joy, versus the trap of craving that comes from attachment to pleasant experiences. Through vivid anecdotes from monastic life, Bhante illustrates how this fear can lead to joyless asceticism that misses the Buddha's middle way.*
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> *Drawing from the Dhammapada, he explains how virtue naturally leads to happiness, and introduces muditā - appreciative or reciprocal joy - as an antidote to envy and jealousy. The discussion includes practical exercises for remembering daily joys, cultivating appreciative joy for others' happiness, and using joy as a restorative when feeling low.*
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> *The talk concludes with guided meditation instructions for joy practice, parallel to mettā meditation, offering the blessing 'may you be joyful, may you be ever more joyful, may you attain the sublime peace of Nibbāna.' This teaching provides a balanced approach to spiritual joy that avoids both indulgence and joyless austerity.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa.
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa.
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So being spring, or April anyway, I thought we would have a go at joy. The first thing I did was to look up all the synonyms we have: pleasure, enjoyment, happiness, gladness, delight, thrill, exaltation, elation, bliss, ecstasy, rapture, and absorption. That's not bad, is it? And it's all good. It's not as though the Buddha asked us to be miserable all the time, even though most of the teaching is about getting rid of suffering. He was asked, how does he feel when he teaches and somebody doesn't accept the teaching? He said he feels all right with it. It's calm. But when somebody does accept his teaching, he feels happy, feels joyful.

Now, it's an interesting thing that all my teachers never introduced us into the practice of joy. It's very strange. *Metta*, *metta* all the time. Compassion a little bit, but joy never. I'm thinking they did it because of the problem of indulgence. And I think that's what goes wrong, of course. All these beautiful mental states to which we are heir corrupt as soon as we try to hold on to them or want more of them. So it's a case of recognising that nothing is repeatable and that when it's gone, it's gone and there's no point in hankering after it. So that, for instance, if you take a morsel of food which you delight in, once you've swallowed it and the aftertaste is gone, that's it. Let go.

Now, this fear, this fear of indulgence actually destroys joy. And I noticed it in the monastic life more than in lay people. At the monastery, Kanduboda, there would be occasions when people would come with special foods to celebrate a birthday, a marriage and so on. And one of the things that is quite lovely is buffalo curd, *miikiri*. And it was handed out, you see, and you put loads of sugar with it, or kittle juice, a bit like maple juice. And it's wonderful. And we're all eating it, you see. And there was a monk sat next to me who was the picture of the ascetic, very gaunt, and his cheeks were like this. And as we got around, while we were eating, he was glaring, as it were, at this curd. And as we came to the finish, he leant forward quite slowly, lifted it up slowly, and then basically shovelled it down his throat. And I've always presumed he was just so afraid of indulgence. So that's no good, is it?

There was another case, too. There was my teacher, Sayadaw Ujanaka. About ten years ago, he taught at a place called Beatenberg, which is in Interlaken, those beautiful lakes in Switzerland. And from it, on a beautiful day, you can see these three great mountains: the Eiger, the Mönch and the Jungfrau. During the retreat, the weather was miserable, rainy, cloudy. And one day it all opened up and it's a glorious sight. The white peaks against this deep blue sky. So everybody on the retreat went out onto the balcony and outside to have a look, you see. Well, he gave them hell, didn't he? He upset a lot of people. He told them they were useless meditators. They were just indulging and he was wasting his time and all sorts. So I don't think he was invited again.

And I remember whenever I would say something like, "Isn't that a beautiful flower?" he would say, "Ah, yes, but it fades, it dies." A bit of a killjoy, really. But his intention, of course, was to awaken me to the problem of indulgence. And that seed of indulgence is always there, right to the bitter end. Mara is always right there, just waiting for the moment to creep up on us.

So it's a case of just recognising these two things: if we begin to see what the consequences of indulgence are, then we'll make ourselves afraid to enjoy something. But actually, if, for instance, you have a biscuit, right, and you finish the biscuit, the last bit

goes down, flavour's gone. And then you get this: "I think I'll have another one." So as soon as that comes, oh well, that's greed. So you have to sit down and wait for that to exhaust itself. Now, once you've done that, you've exhausted the karmic consequence of the greed that arose while you were eating that biscuit. I think it's as simple as that.

I know somebody who got into the habit of eating biscuits just before they went to bed. And he was getting rather afraid of it. So instead he turned to music. And that's a skilful thing. If you find that an indulgence feels a little bit overwhelming, then put your attention on some other joyful thing that you like to do.

So there we are. There's the fear. The fear of indulgence undermines, destroys enjoyment of joy. And to become indulgent with our joys, wanting more of this, more of the same, is just the old suffering.

Now the question is, why is it we remember mostly at the end of the day the painful parts and hardly any of the joys? Well, I suppose the reason is because painful things hurt. But unfortunately, it does shadow out the joys of the day. So we have to make a special effort to remember the joys of the day. Instead of obsessing about our failures and our upsets, we can contemplate the successes and joys of the day.

Now, the interesting thing is, the more you make yourself aware of the joys of the day, the more you bend that way and the more you see what is actually undermining your joy. And this, of course, creates even greater joy. So we try to rid ourselves of behaviours which undermine our joy and over time, our joy grows. And of course, this is done with a certain affectionate awareness. And this is towards ourselves, being kind to ourselves, gentle to ourselves and seeking what lifts the heart. Music, nature, friendship and so on.

Now, this word *mudita*, which is one of the four Brahma-viharas - remember, so love, compassion, joy, and peacefulness, equanimity, are the four great mental states. These we can develop indefinitely. And it's often translated as appreciative joy, reciprocal joy. And what this does, of course, is it undermines envy and jealousy. And I define those two as saying that envy is wanting what the other person has and jealousy is wanting what the other person has and hating them for having it in the first place.

Now, it's interesting in the East, if you make a donation to a cause, if you make a donation to, say, a monastery, all the names are posted up with exactly how much you gave. So it starts off with, I don't know, maybe a thousand pounds and it goes all the way down to a couple of shillings. That's an old word, isn't it? And it's done because in the East, it's understood that people will rejoice in the good karma that you have gained by your offering.

Now, when it came to Bill Gates giving his millions away, I wonder what our response was. When he got all that money, he should be able to give something away, the one percenters. Did we say, "Oh, good on Bill, may he receive many blessings"? He's got enough blessings. So here we have that reciprocal joy of actually being joyful in somebody else's successes and joys.

And I think it comes as a revelation that we can actually be more joyful for others than for ourselves. And this is not strange, of course, to parents who rejoice in the successes of their offspring. I remember once I must have been about maybe twelve years old because my sister's eleven years younger than me. And I got back from school and I sat opposite my mother and she held Maria, you see, and encouraged her to walk towards me. And of course, when she did, I mean, it was joy. It was wonderful to see this little toddler making her way. So this development of being joyful for other people in the joys of other people and the successes of other people is really heart-lifting.

And joy is also a restorative. Somebody's called it restorative joy. So there you are down in the dumps, and you think to yourself, well, how can I lift my heart? How can I bring joy into my heart? Whatever level, it doesn't always have to be amazing, ecstatic joy. It's just feeling happy, generally happy. So that's when you meet up with a friend or you watch a good film and so on.

In the monastic life, of course, the daily routine tends to be the same. Even when there's a feast day, the only difference is you turn up for a better meal and then you go back and it's just the same. So it can move you towards a sense of apathy, a sense of laziness and all that. And it was then that I realised the amazing power of a long, mindful cup of tea. No doubt about it.

If we just list all those things - this is not an exhaustive list, but the sensual joys that we get that lift the heart, relations of happiness, the religious joys of feast days. Now, the ethical joys are really what the Buddha points to. As far as he's concerned, virtue, goodness equals happiness. And in chapter 20 of the Dhammapada, a lot of the verses are devoted to being happy. This is what he says: "Oh, how happily we live without hate among those with hate! Among people who hate, we live without hate. Oh, how happily we live without misery among those in misery! Among people in misery, we live without misery. Oh, how happily we live without ambition among those with ambition! Among people with ambition, we live without ambition."

Now, just a note on that ambition. There's nothing wrong with us offering our talents for the benefit of the company, people and so on. But of course, it becomes corrupt when we start thinking about money and power.

So the whole idea, really, if we want to develop joy, is to bend that way. What have we talked about? We've talked about the enemies of joy. We realise how corruptive indulgence is, how it becomes an obsession, how it's what they call feeding the dragon. And because of that, we can't allow ourselves to enjoy something. And then, of course, there's the indulgence itself, which becomes a trap in itself. That's feeding the dragon. And the way we do it is by becoming more aware of our daily joys and just bending life towards that way, just as we do with *metta*. Then we have this reciprocal joy, undermining envy and jealousy and really being happy for other people's happiness. And finally, to use joy to lift the heart when we feel a bit down in the dumps.

So here are some exercises. You have to make a resolution, you see. If at the end of today you sit and you think now, how happy was I today? And all you can remember is the miseries. Then you have to make a determination that tomorrow you'll actually acknowledge when you're happy, any level of happiness, any level of joy. It could just be contentment. And just to acknowledge it and doing that, of course, you remember it by the end of the day.

The other thing you might try to do is to contemplate every evening for about a week, maybe five, ten minutes, and just go back in your life and just think of all the joys you've had. All the joys you've had. And by the end of the week, you'll have a big smile on your face.

And the other thing is the practice of joy, which is like *metta*. So you go through all the categories, but the blessings are, may you be joyful, may you be ever more joyful. Now, those are the ones that are regularly used. I like to add, may you attain the sublime peace of *Nibbana*. Now, the problem with Nibbana is that there's no emotions in Nibbana. So it's not that sort of happiness. In fact, that's what Sariputta said. He says it's the very absence of emotions, which is the bliss of Nibbana. That's a bit difficult for us, but at least we can make that intention because, according to the Buddha, this is the highest of all happinesses.

So may you be joyful. May you be ever more joyful. May you attain the sublime peace of *Nibbana*. I think peace rather than bliss. I've sometimes used bliss. Peace gives you, I think, a slightly better feel for it. And as I say, at the end of this hour, that's what I'll be doing. I'll be doing joyful meditation instead of *metta*.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your development of joy, you will be joyful sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 196

The Importance of Tranquillity — Passaddhi

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines passaddhi — tranquillity or calmness — as one of the seven bojjhaṅgas (factors of Awakening). He explains how this essential quality affects both body and mind, from activating the parasympathetic nervous system to releasing beneficial neurotransmitters like serotonin and reducing cortisol.*
>
> *Bhante explores how tranquillity functions in meditation practice, particularly in samatha (calming) exercises and jhāna (absorption states), and its connection to the fourth brahmavihāra of upekkhā (equanimity). He demonstrates how cultivating calmness improves decision-making, relationships, creativity, and overall mental health, while serving as the foundation for deeper concentration and insight.*
>
> *Drawing on both Buddhist psychology and modern neuroscience, this talk offers practical guidance for developing passaddhi as a daily habit — from mindful transitions between activities to creating peaceful conditions for sleep. Bhante emphasizes that tranquillity is not merely relaxation but a crucial spiritual quality that supports all aspects of the path to Awakening, ultimately pointing toward the sublime serenity of Nibbāna itself.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I thought this evening we'd tackle this factor of enlightenment. The word is *passaddhi* and it translates as calmness, tranquillity, serenity. And you can see that this is really important because the Buddha has included it in one of the seven factors of enlightenment.

Just to remind you, the seven factors are awareness, effort and concentration, this calmness and curiosity, and then you have equanimity and the investigation of the Dharma. So the first six are just general virtues that everybody can develop. What turns them into factors of enlightenment is the investigation of the characteristics of existence: impermanence, how we create suffering for ourselves through wrong attachments, wrong desires, wanting, not wanting, and of course, identity, not self.

I think people who've done yoga nidra will know that's a really deep way of relaxing. And we have to, yeah, in war zones, you have to keep calm and carry on. So I don't know whether I want to post that up in present war zones. Terrible what's happening.

The Buddha always splits everything into body and mind. So if we look at what happens in the body... I did a bit of research. Most of you know this better than I do, actually, for sure. Remember, we have autonomic systems. So one is the sympathetic, one is the parasympathetic. So the sympathetic one is the fight and flight. You're walking across the road and a car suddenly makes for you. Before you know it, you've got to the other side. So that's the sympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic is the opposite, right? So it's about calmness, rest and digest. I've picked that up somewhere. It affects your heart rate, et cetera.

The big thing about being calm, about relaxing into the present moment is physically it releases all these wonderful neurotransmitters: serotonin, which makes you feel happy and well-being, and feel-good factors, the endorphins. Now, remember that in Buddhist understanding, these hormones within the body affect the mind, right? So there are two different systems within us. There's this more gross energy that we call subatomic particles, or subatomic energy, and there's a mental energy which is separate from that. This you can actually experience in your meditation.

So it's not as though these hormones directly make you happy, they just have the effect on the heart of making it happy, your emotional life. And of course, it works the other way. When you're angry, the body gets hot. Similarly, it reduces cortisol. So that's what we have when we've got all this stress-related stuff, which isn't very good for us.

Because you're relaxed, because the body is feeling okay, obviously it's much better for our immune system. So we're able to fight diseases. As you know, there's a syndrome where people who are stressed at work, they go on holiday and then fall ill. So it's as though they have to have a real rest.

So it lowers muscle tension. I mean, that's the whole point of relaxing, isn't it? To relax the muscles. And this, of course, can alleviate even chronic pain. Just going back to my first episode with my back, the first time the disc prolapsed, I went along to an acupuncturist and I was surprised that as the needles went in, this anxiety came up. And as the anxiety dissipated, the pain wasn't anywhere near as bad as when I had this anxiety holding the body, as it were. It was trying to protect me. I mean, these systems are trying to protect us.

And similarly, of course, it helps digestion. It actually says that stress can lead to digestive issues such as indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome. So especially to feel relaxed around eating. I mean, if you're at work and you're being pressured and you're just chucking the sandwich down your throat, can't be doing you good, can it? And in Eastern understanding, I was thinking of the Chinese: 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock is eating time. So your body is primed to eat at that time. And from 1 o'clock to 3 o'clock is liver

time, right? So if you're rushing around while your liver's trying to handle all these nutrients, you can see it's not going to do you very good. So between 11 and 3 o'clock, make an effort to be a bit more relaxed. That's if you're stressed, yeah.

As a change in brain activity, you get these lovely alpha brain waves. So these are the ones that you have when you're feeling relaxed. It's also a very creative place to be. And we're there when we meditate. So when you're actually in that state of just *vipassanā*, normally the mind will go down to these alpha waves.

And obviously it improves your sleep because if you're not calm when you're trying to sleep, it's difficult. I mean, that's why really to close everything down about half an hour before we intend to sleep. Get off the social media, turn off Netflix, the BBC. And do something which is going to calm us. Like, I personally sometimes listen to the chanting from Throstle Hole Abbey, which was my first Buddhist encounter. And I just love their chanting. But there's other types of music, read poetry. There's many things you can do that are just relaxing in order to be prepared to go into sleep.

What we want to do is get that substrate under sleep to be calm and peaceful. And of course, when we're in bed, to put the breath, to put the attention on the breath and just feel it, just feel the body breathing. It wafts you into sleep, very calm. I can do *mettā*, of course. But the big thing is this sense of being relaxed, of being at ease.

I'm actually reading a book on this. It was a bestseller, Sunday Times bestseller called *Breath* by James Nestor. It's entertaining. It's very good. So when we relax, when we feel calm, even in situations that are stressful, we can get into a calmer place. It's obviously having these effects on the body and that's got to be good for us.

And when it comes to *cittānupassanā*, the calmness, tranquillity of the heart, so obviously the stress is happening the other way. It's coming as a reaction we have to a given situation or person. That stress coming in the heart is moving back into the body. So as soon as we can just relax around something which is upsetting us, making us anxious, all the better. And of course, if we have a habit of being calm in situation, it should extend itself into situations which are stressful, which means that we're slightly more emotionally resilient. We can move our emotions a bit. We're not stuck on one groove of being angry or being anxious or getting depressed about something.

And of course, when you are calm, it just improves your decision making. I make a rule for myself, which whenever I break it, it's always disastrous. I try never to make any decision when I'm miffed or angry, when I'm anxious or when I'm in doubt. If I make a decision in those states of mind, something bad turns up. So you have to wait sometimes. You have to wait until there's calmness and then there's greater clarity.

I mean, it's obviously better for our relationships too, isn't it? If you're with somebody who's neurotic, it affects you, doesn't it? And if you're neurotic, it affects them. So if we can get into the habit of just being calm, not rushing in conversation, not trying to get the answer ready before the person stopped talking, but to actually get into that mode of listening. And to listen you've got to be calm, right? You've got to be open.

It's obviously a good place for creativity. We're not talking about winners of the Booker Prize or ecstatic artists. It's just daily being creative about what we do. So even washing the pots can be actually a creative action, right? You can find different ways of doing it. This creativity... I mean, every moment, every day is different. So without us knowing it, we've got to be creative, right? Even if you're driving a car, you've got to be creative. You've got to see where you're going. You've got to drive in a safe and easy way and feel relaxed.

You know what happens when you drive and you're tense and you're anxious to get to a place or you're late to get to a place. That's how accidents happen. So obviously being calm just has an effect on our mental health. And developing that as a base within our lives from which we move, right, out of that base you move into an action. I mean, it's got to make us happy, hasn't it? Remember, these things are just habits. They're just habits that we can develop.

So it obviously has an effect on the body and it affects on the heart. And so it now becomes a *bojjhaṅga*, which is a factor of enlightenment. And it looms quite large in the Buddha's teachings. It's normally connected to concentration, calm concentration. *Samatha* is the word for calming exercises. So *mettā* practice would be a *samatha* practice. And it leads into an easy concentration. If you want to be concentrated, the worst thing you can do is to try to be concentrated. The whole thing about concentration comes when you're relaxed and at ease and just placing the attention on the object and allowing the concentration to manifest. As soon as you try and push the process, you're getting in the way and what you get is restlessness.

So you find it in the Eightfold Path. The last three are to do with mindfulness. It's right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. And we can include in that concentration, that sense of calmness.

It's one of the four divine abidings. So we've got love, compassion. They come divine abidings, also illimitables. But there are social virtues, the love, compassion, joy. And there the word is *upekkhā*. And this is where you get that touching of calmness and equanimity. So equanimity has to rest upon calmness. You can't be equanimous if you're all agitated. Equanimous, in my understanding, refers to a certain attitude, a certain way of looking at things. Calmness is your mental state and it's supporting it.

It's in meditation. The concentration of the *samatha* practice, of course, leads to an even deeper sense of relaxation through the practice of *jhāna*, through the practice of absorptions. So it's right there within the practice. It's not something that we add on. It's a necessary part of our practice. And when we are calm and we're not restless, whenever something arises, which is obstructing our meditation, messing us about in ordinary daily life, even from minor silly things to heavy mental states, that calmness, if we've got that substrate of calmness, we can deal with it. That's the point.

And then finally, of course, there is the great calmness itself. In the Metta Sutta, remember, it talks about what must be done for those people who wish to reach the state of peace. Now, they use a different word there, *santa*. But of course, it is this calmness, this state of sublime serenity. That's one of the adjectives the Buddha uses for *Nibbāna*.

So there we are. So I'm hoping that you're all convinced and that to develop our calmness is absolutely necessary. And just remind yourself, it could become part of your New Year resolutions. A bit late, but why not? We can always add them on, can't we?

And to get in the habit, something I've been working on all my life since I became a Buddhist is to, when you finish something, when you've done a task, it can be just the washing of the pots, but it could be a piece of work. It could be a bit of gardening you've done, not this time, of course. And when it's finished, just to relax for a moment and just reflect on what you've done and see how you feel about it.

And then just to stop for a moment, just to relax into the present moment. And then quite naturally, the next thing to be done will arise. So you're moving into the next thing to be done from that base of calmness. And that allows us to be more wise, more loving.

So I'm hoping that I've convinced you to really practice this quality of calmness and that by your devotion to it, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 197

Patient Forbearance

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

> *In this exploration of khanti pāramī (the perfection of patient forbearance), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines one of the Buddha's most emphasized virtues. Drawing from the Akkosa Sutta, he shares the famous teaching where the Buddha responds to verbal abuse by comparing it to food that, when not accepted, remains with the giver. The talk covers five key areas of forbearance: dealing with insults and slander without retaliation, enduring life's inevitable hardships and adversities, cultivating patience with difficult people, working skillfully with inner reactivity and mental states, and maintaining patience with one's spiritual progress.*
>
> *Bhante illustrates these teachings with practical examples, including his own experience with illness and stories from his time at meditation centers. He references the challenging Parable of the Saw, where the Buddha instructs maintaining loving-kindness even under extreme duress. The discourse emphasizes that patient forbearance builds inner strength and resilience, allowing practitioners to maintain equanimity when 'everything falls apart.' This teaching is particularly valuable for understanding how acceptance ('this is the way it is') can transform our relationship with difficulty and support gradual spiritual development on the path to liberation.*

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa.

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa.

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

So last month we did courage, which doesn't actually come up as a separate item in the ten perfections, the ten virtues to be perfected. But I suppose you could fit it into *adhiṭṭhāna*, which means resolute resolution. We'll do that another time anyway. But what we talked about was courage is doing something, achieving something, even though it's very difficult one way or the other. But there's a passive side to courage, which is, of course, patient forbearance.

Now, the Buddha is very big on that. He encourages us to develop it. So this is what he says: "Patient endurance is the supreme austerity. Whoever endures abuse, assault and imprisonment without animosity, and who has forbearance as one's strength, as one's mighty army, I call a Brahmin." So a Brahmin in the Buddha's understanding is

someone who's achieved something. He was always poking fun at the Brahmins who were pretending to be the spiritual leaders of society. Many of them were a bit corrupt, I think. I'm sure there were some good ones there.

"He who holds back rising anger like a rolling chariot, him I call a real driver. Other people are but holding the reins." And there's a verse here from the *Theragāthā*, which is the collected verses of the elders – this is the senior monks, not the nuns: "Forbearance is the highest virtue, forbearance is the highest self-control, forbearance is the highest happiness."

So there's a lot going on for this virtue of forbearance. And we'll look at one or two areas: all those areas where we feel insulted, slandered and all that sort of stuff. Then there's the hardships and adversities that come to us through life. Then we're cultivating patience with others. Then there's this inner bearing with reactivity, letting go of our inner reactions to things. And finally, patience with the spiritual path. And in so doing, we build up this inner strength and resilience. When everything falls apart, there's that ability to bounce back.

So the first one: dealing with insults, criticism, slander. It's important for us to face these things when they come up instead of retaliating, becoming upset. You have to develop this patience and maintain equanimity, which is difficult, of course. I mean, often the best thing is to approach the person who's done this to you and have a little discussion with them. That's before you hit them.

Now, there's an occasion here where the Buddha is actually abused by somebody. So I shall read out this little bit. At one time, the Buddha was staying near Rajagaha in the bamboo grove, the squirrel's feeding ground, and the Brahmin Bharadvaja the Rude heard a rumour that a Brahmin of the Bharadvaja clan had gone forth from the lay life to homelessness in the presence of the ascetic Gautama. So remember, that's his family name, Gautama. Angry and displeased, he went to the Buddha and abused and insulted him with rude and harsh words.

And when he'd spoken, the Buddha said to him, "What do you think, Brahmin? Do friends and colleagues, relatives and family members and guests still come to visit you?"

"Well, sometimes they do, Master Gautama."

"And do you then serve them fresh and cooked foods and savouries?"

"Sometimes I do."

"And if they don't accept it, Brahmin, who does it belong to?"

"Well, in that case, it still belongs to me."

"In the same way, Brahmin, when you abuse, harass and attack us, who do not abuse, harass and attack, we don't accept it. It belongs to you, Brahmin, it still belongs to you. Someone who, when abused, harassed and attacked, abuses, harasses and attacks in return, is said to eat the food and have a reaction to it. But we neither eat your food nor do we have a reaction to it. It still belongs to you, Brahmin. It still belongs to you."

Now, the Brahmin mistakes the Buddha's assertive forthrightness for aggressive bluntness. And he says, "The king and the retinue believe that Master Gautama is a perfected one, and yet he still gets angry." So one of the signs of somebody who's perfected, of course, is that they don't get angry – or at least when they do show anger, they're only putting it on.

Anyway, the Buddha replies, "For one free of anger, tamed, living in balance, freed by right understanding, one who is composed and at peace, where would anger come from? When you get angry at an angry person, you just make things worse for yourself. And when you don't get angry at an angry person, you win a battle hard to win. When you know that the other is angry, you act for the good of both yourself and the other if you're mindful and stay calm. People unfamiliar with this teaching consider one who heals both oneself and the other to be a fool."

Anyway, this seems to have convinced Bharadvaja – he's practically bowled over because he then says, "Oh, excellent Master Gautama." And before you know it, he's taken refuge in the Buddha, his teaching, and the order. And he wants to become a monk. So then he receives the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence. And not long after the ordination, the Venerable Bharadvaja the Rude, living alone, withdrawn, diligent, keen and resolute, soon realized the supreme end of the spiritual path in this very life. He lived having achieved it with his own insight, the goal for which people rightly go forth from lay life into homelessness. And he understood: "Rebirth is ended. The spiritual journey has been completed. What had to be done has been done. There is no return to any state of becoming." And the Venerable Bharadvaja became one of the perfected ones.

So I don't know how you handle when you feel angry about what somebody's done or said about you. But if somebody has been angry with me, I've learned to listen to what they say rather than – even though there's a reaction here, I put my whole attention on actually what they're saying. And in so doing, I then reply to what they're saying

and maintain at least an outward sign of non-anger, non-reactivity. And that normally allows them to cool down a bit. And then hopefully there's some discussion before anything gets worse.

And that leads us, of course, to having patience with others. Also, we meet people who just get up our noses. And somehow we have to cultivate this acceptance, this patience with them. So, of course, responding with a certain understanding and compassion.

Now, there was a case at Kanduboda, which was where I stayed for quite some time. A schizophrenic came – at least he told us he'd been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. And he'd obviously stopped taking the pills. And he was doing some very funny things, like, for instance, meditating in the nude, which in the East is a bit off, and sometimes showering – public showering where you go to the open well and pour water over yourself. And he was doing some other silly things that were disturbing people.

So the people there – I didn't know this was going on because the place was a little bit far away from my own hut – and so they went to the abbot and complained about him. But the abbot did nothing. Eventually, in a bit of desperation, they came to see me. And I said, "Well, I'll go up and see the Venerable Upalian and see what he'll do." So I went up and expressed their annoyance, well, the fact that they felt their practice was being heavily disturbed. And he didn't do anything.

Now, I never knew whether it's because he didn't want to confront this man or whether it was a teaching of just bearing up with what is unpleasant. And it's usually the unpleasant which disappears. Usually it's the opposite – somebody disturbs you and we tend to move away. But actually, if you just hang on in there, they usually give up and disappear. So this was a big teaching for me.

The second one, of course, is endurance in adversity – when things fall apart. When you have an illness or something like that, or you lose a close friend or a family member or somebody at work leaves whom you had a good relationship with. All those things, just the ordinary adversities of life that just come our way. Just being able to accept them. This is the way it is. That's the big phrase, isn't it? Just to accept it.

And sometimes I found it helpful to write out the situation so that I'm clear as to what's actually happening. And that allows this – whatever has arisen: anger, disappointment, grief, despair, all that sort of stuff – it just eventually burns itself out.

I mean, as you know, recently I had some really bad trouble with a slipped disc, which gave me – which stopped me from walking actually, the sciatica. And funnily enough, having accepted the situation this year, this is the first time I've actually walked around the meadows twice a day and really enjoyed the way that nature's come alive over the spring. So it's not been that heavy.

And it all comes down to this basic acceptance: this is the way it is. If you keep saying that to yourself, just banging it into your head – "this is the way it is" – and then just letting the heart relax around that. "This is the way it is." And then the possibilities usually turn up. I mean, we went through that very strange period of lockdown, that was really weird. And for many people, it was just an opportunity to do stuff they always wanted to do. Now they can't do what they usually do. So take up new hobbies and writing and music and stuff like that. So it is very much a case of bearing with it. And it begins with this acceptance. And then, of course, we find that it's not so bad.

However, there can be situations which are very painful. And there's a discourse here called the Parable of the Saw. I'm sure many of you have heard it. And this is the Buddha says: "Monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely, limb by limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teachings. Monks, even in such a situation, you should train yourselves thus: Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain in full concern and pity with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to those very persons, making them, as well as the whole world, the object of our thoughts of universal love – thoughts that have grown great, exalted, and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts, which are void of hostility and ill-will. In this way, you should train yourselves."

That's a bit of a demand, isn't it? In fact, when I once said this in a talk, somebody said, "Well, the Buddha had a great sense of humour."

So bearing up with things just gives us that sense of resilience.

Now, when it comes to our inner practice, I mean, this is also to do with how we react to what's happening to us on the outside. But of course, it also has an effect of how we react to ourselves within ourselves. And all this comes under that quality of reactivity. And here again, there's an importance to be able to bear with ourselves, to bear with our own thoughts and emotions, sensations and stuff like that, just so that we can develop a clarity of mind.

I was here reminded of Brian Keenan. Some of you remember this. So he was captured by Shiite militiamen – 1990, that's when he wrote the book. And luckily, he had another person, John McCarthy, who shared the cell with him. And for four years, they lived in this really horrible imprisonment state. If you read the book, *An Evil Cradling*, it really is a shocker. And he came out of it, from all intents and purposes, really strengthened. And I remember when I read the book, there's a point there where he has an insight into thought, which I thought was a spiritual insight, actually. But unfortunately, there was another man there who was an American who really was broken by it. It's a sad story. So some people just – I mean, now we've got this business in Ukraine and Russia. So there are people having to go through this sort of stuff.

So the final thing is, of course, patience with our spiritual progress. So you have to be careful here because lots of people say to me, "Well, I don't feel I'm progressing." And that means normally that we've got some idea as to where we ought to be, what we ought to have achieved by now, some idea of what the insight practices are, some idea about *nibbāna*.

So this can be very debilitating. And I always think it's best just to put that to the side because the spiritual practice – so long as you're making that effort, that gentle effort to just keep mindful, keep working with it – it's bound to move. The Buddha talks of it like the growth of a tree from a very seed and how long it takes for that tree to finally fruit. So it is a case of really having patience with that, but also not getting into it at all, really. It just happens naturally.

And I think that it's much more wise in a way just to work with our negative mental states, because as they begin to lose their power over us, there's a greater clarity anyway. It's just part of the practice.

In fact, somebody complains to him about how hard the practice is. And the Buddha says, "Well, in the end, you achieve *nibbāna*." And the questioner says, "Yeah, *nibbāna*, so what?" He says, "Well, when you get there, you are happy and with it contented." That's the idea.

So we have to be careful about that, not wanting to have some idea as to what spiritual insights or what *nibbāna* is, and just have that confidence that we're moving that way.

So we've been looking at this patient forbearance, which the Buddha really highlights as an important practice: how to work with people who slander us or abuse us or say nasty things to us. We have to work with hardships and adversity when it comes our way. Cultivating patience towards others and then reactivity either towards others,

but spiritually in the practice, this reactivity that we have within ourselves, driven by desire, wanting something, not wanting something, always trying to make the world comfortable. And then finally, just having patience with the spiritual path. The Buddha says it's a gradual path.

Very good. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that by your development of patient forbearance, you will achieve the final liberation from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 198

Equanimity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 26 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents equanimity (upekkhā) as "the most important of all virtues," drawing on the teachings of Nyanaponika Thera. He explores equanimity as composure and calmness that encompasses both heart and mind, preventing the other brahmavihāra (loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy) from falling into their "near enemies" - attachment, pity, and over-excitement respectively.*
>
> *The talk examines equanimity's crucial role in the seven factors of awakening (bojjhaṅga), where it balances investigation of the dhamma and maintains objectivity in vipassanā practice. Bhante discusses the four worldly conditions (aṭṭha lokadhamma) - gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain - showing how equanimity prevents overreaction to life's inevitable changes.*
>
> *Using vivid examples including stories of monks and practical monastery situations, he distinguishes true equanimity from its near enemy of indifference. The session concludes with a guided equanimity meditation using the qualities of being calm, peace-loving, open, and composed, extending these wishes from oneself to all beings in all directions.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So we're covering equanimity this evening, and I think that completes the four illimitables, maybe. I'm not so sure I've done compassion. Well, I'll get around to it if I haven't.

According to Ñāṇaponika Thera, who was the German founding monk of the Buddhist Publication Society, to which Bhikkhu Bodhi then became the editor—he's got a massive collection of books on Buddhism. He wrote what is still a classic, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, well worth a read. He was a follower of the Mahāsi, like myself. And he wrote another book called The Vision of the Dhamma. In it, he states that equanimity is the most important of all virtues. And I agree.

First of all, we have to understand what equanimity is. I might extend the meaning of it just a little bit. Synonyms are things like composure, calmness. It's got this word animus in the middle of it, and that's a Latin word which covers both the heart and the

mind. In Buddhism, remember, when feeling arises, perception arises. When perception arises, feeling arises. The intellect and the emotional life are always working together.

What equanimity would ask us to do is not to hold on to opinions, see them more as perspectives so we're open to other people's and undermine the sense of "I'm right and everybody's wrong." From the heart's point of view, you're overcoming things like acquisitiveness, aversion, fear, preference.

If we think of a judge, we definitely don't want him to fall victim to bribery and all sorts of personal gain. We don't want her to be swayed by the clever arguments of the lawyers. We don't want her to be afraid of threats. We don't want him or her to be biased towards the accused because they just don't like them. And they have no preference as to what the verdict of the jury comes up with. They must maintain a sense of composure, unruffled poise. This is equanimity.

If we look at something like climate crisis, equanimity would stop us from becoming panicking preppers, imagining terrible scenarios. I mean, frankly, what's happening now doesn't need the imagination so much, leaves much to the imagination. We don't get angry with deniers, and we help to maintain an attitude of whatever the outcome so that we keep to our principles.

Noreen has done a set of writings on the Stoics, which relate to situations which are desperate. In such a situation, we remain calm, tranquil, stiff upper lip, that sort of thing. Not so stiff, mind.

When we look at where it's important, it stops all the social virtues from falling into the error of their near enemy. Love has its obvious enemy—hatred. But its near enemy, of course, is attachment. And what equanimity is supposed to do is to stop you doing that. Equanimity, as it were, is supporting all our virtues. If it's not there, we slip into these subtle errors.

Compassion—the obvious enemy is cruelty, but the subtle enemy is having pity, giving preference to somebody whom you have more pity for than somebody else. If you were a nurse or a doctor or a teacher even, then of course you'd upset other people by giving other people preferential treatment.

When it comes to joy, one of the obvious enemies is jealousy, because we're supposed to rejoice in the joy and success of others. But the subtle enemy would be to over-egg it, to get all excited. And again, equanimity calms us down, keeps us on the steady path, keeps the joy true to its object.

Finally, there's equanimity itself. That also has an enemy, a subtle enemy. The obvious enemy, of course, is to become completely unruffled, to lose your composure. The subtle enemy is indifference. We think we're being equanimous, but actually we're being indifferent. We're being apathetic. We're not really caring. What we do for that is depending on the situation, we raise the social virtue. If it needs friendship, you raise love. If it needs compassion or caring nature, you raise compassion.

Equanimity is something that supports all the other virtues, stops, for instance, courage falling into foolhardiness, humility dipping into this false self-effacement, a humbly humbleness, and keeps us cool. It keeps us cool, it keeps us poised, but it also keeps us warm. It keeps us engaged.

There was an occasion when I was at two monasteries—they'd happen one after the other, actually—where I was with one monk and there was a cat in the room, had obviously been playing around with a mouse and killed it. I just said, "Did you try and stop that?" And he said, "No, it's cat kamma and mouse kamma." And I went to another monastery later on, and this cat just jumped out and jumped on this bird. And this monk got up and gave the cat a great wallop. Unfortunately, he didn't save the little bird. The bird died. And he very beautifully held it up by the wings and chanted, "All compounded things arise and pass away." So which one had equanimity, you see?

Another place we find equanimity is in the factors of enlightenment. All these factors of enlightenment are supporting *sati*, the main one, supporting right awareness. We have these qualities which balance each other. We have a sense of focus, a sense of steadiness of attention, and that needs right effort. Too much effort, you get restless. Too little effort, the mind begins to wander.

Then you have this pair—the word *pīti* is translated as joy, but it's the joy of interest. Just like when you're exploring anything, when you're interested in anything, that's a joyous mental state. And that needs calmness. Again, it stops the interest becoming excited. Too much calmness, you fall asleep. Too little calmness, you get all excited and restless.

The final two are the investigation of the Dhamma, which, when you're sitting, are the three characteristics of existence—impermanence, how we create suffering for ourselves, the *dukkha*, and not-self, insubstantiality. And that's balanced with equanimity. It stops us trying to see something. It stops us over-efforting and it keeps us cool. It keeps us objective in our investigation.

When it comes to *vipassanā*, whenever we practice *vipassanā*, as we'll do tonight a little bit, there has to be this quality of equanimity. You'll notice that in those seven factors of enlightenment, there isn't any love, there isn't any compassion. We can presume that that's there as an underlying purpose because we want to escape suffering. So that's an act of compassion towards ourselves. But it's not directly involved in the process of insight.

But in *vipassanā*, we have this *upekkhā*, this equanimity. If we get up from a practice and we go straight into daily life, then the danger of *upekkhā* falling towards its near enemy is there. It becomes a sort of aloofness, an inability to fully engage. And the way we overcome that is by doing *mettā*.

In ordinary daily life, after you've done your hour or two hour meditation in the morning, you then bring to mind the people whom you're going to visit, you're going to meet during the day, and you offer them this loving kindness. And especially to those whom you're having some problems with. And of course, you do it again at night after your two to three hour meditation session.

Finally, there's the four worldly conditions, sometimes referred to as the four worldly winds: gain and loss, disrepute and fame, blame and praise, pleasure and pain.

When it comes to gain and loss, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. I mean, playing games at school really helps us to become acquainted with those two mental states. What equanimity does—it stops getting excited about gaining too much and we don't get depressed when we lose. It's a way of being unruffled. It stops us overreacting, that's all.

When the Buddha, for instance, was asked how did he feel when somebody rejected his teaching, or at least didn't respond to his teaching, he said it was fine. According to him, it was the person's *kamma*. But when somebody actually did follow, he said he felt joy. So that's that sympathetic joy, the joy of knowing that somebody was on the path to liberation.

When it comes to having a fame or infamy, a good reputation, we all want a good reputation. We all want people to have a feeling that we're good people, that they respect us. And when we find somebody's slipped us a little slander, said things that even if it's only a small thing, we find it humiliating. We get angry about it and we do the same to them. But equanimity stops you doing that. You just accept it. That's the way it is. And we try not to fall into that error ourselves, of course.

At that time, they used to have these meetings on the full moon night, which were debates between the various teachers and philosophers, the Brahmins. And seemingly that was the big night out. I mean, this is before reading and writing, radio, TV, internet. I mean, what did people do before all that? Well, they used to, in the East anyway, gather on a full moon night and listen to these talks.

The Buddha warned his monastics not to get involved in these events. And this is some of the verses that he tells them:

"Desiring debate, they plunge into an assembly where each takes the other as a fool. Relying on others, they state their contention, desiring praise while claiming to be experts. Addicted to debating in the midst of an assembly, their need for praise makes them nervous. But when they're repudiated, they get embarrassed. Upset at criticism, they find fault in others. In their doctrine, if their doctrine is said to be weak, the judges declare it repudiated, the loser weeps and wails, moaning, 'They beat me.' When these arguments come up amongst ascetics, they get excited or dejected, seeing this refrain from contention. The only purpose is fame and profit."

There's the Buddha telling us not to get involved in these argumentations.

The next one would be blame and praise. Whenever you get blamed, even if it is your fault, it's not very nice. It hurts. Actually speaking, when something goes wrong, we shouldn't be blaming people. We should be asking, how did it happen? What we're looking for is a solution so that that particular incident doesn't happen again.

For instance, we had an occasion, we've had, I think, two of our rice cookers ruined because the bowl wasn't inside and the assistant just put the food straight into the cooker. So it went everywhere right into the machinery, into the electrics. We tried to save both of them. It was impossible. So now recognizing that that mistake is done, it's easy to do. We now leave an empty bowl next to the cooker so that when the other bowl is taken out to be washed and the person comes in, they recognize that there's no bowl in the cooker. And so far so good. We've got to keep our fingers crossed on that. There's no good blaming people. You have to find out how the mistake was made, how it came about, and then you just correct it, as simple as that.

On this business of praise and blame, there's a story of a Zen monk. He entered a village. He was a local monk. He lived in his own little hut somewhere, and he came into the village for alms. Suddenly, this young woman accused him of making her pregnant. He was silent. When the baby was born, they took it to his dwelling and he received it without saying anything. And he nurtured it. Well, of course, over time, especially the

young woman wanting her baby back, the truth came out. So all the villagers went back and apologized and took the baby back and he gave it to them and he never said a word. So that's how we can deal with praise and blame.

The final one, of course, is pleasure and pain. We're always seeking pleasures and we're always trying to get away from pain. And these days, with our consumerism and all that and our adverts always wanting to make us excited, basically, we just want more. It doesn't matter what it is. We just want more of it. And so we tend to get lost in that greediness.

But that doesn't mean to say that we shouldn't appreciate a joy when it arises or a pleasure when it arises. But the trick, of course, is to remind ourselves that it's over. It's gone. It's finished. It cannot be repeated. This is the big thing. You can't repeat a joy. Make something like it, but you can't repeat it. So you just let go of it. That's it. It's fine. And what equanimity does, of course, is it stops these unnecessary reactions. It rides on acceptance. This is the way it is. Things arise and pass away. You can't repeat anything. A joy will come and a joy passes. If I remember Blake's little phrase, "To kiss a joy as it flies is to live in eternity's sunrise." Well, that's the trick.

We have a little verse here from the Buddha telling us about this, the four worldly conditions or winds:

"Gain does not obsess their minds and loss does not obsess their mind. Fame does not obsess their mind and disrepute does not obsess their mind. Blame does not obsess their mind and praise does not obsess their mind. Pleasure does not obsess their mind and pain does not obsess their minds. They're not attracted to gain or repelled by loss. They're not attracted to fame or repelled by disrepute. They're not attracted to praise or repelled by blame. They're not attracted to pleasure or repelled by pain. Having thus discarded attraction and repulsion, they are freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and anguish. They are freed from suffering, I say."

So having gone through these qualities, the quality of equanimity, how it's part of the seven factors of enlightenment, how we use it in our *vipassanā* practice and these four worldly winds, how do we actually develop it as an exercise?

Very much the same as *mettā*. In fact, exactly the same as *mettā*. You have certain well-wishings and you offer it to a benefactor and so on and so forth. And that's what I thought we would do now. And we'll just slip into the meditation.

You can carry on doing this until we get to the refuges and precepts or just decide to do *vipassanā* whenever you think so.

What I've got here are four adjectives. And you can formulate your own, you can add, you can take away. The first one I put is may I be calm. This refers to physical realization, loosening body tensions, calming the heart with the out-breath, just relax. So that's the underpinning of equanimity.

Peace loving. This refers to an attitude of always wanting to engender an underlying sense of safety and peacefulness.

Open. This refers to an attitude of being able to receive other people's opinions and not see them as trying to indoctrinate us. It's just being open to other people's opinions. Our own opinions may be nuanced, may change, who knows? But it's about not clinging to our little "I'm right and everybody else is wrong." And to engage with people. I mean, these days, when you look at the political situation, it's just A against B, like there's no meeting place. And it's a matter of really just people relaxing around that.

And finally, composure. It's a basic posture, a serene, unruffled poise.

May I be calm, peace-loving, open, and composed. May I be calm, peace-loving, open, and composed.

I'll guide us through the various categories, and then we'll go straight into the meditation.

May I be calm, peace-loving, open and composed. Calm, peace-loving, open and composed. Calm, peace-loving, open and composed.

We can bring to mind some of our benefactors. Those who are near and dear to us. Friends, people at work, whomever we're with. There's that character, there's that neutral person, someone we see but don't know, that category.

Turning towards ourselves.

Come on, we may have some difficulty here — offering our goodwill to each other, our equanimity. May we, to all our neighbours and neighbourhoods, to all the people in our country, all the peoples of Europe, all people on earth and finally to all beings in all directions.

So *upekkhā*, equanimity, is a tremendously important quality. It's one of the *brahmavihāra*, the divine abodes, along with *mettā*, *karuṇā* and *muditā* — loving-kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy. And it's also one of the seven factors of enlightenment, the *bojjhaṅga*. So it has a very high standing in the Buddha's teaching.

The literal meaning of *upekkhā* is "looking on" — *upa* meaning "over" or "upon", and *ikkhā* meaning "seeing" or "looking". So it's this quality of being able to look on with balance, with equanimity, not being pulled this way and that by our reactions and emotions.

Now, equanimity is sometimes misunderstood. People think it means being cold, detached, indifferent — but that's not what the Buddha meant at all. True equanimity is warm. It's a balanced state of mind that includes wisdom and love. It's not pushing away or suppressing our feelings, but rather holding them with awareness and acceptance.

The opposite of equanimity would be reactivity — being constantly thrown off balance by whatever arises. When something pleasant happens, we get excited and attached. When something unpleasant happens, we get upset and push it away. When something neutral happens, we get bored or restless. This constant reactive pattern keeps us suffering.

But with equanimity, we can remain centered whatever arises. We can appreciate the pleasant without clinging to it. We can acknowledge the unpleasant without being overwhelmed by it. We can stay present with the neutral without needing constant stimulation.

This doesn't mean we become passive or don't care about anything. Equanimity actually allows us to respond more wisely because we're not caught up in our emotional reactions. We can see situations more clearly and act from wisdom rather than from impulse.

In meditation, equanimity manifests as that quality of balanced awareness. We're neither trying to get rid of thoughts and sensations, nor are we getting lost in them. We're simply aware, simply present, allowing things to be as they are while maintaining our center.

And this is really the fruit of all our meditation practice. As we develop mindfulness and concentration, as we see more clearly the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena, naturally equanimity arises. We begin to understand that everything is in constant flux, that clinging to anything only causes suffering, and so we learn to hold everything lightly.

This is the wisdom aspect of equanimity — seeing things as they truly are. And the love aspect is that we don't withdraw from life or from others. Instead, we engage with greater openness and acceptance, knowing that everyone is struggling in their own way, everyone is trying to find happiness and avoid suffering, just as we are.

So may we all cultivate this beautiful quality of equanimity — this balanced, wise, loving awareness that allows us to meet whatever arises in life with grace and understanding.

CHAPTER 199

Sympathy, Empathy and Compassion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines three distinct ways of relating to suffering: sympathy, empathy, and compassion. Drawing from the Buddha's own words about being a compassionate teacher who acts with anukampā (literally 'trembling with' another's suffering), he explores how the Buddha modeled true empathic response to disciples' needs.

Bhante discusses the practical challenges each approach presents: sympathy's risk of emotional distance and judgment, empathy's potential for overwhelming emotional involvement and burnout, and compassion's call to skillful action. Using research from social psychologist Daniel Batson, he clarifies the eight different definitions commonly used for empathy, helping practitioners understand these subtle distinctions.

Through personal anecdotes and practical examples, including how to respond to someone's suffering on a bus, Bhante illustrates the spectrum from detached sympathy through engaged empathy to compassionate action—and the pitfall of becoming a 'do-gooder' who helps whether wanted or not. This talk offers valuable guidance for anyone working in caring professions or seeking to develop the brahmavihāra of karuṇā without emotional exhaustion, emphasizing the importance of recognizing our limitations and sphere of influence.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

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

So I thought we'd just have a little contemplation around these three words: sympathy, empathy, and compassion.

I want to quote the Buddha here, talking about himself and his relationship to the monks: "Thus, monks, I have taught you the unconditioned, the destination and the path leading to the destination. Whatever should be done, monks, by a compassionate teacher, out of compassion for his disciples, desiring their welfare, that I have done for you. These are the roots of trees, monks. These are empty huts. Meditate. Do not be negligent, lest you regret it later. This is my instruction to you."

Now, interestingly, whenever he talks about compassion, about himself as a compassionate person, he always uses the word *anukampā*. And this word *kampati* means to tremble. So the *anu* is just a reinforcement—shaking, trembling. And it's what we would, I presume, recognize as empathy. So it's a sort of resonating with somebody else's heart, with somebody else's suffering. The usual word that you'll find, of course, is *karuṇā*, which just means compassion. And he's often titled the Mahākaruṇiko, the great compassionate one.

If we look at these three words, sympathy gets bad press these days, particularly in the caring professions. Well, you can understand that if you're looking after somebody, sympathy doesn't quite make it. But even in psychotherapy, I think they have a bit of a downer on it. But frankly, if you were going to feel empathetic about all the suffering in the world, I think you'd burn out. At least I think I'd burn out.

The danger, of course, is that you're standing too far apart. You're not actually feeling anything. And this makes any expression of sympathy sound a bit false. And also, in that state, you could fall into the error of being judgmental about the person who's suffering. So if somebody fell off a ladder, you might say, "Oh well, you shouldn't have put the ladder there at all. I mean, you were just asking for an accident." It doesn't particularly help somebody who's just broken their legs.

So I think there's a place for sympathy. I mean, when somebody dies, you send a card with sympathies. You don't send a card with empathies. So I think it still has some role to play in our relationship to suffering, to people who are suffering.

If you hang about certain facts about the world and you allow yourself to become empathetic, then it's a big weight upon you because that empathy moves you towards action. So sympathy, I think, just has a place of a mild connection, a mild heart connection, just knowing that there's not much you can do about it.

At the moment, for instance, every day it seems around about forty thousand children die of starvation or hunger-related causes. If you were to hang on to that, it's a dreadful, awful figure. The Buddha in the Dhammapada actually says hunger is the worst of all diseases. I mean, we don't really feel hunger. We feel hungry, feel a bit peckish, but we're very quick to fulfill it. But hunger, knowing hunger—a something that really begins to make you worry about your life—that we've never, or at least I've never, had that hunger.

There was somebody who came to Kanduboda who said that he'd been out in the country and he lost his food. Something happened. This is in America. And he got so hungry that when he caught a bird, he just ate it. He ate it raw. I couldn't tell you how hungry you can get.

So this sympathy comes from the Greek, which just means to have a feeling with, a community feeling actually—a sympathy. Empathy, of course, comes from the Greek as well, meaning in, in feeling. So you're actually much closer to the person in your heart.

Now, I've got something from this social psychologist, Daniel Batson, who's researched empathy, it seems, for decades. And he says there are eight different concepts. So I'll read them through and you can decide which one you prefer.

The first one is knowing another's thoughts and feelings. That's how some people use empathy—knowing another's thoughts and feelings. Imagining another's thoughts and feelings. Adopting the posture of another. Actually feeling as another does. Imagining how one would feel or think in another's place. Feeling distressed at another's suffering. Feeling for another's suffering, sometimes called pity or compassion. And finally, projecting oneself into another's situation.

So people use this word with various meanings. That one about actually feeling as another does, I think is a dodgy one, isn't it? I mean, if you have some great sorrow and the person you're telling that to says to you, "Oh, I know exactly what you feel"—well, it's a bit of a jump, isn't it? And the other one about feeling distress at another's suffering sounds a bit like reactivity. It's like you're reacting to it.

So there's all sorts of definitions for this empathy, but basically I think it differs from sympathy in that there's a greater heart connection. One definition was the ability to appreciate the other person's feelings without becoming so emotionally involved that your judgment is affected. And I think that's the danger with empathy—that the emotional part overrides your rational part. There's got to be a balance there.

If you just think about this recent case of this poor five-year-old boy who fell down a well in Morocco, hundreds of people turned up, thousands watching online. It became worldwide news. And yet, as I've mentioned, every day forty thousand children are dying of hunger or hunger-related causes. So there's a point where something touches you very greatly and it becomes a obsession, really.

Now, you might not feel empathy for various reasons. One of them is fear and aversion towards another's suffering that keeps you away from it. And if that comes to us, then really we have to do a bit of *vipassanā* on it and wait for it to pass and make that effort to connect.

I was once walking on a main road. This is going back many, many years. And a dog had been knocked over. It was dark at night and it was obviously in agony, and whoever had knocked it over had put it under a tree. And I was with my ex-wife at that time, and I went to try and make the dog comfortable. And as I lifted it a little bit to try and get it into a better position, it just grimaced with this dreadful pain. And I didn't know what to do, really. So we just left it. I mean, these days, of course, with mobiles, you'd have got in touch with the RSPCA. But it was imprinted on my mind, the dreadful agony that this poor dog was in.

The other thing is pity. Pity is feeling sorry for someone. It's really coming from a place of conceit, and it stops you really feeling what you're really hiding—your feeling for that person—by covering it over with a sense of being sorry for someone. Well, I mean, we've all, I'm sure, had that experience of somebody feeling sorry for us. It's not very helpful. But it's one way that we can, as it were, bypass that feeling of being connected to somebody's suffering if it's something that we find very difficult to be with.

And the final thing is moral outrage. People being outraged by the dreadful things that are going on in society and things like that. And I was just reading that there are recent studies where for celebrities, it's very good for publicity to be morally outraged. And then social media content loves it—sharing, retweeting it, expressing this tremendous moral outrage. But it often disguises a sense of insecurity about one's own moral standing, it seems.

So if you find yourself being morally outraged, just hang on in there for a minute and just ask yourself, "Well, where's this outrage coming from? And how is it helpful?" In Buddhist understanding, rage doesn't really help. It only clouds our minds, clouds our hearts.

And then, so finally, if the empathy has force behind it, then there'll be a demand really within ourselves to do something. And that's when we enter into some compassionate action. I just think you have to be very careful there, because often people get burnt out with this stuff, not recognizing that difference between what you can do and what you want to do, who you can influence and who you can't influence. And if you try to do something which is not within your power or your area of influence, then obviously you're just going to end up burning out. You're just going to end up feeling disappointed, disheartened, and all that.

I've used the word "depressed" there, which I don't like. It medicalizes it. More like disheartened would be a better word, I think. Down in the dumps.

Here's a little thing that might be of interest. If you're a bit down in the dumps and you feel a bit low, you might give yourself a little present. And that makes you feel happy. It lifts you a little bit. I suppose it comes to what they call retail therapy or something. But how interesting it is that when you see somebody who's a bit down in the mouth and you want to give them a bit of a lift, doing a little kindness to them, your happiness stays much longer. And it tells us about how we relate to each other and how important it is for us to have that kind relationship.

So I just want to end with just this little occasion that happened to me and what responses I might have given. I won't tell you which one I did. That wouldn't be fair.

So I got on a bus once and I sat next to this elderly man. Again, this is going back years. And his face was very badly injured and scarred and bruised. And I asked him, I said, "What happened?" And he said he'd been worrying about his rent and he walked out in the road and got knocked over, got knocked down.

So I mean, I could have said things like, "Well, that's bad news." "Well, that's what happens when you get worried, you see." "Well, at least you weren't killed." I could say something like, "Well, you know, I'm very sorry to hear that. But you know, the Citizens Advice Bureau, they can really help you with money problems." That would be particularly helpful. I might say, "Well, that's really terrible. You know, I'm so sorry to hear it. I do hope you heal quickly." I might say, "I'm very saddened. I'm saddened to hear what you say. It's a pretty terrible experience. How are you feeling now? Are you getting treatment? Are your rent troubles getting sorted? And I hope you heal up quickly."

So I've had that little bit of conversation. I might leave him cheered up a bit. But then you might step over that line and you might be saying similar things. But then you say to him, "Have you asked, do you know where to go for help?" And then you suggest, you know, the Citizens Advice Bureau. And then you might go a step further, which takes you a little bit into do-gooding, where you say, "You know, listen, what I'll do is I'll get in touch with the Citizens Advice Bureau for you and I'll get you to meet them and I'll take you there and do this and do that," whether the person wants it or not.

So this is do-gooding. A do-gooder is a person who does you the good they want to do you, whether you want it or not, whether you need it or not.

So there's all these various ways that we can relate to somebody's suffering. Anyway, I hope that gives some food for thought and just allows us, I think, not to fall into—not to feel that we have to always do something about somebody's suffering. You know,

we're limited by our circumstances. And not to feel that we always have to be deeply empathetic every time we hear somebody's suffering. I just think that burns out. And that there's a place for just ordinary sympathy.

Well, I don't know whether you agree with me or not. Anyway, I hope my words have been of some assistance and that by your wise choice between sympathy, empathy and compassion, you will release yourself from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 200

Fear and Courage

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

> *In this exploration of human psychology and spiritual development, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines fear as the most fundamental emotional state dependent on delusion. He explains how the illusion of self creates uncertainty about sickness, aging, and death, leading to protective behaviors and accumulation of possessions, power, and pleasures. Drawing from the Dhammapada (verse 39), he shows how the Buddha promised that all fear disappears for the awakened mind.*
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> *The talk systematically explores six areas where courage is needed: physical (facing pain and illness), social (overcoming embarrassment and criticism), moral (standing for right and wrong in complex situations like abortion and immigration), emotional (opening to difficult mental states through vipassanā practice), intellectual (expressing views despite opposition), and spiritual (facing the unknown mystery of nibbāna). Bhante shares the Buddha's own account of conquering fear in the forest, demonstrating how to turn toward fear rather than flee from it.*
>
> *This teaching offers practical guidance for working with fear as a friend that protects us, while using each encounter with fear as an opportunity to undermine the delusion of self. The talk is particularly relevant for meditation practitioners learning to sit with difficult emotions and for anyone facing challenging life situations requiring courage.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

So, I've chosen this topic of courage, but really, what we're talking about is fear, isn't it? Overcoming fear.

Now, fear is, I would argue, the most fundamental of our emotional states dependent on delusion. This delusion of a self has created a self which feels uncertain because of sickness, ageing and death and all that. Therefore, it has this fear about itself and it reacts to this fear by making itself safe. That's when we start accumulating stuff. So money makes us feel safe. We've got a big bank account, lots of friends and power, of course, and lots of pleasurable things to do. So we keep our mind off these horrible things.

This fear of death or fear of sickness, ageing and all that, has this effect of making us try to escape it. Of course, this is one of the great awakeners. This was the awakener that drove the Buddha to seek liberation: sickness, ageing and death. So it plays a big part in our lives, obviously. It shapes our behaviour whenever we're in any situation which is dangerous or stressful or in any way a challenge. So it's something we need to deal with. I'm sure all of you have to some extent or other. It won't go until the very last moment when the self is destroyed. So it's going to be with us for a while.

We have to see it as a friend. After all, it is trying to protect us, right? So we have to give it a hug. Then we have to open up to it, get the feel of it, and not run away from it. Of course, that running away from it is the panic, isn't it?

If we consider the amount of fear that we have as a measure of the delusion of self, every time we undermine this fear, we're undermining the delusion of self, right? So there is a plus to it.

In fact, the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, verse 39, tells us that in the end, all fear would disappear. This is what he says: "For one who has awakened, whose mind isn't agitated, whose heart isn't tormented, and who has abandoned both merit and demerit, fear does not exist." So once the mind has been silenced and the heart calmed, and there's no attempt to create *kamma* based on a self, me creating stuff, fear is completely gone. So the prognosis is good. This is what we have to keep remembering.

Now, psychologists have delineated six areas of experience where we experience fear. I'm indebted to Gwen for this, who runs the monthly meeting on climate change, climate crisis. So it's the physical, the social, moral, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. This is sometimes where we need to find a certain level of courage.

The physical, I think, is pretty straightforward—just straightforward with the fear of pain, fear of debilitating illness, etc. Whenever that touches us, we come across this fear and it's being able to sit with the fear, allow it to arise, pass away. That's the courage, the internal courage. Of course, some people have to find that physical courage in daily life. I'm thinking of sports. A lot of sports demand physical courage, especially boxing. I don't know if any of you have done a bit of boxing, but you definitely got to have a bit of physical courage there. And then there are occupations—soldiering. If we think of what's happening now in the Ukraine, both sides demand physical courage. Even the police sometimes need that.

This identity with the body is profound. You can't be here without one. It's the physical representation of our existence. So it's important that whenever this comes to us that we really turn towards it, see it as a friend, see that it's actually trying to protect us and allow, get almost get comfortable with the feelings of fear. That's the big thing. Not to push it away.

So we may use that as a sort of question of ourselves. Has there been a time in our lives when we've been physically timid, when we should have done something? And how do we feel about that? Is there some guilt and shame that we haven't worked through? And then to make these silent inward resolutions that if it's demanded of us, we'll do our best to manifest courage. So that's the physical part.

The social part usually is to do with feeling embarrassed in a meeting. So you don't want to ask a question in case people think it's silly and stuff like that. We're afraid of criticism, saying something which other people will jump down our throats for, things like that. Even expressing ourselves to neighbours, to a neighbour who you know has a different opinion or a different understanding. So that social courage is sometimes really we have to try to express.

Obviously we have great examples of that—Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela. All these people who are out on demonstrations, which are getting to be more and more policed and more danger of being fined and sent to prison. Of course, when you think of countries and the amount of courage you need, like, for instance, that terrible time in Iran, where the morality police murdered that young woman and the tremendous repressive measures that the government took, even capturing people and then hanging them.

We've got, of course, Russia. There's a man called Kara-Murza who is a political activist, journalist, author, filmmaker, political prisoner. So he spoke against the present war and he's ended up in jail for 25 years. Unless Putin is somehow got rid of, he's going to be there for 25 years. And then, of course, there's that Russian opposition leader, Navalny, who's, I think, tremendously courageous. It's unbelievable, really, whom Putin actually tried to poison.

Even if you look back into Russian history, the misery of the Russians is unbelievable. I think it's quite remarkable. And yet they find this courage through, if you remember Stalin's time when the Samizdat, when they were writing poems and all sorts of stuff and passing it on bits of paper to friends, trying to keep the resistance alive.

Of course, there's the investigative journalists, 67 being murdered last year. The most prominent, of course, was when the Israeli forces shot, murdered Shireen Abu Akleh in the occupied West Bank. It's awful, awful, awful.

So again, it's just social courage. It's again an opportunity for us to contemplate where we haven't made our views known out of fear, out of fear of criticism or whatever, being mocked, attacked. Again there might be some shame or guilt around that so you have to work through it. You have to allow it to come up and then to make that resolution: should I find myself in such a situation I'll make my understandings known.

Shading into that is moral courage. It's more to do with right and wrong. I'm reminded now of the 60s, which, of course, is prehistoric now. But we had a person in the UK called Mary Whitehouse who really led the charge against the loss of moral compass. In those days, it was called permissiveness, and people were getting very upset about it. Of course, we did lose the moral ground. We found out about the behaviour of the famous DJ, Jimmy Savile, and then the Catholic priests and all that, and paedophiles. So there was something that happened in the 60s which took away a grounding that we used to have as a society in morality.

But of course, these situations are never absolutely white and black. It's quite difficult to decide. Then we have things like abortion, which in Europe is now a dead subject, really. But we can see the tremendous war that's going on in the United States over it. The usual battle between the mother's rights and the right of the foetus.

I think more upfront these days for us is immigration and the impact it's having on society. No one has a clue. I haven't a clue as to what the answer is to the growing level of immigration. When climate change really begins to bite, presumably it's going to get much worse. These people are coming out of areas of abject poverty and almost unliveable. On top of that, there's the political refugees.

Of course, the danger here is that it pushes society to, the indigenous society, we can say, to defend itself and move over towards fascist regimes, which is happening. We've got Orban in Poland. We've got Meloni in Italy. And this comes out of fear. But it's something that if we want to maintain a liberal society, it's something we really have to tackle.

So again, there's this whole area of morality which demands courage. Has there been a time in the past we could have been more morally courageous? And again, to make that resolution.

The next one is the emotional courage. Well, that points to opening up to these very difficult mental states that we have within ourselves. That's, of course, very much part of our practice of *vipassanā*. Just to allow very difficult mental states to arise and to be able to see the aversion that we have to it, the fear that we have to it, and just to allow that to pass away, and then just to sit quietly with it, to sink into the fire, tie ourselves to the bonfire and just allow it to rage. We do that because that's the healing. Once these emotions have a chance to liberate themselves, of course, what we mistake is that when we begin to create these stories in the mind and it feels like a relief. If you're angry and you go off onto a fantasy of beating somebody up, then it feels like a relief, but actually it's just exercised the anger. It's when you feel it as a physical sensation that it's actually being released. So this, of course, we know through our *Vipassanā*.

There's a little passage here that I've copied from the Buddha who had to tackle fear when he first went out into the jungles: "And while I was staying there, a wild animal would come or a peacock would make a twig fall. The wind would rustle the falling leaves and the thought would occur to me, is this that fear and terror coming? And then the thought occurred to me, why do I just keep waiting for fear and terror?" So instead of that, this is what he determines: "What if I, in whatever state I'm in, when fear and terror come to me, were to subdue that fear and terror in that very state?"

"So when fear and terror came to me while I was walking backwards and forwards, I would not sit down or stand or lie down. I would keep walking backwards and forward until I had pacified the fear and terror. When fear and terror came to me while I was standing, I would not walk or sit or lie down. I would keep standing until I had subdued the fear and terror. And when fear and terror came to me while sitting, I would not lie down or stand up or walk. I would keep sitting until I had subdued that fear and terror. When terror and fear came to me while I was lying down, I would not sit up or stand or walk. I'd keep lying down until I had subdued the fear and terror."

So, in other words, he turned towards it. The word subdue does suggest some sort of suppression, but that's not what he means. So again, if we have a specific mental state that arises that we find very difficult, if it comes up at a convenient time when it's just you by yourself, whatever, just to be able to move into it and stay with it.

Then there's the intellectual. So recently here in the UK, we had a Professor Kathleen Stock, who's a philosopher and a gender critical academic. She's been hounded out of the university that she worked in. There was a whole rumpus at Oxford University, asking her to be cancelled. She basically stated in her book that trans women are not, it's difficult to say, are not the same as born women. Let's put it that way. So that's created quite a rumpus. Of course, she lost the job and everything from it.

This whole area is one where people have to have the courage to speak their truth, you might say. It's a dodgy area because it depends which way you're looking at it. One of the paradoxes of this particular argument is nobody complains about a woman who becomes a man, changes her gender to a male. I presume that's because there's not much problem with that. If a trans man walks into a male toilet, it's not a problem for the men. If they happen to be in the same sport, boxing or something like that, it wouldn't be a big problem for men. But on the other side, it's obviously some women feel threatened by it in hospitals, in toilets and in sport. So it's a difficult area, difficult area.

We need to think about it because there may come a time that we have to express our views, our opinions and feel free to do so. Here in the West, we have that freedom. Interestingly enough, in Hindu or Buddhist countries, and I think also true in the Far East, there isn't this obsession with sex at all. The funny thing is that in the East, Buddhist especially, there's a myth that you're much better off to become enlightened if you happen to be born a man. So many women make the determination to be born a man in the next lifetime. There was a case in Sri Lanka, which is the opposite, where a Catholic bishop became a Buddhist. Towards the end of his life, this is, I think, going back to the 60s, 50s, 60s, towards the end of his life, he determined that he wanted to be reborn as a woman. So he began dressing as a woman and trying to change his gender before he died.

Anyway, it really is just a case intellectually of really being able to hold our views and opinions just a bit more lightly to see them more as perspective. If you hold on to your views and opinions too strongly, I'm right and everybody else is wrong, then there's always conflict. But to be able to be open to critique, to have your views challenged, even nuanced, that really takes courage.

Finally, we have the spiritual courage. There's one little example here, which I think really affected me when I found this out. When the Inquisition started, and they attacked the Cathars, the Albigensians, down in the south of France, what's today the south of France, there was an occasion where about some escaped from the first town that was attacked in Béziers, and they ended up in a place called Minerve, which was a heavily well-fortified small town with a river running through it, etc.

There was a certain Simon de Montfort, who was really quite a cruel soldier. Anyway, they were eventually conquered and he just kept lobbing stones at them with a catapult. When they finally collapsed and they entered into the town, they built a big

bonfire and 140 Cathars threw themselves onto the flames. That's courageous. And ironically, there is a monument to that right in front of the Catholic Church. So that's a bit cheeky.

So in our actual spiritual practice, there is, remember, this whole process of renunciation, of letting go, letting go, letting go. Really, this idea of *nibbāna*, it's a shady idea. The Buddha tells us it's the highest happiness. It's absolutely you want it when you've got it. But we don't know what it is. In the Christian tradition, they talk of the mysterium tremendum and fascinens. So it's the mystery which is both frightening, makes you tremble, and yet it fascinates you. Yet you want to find out what it is. So it's going to take some courage because it's like you're walking backwards towards a cliff. There's a drop coming somewhere.

You know, you've got to let go of everything at some point, but you don't know when it's coming and you haven't a clue what's going to happen when you actually fall off the cliff. So there's a bit of anxiety, fear, existential anxiety around the whole process of spiritual practice. So again, whenever that sort of fear comes up, we just turn to it. The usual thing, give a hug. It's only trying to protect us and make a determination to continue with our practice.

So these six areas just give us a way of examining ourselves. The whole idea of timidity when fear comes and courage.

There is another side to this, which I'll tackle on another talk. And that, of course, is the courage of forbearance, the courage of patience. And the Buddha has a lot to say about that.

Yeah, very good. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your ability to stay with fear, to overcome fear, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 201

Karuṇā: The Practice of Compassion as a Brahmavihāra

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 28 min

> *In this profound exploration of karuṇā (compassion), Bhante Bodhidhamma completes his series on the four brahmavihārā—the divine abodes representing the most beautiful mental states we can achieve. Beginning with a deeply personal account from his travels in Calcutta during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, Bhante reflects on moments when he failed to respond compassionately to suffering, using these memories to illuminate the pain that arises when we don't act from a compassionate heart.*
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> *The talk carefully distinguishes between sympathy (imaginative connection with suffering we haven't experienced), empathy (connection through shared experience), and the Pāli term anukampā—literally 'trembling towards'—which the Buddha used to describe a teacher's caring connection with students. Bhante explains that karuṇā itself has roots meaning 'doing' or sacred action, emphasizing that compassion naturally moves toward response. He explores both passive compassion (simply being present with someone who is suffering or dying) and active compassion, warning against the pitfalls of 'do-gooding'—helping others for our own ego-gratification rather than their genuine benefit.*
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> *With practical wisdom, Bhante identifies numerous obstacles to authentic compassion: disgust, anger, blame, overwhelming grief, pity from a superior position, empathy bias, codependency, compassion fatigue, and enabling behavior that prevents others from taking moral responsibility. Drawing on the Buddha's teaching about caring for a sick monk abandoned by his fellows—'whoever would tend to me should tend to the sick'—Bhante reminds us that compassionate action connects us to what is transcendent within all beings. The session concludes with a guided compassion meditation extending well-wishes to all who suffer.*

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

I've chosen to look at compassion. This is the last of our four Brahmavihāras, the dwelling place of the gods, of the highest gods, by which we mean these are the most beautiful mental states that we can achieve. We've done love, done joy, done equanimity. So compassion is the last one.

I'd like to start with my own little story here. I went along the hippie trail around about the 70s, and I ended up in Calcutta during the Indo-Pakistan War, when Bangladesh got its liberation from West Pakistan. Every day for three weeks, when we were expecting bombers to come over, I used to go to this Sikh restaurant. On the opposite side of the road, there was a woman with a huge goitre under her chin. I passed that woman every day. I never gave her a penny.

One day I came back and just as I turned around the corner, there was a little girl there who must have been well over seven, undernourished, looked very young. She was squatted down chewing a dried out black banana skin. And she had this sort of self-possession, really, to cover her sex, because all she had was this little dress. I walked straight past her.

I've got these two images from this callow youth, and they're very difficult for me to remember without a certain sense of pain. The reason the pain is there is not simply because of seeing this sort of suffering, which I just had never seen before. There were sick people everywhere, lepers, people with elephantiasis. They were there on the pavement. What pains is that I didn't respond. I didn't put a penny in that woman's hand. She sat there all day, completely emotionless with her hand out like that. And I didn't go out and buy a banana for this little girl. Here we have what happens to us, what you feel when you haven't responded from a compassionate heart, for whatever reason.

It all begins with that connection, which we call empathy and sometimes sympathy. I just want to make a little distinction there. This is an arbitrary distinction because these words are used in different ways. Sympathy these days has some suggestion of pity, but sympathy, to make this distinction, is when you have to imagine in a way what the person is suffering. I've never been starving. I've been hungry, but then I've always had food. I've never been in a state where I'm actually starving. All I can do is imagine what it must be like because I've felt hungry. There's a sort of connection there.

But when it comes to refugees, I've never been a refugee. I haven't a clue what it means to suddenly up and out of your home, to find yourself on the road without much money, having to buy your way, sometimes being attacked. Who knows? So there's a point where there's sympathy, where you have to imagine what the person is going through. And there's empathy, where you've actually had an experience which connects you. That's a little distinction I want to make so that we're clear when we're sympathizing and when we're actually empathizing. Sometimes we think we're empathizing when actually we're imagining. If it all leads to the same place, which is a compassionate act, a compassionate word, there's not really a problem, but I thought I'd hold on to that little definition just for clarity's sake.

The Buddha himself uses a word, anukampā. The prefix anu is a suggestion of movement, movement towards. And kampā actually means trembling. So he says, whatever a teacher can do for his students out of anukampā, out of this connection with his students, I have done for you. This anukampā is that point where you have that sense in your own heart of the suffering of the other. It's that connection, whether it's imaginative sympathy or empathic connection.

The other word we use is karuṇā, which actually has its root in doing. The word in Sanskrit, kṛ, means doing, but it was also used for what was holy; it was part of the rituals of the Vedas. So you get this word karuṇā, which is actually the action. You might call it the sacrifice or the sacrament.

When we have responded to somebody's suffering, no matter what it is, from the smallest to the most awful, there are two modes. One is passive and one is active. In the passive mode, it's often good enough just to be with the person, not even to say anything.

An obvious case would be when the person is either extremely ill and is just there in bed—all you can do is actually accompany them. And of course, when somebody is dying. But I think what we come across when we have that sort of situation is our sense of powerlessness. And that's very difficult for us because we want to do something. Yet if we are sensitive enough to the situation and to the person—and you don't have to ask them, for heaven's sake—often it's good enough just to be with them, just to accompany them.

When it comes to compassionate action, when you're actually going to do something, our tendency is to try and overdo it, to slip into the error of the do-gooder. We've all got it in us—when we want to do the good we want to do for your benefit, whether you want it or not. This, of course, really gets up people's noses. So it's a good idea to ask them what they want. Even if your suggestion is rejected, and even if you know that your suggestion would actually be the better thing to do, we've got to pull back a bit and let the person who's suffering have the last say. Often when we over-help like that, perhaps it's coming from some sort of inner feeling of wanting to be esteemed, to be loved—all the usual rubbish that we suffer from.

It's often easier to say what a virtue is by saying what it isn't. So we know it's not do-gooding. These are reactions that we have when we come across suffering. In an extreme case, where the person is really suffering, you've got to have that sort of sense of courage to be with them. It's very difficult if the person is in a lot of pain, especially when they're dying. I read a book about this poor woman who was screaming every

time—screaming towards the end of her life. Eventually the doctor decided to sedate her, obviously with the permission of the family. It often takes a bit of courage to be with somebody who's in real pain or suffering.

There are certain situations—perhaps a work situation, or somebody you're looking after—where you have reactions of disgust. They're sick, they're suffering from diarrhea, all the impurities of the body manifest. Somehow you have to recognize that disgust and yet still come from the heart of compassion.

We can often be caught unawares. Somebody has asked us to do something and we feel messed up. I had my day carefully planned and now they want me to do this and that—especially within a family—and you can feel yourself being angry about that. Again, it's being aware of these negative emotions that come up, these negative mental states, and still focusing on what you can do for the person.

Sometimes a person hurts themselves in an accident and you might find yourself wanting to blame them—so stupid, how could you do that? I remember I once had an assistant here who put a ladder up against the gutter on the decking and the ladder slipped and he just fell flat onto his face almost. Luckily there was nothing but a bit of a bruise. But I could hear myself saying, "Well, that was stupid, wasn't it?" I didn't say it though. No, I didn't say it. I went up and made sure that he was okay. But you've got to be careful.

If it's somebody close to you, you can feel quite overcome by grief. That can have an immobilizing effect. Again, it's just resting with that and trying to come above it, to connect with the person. That way we can keep these emotional states at bay. You might have to deal with them afterwards, but not while you're in the situation with them.

You can understand things like panic—when a child hurts itself and the parents just panic. Obviously that doesn't help the child. But hopefully we bring that mindfulness, that connection with our own hearts and that reaction, and then rise above it and respond.

There's pity. That's another one, which isn't particularly nice. It comes from a superior position, often because we're trying to guard ourselves against actually connecting with what's happening. "Oh, poor thing. I feel so sorry for you. I know how you're feeling." Often we find that this is because we're a bit afraid of facing our own possible sickness and eventual death. There can be a sort of sense of relief—when somebody has a serious illness, as we have in our family, you can first of all feel the fear. If it's in the family, I might get it.

And then comes a sense of relief—oh, it's not me, you see. So we have to understand that this is just basically coming from this false view of self, and not get all guilty about it. It's simply a reaction. But again, it's this ability to rise above it that matters.

There's what's now known as empathy bias—I've picked this up from various things I've read. If a nurse, for instance, is on a ward but has a particular connection with one of the patients, they might find themselves not really heeding someone calling from the other side of the ward because they don't particularly like them. So there's always that going on.

Then there's codependency. This is a bit of a problem because if a person is getting a lot of self-esteem from helping, it's very difficult for them to stop. And so often they're feeding the person who's actually suffering so that they don't have to stop doing good. I knew a mother whose son was a drug addict, and she was always helping him—paying for his rent when he didn't have it, buying food for him. I said to her, "Well, what you're doing is just feeding his habit financially." She said, "Yes, but I'm his mother." She couldn't get over that feeling of guilt if she stopped helping her son. But it would have been the best thing to do.

I think you have to be careful when you are dealing with a long situation of looking after somebody. That's where your emotional boundaries come in—knowing when you're being taken advantage of, even perhaps abused. So that's something else to be careful about.

Sometimes we find ourselves becoming very involved in compassionate charity. I'm thinking of people who get very much involved with refugees, completely on the side of the refugees, and they can lack recognition of what it's doing to them. You get that burnout and then resentment—what they call compassion fatigue. I think that's easy to fall into because there's so much bad news. Everywhere you go, there's just bad news, and you can feel your heart going out to various situations and various people. But in the end, you've got to recognize that enough's enough. Stop feeding all the bad news and try to find some good news.

Sometimes overemphasizing that sort of helping and becoming too attached to somebody might blind us to the fact that we're not allowing them to reflect upon their own situation and take a moral stance about themselves. I'm thinking of something like ADHD—that hyperactive, impulsive behavior. Somebody might, for instance, get into gambling because of it, and we're being over-compassionate rather than addressing the real issue. The problem with medicalizing something is that the person then drops their

moral responsibility towards themselves—"Oh well, I have ADHD," or "I'm on such-and-such medication." So it's also a case of recognizing that we might be making excuses for them, therefore avoiding difficult conversations. All these things are to be wary of.

It's not as though we have to go around with a great big list. Every time we help somebody, we don't need to have our checklist out just in case we're doing something wrong. It's more about recognizing that when we are being compassionate, there's probably some undertone going on, coming from this wrong sense of ego, this wrong sense of self.

But there are, of course, great virtues to be had from compassion. One of them is patience, which we've already dealt with. One of the telltale signs of true compassion, I think, is that you're actually deeply happy about it. This is not the happiness of joy or the happiness of buying an ice cream. This is a sense of inner worthiness, an inner sense that you're doing the right thing. It's a deeper sense of joy, which I think you've all experienced at some point when you've helped people. So that's the sign of compassion—we're not supposed to be suffering. When you're being compassionate, you're not supposed to be suffering. That would be ridiculous.

In fact, this confusion came up when I was at a particular meditation center where lay people had been discussing and eventually came to the conclusion that the Buddha could not have been compassionate because he'd have been suffering. How ridiculous that is! So we have to be careful there.

I'll just mention it briefly because it's a whole subject on its own, but the Tibetan practice of tonglen is all about making that connection with others. Pema Chödrön has a very good introductory meditation on YouTube.

This will appear eventually as a tip—the next one, actually, the one for October. And there you'll be able to pick up these connections.

But I do want to mention this one point where the Buddha came across a monk who was actually suffering from dysentery. He was completely covered in his own filth. When the Buddha saw the sick monk and asked him who was attending to him, the monk replied, "Nobody." The Buddha asked why, and the monk said, "Well, I don't attend to other monks, so the monks don't attend to me."

So the Buddha and Ananda looked after this monk themselves. Then he gathered the monks together and said to them, "Look, you have no mother, you have no father who might tend to you. If you don't tend to one another, then who will tend to you? Whoever would tend to me should tend to the sick."

There he's getting them to make a connection—to the Buddha, to himself. Whoever is attending to somebody who's sick, you are attending to a Buddha. Now, you might not take that literally as the Buddha himself, but to the Buddha within—to that within us which is transcendent. He then goes on and gives a whole list of people who should be looking after the sick. So he was very much involved in that.

What I want to do now is just do a bit of compassion practice. These are the blessings that we do here in the morning puja. The idea is that as we go through this list, we bring up a phrase which expresses our compassion. The one that's normally used is: "May your sufferings lessen, may all your sufferings come to an end." This comes from the Visuddhimagga, the compendium of Buddhism written by Buddhaghosa in the Middle Ages. Or you can make up some other phrase that makes sense to you. But just for this, it might be good to stay with this one. Then as I go through the list, just keep repeating that. After that, we'll do the six directions, and then we'll slip into the meditation. You can continue doing the compassion practice or return to vipassana.

So if we just settle for a moment.

We can bring to mind anyone we know who's having a hard time. At this moment, there are people who are suffering from severe physical or mental disease. There are people in the process of dying, and those who have died and left grieving family, relatives, and friends. There are people going hungry, homeless, and destitute. There are those struggling with personal and interpersonal difficulties. There are all the victims of prejudices, all those caught up in wars and repressive regimes, and those being tortured. There are all the criminals, oppressors, and all who willingly do harm. There are all those suffering from natural disasters and climate crisis, all sentient beings who have been cruelly treated and unnecessarily slaughtered, and all who find life meaningless.

Now we can continue with the ten directions. To all beings in front of us who are suffering. All beings behind us. All beings to our left. All beings to our right. All beings below us.

All beings above us.

And to all beings in all directions.

Feel free to continue this practice or simply sit in vipassana.

CHAPTER 202

Good Friendship, Companionship, Good Comradeship is the Whole of the Spiritual Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's profound correction to Ānanda's understanding: that good friendship, companionship, and comradeship are not merely half the spiritual life, but its entirety. Drawing from the Upaddha Sutta (SN 45.2), Bhante unpacks the three dimensions of kalyāṇamittatā—the intimate companions who travel closely with us, the wider circle of friends who share our path, and the vast comradeship of the Buddhist saṅgha spanning 2,500 years and millions of practitioners worldwide.

The talk takes a distinctive turn as Bhante connects this teaching to Ubuntu, the South African philosophy encapsulated in 'I am what I am because of who we all are.' This understanding illuminates the Buddha's instruction in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) to observe phenomena internally, externally, and both together. Through practical examples—how our bodies are shaped by genetic history and nourished by others' labor, how our mental states rise and fall with those around us, how our very concepts shift through social communication—Bhante demonstrates that we are fundamentally our relationships.

This teaching carries profound implications for practice: recognizing that spiritual friends serve as inspiration, support, and necessary checks on our path. The talk reminds us that the Noble Eightfold Path unfolds not in isolation but through the web of connections that shape who we are and who we may become.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

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

This evening, I thought we'd tackle this advice that the Buddha gives us. As you know, Ananda was the Buddha's attendant for the last twenty years of his life. He was his cousin, and he would listen to all the Buddha's talks. He had a contract with the Buddha when he took on this work that the Buddha would always relate to him anything he'd said when Ananda wasn't present. He had this phenomenal auditory memory.

Ananda would offer his opinions, and the Buddha would gently correct him. On one occasion, Ananda said that he had now really come to understand dependent origination, and the Buddha said, "Oh no, Ananda, dependent origination is deep, profound," and so forth. He made a similar mistake when it came to the spiritual life. Ananda said that he thought good friendship, good companionship, and good comradeship were half the spiritual life. And the Buddha said, "Oh no, Ananda, it is the entire spiritual life—that is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship. When a person has a good friend, a good companion, and a good comrade, it is to be expected that they will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path." In other words, your kalyāṇamitra, your spiritual friend.

If we look at those three things with some arbitrary definitions of these different words, let's take good companionship first. A companion is usually somebody who travels with you. Really, it refers to those who are closest to you—your spouse, your partner, your very close friend. You can understand that if we take partners, for instance, and both of them are actually on the same path, that's a tremendous refuge, isn't it? Even if one follows the Tibetan tradition and the other is Theravāda, I'm sure they can find support for each other. So there's that sort of intimacy. If that intimate relationship involves both people actually on the same path, that's obviously a great support.

On a wider level, when we talk about good friendship, we mean all the people whom you know apart from those who are closest to you. I think some of you will have found, as I did, that as I moved into the Dhamma and became more and more involved, I was losing my interest in other things—the theatre, for instance, the local semi-professional theatre that we had in Birmingham at the time. Eventually I stopped going. I didn't actually say goodbye to anybody. When I look back, I didn't say goodbye to anybody or tell them what I was doing. I just faded out, you might say. Interestingly enough, I can't remember meeting any of them again. That was part of my movement towards a spiritual life. You might have found that also to be true of yourselves.

When it comes to comradeship, for me the word comrade is associated with the Communist Party—"Comrade Boris," and I'm not talking about Big Boris, of course. But that association gives us a sense that we're part of something much bigger than just our personal relationships, something grand. Buddhism is, of course, a world religion. It has so many millions of people following the Buddhist path, and it also has a massive history of two and a half thousand years. When you reflect on this, it gives you tremendous confidence. You would have thought by now, after 2,500 years, that people would have sussed out whether the Buddha was telling the truth or whether it was just a big tall tale.

When I used to contemplate this teaching about friendship being the entire spiritual life, it never quite matched up for me. I couldn't work out why it should be the entire spiritual life. But then I came across Ubuntu. Some of you will know it as the open source operating system on Linux, but that's not what I'm referring to. Ubuntu is a South African philosophy from Zimbabwe southward—the Zulus, the Xhosa people, all those peoples have this philosophy of Ubuntu. You can encapsulate it in one small sentence: I am what I am because of who we all are. In other words, I am my relationships. I remember Krishnamurti saying that, actually.

In the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse, the Buddha presents four sections: one on the body, one on feeling, one on mental states, and one on the teachings of the Dhamma. There is a recurrent phrase that runs through it: "They meditate observing an aspect of the body—or feelings, or mental states, or teachings of the Dhamma—internally, externally, both internally and externally." It's this last one that I want to center on. In other words, the Buddha is asking us to be aware of ourselves, aware of others, but also aware of this interaction that is constantly happening between us.

If we take just one or two examples—this body, for instance. This body that we've got isn't something we chose. I definitely would have chosen something better, I think.

I just happened to end up with this body because of all the genetic history that came before it. This body expresses that genetic history; it's part and parcel of that specific genetic lineage.

When it comes to the body, you see, the food I eat is not only grown by others and sold by others and often cooked by others for me—the actual recipes we use are usually made up by other people. There's this constant flow of information about what's nice to eat, what makes a good meal. It's the same with clothes and fashions. The fashions change. Who changes them? Some bright spark has an idea, and then after that we're all wearing different clothes. In my own life, during my pseudo-hippie stage, I went around with flowery pants.

When we look at our dwellings, these are all designed by other people, all the furniture we have in them. This becomes obvious when you look at different cultures—you see different food, different clothes, different ideas of how houses should look. And finally, medicines and care. All these medicines are produced by other people. They come into my body. They affect me.

So we get this idea that the body isn't static in any way, not physically. The water we're drinking here has chlorine in it. The air we're breathing is full of CO2 because of people using fossil fuels. You can see that the body itself is in a process of communication with the world around it. And in terms of other areas, we're actually just expressions of our culture.

The problem is that this sense of self seems so static. It seems so real. We don't seem to think we change, except when it's obvious that we change. We get this sense of substantiality. But then when you contemplate it, you realize it's just a concept. And that concept holds us in present time, as it were, but unfortunately creates a wrong relationship.

We have this word proprioception—proprio means self, so it's perception of self, perception of the body. You've only got to watch how your body changes with whatever you're sitting on: a chair, a metal bench, an armchair, lying on a bed, doing yoga on the floor. We're constantly having to negotiate with the environment around us. When you're walking with somebody, you have to be in step. If they're walking too fast, you tell them to slow down. If you're walking too slow, you tell them to hurry up. There's this constant negotiation going on.

If you catch yourself with somebody who has authority over you—it could be a policeman—suddenly you feel guilty anyway, even if you've done nothing wrong. You'll notice that when you're with somebody who has authority over you, or whom you respect as an authority, whether you like it or not, you'll shrink your body. That's how we express that sort of respect or deference. And in the same way, when we feel ourselves to be in authority, we lift the body up, we pull our shoulders back. All of that is communication.

I don't want to spend too much time on this, but there was a video I came across about a poor young boy whose parents thought he had an evil spirit. As a toddler, they put him in with the chickens, and basically he became a chicken. When he got too big for the chicken coop, they put him in an old people's home and tied him to a bed. A woman named Elizabeth Clayton documented this—you can see it on YouTube. There are two videos: one where you see him as a young man, and a later one where he's much more socially interactive. But in the first, he's actually standing there like a bird, his shoulders hunched like flopping wings. It's awful.

And he will never be able to speak, never be able to communicate. What that does for me is it puts in sharp relief how much we owe to our relationships.

Our mental states are constantly affected by the people we're with. If you're with people who are depressed, who feel down, it pulls you down. You might try to lift yourself up, but in the end, you might give in. Whereas with people who are in a happy state, who are bubbly, it just lifts you up. There's this constant communication at the heart level.

There's also communication at the perceptual level, at the conceptual level. Take something like big concepts—free speech or democracy. You can see that what we read in the newspapers, what we hear people say on television, what we discuss amongst ourselves, constantly our concepts are beginning to change. They move. There's an actual word for this in the teachings: it's called perception. We all have a concept of an apple, but every time you see an apple, that concept is slightly changed. And so it is with these rather more abstract concepts. You can see they change over time.

I was just thinking about kings and queens, since we have one here and other countries too. There was a time when you could insult a king and it was *lèse-majesté*—you'd find yourself being whipped or thrown in jail or worse. And if you think about Putin and Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un, you can see that depending on the country you're in, your concept of how a country ought to be ruled changes. There are people who support these leaders. All these concepts we are absorbing, and we are doing our own little interpretation of them, but we're in constant communication.

So I think that sums up this statement by the Buddha. Let me return to it. This is what the Buddha says: "The entire spiritual life is good friendship, good companionship, and good comradeship. And when a person has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected they will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path."

In his own life, you remember, he had these six companions who probably followed him from those times when he was practicing absorption states through to when he was practicing the ascetic practices of almost starvation, really. And remember, when he left them, they didn't want to know him. As far as they were concerned, he'd gone soft. When he came back, it took them a while to realize that maybe he'd changed. There was a conversation which comes out when he talks about his new understanding, and he asks them, "Have you ever heard me speak like this before?" So right there within the Buddha's life, he had these six companions.

If we then understand that within the concept of Ubuntu—I am what I am because of who we all are—I am my relationships. The Buddha is trying to urge us, or at least make us understand, that the people surrounding us are our inspiration, our support. But they're also supposed to be checks. A good friend tells you when you're not doing things as you ought to be doing them.

That's what I was centering on. I felt I had a better concept of what the Buddha was talking about when I came across this teaching, this philosophy of Ubuntu.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your development of good friendship, you will complete the Noble Eightfold Path and be fully liberated—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 203

2021 Gratitude, Generosity and Renunciation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

> *In this inaugural Full Moon Day talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents a practical trilogy for daily Buddhist living: gratitude, generosity, and renunciation. He begins by clarifying true renunciation—not self-mortification or rejecting life's pleasures, but releasing our dependency on external conditions for happiness. The Buddha himself enjoyed taste without greed.*
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> *Bhante explores how genuine gratitude naturally arises when we contemplate what we've received—from parents who gave us life, to teachers, healthcare workers, and the earth itself. Since these gifts are ultimately unrepayable, gratitude naturally leads to generosity. He offers practical guidance for pure giving: examining our motivations, giving without expectation of thanks or repayment, and offering 'that little bit more that pinches.'*
>
> *The talk shows how acts of pure generosity are actually practices of renunciation—loosening our grip on possessions and time. This letting go of 'grippiness' touches the desireless quality of nibbāna itself. Bhante presents this trilogy not as a scriptural path to liberation, but as a commentary practice that naturally draws us toward freedom through transforming our daily habits from those causing suffering to those bringing natural happiness.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa

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

This is our inaugural Full Moon Day meeting. I've always wanted to do this, but I've never found a way to do it. So I was really happy when Magda suggested that I try it on this medium. I think we can keep this going. Luckily it's fallen on a Sunday and I'm inclined to in the future choose the closest Sunday to the full moon because that's most convenient for people. In Sri Lanka they are public holidays, all the moons are public holidays so there's no problem in keeping the full moon itself there.

My idea is that with every full moon we look at some of the teachings of the Buddha and eventually throughout the year, we cover it all. So I'm going to start with this lovely little trilogy, a virtuous circle of gratitude, generosity, and renunciation.

Starting with renunciation. The big problem here that can arise is confusing what it is that we're actually renouncing. Remember the body is not our fault. When the body has appetite then it has appetite and when you put something lovely sweet on the tongue it will taste lovely and sweet. That's never the problem. The problem is our relationship to it, which is wanting more, depending on it in order to establish a beautiful mental state. That's what we've really got to grasp. We use the sense bases, not because they are lovely in themselves, but because they are a way of creating a lovely mental state. Hence, you might have a piece of toast in the evening to raise your spirits.

The unfortunate thing is that you have dependency. And that dependency is what we call attachment. And so there's a suffering there. If there's no bread and there's no toast, well, it's misery, isn't it? So when we click onto that, we become much more sensitive to this draw towards what is pleasurable. And this renunciation is therefore not to be confused with what they call self-mortification. In other words, blaming the body for our mental states. That's an important distinction to make. We're not trying to get rid of the pleasures and joys of life at all. And the Buddha himself did enjoy life. He enjoyed taste, but he didn't greed for it. That's what it says in the scriptures.

This whole idea of renunciation will arise on two different types of grasping, which is one about our wealth and the other about our time. We can be greedy with our time, but not greedy with our wealth. We can be generous with our wealth, but if somebody asks us to do something for them, we shy off it and the other way around. We can be very happy giving time, but if somebody asks us for a bit of money, we're not inclined to give. So again, we have to look at that.

This trilogy, this little virtuous circle of gratitude, generosity, and renunciation, is not actually taught in the scriptures themselves as a way to liberation. This is more a commentary pointed out. And this directly concerns our daily life. This is our daily life in our daily work in the way we are with people. So if we can generate that virtuous circle, it's actually drawing us towards liberation. Letting go of attachment and letting go of dependency is the path to liberation.

You might say that the whole of the path is one of renunciation. Because eventually you've got to renounce the sense of self. That's the last thing to go. This little idea that somewhere within us, we actually do believe ourselves to be this psychophysical organism, for want of a better word. So that's this renunciation business.

Now, to go to the front of the trilogy, this sense of gratitude. When you feel gratitude, it really is a heartwarming feeling. And when we feel this gratitude, we always want to repay it. If we spend some time considering what we've received from our parents, our parents gave us our life. Our mothers. When you think about that, you might have

problems with your mother and your father. In fact, somebody once asked, how do you know when you're fully liberated? And they said, well, go and spend a week with your mother. And then you'll know.

So it may be that our general relationship is a bit fractious and so on and so forth, but you still have your life through your parents. And the Buddha said that even if you were to carry them on your shoulders the whole of your life, you'd never repay them. In fact, it's unrepayable. And that's what you begin to realize, I think, when you contemplate everything that's been given to you from your family from your friends the good deeds and the companionship of family and friends. All this is given to you.

Then there are things like what society gives us, all our education. Most of our parents could not have afforded to educate us and it's the same way the social services. We might not have needed them up until now but if we get old enough, you definitely begin to need them. And of course, there's our health system. It's funny how you take something as a right and presume that something isn't given because either you've paid for it through the national insurance or because it's taken for granted. But how many times have you thanked your doctors, thanked the dentist?

The dentist I had here in Bishop's Castle was really good. The front tooth here finally gave in and he put this false tooth in, and it was pretty awful. You've got to get used to it. You couldn't eat nuts. All the nuts got behind the tooth, behind the palate. So you had to take it out and wash your mouth out and stick it back in. And when I told him that it was a little inconvenient, he finally decided to give me a bridge. And there it is. It's absolutely fantastic.

It's a case of recognizing all these gifts that people have given us. If you bring to mind, for instance, the teachers, one or two favourite teachers that you've had, it does fill the heart with a sense of gratitude. And finally, of course, there's nature, the earth that we live on, which we become more and more aware of these days.

What gratitude does is it makes you want to repay. And because you can't repay what has been given, you can't repay something that has been given to you freely, you have to find a substitute. And that draws you towards being generous ourselves. And that moves us into this whole area of generosity.

When the Buddha talked to lay people, he always began with generosity. He pointed out that even a thief can be generous. He's taken something off you and he's very kindly given it to somebody in his family or friends. So when we think about generosity, the ability to give without some idea of being repaid, that's quite difficult for us. So we have to clarify the mind about that.

There are certain times you give gifts such as Christmas, which is more like a little ritual reestablishing friendship. You get your pair of socks and they get their pair of socks. And that's fine. Unless, of course, the pair that they've given you is obviously much cheaper than what you spent on the socks that you gave them. So that's when the trouble starts. There's always a bit of bargaining going on. It's always like a business.

If we want to have an act of pure generosity, then you have to listen to what's going on in the background of our minds about being repaid, about being adored because of our generosity. So if you're going to give, for instance, a donation to a charity, and there are so many of them these days, you have to get yourself into that mental state where that's the only thing in your mind and heart that you are giving this in order to help somebody. And there's no hope of repayment. The charity is not going to give you any money back. So you're doing it for that purpose. And when you do it for that purpose, that's when you act. That's when you make the donation, whether it's by card or by cash, it doesn't really matter.

Then, of course, once you've done it, you'll hear these little voices like you are truly a very wonderful person. Or you might get the one of, oh, that's too much. What do you give so much for? You could have... So you have to not be caught up in that. The Mara did not catch you there. So you can let those thoughts disappear. And if guilt comes, you have to point to it and say, well, that is false guilt. Because when I actually made the action, my heart was full of generosity.

The same arises when you do something for somebody. I think most people, I certainly do, say yes too quickly. So if somebody says, I've moved into this new house. It's actually happened to me. I've moved into this new flat, and we're painting it. Would you like to come and give us a hand? And I said, yeah, yeah, I'll come on Saturday. And then as I'm walking away, I'm thinking, what? What have I given this Saturday away? In that case, at that time, I was advanced enough to actually make myself do it, to teach myself not to say yes. Because somebody asks something, you don't have to say yes. And there's a point where you can actually reflect for a moment and then say yes. So it's coming from a point of reflection. You're not done it by habit.

Again, that point of generosity has to be there has to be a certain reflection about it and that you are doing it from the heart of goodwill and that you're not even expecting a thank you. And that's very difficult. When I became a monastic, we're not supposed to say thank you. I mean, I say it in the West because people get very upset. But in the East, you're not supposed to, you don't say thank you. It undermines the person's gift. That's the understanding. Because if somebody gives something to you, they don't expect you to say thank you. But if they expect you to say thank you and then you don't say thank

you, then, of course, they feel very upset. And that tells you that the gift is slightly corrupted. They wanted praise. They wanted appreciation. So to be able to give something without that desire to be acknowledged is leading us towards a real pure heart generosity.

The other little telltale is to give that little bit more that pinches. That little pinch is where you're truly being generous, where you're giving that bit of extra time, that little bit of extra money and that's the point where it begins to hurt a little bit. That's the point where you are truly extending our generosity.

To recap, we have this lovely virtuous circle of this feeling of gratitude and one exercise you can give yourself is to say that tomorrow, everything, I will say thank you to everything. I'll say thank you to the door that opens. In Zen, of course, you're always gassho when you enter a room. You're taught to thank everything. You have to gassho when you approach the table. You gassho to the chair. So this whole attitude of actually not presuming on anything, not thinking that we have a right to everything, but that everything is a gift. And if you go through the whole day like that, you'd be surprised how it lifts you. It really does lift you.

Then once we've established more and more this sense of gratitude and the knowledge that you can't repay directly what people have given to you, there has to be, you have to find a way of expressing that gratitude through generosity. And when we are being generous, to stop for a moment and to make sure that you're doing it for pure reasons. That's all. And then to realize that when I've actually made an act of generosity with a pure heart, I've renounced something. I've let go of something I'm holding on to. And I'm actually practicing renunciation, letting go of that grip on things.

That loosening of a grip, that letting go of these tight desires, wrong desires, is a little, every time we do that and we feel that loss of grippiness, that in a sense is a touch of *nirvana* because one of the descriptions of *nirvana* is that it is desireless of these sorts of wrong desires.

So there's a lovely little practice there which is ongoing day in and day out. And it's only a matter of reminding ourselves to do it. And very slowly, it becomes a habit, that's all. Really, that's what we're doing in our practice. We are changing our habits, moving away from habits which cause ourselves suffering and aren't very pleasant for others, and moving towards habits which bring us happiness.

There is the gift of the practice is a natural happiness in life. It's not Nirvana, it's a natural happiness. And this happiness that we talk about is the internal environment within ourselves. So this is a really powerful practice. And I try and remember to do it myself occasionally.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion and that you will, by your practice, become liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 204

Need, Sufficiency and Greed

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

> *In this practical and timely teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the anxiety many feel about economic uncertainty by returning to fundamental Buddhist principles about material needs. Drawing from the Vinaya rules governing monastic life, he explains how the Buddha established guidelines for the four requisites: shelter (being content with wilderness, a tree root, or an empty hut), food (one meal before noon), clothing (the three robes), and medicine (traditionally fermented cow's urine as an Ayurvedic remedy).*
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> *Bhante weaves together these ancient teachings with contemporary concerns about inflation, rising energy costs, and financial insecurity. He shares personal memories of post-war austerity in Britain and observations from his time in India, where simple meals of dāl, vegetable curry, and chapati sustained ordinary workers. The teaching distinguishes between three levels of relationship to material things: genuine need, sufficiency (what our culture and circumstances reasonably require), and greed.*
>
> *The talk offers practical exercises for undermining fear and cultivating simplicity: spending one day living only with what is truly needed, reviewing one's wardrobe for unused items, and consciously reducing heating while wearing warmer clothing. Bhante emphasizes that this contemplation is not about making ourselves miserable, but about discovering freedom from the anxiety that accompanies attachment to wealth and comfort. By understanding what we actually need versus what we want, we can face uncertain times with greater equanimity and move toward the simplicity that supports both meditation practice and liberation from suffering.*

Need, Sufficiency and Greed

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

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened.

This evening, I thought to tackle this business of need, sufficiency and greed.

As you know, in the UK here—well, I think it's all over the world—but in Europe and the UK, we've got these huge national debts, and in the UK it's made worse by the wonderful Brexit deal that was made. Everybody's predicting high inflation and a downturn. This is frightening, because you lose your savings, you might lose your work. It can all be very upsetting.

So I thought, well, what we need to do is undermine the fear and anxiety by asking ourselves: what do we actually need?

What I want to do is explain to you—and most of you won't know—what the rules for monks are when it comes to their physical wellbeing.

Shelter

The first one is shelter. In the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, the Buddha said that we should be happy with the wilderness, a root of a tree, or an empty hut. Now, those reflect the three seasons. You want a hut when it rains, in the rainy season. You want a tree in the hot season. And in the cool season, well, you can sleep anywhere and do your meditation anywhere.

In fact, if I remember rightly, when the Buddha settled down to his meditation which brought about the liberation, the enlightenment, near a place called Uruvila—which is now, of course, Bodh Gaya—it sounds as though it was the cool season, which makes a lot of sense. If you're going to make a big effort, you want it to be cool.

When we look around our houses, our flats, or whatever we're living in, you can ask yourself: what do you actually need? Not what you want, or even what is sufficient, but what do you actually need?

I'm thinking of things like heating. There was a little article where a man explained that when he called up the electrical company, they told him to reduce heating by just heating one room. He seemed to be quite upset by that. He had a great big house, and he sounded as though he lived on his own. Living on his own in a house, he was quite upset that he had now reduced his heating to one room. Well, if you think about what you actually need, it probably is just the room you're generally living in.

I met somebody at Gaia House when I was teaching there. I've known him for a long time. He says during winter, he lives at 12 degrees centigrade. If you really want to know how he does it, I can always put you in touch with him. But that's what he actually gets down to—12 degrees. He says if it's under 12, then he starts to lose it; he can feel the body heat really reducing too much. So that's all he needs. He needs just 12 degrees.

But of course, we tend to walk around our houses at 25 degrees. In the middle of winter, you find people wearing just a T-shirt walking around the house. So again, if the price of gas is going to go up, well, it throws us back on ourselves. How much do you actually need?

There was an article for people who are really poor, who are really going to have real problems, explaining that they can buy these rather cheap jackets and pullovers that are heated. You just stick the plug in, the batteries fill up, and then the body armour gives you heat. Again, it's just a reflection. One exercise I was going to suggest at the end was: what would you take with you? What would you need if you were a refugee? Of course, there are people who are homeless. We know that people are living really rough, even in the depths of winter. It's not a case of getting to a point where we're like that, but it's a good question to ask. When it comes to dwelling, what do I actually need?

I lived for quite some time just in a bedsit in the house of my teacher in Birmingham. She had prepared this room specifically for a monk. It was just a bed, a place to sit next to the gas fire, and on one side was just a small stove, a fridge, and a little cabinet for pots and pans and stuff like that. I was very happy.

Food

So that's to do with dwelling—what do you actually need? Now when it comes to food, the monastic has to go out with his bowl and just accept what's given. There were famines in those days, and often they would have to just make do with whatever was put in the bowl in terms of rice.

Lay people complained to the Buddha that these monks and nuns were turning up at all times of the day asking for food and being quite a nuisance. So he made a rule. He said, right, from now on you have to go out in the early hours or during the morning on alms round, and you have to finish eating and everything else by noon. Well, a lot of monks rejected that. They got very upset.

They would normally have had an evening meal—three meals a day, as was customary. So there was a bit of a rebellion. And the Buddha said, "Look, if you want to belong to this dispensation, then that's what you're going to have to do." And for the most part, monks try to keep that rule to this day. So again, it's a case of asking: how much food do you actually need?

Of course, there's a distinction between good food and food which is not so good for the body. And that's the problem, I think, with people relying on food banks. When you see footage of a food bank, so much of it tends to be tinned goods, for heaven's sake. But again, it's just settling down and thinking to yourself, making up a little menu which is really basic.

When I was in India, the regular food for the ordinary worker, the ordinary person in North India, was dal, vegetable curry, and a chapati. And that's what you got every day. You didn't say, "Well, I'm going to have Chinese today." It was simply dal, vegetable curry, and chapati. And that's what you made do with.

Interestingly enough, when they started to recruit men during conscription for the Second World War, they were really taken aback to find that many men weren't having three meals a day at all. They were actually eating quite poorly and were happy to join the army just to get some decent food.

So here's another little exercise you might set yourself: spend a day as if you were poor, as if you couldn't simply buy whatever food you wanted. What would you eat? What would sustain you for that day? It's about taking away this fear that if we become very poor for one reason or another, that's the end of the world. You just make do.

I'm old enough to have memories of just after the war. I remember going to my aunt's for food. On the toast, you'd put the butter on and then scrape it off, and what you were left with was just a sort of suggestion. Then they did the same with the jam—I couldn't believe it. I was only a child, about six or seven, watching this: you'd put jam on the bread and then scrape it all off and stick it on another piece. These were considered luxuries. The food was the bread itself.

When it comes to clothing, the Buddha noticed that people were coming away with huge amounts of cloth from the laypeople. So he actually set out one night—this would have been during the cold season—to determine how many robes you actually need. At the beginning of the night, he had his lower robe and his upper robe. Then as the night grew colder, he needed another robe, so he took one more. And towards the end of the night—the coldest hour is just before dawn—he felt he needed one more. So he had three robes: the lower robe, the upper robe, and the sanghati, the one you see monks putting over their shoulder. That was it, and that became the rule.

Of course, rules are rules, and you find ways around them by having extra cloth—which is a bit cheeky, I know. But the point was coming down to what you actually need. We're talking about the tropics, of course, but the question remains: what do you actually need? How many coats do you need? How many pairs of shoes?

Drawing ourselves down to that basic need—I think that gets rid of a lot of the fear that comes from loss of wealth, whatever that wealth might be, loss of your job and so forth. And just as an aside, it does make us more aware of where we're getting our clothes from.

I met somebody in Shropshire who showed me this jumper they had just bought for three or four pounds. They'd gone to another shop—probably Marks and Spencer's—where a similar jumper was twelve pounds. When I said to them, "Yes, but this is probably made in one of those satanic sweatshops in Bangladesh," they were taken by surprise. It hadn't even occurred to them to think that way.

Now the final requisite. We've covered shelter, food, clothing. The final one is medicine.

The Buddha said that we should be contented with fermented cow's urine. Now, that might come as a big surprise. But in fact, it's a very well-known Ayurvedic medicine. It's an antibiotic, anti-fungal, and if you take it regularly, it maintains the homeostasis of the body, lowers cholesterol, relieves tension, enhances liver function, and slows down aging. So tomorrow morning, you need to get out there and get your bottle of fermented cow's urine!

That's what we're supposed to be happy with. Frankly, I've never tried it, so I don't want to say whether it's any good or not. But it's definitely Ayurvedic medicine, and people do drink it.

So here we have this whole business of asking ourselves what we need—what we actually need to sustain life. This concerns only our physical needs. There's also the other side: our cultural needs, our heart needs. In the Buddha's instructions to the monks, the day was to be spent meditating, remembering, studying, and understanding the Dhamma. In those days, of course, you had to memorize the teaching. They didn't have clever little gadgets like we have to remember things.

So one exercise you can set yourself is to live one day—just one day—with only what you need, and find out for yourself.

The second consideration lifts our perspective to the level of sufficiency. This depends a great deal upon our culture. When it comes to clothes, for instance, people need a set of clothes for work, a set for leisure, a set for climbing mountains and activities like that. So it's not a case of making ourselves miserable, but simply being clear in ourselves as to what we actually need.

I think that if you spend just one day with need, it undermines a lot of the fear and anxiety that comes about with the loss of wealth. No matter how much or how little wealth you have, to suddenly find yourself unemployed and on the dole is pretty miserable. But you discover you can live with it, at least at a physical level.

And then, of course, there's the final consideration of greed. Well, that takes us to another step entirely. I think most of us know when we're being greedy. I don't think I need to go into that too much.

So here are a couple of exercises. When it comes to food, just have one day with what you feel is the cheapest and most sustainable food that would be good for the body. Just one day a week, simply to remind ourselves.

When it comes to clothes, go through the wardrobe and see how much you're not wearing. I remember somebody who was in the habit of putting any piece they used—a shirt or dress—at one end of their wardrobe. Over the year, they would see all the clothes they hadn't actually used, and they would take them down to the charity shop. There are all sorts of little tricks we can play on ourselves to come down to sufficiency. Eventually it saves a lot of money, you know.

When it comes to heating, that's quite crucial for us these days, and our heating bills are going to go up something awful. But just by being careful with it and wearing jumpers, it won't be that heavy on us, I don't think.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused any confusion, and that by your devotion to practice and the practice of poverty—simplicity, that's the word, simplicity—you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 205

Renunciation — The Path of Letting Go

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines renunciation (nekkhamma) as one of the three Right Intentions in the Noble Eightfold Path. He distinguishes between harmful self-mortification—which the Buddha rejected after his own extreme ascetic practices—and skillful renunciation, which involves restraining the senses and letting go of taṇhā (craving) rather than blaming the body itself.*
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> *The talk explores how renunciation addresses the fundamental delusion of selfhood that drives our constant seeking for happiness through sensual pleasures, intellectual pursuits, and even spiritual experiences. Bhante explains practical approaches to letting go: recognizing unhealthy patterns, bearing the discomfort of withdrawal, and distinguishing between mere boredom and genuine disinterest—a spiritual quality of non-attachment.*
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> *Drawing from the Dhammapada and other teachings, he offers concrete examples for daily practice: simplifying consumption, releasing control in relationships, limiting news intake, and decluttering our busy lives. The talk emphasizes that renunciation isn't deprivation but liberation—freeing energy for genuine service to others while remaining vigilant against the ego's attempts to co-opt even generous actions. This teaching provides both newcomers and experienced practitioners with clear guidance for developing one of the essential factors leading toward Awakening.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

This evening I've chosen the topic of renunciation. Now it's not a word we particularly love. We don't fall for it. But you won't find a wisdom tradition that doesn't have some level of sensual restraint in its teachings. Consider Lent for Christians and Ramadan for Muslims. The Hindu tradition and the Jains, of course, all have some form of fasting as part of their practice.

Now in the Buddha Dharma, the Buddha has made this distinction between self-mortification and renunciation. By self-mortification, we understand that the body is to blame. So if we lost our tongues, we wouldn't have any greed. Of course, the Buddha himself went under such practices, nearly starving himself to death. He ended up saying that that practice was just adding more suffering to the already inherent discontent of life.

But renunciation is the restraint of the senses, understanding that it's nothing to do with the body, but our relationship to it. So there is a direct path through renunciation. You'll get monks and nuns who live way out in the jungle, completely renouncing any contact with the sensual life and only going into the village to get some alms.

To understand the importance of renunciation, we have to really go back to the roots of the Buddha's teaching. That always lies in this delusion of a self. What do we mean by that? Well, whatever you finish this sentence with — "I am..." — that's what you're not. That's what we, of course, presume ourselves to be. In fact, the "I" in the "I am" is also part of that delusion.

So it's the problem of this "me" always wanting to be happy. Now, that's not so bad. The Buddha actually has a whole chapter in the Dhammapada devoted to being happy, a happy self. But it's just what we are seeking for our happiness which is going to cause disappointment and eventually sorrow.

That's easy to overcome when we keep reminding ourselves that everything, absolutely everything arises and passes away and does not repeat. You can't repeat the party that you had. It just doesn't happen. It's only going to cause suffering trying to do that. When we become dependent on something — the mobile, or a person that we become dependent on — then when we lose it, that's where the pain is.

What we have to find out is where does this self manifest, and that's the point of desire. That's the direct psychological indicator that the self is active. But it's a certain type of desire. There's a special word in Pali for it: *taṇhā*. There are other words for desire, but this specific desire is the one that leads to indulgence. It's the one that leads us to attachment.

So it obviously includes all the physical senses, such as food and sex. But it's the sensual pleasures too — art, nature, human association. All that comes under the name of sensual. Some people only think of sexual, but it's not. It's the total sense organ of the psychophysical organism, which includes the intellect — all the stuff we learn, the history, science, all the stuff we talk about, the politics. And the culture, all the imagination, the fantasy. All that's part of the sensual life. And of course the pleasures and joys we get from work.

So everything we're doing, everything we experience, we always have to be careful that there is this little bit of taṇhā when it's making us happy. Even in the practice, when we enter into beautiful states of mind, a bit of peacefulness, a bit of joy, and those concentration exercises that some of you might practice — the absorptions — you become attached to them.

All this would be perfectly lovely except for the clinging. That's why we're practicing renunciation. It's a way of letting go of our cravings, no matter how small they are.

The importance of renunciation is found in the Eightfold Noble Path. The first, of course, is right understanding, which is exactly what we're trying to do here. The second one has to do with right intentions. Sometimes it's translated as right thoughts, but intentions, I think, captures it better because it's the intentions that create the attitudes that then manifest in speech, in action and in our livelihoods.

What are these right intentions? Well, the first one is renunciation. The second one is non-ill will. And the third one is harmlessness.

So how do we put this teaching into practice? Well, we can start little. It's getting used to letting go of things. Those of you who've been on retreats know all about this really. But it's good just to remind ourselves that we ought to do it as a little daily practice also.

For instance, if you find yourself snacking and grazing throughout the day at a particular time — say TV in the evening — and you recognize it as unhealthy, so you make a decision: "Stop it. I'm going to stop it." But then you have to remind yourself, you have to bear the discomfort. Every time the word "toast" comes to mind, or "biscuit," whatever comes to mind, the alarm bell should go off. Then we repeat the reasons to ourselves why we're not going to fall for it. We're going to renounce it and then reaffirm that determination.

Now, surprisingly, these desires begin to really loosen up after two or three days and they go. We regain our agency. We gain back our control over our appetites. That's what we're heading for, because generally speaking, we're enslaved to these things. As soon as they come up, they come up as demands and they become needs. Well, they're not needs, are they?

But even when we've got through that discomfort and now we feel we've got our agency back, you always have to be careful about that little demon of the self, the demon of desire. It's only lying low. If we're not careful, we'll soon become an obedient servant again. We have to remind ourselves: not until the delusive self has been completely extinguished will such unskillful desires cease.

Now here we might make a little distinction between boredom and disinterest. Remember that desires are excited by stimuli and they lose their intensity over time. That's when we get bored with something. Taking food for instance as our little object here — you can't keep eating the same biscuit. You've got to look for something else. We need variety. But given enough time, however, we go back to our favourite biscuit.

That's how boredom works. It gets fed up with something, we seek something else, and then we remember, "Oh, wait a minute, what about my favourite biscuit?" And then you're back to that.

Disinterest is something different. It's a spiritual quality. We lose interest in something. We no longer care about biscuits or what biscuits we have or even if there are any. Yet there's still the enjoyment of biscuit if it comes our way. To quote an ancient Zen master, when asked to explain Buddha Dharma, his reply was: "No preference." No preference. That's where we're aiming. We're aiming to a point where we're not sticking onto anything.

At a mental level, it's views and opinions. It's the same attitude that we apply, renouncing this "I'm right and everybody else is wrong or almost wrong or not as right as I am." There's always a conceit that underlies these positions, doesn't matter what it is — religious, political, cultural and so on. Now, it doesn't mean to say that we have to change our understanding. It may be fine. But being open to others, allowing us to nuance our understanding. And occasionally, we might even change our opinion, especially today with all this polarization.

Then there's being members of the human community, aware of climate crisis, of mindless consumption. We have a duty here to simplify our lifestyle. How many pairs of shoes do we actually need? When you're buying some clothing, do you actually need it? We have to see that the culture is caught up — we are caught up in this selfishness that's been generated by neoliberalism and consumerism.

Then we get the idea of giving something away. In the very act of generosity, we're actually exercising renunciation. Of course, it makes living a little lighter.

When it comes to personal relationships, we possess other people. So it manifests as control. We manipulate. We use anger, threats of abandonment, spiteful action. We hold grudges and nurse them. We offer presents and promises to entice them. Becoming aware of those little behaviors, developing the skills of forgiveness, trust, training ourselves to see the situation from the other person's point of view — all that is the exercise of renunciation.

Then there's the news. Oh my goodness. Trawling through the news every morning, every evening, during the day, always onto it, finding out what's happened next with this constant daily messaging of war, Trumpian shocks, injustice, and so on. It's no wonder that we can build up a sense of hopelessness, disempowerment. Now we can undermine this by method, of course, but sometimes the best policy is just to stop listening, to limit the input.

During my first twelve years as a monastic, I took very little interest in world affairs. For long times, I was quite secluded. It took a while when I got back into ordinary daily life here to find out what was happening. But I never felt I'd lost anything. The Buddha, in the discourse on developing *mettā*, which we read at the end, advises us not to be too busy.

So again, it's about decluttering our lives. How are we spending our time? What are we spending it on? Social media, doing things, always having to do something, trying to get back to just being every so often. Being and doing. Do we find ourselves in a sense of rush, of anxiety, even a sense of occasional overwhelm? Then you have to prioritize. You have to let go of some engagements.

When we do that, we find ourselves being more relaxed and we meditate better and become more aware about this underlying turbulence in our hearts, which is often fueling the overactivity. It's allowing that to exhaust itself and bring a greater sense of calmness. It really is a wise thing to constantly remind ourselves that tranquility, calmness, is a factor of enlightenment. A factor of awakening.

Now, renunciation isn't the fullness of the spiritual life. Such practice brings a sense of ease into our lives. It brings with it clean energy. Letting go of the demands of egoistic self is a relief. It's not a deprivation. The energy, the freedom we feel seeks a different focus. The focus is the other.

We're social animals. Everybody knows that. We love people. We love animals. We love to help others. Some of our greatest joys is supporting others in their griefs, in their joys. But you have to always remember this little devil of self may sneak in and we find ourselves doing good in order to feel happy. That's no good. Danger lurks in the most heartfelt generosity.

Luckily, it's enough just to acknowledge the unskillful motivations and then to reaffirm the good intentions. We don't have to be hard on ourselves. A dash of humility is needed here. Just acknowledge that the work on ourselves is yet to be done. That's a comfort. The Buddha warns us the path is gradual, very gradual in my experience anyway.

So renunciation — well, it's important. We need to reflect on our lives, see where we're sticking onto something, someone, some behavior, and just allow ourselves to let go for a while. Suffer gladly the pain of releasing the numbed cramp and enjoy a bit of peace.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your practice of renunciation you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 206

Faith, Hope, and Aspiration on the Path to Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

In this nuanced exploration of spiritual motivation, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the critical differences between faith (saddhā), hope (āsa), and aspiration (chanda) on the Buddhist path. Drawing from the early discourses, he reveals how the Pali texts present hope as a subtle form of craving (taṇhā) that leads to disappointment, while distinguishing this from the healthy spiritual aspiration that energizes practice.

The talk explores faith as one of the five spiritual faculties—not as belief, but as confidence and trust that enables investigation rather than hindering it. Bhante discusses how skeptical doubt can paralyze decision-making, while unrealistic expectations about nibbāna corrupt our practice. Through the story of the monk Soṇa and his over-efforting, we learn about right effort and the importance of focusing on process rather than progress.

The discussion includes the four bases of spiritual power (iddhipāda), religious fervor (saṃvega), and the eight contemplations that inspire urgency in practice. Bhante emphasizes that true hope is grounded not in future attainment but in directly seeing the three characteristics of existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). This seeing provides glimpses of what nibbāna represents and cultivates the patience needed for authentic spiritual development.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So we're looking at this idea of hope. At the top of my page, I've got faith, hope, aspiration, expectation, disappointment. So the idea is to define all this and to see what the Buddha is actually saying.

Faith, of course, often translated as confidence or trust, is a foundational virtue. It's one of the five spiritual faculties: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and insight wisdom. For our purposes, there are two pretty obvious enemies. One is to turn it into a belief system, which would then stop you from investigating. So it's the process of investigation, which is the process of liberation. And the subtle one — and now I'm going to use the word hope because that's how it's defined in the scriptures — is sceptical doubt. We'll come to that a little later.

So we've got to make clear what we mean by faith, and then we can understand a bit more the other stuff. Remember that all our problems root back into this idea of a self, which doesn't like to — it likes to know what's going to happen. It's forever planning, organising the future. And once we come across the Buddha Dharma, we hear about this goal, *Nibbāna*. For some of us anyway, we don't have an idea of what Nibbāna is, and yet there's some sort of hazy concept. And we're told it's the end of suffering, the end of compulsive desiring. That doesn't tell us what the actual experience is.

Even when the Buddha's explicit — so-called explicit anyway — talks about a consciousness without boundary, without an object, full of light, we still have to exercise our imagination to come up with something. And then we have an idea that this is what Nibbāna is. So we strive. The yogi sits full throttle, noting diligently the three characteristics of existence — how we create suffering through wrong desire, impermanence, not-self — but subconsciously somewhere trying to achieve the escape from suffering, which is another way of expressing Nibbāna.

Of course, it ends with disappointment, which it has to do because the subtle aim is not true. We're chasing a false idea, a fake idea. And of course, it's exhausting. You're making this great big effort, getting nowhere.

So what we have to understand is that when we're practising, the purpose is just to see these three characteristics. The subtlety of the Buddha's teaching is to distinguish between an aim, which is a bit fuzzy for us, and the immediate objective which gets us there, which is to observe and examine exactly what's before us, what we're actually experiencing at this moment. And those are the three characteristics.

We've got an example of wrong effort from a monk called Sona. He was desperately trying to get fully liberated and over-efforting. He was about to leave the order when the news came to the Buddha. He goes to see him and talks about tuning a veena — that's an instrument like a lute. Too tight, doesn't work; too loose, you don't get the note. And so ultimately, you've got to get it just right. Getting it right is to do with intention. Once the intention is right, which is just to discover experience, the three characteristics, that's enough. We don't have to worry about the future.

Anyway, you can understand from our life experience that having expectations often leads to disappointment.

Now, in the actual discourses, the word for hope, *asa*, doesn't get good press at all. It seems to be understood as a subtle form of craving. And it's linked to failure and suffering in itself because it's never fulfilled. Somehow it's got to be transcended. So the Buddha talks about *nirāsa*, which we translate as hopelessness. Well, that gets us towards despair. So there must be some misunderstanding here somewhere.

Anyway, I'll give you a flavour of what it says in the discourses. This is one living in hope and one who has abandoned hope. One who is cut off, lost, and one who's at peace. So one who lives in hope is going to be cut off and lost. That doesn't sound so good for us. Then it goes on: hope is suffering in the world. The person who lives with hope is called one who is defeated. When one's hope fails, disappointment arises and it is suffering.

Then we've got a verse from a nun, Mutateri — one of the enlightened nuns of the period — translated by Norman, who's an expert in this. Somehow she says, "That hope which some have here for children and wives and for the love of a woman, such hope does not apply to me." So I don't quite know how that fits her as a woman, but anyway. Again, she's abandoned all worldly hopes, at least.

So you can see that in the scriptures, in the discourses, hope has a shade of yearning for some outcome, slips into expectation.

Now, in the Mahāyāna, it's redeemed, at least in our understanding of hope. But they do use a different word, *praṇidhāna*, which in the Pali, the language of our discourses, is *paṇidhāna*, which means aspiration, a longing. So it fits into the Mahāyāna because of their bodhicitta ideal, which is a heart devoted to awakening through compassion. The Bodhisattva vow, as I think most of you know, is a vow to redeem everyone before yourself. It's a universal awakening rather than a personal attainment. But again, that word — there is a word in Sanskrit, *āśā*, which means hope — it's not used.

So it's all a bit semantic. We have to just work out what this actually means. But of course, in our terms, if there's no hope, then the practice feels as though it's going to run into a cul-de-sac.

If we look at the word aspiration, that I think gets us better on the path. Here we have a word like *chanda*. Chanda is one of the four bases of spiritual power, which I covered in January 2023. I'm sure you all remember it. The other three of the four bases are effort, consciousness, and investigation. We said at the time that these four bases of power can be used in ordinary daily life. You need obviously a desire to attain, to achieve something. And then you need the effort to get there. You need consciousness, of course. And then you need the ability to figure out what to do — the investigation.

So here we have this word chanda, which means a very strong desire. And then we have the word *saṃvega*. The Buddha goes on about saṃvega. This is a religious fervour. It's a heartfelt desire to attain something.

Now, in the Visuddhimagga, which is the medieval spiritual manual, he points to eight objects which induce this devotion, give us a sense of urgency about our practice. I don't think any of them will come as a surprise. Birth, ageing, sickness and death, of course — contemplating those. Contemplating the idea that if we don't do the practice and we fall into error, we'll end up in one of the *apāya* realms, which is either purgatory — sometimes that's translated as hell, but it's not permanent, remember, thank heavens. And then there's rebirth as an animal or as a hungry ghost, always feeling empty, and in the realm of conflict, the asura realm. And of course, finally, as number eight, there is just being here in this world of *saṃsāra*, the world of onward going led by delusion.

But you can see that these realms are also quite obvious to us right here and now in the world. This desire, this eagerness to become liberated, you have to be careful that it doesn't corrupt into expectation. And this is where faith comes in really. We've got faith, which — remember — not a belief. It's a sense of trust, of confidence. Without that, of course, you don't do anything. I mean, the obvious enemy here is sceptical doubt, which is obviously based on, or usually based on, some sort of fear — fear of failure, fear of being fooled and so on.

If we don't have that faith, then you don't make a decision. You can't make a decision. You can't act. And this is true in daily life. It can become a bit destructive. If a person can't make up their mind about someone they're attracted to, a job they've applied for, well, the opportunity just slips away. I had a student actually for a while who couldn't decide whether to get out of bed or not. It can become a bit of a mental illness, I think.

So even if we have this great confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha and the Eightfold Path, it doesn't mean it's unshakeable until we reach first path and fruit. That's when we have such a clear insight into one of those three characteristics of existence that our faith becomes unshakeable. We just know it's right. But until then, there's always a danger of losing it. And one of them is the bad behaviour of monks. Everybody goes around saying it's hypocritical. But the other, of course, is that we have this unrealistic aim. That's the expectation. And then we drop out and we try something else.

Now for some people who achieve liberation, faith is their dominant quality. It doesn't mean to say they don't have to understand or experience the three characteristics of existence. It just means that it doesn't have to be so penetrative. They're driven on

by a sense of devotion. The Buddha qualifies that. He says there are two people: those who are driven by faith and those who are driven by curiosity and usually have a better intelligence in order to achieve a deeper insight.

We have somebody called Puna. He comes up in the Dhammapada. Puna, he was a monk. He said of himself, whenever he learned a verse, a new verse from the Buddha, it kicked the one he just learned out of his head. So he didn't have a very good memory. And his brother told him, "Well, you know, you're just not going to understand the Dharma and you may as well leave and do something useful in lay life."

When the Buddha heard about this, he went to see him. And he knew of the devotion that this Puna had towards himself and towards the practice, that he trusted him implicitly. So he gave him a cloth to rub. And while he's rubbing the cloth, he's supposed to be saying "impermanence, impermanence," just watching impermanence. Well, he became fully liberated. And I don't think it works for everybody, but you can have a go.

So that means that we don't have to have any big intellect to become liberated. It's really to do with opening up the intuitive intelligence, which is the active side of awareness. Remember that *sati* is *satipaññ*a. It's a passive awareness, observing awareness — feeling, letting the information come. And then that moment of grasping — that's the intelligence working, the intuitive, grasping intelligence.

What of hope as such, and where does this aspiration come from? We have to understand that there's always going to be a subtle desire of trying to attain something for me. And that's, of course, this *taṇhā*, which translates as thirst. It's a different type of taṇhā.

Secondly, we see the impermanence. While we're meditating, while we're actually practising, we can see the role of this taṇhā, this desire, and how that's a direct agent of creating suffering for ourselves. While we're practising we see impermanence, we can see things that are insubstantial — they're just arising and passing away, there's nothing that remains. And so every so often by being in that position we come across a hint as to what Nibbāna is.

And here's where our real hope is grounded. It's not in some future attainment. It's grounded in the fact that we can see these three characteristics more and more clearly. And then there comes that patience to await for the great day of awakening.

Just as two asides — because we're embedded in society and the way we live, the way we interact, the way we work, it affects others. So even on a day when we feel depressed, when things aren't going our way, there's the ability to rest somewhere within ourselves in the assurance of the Dharma that gives us an air of acceptance. This is the

way it is. And calmness — this too will pass. And so as we're heading along the path, there comes more and more acceptance, more and more contentment. That's how it works.

It's also of great value when we come to die. To believe on our deathbed that we're dying into some sort of annihilation — it's not a particularly comforting thought. A poor return for a life that's generally done the best it can for the better of ourselves and others. Some say they are accepting this as humanist, but that's, of course, before the dying process.

I struggled myself with this contemplation in my twenties. But of course, at that time, you never believe you're going to die. That's the presumption of youth. Even so, it did lead me to an understanding or to an experience that proved to me personally that death wasn't an end and that it was, in fact, another beginning.

Similarly, when somebody is dying, it makes it easier for us to know that there is a purpose to life and that we don't have to rely on an outer power or a miracle to stop the process, but more accepting of it. We have the example of the Buddha, of course, in his death, that we call the *parinibbāna*, total Nibbāna, which gives us an example of someone who reaches the goal just ready to let go of life. Even as he's dying, he's asking people around him if they've got any last questions. And then he says, "Don't be shy in asking and then regret that you didn't take this opportunity to do so."

So in the actual discourses, when you read it and you come across the word hope and it says it's an absolute waste of time, it's a terrible thing to have, I think it's better to translate it as expectation. And that there is an aspiration, a real grounded hope through the practice. That's where the hope is grounded. That we can see clearly that this desire is the direct cause of attachment, which creates suffering, et cetera. And that we can actually get rid of it. We just don't empower it and it just disappears. And it's doing that until we finally get down to the core desire which arises out of that sense of self — the core desire of wanting to become, wanting to become a person. That's your core, that's the core desire that we're really working with.

So it energises our practice if we do it that way. You just have to be careful it doesn't corrupt into expectation. It's really putting our attention on process and abandoning any — I dare say hope — just not thinking about progress. Abandon progress and put your full attention upon process. That's it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that by your practice you will find that path to liberation sooner, of course, rather than later.

CHAPTER 207

The Nine Qualities of the Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides us through the nine traditional qualities of the Buddha that we recite during pūjā ceremonies. Beginning with Arahant—one who has destroyed all enemies (the defilements)—he explores how each quality reveals the Buddha's unique role as the founder of our spiritual tradition.*
>
> *The teaching covers Sammāsambuddha (self-awakened), emphasizing the Buddha's pioneering achievement like the first person to climb Everest, making the path possible for all who follow. Bhante explains how the Buddha's clear vision and virtuous conduct arose from understanding the true cause of suffering—our fundamental misunderstanding of who we are and our dependence on the sensual world for happiness.*
>
> *Particularly insightful is the discussion of 'knower of worlds'—not referring to supernatural realms, but the psychological worlds we create: hell realms of depression, animal realms of intoxication, hungry ghost realms of greed, and divine realms of anger or bliss. Through vipassanā practice, we learn to see these states arising and find liberation from them.*
>
> *The talk concludes with the Buddha as the incomparable trainer who gave us the precepts, the ten pāramī, and the four brahmavihāras, ultimately teaching only two things: dukkha and its cessation. A perfect foundation for understanding why we take refuge in the Buddha.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa - Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

First of all, many thanks to Donatella who is translating for me, honeying my words with her angelic voice.

I'm going to give a talk on the qualities of the Buddha, the nine qualities. This is what we chant when we do puja. This evening I will talk about the nine qualities of the Buddha, which we refer to when we intone the puja. We chant that in the morning.

The first quality is *Arahant*. It means accomplished, somebody who is worthy of respect. Now, what the commentators do is they begin to separate the word to give it more meaning. The one that makes sense to me is the division between Ari and Hatta. It means he destroyed his enemies. Now the enemies, of course, are the defilements. The defilements are listed as ten, but actually in the scriptures it just means anything that is

unwholesome within our personality. Such a person has no secret evil. He can say with the Buddha, with all the enlightened people, that birth is destroyed and the holy life has been lived. What had to be done has been done. There is no more rebirth for me. So whenever we say Arahant, that's what we mean.

The second one is *Samma Sambuddho*, which means self-enlightened. This is the crucial role that the first person plays for us. Somebody must have planted the first wheat. Somebody must have created the wheel. We know that Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing climbed Everest. Once they did it, everybody else can do it, even the dogs. In other words, the one who initiates, who begins something, has a special place within our praise. The first person, the one who started all this, has a special place in what we attribute to him, in the blessings we wish him. He is the founder of our tradition. Without him there simply wouldn't be any Buddhism.

The next quality is endowed with clear vision, or we can say direct understanding, and virtuous conduct. This means that he has understood the cause of our problems and of course of his own problems. Because of that his actions are always virtuous. Remember that everything begins from this misunderstanding. It's a misunderstanding as to who we are. Presuming ourselves to be human beings, that's all, we seek happiness in the sensual world. This creates what we call an attachment, which means we are dependent on the sensual world to make us happy. This leads us to certain unfortunate qualities: greed, aversion and fear, and all the rest of human misery. In other words, he is somebody who has understood the path and understands it to be a path of purification.

The next quality is translated as someone who has completed a journey. This includes all the training that he went through with his two teachers and his own discovery of the path. Don't forget that he also did some very severe mortification exercises. In other words, by practicing in the wrong paths, he eventually found the right path. This often happens to us. First you make mistakes and then you find the right way to do something.

The next one is a seer of the worlds. This does not refer specifically to seeing other realms of being. This is to do with the worlds that we create. These are the ones that we manufacture, our little universes. Sometimes we're in the hell realm, when we're depressed and upset. Sometimes we were in the animal realm, when we used to get drunk, but we don't do that anymore. Then there's the hungry ghost realm, when we are very greedy. Sometimes we're in the human realm, where we have some sort of intelligence, some sort of wisdom. Occasionally we get lost in anger and we become angry gods. Of course occasionally we are bathing in absolute wonderful joy and pleasure.

These are the worlds that we create within ourselves. Somehow we have to go beyond these worlds. That's what we do whenever we practice *vipassanā*. Because when we practice *vipassanā* we can see these worlds appearing in front of us.

The next translates literally as a coachman driving an ox or a horse. It translates better as an incomparable trainer of trainees. Of course he has left us certain rules and regulations that we can follow. On the negative side there are the five precepts, the eight precepts. Then of course for the monastic life, all the rules of the Vinaya. On the positive side, he's given us the ten perfections and the four Brahma Viharas, the four great illimitables: love, compassion, joy and equanimity.

The next one is, he is a teacher of gods and men, gods and human beings. This, of course, refers to the Dharma, all the teachings of the Dharma. Of course, the practice of Vipassanā, of all the absorption techniques, and how to live the spiritual life in ordinary daily life.

Number eight is *buddho* which is the one who knows. This is simply saying that he knows how we create the world of *samsāra*, the world of ongoing, and the escape. Remember he said he only taught two things: *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is all the miseries that you can think of.

The final quality is *Bhagavā*, which means exalted, sublime. It's an honorific, like we say of the Dalai Lama, his holiness.

So those nine qualities: he has accomplished and has destroyed all his defilements. He was self-awakened. He has a clear understanding of our situation and because of that virtuous conduct. He has completed the journey and he did it skillfully. He knows all the worlds that we can create and how to get out of them. He's a wonderful trainer, a coach, a life coach. He's also a great teacher. He has penetrated the human condition, he is the Buddha. Therefore we consider him to be exalted, sublime and blessed.

I hope my words have been of some assistance. That I have not caused confusion. And that by your devotion to the path you will be liberated sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 208

The Buddha and War

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

In this thought-provoking talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's encounters with warfare and conflict, drawing crucial distinctions between pacifism as an ideology and non-violence as a way of relating to all beings. Through historical accounts from the Pāli Canon, he explores three key episodes: the Buddha's mediation between the Sākyan and Kolyan tribes over water rights, his repeated attempts to dissuade Viḍūḍabha from attacking Kapilavatthu, and his indirect counsel regarding Ajātasattu's plans to conquer the Vajji Confederacy.

The talk reveals how the Buddha never explicitly commanded people what to do regarding war, but instead pointed to fundamental principles about karma and the cultivation of wholesome states of mind. Bhante emphasizes that it is nearly impossible to kill without aversion in the heart, and such actions inevitably create unwholesome karma. He also discusses the practical realities the Buddha faced, having monks and nuns spread throughout various kingdoms, requiring diplomatic wisdom.

Drawing connections to later Buddhist warrior traditions like the Shaolin monks and samurai, Bhante illustrates how defensive martial arts developed within Buddhist contexts while maintaining the principle of acting without hatred. This nuanced exploration offers practitioners guidance for understanding their own relationship to conflict while remaining grounded in the Buddha's core teaching: the complete liberation from suffering through ethical conduct and mental purification.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

I'm going to start off with just a little talk about the Buddha and war. The first thing is to make a distinction between pacifism and nonviolence.

So pacifism is an ideology. And ideologies like communism and neoliberalism always work on some sort of idea of how things ought to be. And therefore they lose connection with what's actually happening. And as Marx said about capitalism, it has the seeds of its own destruction. So you can say that of any ideology.

Non-violence is an attitude. It's a way of relating to all beings.

There are several stories that have been told about the Buddha who came into contact with war. The first one is an argument between the Sakians, his own people, and the people on the other side of the river, the Coleans. This argument over water rights was moving towards a war between the two tribes.

So the Buddha heard about it and he went up there to try and help with the rights of the water. And he basically asked them what was more precious, the water in the river or the blood in their veins? Well, that brought them to the table and they were able to discuss the situation calmly and the problem disappeared.

Now there was a more serious situation with Viduddha Bhat. So he was the son of Passenadi. And Passenadi was a very committed supporter of the Buddha. So Viduddha wanted to marry into the Sakya. The Sakya were already vassals to the king of Kosala. They were subjects. And so he married one of the Sakyan princesses.

However, he came to know that in fact she wasn't a princess at all, but belonged to the lowest of all the castes. Well, he was very angry, so he got his army together to go and destroy the Sakians. He had his elephants and his cavalry, his chariots and his infantry.

When the Buddha heard this, he went to see him. Now, we don't know what the Buddha said to him, but I would think it was along the lines of this is not going to create good *kamma* for you.

So Viduddha took his advice and went home. No sooner had he got home than he got angry again and got back on his elephant. So the Buddha appeared again and seemed to have convinced him to turn back. As soon as he got back, he got angry and he got back on his elephant. Again, the Buddha came and again convinced him that this was not a good idea, so he went back home.

But unfortunately as soon as he got home he got angry and he got back on his elephant. This time when they asked the Buddha to go again he says it's not going to work, he's committed. So it would seem that he destroyed the capital of the Sakyas, Kapilavatthu. Probably the Sakyans ran off into the jungle for a while. And they set up another capital city. Seemingly, you can actually visit them. One is in India and one is in Nepal.

The final example is to do with Ajatasattu. Ajatasattu was the son of Bimbisara, the king of Magadha. In the same way, Bimbisara had been a very good supporter of the Buddha, but his son just didn't have the same commitment. In fact, Ajatasattu starved his poor old father to death. He locked him in a little room which they say you can still see in Rajgir. It was a small building away from the palace.

Now, he wanted to conquer the Vajji Confederacy. And the peculiar thing is that he sent his chief minister to ask the Buddha whether it was the best time to do so. Now the Buddha, of course, won't tell anybody what to do. All he does is point to principles and you are left to make the decision.

Now what he did was to describe the qualities of a strong community. And he was really talking about the monastics, the monks and nuns. So Vassacaro and the king assumed that he was hinting that the Vajjis were a strong people. So he didn't attack them. He sent in the CIA. And in order to bribe and set one people against another. And when the time was right, he went in with his army to keep the peace.

So, some writers say that the Buddha would support a defensive war. But there's no indication in the scriptures that he either encouraged or discouraged anybody from war as such.

And he was in a tricky position. Because the monks and nuns had spread throughout the whole of North India. If he had supported one king against the other, then you can imagine all the monks and nuns in the territory of the king he did not support would be kicked out.

Now, this does make the Buddha sound, it does sound a little cynical of the Buddha. But he was grounded in reality, realpolitik. So there must have been some concern about the monks and nuns. But I think the main thing is that he never told people what to do. He was only concerned with getting across those principles that are necessary to bring suffering to an end.

So I can only presume that when the question of war came up, it was always pointing to that person and saying, if you go to war, you will create bad *kamma* for yourself. Because it's very difficult to kill another human being unless you have aversion in the heart.

Now we have the example of the Shaolin Kung Fu monks in China. So in China, if the emperor didn't like Buddhists, they would be persecuted, and the next emperor would like Buddhists and they were okay. So the Shaolin monks began to develop a form of fighting which was defensive. Not to be overcome by aversion towards the enemy.

This ethos went into Japan from China. And it became part of the samurai code. So the samurai were warriors. And there is a story where a samurai had beaten his opponent, had lifted the sword to cut him in two and then walked away. And when they asked him why he'd walked away, he said, I was angry.

So when it comes to considering what our personal relationship is to war, remember that that is our personal relationship to war. It's not the Buddha's. And all the Buddha would say to you, if you were to ask him, is, can you kill somebody without aversion in your heart? And if you do kill someone with aversion in your heart, then that will bring unwholesome results for yourself.

So, of course, this is not a very straightforward decision between black and white. If you're defending your family, defending the country, then, of course, that particular motivation may be greater than getting rid of the aversion in your heart. Certainly, if you find yourself having to defend your family or your country, and it's left to the individual to decide how they feel or understand they ought to behave.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused greater confusion and that by careful decision-making you will find your way to complete liberation from suffering.

CHAPTER 209

The Buddha as a Teacher

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's exceptional abilities as a teacher, focusing on his skillful methods of instruction and guidance. Drawing from the Cūḷamāluṅkyasutta (MN 63), he explores how the Buddha masterfully handled the monk Māluṅkyāputta's demand for answers to metaphysical questions about the eternality of the world, the nature of the soul, and what happens to a Tathāgata after death.*
>
> *Bhante demonstrates the Buddha's characteristic teaching approach: first listening fully, then restating to ensure understanding, followed by Socratic questioning, and finally using powerful analogies—in this case, the famous parable of the poisoned arrow. This discourse reveals how the Buddha consistently redirected students away from speculative philosophy toward practical spiritual development.*
>
> *The talk highlights how the Buddha refused to engage with questions that don't lead to disenchantment, cessation, peace, and awakening. Instead, he focused on the Four Noble Truths: the reality of dukkha (suffering and unsatisfactoriness), its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to that cessation. This episode offers valuable insights into both the Buddha's pedagogical genius and the practical focus that characterizes authentic Dhamma teaching.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed One, the Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

I'm going to talk about the extraordinary ability of the Buddha to teach. There's no doubt he was a very charismatic person, but that would not necessarily make him a good teacher. He certainly was an extraordinarily charismatic person, but this in itself would not have made him a particularly skilled teacher.

He had the ability to teach large groups—monastics, nuns, and lay people—and adapt his teaching to them. He was especially acute when talking to individuals, catching their moods and opinions, and through various techniques was able to correct their views and practices. He was particularly skillful when he spoke to individuals. He was able to capture their moods, their opinions, and thanks to different techniques, he was able to correct their opinions, their points of view, and also their practice.

Now, he wasn't always successful. A character called Dandapani went away clicking his tongue. It didn't always happen. A certain character called Dandapani walked away shaking his tongue—that is, expressing his disapproval.

The usual way he discussed subjects was to first listen fully to what the other was saying, then he would repeat back to them what they had just said to make sure they both understood. He would correct the person by a Socratic method of questions and answers. Once the Buddha had expressed his position, he would then restate it again clearly, and usually he would add a metaphor or an analogy, as he would say, because some people understand better that way.

Over the next few Buddha celebration days, I hope to take one technique after another and use a discourse to illustrate it.

This is the shorter discourse with Malunkyaputta. Malunkyaputta was the son of Malunkhya, who was married to a relative of the king of Kosala. He became a *samaṇa*, a wandering ascetic. When he heard the Buddha speak, he took ordination under him, but he didn't attain liberation until he was very old.

Now while Malunkyaputta was alone meditating near Savatthi in Jeta's Grove and Anathapindika's monastery, he had been considering the subjects the Buddha would not answer. These were the metaphysical questions of the day, and he came to a decision that if the Buddha didn't give him satisfactory answers to his questions, he would lose confidence and leave the Sangha.

So, in the late afternoon, Malunkyaputta came out of retreat and went to the Buddha. He bowed, sat down to one side, and told the Buddha of his thoughts:

"Venerable Sir, while I was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in my mind. These speculative views have been left undeclared by the Blessed One, set aside and rejected by him. Namely, the world is eternal or the world is not eternal. The world is infinite or the world is finite. The soul is the same as the body, or is the soul one thing and the body another? And after the death of the *Tathāgata*—that's the Buddha—does he exist or after death does he not exist? Or after death does the *Tathāgata* both exist and not exist? Or after death does the *Tathāgata* neither exist nor not exist?"

"Now, if the Blessed One knows, then let the Blessed One declare that to me, and I will lead the holy life under you. If the Blessed One does not know, then it is simple for one who does not know, does not see, to say, 'I do not know, I do not see.' Then I will abandon the training and return to the lay life."

"Well now, Malunkyaputta, did I ever say to you, 'Come Malunkyaputta, lead the holy life under me, and I will declare to you whether I have answers to these questions or not?'"

"No, Venerable Sir."

"And did you ever say to me, 'Venerable Sir, I will lead the spiritual life under the Buddha only if the Buddha will declare these things to me?'"

"No, Venerable Sir."

So now the Buddha makes sure they both agree as to what has been said. "So it seems to me that I did not say to you, 'Come Malunkyaputta, lead the spiritual life under me and I will declare these things to you.' And you never said to me, sir, 'I will lead the spiritual life under the Buddha only if the Buddha will declare these things to me.' In which case, you foolish man, who are you and what are you rejecting?"

"Now, if anyone should say, 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares answers to these questions,' they will still remain undeclared by the *Tathāgata* and meanwhile the person would die."

Now, the Buddha uses his usual technique to support what he's saying with an allegory or a metaphor:

"Suppose, Malunkyaputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. And the man would say, 'I will not let the surgeon pull the arrow out until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble, a brahmin, a merchant, or a worker, whether he was tall or short or middle height, whether the bow was long or a crossbow, what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted with—whether those of a vulture, a heron, a hawk, a peacock, or a stork—and what kind of arrowhead it was that wounded me, whether it spiked, or razor-tipped, or curved, or barbed, or carved-toothed, or lancet-toothed.' All this would still be unknown to that man, and meanwhile he would die."

"So too, Malunkyaputta, if anyone should say, 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares on these questions,' they would still remain undeclared by the *Tathāgata*, and meanwhile that person would die."

Now the Buddha goes on to say that it's not true that the spiritual life cannot be led unless these speculative views are answered, and he reaffirms his position:

"Whether such views are answered or not, there is still birth, there is still ageing, there is still death, there is still sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. And it is the destruction of these, right here and now, that I prescribe for."

"Therefore, Malunkyaputta, remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared as declared. And why have I left them undeclared? Because they are not beneficial. They do not belong to the fundamentals of the spiritual life. They do not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to *Nibbāna*. That is why I have left them undeclared."

"And what have I declared? There is suffering and unsatisfactoriness. There is the origin of suffering and unsatisfactoriness. There is a cessation of suffering and unsatisfactoriness and there is a way leading to the cessation of suffering and unsatisfactoriness."

That is what the Blessed One said, and the Venerable Malunkyaputta was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

So this discourse shows us how the Buddha generally taught by first listening and then probing and then finally stating his teachings and his use of metaphor. He would not be drawn into hypothetical, metaphysical or speculative discussions. They were simply not conducive to the spiritual aim of liberating oneself from *dukkha*, suffering and unsatisfactoriness. The Buddha tells us there is a limit beyond which reason and logic simply cannot go, and which can only be transcended and realised by direct experience.

Finally, the reason he refused to answer questions about himself—what happened to him after he died—was that these questions invariably arose from some idea of a self that would either exist or not exist, exist and not exist, and neither exist nor not exist.

I hope this little talk has been of some assistance, that it has not caused confusion. That by your careful practice and reading you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 210

What Was the Buddha's Great Discovery?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a fundamental question at the heart of Buddhist practice: what exactly did the Buddha discover? He challenges materialist interpretations that deny the transcendent dimension of Nibbāna, exploring the Buddha's self-designation as 'Tathāgata'—the Transcendent One who has gone beyond saṃsāra and suffering.*
>
> *The talk centers on the Buddha's famous victory verse from the Dhammapada, where he declares the 'house builder' of self-delusion finally seen and destroyed, and his citta (heart-mind) having attained the unconditioned. Bhante explains the Buddha's linguistic challenge in describing experiences beyond ordinary language, noting how he used familiar terms like citta while pointing to something entirely beyond our conditioned psychology and physicality. Drawing on the Udāna Sutta's inspired utterances, he presents the Buddha's via negativa descriptions of Nibbāna—that dimension where there is no earth, water, fire, or wind; no infinite space or consciousness; no coming, going, or remaining; no time or space.*
>
> *Bhante also references the contemporary Thai forest master Ajahn Mahā Boowa's meditation insight: wherever there is a sense of a 'knower' as center, there is the essence of continued becoming. This teaching is brought into practical relevance through the everyday example of waking from sleep—that moment when self-recognition arises and with it, our constructed world. The talk concludes with an invitation to investigate the three characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) in meditation practice as the doorway to discovering this unconditioned dimension for ourselves.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

The question was: what was the Buddha's greatest discovery?

There are many people who follow Buddha Dhamma and receive tremendous benefit from the practice and the teachings, who are themselves some form of materialists, atheists, or scientific materialists. You can understand how they benefit from it, because you don't have to believe anything. That's the great thing about the Buddha Dhamma—you have to explore it yourself. But it does baffle me that some people deny the transcendence of Nibbāna or of the Buddha's achievement.

He himself referred to himself as the Tathāgata, which translates rather badly as "thus gone." But the best translation I've seen is "the transcendent one"—one who has transcended. What has he transcended? Well, he has transcended suffering. He has transcended saṃsāra. But I think it goes much deeper than that.

Involved in this is also perhaps a wrong understanding about the teaching of not-self. In the discourse on the teaching of not-self, he simply asks: if you look at your body, what can you control? We think we are the body. We think we are our emotions, but we find ourselves ruled by everything. There is very little I can do about the lack of hair on my head. It's a bit late anyway. Never mind.

And then there's all that business about impermanence, and if something is impermanent then obviously it cannot be substantial, and so on. I'm sure you all know that.

So what I want to do is look at his victory verse. This is what he says:

Through many births I wandered in saṃsāra, the world of suffering, seeking but not finding the builder of this house. Painful is repeated birth. Oh house builder, you are seen! You will not build this house for me again. All your rafters are broken. The ridge pole is shattered. My mind has attained the unconditioned—achieved the end of craving.

This house, of course, refers to himself—the heart, the psychophysical organism. Here he's using a metaphor for the self: the house builder. Through the house builder, we build this world that we're living in. This is our house.

When you think about it, everything is happening within your body, within the mind. And then we project everything onto the world. It's sort of magical, really. We're in this bubble of consciousness, our own little bubble of consciousness. It's up to us to make it a fairly nice place to live. And we've made mistakes in the past, led by delusion, and made a hash of it to some extent or another.

What he's saying is that once he found the cause of this house that's built—which is the self, this delusive idea of a self—then he was able to escape all the suffering that delusion had made for him.

Now, this word citta: the problem for the Buddha was that he had discovered something for which the language couldn't express, and I'm not so sure any language can. But he was stuck with words that have other meanings. He talks about citta—citta means the mind, the heart-mind. It's the emotional and thought life, what we might understand by the Greek word psyche. But here it's obviously not that, because the psyche

as we know it, the body-heart-mind complex, is conditioned. Yet he says he has attained the unconditioned citta. So he's pointing to something which is beyond our psychology and beyond our physicality.

He reinforces what produced that, which was, of course, the destruction of all the defilements. "My mind has attained the unconditioned." Unconditioned means—or rather, conditioned means—that whatever that is relies on something else for its being there. A tree relies on oxygen. So do we. We rely on food, on being gross physical beings. That's what conditioned actually means. And our minds are conditioned by society, by the things we put into ourselves.

So we're in constant interplay with our environment, which includes other people. But he says this is unconditioned—something that doesn't need anything else. And he calls it the citta, which in a sense gives it a certain substance. Now, he doesn't like doing that. It must have been a bit of a pain for him to say, because that's one reason he doesn't like the self.

This self is the atman of the Brahminical system, which referred to an eternal soul. There was huge confusion at that time as to exactly what it was. There were materialists who said that when you die, that's the end of it. So he was stuck for words, but he clearly states that whatever he experienced, once the house builder had been completely destroyed, was unconditioned.

By the way, Freud, with his insights, had a similar problem. He had to make up words—id, ego, superego.

Now, there's a very famous teacher some of you will know: Ajahn Mahabua. He died not so long ago and was understood to be an Arahant. He definitely said of himself that he no longer suffered. In one meditation—and I think this might have been the point of his release from suffering—he's in that place of just observing. And he says this Dharma, this teaching, arose in him spontaneously: "If there is a point or a center of a knower in meditation, anywhere, that is the agent of birth, the essence of continual becoming."

And that's exactly what the Buddha discovered himself. It's something that we also will discover in time: whenever the self arises, the world arises, and we go into that world which, unless we are completely purified of defilements, is a cause of suffering for us, a cause of unsatisfactoriness.

This isn't something ethereal. Every time we wake up in the morning, that process happens. You wake up and immediately recognize yourself. Many of you, I'm sure, have experienced waking up in a strange room—in a hotel or somewhere—and you don't

know where you are. Just for that one moment there's this little frisson, this little burst of fright. You don't know who you are. And then suddenly it's you, and you feel safe again and happy. That moment is telling us that there is a point as we wake up in the morning where we take on this sense of self.

I just want to point out another way that he describes Nibbana. This comes from the inspired sayings, the Udana Sutta. It opens by saying that at one time the Buddha was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove at Anathapindika's monastery, and he was educating, encouraging, firing up, and inspiring the mendicants with a Dharma talk about extinguishment. What we have to be clear about is what is actually extinguished. These mendicants were paying attention, applying the mind, concentrating wholeheartedly, and actively listening.

Then, understanding this matter, on that occasion the Buddha expressed this heartfelt sentiment:

"There is, O mendicants, that dimension where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no wind." So there's none of the four basic elements. That means there's nothing physical. "No dimension of infinite space, no dimension of infinite consciousness, no dimension of nothingness, no dimension of neither perception nor non-perception."

Those are the four arupa jhanas, the non-material absorptions, which is the most refined state that the mind can get into—where there's nothing in the mind of the body at all, not even images of the body. So there's nothing from the physicality and there's nothing all the way through the mind.

"There is no this world, no other world, no moon, no sun." There's nothing there at all. "There, mendicants, I say, there is no coming, no going, or remaining, or passing away, or reappearing." So there's no time and there's no space. "Just this is the end of suffering."

And he uses the word "dimension." This is another way that he describes consciousness. Ayatana comes up in the dependent origination and is normally translated as the consciousnesses based on the sense bases. So you have eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, and so forth. And you have heart-mind consciousness. In the five khandhas, this consciousness is just a screen upon which information arises.

And that screen is dependent upon those six sense spaces. He's saying that there is a dimension that is beyond all of that. And he often refers to it as nibbana.

I'll leave you with a final one. We've just got a bit of time here. So again, the mendicants are paying attention. They're applying the mind, concentrating wholeheartedly, and actively listening. And this is probably the most famous statement, or the most well-known, shall we say:

There is that which is never born, never lived, was never created or bound by conditions. If there was not that which was never born, never lived, was never created or bound by conditions, there would be no escape from that which is ever born, ever lived, ever created and bound by conditions. But since there is that which is never born, never lived, never created or bound by conditions, there is an escape from that which is born, ever lived, ever created and bound by conditions.

And that's really his chosen way of expressing the transcendent—by telling you what it's not. And of course, it's up to us now in our meditation practice to turn our attention towards those three characteristics. Because that's where we will ourselves discover this dimension—to see impermanence, to really see it, and to see that there is a mechanism in us. This desire, which is born out of the self, is an expression of the self causing all these problems. And that sense of not me, not mine.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your diligent practice you will indeed break through the delusion and attain nibbana sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 211

Nibbāna: The Kevaddha Sutta and the Luminous Consciousness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Kevaddha Sutta's unique teaching on nibbāna through the story of a monk who seeks to know where the four great elements (earth, water, fire, wind) cease without remainder. The monk journeys through increasingly sublime divine realms—from the Four Great Kings to Brahmā himself—only to find that none of these gods possess the answer to his question.

The Buddha redirects the inquiry, explaining that the question itself is wrongly framed. Rather than asking where the elements cease, one should ask where they 'find no footing.' The answer points to a consciousness that is 'signless, non-manifestive, limitless, all-illuminating'—a luminous knowing beyond the five aggregates where nāma-rūpa (name-and-form) come to an end.

Bhante explores this rare scriptural description of nibbāna in positive terms, contrasting it with the more common via negativa approach. He addresses the apparent paradox of consciousness ceasing while a transcendent consciousness remains, offering insights into the profound not-self (anattā) realization where all mundane experience disappears yet luminous awareness persists. This teaching bridges early Buddhist descriptions of the unconditioned with later Yogācāra developments, making it essential study for serious practitioners seeking to understand the ultimate goal of the path.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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

I'm continuing what we did last time, which is to talk about *Nibbāna*. That's the short and straight of it.

Here I'm going to go through a discourse which is addressed by the Buddha to a certain monk called Kevaddha. As we go through it, you'll see what it's all about.

He says to Kevaddha: there was a monk in this community of monks, the Sangha, where a thought arose in his awareness. Where do these four great elements—the earth property, the liquid property, that's cohesive elasticity; the fire property, that's heat and

cold; and the wind property, that's movement or stillness or stiffness, the earth property being heavy or light—where do they cease without remainder? In other words, where are they annihilated?

Then he attained such a state of concentration that the way leading to the gods appeared in his focused mind. So he approached the gods—these seem to be the lowest of them, the retinue of the four great kings. He said, "Friends, where do these four great elements, the earth element, liquid, fire and wind element cease without remainder?" When he had said this, they said to him, "Well, we also don't know where these four great elements cease without remainder. But there are the four great kings themselves who are higher and more sublime."

So off he goes to try and find these four great kings. When he does, they also say, "We also don't know where these four great elements come to an end, cease without remainder." So they suggest that he go a little higher to the gods of the Thirty-Three. When they arrive there, they also say, "Well, we don't know, but Sakka, the ruler of the gods, who is higher and more sublime than we, will know."

In this way, they go up and up through the Yama gods and the Suyama gods and the Santusita gods and the Nimmanarati gods and the Sunamita gods. They're going higher and higher and they're all saying the same thing: "I don't know what it is but somebody upstairs knows better." You can see this is getting to be a bit of a satire.

Then finally the Paranimmita Vasavatti, who was the chief of the Paranimmita gods, said, "Why don't you go and approach the retinue of Brahma?" When he approaches them, they said, "Of course, well, we don't know, but Brahma himself will know."

Brahma was the Vedic creator god. You can see here that it's beginning to be a bit of a satire on the way the Brahmins would believe or teach about these various gods, but especially the role of Brahma, who was the creator, the starter of all things.

This particular monk approaches Brahma and he also asks, "Where do these four great elements cease without remainder?" He meets this Brahma—actually, just going back a little bit—he says that a light shines forth and a radiance appears and Brahma will appear, for these are the portents of Brahma's appearance. Light shines forth and a radiance appears.

So Brahma appears and the monk approaches the great Brahma and says, "Friend, where do these four great elements cease without remainder?" The great Brahma replies, "I, monk, am Brahma, the great Brahma, the conqueror, the unconquered, the all-seeing, the all-powerful, the sovereign Lord, maker, creator, chief, appointer, ruler, father of all that has been and shall be."

The monk says to him, "Friend, I didn't ask you if you were Brahma, the great Brahma, the conqueror, the unconquered, and so on and so forth. I asked you, where do the four great elements cease without remainder?"

Well, poor old Brahma, he goes off again with his string of attributes: "I am Brahma, the maker, creator, chief, appointer, ruler," and so on. So again, he asks him, only this time, the great Brahma, taking the monk by the arm and leading him off to the side, said to him, "These gods of the retinue of Brahma believe there is nothing that the great Brahma does not know. There is nothing the great Brahma does not see. There is nothing the great Brahma is unaware of. There is nothing that the great Brahma has not realized. That is why I did not say in their presence that I too don't know where the four great elements cease without remainder.

"So you've acted wrongly. You've acted incorrectly in bypassing the Blessed One in search of an answer to this question elsewhere. Go right back to the Blessed One and on arrival, ask him this question. However he answers it, you should take it to heart."

Then because of his powers, as a man might flex his arm, he appears from the Brahma world before the Buddha.

We've been all the way up through all these higher heavens, these sublime places, and he just doesn't have an answer. Now, when he comes back down, interestingly enough, the Buddha says this to him:

"Once, monk, some seafaring merchants took a shore-sighting bird and set sail in their ship. When they could not see the shore, they released the shore-sighting bird. It flew to the east, south, west, north, straight up, and to all the intermediate points of the compass. If it saw a shore in any direction, it flew there. If it did not see the shore in any direction, it returned right back to the ship. In the same way, monk, having gone as far as the Brahma world in search of an answer to your question, you have come right back to my presence."

It suggests that perhaps there were monks in the order, monks and nuns, monastics, who were still, as it were, going for advice to the Brahmins, especially if they were Brahmins themselves. I don't know what it actually means, but it's an odd thing to admonish this poor monk.

Anyway, what he says to this monk is: "Your question should not be phrased in this way: 'Where do these four great elements, the earth element, liquid element, fire element and wind element cease without remainder?' Instead, it should be phrased like

this: 'Where do earth, water, fire and air find no footing? Where are long and short, small and great, fair and foul? Where are name and form, body and mind brought to an end?'"

And the answer is this: "Consciousness that is signless, non-manifestive, limitless, without boundary and all-illuminating in all directions, full of light. There water, earth, fire and wind find no footing. There long and short, small and large, pleasant and unpleasant. There name and form, body and mind have all been brought to an end. With the cessation of consciousness, all is brought to an end."

Now we have a problem. The Buddha is a little bit like really any person who suddenly sees something which is beyond the culture, which is something which is new to the culture. They're always scrabbling for new words. An obvious example would be Freud, who had to come up with id, ego and superego to get across his model of the human mind.

Here he's using consciousness in two different ways. The first consciousness is the one that is going to cease, is going to come to an end. This is the consciousness that the Buddha describes by sense bases: there's eye consciousness, there's ear consciousness, nose consciousness, mind consciousness. This consciousness belongs to the five aggregates, which are the body or our physicality, all our feelings driven by both the body and emotions, all our perceptions and the *saṅkhāras*, these habits of thought, habits of actions, which we remember create through an act of will, and this consciousness. This consciousness is like a screen upon which this information arises. That's the consciousness which disappears. That's the consciousness which can experience these four great elements. He goes as far as to say that even the mind and the body also are brought to an end. But this is not a final end. It's where they find no footing.

Then he describes this experience, which has to be the experience of Nibbāna. He says there's a consciousness, so there's a knowing, which is non-manifested. The word is *nidassanaṃ*, cannot be seen. What cannot be seen? What cannot be felt? It stands for all the sense bases. It is limitless. It doesn't have a boundary. It's not dependent on anything. Interestingly, it is all-illuminating, or in another translation, in all directions full of light. It is here that the earth, the fire, the wind and water elements find no footing.

What we have here is, again, a restatement that there is a mundane experience that we have through this form of body and mind. And there is something which sits within it, but beyond it. When we experience what is beyond in its purity, then what is mundane, the body and mind, do not appear. That really is one of the most profound

experiences of not-self. Because everything that we experience, we tend to associate with either by way of identity or possession. But here, everything's gone, and yet there remains this luminous consciousness.

Just as a reminder, going back to the early quotes of last month, here he says there's a dimension where there's no earth, no water, no fire, no wind. He's saying the same thing here, but he's not actually telling us what it is. He's telling us what's not there. He says no dimension of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, neither perception nor non-perception. There's none of those higher states of mind that we refer to as the *jhāna,* the absorptions. There's not this world or another world. There's no moon, no sun. I say there's no coming or going, remaining or passing away or reappearing. There's absolutely nothing there which is either phenomenal or physical.

Then we have this other quote, which again tells us what's not there: "There is that which is unborn"—this is how it's translated—"unborn, undying, uncreated, uncompounded," which means it's unconditioned. There is something which was never born. It's never died. It was never created, doesn't develop, and is not bound by any conditions.

We've had these statements now both of the negative—what is not in Nibbāna—but also this very positive statement about an experience that is nibbanic. This is only quoted twice within the whole of the scriptures and it doesn't appear in the *Udāna* collection, which are a collection of his inspired verses. So there's some filtering going on.

Just as an aside, in the Mahāyāna when Buddhism developed into the Mahāyāna, there was a school, the Yogācāra school, that actually has a transcendent—that's what they call it—a transcendent Abhidhamma, and it's based upon this particular phrase, this particular verse that we've just been reading.

This does not complete the mystery of Nibbāna, unfortunately, and there's more to be said, and I'll find some time in order to talk about it.

I can only hope these words have been of assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your careful investigation through your practice of *vipassanā,* you will attain this particular experience.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

CHAPTER 212

The Nature of Nibbāna and the Path to Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's description of nibbāna as "consciousness in which nothing is manifest, with no boundary and full of light in all directions" - the place where the world finds no footing. Through two illuminating metaphors, he explores how we can liberate ourselves from the self-deception created by Māra, the deluded self or "house builder."*
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> *The first metaphor draws parallels between infant development and vipassanā practice - how babies gradually create objects and spatial awareness from overwhelming sensory input, similar to how meditators distance their intuitive awareness (sati) from mental and physical phenomena. The second uses the myth of Narcissus to illustrate how awareness catches its own reflection in the pool of consciousness, only to drown in self-absorption until the Buddha's method rescues us.*
>
> *Bhante presents specific techniques for investigating the nature of self-awareness itself, recognizing it as the very portal into the world of the six senses. The talk concludes with the remarkable testimony of Meichi Kiao, an unlettered village woman who achieved complete liberation, describing her direct experience of the "unborn and undying" awareness that remains untouched by all conditioned phenomena. This teaching offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for recognizing our true nature beyond the aggregates and sense bases.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa - Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

This evening, the presentation is a little different because I've actually written something. So it's not going to be particularly verbatim, which is my normal way of presenting.

In the last two talks, we looked at, first of all, the Buddha's victory verse and his naming of the householder, which is to say that deluded self, which is Māra. When we talk about Māra, the evil tempter, that's the self, the deluded self. Then we went on - the next presentation was about a monk who wanted to know where all the world ended. And the Buddha tells him that this is badly phrased, that it should be where the world does not find a footing. And then he gives a very clear description of that place where the

world does not find a footing. And this is it: There is a consciousness in which nothing is manifest. It has no boundary and is full of light in all directions. So we can understand this to be a description of *Nibbāna*.

Now our task is to find a way to practice in such a way that this might become manifest to us. But before we do that, I'd like to offer these metaphors, these ways of thinking about what we're doing so we can understand the process of liberating ourselves from self-deception, which is generated by this deluded self, this house builder.

Some of you have been to Satipañña to work with me and have heard all this before, but I'm hoping that you've forgotten it. And if you haven't forgotten it, you'll excuse my presentation because I just wanted it to be in this medium.

The first metaphor is to recognise what happens to us when we're babies. It has a similarity to the process of insight meditation. For the first four months of our lives, it seems, we're bombarded by sensual information and can make no head or tail of it. But we do know when we're experiencing what is pleasant or unpleasant. That is the dual world that we enter into. Then around four months, we start to delineate our first object out of this bewildering mass, and in so doing, we create the third dimension of depth. And it's usually out of this that we find our first object - our mother, our carer.

The process continues until around the age of three, when we're pretty clear that I'm not anything outside my body. My body and my sense of me are separate from everyone and everything. And I know my toys belong to me. They're mine. A very strong sense of possession. There's still a great connection to Mother, but what we've done is we've distanced the outer world from the inner world.

Our practice is to distance this inner world from the intuitive awareness. Every time we experience a feeling or sensation, an emotion or mood, a thought or an image as an object, we're telling ourselves that this cannot be the awareness that knows it. The knower, the feeler, the experiencer experiences itself as quite other to everything it knows, feels and experiences.

That's what happens when we turn everything into an object. Just as the baby creates a third dimension by reaching out, and so creating distance, so we're pushing away what we are overwhelmed with - our sensations, feelings, and thoughts. And that distance between the object and the awareness is the inner third dimension.

The second metaphor that I like to use is one of Narcissus. As you remember, Narcissus was a handsome, beautiful young man. He looked into the pool, caught the image of his own face, fell in love with it, and then went to embrace it and fell in and drowned. This is understood as a myth about self-absorption, pride, vanity, conceit. Water in mythology often represents life and creation, as well as chaos and purification.

However, we can read this myth spiritually. It is that *sati*, the intuitive awareness - I notice, not AI - that catches its image on the screen of consciousness. Consciousness itself is that screen upon which the six senses manifest. That is why consciousness is defined by the sense base: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, mind consciousness and so on.

Every morning we wake up, the first thing we are aware of is ourselves, our self-awareness. I'm sure you'll have had the experience of waking up in an unfamiliar room at a hotel or friends. And for those first few seconds, you can't recognise where you are and so who you are. There's a momentary panic till we situate ourselves. So it is that *sati* sees itself, senses itself in the pool of the mind, the pool of the world that the mind is creating, and then we drown in it.

However, the Buddha has come to the rescue and offered us a methodology to resuscitate ourselves. We must drag Narcissus out of the water, sitting back on the bank of the pool. And so it is that in vipassanā, we draw our awareness out of the body and mind with its feelings, perceptions and habits, and we experience ourselves as the one who knows.

In this, our basic identity begins to change - where we base our identity. As children, our identity is very body-centred. We have that experience when we bite our tongues when we're eating. Just for that singular moment of the stabbing pain, we're absorbed into it and become a physical self. We then very quickly bounce out of it and are annoyed with ourselves and so become an emotional self. We then might reflect upon it and counsel ourselves to eat more slowly and mindfully, and so we become a thinking self. But this position of the observer, the feeler, transcends them all. It can be aware of all the experiences the body and heart-mind have.

Then we might acknowledge more and more clearly the distinction between the object and the subject. This takes us back to the distancing, the disidentifying process of the baby and young child. And this takes us a step further to investigate the nature of this identity of the self as the observer and the feeler. For having accessed within ourselves this inner position - called by Nyanaponika Thera in his classic work, still worthy of a read, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, an observation post - from this ob-

servation post, we can see clearly that the body and heart-mind, the emotions and thought life, continue of themselves without the engagement of this self-awareness that we now experience ourselves to be.

Now we have a situation where the self-awareness sees the body as other and that the body keeps on being the body with its sensations and feelings. The emotions and moods still continue to arise and the thoughts and images continue to flit across the mind. None of it needing the direct control of *sati*, this intuitive awareness. So we're left with the question as to the nature of this self-awareness.

Our investigation now turns towards the self-awareness, that sense of presence. Since we're aware of it, that makes it an object. So we can't be it. Worse, we realise that this identity is the very portal into the world manufactured by the six senses, the five physical senses and the heart-mind. This is the face in the pool. Indeed, this primary self is Māra, the evil tempter, inviting us into the pleasures and joys of the world, only to find ourselves entangled, ensnared and imprisoned. This is the house builder the Buddha discovered to be the agent of rebirth, the root of all our discontent and suffering.

Now there's a practice which is pretty specific to this investigation. And I'm indebted - well, we are indebted - to the Mahāyāna school for this. When the body is very still and the heart calm and the mind is silent - now admittedly that's pretty rare in our daily lives, though it does arise on retreat - we can raise our attention into that feeling of presence located in the forehead. We can stay there to the exclusion of everything else and again just gaze.

We now know because we are aware of that sense of self, it is an object and therefore belongs to the mind. So it must be arising and passing away, even though it seems to be coexistent with the awareness that knows it. Remember, consciousnesses are flashing at enormous speeds so that they give us a sense of continuity. We need to hold that position as best we can without straining, just gazing with wonder. Is that sense of self arising and passing away? That is all. Just to gaze with wonder. Presume that the awareness knows what it's looking for.

The other technique is the one that we usually use when we're practising vipassanā. And that involves directly investigating the process of impermanence. Whenever we see an object, whether it's a sensation or a feeling, mood or emotion, thought or image appearing and disappearing, the same applies. The *sati*, this observer, this feeler, that experiences the object arising and passing away, cannot itself be arising and passing

away. That gap, minute as it is, between the passing of an object and the arising of another, would also constitute a glimpse into our true nature, which is unborn, undying, uncreated and unconditioned.

We can sum up the techniques by first of all pulling away from the object we are aware of, so it becomes something to observe and feel, remembering that the perceiver cannot be the perceived. This is the first step of not me, not mine, not self. Then, the direct experience of the appearance and disappearance of the object allows *sati* to experience itself as other, whole, entire and permanent. Slowly but surely, this intuitive awareness, *satipaññā*, becomes an island unto itself, impervious to the physical and mental worlds. This is where the very world cannot find a footing.

Fortunately, we have an example of someone who describes what it's like to be fully liberated from the delusion of self. This actually warrants a talk, but for our present purpose, it's enough to quote her. I'm presuming for the time being that you know the categories that the Buddha teaches: the four great elements, the six sense bases, and the five aggregates.

Mae Chi Kiao was an ordinary, barely educated village girl who died in 1991 at the age of 90. This is her statement: "Body, mind and essence are all distinct and separate realities. Absolutely everything is known. Earth, water, fire and wind. Body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. Sounds, sights, smells, tastes and touches and emotions. Anger, greed and delusion - all are known. I know them all as they exist in their own natural states. But no matter how much I'm exposed to them, I am unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart. They arise and cease, they're forever changing, but the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of all suffering."

I can only hope my little homily has been of interest and that by your dedication to the practice you will be liberated from all suffering, like Mae Chi Kiao, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 213

Contemplating the Unpleasantness of the Body (Asubha)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *In this contemplative teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the asubha practice—meditation on the unpleasant or unattractive aspects of the body—drawing from the Girimānanda Sutta. He explains that the purpose of this contemplation is not to develop disgust, but to undermine our mistaken identification with the body as something we possess or fundamentally are. This wrong relationship, expressed in statements like "I have a headache" or "I am ill," leads to suffering (dukkha).*
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> *Before beginning the contemplation, Bhante emphasizes the preciousness of human birth and the body's essential role in our spiritual journey—it is through the body that we experience the world, communicate, create good kamma, and practice meditation. He offers a touching practice of apologizing to the body for any harm done through greed, hatred, and delusion. The talk then moves through the traditional list of body parts from the Pāli texts, inviting practitioners to notice their reactions and question whether feelings of disgust are truly necessary.*
>
> *Bhante also shares the sobering story from the Vinaya of how this teaching, when given without proper balance, led some monks to take their own lives—prompting the Buddha to establish the first pārājika rule and to teach jhāna practice as a complementary method. The session concludes with a beautiful counter-practice of offering gratitude to each part of the body, creating a balanced approach that neither clings to nor rejects this precious vehicle for liberation.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

This evening I thought we would have a look at the contemplation of the body. The Buddha actually offers us quite a few ways of doing this, but I'm going to focus on the asubha contemplations, which translates as the repulsive or unpleasant parts of the body. It's going to be really wonderful.

The purpose of this exercise is to undermine our wrong relationship to the body, whereby we own it—something that we have or that we are. We say things like, "I have a headache" or "I've got weak knees." But then, of course, we also say, "I am ill." So

there's this dual relationship we have, both of which happen to be wrong and lead us to suffering. That's the purpose of the exercise. There are other purposes, but I'll mention them towards the end.

It's good to begin such an exercise by reminding ourselves how precious this life is. Here we experience joy and woe, just like animals do, but we have this developed intelligence, this intuitive intelligence, which has come, according to Buddhism, through countless births. Because of that, we're in this place and we're able to make our way out of suffering.

There are other realms, which you can also think of as mental states. The hell realm includes people who are deeply depressed or experiencing one of the more severe mental illnesses. There's the animal realm, where people get drunk. There's the insatiable hungry ghost realm, where people chase money all the time. There's the human realm, of course. And then there are the angry gods—unfortunately, we've got lots of experience of that at the moment with Ukraine and Gaza and Sudan. Finally, there are the happy gods, all those multi-billionaires sitting on their yachts. In those areas, there's not much hope of finding liberation because nothing is pushing them. It's this lovely place of being both happy and unhappy, and an inability to maintain that happiness, that leads us to seek the end of it all.

Obviously we can't be here without a body—that's number one. It's through the senses that we experience the world. Virtually everything we come to know has come through the senses. It's through the body we relate, communicate, and express ourselves. Through the body we work, we do things, we help others—in other words, creating good karma. And in virtually every meditation technique, the body is always central to the process.

So before we go into these asubha contemplations, these disgusting contemplations, it's always good to apologize to the body for any harm we've done it. I have this little verse which you can repeat after me, and that gives you a starting point for this sort of contemplation.

Just closing your eyes for a moment: "Whatever harm I have done to you in thought, word and deed, by way of greed, hatred and delusion, intentionally or unintentionally, I'm heartily sorry for it, and I determine from this day on to treat you with due care and respect."

This puts us into a good relationship with the body.

Now, this is what the Buddha tells us in the Dhammapada: "Having understood that this body is like foam, having realized its mirage-like nature, having cut off Mara's flower-tipped arrows, one should make himself invisible to the king of death."

These flower-tipped arrows are the little pushes we get—just for that extra bit of cake, do this, do that—led by greed. And then he says: "Knowing that this body is like foam, fully awake to the mirage-like nature, cutting off Mara's flowers, one goes unseen by the king of death." In other words, once we've cut out our wrong relationship with the world, we can presume that dying will no longer be something to be feared.

I'm taking this exercise from the Girimananda Sutta. It concerns Girimananda, who is sick. Ananda has gone to the Buddha and asked, "What can we do for him?"

Examining our body from the soles of the feet and down from the tips of the hair, we proceed downward: the hair on the body, the nails, teeth, skin, muscles, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, spleen, lungs, intestines, bowels, undigested food, bile, pus, fat, tears, blood, saliva, snot, feces, stools, and urine.

Now, if you encountered some sense of disgust with any of these, bring it back to mind and get in touch with that relationship. What does disgust really feel like? And then ask yourself: is it necessary? Can we change our relationship to it by seeing it differently? Through understanding its function, its biological purpose, its scientific reality?

In this way, we come to accept the body just as it is.

But then the Buddha reminds us of all the things that can go wrong. And this is meant, of course, to give us that *saṃvega*—that sense of urgency to continue our practice.

This body has much suffering and many drawbacks. This body is beset with many kinds of affliction, such as the following: diseases of the eye, the inner ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the head, the outer ear, the mouth, the teeth and lips. There is cough and asthma, catarrh, inflammation, fever, stomachache, fainting, dysentery, gastric pain, cholera, leprosy, boils, eczema, tuberculosis, epilepsy, herpes, itch, scabs, smallpox, scabies, hemorrhages, diabetes, piles, pimples, ulcers, and cancer. Afflictions stemming from disorders of bile, phlegm, wind, or their conjunction. Afflictions caused by changing weather, by not taking care of ourselves, by overexertion, or as a result of past deeds—cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, and urination.

And so he asks us to meditate observing the drawbacks of this body. It is simply recognizing that the body is subject to disease, that it has not gone beyond disease, that it is of a nature to fall ill. This contemplation is meant to help us begin to see the body in a different way—to take care of it, but not to be enthralled by it.

By the way, on that list, I added cancer. I don't know whether they had cancer in those days; it's not listed in the original.

Now, what happened was that the Buddha did give this teaching about the unattractiveness of the body, speaking in praise of perceiving unattractiveness and in praise of developing this perception. And he went off then for seclusion for half a month.

When he came out, he said to Ānanda, "Why does the Saṅgha of monks seem so depleted?"

"Because, Lord, the Blessed One with many lines of reasoning gave monks the talk on unattractiveness, spoke in praise of developing the perception of unattractiveness. The monks, thinking 'The Blessed One with many lines of reasoning has given a talk on unattractiveness,' remained committed to developing this perception in many modes and manners. And they, ashamed, repelled, or disgusted with the body, sought for an assassin. In one day, ten monks took the knife. In one day, twenty monks took the knife. In one day, thirty monks took the knife."

"It would be good, Lord, if the Blessed One would explain another method so that this Saṅgha of monks might be established in understanding."

I cannot imagine what the Buddha must have felt when he discovered that this contemplation he had given his monks had driven them to suicide—and seemingly to monks helping others to commit suicide.

In fact, it was on this occasion that he declared the first *pārājika*, which is a rule for monastics that results in the loss of ordination if broken. Anything to do with killing another person became forbidden. Following this tragedy, he gave them the contemplation of *jhāna* instead, to produce beautiful mental states.

Of course, you need time to do that sort of practice. So another approach is offering gratitude to the body.

Before we do that, let me remind you of the purpose of this exercise. It is meant to encourage detachment from the body and especially to undermine that relationship of identity. It can sometimes be used, particularly in the monastic orders, to cool sexual impulses. The idea is that when some erotic thought comes to mind, you remind your-

self that this body is also not particularly attractive, and this allows the sexual energy to die away. If a person were simply to continue developing that disgust of the body, they would lose their sexual impulse completely. The practice also serves to undermine society's emphasis on physical beauty and attractiveness.

So what I am going to ask you to do is go through the body in the same way, from the top of the head all the way down to the toes. As you move downward and visualize each part of the body, simply say thank you. Give it a purpose if you wish. For instance, to the skin you might say, "Thank you for the protection you give this body." Take your time going down, and when you finish, simply move into the meditation.

This is the practice of offering gratitude to the body. I think you will find that all the cells jump up and down with great joy. Finally, their work is being appreciated.

Let us sit in silence and begin moving down through the body, saying thank you to all its different parts.

CHAPTER 214

The Unattractive Nature of the Body

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 29 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma guides us through a profound contemplation based on the Buddha's teaching on the thirty-two parts of the body, designed to cultivate non-attachment while maintaining respect for our physical form. This practice begins by recognizing the preciousness of human birth, then explores our relationship to the body's less attractive aspects as a means of undermining identification and possession.*
>
> *The talk draws from traditional Theravāda contemplations used to develop equanimity toward the body's impermanent nature, while acknowledging its essential role in spiritual practice through the senses and breath meditation. Bhante shares the Buddha's teaching that led some monks to extreme reactions, emphasizing the need for balance in our approach.*
>
> *The session concludes with a gratitude practice, systematically thanking each part of the body for its service - from skin and bones to organs and senses. This creates a healthy balance between detachment and appreciation, helping practitioners develop a mature relationship with their physical form that supports both meditation practice and daily life. The teaching offers practical wisdom for overcoming body-based attachment while maintaining the care and respect necessary for spiritual development.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and self-awakened one.

I thought we'd do another little exercise this evening. We've done a few in the past couple of years. And this one is basically based on the body. So the body in the Buddha's teaching is just part and parcel of it. And he wants us really to undermine our identification with it, our possession of it. We'll say things like, "I have a headache." See, I have a headache. So somebody has a headache. But of course, "I am ill." So there's a bit of confusion there as to how we relate to this body of ours.

One thing he puts to us is to really come to terms with our relationship to the body, especially, specifically those parts that we find unattractive, repulsive even, disgusting almost. And there are three parts to this. First of all, we begin by recognising the pre-

ciousness of the human life. And then we do this business of relating better to the body as a mammal. I mean, we are animals at the physical level. And then to find a way to balance that through the process of gratitude.

If we think about the preciousness of this birth, the Buddha gives us a metaphor. He says, suppose there's a turtle in the ocean and it only comes up to breathe once every hundred years. And in the whole ocean, there's only one log. How fortunate to come to the surface and bump his head against that log. So that's how fortunate we are to become human beings. And of course, the great fortune is to have come across the Dharma.

Obviously we can't be here without the body. That's simple enough. It's through the senses, through the senses of the body, the outer senses that we experience the world. And everything that we learn comes through them. What we hear, what we see and so on. It's through the body that we relate, we communicate, we establish relationships, we express ourselves. Art, things like that. It's through the body we work for the benefit of ourselves and others. So there's a moral element there, which is, of course, our *kamma*. And finally, in virtually all techniques, the body is included. It has to be because it's there. You have to acknowledge that the body is here. So in our practice, of course, it's the breath.

Having acknowledged that, having acknowledged the preciousness of the human birth, we can now just spend a moment apologising to the body for what we may have done to it, for what harm we may have done to it. So we might have put it in dangerous situations, we might have put substances in it which has not done it very good, and so on and so forth.

So if you wish, you can repeat after me this little verse: "Whatever harm I have done to you"—that's the body—"in thought, word and deed, by way of greed, aversion, fear and delusion. Intentionally or unintentionally, I am heartily sorry for it. And I determined from this day on to treat you with due care and respect."

So now we can get on to the 32 parts that the Buddha goes through, which is the unpleasantness, the unattractiveness, the repulsiveness, call it what you want, of the body. And here's a verse from the *Dhammapada*: "Knowing this body is like foam, fully awake to its mirage-like nature, cutting off Mara's flowers, one goes unseen by the king of death."

So the body is foam. There's no reality to it. It's a mirage-like nature. It's something that is also an extension of our minds. Cutting off Mara's flowers. So Mara is not the sort of torturing devil of Christianity. He's more the tempter that you find in Islam, tempting

you to devote your life to sensual pleasure. And that's why he offers flowers. They're attractive, you see. Now, if we can get rid of all that as an attachment, then, of course, the king of death, meaning spiritual death, doesn't see us. That's what it means.

Now, the purpose of this meditation is, first of all, to encourage that sort of detachment from the body, or non-attachment, should I say, non-attachment. So you can understand that people who are in the medical profession, I mean, they have to have a certain detachment to what the body is capable of manufacturing. It's also a way of cooling erotic impulses. So this is important if you're a monastic. So basically, when something erotic arises in the mind, when you see the impurities of that body, it tends to scupper it. It tends to take the imagination. The imagination disappears on the wonderfulness of it.

So as you know, beauty is skin deep. And that's part of it too, that we don't worry about our physical beauty anymore. The body is the body. It's just the way it is. You have to be, as they say, happy in our skin.

So I'm going to now read through these 32 parts. And the idea is that as I mention a word, the image, the relationship will come to mind, and you want to get in touch with that reaction. Because that reaction is telling us how we relate to that part of the body. So it could be equanimous, it could be no reaction. On the other hand, there could be some level of repulsiveness, disgust, et cetera. So you've got to accept that. You've got to let that come up, you see, and just acknowledge it. So this is the part of the exercise of getting in touch with our relationship to the body.

So I'm going to read these parts, the Buddha's own 32 parts, I think he said. So if we just settle for a moment, you see.

So here's the first one. Hair on the head, the scalp, dandruff. Body hair. Nails. Teeth. Skin. Muscles, flesh. Tendons. Bones. Bone marrow. Kidneys, heart, liver. Diaphragm. Spleen. Lungs. Intestines. Bowels. Undigested food. Faeces. Bile. Phlegm. Pus. Blood. Sweat. Fat. Tears. Saliva. Nasal mucus. Synovial fluid—that's around the joints. Lymph.

Now, just go back to the one that gave you the most sense of disgust or dislike, call it what you wish. Just go back to it and just get in touch with that feeling, with that reaction. And just see if you can change your view of it, maybe from a chemical point of view, a functional point of view.

So then he reminds us of the drawbacks of the body. So he also asks us to contemplate the fact that there are diseases and he holds a whole list here which is not at all comprehensive of course. Diseases of the eye, the inner ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the head, the outer ear, the mouth, the teeth and the lips. Cough, asthma, catarrh,

inflammation, fever, stomachache, fainting, dysentery, gastric pain, cholera, leprosy, boils, eczema, tuberculosis, epilepsy, herpes, itch, scabs, smallpox, scabies, haemorrhage, diabetes, piles, pimples and ulcers, affliction stemming from disorders of bile, phlegm, wind or their conjunction, afflictions caused by change in the weather, by not taking care of yourself, by overexertion or as a result of past deeds, cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation and urination.

So there's a nice little list to contemplate. What the body is capable of giving us.

So there are these two parts, but the main part is to bring parts of the body to mind that we find in some way difficult to be with equanimously and just keep working on it until that sense of disgust disappears. Disgust, of course, is a natural reaction, but I think it should be when you put something horrible in the mouth.

Now, he gave this teaching to a group of monks, you see, or to the *sangha* that was at the monastery in Vesālī. And then he went off. The Buddha went off to do two weeks by himself. He often went off for quiet abidings. So you can imagine that, you know, there comes a time when he's got lots of visitors, lots of monks, you know, and he just needs to get away for a bit of a rest. And what he would do is go off into the forest by himself. Just for a couple of weeks, you know.

Anyway, having given this talk to the monks, he comes back and he says, "Ānanda, why does the *Sangha* of monks look so depleted?" In other words, where have all the monks gone? And he says, "Well, because Lord, with many lines of reasoning, gave monks a talk on the unattractiveness of the body, spoke in praise of the perception of unattractiveness, spoke in praise of the development of the perception of unattractiveness. And the monks, thinking, oh, the Blessed One, with many lines of reasoning, has given a talk on the unattractiveness of the body. They remained committed to the development of it, in many modes and manners, they, ashamed, repelled, and disgusted with the body, sought for an assassin. In one day, ten monks took the knife. In one day, twenty monks took the knife. And in one day, thirty monks took the knife. It would be good, Lord, if you could explain another method so that this *Sangha* of monks might be established in understanding."

So I can't imagine how he felt when he came back from his rest to find that all these monks had committed suicide because of his teachings. So what he does is he gives them the exercise of practising these absorptions.

But there's another way that we can relate to the body, which, shall we say, balances this whole business. And that is by offering gratitude.

So this little exercise, what we're going to do is go through the body in a different way. And we're going to recognise what the body does for us. So, for instance, the skin is our outer protection. It does other things too, but whatever comes to mind, whatever comes to mind that a particular part of the body does, you say thank you. And that's all you do. All you're going to do is say thank you. And you just keep saying thank you to all the parts of the body.

So if we just settle for a moment and then I'll suggest another way that you can go through the body and do this.

So just starting at the top of the head, and just come down the body and just say thank you to our protecting skin. All the way down to the toes. It's like you're showering yourself with gratitude.

Coming back to the top of the head there. And just sink into the skull, the bones. And just saturate it with your gratitude. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. All the way down the body, just following the skeleton. It holds the marrow, of course, where all the blood cells are created, all the way down to the toes.

And if we come back to the top of the head, and this time we sink into the brain, and we just keep saying thank you. And then follow the nervous system all down the body. All the way down to the toes.

And coming back to the top of the head. And this time we go into the muscles of the face. Just massaging them with this gratitude. And then follow the musculature all the way down to the toes. It's massaging your muscle with gratitude.

And then coming back to the heart in the body. Filling the heart with gratitude. And then just follow the blood every which way, just saying thank you, feeding the body.

And coming back to the head offering gratitude to our eyes and to the ears and to the nose. To the tongue and teeth, these are all our senses. And to the larynx, the voice.

Sinking into the chest, say thank you to all the organs there. Coming down into the midriff, the stomach, liver area, all the various organs. Down into the abdomen, the various systems.

Thank you to our hands. And thank you to our feet. And finally, thank you to the whole body, the whole physical organism.

So this organism made up of billions of cells, some guest cells, billions of guest cells. They can't help but be jumping for joy. Finally, their work has been acknowledged.

So this exercise then balances the unattractiveness of the body. We feel grateful that we have a body. So now you can spend as much as you want on this exercise. I'll put a PDF up on the website. But actually, once you know what you're doing, it's just a two-minute job, you know, just in the morning, just to acknowledge that there are parts of the body that we don't particularly like, et cetera, just to spend a moment thanking it.

And that can't be doing us harm, can it? All those negative feelings, all that negative relationship we have with the body can't be doing it any good. It's a way of suppressing what the body does.

So this brings us to the end of this lovely little exercise. I can only hope that it will further you on your path to complete and total liberation.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

CHAPTER 215

I own my actions. I inherit the results of my actions. I am born of my actions. I form relations through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. Whatever I do for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results. — Kamma and Rebirth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25 min

> *In this profound contemplation, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddhist understanding of kamma (action) and vipāka (consequences) through the traditional five reflections on personal responsibility. Drawing from the canonical teachings, he clarifies that kamma refers specifically to intentional actions of body, speech, and mind, while distinguishing this from popular misconceptions about karma.*
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> *The talk examines each of the five contemplative reflections: owning our actions, inheriting their results, being born of our actions, forming relationships through them, and living dependent upon them. Bhante emphasizes the crucial role of intention (cetanā) in determining karmic consequences and addresses common misunderstandings, including the relationship between genetic conditions and past actions.*
>
> *Using contemporary examples like Nelson Mandela and referencing the Ubuntu philosophy ('I am because we are'), he illuminates the interconnected nature of existence and how our actions ripple through both inner psychological matrices and outer social environments. The session concludes with a guided contemplation where practitioners repeat each reflection into the heart, allowing the truth to penetrate beyond intellectual understanding into emotional and spiritual transformation. This practice helps develop wise reflection and moral sensitivity essential for the Buddhist path.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambuddhasssa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So this is November and it's time for our lugubrious contemplations. We've done death, ageing, sickness and all that. Now it comes to the contemplations of *kamma*.

First of all, in the Pali, *kamma* just means action. Consequences are called *vipāka*. Now, of course, our language uses the Sanskrit term karma with an R to mean consequence. During this particular talk, when I talk about karma, I'm talking about the action.

The first little quote here is: beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions. They originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings from inferior and superior. This is not the distinguishment according to artistic or intellectual or physical talent. This is to do with morals, to do with whether we are moral or immoral, virtuous. The equation is that the more deluded you are, the more unethical you will be, and the more wise you are, the more ethical.

We'll be using this normal way of contemplating karma: I own my actions. I inherit the results of my actions. I am born of my actions. I form relations through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. And then a final catch-all phrase: whatever I do, for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

Now, the first one: I own my actions. We are totally responsible for what we say, for what we think, and for what we do. It's coming out of us. That's the first thing to really grasp. The consequences that come from that are dependent upon the intention. Remember, the role of intention in the Buddhist teachings is crucial and to be separated from desire. There may be a desire to say something angry, but you see it and you let it go. But if you speak angrily, then that will have consequences.

Remember, it goes into a matrix. The inner matrix of our psychology making us more angry and the outer matrix, which is all these people coming together to listen to what you said and you don't know what the response will be. You can't tell what the consequence of an action will be because it is either enlarged or diminished by the milieu that it finds itself in, the environment that you speak into or do something into.

That's the reason that the Buddha constantly asks us to make wise reflections and why we need a guide at this point. I always think to myself how fortunate I am that I have such a wise person, the Buddha, to guide me. I doubt if there's anybody more wise than the Buddha. There may be somebody equal, but I doubt more wise, such is the profundity of his wisdom.

So something is a desire, nothing's happened. As soon as you empower that desire, if you remember the word *cetanā*, the will, then something comes of it. The general rule is that if something is good, some good will come of it. If something is not good, something not good will come of it.

The second reflection is: I am heir to my kamma or I inherit the results of my kamma. Here we have to again remind ourselves of the specific law of conditionality. We don't know what will happen once we say something or do something. In fact, we don't know inwardly what will happen when we allow thoughts to develop within ourselves.

The important thing for me here is to accept what comes back to us, even though it's not directly related to my personal karma. What that does away with, which I found a real freedom, a real liberation, is the need for punishment. Punishment comes on top of that. When we're self-criticising, when we're full of aversive self-blaming, when we're beating ourselves up, it's all completely unnecessary. You do something unwholesome. It comes back to you. You bear the consequences. You learn from it. You make an intention not to do that again. And that's the end of it. If you do it again, the same process. Habits are hard to overcome.

If you do something that's really beautiful, something that's wonderful, and the response of praise comes towards you, you accept it, but there's no need to go into how wonderful I am, what an amazing person I really am. All that's not necessary.

There's a little note here which concerns Hoddle. Hoddle was the England manager between 96 and 99. He somehow had this understanding, or at least this is what people thought was his understanding: that people who suffered some genetic disablement, that was the consequence of a past life. It created such a furore, he had to resign. According to the Buddha's teachings, that's not right. The body you receive is coming from all your past generations. What is your karma, no matter how unhappy you are with the body you've received? It might not be that it's disabled. It might be that it's just ugly. You don't like it. Whatever the body you end up with is not the direct consequence of your past actions, but the way you relate to it is.

Then we have: I am born of my actions. This is the understanding about habits. Remember that once you create a set of actions, you then develop a habit. When we collect all our habits, that's our personality, that's our character, and it will drive us to our destiny. Our job is to see what is driving us to an unfortunate destiny, to perdition, and what is driving us towards a heavenly destiny.

This happens, of course, not only in terms of future lives—that's the normal understanding in Buddhism, that it does affect future life. In fact, your last consciousness as you die has a great effect on what's going to happen in the next life. It will drive you to do something about it. If you die, for instance, with a lot of guilt on your mind, you did something which has just come up as you die and you die with that on your heart, in

the next life, you want to do something about that. If your last thoughts are what a wonderful life you've had, what a wonderful relationship you had, then you'll be seeking the same thing in the next life.

Remember that this also is happening in this present moment, and it's happening from day to day, from year to year. We're being reborn all the time. The only thing that happens at death is that the body falls off.

Going back to the idea of genetic evolution, there was a young man brought to the monastery at Amaravati who was severely disabled from a genetic illness. This is going back thirty-odd years now. Seemingly he was going to move into a flat and be quite fairly independent. We were asked to go and have a chat with him and all that. We would have to carry him to the toilet, things like that. He was perfectly happy as far as we could see. He was accustomed to his situation and he'd adapted to it.

It seems that his parents have been told that such a thing could never happen again or it'd be a million to one chance of such a disease coming again. They had a daughter and the daughter suffered exactly the same. Seemingly she was extremely embittered. Here we have a similar situation and two different ways of coping with it. That's the karma, the way they've coped with it.

The next one is: I form relations through my karma. It can be sobering, really, to think about one's past relations, relationships that one has had, and just to see what we did, what we said, which either made them flower into something beautiful or disappear and crumble into something horrible. I personally have lots of regrets of being unkind and things like that. It's reflecting on that that makes you want to be different in the future.

Here we have this interconnectedness. We're going back to this law, this specific law of conditionality. It's the understanding that we are all interconnected, interdependent, that even these words, even these thoughts that I'm giving to you, they're not mine. They don't belong to me. I've read them all. In fact, I also use GPT to give me some ideas. Then I normally just fill out around those ideas and maybe add something that I picked up from somewhere else. It's not as though anybody is completely original. I mean, that's very rare indeed. You'd have to be a Newton, an Einstein, you'd have to be an original musician, a composer, for instance. But all these people rest as, I think it was Jung, who sits on the shoulders of giants.

Nothing is original, original. Everything has been either said before or done before. We are this interconnectedness. We're not this—it's very difficult for us Westerners to get away from the idea that we're little isolate modules, whole entire. And that we somehow have this enormous wall around us to say, well, this is me and I'm not you. Of course it does affect the way we relate to people.

The philosophy that I always point to here is the South African philosophy of Ubuntu which in short just says: I am because we are. It's just catching that relationship that we have and to realise that the relationships that we create with others affect the way they relate to us.

Then there's: I live dependent on my actions. This refers both to the inner and to the outer life.

Here we have, let's talk about a certain paradox, which is not understood in popular Buddhism. That is that you can purposefully suffer and yet be inwardly perfectly happy. I once asked somebody in Sri Lanka, a born Buddhist, brought up as a Buddhist, why he thought Jesus Christ suffered such a terrible death. He said, well, he must have done something terrible in his past life. That's the way, we might say, regular Buddhists, born Buddhists would think of that. Anything that happens to them, there must be some problem that is something they did in the past life. So there's very little understanding that you can put yourself out for a cause. You can become a martyr to a cause.

If we look at some of our modern day saints and martyrs, the obvious ones that come up are Nelson Mandela. And for me, the very tragic figure of Alexei Navalny. To lose someone with that clarity of vision and courage is really heart-rending. And especially when you hear that he would have been one of those released with the other people just recently.

So I live dependent on my actions. Then we have this summary, which captures all: Whatever I do for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

Now with these little reflections, we have to turn them into contemplations. The way we do that is by repeating these phrases into the heart. When you do that, you've got to be aware of any aversion. You don't want to know that. You don't want to feel what comes up when you say to yourself, I am heir to all my actions. You have to keep repeating it and feeling that negativity if the negativity is there. You have to wait until as the truth of that statement begins to penetrate that aversion begins to disappear. Finally, there's a feeling of digestion.

When a contemplative subject is being digested, that's when it's going to change us. That's when it's changing our attitudes. So that's what we're going to do. We're going to spend a moment with each statement, a minute actually. I'm going to spend a minute with each statement. During that time, if you just keep repeating it into the heart—this is not an intellectual exercise. This is an emotional exercise. This is a heart exercise. Just keep repeating it gently to yourself. Then after the five minutes, we'll go into the sitting. If you want to keep it up, that's fine.

Owner, inherit, born, relations, dependent. Whatever I do for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

If we go into a meditation, and I will repeat those phrases and tie them to about a minute. The first one. Again, remember repeating it into the heart.

I am the owner of my actions of mind, speech and body.

I inherit the results of my actions.

I am born each moment, each day, each lifetime of my actions.

I form relations through my actions.

I live dependent on my actions.

Whatever I do, for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

Now we can either continue that contemplation or return to *vipassanā*.

CHAPTER 216

Kamma and Rebirth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies the Buddhist understanding of kamma (karma) and rebirth, distinguishing personal kamma from other natural laws. He explains the five laws operating in existence: physical laws (utu), heredity (bīja), psychology (citta), personal kamma, and Dhamma. The talk emphasizes that personal kamma—our ethical responses to life's experiences—is what determines our spiritual progress toward Awakening or continued suffering.*
>
> *Bhante explores how our reactions to circumstances, rather than the circumstances themselves, create the conditions for liberation or bondage. Drawing on the Buddha's teaching of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), he shows how taṇhā (craving) and wrong identification perpetuate dukkha. The discussion addresses common misconceptions about collective karma and natural disasters, maintaining focus on individual ethical responsibility.*
>
> *Regarding rebirth, Bhante offers a practical approach for those finding the concept challenging, suggesting it be held as a possibility rather than requiring immediate belief. He emphasizes the cosmic moral dimension of kamma operating across different levels of existence, while always returning to the individual's capacity for liberation through ethical conduct and wisdom. The talk concludes with the Buddha's teaching about the unconditioned—that pure awareness within which offers hope for complete freedom from suffering.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa.
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

We're celebrating the moon night. Actually, I think it's on Wednesday, but we have to bend the rules a bit for our culture, so we're doing it tonight. The topic is on *kamma* and rebirth.

So just going through the basics, really, just being sure as to what we mean by personal kamma. In other words, the kamma that leads to liberation. We understand in Buddhism that there are five laws, the first one being called the law of heat. That's how it translates. But it's really to do with what we would call physics and chemistry, just matter. So those are laws which are separate from personal responsibility.

What I think this is really pointing to here is things like the tsunami. In the East, if you were a victim of the tsunami, they would tend to think that was because in some past life, you must have drowned somebody or something worse. So it gets a bit far-

fetched. We have to be clear that the Earth matter has its own properties, and we happen to be born at this time. Now, there is this connection, of course, with climate change, but that comes later.

The next one is hereditary. You can't, if you're born with a disease coming from your parents and their parents and back all the way, that's not your personal kamma. That's to do with being born with that certain genetic makeup. Now, what is your personal kamma is how you relate to it. And again, we'll come to that in a minute.

So it's wrong to think of somebody who is born, say, with Down syndrome and to think that they therefore must have been some sort of animal in the past life and that they're born at the same level of intelligence. That wouldn't be correct. Even they have their own kamma to work out.

The next one would be *citta*. So this is our psychology. We're born with a certain set of psychological rules. And that's as simple as that. A simple one would be just the way we learn language. And that's all to do with the mind, the wake up of the mind and the brain. Remember, in the Buddha's teaching, the mind and the body are two separate energy systems. And when we're reborn, it's the mind that leaves the body. We'll come to that again when we have just a quick reminder of what rebirth is. So again, you have to be very careful when we're talking about personal kamma, the kamma that leads to liberation or not.

This leads us to the problem of social kamma. A lot of people might talk about social kamma, meaning the kamma of, say, being born in British culture or in another culture. And again, that wouldn't be quite the way that the Buddha would see it. He would see it more as a collection of individuals. And the collection of individuals have agreed to certain rules and regulations, certain cultural norms. Most of this is passed on to us, whether we like it or not, when we're children. But it's not as though it's something that is out there as a social or as something separate from individuals.

Whatever is passed on to us through our societies is passed on individually through our parents, through the media and so on and so forth. So, again, it's about individuals. And it's the same when you think about, say, thousands of deaths from famine or thousands of deaths from all these conflicts that are going on, all that really is individuals who are dying. And some will die very peacefully. Some will not have suffered greatly. And others, of course, will have died in agony. But again, it's all very individual.

It's our universe. If you think about it, everything that we're experiencing is coming in through the senses and through our own particular conditioning. And what we're experiencing now is our own little universe. And we're always at the center of it. So when somebody steps into that universe and does us harm, that isn't our personal kamma. That's coming from their decision-making. Our personal kamma is how we react to it.

So that takes us into the next section about kamma itself, the law of kamma. And this is all about ethics. You could say that the Buddha really, you could reduce all his teachings to ethics and transcendence. And the reason for that, remember, is that because of this delusion that we are suffering from, we enter into a wrong relationship. So when we look at our ethical, moral behavior, that will be a measure of our wisdom or lack of it. So there's a connection there between the process of liberation and ethics.

There's always this purification has to go on at the same time as insight. You can't have insight and still go around murdering people and robbing from them and getting wild on drugs. You can't. It's not possible because of the connection between the delusion and how it manifests and the process of beginning to undermine that delusion through the process of ethical behavior. And that's all put out, of course, in the eightfold path: right speech, right action, right livelihood. And the more we work on that, the more it feeds back into the way that we understand the world.

So when we talk about the law of kamma, we're talking really about ethics. And that's now beginning to be where our core work is, you might say.

The final one is to do with Dhamma. And these are, of course, the basic teachings of the Buddha: the Four Noble Truths, the Law of Kamma itself, and the Wheel of Dependent Origination, Dependent Origination itself too. So all that teaching of the Buddha comes under the Law of the Dhamma. The Dhamma itself is the truth that when we take it on, will lead us to the end of our own personal inner suffering.

Remember, the suffering we're talking about is to do with wrong understanding. So it doesn't include physical suffering. So long as we have a body, it's going to give us pain. It's just the way it is. But the heart, once cleansed of all its negativity, of all its unwholesome habits and understandings, begins to be in a state of one of the four great illimitables, one of the four *Brahma Vihāras*. It's in some state of love or some state of compassion, some state of joy or just peaceful equanimity. So that's the Buddha heart. But don't confuse that with the Buddha itself, with the Buddha within, which is this pure awareness.

Remember, the awareness is within this psychophysical organism. And it's through this organism that it's manifesting its delusion or its wisdom. So that's the Dhamma. So the point here is to be very clear as to what is our personal kamma, the kamma that leads to either continued rebirth or to liberation. And it all comes back to the dependent origination and to the point of reaction to what we're experiencing.

So dependent origination, what it's saying is that this *taṇhā*, this wrong relationship to things that we call attachment, indulgence, aversion, fear, all these reactions to what we are experiencing is the cause of our unsatisfactoriness, our suffering and our continued suffering. And it's when we undermine that, that we begin to roll that wheel backwards upon itself. And we come down to the root problem, which is about our sense of identity. That's where the root is.

Remember, his victory verse is that he had discovered the house builder. And he's broken down, he's found the house builder, he's broken the house, he's broken this and he's broken that. It all sounds very violent. And he's liberated himself. He's found the *citta*, that knowing which is the Buddha within. So that's the root problem as to what we identify with. And remember that when you are practicing *vipassanā*, you've pulled yourself out of this organism into this observer. And that observer really recognizes it as a place of untouchability. Once you're established there, nothing can harm you. Really grasp that because that's very close to our liberation.

So when it comes to something like rebirth, it's not within our culture. It's a bit difficult for us to get our head around that. The fact that we might be reborn into another place, another time, take on a different personality. And yet through that personality, whatever unwholesomeness and wholesomeness we have in terms of the way we look at things will again begin to manifest.

Really, for those that find it just difficult to accept, it's a case of just putting it on the back burner. There'll come a point when we'll know for sure. And that's when we leave the planet. So there's no point in rushing the decision. The decision will be made for us when we die. And if after all, it's just annihilation, we just disappear. Well, there's no problem in that at all, is there? I mean, there's no suffering involved in that whatsoever. So it's best not to come to a decision about that. There's no need, for instance, to come to a conclusion.

If we don't have that information, and we're talking about information which is experiential, this is not science. We're never going to prove it with a thermometer or something. It's just something which is beyond our ability to know in that sort of way.

But there are people who have come out of the body and have gone to such places, and they stand as witness to that possibility. So really, it's just a case of keeping it as a possibility.

In the fullness of the teaching, it gives you some idea of the grand moral laws that go right through the cosmos, through all the different levels of being. There is this law of kamma, which is basically saying, if you're coming from a wrong place, you're going to end up unhappy. If you're coming from a deluded place, you're going to keep finding yourself in an unhappy situation. And slowly it's going to come through to you that maybe you're the problem. It isn't the other person who's making you angry. The world doesn't make you depressed. There's something within us which is causing it. And there's some resolution, you might say, to the whole problem of moral behavior. But again, it always comes down to the individual.

So whether saṃsāra will ever come to an end is anybody's guess. As individuals keep reappearing, they themselves are their own little universe working out their own plan. And eventually, in Buddhist understanding, again, liberation is something which has to happen. It's within the process. It's something which is set into the process because that part of us which is deluded is not naturally deluded. Itself is clear of delusion. What it is is a simple not knowing. So in itself, it is absolutely pure and whole. But because of this misunderstanding, it finds itself creating this bad kamma, these bad consequences, unwholesome consequences, the suffering. And it can pull itself out and return to its original purity. Otherwise, there'd be no escape.

So that's what the Buddha says in one of these little verses about the process. There is an unborn. There is an undying. There's something that doesn't die. There is an unconditioned. And then he says, if it were not so, there would not be an escape from what is born and dies and is conditioned. So there's hope for us all. This is the big message. So no matter how miserable we become, there is an end. So we have to accept that. He's up there on his pedestal and he's definitely teaching us that.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused any confusion, and that you will, by your careful ethical behavior, release yourself from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 217

The Five Regular Contemplations

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the Buddha's five regular contemplations (pañca abhiṇha paccavekkhaṇa) from the Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN 5.57). These contemplations address our inevitable aging, illness, death, separation from loved ones, and ownership of our karma. The Buddha taught these reflections to overcome the intoxication with health, youth, and life that leads to misconduct and suffering.*
>
> *Bhante explains how these contemplations work not as mere intellectual exercises, but as heart-centered practices that help us face our deepest fears and attachments. By repeatedly reflecting on phrases like 'This body is subject to death' or 'I must be separated from everyone dear to me,' practitioners gradually surrender resistance and find profound relief. The discourse reveals how regular practice of these contemplations can lead to the complete abandonment of the ten fetters (saṃyojana) and the uprooting of underlying tendencies (anusaya).*
>
> *This teaching offers practical guidance on transforming our relationship with impermanence and developing the renunciation that supports the path to liberation. Bhante provides specific phrases and methods for each contemplation, making this ancient wisdom immediately applicable to modern practitioners seeking freedom from attachment and fear.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arhato sammasambuddhasa namo tassa bhagavato arhato sammasambuddhasa namo tassa bhagavato arhato sammasambuddhasa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I've pre-recorded this talk because I'm on personal retreat at the moment, when you see it anyway. So last November, we dedicated this lugubrious month to that regular party topic, death. And we learned how powerful the Buddha thought the contemplation was leading to full liberation.

Now, this is actually one of a set of five. And in the numerical sayings, there's a discourse of the five constant or regular contemplations. For those of you who want to know, it's in the chapter 5, verse 57. So I'm going to read parts of the discourse and then we're going to look at the different contemplations.

So *bhikkhus* or listeners — the commentary always glosses *bhikkhus* to mean anybody who's reading the scriptures — there are five themes that should often be reflected upon by a woman or a man, by a householder or one gone forth. What five?

I am subject to aging, I am not exempt from aging. I am subject to illness, I am not exempt from illness. I am subject to death, I am not exempt from death. I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me. I am the owner of my *kamma*, my actions of body, speech and mind. I'm heir to my *kamma*. I have *kamma* as my origin, *kamma* as my relative, *kamma* as my resort. I will be heir to whatever *kamma*, good or bad, that I do.

I'm going to leave *kamma* till next November because it's a big subject. Then he tells us what the benefits are. So what are the benefits to this sort of practice?

First of all, he points out, in a state of health, I am subject to illness. I'm not exempt from illness. In a state of health, beings are intoxicated with their health. And when intoxicated with their health, they engage in misconduct by body, speech and mind. We often take it for granted. Sometimes we don't eat properly. At other times we're a bit obsessed by what we eat, vitamins and so on.

I'm subject to aging. I'm not exempt from aging. In their youth, beings are intoxicated with youth. And when they're intoxicated in their youth, they engage in misconduct by body, speech and mind. Of course, we live in a very youthful culture, Botox and all that. And so we pretend to be youthful until the point where we kick the bucket. Sixty, as they say, is the new forty. Such is delusion.

I'm subject to death. I'm not exempt from death. During their life, beings are intoxicated with life. And when they're intoxicated with life, they engage in misconduct of body, speech and mind. And of course, here we can quote the Buddha's understanding of this contemplation. "Monks, when mindfulness of death, when developed and pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit, it gains a footing in Nibbāna, the deathless, has Nibbāna, the deathless, as its final end."

And then there's the renunciation. I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me. And beings have desire and craving in regard to those people and things that are dear and agreeable. And excited by this craving, they engage in misconduct of my body, speech and mind.

One exercise there that you might take up is to create two lists — all the things you wouldn't want to lose or be robbed of, and all the people whom you would miss if they disappeared or died. So that's a nice little exercise. And then you'll see what to do with them as we go through the discourse.

I'm owner of my *kamma*, my actions of body, speech and mind. That's what *kamma* here means, not comeuppance. Heir to my *kamma*. I've *kamma* as my origin. *Kamma* is my relative. *Kamma* is my resort. I will be heir to whatever *kamma*, good or bad, that I

do. People engage in misconduct by body, speech and mind. Now, when one often reflects on these themes, such misconduct is diminished or completely abandoned. And it is for the sake of this benefit that a woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth often reflect thus.

So as you reflect, these themes lose their power over us. In the next section, he gives us some indication on how to reflect.

The noble disciple reflects thus, "I'm not the only one who is subject to illness, not exempt from illness. All beings that come and go and pass away and undergo rebirth are all subject to illness. None are exempt from illness." So this, in a sense, puts us into the big picture. So there's nothing special about me. I may be lucky and not suffer from severe illness, but illness will come my way. And if it is to be, well, I shall have to just accept it.

The noble disciple reflects thus, "I'm not the only one subject to ageing or exempt from ageing. All beings that come and go, that pass away and undergo rebirth are subject to ageing. None are exempt from ageing." So again, there's a strange comfort in knowing that all of us go through this process of aging. In fact, all beings go through this process of aging.

A noble disciple reflects thus, "I'm not the only one who's subject to death, not exempt from death. All beings that come and go, that pass away and undergo rebirth are subject to death. None are exempt from death." Now, that's interesting. When both my mother and father and all that generation had passed away some twenty-odd years ago, maybe thirty years, it's a strange comfort. These people that were so close to you, they've gone through that process. And so it makes it easier for us to do so. Can you imagine what it would be like if you were the first person to die? It reminds me of a cartoon I saw once where there's an elderly lady on her deathbed surrounded by her friends. And she says, "Why me? Why not one of you?"

"I'm not the only one who must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear to and pleasing to me. All beings that come and go, that pass away and undergo rebirth must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and pleasing." So this is really about renunciation, about letting go before you have to let go.

Take an instance where a robber takes your mobile. You go around angry and moaning about the state of affairs and all that. "And this thief has got my mobile." But it's not my mobile anymore, is it? It belongs to the thief. So you're able to let that go and wish that the thief benefits from his theft in some positive way or at least puts it to good use.

And finally, "I'm not the only one who is owner of my *kamma*, heir to my *kamma*, who has *kamma* as one's origin, *kamma* as one's relative, *kamma* as one's resort, who will be heir to whatever *kamma* they do, bad or good. All beings that come and go, pass away and undergo rebirth are owners of their *kamma*." And as they often reflect on these themes, as they often reflect on these themes, they pursue the path, develop it and cultivate it. And as they do so, the fetters are entirely abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted.

So this is also a path to liberation. Now, what are the fetters? The fetters or the chains, the manacles that keep us into this process of rebirth — the first three: the view of self, skeptical doubt and clinging to rites and rituals or just thinking that rites and rituals are enough. Light 100,000 candles to the Buddha and you're bound to be liberated — that sort of understanding. That goes when a person enters the first level of attainment, stream entry. But the other two don't go until you're at the third level, which is the non-returner, because they've lost any desire for this sort of dwelling. And that sensual craving and ill will have been done away with.

But the last five — craving for the joys of the lower five absorptions and of the upper four absorptions, those two, they go first. Not the *jhāna*, just a craving for it. Then there's the conceit, which is always about comparison — better than, worse than, equal to. Restlessness, which suggests that right to the point of liberation, there's always a bit of defilements there, the little end defilements which cause restlessness of one level or another. And, of course, ignorance.

The *anusaya* are the subconscious tendencies which come up whenever there's a when it's prompted by circumstance. So we don't actually know what's down there. This is very Freudian. But even all that is cleared so that there's no negativity, no defilement within the system.

So I'll just repeat that. If we continue this meditation, continue these contemplations — and we'll talk about that in a minute — we will pursue the path and cultivate it. And as we do so, the fetters are entirely abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted. In other words, we'll be liberated from all suffering.

Now, at the end, we have a verse which is given to the Buddha. What I've done is I've retranslated it into ordinary sentences, because the people who translate these verses try to keep it as a verse, and I just find it confusing. But if you put it into ordinary, straightforward language, it's very simple.

"It terrifies ordinary people to contemplate sickness, aging and death and that they are inescapable. That's true. If I find myself detesting such people, it would not be proper for me, for I have the same flaws. Contemplating this while knowing that there is no acquisition — you can't take anything with you to *Nibbāna* — I overcame these obsessions with health, youth and even life. I saw safety in renunciation. So I put effort into the practice and realized *nibbāna*. It is no longer possible for me to indulge in sensual pleasures. Now that I fulfill the spiritual path, I shall never come back."

So this does suggest that it's not only, of course, these practices. These practices lead you to develop the path. And part of that path is, of course, insight meditation.

So let's look at how we do this — this wise reflection, as the Buddha would put it. You always get this little phrase every so often.

Now, first of all, contemplation isn't thinking. There's a bit of thought involved, but what we're really doing is not an intellectual exercise, but opening up to our feelings about things, our relationship to these five contemplations. And we have to try and accept something that can be quite difficult for us. Sometimes it actually stings. And you choose a phrase or a passage and you just gently repeat it into the heart, just allowing the heart to accept it. Feel the resistance, keep saying it, keep saying it till you get a surrender. Then there comes this sense of relief and with it you get a smile. So you repeat it quietly into the heart, stay with the heart's reaction, wait for the resistance to disappear and wait for it to be digested.

So just to give some idea, you can make up your own phrases. So these are taken from the scriptures.

So sickness, of course, is sort of mini death or a preparation for death. The body manifests its vulnerability. There's discomfort and pain and always some disability, staying in bed or something. Sickness is unpreventable. This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness.

So now when you think about that, you think to yourself, "Subject to disease." So diseases come to mind. What am I afraid of? Is it cancer? Is it a wasting disease? Is it dementia? In one of those, somewhere along the line, there'll be something that you're really afraid of happening. And you stick with that. "I am subject to disease." That doesn't mean you'll wish yourself getting it. Don't frighten yourself out of your skin. It's just the case of facing these inner demons, these inner fears. And we've all, all of us suffer to some degree, a bit of hypochondria.

Aging — the contemplation of aging undermines this intoxication with youth, always wanting to be young. So aging is inevitable. The body is subject to aging. Body's not gone beyond aging. This body is now in a process of aging. So some phrase you personally make up, you just repeat it. "This body is now in a process of aging." What does that mean? "This process of aging." So I'm looking at my skin and my strength, how my relationship changes.

Now, the big one, of course, is death. So life is uncertain. Death is certain. Sometimes saying the obvious hits the nail on the head. So this undermines clinging to life at all costs, barricading it with fame, riches and power, no matter how little we might have of them. So death is inescapable. Everyone must die. The remainder of my lifespan is decreasing continually. Death will come regardless of whether I have made time to practice the Dharma. That can be a bit terrifying, that one. We don't know when we're going to die.

Human life expectancy is uncertain. There are many causes for death. The human body is fragile. Only the practice of Dharma can help us at the time of our death. Now, there's a bit of comfort. Only the practice of Dharma can help us at the hour of our death. Our wealth cannot help us. Our loved ones cannot help us. Even our own body cannot help us.

So death is inescapable. This body is subject to death. This body is not gone beyond death. This body will die. So basically, it's like when you're trying to get to a situation where a doctor tells you you've got a very serious disease or it's a terminal illness, and you're just sitting there with that and you keep repeating it. Just keep repeating. You just feel how it is to say something like "This body will die." You get in touch with the body. You feel it. You see it in your mind's eye. "This body will die. This body, this body will go."

In the same way, I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me. So this is, again, making those two lists and just recognizing the things you really don't want to let go of. But they're going to let go of you.

And then finally, something we won't go into this evening is *kamma*. I'm owner of my *kamma* actions. *Kamma* here, remember, means actions, not comeuppance. I inherit the results of my actions. I'm born of my actions. I form relations through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. Whatever good or bad I do, I shall inherit those results.

Now, we can still contemplate that by just repeating a phrase which touches us. You're always looking for a phrase which touches you, which hits the button. But we'll go into that in more detail next November.

So what I've done is I put this up as a PDF, the actual original discourse with all these exercises, which you can download. The video won't go up, nor the actual spoken won't go up until I return in December. So in this case, it doesn't really matter because here you've got the exercises that you can do.

I can't think of any other way more skillful to spend this lugubrious November. I wish that your practice of these five reflections will lead you speedily along the path of liberation.

CHAPTER 218

The Contemplation of Death

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25 min

> *In this November teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents maraṇasati (mindfulness of death) as what the Buddha called "the most powerful of all contemplations." Drawing from his Catholic upbringing's November traditions of remembering the deceased, Bhante explains how death contemplation addresses our fundamental delusion of selfhood and the biological terror that drives human behavior toward acquisition, aversion, and fear.*
>
> *The talk explores how the Buddha taught monks to contemplate death with each breath, not merely daily or with each meal. Bhante presents the traditional contemplations of aging, sickness, and death using repetitive phrases that allow practitioners to feel and surrender to resistance rather than merely thinking about mortality. He explains how this practice leads to "a footing in nibbāna" - glimpses of the deathless dimension that can ultimately bring complete liberation from dukkha.*
>
> *The practical benefits include relief from fighting the inevitable, increased appreciation for life's preciousness, gratitude, compassion for others' suffering, and deeper presence with anicca (impermanence). This contemplation directly supports vipassanā practice by revealing the insubstantial nature of self and the arising-passing nature of all conditioned existence, leading practitioners toward the unconditioned peace of nibbāna.*

Greetings everyone, this wonderful full moon celebration of November.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambhodassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

Well, I'm going to start with a quote from St. Paul. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" A letter he wrote to the Corinthians.

I was brought up a Roman Catholic and November is a month where the souls in purgatory are remembered. In Catholic doctrine, there are three realms. There's hell. And if you get in there, you're stuck. There's no way out. And then there's heaven, which, of course, is very blissful. And that's where you want to really get stuck. But there's this in-between place where, well, you weren't that bad in life. You don't deserve hell. But on the other hand, you're not clean enough to get into heaven. You've got to really purify the heart. So this was the purpose of Purgatory.

Now, in the purgatorial realm, you might suffer just as much as hell, but the distinction is you know the way out. Now, whether these realms actually exist or not is not important. They definitely do mirror mental states. So when you're in hell, in those times when everything falls apart, when the whole world seems to be against you and you don't see a way out, well, that's hell, isn't it? And we know certain illnesses, certain mental states, driving people, for instance, to suicide. All these are hellish states. And heaven, of course, are those wonderful little times when we feel perfectly happy and the world seems to be supporting us. But I think I can safely say that for most of the time, life is purgatory. And this, of course, is the meaning of *dukkha*. It's somehow not entirely satisfactory.

So in the tradition, in the Roman Catholic tradition, a month was set aside, November. Now, November doesn't have the colour of autumnal October, and it definitely hasn't got the promise of December. So it's a month which is dark, dank, at least in these climes. And it's devoted, it's a lovely month to devote to thinking about our ancestors, people who died, et cetera. And that we can do. But I thought this happy idea came to me that this would be a wonderful month every year to contemplate death. Now, I know you're very excited about that idea.

So we have to begin at the beginning. And I've written one or two things here. So when we talk about the beginning of time, we're not talking really, I'm not talking here about time in the past, when time began. I'm talking about every single moment of consciousness. Just in that absolute moment of beginning, we become, we fall into an identity of what it is we're actually experiencing, which is, of course, through this psychophysical organism. And herein, just in this understanding, is the fear of death. Right there, at the end point of that consciousness, is the letting go of a moment of being awake, and that point there is the point of death.

Unfortunately, these series of conscious moments are so quick that they all seem to run together, giving us an impression of continuity. And of course, in that moment, too, there is also the destruction of fear.

Now, the Buddha tells us that the contemplation of death is the most powerful of all contemplations. But we are actually reaching down to the very foundation stone of our delusion, this delusion of identity, the delusion of self. And if there's one thing that the self does not want to do is it does not want to die.

And here he is, this is what he says about it. "Disciples, mindfulness of death, when developed and pursued, is of great fruit and great benefit. It gains a footing in *Nibbāna*, the deathless. Has *Nibbāna*, the deathless, as its final end." *Nibbāna* here is, of course, that transcendent dimension. What's he actually saying here? He's saying that if we

really contemplate this whole idea of death, this notion of death that we have, we will get a glimpse of what *Nibbāna* actually is. That's the footing, a glimpse. And if we continue to do it, this path alone, I mean, this is what he's saying, just the contemplation of death will actually bring us to the end of *dukkha*, the end of suffering, right? And it'll be done at that point where that whole notion, that whole concept of self completely disappears.

Now, I do mention a book here by Ernest Becker. It's called "The Denial of Death" that was written in 1973. And it is still a smashing read and well worth buying and having a look at it. And what he says is the basic motivation of human behaviour is our biological need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death. Now that says it perfectly. I'll repeat that because it's such a, it gets it straight on. The basic motivation for human behaviour is our biological need, physical need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death.

And that exactly leads us to those three basic attitudes that come out of that delusion of believing we are this body, heart and mind. The one is, of course, gathering, acquiring. The more we have more money, more power, more riches, the more safe we feel. Safety, that's what we're searching for, safety. And of course, if anything undermines that, then they become the enemy, the rivals, the enemy. We've got to get rid of them. And if they happen to be bigger than us, we've got to run.

So these three fundamental attitudes of acquisitiveness, fear, and aversion are coming out of that fundamental delusion of self. And I like it when he says it's a biological, it's a physical need, right? Because without a body, you're not here. So this fear roots itself in the body.

Now, here's the Buddha asking his monks, well, how often should we meditate on death? So on one occasion, this is paraphrased, on one occasion, the Buddha asked several monks, "How often do you contemplate death?" And one of them replied, "Well, I contemplate death every day, Lord." He said, "That's not good enough." And then he asked another monk and he said, "How often do you contemplate death?" He said, "Well, I contemplate death with each mouthful I eat during a meal." "It's not good enough." And then he turned around to another and he said, "What about you?" And he said, "Well, I contemplate death with each in-breath and out-breath." And the Buddha smiled and he was pleased.

So, of course, we can't be always thinking about death all the time. I mean, completely all the time. But as you know, in medieval times, death was very obvious. I mean, people died in front of you. And they always kept death. It was a habit to keep a memento mori, a reminder of death, which was normally some little skull or some-

thing, kept on a table by the bedside or whatever it could be easily seen. So you could catch your eye and it would just come up just that moment. There is an end to my life. And every day shortens the period by where I'm going to actually reach this point.

So that's, now, when we're thinking about the actual moment of death, that's all it is, isn't it? You could be shocked, somebody could throw you under a bus, for instance, and just in that shocking moment, you'd be breathing in, wouldn't you? And then you'd be dead. On the other hand, you could be just breathing out, just your last breath. You could just letting go. And at the end of the out-breath, there's death.

So every time you're sitting in meditation, just knowing that the in-breath ends and the out-breath ends is to keep us in touch with the idea that everything vanishes. Everything comes to an end. And this body will die. This person will die. And of course, if we keep constantly distracting ourselves, always finding something to do, something to achieve, something, we're just going to be taken by surprise.

I mean, what would our last thoughts be? I mean, just consider, just consider. You're sitting at breakfast there and you're holding a piece of toast and it's saturated, dripping with hot butter and layers of marmalade. And as you raise it to your mouth, suddenly you have a heart attack. Can you imagine the agony? What would you do? Would you go for a final bite or would you sit there calmly, knowing and just letting that toast drop and falling away into death?

Now, on the other hand, we have a story of a Zen monk, it's only an apocryphal story, falling over a cliff, hanging on by his nails for dear life and having the time to admire, sneaking from a cranny, a little wildflower. That's how we want to go, isn't it? Calm, peaceful, with joy in our hearts. Why not? Why not?

The Buddha says there are four types of people. There are those who wake up to death, who wake up to the idea of death, the immediacy of death, even upon hearing the word very early on in life. And there are those who don't wake up until someone dear to them dies. I remember when my mother and father died, I was telling the family that I'm next. And there are those who wake up when lots of people die. So, I mean, this whole catastrophe that's happened around COVID with people dying here and there in that first wave, that really created a lot of fear and anxiety in society. And the final one, of course, is when, or the worst case scenario is to suddenly wake up to the whole notion of death when the doctor tells you you've got six weeks to live. That's called being unprepared for a terminal shock.

So, but no matter how ready we are for death, it'll always come with a shock. Because so long as the self is there, there's always that residue, no matter how small, of fear. But now that we've got this war right on our doorstep, and of course the war's going on all over the place, consider the soldier, what he must have to brace himself for. He goes in with his machine gun and whatnot, but I mean, he knows that he could be shot. So there's always that wonderful ability to be able to be open to the idea that you're going to die. And it's one of those things I think that a soldier who goes in with proper intention has the ability to turn it into a spiritual practice.

Anyway, how do we do it? So this is the big question, isn't it? How do we actually do this contemplation on death? Now, contemplation is not the same as thinking, right? We're not going to sit here thinking about death. What is death? What does it mean? Where is it going? What will happen to me when I die? That's a complete waste of time.

What we're going to do is to use a phrase, use a mantra. You can choose a passage, but anything which brings up the feelings, the attitudes we have around death. And as we repeat these phrases, we're getting in touch with the resistance, not wanting to accept the truth value of it. And it's being able to keep on saying it, keep on saying it gently into the heart until you get that surrender. And then there's that digestion that comes into the heart of the whole idea of sickness, aging and death.

Sickness, of course, is a prelude to death. And aging is just a slow, miserable death, which I am now coming to, such as myself. And as we practice this, and that openness comes to that, and we surrender to the truth of that, you might find that there's a wonderful relief, and even a smile appears on the face. And then there's that ability to hold it with a gentle kindness, with a gentle kindness. And there's always that sense of humour about it. I mean, the whole situation is ridiculous. You get born, you do all this work and then you drop dead. If you remember the old comedian joke, life's hard and then you die. Samuel Beckett says it beautifully in his own inimitable way: "We are born astride a grave."

So what I'm going to do is give you these sentences. And what you do is just repeat them gently within your heart. We're going to do it for about a good half minute each. It sounds long, but you'd be surprised how quickly it passes.

So first of all, there's the sickness, which is a preparation for death. You can look upon it as a preparation for death. The body manifesting its vulnerability. So there's discomfort or pain and there's always some disability. And this contemplation undermines this intoxication with youth of always trying to stay young, of always being 60 as the

new 40, things like that. So sickness is unpreventable. The body is going to fall sick to some degree or another in our lifetimes. Hopefully, of course, it will be something which passes.

So these are the three sentences. The body is subject to disease. The body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. So I'll say them again and then I'll create a break for you to just keep repeating it.

This body is subject to disease. Repeating it gently into the heart. This body is subject to disease.

[pause]

This body is of a nature to fall ill.

[pause]

This body has not gone beyond sickness.

[pause]

The next set of phrases are to do with aging, which is, of course, as I say, a progressive dying. This undermines the obsession with health and beauty, with intolerances and fasting and food ingredients. It's the obsession with it all. So aging, of course, is inevitable.

So again, the three phrases: this body is subject to aging. This body has not gone beyond aging. This body is now in the process of aging. So again, we just repeat these phrases into our hearts, observing any resistance, feeling the resistance, just allowing the resistance to manifest and wait for it to die until we surrender to the truth of the statement.

This body is subject to aging.

[pause]

This body has not gone beyond aging.

[pause]

This body is now in a process of aging.

[pause]

Life is uncertain, death is certain. This contemplation undermines the overwhelming clinging to life at all costs, shoring it up, barricading it with fame, riches, and power. It is inescapable. Everyone must die. The remainder of our lifespan is decreasing continually. Death will come regardless of whether or not we have made time to practice Dharma. We don't know when we are going to die. These are all phrases from the Buddha. We don't know when we're going to die. Human life expectancy is uncertain. There are many causes of death and the human body is fragile. Only the practice of Dharma can help us at the time of death. Our wealth cannot help us. Our loved ones cannot help us. Our own body cannot help us. Death is inescapable.

These are the phrases to repeat. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

This body is subject to death.

[pause]

This body has not gone beyond death.

[pause]

This body will die.

[pause]

There is a final contemplation which links into this, which is about *kamma*. And it's recognising that we own our actions. We inherit the results of our actions. We are born because of our actions into every moment. We're related through our actions. And we live dependent upon our actions. So whatever good or ill I do, I shall inherit the results. That's a nice little thing just to repeat.

Having done these exercises, you might think, oh, well, so I get a footing in *Nibbāna*. I might get a little hint of what *Nibbāna* actually is. And if I do it often enough and with real sincerity, I might even be liberated. But is that all? Not at all. There are amazing benefits to be had right through this practice of contemplation.

First of all, there's that relief that comes from the acceptance of the inevitable. We simply stop fighting. So much energy is lost, pushing thoughts and feelings away. This energy is now released in order to do better things with it. The underlying fear of sickness, aging and death puts a pall over our lives. Now life becomes more colourful. We appreciate it more. We regain some of the childlike wonder of the miracle of life. It's as though somebody's pulled up a blind in a room that we didn't think was dark.

Now, with this, there comes gratitude. And from out of that gratitude, a desire to share our joys and comfort others, share our joys with others, to share our joys and to comfort others in their sorrow. Accepting death as part of the life cycle, we're more at ease by someone's dying bedside.

And it brings us sharply into the present, to the arising and passing away of every moment, and to the realization that within all this change is the unchangeable, the unconditioned, the beatitude of *nibbāna*.

So that is why in *vipassanā* we investigate *anicca*, impermanence, one of the three characteristics of existence. It leads to the realization that to hold on to anything is illusory and bound to bring some level of dissatisfaction. And it leads us to realize the insubstantiality of the self, once so solid, but now just arising and passing away with every moment of consciousness.

You'll find lots of books if you want to find them somewhere by various writers.

So what's the practice in daily life? Well, it's putting aside just a few moments in the morning. You could do it just after the sitting, before *mettā*. It's nice to do before *mettā*, I think. In which you just repeat those phrases gently into your heart.

These sorts of contemplations work over time. They're not something that works just because you've done it once. Even if you were to do it all day, which would be a good idea, the effect would disappear. It has to be done every day, for every day of our lives. Just that little reminder. And it is a really powerful practice.

I want to leave you with a little film. It's not a very good quality at all, but it does get across the inevitable and the shortness of our life. We don't realize how short it is until it's nearly over. But it's amazing how time passes and it does.

I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your daily practice of the contemplation of ageing, sickness, and death you will reach your liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 219

The Eight Worldly Winds

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

> *Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the atta loka dhammā (eight worldly conditions) that create mental turbulence and suffering when we become obsessed with them: gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. Drawing from the Buddha's teachings, he explores how these conditions arise from our sense of self and create attraction and repulsion that bind us to suffering.*
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> *Through practical reflection questions, Bhante guides us to investigate our own relationships with these inevitable life experiences. He explains how an awakened Arahant remains unmoved by worldly vicissitudes—described in the Maṅgala Sutta as "a mind unshaken by worldly vicissitudes, sorrowless, stainless and secure"—representing one of life's greatest blessings.*
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> *The talk emphasizes developing equanimity toward these conditions through understanding their impermanent nature and learning to receive rather than grasp experiences. Bhante distinguishes between wholesome desires and obsessive craving, showing how we can engage with life's ups and downs without the personalization that creates suffering. He concludes by connecting this wisdom to daily life and the Noble Eightfold Path, demonstrating how Buddhist practice extends beyond meditation into skillful engagement with worldly realities.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

This month, I've chosen these *Aṭṭhalokadahamā*, these eight worldly conditions, concerns, winds, fortunes, vicissitudes. It's the ups and downs of life. That's basically what it is.

So this is what the Buddha says. Gain obsesses the mind and loss obsesses the mind. Fame obsesses the mind and disrepute obsesses the mind. Blame obsesses the mind and praise obsesses the mind. Pleasure obsesses the mind and pain obsesses the mind. They are attracted to gain and repelled by loss. They are attracted to fame and repelled by disrepute. They are attracted to praise and repelled by blame. They are attracted to pleasure and repelled by pain. Thus involved with attraction and repulsion, they are not freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and anguish. They are not freed from suffering, I say.

So that's the eight worldly conditions. Now, when we look at those conditions, you can see that they all arise out of a notion of a self. It's me that's blamed. It's me that's praised. And when we do that, it just creates mental turbulence. When this happens at a societal level, then you can see communities being split, as we see these days. And when it gets to an international level, well, there's always war going on.

So what's it like to be freed of these worldly concerns? In the discourse on the greatest blessings, the Buddha has stated how an awakened Arahant, how somebody who's fully liberated is unmoved by one of the eight worldly conditions. And he describes this as one of the great blessings. It says that a mind unshaken by worldly vicissitudes, sorrowless, stainless and secure, this is the greatest blessing. And we can extend that to families and countries and we might just get to a peaceful world.

What I've done is just made up questions around these eight factors to give some idea of how we can use them to reflect on the way we are with these fortunes and misfortunes. So if we take gain, for instance, we ask ourselves, what am I obsessing about? What sort of an accumulation am I gathering? What collections do I have? Wealth, power, even though we might not have much wealth at all or indeed hardly any power. The point is this obsession about it, control. How much energy do we give to it? And how much time do we waste brooding and planning over these sorts of things?

And then once we can bring a past event to mind as a practice, we can get in touch with that feeling, that craving, that holding on, the cramped grip. What does that feel like? And to try and separate that from what you might call just an ordinary wholesome desire. I mean, we need money, we need friends. But there's a way of having that without that obsessiveness.

And then there's loss. And everybody feels that. You might lose your job. What does that feel like? If you have lost your job in the past, how did that feel? The despair, the confusion, the anxiety, panic? So much depends upon our work and the wage that we have. And then there's the self-worth that we have from our work, the sense of status. But we'll come to that a bit later.

So we have to ask ourselves, what if I let go of that? What if I just let go of the obsessiveness and just be more content with what I have? And by going to a past occasion and investigating it and reflecting on it, it just helps us to be prepared for the next time. So we're not so shocked when we lose things, lose our work, lose money on the horses and stuff like that.

So the next one is praise. Again, we look back and we think, well, what have I done or said, or am doing or saying which has an underlying demand for praise, for admiration, for compliments, for appreciation? How does that feel? Is it necessary? And how does that reflect on ourselves and how we're judging ourselves? And how we feel embarrassed when we suddenly realise that we've said something or done something just to be praised, just to be admired. And what would have happened if you hadn't had that intention in that particular case? And what should the attitude have been?

When it comes to blame, well, nobody likes that. Nobody likes to be blamed for anything. And again, to bring up an occasion in the past where we've been blamed and we've been judged and we've been criticized, and just to get to the hurt of that and how we reacted. And sometimes we react silently within ourselves. We spend hours getting our own back in these fantasies, throwing people on fires and chucking them off bridges and things like that.

So it's getting in touch with those feelings and naming them for what they are. What is it like to be humiliated? Instead of hiding that from ourselves, suppressing it because of our pride, it's to let it up, to let up and just feel it and to know that if I can just allow these things to manifest, they're actually dying out. They're actually curing.

And some of these things are very difficult. The hurt, the humiliation really hurts the ego. It really punches the self. And if we're afraid of criticism, does that make us timid? Does that make us timid? And then when we have been blamed and it has been our fault, have we been humble enough to accept that and try and do something about it and not let that rumble on afterwards about self-criticism? I'm such a fool. I'm an idiot. How could I have done that? It's just being able to let go, to let go of something.

And then we have the area of success and failure. So again, it's much the same thing. You bring to mind a past occasion when you feel you've been successful, a job well done. And there's nothing wrong with appropriate congratulations. But again, it's this business of hanging on to that success.

I've got here just what the Buddha says about somebody who becomes an Arahant. He says that someone who's an Arahant with their taints — taints are the roots of all our defilements, a craving for pleasure, craving to become, and ignorance, the basic ignorance of self. And these are the roots from which all these defilements arise. So he says when those are destroyed, and has lived the holy life, done what has to be done, laid down the burden, reached the goal, destroyed the fetters of becoming, and is completely liberated through final desire. So you can see it's that sense of completion. What had to be done has been done. And if you look at your life where you've really completed something, it's done, it's finished, it's gone. There's a sense of joy about that.

And lay down the burden, the sense of relief of laying down the burden, laying down the burden of being a human being, basically. And the taste of *Nibbāna* is the joy of freedom. So that's where we're heading. It's good to remind ourselves about that.

And when we are praised, we tend to personalize things. So immediately it's not the job that's being praised. It's me. I'm amazing. I get very big headed. And sometimes if you catch yourself like that, if you catch yourself being big headed and full of self praise and all that, then again becomes a sort of — and you notice that other people are seeing it as big headedness. And that again produces a sense of shame within us.

So all these things, just recognize all the ego stuff as unnecessary evaluation tags. Just let them fade away. And eventually, as the Buddha said, they just fall off.

Failure. So a job didn't turn out well, a relationship sadly ended. How's it feel not to achieve something, even if you've put a lot of work into it and it just hasn't happened? So again you get this personalization. The job failed, therefore I'm a failure. The relationship failed, so I'm unlovable.

And it's reflecting on that and recognizing that those personalizations of things are just not necessary. They just add suffering to it. And if it was a genuine mistake or whatever, we can be realistic about it and to make sure that we don't repeat that same mistake. But then again, circumstances change. We don't have that total control anymore.

And finally, there's pleasure and pain. So pleasure, both mental and physical pleasure. We're always seeking that. We're always trying to be in that pleasurable state. But it's a case of not attaching to it, not making it something that is repeatable. So when we have something joyful, something pleasant, to accept that it's come to an end and there's no need to go any further with it, and to find out how we experience desire.

So sometimes, for instance, when it comes to food, you don't feel hungry, so you're not attracted so much to the cake. But sometimes when you are hungry, you can't stop yourself from eating the whole cake. So there's something about desire which is separate from seeing something that is pleasant. There's that movement towards it of wanting, wanting, wanting. And then to make that distinction between the desire and the action.

So remember, in Buddhist psychology, this is really crucial because when something is a desire, nothing's actually happened. It's just potential. But as soon as you decide to let that energy go and produce something, a thought or speech, something that you do,

there becomes an action. And that action goes out into a matrix of relationships on the outside, but it also moves into the inner matrix of our psyche. And that's what we've been by *kamma*, action.

So we're trying to make a distinction here between indulgence and enjoyment. And we do that, and the Buddha's always on about this, by restraining ourselves. That's very difficult in our society. We're not expected to restrain. In fact, everybody wants us to indulge. But the act of restraint gets us in touch with the unacceptable level, you might say, from a Dharma point of view of desire. So in other words, nothing's wrong with appetite. Everything's wrong with greed.

And then finally pain. So pain can be very difficult. And I think one of the things we have to be careful of here is that we don't take what pain comes to us as some sort of karmic resolve. I deserve the pain. We're not in charge of the body and the body has its own weaknesses. And sometimes when the pain comes, it's to do with genetics. It's not to do with the person themselves.

So it's up to us to decide whether this pain is something that I want to work with. So you're working with it in terms of getting that right relationship with pain of patience, understanding what pain is at different levels. At one level, at the basic level of contact, pain is just sensation. It's when it becomes a feeling, when it's acknowledged as a feeling that you get the sense of pain and then you get that reaction of not wanting it. But if you can't do that sort of investigation and you haven't got the patience for it, then take an aspirin, do something.

I was just thinking then of the Act of Parliament that we've had, well, it's not completely passed, about assisted dying. And it's an area which Buddhists have to really think about and where they are personally with that. And when pain gets to a point which cannot be assuaged by any of the morphines and all that sort of stuff, then one has to decide for oneself whether it's a time to put an end to one's life and whatnot. And there are various degrees of understanding as to what is right and what is wrong. But ultimately, it's the individual. It's for them to feel OK with it. So that's a big topic, that.

So again, going back to the Buddha. When gain arises for an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person, they do not reflect. Gain has arisen for me. It is inconstant, stressful and subject to change. They do not discern it as it has come to be. So that's what's missing. We presume that once I've got something, it's just going to grow, that it's not going to leave me. But it's a good thing to be able to remind oneself that whatever I have received, which is bringing me joy, pleasure, this too will pass.

So one of the things I try to remind people to do is that after lunch to say to yourself, well, this is one less lunch in this lifetime. We can measure our lives by how many lunches we have, how many breakfasts we have.

And then those people who are not instructed, they welcome, they grab hold of an arisen gain and rebel against an arisen loss. And so it's the same with status and disgrace, with praise and blame and with pleasure and pain. As they are thus engaged in welcoming and rebelling, they are not released from birth, aging and death, from sorrows, lamentations, pain, distresses and despairs. They are not released, I tell you, from suffering and unhappiness.

And those who are awakened, those who have developed to some degree, then they don't welcome it in that sense of wanting to indulge it. They just receive it. And this is the difference, he says, the distinction. This is the distinguishing factor between a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person.

So what's this underlying attitude that we're trying to develop to all these worldly conditions? It's equanimity. And this comes about more and more as identity becomes, about a self becomes less and less. The less we personalize things, the more we find ourselves at ease with the way things are. And it's this sense of self which is producing all the problems.

And we undermine that by reminding ourselves what the correct, or should we say, the more wholesome, skillful attitude ought to be. And it's a working process. I wouldn't talk about progress. Don't get involved with progress. Just get involved with process. How do I get rid of these wrong attitudes that I have to these eight worldly winds, which are going to happen anyway in my life? We're not going to stop it.

So it's one of the attractions of the Buddha's teachings that he really has also buried his teachings as well into daily life. So it's not just meditation and beautiful mental states and developing *mettā* from the heart. It's actually driving us into right action, right eightfold path, right speech, right action and right livelihood. And one of the things we have to do is just be able to handle these eight worldly winds.

Very good. I hope that these words have been of some assistance. They have not caused confusion. And that by your careful investigation of these eight worldly winds, you will soon be liberated from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 220

The Paradox of Fear

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddhist understanding of fear and anxiety, tracing their roots to the delusion of self and our attachments to people, possessions, and experiences. Drawing on the Dhammapada's teaching that 'from attachment comes fear,' he explains how our attempts to buffer ourselves against loss paradoxically increase our vulnerability to fear.*
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> *The talk features a detailed exploration of the Bhayabherava Sutta, where the Buddha describes his own encounters with fear and dread while meditating alone in frightening forest shrines. Through this discourse, Bhante demonstrates how even the Awakened One had to work skillfully with fear, neither suppressing it nor being overwhelmed by it, but staying present with whatever posture he was in until the fear subsided.*
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> *Bhante introduces the 'paradox of fear' - how some fears are actually wholesome and protective. He distinguishes between unwholesome fear arising from attachment and self-grasping, and beneficial fear that includes dread of consequences and healthy shame, which act as guardians preventing unskillful actions. The practical approach emphasizes using mettā (loving-kindness) not to suppress fear, but to hold it with care, allowing the energy to naturally dissipate through mindful awareness and acceptance.*

So I thought this month we'd have a look at this fear and anxiety since there's so much of it. No need to mention names, what's causing all the problems.

I mean, there are words in Pali which separate fear and anxiety, but for our purposes, we can put them all into just this word fear. The way we experience fear is a sudden jolt of bad energy in the body and it tends to go away. So if you step out on the road and a car just misses you, you get that fright. And it tends to be paralyzing and cold, I think. Whereas anxiety is something long-term. It's always about the future. It's always what's going to happen next. And we tend to feel that as an agitation. And it warms us up. It heats us up. So there's quite a difference between them. But for our purposes, as I say, fear will do.

So whenever we talk about things like this, always go back to the root problem. And there, of course, we find the dear old self. So this is the delusion of some body, some person which has a reality to it. So remember that even the Buddha has a personality. It's not as though you lose your personality when you become liberated. But you lose

that sense of self being isolated from a sense of disconnect and this manifests of course mainly when we come across death. So that's our old friend death and anything that suggests endings always reminds us of that ultimate state, which brings fear.

It's the unknowability when it'll happen. We don't know what will happen after death. We might have a certain faith, a certain belief that we carry on. On the other hand, we might think we just disappear. But whatever it is, nobody actually wants to die.

Now, from that sense of self, of course, we try to buffer ourselves against the world to protect ourselves from the world and from that fear of losing. So we attach to things, we gather wealth, friends, power. We like to absorb into sensual pleasures and become attached to that sort of thing, going on holidays, sex, drugs, rock and roll. And of course, the more things we have, the more people, the friends and so on, the more we can lose. And therefore, with that attachment, there also comes fear.

So the Buddha in the Dhammapada states it quite clearly. From attachment comes grief. From attachment comes fear. One who is free from attachment has no grief. So how can there be fear?

So how do we overcome it? Well, first of all, there's just the reflection. So we've done, in a past moon celebration, we wandered into the idea of death, sickness, aging and all that. And it's bringing that up as often as we want just to get accustomed to the idea of sickness, aging and death. And it's through that sort of cusp that that sense of being OK with the feelings that come up with that, that is part of purifying the heart of its fear of it. So one who is wise and full of insight does not tremble in the face of death.

And then there's *mettā*. Now you have to be careful. *Mettā* isn't there to sort of bury it, to push it away, to suppress it. *Mettā* is there as a way of approaching it. I'm sure you've heard me speak about holding things with that sense of care.

So if we find ourselves being anxious, being afraid of things, especially with the news and all that. And it can bring up a certain sense of fear and anxiety about what's happening in the world. Just to stay with the feeling and to embrace it with a sense of care. And remember, you can always talk to the heart: "Dear heart, I can feel you. I know you're in a dreadful state, but we'll just stay here for a little while and I'm sure that you'll release that energy." See?

So by creating that distance between what you're feeling and what is doing the feeling, you're allowing that energy to dissipate. So that's a way of coming to terms with fear and of allowing that sensation to die away.

So what we're heading for, of course, is fearlessness. And part of the practice of *vipassanā* is to do with that. But remember, you can do it at any time. Any time, if there's the occasion, if you're on your own, for instance, as you'll see from a reading that I'll be giving from the discourses, you can just sit with it for a while. That's all. And sometimes it can be quite heavy. I mean, even feelings of nausea. So you just sit with it, you see. And that lack of reaction allows the heart to heal itself.

So remember, every time we're reacting, pushing it away, the energy of pushing it away is actually becoming part of that fear. And if we allow the anxiety to run away with those thoughts, then it's going to grow. So with those two ways of dealing with it, as soon as we realize we're doing that, stop, and just open up to what the heart wants to say.

So I've just chosen a passage really to show us how the Buddha himself dealt with it. And it's much the same as we've been talking. So it's nice to know that he went through the same problems. So it's called the discourse of fear and dread. And a Brahmin, Janusoni, goes to see him. And there's the usual exchange of greetings and little niceties. And then he says to the Buddha, "Remote jungle thicket places in the forest are hard to endure. Seclusion is hard to practice and it is hard to enjoy solitude. One would think the jungles would rob a meditator of their minds if they have no concentration."

So the Buddha agrees with that. And then he lists a whole load of things that if we suffer from these things, it's going to be hard to sit in solitude. So it's unpurified of bodily conduct, verbal conduct. Covetousness and full of lust, ill will and intentions of hate, sloth and torpor, restlessness and unpeacefulness in mind, uncertain and doubtful, given to self-praise and disparaging others, subject to alarm and terror, that suggests trauma to me. Desirous of gain, honour and renown, lazy and wanting in energy, unmindful and not fully aware, unconcentrated, with straying minds, devoid of wisdom, idiots. Such people will find it very difficult to find solitude in the forests, in the jungle thicket resting places.

So now he says of himself that he felt that he wasn't suffering from all that very much. And so he decides there are especially auspicious nights of the 14th, 15th and the 8th of the fortnight. So this is the moon calendar. "Now, what if on such nights as these I were to dwell in such awe-inspiring, hair-raising abodes as orchard shrines, woodland shrines and tree shrines?" So these shrines were where the gods were and some of them weren't particularly nice. Interestingly enough, he doesn't here suggest that he went to sit in the charnel grounds to overcome the fear of death. Here he is talking about these shrines and of course he's there during the night.

"I dwelt in such awe-inspiring, horrifying abodes as orchard shrines, woodland shrines and tree shrines. And while I dwelt there, a wild animal would come up to me or a peacock would knock off a branch or a wind would rustle the leaves. And I thought, what now if this is the fear and dread coming?" So he's gone to experience this fear and dread.

"And then I thought, why do I always dwell expecting fear and dread? What if I soothe that fear and dread while keeping the same posture that I'm in when it comes upon me?" So he stops expecting this fear and dread. However, it does come.

And he says, "While I walked, the fear and dread came upon me. I neither stood nor sat nor lay down till I had soothed that fear and dread. While I stood, the fear and dread came upon me. I neither walked nor sat nor lay down till I had soothed the fear and dread. And while I sat, the fear and dread came upon me. I neither walked nor stood nor lay down till I had soothed the fear and dread. And while I lay down, the fear and dread came upon me. I neither walked nor stood nor sat down till I had soothed that fear of dread."

So there he is, you see, he went through the same sort of rubbish that we have to go through.

Now, so that's to do with, shall we say, fear as something unwholesome. But interestingly enough, fear can be wholesome. And one writer calls it the paradox of fear. So take a very simple instance. Why don't we just step out on the road and cross to the other side? Because, within us, there's a fear of being knocked over. And it's reminding ourselves of that, even if it's only in the background, even if it's only, say, subconscious. We know that if we don't take care and we walk out into the road, we may very well have a serious accident.

So there are two qualities that he points to, which are, shall we say, wholesome fear. And that's the dread of consequences and shame. So he gives a whole list of things that we should be afraid of in terms of consequences. Some of them pretty straightforward. Things like misconduct of body, speech and mind. But he also talks about famine, catastrophes, schisms.

So these things are being afraid of famine and catastrophes and things like that. We prepare for them. So, as you know, we've had floods in this country and we finally did have done a little bit about them. So knowing that there are going to be catastrophes, there are going to be famines, you build up situations where you can undermine them.

So this fear of things going wrong and the fear of doing things which are unwholesome and will have consequences, that sort of fear is a wholesome fear. It stops us doing things or it makes us do things for our own personal benefit.

The other one is shame. So shame is when we feel that we've lost esteem in people's eyes if we do something that they see or hear. And that, of course, is something that we don't like at all. But it's also at times when we have thought something or we do something where nobody's around, but we just feel that it's not something that I expect of myself. I had an old aunt who used to say, if I did that, it wouldn't be me. So it's that understanding about how we feel when we do something that humiliates us, that we feel that our worthiness in people's eyes and in our own eyes has been undermined.

So fear and dread of consequences, in the Buddha's understanding, are actually our guardians. They stop us doing unwholesome things. And it's interesting that the academics who study this are sort of confounded by it. I mean, to me, it seems pretty straightforward. So one of them conjured up this phrase, the paradox of fear.

So there we have it, in short, how the roots of fear and anxiety based on this self and attachment to things, how we deal with it through loving kindness and insights, *vipassanā*, and allowing that energy to dissipate and how some fears that we have and some loss of face, the fear of the loss of face are actually our protectors.

Very good. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that by your careful investigation of fear, you will be liberated from all fear sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 221

Dukkha - The Buddha Grounds His Teaching on This Word

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

> *In this foundational talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma returns to basics by examining dukkha—the central concept upon which the Buddha grounded his entire teaching. Beginning with the word's fascinating etymology (from ancient Aryan nomads where 'su-kha' meant a good axle hole and 'du-kkha' a poor one), Bhante explains why the Buddha chose this undeniable human experience as his starting point, unlike other religions that depend on unprovable premises about supernatural beings or market forces.*
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> *Drawing from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), the Buddha's first discourse, Bhante outlines the Four Noble Truths and the Middle Way between sensual indulgence and self-mortification. He clarifies the three aspects of dukkha: ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha), suffering due to impermanence (viparināma-dukkha), and suffering due to conditionality (saṅkhāra-dukkha). This third aspect points to the compounded, essenceless nature of all phenomena, including ourselves—a crucial insight for vipassanā practice.*
>
> *The talk illuminates how dukkha connects to the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhaṇa): anicca, dukkha, and anattā. Bhante emphasizes that our task as meditators is to perceive the very process by which we create suffering through craving and clinging to the five aggregates (khandhas). Understanding this process directly—not intellectually but experientially—is itself the path to liberation. The teaching reminds us that dukkha is not merely 'suffering' but encompasses unsatisfactoriness and stress in all conditioned experience.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

This evening I thought we'd get back to basics a little bit and just look at this word dukkha.

The first thing is just to catch a little bit of the etymology. According to Winthrop Sargeant, the ancient Aryans who brought the Sanskrit language to India were a nomadic horse and cattle breeding people who travelled in horse and ox drawn vehicles. Su and du are prefixes indicating good and bad. The word kha in later Sanskrit comes to mean

sky, ether, or space, but was originally just a hole, particularly of an axle. So sukha meant having a good axle hole, and dukkha meant having a poor one. That gives you some indication as to its roots.

Before we go into dukkha and its crucial place in the Buddhist teachings, just as a general understanding about isms and religions: all the Abrahamic religions have a God, a supernatural being who punishes you if you do something wrong and gives you lots of ice cream if you do something right. This sort of God, as you know, has created enormous problems for Western civilization, depending on which side God was on.

The East is different. There's no such personal God in Hinduism, and all that around good and bad moral behavior is taken care of by the law of karma, as it is in Buddhism and Jainism. Hinduism came to teach more of Brahman, who was an impersonal God. But in terms of the other main religions—Taoism, Jainism, and Buddhism—there is simply no God. They are non-theistic.

The Buddha, then, like these other two religions, Jainism and Taoism—it all depends on the individual human being. We create our own worlds. We have to get out of the mess. And once we're out of the mess, we are in a state of purity and happiness.

Now, that word dukkha has such a wide meaning that no one English word can do it. It was originally translated as suffering, but that's far too heavy, you might say. Then unsatisfactoriness, and even stress, for those of you who know the work of Ajahn Thanissaro.

Just as these religions have a grounding in a supernatural being which cannot be proven—although they say it can be—you'll also find that in the humanistic religions or secular religions of liberalism, communism, national socialism in its worst form Nazism, and now a tweaked form of liberalism as neoliberalism—all of these have a premise. We know, for instance, in neoliberalism everything is to be controlled and guided by the market; governments and unions all have to get out of the way, the market knows best. And we all know where that's taken us.

Once a premise is proven to be untrue or leading to disaster, then the whole fabric, the whole architecture of that belief disappears.

So the Buddha grounds himself on something which simply cannot be denied: dukkha. The first discourse is around this word dukkha, and this is what he says at the beginning of it:

"There are two extremes that should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness." We can take homelessness to mean anybody on the spiritual path. "What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial. And the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these two extremes, the Tathāgata"—that's what he called himself; it translates badly as "thus gone," but basically means the transcendent one—"has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to nibbāna."

The first extreme is about indulgence, which is desire and attachment. The second is really blaming the body for all the desires we have. If I didn't have a tongue, if I didn't have the sense of taste, I'd have no problem with food. That's a mistake perhaps made by the Jains, who felt that the body itself, the material of the body, was the karmic result of bad actions.

In that discourse, he delineates the truth. He first of all states clearly that there is the truth of dukkha—we'll come to exactly how he defines that later. Then he points to the second, which is the cause of dukkha, which of course lies in that craving. The third is the cessation of dukkha. Dukkha is completely overcome by letting go of that craving and attachment. And then there's the path leading to the cessation of dukkha, the Eightfold Path.

He goes on to say what we should do about this dukkha. "This is the noble truth of dukkha. The noble truth of dukkha is to be fully understood." Then he says, "The noble truth of dukkha has been fully understood"—so he's talking about himself now.

Then he talks about the origin of dukkha: "The noble truth of the origin of dukkha is to be abandoned." That cause of dukkha is eventually to be abandoned. And he states of himself, "The origin of dukkha has been abandoned."

In the third, he says there is a noble truth of the cessation, the complete eradication of dukkha. "The noble truth of the cessation of dukkha is to be realized."

This is something to be personally experienced—the liberation from suffering. And the noble truth of the cessation of dukkha has been realized by himself.

This discourse was given to his five companions. Remember, he had left them. He had then gone on his own and finally found enlightenment, or became, shall we say, awakened. And when he came back, this is the talk that he gave to them. This is, of course, a formalized talk, but it gives us some idea of what that original conversation was about.

"This is what the Blessed One said." And being pleased, the group of five delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: "Whatever is subject to arising is all subject to ceasing."

Then the Buddha expressed this heartfelt sentiment: "Kondañña has really understood! Kondañña has really understood!" And that is how Venerable Kondañña became known as "Kondañña Who Understands," or Añña Kondañña.

So that is the first definition of dukkha. Dukkha later becomes slightly more refined in the sense of being one of the three characteristics of existence. And these are what we investigate in our vipassana practice: anicca, the quality of impermanence. Knowing impermanence, seeing impermanence, begins to reveal why holding on to anything pleasant leads to suffering, because everything, of course, disappears. Impermanence also leads us to understand anatta, not-self, because the self is supposed to be eternal, immortal.

Now we come to the core aspects of dukkha, and this is the most general explanation the Buddha gives.

First, there is ordinary suffering—dukkha-dukkha. That first dukkha refers to all the natural suffering and displeasure that we experience in life. The dukkha that we can be freed from is our relationship of wanting and not wanting. Reactivity. All our reactions based upon the idea of a self seeking to make this world a pleasant place for itself, always manipulating the world to create comfort, wanting and not wanting. That is the first form of dukkha.

The next form is caused by change—viparinama-dukkha. Even pleasant experiences are to be recognized as impermanent, and it is foolish to cling to them. When we have a wonderful party, we always want another one just like it. And of course, it never turns out the way we hoped.

Finally, there is the suffering due to conditionality—sankhara-dukkha. Sankhara refers to conditionality, but it also speaks to compoundedness. Everything is made up of bits and pieces that constitute an object, or rather, that the human mind perceives as an object. We experience ourselves as whole, complete, entire. And yet when we actually investigate ourselves, we find we are just a mass of cells, or chemically speaking, just chemicals, or at the deepest level, just subatomic energy. And the mind is simply this constant flow of thinking, imagining, emotions arising and passing.

This means that this body, this self, does not have a permanent essence. That is the important thing. Not seeing this leads us into delusion, which is the fundamental cause of our suffering.

Finally, the Buddha sums it all up. This is his definition of dukkha:

"Birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, illness is dukkha, and death is dukkha. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are dukkha. Association with the unloved is dukkha. Separation from the loved is dukkha. Not getting what one wants is dukkha. In conclusion, the five clinging aggregates—the khandhas—are dukkha."

That final sentence speaks of the clinging aggregates. Remember, these are the body itself, all our feelings both physical and emotional, all our perceptions, and then the sankharas. This is where we come in, because through acts of will, we have created these volitional conditionings, these habits, which are both conditioned and conditioning. And our task as meditators is

is to perceive this whole process of how we create suffering. And it is perceiving the process that is the process of liberation.

The final khandha, by the way, is consciousness.

I can only hope that this little talk on dukkha will be of some benefit, and that you will, by your personal and complete devotion to the practice, liberate yourself from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 222

The Crucial Role of Desire and Intention

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies three crucial Pali concepts that are often misunderstood: taṇhā (unwholesome craving), chanda (wholesome desire), and cetanā (intention). Drawing from paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), he explains how taṇhā operates within the five middle factors of conditioned existence, leading from sense contact through conceptualization and feeling to craving and identity formation.*
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> *The talk demonstrates how chanda, unlike taṇhā, represents wholesome desire that can develop into spiritual zeal—one of the four iddhipāda (bases of spiritual power). Most significantly, Bhante explains how cetanā (intention) serves as the conditioning factor that determines whether our actions create wholesome or unwholesome kamma. Using vivid examples from daily life and the Vinaya, he shows how the same energy can serve different purposes depending on our underlying intention.*
>
> *This teaching offers practical guidance for developing the mindfulness needed to recognize our true motivations, whether washing dishes with resistance or helping others with hidden expectations. Essential listening for understanding how Buddhist psychology approaches desire, intention, and the path to liberation from suffering.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa

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

So I thought this evening we'd tackle this crucial role of desire and intention. There are three words that we have to be clear about: *taṇhā*, *chanda* and *cetanā*.

This word *taṇhā* originally means a drought. So from that, you get the idea of thirst, and it's used only for unwholesome desires. And it always is included in dependent origination, in the five middle factors, which are the ones that are a process. So first of all, you have a contact with one of your sense bases. Remember the mind, heart is a sense base. Something has to come up into that base of consciousness: moods, emotions, thoughts, images.

And then there's a relationship to what we are experiencing. So we give it first of all a name, a concept. And then we have a feeling arises with it. And dependent on those, we have that reaction that we call a desire. That desire, remember, is coming from a conditioning of wanting and not wanting. And in this case, it's always unwholesome, in dependent origination, because it describes how we create suffering for ourselves.

And then after that, you have an identity: I want. And then there's the empowerment. And that's where we make a distinction between the desire and an intention.

If I take an example, you see an apple. So the first is just a seeing an object—it's round, et cetera. And then it's given a name, apple. And with the word apple, there comes a nice feeling, usually. And then you might feel hungry. So there's a desire for the apple, which may come from just ordinary appetite. But in this case, with *taṇhā*, it becomes because we're greedy.

And then you identify with that. I want that apple. And you can see there how the language confuses us. It creates a delusion, gives you the idea that the I comes first. "I want the apple," but actually it comes towards the end of that process. Once you have that identity, then you empower that desire. And that's when you become an apple eater. So that's the first word, *taṇhā*.

The second word is *chanda*. Now, actually, in the discourses, *chanda* can either be wholesome or unwholesome. But in later Buddhism, the more Abhidhamma commentarial side, the *chanda* tended to be used only for what was a wholesome desire. So we do need desire, but we need those desires that lead to liberation, that lead to happiness in this very life.

So that's *chanda*. And we can translate it as a sort of desire—I mean, you've got to be careful. These words are so confusing. A resolution. It's the energy of wanting something.

The third word is *cetanā*. Now, *cetanā* is connected to the word *citta*, which means mind. So here we're talking about intention or purpose. So there are these two things. There's a desire, which can be wholesome and unwholesome, and there's the purpose.

Now, the importance of that is that the desire itself, the actual energy, the wanting, is neutral. What makes it wholesome and unwholesome is the *cetanā*, your purpose for doing something. Now, to get a feel for what that desire is, as opposed to purpose, you might say, one thing you can do is if you're very hungry, just sit with the food in front of you and just feel the desire. So the purpose is obvious. You want to eat the food. But by sitting there, just looking at the food and smelling the aromas and all that, and you can get that feel for what desire is as an energy.

If you want to really experience it, this is what I used to say, but it's been ruined now. I used to say, turn on the TV when it's your favorite program. Sorry, sit in front of the TV when it's your favorite program and don't turn it on. But unfortunately, iPlayer has ruined all that. You can always catch up with a bit of a pain.

If we take an example from physics of throwing a stone, the energy within the arm is translated into the stone or transferred into the stone, rather. And you cannot separate the force from the stone. You can't stop it in midair and say, well, look, this is the force and this is the stone. They're all one. But the purpose of throwing the stone can be various.

So when I'm walking around the property here, some of the stones from the car park have come onto the path where they shouldn't be. So I might just pick one up and flick it back onto the car park. I might find a flat stone, we have a little pond, and I might throw it on the pond to see it skim just for the joy of it.

But then we also have rabbits. Now, most of you or some of you will remember my experience with moles and how we had to get rid of the lawns and create a garden. So now we have rabbits who come in and dig little holes. So I might be tempted to pick up a stone, not to harm the rabbit, you understand, but to give it the impression that it shouldn't actually be digging a hole in the garden and they've got a whole meadow to go and do it in.

So these are my intentions, but the actual energy or the desire to throw the stone is neutral. There's a distinction there. And the Buddha makes it quite clear. He says, I say to you that it is the *cetanā* that creates a *kamma*.

Now, *kamma* here is not the same as karma, which has come into our language as comeuppance and what you deserve. *Kamma* here just means an action. Now remember that when you repeat an action, you create a habit. And as we know, a collection of habits is your personality, your character. And once you've got that, then your destiny is assured. So something is driving us to our destiny and it's these habits that we've collected throughout life. And our purpose, of course, is to discern those habits that lead us to perdition and those habits that lead to liberation.

I'll give you another example, actually, which comes from the Vinaya, the rule of the monks. If, for instance, I see somebody's mobile and I'm very attracted to it, and I think to myself, I'd like that mobile, because they've left it unguarded on a piece of furniture or something. Now, if I just allow the thoughts to process, in a sense, I'm building up a wrong intention. Now, it might be that this intention becomes so strong that I actually

move towards the mobile with the intention at the back of my mind to slip it in my pocket. Now, and then I stop myself. I stop myself in that process. What the heck's going on? So this is called a *dukkaṭa*. This is already a small offense. It's not serious.

However, the desire for this mobile overtakes me and I again approach the mobile and I just put my hand on it. And then in a sort of horror, I take it back. Now, this is what's called a *thullaccaya*. It's a serious offence. I've actually gone and touched the object that I'm wanting. But again, the desire for this mobile completely overtakes me. I go to it. I touch it and I move it a nano centimeter. That's all just a nano centimeter. I suddenly realize what I've done. I drop it and I walk away too late. As far as the Vinaya is concerned, I've committed an act of stealing, even if I don't get it. It's an act of stealing. And in the Vinaya, this is a very serious offense. It's called a *pārājika*.

So *pārājika* translates as end of life, which means that you have to leave the order and you can't join it again in this lifetime. So this shows you there's an example to sort of show the process of how we can unwittingly be developing a desire, which then suddenly grabs us and we do something that we ought not to have done. So the moral there is don't become a monastic.

So one or two things here now, just as a sort of reflection. When we have a negative desire, so this is to do with a sense of self, when we have a negative desire, when we're doing something or saying something, there's always a separation. You create a duality between the person who doesn't want to do something and what you're actually doing.

So a simple example might be washing pots. You're fed up with washing pots, especially if you've got a family and all these pots and pans everywhere and you're fed up with it and you're washing the pots. Now yourself, the sense of self is I don't, I shouldn't be doing this. Somebody else should be doing this and I'm fed up with doing this, and you're washing the pots at the same time. So there's a split there between the sense of self and what you're actually doing. And that's why sometimes you lose your attention and you drop a pot and break it, and then you're really mad.

Now, if you have a positive craving, if you have something that you really want, an indulging thing, then here you can immerse completely into that experience. So it might be that you're very fond of horror movies or something like that. And you're knowing yourself that perhaps you shouldn't be watching these. I'm not saying you shouldn't, you're saying it to yourself. And then you absorb into the film, you lose yourself into the film.

Now, the problem with going into something from a position of indulgence is that you go in with prejudice. And it's selective. So for instance, supposing now you go to a restaurant and there's a pizza. So you've had all these pizzas. So you've got this idea of what a proper pizza ought to be. And you walk into the restaurant, you ask for a pizza and it just doesn't live up to what you expect a pizza to be. So you're very disappointed and you eat it, of course, grumbling. And you won't go back, of course. But if this was the first pizza you'd ever eaten, you'd be delighted by it.

Another thing is when you are eating something like sticky toffee pudding. So if you eat sticky toffee pudding and what you really want is the sweetness of it, so you're prejudiced towards, you're biased towards tasting the sweetness of the sticky toffee pudding. Now, it might have all sorts of different subtle flavors, but you're unaware of those. You've brushed them out, as it were, because all you're interested in is sweetness. And that's what indulgence does. It just looks for what will gratify it.

So, for instance, another distinction would be, say, wine tasters or tea tasters, better. They have to put the tea or the wine on the tongue and roll it round and really be aware of all the tastes that come out from that. Whereas when we drink tea normally, we just have this one taste in mind. And if there isn't enough milk, we don't like it. If there's not enough sugar, if it's not strong enough and so on and so forth.

So it's a case of recognizing that whenever we're doing something from a position of indulgence, it's always going to crimp our experience. It's going to limit it. Apart from, of course, creating a further, greater dependency on it, like they become addictions at various levels or other, because you're always trying to satisfy this indulgence. And the fact of the matter is it can't be satisfied. Because that's not where the suffering is coming from. The suffering is coming from some sense of lack within us, some sense of neediness within us.

And the object that we're using to fulfill it can never cure that sense of neediness. It just gratifies it for a little while. The only way we can cure the neediness is by staying with it until it evaporates. And the energy of that habit is slowly undermined and disappears. So looking to indulge ourselves, hoping to get rid of the sense, hoping to get rid of that craving is a non-starter. It just gets worse.

Now, going back to *cetanā*, remember that that's your conditioning factor. The purpose for which we're doing something is actually reinforcing a habit that we already have. So it's really important to catch that purpose. Now, sometimes in the discourses, remember that the word *chanda*, desire, will be used in a sense of wholesome and unwholesome. But don't be confused by that if you come across it, because it's always the purpose for which we're doing something which is conditioning us.

Just one little example, which comes from the Visuddhimagga, the path of purification, which was written by a monk called Buddhaghosa in the 5th century. And it's got to be one of the great spiritual manuals of the world. I mean, in that book, which is a big tome, and it's as dry as you could imagine. It has a whole section on the Dharma, a whole section on how to develop beautiful mental states, such as the use of love and *mettā* and things like that, and a whole section on how to develop insight. So it's a really beautiful book.

And in it, he gives this example of a teacher who's with his students. And while he's talking, his hand lifts up and he stops and very slowly puts his hand down. And all the students want to know what happened there. He said, well, what happened? And he said, I didn't know my intention. In other words, his mindfulness is so acute, is so in the present moment that even the smallest intention would normally be acknowledged. And in this case, he hadn't. But he recognized that his hand shouldn't be there. And he very slowly put it back. He intended to put his hand back where it ought to be. So that's how awake we can become in daily life. And it's especially important to be awake whenever we're making decisions that are of an ethical nature.

Finally, this *chanda* is a desire which grows with the habit of doing something until it becomes a sort of zeal. And it becomes part of the four bases of power or success. And I've covered that in an earlier Moon presentation. And that's your zeal. And with it, there comes the energy to support that aspiration. And then there's the commitment, the devotion of the heart to what you're doing. And finally, in terms of anything that needs an investigation, the path of insight, there comes that discrimination, that investigation of what we're experiencing.

So this *chanda* moves from being the slightest little desire, good desire in this case, to a real zeal, a real desire to achieve something. And that's your *chanda*.

So just to sum up very quickly, we've got these three words, this *taṇhā*, which is any desire which we can perceive or realize is unwholesome, *chanda*, which is a desire which is wholesome. And what we have to be careful of is this *cetanā*, the purpose for which we're doing something. And that sometimes takes a little reflection, because it can get a bit dodgy.

On the surface of things, we might be doing something for good purpose. So I'm helping somebody just out of the goodness of my heart. But when they don't thank me, I'm very upset. So that shows that underneath there, I'm expecting some sort of praise. So trying to get all that stuff into consciousness really demands an ability to just stop every so often and recognize what's going on inside us.

I hope my words have not caused any confusion and that by your careful observation of desire, you will drive yourself relentlessly to your liberation from all suffering.

CHAPTER 223

The Four Great Elements

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the mahābhūta or four great elements as presented in the Mahābhūta Sutta (MN 28), delivered by Sāriputta, the Buddha's chief disciple. He explains how these elements—earth (solidity/structure), water (fluidity/cohesion), fire (warmth/metabolism), and air (movement)—form the foundation of our physical experience both internally and externally.*
>
> *The talk demonstrates how these elements serve as powerful meditation objects for developing samādhi and vipassanā insight. Through careful investigation of hardness, liquidity, temperature, and movement in the body, practitioners can deconstruct their experience down to its most fundamental components. This process reveals the constructed nature of our perceptions and supports the insight that these phenomena are "not mine, I am not this, this is not myself"—the classic formula for understanding anattā (not-self).*
>
> *Bhante provides practical guidance for both formal meditation and daily life application, showing how recognizing these elements in simple activities like eating or walking can deepen our understanding of impermanence and the conditioned nature of experience. The teaching concludes with a guided exercise helping practitioners directly experience each element in the body.*

So this evening I thought we'd tackle what's known as the Four Great Elements. Actually, that's translating *Mahābhūta*. And *bhūta* means being, so it should be properly translated as the four great beings. And this goes back to an earlier time. Well, it would have been believed in by people during the Buddha's time, maybe even today, who knows. That gods, of course, govern the universe.

So, for instance, Agni, the fire god, he was the sun, but he actually governed the sun, governed the heat coming from the sun. So to appease him, if he got too hot, you'd have to do some rituals and do a bit of exorcism, a few hymns you have to chant, and he was only second under Indra who was in charge of all the gods, a bit like the Greek Zeus. But by the time the Buddha came along, they just become ordinary elements and they are earth, water, fire and air. And they become just elements, just ordinary things that we can directly experience.

Now, the great thing about these four elements is that they are self-produced. They cannot be reduced to anything else. They're not derived from everything. So when we're experiencing these four great elements—earth, fire, water, and air—we're right at the base of our experience of life, our sensual experience of life, both outwardly and inwardly. And one of our aims in meditation is to get down to this level of insight, which we'll talk about in a bit.

Now there's a discourse in the middle collection, number 28, given by Sāriputta, not by the Buddha. Sāriputta, remember, was called the general of the Dhamma by the Buddha, because he was second only to understanding the Dhamma itself. So he's understood to have really grasped the truth of things.

So earth element represents solidity, structure. Now, this is interesting because I read a physicist who was saying that there was no such thing as space, but that matter or subatomic energy created space. Space came because matter itself had arrived. So it wasn't a case of matter going into an empty place that we call space. The space was being created by matter itself. And there's a hint of that in the Buddha's teachings, but it is only a hint. It just might be me. So it includes hardness, but it also softness, and it's associated with form, occupies space.

This is what it includes in the body: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, and there's a whole load of stuff. But the important thing is that this is internal, pertaining to an individual. And then Sāriputta makes this statement: "This is called the interior earth element. The interior earth element and the exterior earth element are just the earth element." So in other words, you can't get beyond that. So it's a bit like, for instance, in physics, once we're down to subatomic energy and particles, that's it. You can't get beneath that. That's what everything is made of, we could say.

The same happens with water element. So the water element is what is cohesive, fluidity, elasticity. And it's liquid in the body, of course. So he says the water elements may be interior or exterior. And what is the interior water element? Anything that is water, watery and appropriated that's internal pertaining to an individual. It includes bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears and all the rest of it. So it's not as though we're short of the water element in the body. In fact, I think we're mostly water. So then again, it finishes with that phrase: "This is called the interior water element. The interior water element and the exterior water element are just the water element."

So then he talks about fire. So this is, of course, warmth, the metabolic processes. And it also means the process of aging. That's interesting. So the fire element may be interior or exterior. And what is the interior fire element? Anything that's fire or fiery and

appropriated, that's internal, pertaining to an individual. This includes that which warms, that which ages, that which heats you up when feverish, that which properly digests food and drink, and anything else that is fire, fiery, and appropriated, that's internal, pertaining to an individual. This is called the interior fire element. The interior fire element and the exterior fire element are just the fire element.

And the final one is, of course, air, sometimes translated as wind. It's to do with movement and it's opposite of being still. And what is the air element? The air element may be interior or exterior. And what is the interior air element? Anything that is air or wind and appropriated, that's internal, pertaining to an individual. This includes winds that go up and down, winds in the belly or the bowels, winds that flow through the limbs, in breath and out breath. Now that winds that flow through the limbs, I think that's referring to *prāṇa*—the energy that's within the body. And so the winds include both literal gas and movements of energy. This is called the interior air element. The interior air element and the exterior air element are just the air element.

Now, at the end of all those four elements, there's a refrain, and I've left it out because it's an important little bit to understand, because this is why we are investigating the four elements. "This should be truly seen with right understanding like this: This is not mine, I am not this, and this is not myself. When you truly see with right understanding, when you truly see this with right understanding, you reject the air element, detaching awareness from the air element."

So in other words, when we're actually experiencing this, there's a moment of reflection where we can say to ourself, well, look, that is not me, it's not mine, and it is not myself. And in so doing, we're separating what it is that's actually thinking that, that's actually saying that. And that's, of course, your intuitive awareness. And although Sāriputta doesn't mention it here, it's at that level that you can see impermanence. You can see the changing nature of things much more easily. We'll come to that again in a little bit.

So we can see now why they're used as meditation objects. In order to get down to that level of experience, you've got to focus in on it. So it's very good for getting the mind to be very still and focused. And of course, what's driving it is your interest. Remember that the whole process of investigation is the process of liberation. We're not taking anything on faith. We don't have to believe anything. And that, in fact, will be a hindrance because everything that the Buddha is putting to us is to be investigated.

It helps with the concentration. And what we're trying to understand, apart from that, is how we construct the world. And we'll come to that a little bit more down the line. And in that way, we're developing this insight—the insight of *vipassanā*. So it's a process of seeing things as they are.

So, if we take an example now. If we take an example, an easy one, say of pain or discomfort. So as soon as that feeling of pain arises and we become aware of it, the first port of call, remember, is to see how we're reacting to it. So we want to move, we want to get rid of it. So that's the first thing. And we wait, we have to wait until that reaction begins to fade away. Then we can feel the pain more equanimously, patiently. So we can just be with the pain. And our noting word, our reflection on it is that this is pain and we can still do the same thing. We can say, this is not me, not mine, not myself. You can actually say things like that to yourself.

And then once that's very clear to you and it's distanced from the awareness, like it's a real object, that's when you can plunge into the object. So this is a phrase that my teacher Sayadaw U Paṇḍita would often say. And it actually is trying to express what the Buddha says in the discourse on how to establish right awareness. He uses a form which translates as to feel feelings in feelings. That's what he says. To feel the body in the body. So he was having problems getting across to people, to his students, that you have to get into things, you have to sink into the object.

So here you are. You see the pain. So you then sink into that pain with the intention of seeing what it's made of. In other words, you're deconstructing that experience. And what we discover, of course, is things like heat, pressure and so on. Little different words will come to mind. And when that's clear and distanced, and it's quite clearly an object, you can always say to yourself, look, that's not me, not mine, and not myself.

And then you recognize that when you come to the next level of perception, which gives these sensations meaning, the word pain arises. Ah, so now we know that pain is a mental construct. It doesn't actually exist. What actually exists are these sensations. And now it doesn't mean to say that you can forget what pain is. You need to know when to go to the doctor. But now we know that pain is a mental construct. And then the third level is to see our relationship to pain. And that's when we have that growth of patience and forbearance with what is unpleasant. So there's a whole process there, which is just part of that *vipassanā* insight process.

And just finally, in daily life, you can always bring it to mind. It's very simple. You're sitting at a table. You pick up your knife and fork or a spoon. And just for the moment there, just recognize that there's a feeling of the steel, the sense of maybe coldness. The cutlery might be cold or you might sense the hardness of it. When you're drinking a tea

or coffee or just a juice or something, just for a moment to feel that liquidity, the way that the liquid is moving around in the mouth. When you're outside, occasionally this summer, you might feel the warmth of the sun, at least in the UK. You'll be very lucky these days. And you can feel the warmth of the sun on your skin. When walking, you get that feeling of movement, the body moving through space, you might say. So these things we can actually experience. You can also see it on a sort of second hand, like the trees moving with the wind and so on. And it's just this constant recognition that everything that we're experiencing at a physical level is based on these four elements.

Now, I must say that when it comes to the more animal elements of smelling and tasting, there's no real understanding as to what creates the various subjective tastes within the mouth of sweetness, sour, salty, all those sorts of things. But it's like the photons that hit the eye. That would be seen as a fire element. But what the eye actually sees are all these very different shapes and colors. But it's still at the base of the eye, just a fire element. And in the same with the ear, all we're getting is pressure waves. And that's all that's actually being picked up by the sense base. And you can actually experience that, that there's no sound. It's just a sensation of touch. And then that enters into the mind, and it's the mind which turns it into a recognizable sound.

So we're going to do a little exercise, and then we'll sit for a while. So if we sit comfortably and just close our eyes a little, and I'll just mention some parts of the body that you can contact according to these four elements.

So we're just sitting there quietly, and we want to find something which is hard. So it could be that your one thumb is feeling the hardness of a nail, or you could be having your hand on your knee, just the kneecap there, and just get a feel of the hardness of it. Now, at this point, we can just say to ourselves, well, you see, that's not me, it's not mine, and it's not myself. Now, the hardness you're feeling, I suppose it's better in the knee, really, if you can, is to feel it on the bone or in the bone, not in the finger itself. That's a bit difficult. You can, of course, feel it on the finger. That's not a problem either.

And then if we try to find something which is warm or cool, the heat of the body, perhaps you can feel a part of the body that's warm. Or it could be if you put one hand on the back of the other hand, you might find that the fingers are cooler and you can feel that there's a change of temperature there. And the palm of the hand being warmer. And just get into that feeling of warmth or coolness. So at the moment I can feel the coolness of my fingers and the warmth of my palm. And I can also feel how the energy is moving. The palm feels cooler and the fingers are beginning to feel warmer. I'm right there at the base of my experience.

And then the next one would be liquidity. So you can fill your mouth with a little saliva. There's also you can squeeze a muscle of your thigh or your biceps or whatever, or a muscle in the hand, the muscle at the thumb. And just as you press it, you can feel it squeezing that way.

And then finally, there's movement. So we can make that very simple by just lifting your hand and placing it back onto your knee. Or observing the falling and rising of the breath in the body, the chest, the stomach or the abdomen. And all you're trying to be aware of, to get down to, is that feeling of just movement. That's more easily done when it's neutral. And again, you can say to yourself, this is not me, not mine, and not myself.

So that's a quick introduction. The last thing is that, of course, you can also do this with your emotional life. An obvious one would be anger. If you feel a bit angry about something, irritated about something. So when you come off the fantasy and you come into the body, then you feel, first of all, that there is anger. But as you go into the anger, there is just this energy, just heat that's going on and movement, heat movement mainly. So it's just deconstructing what we're actually experiencing, always taking away that sense of something being substantial, being real. And that's how we use these four great elements.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your careful investigation of the four elements, you will liberate yourself from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 224

The Specific Law of Conditionality

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines iddapacchayatā, the Buddhist law of specific conditionality, which states: 'When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.' He distinguishes this from both deterministic views (like those of Makkhali Gosāla) and amoral randomness (Pūraṇa Kassapa's position), showing how the Buddha's teaching reveals a middle way understanding of causality.*
>
> *The talk explores how every moment arises from the convergence of countless past causes and present conditions, creating constant change and interdependence. Bhante connects this principle to practical meditation concerns - why we cannot predict the exact results of our karma, how this understanding supports acceptance of impermanence, and why it undermines our sense of a fixed self. He illustrates these concepts with contemporary examples from charity work to political movements, demonstrating how small actions can have unpredictable consequences through the 'butterfly effect.'*
>
> *This teaching provides crucial foundation for understanding paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) and supports the development of equanimity and realistic engagement with conditions as they are, rather than as we wish them to be.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

This evening, slightly different, I've written an actual essay. So I'm going to keep popping down and finding out what I'm supposed to have written. And I'm just wondering, how many of you have come across the law of this and that? Or sometimes it's better translated as the law of specific conditionality.

Okay, so what I'm going to do is share my page with you. This is the law of this and that, of the law of specific conditionality, *idappaccayatā*. Now, it says when this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. And from the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.

Now, if we put them in a slightly different order, it makes a bit more sense. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that. When this is, that is. When this isn't, that isn't. I'm hoping that's perfectly clear.

So, if we take the first proposition, from the arising of that comes the arising of this, and from the stopping of that comes the stopping of this. Okay, so this is basically what we would recognize as our usual way of thinking about causality. So the thief stole from the shop and he's now in jail sometimes. Someone disturbed the thief. He failed to steal anything and the police didn't bother to investigate.

Now, if this were the only way things happen because of things in the past, it would suggest the repetitive cosmos. It'd be difficult to see where creativity would come from since everything now is a product of the past. Now, in moral terms, that leads to determinism or fatalism. And there would be no room for any form of free will.

Now, indeed, at the Buddha's time, there was a person who taught this very understanding. He was called Makkhali Gosāla. Now, he taught that no matter what you did, you could not change your fate. Everything was determined. It was a very hard position, and the consequences of this meant that you were not responsible for your moral actions, good or bad. You can't blame somebody, can you, if they had to do it by fate.

Okay, so now the second couplet presents causes that leads to present conditions. How present conditions lead to present conditions. So when this is now, that is, and when this isn't, that isn't. So it's all in the now. So this we can call synchronicity. How many events come together to present a particular situation?

Now, if events arose from these conditions without past influence, there would be chaos because there doesn't seem to be any regulating factor. Now, from a moral point of view, that expresses itself as amorality. What's the point of morality when there's no guarantee it will have any effect? Needless to say, there was such a person who taught this, Pūraṇa Kassapa. He had the theory of the way of non-doing. But what he meant by that was that actions considered good and evil carried no inherent morality. And thus there exists no future consequences from committing either good or evil deeds.

So quoting him: "Even if one were to go along the right bank of the Ganges, killing and getting others to kill, mutilating and getting others to mutilate, torturing and getting others to torture, there would be no evil for that course, no coming of evil. Even if one were to go along the left bank of the Ganges, giving and getting others to give, making sacrifices and getting others to make sacrifices, there would be no merit from that cause, no coming of merit. Through generosity, self-control, restraint, and truthful speech, there is no merit from that cause, no coming of merit." So it's a pretty stark situation.

So how do these two forces operate, one coming from the past and all these different causes coming into the present? Okay, so an obvious example is this Zoom meeting. So for instance, we've all come from different causes. You've probably had to do various things before you set up the Zoom. I myself, I've got to make sure I'm plugged into internet rather than Wi-Fi. I've got to make sure the Zoom is updated. I check the talk on my tablet and then I press the necessary icons and here I am. So everybody will go through that similar process.

But this doesn't include the way in which we had to factor this event during our day, how future events affect present conditions. So lots of personal causes went into this particular event. And on top of that, there's all that's going on behind the scenes in the technology which is supporting this. And you can also include, of course, the conditions of nature.

So, if we take a snapshot of any moment, the event will be a meeting of all past causes and present actions and situations. Now, this then becomes the cause for one of the causes for the next moment, where more results from different causes meet. So there's a constant change, constant process. Every event has to be singular and unique. It's not conceivable that the same thing could happen twice. Never mind Groundhog Day.

So even though we're here seemingly in a static place, the Zoom meeting is constantly changing as I'm talking and you're listening. The technology behind it all, we don't know what's going on there at all. And nature, of course, is changing. So you can see that we're in a process of real, quite radical change.

So what Buddhism tends to call this is interdependency, interconnectedness. And I think it was Thich Nhat Hanh who came up with the word of interbeing when it came to the biosphere. And this comes out in the Mahāyāna's metaphor of Indra's web. So Indra was the king of the gods and at each vertex of his web is a jewel wherein every jewel is mirrored and so unique in itself. So the cosmos is holographic and in constant change.

And Blake writes it beautifully: to see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour. So we can see that it might even be more apt to call it the law of specific contingency, meaning everything coming to touch.

Now, there might be a little bit of a roar in the background. I don't know whether you can hear it or not. It's the tractor coming to take these bales of hay away. Which means, you see, that we can't completely with certainty say what's going to happen the

next moment. That's how so-called unexpected events happen. Things that we don't expect. Earthquakes, tsunamis used to be called acts of God, but now, of course, they're acts of nature. And if we had an omniscient mind, we might be able to see that what is coincidence or luck is actually conditioned.

So now on a personal level, this brings us always to our little special subject of death. So we don't know the moment of our death. We live on a knife edge and therefore the Buddha's admonition to practice or develop continual mindfulness.

Now, when it comes to social, economic, political situations and all that, it does make us feel a little bit powerless when you see this law. We have such little ability to influence what's going on in the world. Of course, there are certain powers, certain people in power and corporations that will be capable of doing much more. But the overwhelming majority of us have very small influence. So the strength comes, of course, when we all act together. So that would be a case of contingency.

And if we accept our personal condition as little underlings pushing up against this heavy weight, accepting our boundaries, that should undermine all this anger and outrage, grief, fear, all the negative states that come up when we're going beyond the limits of our power and influence. And of course, that should make us more effective. It's better if the heart is not so embroiled but calm, the mind not so agitated but quiet.

So it comes really from having confidence that if we want to support something and we see others are going to support it, this interdependency, this interconnection will actually create a force. And we see that, of course, in various movements around the world.

This also brings us to the law of *kamma*. And what this tells us, of course, is that it's the working of kamma and what the consequence of an action will be is basically imponderable. There's no way you can really tell, you can really say what's going to happen. I mean, there's a general law that if we do something wholesome, well, then something wholesome will come of it. And if we do something unwholesome, there'll be an unwholesome result. But every action of speech and body just enters into the matrix of all relationships. And we can't know the effect of what will follow. Inwardly, it has an effect on our inner matrix of the mind. And we don't know what the effect of that will be. Except, again, that general understanding.

So here are just some examples. So there was a charity that I knew of which sent clothes to an African country only to upset the tailor trade and the local economy. Now, the charity, of course, wouldn't have known such consequences. But you do ask whether they actually went and interviewed the people, got some understanding before they did it.

There was also a charity way back that I remember that would ask you to support an individual child. And you had a relationship with that child. You got pictures, you got little essays. Unfortunately, they produced jealousy in the other children in the village who didn't get that treatment. And there was disharmony in the community. So it was successful at attracting donors. But when that Western individualism meets the more communitarian African society, well, it didn't work. They had to pull the plug on it.

There's another one about tragedy leads often to charity, to a charity or to a new law. So the abortion law came in and it wasn't just women's rights. Of course, it was there, but it was fueled by the injuries and death caused by backstreet abortions. And in that negative sense, if this doesn't happen, this doesn't happen. Of course, if the law hadn't passed, we'd still be continuing with the unnecessary suffering and deaths of women.

Now, one thing that this reminds us of is the theory of chaos. So in the simplest way, I have no understanding of systems theory at all. But in the simplest of way, the example is that a butterfly, it's called a butterfly effect. So the flap of a butterfly with supporting conditions can end up as a hurricane. So even a small catalyst can bring about unpredictable effects. And this is, as I say, referred to as systems theory. I mean, an obvious place, an obvious system is, of course, the weather, which we come to know very intimately.

There was a case of a Bosnian nationalist shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife. And it's understood to be the immediate cause of the World War I, which started a month later. Now, he was visiting Bosnia and Herzegovina in an open carriage where there were groups of revolutionaries who wanted the country to be free from Austrian rule. I mean, even if he'd been just a little cautious, sat in a bulletproof vest or something, well, we might not have had the First World War.

On a more positive note, we have, of course, Greta Thunberg, you see, skipped school at the age of 15 to demonstrate outside the Swedish parliament, calling for greater action on climate change, which eventually led to the movement of school strike for climate. Now, there might not have been such a movement had it not been for that plucky little teenager.

Now, when it comes to our internal psychology, whatever we think, say, and act actually affects the internal matrix of our body, heart, and mind. And we don't know, except again, except in those broadest terms, that if we do something wholesome, then we'll have wholesome results. And of course, unwholesome results.

Here are some examples that I've just plucked. I haven't been specific in names and whatnot. But there was a man I was told of, a friend of a friend, who had been temperate ever since he knew he was an alcoholic as a young man. Now, at retirement party, he took a sip and subsequently died of alcoholic poisoning. So needless to say, if he'd not had that false confidence at that moment, then he probably would have lived a long and healthy retirement.

There was a politician in Germany, actually, and I couldn't find the facts, but I'd seen the article. A leading member of the far-right racist party heard a child in distress and went to help. And when she saw the child was black, it so connected her with humanity, with all humanity, she dropped all her far-right beliefs. Now, if that little chance event, that's inverted commas, chance, had not happened, of course, she'd now be propagating far-right views.

So even if we cannot, even in this law of unpredictability, of contingency, yet the Buddha clearly delineates a way in which we can bring our own suffering to an end. Can't do it for others, but we can do it for ourselves. And of course, he describes that in dependent origination, which is another talk.

Now, when it comes to this specific law of conditionality, you can see how it supports the whole idea of impermanence. It's a real radical change. And there's no other way it could be. So it's not that everything is impermanent, it's also that everything is therefore unsubstantial. There's nothing at the core. There's nothing there which you can point to and say, well, this is always here. And this, of course, refers also to ourselves as a self, which we feel is a sort of steady state within ourselves. But what it's saying is that that also changes. And what we're doing constantly is selfing. And this is what dependent origination actually points out to us. And that's why the Buddha is constantly telling us that this sense of self that we have, the way that we experience ourselves is delusional.

So, where does this lead us to? Well, it ought to stop us being in conflict with conditions, like an open radical acceptance. This is the way it is. This is the condition of this present moment. Now, that doesn't lead to hopeless resignation. What it should do is lead to a realistic appraisal with the way things are, and it should be a basis for action. So otherwise, if we don't do that, we just live in a morass of delusive aims, constantly going against what is actually happening and just making things worse.

So there we are. And it's a wonder, isn't it? Like 2,500 years ago, Siddhartha Gautama, son of the Sakya tribe in North India, left home life, went to be a *samaṇa*, a wandering ascetic. Wondering whether there was an end to rebirth, constant round of birth, aging and death, all the suffering that it entails. And he not only discovered this root cause of the notion of self as false and delusive. He realized that there could not be an eternal soul self or integral, which is integral to the psychophysical organism. It's not possible for it to contain something eternal. And one of the reasons for that is because of this specific law of conditionality.

Now, having said that, of course, you have to remember that there is *Nibbāna*. And our spiritual aim is to find out exactly what that is.

Well, I think that's it. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that this law of conditionality will allow you to modify and develop your actions to work with present conditions so that you become liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 225

The Dangers of Indulgence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

In this discourse, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's first teaching on the middle path, distinguishing between wholesome enjoyment and harmful indulgence. Drawing from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta's rejection of both sensual pleasure and self-mortification, he explores how attachment to excitement and pleasure creates a cycle of suffering.

The talk identifies five key dangers of indulgence: compulsive behavior, frustration when desires aren't met, grief over loss, underlying anxiety about possession, and the boredom that drives endless seeking. Using vivid examples from Greek mythology to modern consumerism, Bhante illustrates how the confusion between happiness and excitement traps us in cycles of craving and dissatisfaction.

Practical guidance is offered for distinguishing pure enjoyment from attachment-driven indulgence, emphasizing the importance of clear intention. Whether eating, enjoying nature, or engaging with possessions, the key lies in understanding our true motivations and practicing renunciation when compulsive patterns emerge. The teaching concludes with the liberating truth that genuine contentment and happiness arise not from feeding desires, but from the freedom that comes through wise renunciation—the very taste of Nibbāna itself.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

I thought tonight I'd tackle this problem of indulgence. If I were to quote the Buddha from the first discourse, which is really just a formalised teaching he had—I can't imagine that this is exactly what he said—but he says that indulgence in sensual pleasures, which is base, vulgar, worldly, ignoble and not beneficial. And then he says the practice of self-mortification, which is simply painful, ignoble and not beneficial. And then he talks about the middle path.

This middle path isn't a little bit of indulgence and a little bit of mortification. It's something which transcends them. That's the middle, as it were. It's a way of saying that there is a path which does not include either the indulgence or the practice of self-mortification. That self-mortification is blaming the body for our problems. So if your eye sees something which brings up lust, you start blaming the eye. Well, that wouldn't be correct, would it? In those days, especially the Jains, they thought that the body itself

was the product of our *kamma* and you had to let go of the body. So to die, to stop eating was considered to be the way to go. And I believe elderly people do that even these days.

Anyway, we're talking about indulgence. And this is an essay I've written really around eating. But hopefully I'll try and spread it out to include everything.

I always like the Greek myths. So how bad can greed get? Erysichthon, the Greek king of Thessaly had the temerity to build a banqueting hall over the shrine of Demeter, goddess of earth's fertility and protector of the harvest. She cursed him with insatiable hunger. First, he ate everything that was in his kingdom that was able to eat. And then he started on his people and even ate his own family. Finally, still famished, he ate himself. So that's how bad it can get.

Actually, when I was staying at Kanduboda in Sri Lanka, there was an American turned up and he was telling me that when he got lost in the wilds once, he went through a period of a few days where he just didn't have any food. And when he eventually caught a pigeon, he said he just ripped it open and ate it raw. So I don't think we ever get as close to that sort of hunger usually. Normally, when we feel a bit peckish, we'll put an end to it as quick as we can. Those are the extreme conditions.

But what we have to do—there are three things that we have to become clear about. Remember, this is the other side of suffering. So everybody knows the depressions and the anxiety. We know how to deal with that. But this indulgence is rather difficult because it's so close to enjoyment.

The first thing is to be able to distinguish when we're enjoying something as opposed to indulging it. And the second one is to begin to see the distinction between the body and the mind and what the body is actually giving us, which is pure. So all that's coming in, for instance, through the ears is the vibrations in the air. And then from there, it's taken into the mind and it's the mind which gives it meaning. So you get a bell, alarm bell, and so on and so forth. And then finally, to know the distinction between a desire and an action. So this is the Buddha making as clear as to what the role of the will is.

The first thing is to really begin to understand what the downside of indulgence is. The problem is that when we're indulging something—we're getting food or we're out in nature and we're loving it and we're bathing in it—while we're doing that, there's not a problem. It's heaven, isn't it? We think it's *Nibbāna*. It's the aftermath that we have to become aware of.

So the first thing that arises from that indulgence is of course that sort of compulsive behaviour. Here, the psychology is the same as any addict. I mean, they've got it bad, but for most of us, it becomes a sort of obsessive thing that we need. Just to take a very simple example, everybody has a special time for a tea or coffee and biscuits, coffee and a piece of cake. And when you get to that time, if you just sit in front of it, you'll feel the process of that wanting and the compulsive nature of having to have it. You can get quite depressed if you don't get it. But that's the other side too. It's a case of recognising that as soon as we have one of these unwholesome habits, there's a certain compulsion around that behaviour.

I've got an example here of somebody who gave up smoking and thought that they were completely over it. And then at a party, they just have that just one, just one cigarette. And before they're knowing it, of course, they're buying a packet. Now, I know that has a physical dependency to it, but it's the same sort of psychology even for biscuits.

The second problem is the frustration that arises when we don't get what we want. So if you've forgotten to buy the tea, that's terrible. Or to buy the coffee, that's even worse sometimes. And Amazon, of course, has spent millions on getting their products to the customer as quickly as possible, just knowing that if they can gratify a person's desire more quickly than anybody else, then they get their loyalty. And of course, it's worked. We get angry over silly things—the bus doesn't arrive on time and the train's late as usual and things like that. And that's the frustration of not getting what we want. And that comes from an attachment to something.

The third one is grief. So especially, well, with things, it's especially if you lose something which is treasured by you—an engagement ring, a marriage ring, or some token of friendship, some heirloom, if that's stolen from you. I remember at college, my girlfriend at the time, she was living in this place with other girls and the landlord turned out to be some sort of thief. And just one day they found that all their little treasures were completely stolen. All the jewels that they had—it's absolutely awful. And of course, when we lose something like a mobile, we get more angry than anything, but there's a sense of grief there.

And when it comes to objects, it's good to remind ourselves that the idea of possessing an object is a legal fiction. It's something that we presume on the object, that the object is mine. But actually, when you think about it, you can only use objects. You can only use your phone. And when the thief takes it, it's his. It's not mine anymore.

So the fourth one is anxiety. Under anything we possess, I'm sure you will find some level of anxiety about loss. And the more we have, the more the anxiety is there. And you can see that from people who are very rich. Once they reach a billion, it's hardly

enough. They've got to insure that billion by having another billion. And it's the same with other things that we have, like friendships. We feel more safe when we have lots of friendships, people whom we can call our friends, family, like that. And there's also to do with power. The more power you have, the more safe you feel. So when those things begin to dissipate, when they begin to lose them, that's when you touch this underground anxiety we have.

And of course, that anxiety goes right to the basis of the real problem that sits under everything. And that's the idea of a self. And the self is telling us to enjoy ourselves, to try and make this life really enjoyable. And so when that joy begins to disappear that we become attached to, then you get that anxiety. Now, that isn't to say that there isn't enjoyment and the joys of life. And we'll come to that in a bit.

So finally, and I don't think this is an exhaustive list, there's boredom. So if you remember, after the Buddha became fully liberated, Māra, the evil one, sent his three daughters and they were sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure and boredom. So this boredom is an aversive state. What used to give you happiness doesn't give you that happiness anymore. And if we look at it, it's actually not so much the happiness that we're after, it's that little sliver on top, which is the excitement. And that's the big delusion of our consumerist societies, to confuse happiness with excitement.

So if you think of a Christmas cake—this is a British and Irish Christmas cake—you get the solid bit, the fruit cake underneath it all. And then you get this sliver at the top of marzipan and the icing. And children will peel that off and just eat that, of course. And that, of course, gives the cake that little special zing. So it's just an ordinary fruitcake unless you have that little bit of marzipan and icing on top. And of course, that's what gives you diabetes, isn't it? The sugar. But we're not worried about that. We'd rather just enjoy it.

So it's the same with this happiness and excitement. And often when we make the right intention to just enjoy something and not to indulge, there's always that sense that we've lost a little bit of that little pleasure that we used to have through indulgence. And that's your renunciation. When the Buddha talks about renunciation, and that renunciation is the path to liberation, it's getting rid of that excitement.

The Buddha was happy. He actually says, when you get to *Nibbāna*, you are contented and with it happy. So we're not going to lose contentment and happiness, but it's giving up that little sliver of excitement. Well, even though I say it's a little sliver for most, for a lot of people, that's what it is. And that's where you get this sort of clickbait that they talk about, when people are scrolling through all these fashions and computers and anything else that they want to feed off.

And what it's doing is, at a physical level, we know it's sort of drenching the brain with dopamine. But at that mental level, it's that what we call the attachment. That's the dependency. And that's what we mean when we talk about attachment. We mean that we are dependent on something to give us happiness. But when we look at that happiness, it's actually a little level of excited energy. And that's what we've got to give up because if we don't, it creates all these problems afterwards that we've been through. We talked about compulsive behaviour and frustration and grief and anxiety. And finally, this boredom.

If your whole life is about being excited and it begins to lose that excitement, it could be through illness, for instance, the boredom arises. And what boredom is saying is, what's the purpose of life if I can't be excited? I've got to search something. So you can see that this boredom is the underlying engine of the whole consumerist society. It's the boredom that makes you seek the next thing that's going to make you excited.

And we have this phrase, don't we? Variety is the spice of life. Well, that sort of attitude is the path to perdition, the path to hell. But that's not necessary. We can just be happy.

The big thing that we have to do is to make sure that whenever we're going to do something which is going to bring happiness, is to be very clear about our intention. So just taking food as an example, which is pretty straightforward. What's the purpose of eating? The real purpose of eating is to nourish the body. That's the real purpose so that we can continue living and practising and doing our practice. The fact that it tastes nice is part and parcel of that process. It might not be the taste that we expected, et cetera, et cetera, but at least that's just there, but we're not eating it for that reason.

So we go back to that little phrase, are we eating to live or living to eat? And it's just making those intentions very clear to ourselves and moving from that intention. And that's what undermines this desire for excitement.

And it's very difficult to separate excitement from indulgence. Aversion is clear. Aversion pushes you away from the object you don't want to know. To be aware of aversion is much easier because it separates out from what it's averse to, same with fear. But when it comes to indulgence, it sort of melds. The connection is melding. So it's very difficult to sort of pull it apart and to see what the indulgence actually is.

And of course, one way to do that is if we find ourselves having a habit which is compulsive is, of course, is to stop it. And when the desire comes, you sort of sit with the agony of letting go of that. One example I used to use, it doesn't work anymore, as you'll see, was to have a favourite TV programme, a serial or something like that. And you

sort of turn it on and just look at the blank screen. And that would send you absolutely berserk. These days, of course, you can't do that because everybody's got iPlayer or something else.

But the whole point of renunciation or an act of renunciation is to contact that desire. It's an unwholesome desire. And as you work with that over time, of course, that habit begins to dissolve. It's not being fed and therefore it just begins to die away. And then once it's got low again, once you've got it down to a decent basis of control, then, of course, you simply have to watch that it doesn't get the better of you again. That's all.

But eventually, we've got to give all that up. And we don't give it up unless we see the juice that comes from it, the fruit of that renunciation. And so if you take something which you can see is compulsive, it might be just a cup of tea at a certain time of day, and you just sit there with the empty cup. And you get that feeling of wanting it. And if you just sit with it, it's quite remarkable. If you just sit with it and wait for that desire to go away, that bad energy, remember, is transformed. And what you find is that suddenly you're contented and you don't want a cup of tea. And that's the joy of renunciation.

So remember, we're not trying to confuse enjoyment with indulgence. And it all comes down really to our intentions. So the more we're aware of our intentions and we correct our intentions towards just enjoying something, then you'll find yourself being a bit more contented with the way things are. And with it, happiness.

Just to end off with the Buddha's own quote—he talks about the taste of the sea, the taste of the ocean is salt. And just as that has a taste, the taste of *Nibbāna* is freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from this sort of compulsive desire. And remember, this is the desiring side for pleasure. Remember, there's the other side too, which is all about suffering. It's all about anxiety, depression, et cetera, et cetera.

So just to recap there, when we get into this indulgence business, we can expect there'll be an aftermath. There will be compulsive behaviour. There'll be frustration. There'll be grief. There'll be anxiety. And there'll be boredom. And if we can get into that, then hopefully we'll liberate ourselves from it. That's the whole point of our practice, really.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your devotion to separating indulgence from enjoyment you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 226

The Four Bases of Power

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

> *In this New Year teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the four iddhipādā or 'bases of power' — more accurately translated as the four foundations that lead to success. These are part of the 37 bodhipakkhiya dhammā (requisites for awakening) that the Buddha taught as the complete path to liberation.*
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> *The four bases are: chanda (skillful desire or aspiration), vīriya (energy and perseverance), citta (wholehearted devotion), and vīmaṃsā (discrimination and reflection). Unlike taṇhā (unwholesome craving) from the dependent origination, chanda represents the skillful longing necessary for spiritual progress. Bhante explains how these qualities work together — from initial aspiration through sustained energy, complete devotion of heart and mind, to constant reflection on one's practice.*
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> *Using personal examples from his student days, Bhante demonstrates how these four bases apply not only to meditation and the path to awakening, but to any meaningful endeavor in daily life. He emphasizes how developing 'affectionate mindfulness' — combining Right Awareness with heart-centered care — requires all four foundations working in harmony. This practical teaching offers valuable guidance for maintaining New Year resolutions and cultivating the sustained commitment necessary for spiritual transformation.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I thought today, being the new year and everybody's made these amazing new year resolutions, that we would do the four bases of power — or better still, the better translation — the four bases that lead to success.

Now, these are part of the 37 requisites for awakening, the *Bodhipakkhiya dhamma*. And this is the practice that the Buddha teaches us. So it begins with the four foundations of mindfulness. And then you have the four right efforts. I won't go into details — it takes too long. Then you get these four roads to success or basis for success. Then you have the spiritual faculties. And when you achieve stream entrant, they become the five spiritual powers. Then you have the seven factors of awakening, the Noble Eightfold Path, and all that adds up to 37.

And according to Bhikkhu Thanissaro, Ajahn Thanissaro — some of you will know his very good work — he reckons that this relates to the 37 chords of those times. If you wanted to play the veena, which was like a guitar, then you had to be able to find these 37 chords. I don't know, I've never seen proof of that, but there we are. So there's a nice connection there between music and the Buddha Dhamma.

Anyway, when you practice these four bases, you get what's known as the *iddhis*, or the powers. You might have heard them called the siddhis. So you can bilocate — you can appear in two different places or more. You can fly through the air and through walls. You can have the divine eye where you see beyond what's possible through the physical body. And the same with the divine ear — you can hear things which you can't hear if the mind is constrained by the physical body. You can read other people's minds. You can see how people are born and die depending on their *kamma*. So these are just some of them.

Now, all these are very wonderful and magical. But the really important one for us is that it leads to the destruction of the mental defilements. So that's where they become important for us. So these four bases or four qualities are what we need in order to purify the heart. And that's an absolute necessity in order to become fully liberated.

Okay, so what are these four bases? The first one is *chanda*, and it translates as desire. Now, in the dependent origination, of course, we have this word *taṇhā*. That's always an unwholesome desire. It's always a desire which is driven by greed, hatred or delusion. *Chanda* can be unskillful. But here, of course, it's a skillful desire. Now, it's not just a wish, it's an aspiration. It's a longing, it's a yearning for something. So in order to get this liberation from suffering, you've got to really want it.

Now, once you've got that desire, once you've got that aspiration, the next thing that arises to support that, of course, is your energy, your commitment, true grit, doggedness, perseverance and all that drive.

And then with that, there comes a devotion to it. So that word is *citta*. Now, *citta* refers to both the heart and the mind. In other words, it's the whole mental process. And it demands a complete devotion from the heart to the task in hand. It's to do with attitude, dedication, devotion, care. And this is where the Buddha's word, *appamādo*, one of his favourite words, which means diligence, is one of the last two words: *appamādo sampādeta* — really strive, really work for your liberation. So there's the *citta*.

And then finally, there's this word *vīmaṃsā*, which translates as discrimination, reflection, knowing what you're doing, constantly reflecting on how you feel, what you're doing, what the process is, where you're going, et cetera, et cetera.

So these four qualities, I'm sure all of you have exercised these. They are necessary for spiritual attainment, but they're necessary for anything that you set about in ordinary daily life. If you set yourself a goal, whatever it is, even if it's a simple thing like having to replant the garden or a job of work, you've got to have these qualities. And if one of them is missing or if one of them is not up to standard, then it undermines the project. It'll undermine your process.

Let's see now. I'm just thinking of my own personal — there's about four or five times in my life where I've had to put some special effort in. One of them was when I was a student. So I just lived the good old student life. And I was doing at the time this combination of a BA with a teacher's certificate. And in that very same year, they'd actually instituted the Bachelor of Education, which would have been far easier. Anyway, by the time I got to the fourth year, I knew I actually knew nothing. I had to pull my socks up, as they say.

And I really, really, really wanted that BA because it's a passport to jobs and all sorts of stuff, especially in teaching. So I really had to put my heart and soul into it. And I remember working 12, 14 hours a day trying to get this stuff into my head. But what was missing there? So I had the desire, I had the aspiration. I really, really wanted that BA. I had the energy because I was young anyway. I had the energy, the empowerment to do it. My heart was completely devoted to it.

But I'm also sure about the discrimination and reflection. So in those days, I don't remember anybody teaching you study skills or anything like that. You just hung on in there and drove it in. If I'd have had some guidance on study skills, it probably would have been that much easier for me. So I wasn't really reflecting on the ways that I was studying or the way that I had chosen to do this work. And it probably led to inefficiencies and all sorts of stuff.

So I think if you look back into your life, I think you'll find there were times when you really had to put your body and soul into something. I use soul, of course, in a Buddhist sense.

So here we have these four qualities. You have to have an aspiration, a yearning, a real zeal for something. And there has to come that energy, which includes diligence. Your heart has to be right behind it. And there's this constant reflection.

So in our spiritual life, every day, every time you wake up in the morning to set yourself to make this a day of mindfulness, affectionate mindfulness. I mean, that's what the Buddha wants us to do. That's his teaching in the Mettā Sutta, the discourse on goodwill

— to develop not just a mindfulness, but something that engages also the heart. And that's your sense of care. So it's care and attention. Care and attention leads to this affectionate mindfulness.

And sometimes you have to give yourself a really good aspiration. So the aspiration, whatever it is — the end of suffering, make life a bit easier, movement towards contentment, it's better for other people. You can always bring others in. And then to raise that energy, the commitment to your practice, and then this constant reflection. So throughout the day when the mind's wandering, you find yourself all over the place just to stop for a minute. Whoa, where am I going? What am I doing? And in that way, we're slowly developing these qualities.

And well, that's the path. I mean, it's pretty straightforward, really, once you're into it.

So that's what I've got for this evening. And it supports whatever resolutions you've made. So a resolution normally lasts for as long as you say it. So it's no good saying, "Oh, I won't have any tea from now on." It'll last about 10 minutes. So you've got to keep reinforcing that commitment, whatever your resolution has been.

Very good. Short and sweet. I hope these words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your devotion to the practice and the four bases of success, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 227

Transcendent Dependent Arising: The Spiral Path from Dukkha to Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Upanisā Sutta's presentation of Transcendent Dependent Arising, a teaching that traces the complete journey from dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness) to full liberation. Unlike the traditional twelve links showing how we create suffering, this teaching reveals twelve progressive steps leading from dukkha to awakening.

Bhante presents seven practical "entry points" to the spiral path: faith (saddhā), wise investigation, virtue (sīla), restraint, dedication, right awareness (sammā sati), and inspiration. Using climate change anxiety as a contemporary example, he demonstrates how each entry point can transform our relationship with suffering. The teaching progresses through gladness (pāmojja), rapture (pīti), tranquillity (passaddhi), happiness (sukha), and concentration (samādhi), ultimately leading to wisdom and liberation.

This approach offers a refreshing complement to traditional Vipassanā practice, allowing practitioners to actively cultivate wholesome states rather than merely observing. Bhante emphasizes keeping expectations modest—recognizing that even small shifts from suffering toward gladness constitute genuine progress on the spiral path. The teaching provides practical tools for meeting life's challenges while maintaining spiritual integrity and moving toward freedom.

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

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

During the summer I got interested in a teaching commonly known as Transcendent Dependent Arising, the Upanissaya Sutta. I was drawn to this via the six maxims, ethical practices designed to help us face climate change in a way that preserves our integrity. One of these maxims is to see our good fortune in being alive right now at a time of such crisis for mankind. Instead of seeing floods, droughts, wildfires, soil erosion as horrors, we are to welcome each one as an opportunity to develop courage, resilience, and other gifts that come of meeting suffering with open arms.

The Upanissaya Sutta provides Dhamma support for this, as it traces out the list of causes and conditions leading to enlightenment. The first 12 steps might be familiar, showing how we create *dukkha*, meaning suffering in all its variations from minor irritation to heartbreak, excruciating pain or abject fear, by believing we can make ourselves happy in a world which is unstable, uncontrollable, inherently unsatisfying.

What is special about this teaching is that it doesn't stop at dukkha, but traces an equal number of steps leading from dukkha to liberation. It gives us a list of skills and qualities we can and should develop to bring about our own liberation. I've recently attended a Tricycle online course entitled The Spiral to Freedom, in which the teachers, John Peacock and Akincano Weber, look at this particular teaching, as well as a number of related teachings which explore the same area. They refer to these as the spiral teachings, and call the path leading from dukkha to liberation a spiral path. They also stress that all the links in the spiral path can be seen in ordinary daily life.

It all starts with dukkha, which I think is really good news. If you know you're unhappy, irritated, out of sorts, then you're already at the launching pad for the spiral path. Taking dukkha as a given, the teachings suggest a number of responses, which John and Akincano refer to as entry points to the spiral.

Let's take dukkha over climate change as an example. Suppose we are in a stew of misery at news of another wildfire. How can we meet this with open arms? For some, faith is the easiest way to counter the pull into negative thinking. This could be the bright faith of the beginner, or the mature trust that grows with long practice. Every time another dark thought takes us back into the pit, we place our trust in the Dhamma to draw ourselves out. It could help to look at a Buddha rupa or whatever symbolises the Dhamma for you. Buddha touched the earth when he needed all his faith, and this is worth trying out sometime. Place your hands on the ground, feel its stability, its solidity, trust the vastness of the earth as a grounding in truth.

For some of us, faith might not come so easily. News of an environmental catastrophe and knowing that this has been wrought by human greed stimulates doubt rather than faith. And we are flooded by questions like, what is life all about? But the only answer is, I don't know. If we're willing to explore the experience of I don't know, this is wise investigation, a second entry point to the spiral. Although we don't have the answers, we have access to teachings that can point us in the right direction. Thus, the feeling of bewilderment is the catalyst that motivates us to learn about suffering and how it can be transcended.

At other times, investigation may seem irrelevant. We want to do something, anything to relieve the suffering. In this case, virtue becomes the link from dukkha to the spiral. We respond to the news of the wildfire with ethical action. We might donate to a charity supporting those affected, sign a petition or write to our local council. We find some positive action aiming to minimise the harm and pain. As well as being beneficial for the world, this counters the pull into depression owing to the perilous state of the world, restores our confidence in the power of goodness.

But sometimes we just can't find the energy, the goodwill needed to sign yet another petition or make that donation. Everything in us wants to turn away from the world, forget all its horrors. This impulse contains the wisdom of restraint, which is another entry point to the spiral. We let ourselves turn away from activity, withdraw to some quiet place, let go of all the thoughts about climate change or other news. Give ourselves the silence and rest we need to let our hearts heal. This could mean an hour's meditation, it could mean a long retreat, or perhaps all we can do is a few mindful breaths. Whatever works is fine. We're honouring a wholesome response to dukkha.

The opposite can happen too. The news of the wildfire leads to restlessness. We can't keep still and we certainly don't want to turn inwards. Instead, we need something to occupy us. In this case, we can use the entry point of dedication. We could wash the dishes as if this were a sacred ceremony, the most important task in the world, taking care of all the little details. Although we can't fix the wildfire, we can take care of what is at hand. And this is a very worthy response to dukkha.

At other times, the thought of taking care of anyone or anything seems an impossible burden. Perhaps thoughts of who is to blame and how it should be fixed crash into one another, making our heads spin. In this case, mindfulness provides a good entry point to the spiral. We don't have to follow each sensation of the breath. We can use phrases like walking to the shops, making the dinner, driving to work to keep us present, alert, mindful. Although news of the wildfire might still be tempting us to fret and worry, we are choosing present reality as an antidote to those dead ends. And this is a valid way to lift ourselves out of dukkha and into the spiral path.

Sometimes we can't even muster the energy to be mindful. Everything seems hopeless. In this case, we need to look outside ourselves. Let inspiration become our stepping stone from dukkha to the spiral. Who or what will draw attention away from misery? Persuade us that life is worth living. For some, it's a weekend camping. Others might sign up for a study course. It could be as simple as meeting a friend, listening to a

dharma talk, leafing through photos of happier times. I keep some well-worn biographies at hand when I need a lift or go out for a long walk. Sometimes gazing at the sunset is enough to inspire me, remind me of life's promise.

Thus, we have seven options for digging ourselves out of dukkha and into the spiral: faith, investigation, virtue, restraint, dedication, mindfulness, inspiration. Each of us will have our own strengths, our preferred entry points, and it will also vary from one situation to another and depending on what mood we're in. Working with these entry points is a powerful practice. As we try these in practical situations, we get to know our strengths, learn to play to them.

This provides a contrast with the standard *vipassanā* approach, where we simply observe, don't interfere, don't try to make things better. To launch ourselves out of dukkha and into the spiral path, we're allowed to be biased, seek out and amplify feelings and mind states that lift us up. Mindfulness is not only an entry point in itself, but it's also working in the background for all entry points, noticing what works, what doesn't, when we've gone too far, when we need to step back, take it easy, try another approach when we're ready.

Once we've found an entry point, the next link in the spiral is gladness. A moment ago we were stuck in the pits of dukkha, now we've found a way forward. The heart quite naturally gladdens when this happens. Surprisingly, the feeling of gladness is easily overlooked. We can be so intent on doing our virtuous action, so immersed in the beauty of the sunset, that we don't notice the change of heart. Unless we pay attention to this, we could inadvertently start another round of dukkha, stressing ourselves out in the effort to do our good deeds, so inspired by the sunset that the rest of life pales by comparison. We need to be on the lookout for gladness to deepen our faith that there is really a path leading from suffering to liberation and it is possible for me to follow this.

My advice also would be not to expect too much. A tiny glimpse of gladness is all the evidence we need that there is something here worth cultivating.

Gladness sets up the necessary conditions for rapture, the next link in the spiral. The word suggests an over-the-top joy, but if we are on the lookout for it, we find rapture to be quite a simple, down-to-earth experience. The background mood of gladness helps us engage, be interested in whatever we experience. This engaged interest in present experience is what we mean by rapture. This can be experienced quite simply as interest or curiosity. Look out for this at the start of any activity. As you step into the shower, take the first bite of dinner, say hello to a friend, listen to a podcast. Sometimes it can feel a bit giddy or overexcited, expecting too much. Sometimes very mild, like a gentle uplift or refreshment.

Rapture sets up the condition for the next link, tranquility. This was one I struggled with till Akincano described tranquility as that cooling phase in every activity, when the initial fizz goes out of it. This put a completely different light on tranquility for me. And true enough, once I investigated that slight deflation when a new activity lost its sparkle, I detected an inner relaxation underlying the more obvious surface layer of disappointment. I needed to bring attention to the body for this. The mood of deflation still predominated in the mind, but within the tissues of the body, particularly the limbs, I sensed peace and ease. I realised that I had become more grounded, more settled within myself.

So keep an eye out for any slight deflation when a new activity starts to feel humdrum. Ask whether deep down peace has descended. I never knew disappointment could hold such treasure. But don't go straight for tranquility, skip over the rapture stage, thinking it's silly to be getting excited by things. For tranquility to have any depth, we need to put our heart into the activity, while it still strikes us as novel and interesting. The energy of enthusiasm lifts us up, and that is the same energy which transforms to tranquility when the novelty wears off.

Tranquility sets up the conditions needed for the next link, happiness. Once I had detected and assured myself that tranquility was really present, the mood of disappointment evaporated and instead the heart softened. I realised I was content, happy. While tranquility for me could be described as a bodily form of happiness, the recognition of tranquility allowed the happiness to spread from body to mind. Unless I had looked for tranquility within that deflationary phase when the fizz went out of an activity, the mood of disappointment would have remained. Nothing had changed in my circumstances to make me happy, only that I'd noticed and paid attention to the physical relaxation that happened as an activity turned from novel and exciting to humdrum.

I hope any of you who often feel depressed will take this point to heart. Trust that it is possible to be happy, even if you can't change the circumstances of your life. But beware the temptation to skip over the early stages, early steps and go straight for tranquility or happiness. Each step needs the support of the previous ones. We need to investigate each one, be prepared to come back to dukkha again and again, so as to get more familiar with the entry points, detect the change of heart to gladness and so on.

A happy mind quite naturally rests attention on whatever it chooses to attend to, and thus happiness sets up the conditions needed for *samādhi*. Samādhi is the ability of the mind to rest, be still, gather its energies around a particular focus. If we're happily washing the dishes, it won't take any effort to feel the rubbing movements, see the dishes, hear the gurgling of water. It's only when we're unhappy that we get distracted,

planning or worrying so intently that we never notice our hands in contact with dishes. The unhappy mind has its energies going in multiple directions as one thought careers after another. The happy mind is unified. While washing dishes, we know we are washing dishes. The only thoughts that come up relate to washing dishes.

There are many advantages to samādhi. We sense the gathering of our usually scattered thoughts as restful healing. From the Buddha's point of view, the greatest value is that the gathered mind can see more deeply into whatever it focuses on. If we want to see the cause of suffering and the path to freedom, then samādhi lets us see this more clearly.

This brings us to the many fruits of the spiral path, which start with understanding the Dhamma and lead onwards to full liberation from all suffering. To stick with our climate change example, I might start with a confusing mix of anxiety, anger and despair at the news of the wildfire. If I can follow the spiral till the mind gathers in samādhi, I might then see how I'm torturing myself with imagined fears. The horror has been grasped so tightly I feel guilty unless I'm suffering too. It comes as humbling relief to admit that I am not suffering physically and this liberates a much more genuine compassion for those who are.

I hope you will try out these teachings, get to know your easiest entry points to the spiral and the transition from misery to gladness as you do this. A word of warning. Words like gladness, rapture, tranquility, happiness can set us up for disappointment. Set your expectations very low. A momentary uplift from dukkha counts as gladness. The slight buzz that comes from a new activity counts as rapture. The slight relaxation in the body when the buzz dies away counts as tranquility, and so on. Remember, small is beautiful.

In small steps, may we all be liberated from suffering. Thanks so much.

CHAPTER 228

The Spiral Path

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the profound Upanisā Sutta and its teaching on Transcendent Dependent Arising—a spiral path that transforms dukkha into liberation. Unlike the familiar twelve links showing how we create suffering, this teaching reveals twelve steps leading from dukkha to awakening.*
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> *Using climate change anxiety as a practical example, Bhante explores seven 'entry points' to escape dukkha: faith (saddhā), investigation, virtue (sīla), restraint, dedication, Right Awareness (sammā sati), and inspiration. Each provides a doorway from suffering into the upward spiral of gladness, rapture (pīti), tranquillity (passaddhi), happiness (sukha), and samādhi.*
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> *Drawing on teachings from John Peacock and Akiñcano Weber, this talk offers a refreshing contrast to passive Vipassanā observation. Here we're encouraged to actively cultivate wholesome states that lift us from misery. The key insight: even slight disappointment when novelty fades can reveal hidden tranquillity in the body, opening the heart to genuine happiness.*
>
> *This accessible teaching shows how the spiral path operates in daily life—from washing dishes mindfully to finding inspiration in a sunset. Perfect for practitioners seeking practical ways to transform life's inevitable difficulties into opportunities for spiritual growth.*

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

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

During the summer I got interested in a teaching commonly known as Transcendent Dependent Arising, the *Upanisā* Sutta. I was drawn to this via the six maxims, ethical practices designed to help us face climate change in a way that preserves our integrity. One of these maxims is to see our good fortune in being alive right now at a time of such crisis for mankind. Instead of seeing floods, droughts, wildfires, soil erosion as horrors, we are to welcome each one as an opportunity to develop courage, resilience, and other gifts that come of meeting suffering with open arms.

The *Upanisā* Sutta provides Dhamma support for this, as it traces out the list of causes and conditions leading to enlightenment. The first twelve steps might be familiar, showing how we create *dukkha*, meaning suffering in all its variations from minor irritation to heartbreak, excruciating pain or abject fear, by believing we can make ourselves happy in a world which is unstable, uncontrollable, inherently unsatisfying.

What is special about this teaching is that it doesn't stop at *dukkha*, but traces an equal number of steps leading from *dukkha* to liberation. It gives us a list of skills and qualities we can and should develop to bring about our own liberation.

I've recently attended a tricycle online course entitled "The Spiral to Freedom," in which the teachers, John Peacock and Akincano Weber, look at this particular teaching, as well as a number of related teachings which explore the same area. They refer to these as the spiral teachings, and call the path leading from *dukkha* to liberation a spiral path. They also stress that all the links in the spiral path can be seen in ordinary daily life.

It all starts with *dukkha*, which I think is really good news. If you know you're unhappy, irritated, out of sorts, then you're already at the launching pad for the spiral path. Taking *dukkha* as a given, the teaching suggests a number of responses, which John and Akincano refer to as entry points to the spiral.

Let's take the *dukkha* of climate change as an example. Suppose we are in a stew of misery at news of another wildfire. How can we meet this with open arms?

For some, faith is the easiest way to counter the pull into negative thinking. This could be the bright faith of the beginner, or the mature trust that grows with long practice. Every time another dark thought takes us back into the pit, we place our trust in the Dhamma to draw ourselves out. It could help to look at a Buddha rupa or whatever symbolises the Dhamma for you. Buddha touched the earth when he needed all his faith, and this is worth trying out sometime. Place your hands on the ground, feel its stability, its solidity, trust the vastness of the earth as a grounding in truth.

For some of us, faith might not come so easily. News of an environmental catastrophe and knowing that this has been wrought by human greed stimulates doubt rather than faith. And we are flooded by questions like, what is life all about? Where the only answer is, I don't know. If we're willing to explore the experience of "I don't know," this is wise investigation, a second entry point to the spiral. Although we don't have the answers, we have access to teachings that can point us in the right direction. Thus, the feeling of bewilderment is the catalyst that motivates us to learn about suffering and how it can be transcended.

At other times, investigation may seem irrelevant. We want to do something, anything to relieve the suffering. In this case, virtue becomes the link from *dukkha* to the spiral. We respond to the news of the wildfire with ethical action. We might donate to a charity supporting those affected, sign a petition or write to our local council. We find some positive action aiming to minimise the harm and pain. As well as being beneficial for the world, this counters the pull into depression owing to the perilous state of the world, restores our confidence in the power of goodness.

But sometimes we just can't find the energy, the goodwill needed to sign yet another petition or make that donation. Everything in us wants to turn away from the world, forget all its horrors. This impulse contains the wisdom of restraint, which is another entry point to the spiral. We let ourselves turn away from activity, withdraw to some quiet place, let go of all the thoughts about climate change or other news. Give ourselves the silence and rest we need to let our hearts heal. This could mean an hour's meditation, it could mean a long retreat, or perhaps all we can do is a few mindful breaths. Whatever works is fine. We're honouring a wholesome response to *dukkha*.

The opposite can happen too. The news of the wildfire leads to restlessness. We can't keep still and we certainly don't want to turn inwards. Instead, we need something to occupy us. In this case, we can use the entry point of dedication. We could wash the dishes as if this were a sacred ceremony, the most important task in the world, taking care of all the little details. Although we can't fix the wildfire, we can take care of what is at hand. And this is a very worthy response to *dukkha*.

At other times, the thought of taking care of anyone or anything seems an impossible burden. Perhaps thoughts of who is to blame and how it should be fixed crash into one another, making our heads spin. In this case, mindfulness provides a good entry point to the spiral. We don't have to follow each sensation or breath. We can use phrases like "walking to the shops," "making the dinner," "driving to work" to keep us present, alert, mindful. Although news of the wildfire might still be tempting us to fret and worry, we are choosing present reality as an antidote to those dead ends. And this is a valid way to lift ourselves out of *dukkha* and into the spiral path.

Sometimes we can't even muster the energy to be mindful. Everything seems hopeless. In this case, we need to look outside ourselves. Let inspiration become our stepping stone from *dukkha* to the spiral. Who or what will draw attention away from misery? Persuade us that life is worth living. For some it's a weekend camping, others might sign up for a study course. It could be as simple as meeting a friend, listening to a

Dhamma talk, leafing through photos of happier times. I keep some well-worn biographies at hand when I need a lift or go out for a long walk. Sometimes gazing at the sunset is enough to inspire me, remind me of life's preciousness.

Thus, we have seven options for digging ourselves out of *dukkha* and into the spiral: faith, investigation, virtue, restraint, dedication, mindfulness, inspiration. Each of us will have our own strengths, our preferred entry points, and it will also vary from one situation to another and depending on what mood we're in. Working with these entry points is a powerful practice. As we try these in practical situations, we get to know our strengths, learn to play to them.

This provides a contrast with the standard Vipassana approach, where we simply observe, don't interfere, don't try to make things better. To launch ourselves out of *dukkha* and into the spiral path, we're allowed to be biased, seek out and amplify feelings and mind states that lift us up.

Mindfulness is not only an entry point in itself, but it's also working in the background for all entry points. Noticing what works, what doesn't, when we've gone too far, when we need to step back, take it easy. Try another approach when we're ready.

Once we've found an entry point, the next link in the spiral is gladness. A moment ago we were stuck in the pits of *dukkha*, now we've found a way forward. The heart quite naturally gladdens when this happens.

Surprisingly, the feeling of gladness is easily overlooked. We can be so intent on doing our virtuous action, so immersed in the beauty of the sunset, that we don't notice the change of heart. Unless we pay attention to this, we could inadvertently start another round of *dukkha*, stressing ourselves out in the effort to do our good deeds, so inspired by the sunset that the rest of life pales by comparison. We need to be on the lookout for gladness to deepen our faith that there is really a path leading from suffering to liberation. And it is possible for me to follow this.

My advice also would be not to expect too much. A tiny glimpse of gladness is all the evidence we need that there is something here worth cultivating.

Gladness sets up the necessary conditions for rapture, the next link in the spiral. The word suggests an over-the-top joy, but if we are on the lookout for it, we find rapture to be quite a simple down-to-earth experience. The background mood of gladness helps us engage, be interested in whatever we experience. This engaged interest in present experience is what we mean by rapture. This can be experienced quite simply as interest or curiosity. Look out for this at the start of any activity. As you step into the shower,

take the first bite of dinner, say hello to a friend, listen to a podcast. Sometimes it can feel a bit giddy or overexcited, expecting too much. Sometimes very mild, like a gentle uplift or refreshment.

Rapture sets up the condition for the next link, tranquillity. This was one I struggled with, till Akincano described tranquillity as that cooling phase in every activity, when the initial fizz goes out of it. This put a completely different light on tranquillity for me, and true enough, once I investigated that slight deflation, when some new activity lost its sparkle, I detected an inner relaxation underlying the more obvious surface layer of disappointment. I needed to bring attention to the body for this. The mood of deflation still predominated in the mind. But within the tissues of the body, particularly the limbs, I sensed peace and ease. I realised that I had become more grounded, more settled within myself.

So keep an eye out for any slight deflation when a new activity starts to feel humdrum. Ask whether deep down peace has descended. I never knew disappointment could hold such treasure. But don't go straight for tranquillity. Skip over the rapture stage, thinking it's silly to be getting excited by things. For tranquillity to have any depth, we need to put our heart into the activity, while it still strikes us as novel and interesting. The energy of enthusiasm lifts us up and that is the same energy which transforms to tranquillity when the novelty wears off.

Tranquillity sets up the conditions needed for the next link, happiness. Once I had detected and assured myself that tranquillity was really present, the mood of disappointment evaporated and instead the heart softened. I realised I was content, happy. While tranquillity for me could be described as a bodily form of happiness, the recognition of tranquillity allowed the happiness to spread from body to mind. Unless I had looked for tranquillity within that deflationary phase when the fizz went out of an activity, the mood of disappointment would have remained. Nothing had changed in my circumstances to make me happy, only that I'd noticed and paid attention to the physical relaxation that happened as an activity turned from novel and exciting to humdrum.

I hope any of you who often feel depressed will take this point to heart. Trust that it is possible to be happy, even if you can't change the circumstances of your life. But beware the temptation to skip over the early steps and go straight for tranquillity or happiness. Each step needs the support of the previous ones. We need to investigate each one, be prepared to come back to *dukkha* again and again, so as to get more familiar with the entry points, detect the change of heart to gladness and so on.

A happy mind quite naturally rests attention on whatever it chooses to attend to, and thus happiness sets up the conditions needed for *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is the ability of the mind to rest, be still, gather its energies around a particular focus. If we're happily washing the dishes, it won't take any effort to feel the rubbing movements, see the dishes, hear the gurgling of water. It's only when we're unhappy that we get distracted, planning or worrying so intently that we never notice our hands in contact with dishes. The unhappy mind has its energies going in multiple directions as one thought careers after another. The happy mind is unified. While washing dishes, we know we are washing dishes. The only thoughts that come up relate to washing dishes.

There are many advantages to *samādhi*. We sense the gathering of our usually scattered thoughts as restful healing. From the Buddhist point of view, the greatest value is that the gathered mind can see more deeply into whatever it focuses on. If we want to see the cause of suffering and the path to freedom, then *samādhi* lets us see this more clearly. This brings us to the many fruits of the spiral path, which start with understanding the Dhamma and lead onwards to full liberation from all suffering.

To stick with our climate change example, I might start with a confusing mix of anxiety, anger and despair at the news of the wildfire. If I can follow the spiral till the mind gathers in *samādhi*, I might then see how I'm torturing myself with imagined fears. The horror has been grasped so tightly I feel guilty unless I'm suffering too. It comes as humbling relief to admit that I am not suffering physically and this liberates a much more genuine compassion for those who are.

I hope you will try out these teachings, get to know your easiest entry points to the spiral and the transition from misery to gladness as you do this.

A word of warning. Words like gladness, rapture, tranquillity, happiness can set us up for disappointment. Set your expectations very low. A momentary uplift from *dukkha* counts as gladness. The slight buzz that comes from a new activity counts as rapture. The slight relaxation in the body when the buzz dies away counts as tranquillity and so on. Remember, small is beautiful.

In small steps, may we all be liberated from suffering.

CHAPTER 229

The Four Noble Truths

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the Four Noble Truths as the cornerstone of the Buddha's entire teaching system. He explores dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness) in its three aspects: the suffering of suffering (dukkata), the suffering of impermanence, and the suffering inherent in our concept of self. Through practical meditation examples, he demonstrates how awareness creates the 'nibbānic gap' - that crucial space between experience and our reactions that offers freedom from suffering.*
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> *The talk examines how desire (taṇhā) manifests our delusions and why Right Awareness (sammā sati) is essential for recognizing unwholesome desires before they become activated. Bhante emphasizes the Buddha's teaching that happiness isn't life's purpose - awareness is. He concludes with an inspiring account from Thai Arahant Mechi Keau, describing how a fully awakened being experiences complete engagement with life while remaining untouched by mental formations.*
>
> *This accessible yet profound exploration offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners clear insight into how the Four Noble Truths operate in daily meditation practice and ordinary life situations.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

What I'm hoping to do for the rest of the year is go through the whole teaching in little short talks, and the place to start of course is with his declaration of the Four Noble Truths.

If you were to choose one word upon which all his teaching is based, it would have to be the word *dukkha*. This *dukkha* means hard to bear and it's translated variously as suffering, dissatisfaction, discomfort and so forth, but it really covers the whole of life.

It begins with dukkhata, which means the suffering of suffering or the dissatisfaction of dissatisfaction. In other words, ordinary physical pain, mental anguish and so forth are natural to the human condition. But what makes it suffering is the way we react. It's knowing that that allows us to find the escape out of suffering.

That's what we're doing when we're meditating. When we're in posture, we note something coming up, a pain in the knee or something, and we note the reaction to it. When we can stand apart from the reaction, we find ourselves in a place which is not suffering, even though the environment - the pain in the knee and the not wanting of the pain in the knee - is not pleasant. It's making that distinction when it comes to the pains and woes of life.

Even taking something very heavy like a death, the death of somebody close to us. There's a tremendous amount of grief and heart suffering. But then there's the reaction to that, which is sometimes a desire not to face it. It remains in the system as a turbulence, and sometimes the desire to indulge it. You get into this wrong relationship with grief, where if you stop grieving, you think you've stopped loving. But when we feel it as a feeling in ourselves we're standing apart from it, and that separation from the reaction that we've had is the nibbanic gap. That's what we have to really keep rediscovering for ourselves, and of course in these situations the heart heals itself.

Now on the obverse side of that is everything to do with pleasure - the pleasures and joys of life. Here we have a different problem to do with indulgence. What indulgence simply means is that we're using something, we're becoming dependent on something in order to be happy. Everybody has their own definition of what makes them happy and everybody has their own particular feeling as to what happiness is. We tend to believe that that's the purpose of our lives, to feel happy.

When Sayadaw U Pandita turned up at IMS once, a woman said to him, "I'm so happy to see you." He replied in Burmese, but the translator didn't translate it. Afterwards, she went to the translator and asked, "What did he say?" He said, "I haven't come here to make you happy. I've come here to make you aware." That's the crucial point about the Buddha's teachings.

When we do indulge, there are always consequences - the grief of loss, the anxiety of loss, paying out loads for insurance. There's the anger of not getting what you want, the frustration of not getting what you want. And then of course the boredom - what used to make you happy and joyful, now you find boring. There's a whole load of mental diseases that comes through the process of attachment, through the process of indulgence. This is all contained in that little phrase, dukkha dukkhata. It's one type of suffering.

The second type is to do with impermanence. This is basically not really coming to terms with the fact that everything arises and passes away. Not only does everything arise and pass away, nothing ever repeats. There's actually nothing in this universe, in our universe, in our lives that we can rely upon. Anything can disappear at any moment. Coming to terms with that is really understanding this process of change.

We're especially fortunate in Britain because of our weather. The weather is constantly changing and therefore we can never make absolute plans as to when you want to go for a walk. I'm a fair weather walker, and you make a plan to walk on such a day and of course it rains or it rains and snows or it does everything else apart from sunshine. This whole idea of impermanence comes across when we actually look at what we arrange - sometimes we can make it and sometimes we can't.

At a deeper level, this whole impermanence is taking us to the whole process of aging and final death. That's the difficult one to come to terms with, of course. But it's the quiet gentle remembrance at all times - there - that everything comes to an end, life comes to an end. You might think by reminding myself of that I'm going to make myself depressed, but what happens is of course you find yourself living more in the moment. You come to appreciate the moment more and therefore paradoxically your life becomes much more joyful for it.

In the medieval times, it was very regular to have your memento mori, your reminder of death, a little skull on your desk or somewhere, so that you never actually forgot that life is short. That whole attitude of coming to terms with impermanence is part and parcel of our practice.

The final one is to do with the concept of self. The concept of self creates a substantiality, something that is real, whole, entire unto itself. But actually, when we look even a little bit deeper we can see that everything is compounded. Everything is made up of little bits and pieces, and these little bits and pieces are dependent on other little bits and pieces. This whole planet as we know is a living organism with little bits and pieces dependent on some other little bits and pieces. It's beginning to dissolve, beginning to deconstruct our experience of ourselves which is part and parcel of that process.

We wouldn't do that or we'd be afraid to do that if when we actually deconstruct everything we find there's nothing there. That would be terrible. But what the Buddha is saying is that hidden within this organism, there is something which doesn't die. It wasn't born, doesn't die. It's not even conditioned. Where is it? What could it possibly be? That's the process again of our meditation.

This sense of self is the fundamental delusion that lies at the basis of all our unhappinesses. It's the point where the awareness within us begins to experience this organism as itself - that's the big point of contact. Right there the whole trouble of delusion begins, and the dependent origination begins with that phrase *avijjā* - delusion, not knowing. It's not a culpable thing, it's just the way it is.

How do we know when any of these delusions are arising? How do we know, once we've sussed this out, once we've understood this, how do we know when it's activated? How do we know when we are under the spell of these misunderstandings?

This is where the genius, you might say, or the real insight of the Buddha lies. It lies right there in our desires. If we're aware of a desire, we'll be able to pinpoint what is causing that desire. If it's wholesome, of course we empower it. But if it's not wholesome, then we have to sit with that energy until it dies away.

To be aware of a desire as it rises takes that bit of *appamāda* - it's his favourite word, one of his favourite words, which of course was his second to last word in life. *Appamāda* - strive diligently for your liberation. It's that sense of constantly bringing ourselves back to the present moment and being awake to any little desire that comes up.

Most desires are neither here nor there. There's a desire in me to wave my hand about like I'm doing now. It's not something I'm going to be too bothered about. But if a desire is for something which I immediately perceive as unwholesome, unskillful, unvirtuous, then if I'm right there with the initial movement of that desire, the choice arises. Once I've activated it, that's it. I've lost that moment of little bit of choice. Once it's activated, then of course there are going to be results.

That second noble truth, the noble truth that desire is the cause of suffering - that's how the delusions manifest. And then of course he says that there is an end to this suffering. Finally, there's the path that he delineates, which is a bit too much for us to go into this evening. But most of you know it - it begins with right understanding, which is what we're doing now. That of course changes our attitudes. When our attitudes change, it affects the way we speak and what we do and our livelihood. It all reverts back to this - really understanding the way things are. Through that process of not activating those desires that are unwholesome and activating those desires that are wholesome, the attitude changes and very slowly we pull ourselves out of the morass of human suffering.

But let's go back to the third one, which is of course there is an end to suffering. The word he gives for that is *Nibbāna*. It's translated in various ways. Some of it is creative etymology. But the two main ones are no desire and unshackled, unfettered. Some of you will know the ten fetters that keep us at this level of existence. It's unfettering those that releases this awareness, which is the Buddha within.

I'd like to end my little homily with a quote from Mae Chee Kaew. Mae Chee Kaew was a Thai nun who died in 1991, so she's absolutely contemporary. She was a student of Ajahn Mahā Boowa. Some of you might know his writings. She worked with him and then once she became liberated she went back to look after her nuns, and that's what she did really for the rest of her life. Died when she was about ninety-one, if I remember, of lung cancer.

This is what she says, which tells us how somebody who's fully liberated actually experiences life. Remember, she's fully engaged. She's there with the nuns and lay people who come, but mainly her concern seems to have been to guide her nuns. She's fully engaged in life. This is what she says, which tells us how that engagement is, how it manifests.

"Body, mind and essence are all distinct and separate realities." So there's three parts to us - the body, our physicality, our mentality and this, what she here calls essence, that which is. "Absolutely everything is known," which means that whatever comes into the awareness, whatever arises on the screen of consciousness, she knows it. Her mind isn't somewhere else.

"Earth, water, fire and wind" - these remember are your four great elements, I won't go into detail, I'm presuming you know this. "Then there's feeling, the body, feeling, perceptions, conceptual thinking, and then there are the habits that we have, and finally consciousness. She knows when sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches and emotions arise. She knows when" - now this is interesting - "when greed, anger and delusion arise. All are known. I know them as they exist in their natural states."

It might surprise you to think that somebody who's fully liberated still has negative unwholesome thoughts arise, but remember the mind is now habituated in a way of thinking. The distinction between somebody who's an *arahant* and us is that they are traces in the mind that have no pull, they have no attraction and therefore they just arise and pass away. Whereas our habit, of course, is to jump and grab hold of them and off we go. What she's saying is that these are just traces that pass through the mind.

"Now no matter how much I'm exposed to them I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart" - that's her next word for this Buddha within, her heart. It doesn't remember - it's not the emotional heart, this isn't emotion, this is her real being. They have no power over it. The awareness is there. We experience that in our meditation on occasion. On occasion when we're observing things rising, passing away, we're in this state. We're having a little touch of *nibbāna*.

"All these things arise and cease, they're forever changing, but the presence" - that's the third word she uses to describe this awareness, this Buddha nature - "but the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of suffering."

I've never come across a more clear statement as to how an *arahant* experiences life. Not even the Buddha, which may be surprising. The Buddha has many statements about *Nibbāna* and about that state of mind, but I've never seen it expressed, as it were, in a way that the ordinary meditator can grasp.

There she is, looking after her nuns, always in the moment, aware of what's actually happening. Whenever something slightly negative arises in the mind, it simply arises and passes away. It doesn't enter into her heart, into her awareness.

I'm hoping that you find that inspiring. I personally find it very inspiring. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that by your total devotion to the practice, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 230

Dukkha (Unsatisfactoriness) and Sīla (Morality and Ethics)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25 min

In this comprehensive teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the relationship between dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) and sīla (morality and ethics), offering both traditional Buddhist framework and practical guidance for modern practitioners. He begins by explaining how suffering manifests through the three unwholesome roots—delusion (moha), which branches into acquisitiveness and aversion, with aversion further dividing into hatred and fear. A key insight emphasized is that we cause our own suffering through our reactions to experience, making liberation possible through inner transformation rather than external change.

The talk covers the five precepts (pañcasīla) and their positive counterparts, moving from abstaining from harm toward actively protecting life, from not stealing toward generosity, and from avoiding false speech toward the four aspects of right speech—truthful, non-slanderous, non-abusive, and timely. Bhante then explores the five hindrances (nīvaraṇa) and the ten defilements (kilesa), including sensual desire, hatred, delusion, conceit, wrong views, skeptical doubt, torpor, and restlessness, providing context for self-reflection during meditation.

Particularly valuable is the discussion of anusaya (latent tendencies)—the deep-seated habitual patterns (saṅkhāra) lying dormant within us, ready to arise when triggered. These include the tendency toward becoming (bhava) and its opposite, the desire for non-existence. Bhante connects these ancient teachings to contemporary understanding of unconscious biases and prejudices, offering a compassionate framework for acknowledging these conditionings without self-judgment. The antidote presented is yoniso manasikāra (wise attention)—maintaining awareness sufficient to catch unwholesome thoughts as they arise, allowing these patterns to gradually exhaust their energy.

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

On this full moon—I hope you saw the blood moon. It wasn't actually the full moon itself, but it was very red against the clear sky. Very lovely.

The topic I've chosen for this evening is dukkha and sīla. These are words I'm sure you're familiar with, but it's good to have a little reminder. Dukkha, translated as unsatisfactoriness or suffering, simply means "hard to bear." But why does it manifest? It

manifests because of three basic roots—the unwholesome roots. There is delusion, which forks off into some form of acquisitiveness and some form of aversion. And aversion spikes off into hatred and fear. These are our basic attitudes that arise out of this deep delusion.

In order to go backwards to the original delusion, we have to work through the moral laws and ethical guidance. I'm using these words to mean two different things. The moral laws are basically things like not to kill. But ethical guidance is really about relationships—about changing our relationship not only to people, animals, and plants, but even to material things.

For instance, at Eiheiji Monastery, the founding monastery of Zen, I'm told that when they take water from a well, they will use the water but always leave a little bit to put back into the well. It's a sort of offering, an acknowledgement of the preciousness of water.

Now, the thing about this suffering is that we cause it to ourselves. What's difficult for us to really accept is that we've actually been doing it since we were born—in fact, probably in the womb. We have to make a distinction between the pressures coming upon us, even as babies, which are usually not meant to be harmful—such as the process of birth, or feeling hungry when mummy's not there—and acts against us which can be harmful. But whatever happens to us is, shall we say, the original pain. How we react to it through aversion and so forth is our suffering.

We have to recognize that if this were not so, it would be impossible to become fully liberated. Unless we got rid of the actual cause of our suffering—if we believe other people are the cause of our suffering—then basically we've got to get rid of other people, and then we can be liberated. But it's the very fact that we cause our own suffering that makes it possible to become fully liberated from it.

I want to center upon what are known as the defilements and the latent tendencies, but we'll come to that in a minute. First, the five basic precepts—these are places I'm sure none of us go anymore. But it's good to know that there are things we don't do, like kill people. We don't kill anybody if we can help it. We don't steal. We don't tell lies. We don't abuse our sexual powers. The last one's a bit difficult: not to take drugs and drink and such things which make the mind fuzzy.

We do live in an alcohol culture, but it's up to the individual. If one brings to mind that alcohol, no matter how little, is actual pure poison to the body—probably worse than any of the drugs—then that might encourage moving toward non-alcoholic wine and beers, which I can tell you now are very good.

What happens when we take those precepts is that we move towards the opposite. We don't kill any being or anything, and we naturally move towards protecting them. It's just a natural movement. Sometimes that first precept is translated as "no harm," but it's not—it's actually about killing. To not harm any living being is a refinement.

Not to steal, when we give that up—we know that leads to a harmonious society and eventually to generosity. The use of sexual powers is, of course, out of respect and within a loving relationship.

When it comes to lying, right speech splits into four different types. There are great big whoppers that we don't want to tell anymore. But slandering is a bit more difficult—we let words slip and find ourselves saying things about people. Then there's abusive language, of course, and just wasted talk, talking for talking's sake. What we're moving towards is kindly speech: truthful, beneficial, and—of most importance—to say things at a suitable time, because often we're saying what we want to say, but it's not quite the right time to say it.

We also have this other category of hindrances, where all these things come up as obstacles to our meditation when we're sitting. It's another list which allows us to see where these defilements within us arise.

and how to deal with them. Each category has a way of dealing with them, and I'm sure you remember.

So the first one concerns sensual desires—avarice, greed, and all of that. The next one encompasses the hatreds, the grudges, the vendettas. And then there's sloth and torpor, which comes about through our habit of using sleep to escape, to get rid of ourselves for a little while. I think somebody called it "the duvet dive." When you do that, of course, you're developing an energy that pulls you down, like a whirlpool. These things have to be overcome, have to be allowed to drain themselves.

Then there's that whole area of restlessness caused by inner turbulence. But that also contains guilt, remorse, and shame, which are secondary effects of doing something harmful. And finally, skeptical doubt, which is quite a problem if you have it badly because you can't make a decision. You keep making lists for and against. If you have a relationship where you're attracted to someone—could it work? Could it not work?—before you know it, the person's left you. It's the same with a job. Shall I go for it? Shall I not go for it? And it's gone. This often comes from fear of failure or a lack of self-esteem.

Anyway, moving on to the kilesas. This is often translated as the ten defilements. In the early scriptures, the word kilesa is used as a general way of pointing to that within us which is unwholesome. But of course, the early scriptures couldn't resist—and the Abhidhamma couldn't resist—making lists. So they've given us a list of ten of these defilements, and none of them will come as a shock. You know they're there. But the reason for looking at this is for self-reflection, so that when we see thoughts coming up, when we see our actions arising, it categorizes them and gives us some idea of how to deal with them.

The first one, obviously, concerns sensual desire—basic sensual desire, the greed, the lust, the avarice, and so on. The next one concerns hate: unforgivingness and things like that, holding grudges. The next one is delusion. And this is always around this fundamental problem of identity. It's always about this feeling of being a self, a person, something that doesn't change within us. This then gives us—moving from the self, which is actually only seeking happiness, only seeking happiness—some sort of purpose for life, to seek this happiness. But unfortunately, as we know, human life doesn't eventually satisfy us. It's not somewhere we are going to feel completely satisfied.

This also manifests as conceit. Conceit has three manifestations. The obvious one is "I am better than"—I'm better than you, and so forth. Then you get the opposite: "I'm not as good as." And then you get a more subtle one where you feel, "This is okay, I'm equal to this person." That doesn't seem to contain any conceit of being better or worse; it seems to be a good place to be, sort of wholesome. But unfortunately, you are creating a group of people who all think they are equal. Once you've done that, there are other groups who are not equal—who are actually worse or better. So it's a subtle one.

The next one is wrong views. This goes back again to the self. It's about believing that something of our personhood is eternal. We all know the body will die, but we believe the heart-mind, the mental body, continues to live, never changes. The soul—often people will talk about their souls as being this unchanging person, basically, but without a physical body. And that, of course, is not the Buddha's teaching. The subtle body, the body that seeks rebirth, is just as impermanent as this one. It is just another, finer energy.

When I say that, sometimes you can experience it. When you're there with an emotion, something loud—like you might be feeling irritated, or anxious is a bit difficult to work with, but irritation or anger, that's a good one.

And you're in the body and you can feel it, you can feel it. You might be able, by centering in on it very clearly, by holding your attention right there—it might just separate for you. And then you'll see that the mind's anger isn't that bad, but that when it touches the physical base of the body, it's like a sounding box. It comes back as very loud, as very burning.

Little experiences like that prove to the meditator that these two things, the body and mind, are actually two different forms of energy. But neither of them are permanent. They're arising and passing away.

And the opposite of eternalism, of course, is annihilationism—the idea that when you die, well, you're dead and that's it, so you should be happy with that. In the Buddha's time, there were materialists, people who believed that there wasn't a soul, there wasn't anything. You were just this body, and when you died, you died. These days we would have scientific materialists who take that position.

Definitely the Buddha was against both, and he tended to be accused of being an annihilationist, not an eternalist, because of his teaching of not-self. It became very confusing, this not-self business. The Jains said, "We believe, ourselves and the Brahmins, that there is an eternal soul. And the materialists believe that there isn't. But the Buddhists haven't made their mind up." That was how confused people were with this doctrine of not-self. There are occasions in the scriptures which are quite funny, actually. We'll explore those some other time.

Then we've got skeptical doubt, which we've talked about, and torpor, which we've talked about, and restlessness. So those are your ten kilesa: sensual desire, hatred, delusion, conceit, wrong view, skeptical doubt, torpor, and restlessness. I'm going to put these lists onto a PDF if you want to have a look, and there's lots of material on the websites if you want to go into it more deeply.

But the next bit is particularly interesting, I think, for us as Westerners—this idea of anusaya, the latent tendencies. This tells you that within us there are these habits, sankhara. Sankhara is often translated as "volitional conditioning," which is really confusing. But if we think about habits, it's simply what we habitually do—the way we think, the way we speak, our thought patterns. These are all habits. And the compendium of habits is what we would call our personality, our character.

It's understood that these are lying underneath everything we're doing. Given an opportunity, given some sort of catalyst, some sort of stimulus, there will arise out of this sankhara a response. For instance, all of us have some amount of anger within us. If somebody stands on your foot, that's a little stimulus, and this anger will want to reply

to it. It's lying there dormant, ready. What the Buddha is saying is that these are actually underneath our obvious consciousness, but they're always ready, always in many ways affecting the present moment.

The term anusaya is translated as bent, bias, proclivity—all those sorts of words. The list is much the same as the defilements, of course, with one extra element, which is the tendency toward the desire to become. In other words, the will to live and its opposite, the will not to live.

This will to live leads us to beliefs of eternalism, while the desire not to live leads us to beliefs about annihilationism. If you have that desire to live, you'll do everything to keep alive and you will substantiate your life. You'll try to make it safer and safer with more money, more friends, and so on. It causes us to be acquisitive.

If you are on the other side, where there's a feeling of being okay with annihilation, with the idea that death is the end and that's all—then you'll often find such people taking refuge in sleep, the duvet dive. As soon as something's too much, you just lie down and go to sleep. But of course, at its worst level, it's suicide.

Just wanting to get rid of yourself. Unfortunately, in Buddhist understanding, that doesn't work. It will re-arise. So it's not a good solution.

This tendency is included as an underlying tendency which makes us grasp at everything that proves to us we're alive. And that means trying to make ourselves happy, defending what makes us happy from any enemies—so there's your aversion. And if the enemy is too big, well, you run for it. We're constantly trying to manipulate our lives in order to establish this constant state of living happily.

Now, the last thing I want to mention is that these are translated as tendencies. These days we're very much aware of our prejudices, and there are two words people use. The commentators use the word prejudice, which is a hard sort of word—there's almost an activity there. If you're racially prejudiced or sexually prejudiced and somebody calls you that, there's a feeling of you being actively so. The other word being used is bias, which is slightly softer on a person.

If we use these two words in the sense of the defilements and the latent tendencies, it allows us to accept that all these things, these prejudices, are within us. It's part of the baggage we receive when we're born into a culture. There's racism, obviously, and tribalism which is a lesser form, sexism, ageism—I'm very much against that one—classism, homophobia, nationalism, religious prejudice, and xenophobia. And that's only a short list. There are lots and lots of other prejudices.

So it's being kind to ourselves. It's recognizing that we will have these prejudices within us, and they can manifest—sometimes embarrassingly so. But how do we overcome these prejudices? Well, obviously, on the obvious side, you don't indulge them. But the other thing the Buddha often talks about is this *yoniso manasikāra*, this wise attention, this being really awake—that in any situation you are aware of unwholesome thoughts as they arise, not after they've arisen and done something, but as they arise. When we are awake enough to actually catch these little unwholesome thoughts coming up, they very quickly dissipate. In that way, these prejudices, these biases, begin to be exhausted of their energy and lose their power to take us by surprise.

I think one of the difficulties is that it's very hard for us to say to ourselves, "Well, I am racially prejudiced." To say that and mean it as an active thing, of course, wouldn't be correct. But to say that there is in me that *sankhāra*, that conditioning, and to be aware should it ever arise and not to indulge it—I think that's a more truthful way of being with these conditionings within us.

It's also, I think, comforting to know that every person in the world will have these prejudices. It doesn't matter what ethnic group you come from, what race you belong to—these are just basic prejudices that are completely universal, regardless of where you live. This allows us to be more open about ourselves, at least to ourselves anyway. And that means we will be aware of these things when they arise, and they don't sneak out as Freudian slips, which can be very embarrassing.

So what we've done this evening is revise these moral precepts and begun to look much more at this idea of relationship. We've looked at the more negative side. At another time, we'll be looking at the more positive side, the virtues. But these are just ways in which we can reflect upon these things whenever the occasion arises, and they allow us to find a way to heal the heart of these things. That's the purpose of bringing these matters to mind. And as I say, if you want to go deeper into it, there's lots of material on the websites, lots of talks on Dharma Seed and things like that.

I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that you will, by your constant effort, release yourselves from all suffering and achieve the peace of Nibbāna.

CHAPTER 231

Paṭicca Samuppāda, the Role of Desire and the Only Choice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *In this exploration of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the twelve-link chain that explains how suffering arises and how we can find liberation. Beginning with avijjā (not-knowing) rather than culpable ignorance, he traces how our fundamental delusion of identifying with the psychophysical organism leads to the formation of saṅkhāra (volitional habits) that condition every moment of experience.*
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> *The talk particularly illuminates the crucial transition from vedanā (feeling) to taṇhā (reactive desire), showing how our judgments of pleasant and unpleasant experiences lead to grasping and aversion. Bhante emphasizes the Buddha's key insight about upādāna (identity-making) - the point where we say "I am this pain" or "I want this pleasure" - as the moment when suffering truly begins and becomes nearly impossible to stop.*
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> *Using practical examples like encountering ice cream on a sunny day, he demonstrates how the sense of "I" comes late in the process: contact, liking, wanting, then "I want." This reveals the crucial moment of choice before identity solidifies - the only point of genuine free will where we can interrupt the automatic progression toward bhava (becoming) and continued suffering. Through mindful awareness using techniques like the Mahasi method of noting, practitioners can learn to recognize and hold this energy of desire, allowing unwholesome impulses to transform naturally into their positive opposites.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Yesterday I gave the moon talk and then it failed to, well, I failed to do the right thing. And so I lost it. So I'm doing it again. I'll be covering exactly the same ground, but of course it won't be quite the same as you yourself had heard it, or as those on the moon broadcast had heard it.

So we're talking about the dependent origination and centering towards the end on this process of desiring. Now, the dependent origination begins with this word *avidyā*, and it's been translated as ignorance, giving it some sort of culpability, like we shouldn't have been ignorant. But no, this is just a plain flat not knowing, didn't know. And it's because of that that we fall into a delusion. And that delusion, of course, is to believe ourselves to be this heart, body, and mind, this psychophysical organism.

And that leads us into a funny relationship with the world, wanting to be happy. So we acquire things, money, friends, power, and so on. And then anything that upsets us or threatens us, we push away, we get angry and so on. And if it's bigger than me, then of course I'll run for it. So these are your basic attitudes that come from that delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion and fear. And they have created these *saṅkhāra*. The saṅkhāra is translated rather awkwardly as volitional conditioning. But I think it's much easier to think of them just as our habits, habits of thought, habits of feeling, habits of reaction and so on. And these two, this not knowing, this delusion, and the saṅkhāra, the habits, underlie every moment of our life. They're just passing with us underneath every moment.

Now, when something moves on the saṅkhāra, it will manifest on that screen of consciousness. And consciousness is described by its six bases, the five sensual bases, the eye, ear, nose, and so on, and the mind-heart, the inner life of images, thoughts, emotions. And these five consciousnesses, whenever there's a stimulus, it'll manifest on that screen.

Now then we have, because of that screen, we of course become aware of our body and mind, of our materiality and of our mentality. And it can also be understood as what is subjective mentality and what is objective, our physicality. And these physical, psychophysical organism has of course these six sense bases. And whenever we have a contact, which includes a sense base, some sort of object, and the awareness, the consciousness of it, we have that moment when we become aware of something, conscious of something.

Now, that moment is, shall we say, just an experience. But we then put a judgment on it, or we look at it from the point of view of happiness. So obviously, there are some things that make us happy and some things that don't. And that's the point where it becomes *vedanā*, or feeling, physical feelings, mental feelings. So as soon as these first little sensations come up in our sitting posture, for instance, of pain in the knee or pain in the back or pain in the neck, as soon as they come up, immediately we say, oh, that's pain. Pain meaning don't like. And of course, if it's something pleasant, we suddenly have a lovely, joyous memory, then of course, we label that as something to be enjoyed.

It's the point next, which is the problem, how we relate to it. And this is our reactivity. So because we've determined to try to make this life really absolutely happy. Whenever something does create happiness, we grasp it, we try to maintain it, we try to make it grow. And when something is unpleasant, we want to push it away, etc. That's the point of this *taṇhā*, this translated as craving, but that's too strong. Thirst is not bad, but it's just that reactivity coming from the wrong understanding.

Now, at the next point, there is an identity. And this is the point where actually suffering begins, because that's when you say, this is me. I am this pain in the knee. I am depressed. And once that is determined, it's virtually impossible to stop the empowerment of that desire. So if the desire said, take an aspirin, get rid of this headache, and you say, yes, I will take an aspirin to get rid of it, it's virtually impossible to stop reaching out for the aspirin. You may, of course, change your mind in the process, but the reaching out or the movement towards, even the slightest movement, will be very difficult to stop. And then once you've started an action, there'll be a process of the action and the completion of the action, right?

Now that's looking at dependent origination from a present moment to moment experience. But of course it is also explained as a sort of three lives. In the past life, we've developed these habits. We come into this life with consciousness, with awareness. We go through this process. We build up, hopefully better, habits, which get us reborn in a better place. And life begins again, birth, death, birth, death. But to us, I think as, well, what can we say as Westerners really much more involved in our psychology and all that, then the moment to moment changes or the present moment experience of Dependent Origination makes much more sense to us.

Now, this is what's really important here is the Buddha's tremendous insight about the point of identity. So if we take a very simple sentence, which some of you will have heard me often use, one sees ice cream, one makes a contact with ice cream. It's a lovely sunny day, it's very warm, you're out walking and there it is, the vision, the seeing of the ice cream. And immediately that brings up a sense of liking. Once you like something, there's a wanting, right? So there's a contact, ice cream. There's like, ice cream. There's want, ice cream. And then there's I want ice cream. So the I comes in late in the process. I is a sense of identity. This is me. If that weren't so, there wouldn't be an escape. There wouldn't be an escape. It's the fact that it comes at the end of that process, that we can now, instead of moving into that identity, actually stop at the point of desire. And when we stop at the point of desire, we can see that process quite clearly. It's a sort of energy that wants to manifest, and it needs our permission, a decision to manifest.

And that's what comes after. This identity is known as *bhava*, becoming. When we are becoming, we are creating a self all the time, but it's also an action and therefore there are consequences. And it all reverts back to this desire. Now, we're talking here specifically about unwholesome desire, but it also works for wholesome desires.

Now, unlike the Buddha, we have this underlying identity, we have this underlying delusion, and so no matter how we try there'll always be that sense of self. Now that doesn't mean to say it somehow destroys the benefit of a good action, far from it, but there'll always be that sense of me doing something and with it this underlying little conversation about how wonderful we are or how we're not so wonderful or how we've given too much, spent too much and so on and so forth.

So now if we go back to this desire, we have to feel that, okay? So in our meditation, when we're sitting there, as soon as something comes into our attention, on that screen of consciousness, we become aware of it, right? As soon as that happens, the Mahāsi technique of labeling is extremely good at making us acknowledge what is happening. So if my mind is wandering, I know wandering, but then I can see that I'm planning something. So I know planning. And when I come back into the body, I can feel the agitation, the excitement of this amazing thing that I'm going to do, saving the world. And if I can stay with that, I'll see that there's a sort of little energy that wants to take me out, take me back into the dream world. And I've got to be aware of that. If there's an iota, a moment of inattention, I'll shoot off again up into la-la land.

So this whole process is explained by the Buddha in this dependent origination. And this desire has to be felt. It has to be known. It has to be understood. So that when the desire comes and we see it is unwholesome, we've got to hold it there. We've got to stand. We mustn't let it take us. We mustn't let it tempt us into an action, a thought, word or deed. And if we fail, that's not a problem. You just know that, ah, yeah, it's still a very strong habit. So, okay, I've got to work with it, which means the next time it arises, being slightly on the ball, just waiting for that energy to dissipate, dissipate, dissipate.

Now that energy, remember, doesn't disappear. It's always transforming to its opposite. So where there was selfishness, they'll find generosity. Where there's hatred, you'll find love. And where there's cruelty, you'll find compassion and so on.

So that was our little contemplation yesterday. It was probably slightly better, slightly longer yesterday, but at least we have gone over it again so it'll be slightly different from what you heard yesterday but at least we've covered the same area.

Now I think I also said just to finally finalize the, to finish off, this moment of desire is actually the only moment of, for want of a better word, free will, right? That's the point where we can actually say no or yes. Otherwise, we would just be automatons. We'd just be living faithfully. We wouldn't have an ability to guide ourselves.

Now, when I say that's the moment of choice, the moment of free will, actually speaking, it's very narrow because what we want to do is get to a point of liberation from suffering. And the path is ahead of us. Now, we come along the path as if you were, so we say, just walking in the country, going somewhere to a tea shop, perhaps, of course, to a place where you can get a nice cup of coffee and a tea cake. And you know the way. It's on the map. And as you're going along, there's a little road to the left. And as you look, you think, oh, that's interesting. So now you've got a choice, you see. You can either wander up there, wasting time, getting more and more anxious as to whether the tea shop will be closed by the time you get there, and getting all flustered. And you may get lost, you see, even though you've got a map. And so you have to decide at that crossroad, have I got time? Do I want to go there? Do I need to go there? And then you move on.

So that moment of choice when the desire comes up is the point where we can liberate ourselves, where we can actually make the decisions that will liberate ourselves from this whole process of desire.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and they have not caused even further confusion and that you will, by your devotion to practice, liberate yourself from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 232

Identity and Not-Self

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

In this deeply practical talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma illuminates the challenging Buddhist teaching of anattā (not-self) by examining how our identification with roles, abilities, and achievements generates suffering. Using relatable examples—from baking a cake to fixing a printer—he demonstrates how the dukkha we experience stems not from external failures but from our sense of 'me' and the disappointment of letting ourselves down.

Drawing on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's instruction to practice mindfulness both internally and externally, Bhante offers a framework for investigating identity. Internal practice involves feeling moment-to-moment sensations directly, while external practice means observing and noting these experiences. This dual perspective allows practitioners to witness the 'self-ing' process—what the Buddha calls upādāna (clinging)—as various identities arise and dissolve based on circumstances. Through his own candid meditation account, he reveals how emotional storms can become 'rocket fuel for enlightenment,' exposing the painful patterns of identification that normally remain hidden.

The talk offers profound encouragement for working with difficult emotions rather than suppressing them. By patiently bearing witness to our greeds, hatreds, and delusions in the light of awareness, we allow them to teach us the Dhamma directly. Bhante describes how unpleasant sensations can serve as messengers, reminding us 'this is not who you really are'—a message that eventually brings joy and relief rather than fear. This understanding frees us from the prison of identification, allowing greater flexibility, compassion, and appreciation for our limited human efforts on the path toward the unconditioned peace of Nibbāna.

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

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

The Buddha's teaching on anatta, not-self, is a hard aspect of the Dhamma to understand. We will all be grappling with it until the moment of enlightenment. To motivate ourselves for the challenge, it's worth reflecting on the suffering we experience because of identifying with our body, our mind, our life stories.

Take the example of role identification. Whatever role we're playing in life—father, daughter, gardener—we want to do it well, which is a good motive. No problem there. It's when we over-identify, when we can't see beyond our role, that dukkha emerges.

On a good day, we get a buzz out of doing things well: cooking a meal, mending a puncture, teaching a class. But we all have days when these go wrong. The sponge cake turns out as a stodgy lump. The tyre deflates the minute we put the wheel back on. We go blank when trying to teach. This is when the dukkha of identification is felt. The more we identify as a good cook, a good DIYer, a good teacher, the harder it is to bear the letdown. We can't stop thinking about it. What went wrong? How could I have made such a mess of things? What did they think of me? We look for someone to blame. If he hadn't interrupted, it would have been perfect.

While none of us enjoy those times when we've made a hash of something, it is worth dwelling on them long enough to acknowledge that the source of the misery is not actually the gooey mess or the deflating tyre. It's the sense of me and how badly I've let myself down. That's the real dukkha—a loss of confidence, perhaps an almost desperate need to reassert ourselves, prove our ability.

The more clearly we can acknowledge the suffering that comes from identification, the more we will be willing to explore the difficult Buddhist teaching of anatta. And there is no doubt anatta is a difficult nut to crack. We all have a strong sense that we are the ones baking the cake, mending the tyre, teaching the class, living our life. It's hard to even toy with the idea that this might not be so.

The Buddha's advice is to keep breaking down experience into smaller and smaller chunks. It's easier to get glimpses of the truth in these. Then gradually, over time, the notion of not-self becomes easier to contemplate. We start to see its benefits—how much easier life is when we're not identified with our roles or opinions or abilities or achievements. It's wonderful to have nothing to defend.

One instruction from the Satipatthana Sutta, the four foundations of mindfulness, that I found very helpful for exploring anatta is the advice to practice internally and externally. Internal can be interpreted to mean our subjective felt experience, while external means our mental understanding of it. We feel the sensations of breathing for internal practice. For external practice, we reflect that we are breathing.

The Mahasi noting technique provides a way of practicing both internally and externally. We feel the breath and at the same time make a mental note of it. Same for walking, eating, talking. All of life can be known both internally, as moment-to-moment sensations and feelings, and externally, as our objective mental perception of what's happening.

Say we are practising mindfulness of breathing. Feeling the sensations of breathing is to practise mindfulness internally. Although we don't usually make the thought conscious, we assume we are the one who's sitting here breathing. If we're also practising externally, then we're noting "rising, falling" as we track the breath.

As concentration deepens, it can seem like our identity shifts. Instead of being the one who is sitting here breathing, we sense ourselves as the observer—some sort of spaced-out entity hovering around our head, the one who is watching the body breathing. On a good day, we'll also be able to watch our thoughts coming and going, watch emotions rise and fade, realize we don't have to get caught up in them.

All of this is helping us disentangle our confusion about identity. Internally, we feel ourselves breathing, thinking, growing happy one moment, sad the next. But because of our external perspective, we realize we don't need to identify with our thoughts, emotions, or breathing. We see these as happening of their own accord, driven by various stimuli, but not driven by what I now think of as me.

This can be a lovely experience—a sense of coming home, having found our true self, a sort of disembodied entity that hovers in and around the body, equanimous, interested, watching the show without getting caught up in it. But after a while, we might grow uncomfortable. Things start to feel sticky, as if there's a sheet of velcro passing over each sensation, pulling us along with it.

We start getting caught up with experience again, identified with thoughts and feelings and emotions. We are again the one who is sitting here breathing, and now anxiously trying to find our way back to that lofty crow's nest from which we had been able to observe the show.

Although there's a temptation to see this as bad meditation, we should really see it as a precious opportunity to learn the Dhamma more deeply. Pema Chödrön likens these episodes to rocket fuel for enlightenment.

To take a practical example: we got a new connector for our gas canister the other day, and so I overcame all my fears about gas and explosions and went to hook it up. After about a dozen failed attempts, all the bits eventually came together. It looked perfect. But gas started leaking the moment I opened the cylinder. I took it apart, reread the instructions, reconnected it. Still no go. Disappointing.

I was then asked to look at the printer because it wasn't working. It needed a new toner cartridge. And again, I overcame my deep suspicion of all things electrical and mechanical, and managed to replace the cartridge. But no go. Every page came out white as snow with nothing at all being printed. Again, I took it all apart, reread the instructions, watched a few videos on replacing the cartridge, tried again. Still no go. Another disappointment. And this time I felt the edge of bad humour. My mind was starting to close up, feel oppressed by others and by the world in general.

A bit later, Banté came over, took the cartridge out and, in his own words, gave it a few thumps and put it back in place. Lo and behold, it worked perfectly. Of course, I was impressed and amused and grateful, but alongside these happy responses, my incipient bad humour gave a painful kick within. Why couldn't it have worked for me?

I decided to go to my room to explore this more deeply. Rationally, it was just silliness—the mind building a mountain out of a molehill. And yet there was not quite a mountain, but certainly more than a molehill of frustration at my failure to connect up a gas cylinder and change a toner cartridge. But what was more distressing was the admission of being so emotionally impacted by such trivial matters. What was the point of decades of Dhamma practice only to be getting distraught over nothing?

This is the dukkha, the suffering of identification. Identifying with self as manager, the one who is supposed to sort out problems. Identification with self as meditator, who should by now have developed outstanding equanimity. Not to speak of self as meditation teacher, who should know the Dhamma upside down and be able to instantly see through this latest delusion.

As always, mindfulness allowed the storm to blow itself out. Looking back now, I sense the truth of Pema Chödrön's advice to see these times—when our buttons are pressed and we feel like a two-year-old again—as rocket fuel for enlightenment. Emotional storms have so much energy that negative thoughts and feelings we normally suppress come skyrocketing into consciousness. In the light of awareness, their pain becomes so acute that our system is forced to learn a new way of coping with the dukkha. This new coping mechanism, learned from within, from moment-to-moment aware-

ness, opens up new pathways for energy flow in the body and new doorways in the mind. We discover new thoughts and perspectives which are gentler, kinder, more patient and forgiving.

In my own example, a new doorway opened because of feeling so acutely the pain of identification—how it traps the mind in a prison of delusion. The pain of this prison sharpened when the storyline of "me who should be better at everything" had fallen away, and I could more clearly feel the emotional patterns underlying the thoughts.

Practising mindfulness internally, I could feel how eagerly the body and mind pounced on a pleasant feeling, sending tentacles of energy around it to clutch and hold as mine, while a bright light switched on in my head, which I perceived as me—confident, on top of things, in control. A whirlpool of energy arose around my chest and head to sustain this delight. The feeling of confidence was gorgeous, but watching it, the external perspective showed up the craziness and pain underneath. Seeing this, I desperately wanted to escape the prison of identification.

The external perspective let me recognise the crazy whirlpool of energy and the bright light as what the Buddha terms upādāna, usually translated as grasping or clinging. It's also sometimes referred to as selfing. What is happening is that unskilful desire, taṇhā, has driven us to create a new identity so as to fulfil this desire.

The better we get to know this experience of selfing, the more we are persuaded of the Buddhist teaching on anattā, not-self. Knowing from our direct experience that a "me" has suddenly arisen makes it hard to take "me" too seriously. We start to see how various "me's" arise and fade depending on external stimuli. When things go well, a happy, pleased, self-confident me emerges. But that fades quickly when things go wrong, and the deflated, miserable me takes its place instead.

Back to my own example of watching the fallout from my emotional storm. Internally, I was experiencing the selfing process, which was generating a confident, delighted sense of me—one who could fix all the printers and gas cylinders in the world. However, the external perspective knew this as delusion. Undermined by that recognition, the confident self suddenly collapsed into a timid, scared, stiff entity which felt it had no right to exist. A moment later, the confident self reappeared, wildly insisting it was totally in control of the situation.

This yo-yo between elated confidence and abject fear continued for some time. Both identities felt excruciatingly painful and vulnerable. There was a strong desire to abandon the meditation, but I persisted, allowing my emotional roller coaster to take its course, trusting that a lesson would eventually be learned.

In vipassana, we cannot interfere. We cannot tell ourselves to stop being deluded. We have to bear patiently with our greeds, hatreds, and delusions—trust them to burn out in the light of awareness, teach us the Dhamma as we suffer their flames.

And sure enough, the energy of the roller coaster gradually diminished. As it did, my attention extended gingerly beyond the whirlpool of elated and fearful energies in my chest and head, to sense my arms, legs, my body sitting. I couldn't really feel these in any detail. I only knew them as faint suggestions. They seemed like strangers from another world—alien, scary. Luckily, curiosity was stronger than fear, and each outbreath let awareness rest more attentively in the seemingly alien body.

At last, some feelings rippled through. They were unpleasant and carried the message that the heady whirlpool of confidence was not me, not mine. The emotionally energetic, deluded part of myself felt this as a threat. But some wisdom emerged from the depths to welcome the unpleasantness. Here was something I would not want to cling to—therefore very welcome. Letting attention rest on the unpleasantness became a non-interfering way of containing and restraining the deluded self. Gradually, the energetic, bright-light me felt glad of being contained and limited, embodied rather than a totally deluded mental entity.

It became like looking in a mirror. Perhaps we've all had similar experiences where we sense ourselves as both watching and being watched. Sometimes I was the watcher, the observer, the disembodied entity that hovers near my head—this was the external mindful perspective. Sometimes I was the mirror image—this was the internal mindfulness perspective, bringing the embodied experience of me, the experience of sitting and breathing and knowing that I was being watched.

The desire to know who I really am has always been very strong for me. And the part of me that was observing felt this now as an almost overwhelming attraction towards the mirror image. I wanted to grasp hold of the image, devour it even. But whenever I gave in to that desire, it was as if I'd gobbled up my own reflection. All that was left were little shivers of fear and grief as I realised how I destroyed what I desired. I had to suffer the fear and grief, wait patiently till peace prevailed, before I could again glimpse the mirror image.

I became grateful for any unpleasant sensations in the mirror image. These acted like repulsive forces, countering the attempt to grasp and own the image. They carried the message: this isn't who you really are. That understanding also helped me not to grasp and thereby destroy the image of me that I desired so deeply. I became grateful for the fact that the body can repel the mind as well as attract it.

By this stage, I'd forgotten altogether about my sense of having let myself down. It just wasn't an issue. And I was very glad I'd persisted with the meditation, hadn't given up at the height of the emotional storm. The great gift of sitting with the misery was that the message—this is not who you really are—became for the first time totally welcome. As the meditation went on, the message brought joy, relief, gratitude. I understood it as necessary to counter the strong desire to identify with my body and mind, the only reflection I can find for whatever it is I sense myself to be.

In subsequent meditations and in daily life, I was better able to recognise all mes as temporary and conditional. I could smile at them, appreciate them, but not be surprised when they dissolved. This is such a gift. The deluded me expects too much of me, expects me always to be on top of everything. Being able to see myself as limited brings forth compassion, as well as appreciation for whatever efforts I make to follow the path and fulfil my various roles. And if I'm getting a bit heated in conversation, clinging to my opinion, then I can focus on some unpleasant sensation

and welcome them as messengers, reminding me that this strongly opinionated one is not my true self either. Again, this brings a smile and allows me to be more flexible, ready to change my mind and see the other's point of view.

I hope this illustration of working with the dukkha of identification encourages you to explore the teaching around anattā, not-self, and perhaps also see how those external and internal mindfulness perspectives can help with this challenging teaching.

In this way, may we all see through our identification as daughter, manager, cook, or whatever roles we inhabit. May we see these as temporary, conditional, never designed to be satisfactory. As the Buddha said, whatever is inconstant, conditioned, unsatisfactory, is not worthy of being thought of as me.

We sell ourselves short by investing in these limited identities. Our continued practice leads us to a truth, a resting place beyond all such limitations.

May we all experience the peace and bliss of Nibbāna.

CHAPTER 233

Right Livelihood as Right Lifestyle

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

> *In this Dharma talk celebrating the November full moon, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines sammā ājīva (right livelihood) as one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path. He begins by outlining the Buddha's traditional warnings about five types of businesses to avoid: weapons, trading in people, meat, intoxicants, and poison, while acknowledging the complexities of applying these ancient guidelines in modern contexts.*
>
> *Drawing from the Upadasutta and the Buddha's teaching to Ānanda that good spiritual friendship constitutes the whole of the spiritual life, Bhante extends the concept of right livelihood to encompass our entire lifestyle. He suggests viewing all our activities—work, leisure, relationships—through the lens of how they support or hinder our spiritual development. Using personal examples, he illustrates how Dharma practice naturally causes us to seek balance in our lives and how our interests may evolve as we center our lives around spiritual practice.*
>
> *This practical approach encourages practitioners to examine whether their complete lifestyle—not just their job—aligns with and supports their spiritual path, creating coherence between all aspects of life and Dharma practice.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

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

We're celebrating the full moon of November, which is ahead of us, I think. It's the middle of next week, but it's convenient for us to come together on a Sunday. So the topic for this month was livelihood, right livelihood.

I'll just go through the usual warnings that the Buddha gives. The first is that we shouldn't engage in five types of business. They're pretty straightforward, actually. The business of weapons, selling them, making them, and so forth. Of course, it does question the role of the soldier. Remember in the Buddha's time, it was really about conquest. The kings were trying to expand their kingdoms at the expense of tribal democracies. And the Buddha was definitely for the democracies, I think. He didn't like the way the kings were warring, often against each other. These days, of course, there's a call for defence. So it's a slightly different era. Maybe we can't make these rules absolute

because it depends upon your take upon violence and all that, and as to whether there is such a thing as a justifiable armed intervention. But that's for somebody to write a book on.

Then he says nobody should be involved in the business of people. So, of course, that's prostitution and modern day slavery is absolutely awful. Indentured workers, workers that have fallen into debt and are working for a pittance. We know that goes on anyway.

Then there's the whole business of meat. Now, monks are not supposed to eat any meat if they've seen, heard, or suspected the animal has actually been killed for them specifically. I've always thought the Buddha was a crypto-vegan, but being a practical person, it wasn't as though he was going to make this hard and fast rule, which of course the Jains did. You can't enter a Jain temple if you're wearing, say, a leather belt or leather shoes. They just won't let you in. They're absolutely severe. But the Buddha never really did that, especially for lay people. They would always remember rules of training. It was never thou shalt. I undertake the rule of training not to kill, and so forth.

Then there's the business of intoxicants. The West has this very refined, intoxicating industry of wine and beer. I don't think there's another culture that has quite the range of tastes. So it's a bit difficult for us to keep that one. But these days, more and more, you see these non-alcoholic things. I often wonder how a person feels who's taken this very seriously, working, shall we say, in Tesco's or a supermarket which sells alcohol. I think you have to be careful that you don't take on other people's responsibilities.

And then there's the business of poison. Well, we all know about Putin and his clever use of sarin to get rid of enemies. But it was quite widespread, of course, in Renaissance Italy. The Borgias were especially good at it. And at the time, it said, nobody ever believed that popes, cardinals or royalty died natural deaths. It was that prevalent.

So those are your five businesses that people shouldn't be engaged in. There is actually something for the monastics too. It says that they shouldn't procure their requisites, whatever they need, through flattery, hinting, bribery, coercion or hypocrisy. So there's a whole load of mistakes that even in the monastic life you can make. So that just gives us just a grounding, really, of how the Buddha makes these limitations.

But there's another particular discourse, the Upadasutta, it's the discourse on the Holy Life. And Ānanda, who's a very endearing character, said to the Buddha that he would be his personal attendant, and he did so for the last twenty years of his life, so long as he heard everything the Buddha said, and if he wasn't there to hear it, the

Buddha had to relate what he had said. And of course, Ānanda then became this enormous audio memory. It's difficult for us to grasp that these days, because we've become so visual, and we've sold our memory to microchips. But he had seemingly this phenomenal memory, and that's where the discourses come from, the Pali discourses.

And he had the habit of thinking that he really had understood something. So there's a lovely moment where he says to the Buddha, I think I've really got this dependent origination business. And the Buddha says, oh, no, Ānanda. *Paṭiccasamutpāda* is deep, profound, and so forth. And he does the same with good companionship. So he says he thinks that good companionship is half of the holy life. Having admirable good people as friends, companions and colleagues. And the Buddha says, oh, don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Having good admirable people as friends, companions and colleagues is actually the whole of the spiritual life. And when a monk or a monastic has admirable people as friends, companions and colleagues, they can be expected to develop and pursue the noble eightfold path.

So this definition of right livelihood as the spiritual life, our spiritual lives within the life of our ordinary lives, at work and so forth, seems to me then to give us a little bit of latitude as to this right livelihood. I'm tending to think of it more as right lifestyle.

For instance, I Googled what were the important qualities of a police officer. And it's got physical fitness, critical thinking, problem solving skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, strong moral character, devotion to the community. And then I looked up what was a successful nurse practitioner. So empathy comes at the top there, enthusiasm, an intense and eager enjoyment accompanied by a big grin and a list of questions. Tenacity, creativity, integrity.

And when I looked up, I put in common traits of a good employee, fifty-four million responses came. And there's a whole list: dedication, confidence, reliability, teamwork, independence. That's interesting. Teamwork and independence, leadership, interpersonal communication skills and self-awareness.

Now, whatever job you're doing, and of course, if you're retired, you'll be doing something with your life, all these activities reinforce certain parts of our characters and personalities. And it might be worth just thinking about what you're doing and how it's affecting you personally, your characters, personalities, and then doing something which does the opposite so that you get a balance.

I remember at work, I was teaching. I really got fed up with all the head stuff. It's always head stuff, always talking about stuff. And I got to a point where, this is when I was practising, that I really felt I needed, if I was going to progress, I really needed to do

something physical. So I got the idea in my head that I'd be a great cook. So I went for a week's introduction to vegetarian cooking. By the end of the week, by the way, I knew I didn't want to be a cook, but it did give me — there's too much vegetable shopping. But it did give me a physical base because I haven't been brought up to take care of gardens or anything like that. And so I just found ways of bringing into my life something that was physical. And so I started doing things like Tai Chi and stuff.

So you can imagine that if somebody, say, runs a business, so their mind is always really caught up in running costs and profit — I mean, I know that, just running this little centre, you're always worried about running costs. And it'd just be nice to balance that with doing some charitable work where those sorts of thoughts just don't come in. So it's a case of, I think, perhaps translating that right livelihood in a wider sense and just looking at our lives, trying to get that balance.

And that would include, of course, our leisure pursuits, the films, the reading, walking, looking after the body, flying drones, things like that. So anything that we do, which is our pastime, and just to get a global view of our lives. And I think that, and then to make it sense to the centre.

I don't know whether they have them anymore, but in the old fairs, I'm sure they do really, they used to have these roundabouts with different animals. You could ride a horse or a bear or a pig and they'd go round and round with this silly music, as a kid. And if our lives are unconnected, we tend to go from one thing to another, really just to keep busy, keep occupied and so on and so forth. But there's no connection.

But if you were centred on the Dharma, on what you understand to be your personal spiritual path, then everything you do has to make sense to that particular position.

One thing that happens to a lot of people when they start practising, definitely happened to me, is that you find interests that you had begin to disappear. So I remember once listening to jazz. I used to go to jazz in pubs. And I remember this was a special night. They had this American trumpeter. I can't remember the name, but he was phenomenal. And the backing group were finding it really difficult to keep up with him. You could see them sweating, trying to keep up with the speed of his playing. And just somehow, halfway through the performance, I just got this feeling that I was wasting time. It just didn't make any sense to me anymore. And just after that particular performance, I made my excuses and left.

So you find that your life begins to collect around those things that make sense to the heart of your dharma. And if you don't — I mean, a lot of people, for instance, don't know where they're going. So I like to quote Lewis Carroll: if you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there. But the thing is, some wit also said, how do you know when you've arrived?

So at least the Buddhist path is fairly clear for us, gives us parameters and allows us to be very creative within that too.

Often when people think of the monastic life, they think it's one type of livelihood. Maybe they know the forest tradition and all you do is meditate all the time. But there's quite a variety of things that you can do and become involved in as a monastic. I'm thinking things like the study part, many become, many take degrees and stuff like that. Other people involved in the community. I know in Colombo, for instance, there was a monk who was a constant visitor to the hospital, things like that. So there's a whole load of variety in life, but we have to think of it in terms of where I'm standing in the Dharma and how it makes sense to it.

You might find, again, as I did, that certain friends drop away. It's not as though you end up telling them to go away. You just stop seeing them. It's just that a different social scene begins to appear.

There we have it. I think we are closer to the idea of the spiritual life if we just extend that word, right livelihood, which is the direct translation, *sammā ājīva*, right livelihood, and just see it more rightly. The work we have, if we just extend that to include everything we do so it becomes like a right lifestyle, I think that would be a much more profitable way of looking at it.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion and that by your devotion to right lifestyle, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 234

Right Livelihood

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this talk on sammā ājīva (Right Livelihood), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's traditional warnings about five types of harmful businesses while exploring a broader understanding of right livelihood as 'right lifestyle.' Drawing from the Upasakāsutta and teachings on spiritual friendship, he discusses how the Buddha advised against dealing in weapons, human trafficking, meat, intoxicants, and poisons, while acknowledging the complexities these guidelines present in modern contexts.

The talk expands beyond mere occupation to encompass how all our activities—work, leisure, relationships—can either support or hinder spiritual development. Bhante emphasizes the importance of centering our lives around the Dharma, creating balance in our activities, and cultivating the wholesome qualities that naturally emerge in ethical professions. He shares personal reflections on how meditation practice naturally transforms our interests and social connections, leading to a more integrated spiritual life.

This teaching offers practical guidance for practitioners seeking to align their daily activities with the Noble Eightfold Path, showing how right livelihood becomes a comprehensive approach to living that supports awakening in all aspects of life.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

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So it's a slightly different era. Maybe we can't make these rules absolute, because it depends upon your take upon violence and whether there is such a thing as a justifiable armed intervention. But that's for somebody to write a book on.

Then he says nobody should be involved in the business of people. So, of course, that's prostitution and modern-day slavery, which is absolutely awful. Indentured workers, workers that have fallen into debt and are working for a pittance. We know that goes on anyway.

Then there's the whole business of meat. Now, monks are not supposed to eat any meat if they've seen, heard or suspected the animal has actually been killed for them specifically. So I've always thought the Buddha was a crypto vegan. But being a practical person, it wasn't as though he was going to make this hard and fast rule, which, of course, the Jains did. You can't enter a Jain temple if you're wearing, say, a leather belt or leather shoes. They just won't let you in. They're absolutely severe. But the Buddha never really did that, especially for lay people. They would always remember rules of training. It was never "thou shalt." "I undertake the rule of training not to kill," et cetera.

Then there's the business of intoxicants. So the West has this very refined intoxicating industry of wine and beer. I don't think there's another culture that has quite the range of tastes. So it's a bit difficult for us to keep that one. But these days, more and more, you see these non-alcoholic things. I often wonder how a person feels who's taken this very seriously, working, shall we say, in Tesco's or a supermarket which sells alcohol. I think you have to be careful that you don't take on other people's responsibilities.

And then there's the business of poison. Well, we all know about Putin and his clever use of sarin to get rid of enemies. But it was quite widespread, of course, in Renaissance Italy. The Borgias were especially good at it. At the time, it said, nobody ever believed that popes, cardinals or royalty died natural deaths. It was that prevalent.

So those are your five businesses that people shouldn't be engaged in. There is actually something for the monastics, too. It says that they shouldn't procure their requisites, whatever they need, through flattery, hinting, bribery, coercion or hypocrisy. So there's a whole load of mistakes that even in the monastic life you can make.

That just gives us a grounding, really, of how the Buddha makes these limitations. But there's another particular discourse, the Upaddha Sutta – it's the discourse on the Holy Life. And Ānanda, who's a very endearing character, said to the Buddha that he would be his personal attendant. And he did so for the last 20 years of his life, so long as

he heard everything the Buddha said. And if he wasn't there to hear it, the Buddha had to relate what he had said. And of course, Ānanda then became this enormous audio memory. It's difficult for us to grasp that these days because we've become so visual and we've sold our memory to microchips. But he had this seemingly phenomenal memory. And that's where the discourses come from, the Pali discourses.

He had the habit of thinking that he really had understood something. So there's a lovely moment where he says to the Buddha, "I think I've really got this *paṭiccasamuppāda* business." And the Buddha says, "Oh, no, *paṭiccasamuppāda* is deep, profound." And he does the same with good companionship. So he says he thinks that good companionship is half of the holy life – having admirable good people as friends, companions and colleagues. And the Buddha says, "Oh, don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Having good admirable people as friends, companions and colleagues is actually the whole of the spiritual life. And when a monk or a monastic has admirable people as friends, companions and colleagues, they can be expected to develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path."

So this definition of right livelihood as the spiritual life, our spiritual lives within the life of our ordinary lives at work, seems to me then to give us a little bit of latitude as to this right livelihood. I'm tending to think of it more as right lifestyle.

For instance, I Googled what were the important qualities of a police officer. And it's got physical fitness, critical thinking, problem solving skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, strong moral character, devotion to the community. And then I looked up what was a successful nurse practitioner. So empathy comes at the top there. Enthusiasm, an intense and eager enjoyment accompanied by a big grin and a list of questions. Tenacity, creativity, integrity. And when I looked up "common traits of a good employee," 54 million responses came. And there's a whole list: dedication, confidence, reliability, teamwork, independence – that's interesting, teamwork and independence – leadership, interpersonal communication skills and self-awareness.

Now, whatever job you're doing, and of course, if you're retired, you'll be doing something with your life, all these activities reinforce certain parts of our characters and personalities. And it might be worth just thinking about what you're doing and how it's affecting you personally, your characters, personalities, and then doing something which does the opposite, so that you get a balance.

So I remember at work, I was teaching. I really got fed up with all the head stuff. It's always head stuff. You're always talking about stuff. And I got to a point where I really felt I needed – if I was going to progress – I really needed to do something physical. So I got the idea in my head that I'd be a great cook. So I went for a week's introduction to

vegetarian cooking. By the end of the week, by the way, I knew I didn't want to be a cook, but it did give me confidence. There's too much vegetable shopping. But it did give me a physical base because I'm not – I haven't been brought up to take care of gardens or anything like that. And so I just found ways of bringing into my life something that was physical. And so I started doing things like Tai Chi and stuff.

You can imagine that if somebody runs a business, so their mind is always really caught up in running costs and profit – I mean, I know that just running this little centre, you're always worried about running costs – and it'd just be nice to balance that with doing some charitable work where those sorts of thoughts just don't come in. So it's a case of, I think, perhaps translating that right livelihood in a wider sense and just looking at our lives, trying to get that balance right.

And that would include, of course, our leisure pursuits – the films, the reading, walking, looking after the body, flying drones, things like that. So anything that we do, which is our pastime, and to get a global view of our lives.

I don't know whether they have them anymore, but in the old fairs – I'm sure they do, really – they used to have these roundabouts with different animals. You could ride a horse or a bear or a pig. And you go round and round with this silly music as a kid. And if our lives are unconnected, we tend to go from one thing to another, really just to keep busy, keep occupied and so on and so forth. But there's no connection. But if you were centred on the Dharma, on what you understand to be your personal spiritual path, then everything you do has to make sense to that particular position.

One thing that happens to a lot of people when they start practicing – definitely happened to me – is that you find interests that you had begin to disappear. So I remember once listening to jazz. I used to go to jazz in pubs. And I remember this was a special night. They had this American trumpeter. I can't remember the name, but he was phenomenal. And the backing group were finding it really difficult to keep up with him. You could see them sweating, trying to keep up with the speed of his playing. And just somehow, halfway through the performance, I just got this feeling that I was wasting time. It just didn't make any sense to me anymore. And just after that particular performance, I made my excuses and left.

So you find that your life begins to collect around those things that make sense to the heart of your dharma. I like to quote Lewis Carroll: if you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there. But the thing is, some wit also said, how do you know when you've arrived? So at least the Buddhist path is fairly clear for us, gives us parameters and allows us to be very creative within that too.

Often when people think of the monastic life, they think it's just one type of livelihood. Maybe they know the forest tradition and all you do is meditate all the time. But there's quite a variety of things that you can do and become involved in as a monastic. I'm thinking things like the study part – many take degrees and stuff like that. Other people involved in the community. I know in Colombo, for instance, there was a monk who was a constant visitor to the hospital, things like that. So there's a whole load of variety in life, but we have to think of it in terms of where I'm standing in the Dharma and how it makes sense to it.

You might find, again, as I did, that certain friends drop away. It's not as though you end up telling them to go away. You just stop seeing them. It's just that a different social scene begins to appear.

There we have it. I think we are closer to the idea of the spiritual life if we just extend that word, right livelihood, which is the direct translation, *sammā ājīva*, right livelihood, and just see it more as right lifestyle. Right work, the work we have – if we just extend that to include everything we do, so it becomes like a right lifestyle. I think that would be a much more profitable way of looking at it.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion and that by your devotion to right lifestyle, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 235

Rest for Autumn

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

> *As September marks new beginnings with schools returning and people planning their autumn activities, Bhante Bodhidhamma provides gentle, practical guidance for establishing a sustainable daily practice. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's foundational instructions to "put aside" worldly concerns, he emphasizes the importance of quality over quantity in meditation—better ten minutes with good intention than an hour of distracted sitting.*
>
> *The talk covers essential elements of daily practice: proper preparation for sleep through calming activities, establishing a mindful morning routine, and working skillfully with difficult emotions that arise during meditation. Bhante explains the vipassanā process of recognizing aversion to unpleasant experiences, waiting for reactions to pass, and investigating phenomena with the perspective of anattā (not-self). He introduces the concept of "affectionate awareness"—combining bright mindfulness with kindliness of heart, encouraging practitioners to look at each other "with kindly eyes" as the Buddha taught.*
>
> *Practical advice includes using the five touch points technique for settling a busy mind, taking time for daily reflection to recognize skillful and unskillful habits, and maintaining mettā practice after vipassanā sitting to cultivate the equanimity needed for clear investigation. This accessible talk offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners a refreshing reminder of how to approach practice with gentleness and sustained commitment.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I just thought that September's a sort of beginning for people. Academia wakes up, schools go back, the summer holidays are over, and usually people about this time think about what they're going to do during the autumn and winter. So start joining courses and hopefully going to meditation groups.

I just thought to go over some general instructions which we all know, but it's sometimes important to have them reminded to us. And as I'm speaking to you, I'm actually reminding myself of the importance of what I'm saying.

The first thing, of course, is good sleep. You really have to wind down at the end of the day. You've got to give yourself half an hour. It's no good coming off a Netflix horror film and throwing yourself into bed, or coming off social media and then expecting

yourself to have a deep sleep. Really, if you can just find that half hour before you intend to sleep, you can do anything. You can do *metta* practice, meditation, read something which is calming, something which is inspiring, listen to music — not heavy rock, more like some spiritual music, something that's calming.

What that does is create this strata underneath the sleep, a sort of calmness underneath the sleep. And then when you're in bed, continue that to find some sort of practice — either relaxing on the breath, not to awaken the inquiry, just to feel the loveliness of it, the body breathing, or *metta*. There are all these little practices, and of course it just helps us to have a deeper sleep.

Then in the morning, that morning sitting. It doesn't matter how long you do it; it's the quality of it. Often when we've been practicing for so long, we just get very lazy, just sit there for an hour with the head going all over the place and we can tick a box. There's not much point in it, rather than sitting ten minutes with good intention.

So I always think it's good practice, when you finally decide to sit, just to stay there for a minute and just think about the worries, concerns, the planning, the excitements that you expect during the day. Because the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse actually begins by putting aside those things. So it's recognizing what's there at the back of the mind and just putting them to the side. It's not as though you're going to forget them.

And then, of course, you have to make this clear determination that you are going to put effort into the practice. It's good to start with just a little bit of calming meditation — place the attention on the breath. The mind is very busy. Don't forget there are these five touch points: you feel your knee and you feel the other knee, feel your hand, feel the other hand, and then come back to the breath. As you feel yourself settling, at one point when you get back to the breath you could probably stay there.

When you feel that settlement, just begin by recognizing the beginning and end of the breath, and of course be open to whatever draws your attention. Now during that sit, something might come up which is pretty obvious which keeps your attention — some difficult emotion, some pain, some discomfort.

So we can remind ourselves of the process of *vipassanā*. When something unpleasant comes up, that's the easiest really — one immediately recognizes your relationship, the aversion, not wanting that at all. Remember, this is the direct psychological cause for our suffering, and it's a case of staying with that and hanging on in there until it completely passes. Then you find this equanimity with whatever's being presented. Of course, you're actually growing in patience too, being able to bear what is unpleasant.

And then you distance it. So there you've got this *anattā*. Whatever you're looking at is not me, not mine. You can use a little word like "there." So there's a discomfort. There's some emotional turbulence. And you create that distinction between whatever is feeling it and what is being felt.

Although in the literature you always get this word "observing," the accent should be on feeling, actually directly experiencing what's happening. Once that's established, it's as though you can go into it and deconstruct it, find out what it's made of. So a pain might end up just being tightness or fiery feelings. An emotion could just be wobbliness or a feeling of sickness or something. But as you go in there at that level, the quality of impermanence is a bit more obvious to you.

So just in that movement — recognizing the reaction, waiting for it to pass, distancing what it is you're looking at, and then investigating more closely — you're actually exercising this curiosity around the three characteristics of existence, and that's what's going to liberate us. The fact that emotional turbulences are actually dying away, they're blowing out, you might say, they're being transformed into their opposite just by allowing that energy to arise and express itself. That's by the by. So you have to be careful you don't slip into psychotherapy because it's happening quite naturally. You don't have to work at it.

As you progress in the sitting and your mind's wandering and all that, don't keep forcing yourself back. Just stop for a minute and ask yourself, what is it that's making the mind wander? Come back in the body. It could be that you're also coming through a time when you're feeling a bit dozy, a bit tired. So then make that your observation, so that you're awakening this understanding of actually feeling things and allowing this intuitive awareness to make its own understandings.

When you come to the end — this is what I try and get people to do — reflect upon the hour. Don't forget, if you've really made the effort, it doesn't matter whether the mind's been wandering all over the place. It's the effort to come back and restart, restart. We ought to congratulate ourselves. An extra biscuit. And if you thought, well, you could have done better, well, you have to encourage yourself. It's no good punching yourself on the nose. What's the point of that?

And then after that, make some resolution. So it could be, if you didn't feel you were so committed to being in the present, just make that resolution: "Next time I'll really make that commitment." And if there was a part that you felt you really were highly investigative and the mind was breaking, encourage yourself: "I've got to get there next time."

And then, of course, after that, there's *metta*. So this *metta* is really helping that equanimity that you need for the *vipassanā*, so that you're not coming from an "I know" place or any sense of preference or anything like that. It's undermining the possibility of its corruption into what we call the subtle enemy, which is indifference, aloofness. It stops you engaging, so it's really important that the *metta* is practiced after any *vipassanā* sitting.

That's the time you can bring to mind people you're going to meet during the day, and in so doing you're preparing yourself for that meeting, especially people whom you might be having some difficulties with. Those two things are important.

And then make that decision to try and feel at ease during the day. Keep coming back to just relaxing into the present moment. What helps that is to keep stopping. You'll see writers use the word "pausing." I prefer the word just "stop." Just stop and just catch what it is that you're developing sometimes unknowingly, like a little irritation, a little anxiety, whatever's there, a little excitement, and just allow it to drop. Keep coming back to that level of contentment because that's where we'll find that ease with living.

You're always ahead of yourself, either because you're anxious about something or because you want to do something, and it's just a waste of energy really. If we make that effort just to stop and just come back to a place of ease, you'll see that it tends to support mindfulness, but it also saves so much energy because emotions and such really draw upon our energy.

And then to develop this affectionate awareness — that's why we go through the discourse on loving kindness at the end of this session — because what the Buddha's inviting us to do, encouraging us to do, is to develop an affectionate awareness.

The awareness is, of course, being bright, being awake to what's actually happening. And the affectionate is referring to a general attitude in the heart of kindliness. So even now, as you're listening to me and as you're seeing me, you can actually develop a nice attitude of kindliness towards me. It would make me feel so much better to know that so many people are beaming this lovely kindness towards me.

If you have that as a general attitude, which you've developed as a general attitude, you can see it calms situations. It just undermines anybody who might be a little miffed with you or something like that. But it's also good for us. It creates this lovely feeling of an inner gentle happiness.

So put those two words together. It's not just mindfulness; it's affectionate mindfulness — mindfulness with kindliness. That's one of the things the Buddha says that we should do. We should look at each other with kindly eyes.

And then see if you can find some time in the day to spend just five minutes, ten minutes, just being with yourself.

Finally, when you get to the evening, coming back from work or a day out or whatever, just sit down somewhere and recollect the day. If you find the mind wanders a lot when you're doing that, you can always write it on a bit of paper. As you go through the day, you can see where you've been skillful, where you could have been more skillful.

That sort of reflection is very helpful because it slowly wakens us up to certain habits that we'd like to be rid of and certain habits that we'd like to develop. Having been brought up Catholic, we were always told in the evening to have an examination of conscience. That's how they put it. So we always thought, "Oh my, I better get to confession pretty quick." But it's a good thing — you just go through the day recollecting what's happened, and it just makes you more aware of yourself.

And then of course, try and do some sitting — it doesn't matter how long, five minutes, ten minutes — before you eat. Doing it after you eat is miserable. You just fall asleep. And then you've got the evening with more energy.

These are just basic reminders on how to sort of go through the day gently, at ease. That's what we do on the *metta*, when we do the *metta* practice, to live more contented, be more contented with what we have, and in harmony — that harmony with the world, whatever's happening around us. These are just little pointers to remind ourselves.

On top of that, it's always good to have a little bit of feed intellectually — just an occasional read from a book, a spiritual book, a Buddhist book or something, or listen to a talk. It's just that little bit of encouraging ourselves to just keep the practice turning over.

So I hope this little talk has been of some use, that you're all eager now to sit in meditation and that I've not actually undermined your hopes to do so. Thank you very much, and that you will be liberated by your practice sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 236

Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines one of Buddhism's most direct teachings on liberation through the story of Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth from the Udāna Sutta. He contextualizes this encounter by exploring the historical background of bark cloth-wearing ascetics who followed Upanishadic teachings, particularly the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad's concept of the "unseen seer."

The Buddha's revolutionary instruction to Bāhiya—"In the seen, there is merely the seen; in the heard, there is merely what is heard"—represents a radical departure from Brahmanical ideas of an eternal self. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how this teaching points to the dissolution of the subject-object relationship through the six sense doors, leading to the cessation of consciousness and the end of dukkha.

Using Buddhist psychology's framework of sense base, sense object, and consciousness, he demonstrates how liberation occurs when we neither identify "with that" (the object) nor remain "in that" (the sense base), transcending the psycho-physical organism entirely. This discourse offers profound insight into the direct path of Awakening through understanding the nature of sensory experience and the construction of selfhood.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-awakened one.

So I thought today we'd tackle a slightly more, for want of a better word, mystical discourse. It's called, or it's called after, somebody called Bahiya of the Bark Cloth.

Now, whenever you get people writing about saints and holy people, hagiography, they always pump it up to make sure that either the person is amazing or the teacher is. It's not that the Buddha wasn't an amazing teacher, but in order to make him more amazing, we got this story about Bahiya.

So he was a merchant and he used to ply up and down the Indian coast. One day he was shipwrecked and on a raft he made land. Suddenly he starts wearing a bark cloth. Now, for those of you who want to know what a bark cloth is, you have to peel the inner bark off trees and beat it until it's soft. Then it can be used as a loincloth, skirt,

draperies and wall hangings and in thick layers make an excellent bed. So that's what you can do tomorrow. But it also says it's an ancient art which is deeply involved in religious and ceremonial life. So remember that bit.

Anyway, he starts wearing this bark cloth and he becomes a mendicant. Of course, people feed him. After a while, he got the impression that, in fact, he was fully liberated. Well, as these stories go, a god appeared to him, an old relation, and said to him, "No, you're not liberated. You're not enlightened. In fact, spiritually speaking, you're as thick as a plank. The person you want to go and meet is the Buddha." So, of course, off he goes to meet the Buddha. He must have been a bit disappointed at that revelation.

Now, I think a better story, which seems more true, is that the Brahmins were developing their own scriptures, which were called the *Upanishads*, translates as connection. They're also known as the *Vedanta*, the end of the Vedas. They were specifically interested in who we were, what was the ground of our being – ontology.

This is a passage from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*: "That imperishable is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the un-understood understander. Other than it there is naught that sees, other than it there is naught that hears, other than it there is naught that thinks, and other than it there is naught that understands." In other words, it's pointing to this self, which is transcendent of everything. But it's interesting to see how it is expressed. The imperishable, that which does not change, is the unseen seer. It's very Zen, like the effortless effort, the unseen seer.

Now these people who followed this particular Upanishad used to wear the bark cloth. That was their signature dress, just like the Buddhist monks went around with a bald head. Everybody else had long matted hair, dreadlocks, but the Buddha made us shave our heads. So all these sects had their own little way of manifesting who or what they were following.

So he's obviously heard about the Buddha and he comes to find him and he finds him on alms round. The Buddha says this isn't the time. He says, "Look, I'm a very old man and you're not so young and we could die any moment. So really, please give me the teaching." So the Buddha, out of his compassion, does so.

Now as the story goes, not long after he was fully liberated, he got gored by a cow who was looking after her calf. Again, I think we can take that with a little pinch of salt.

Anyway, this is what the Buddha says to him: "Here, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus. In the seen, there is merely the seen. In the heard, there is merely what is heard. And in the sensed, there is merely what is sensed. In the cognized, there is merely what is cognized. And in this way, you should train yourself, Bahiya." Now, if you're listening to this, you may very well become fully liberated.

Here's the crucial bit: "When Bahiya, for you, in the seen there is merely what is seen, in the heard merely what is heard, in the sensed merely what is sensed, and in the cognized is merely what is cognized, then, Bahiya, you will not be with that. When you are not with that, then you will not be in that. And when you are not in that, then you will neither be here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering."

Anybody awaken? No? Don't worry, it didn't work for me either.

So now what's the Buddha saying here? In Buddhist psychology, we have a sense base. We have something that the sense base is aware of, or senses, rather, senses. And there is the awareness, the consciousness. This consciousness is dependent on the sense base. That's why the Buddha enumerates consciousnesses according to the sense basis. So you have eye consciousness, nose consciousness, ear consciousness, etc.

Here, what the Buddha is saying is that in any given experience, there's an object. It could be a video you're watching. It could be a biscuit you're eating, whatever. That's the object. He's saying when you are not with that – so that's a connection of being with something. When you're not with that, then the sense base, if you're not aware of something through a sense base, then you're not in the sense base. If you're not in the sense base, then consciousness cannot arise. So you're neither there with the object, here with the sense base, and in between with that consciousness, which is a screen upon which these two things arise. When you experience something beyond that, then you've experienced something which is not part of the psycho-physical organism. And just this is the awakening.

Now, the thing is that when Bahiya hears this, he is actually immediately enlightened. The Buddha actually gives him a title. He gave titles to certain disciples who had special gifts. For instance, Sāriputta was called the *Dhammasenapati*, the general of the Dharma, because of his understanding of the Dharma, which was said to be second only to the Buddha. So he called Bahiya "*Pipabina Tichim*," the quickest person to become liberated amongst all those who were quick to become liberated. That's the title he gave him. As I say, later on, he dies from an attack from a cow.

So this is the story of Bahiya of the Bark Cloth. It fits into the *Udāna* Sutta. These are a collection of the inspired verses of the Buddha. Next week, I'll actually read that discourse and the Buddha's own response in verse, which will add to this meaning. That's if I explain it correctly.

So I hope that has been of some use, that it has not confused you, and that by your insight meditation, by seeing this process of how we create the world, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 237

The Bāhiya Sutta: A Teaching on Direct Experience and Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

In this discourse, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines one of the Buddha's most concise yet cryptic teachings from the Bāhiya Sutta in the Udāna collection. The episode explores the story of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, a spiritual seeker who receives the Buddha's revolutionary instruction: "In the seen will be merely what is seen, in the heard will be merely what is heard, in the sensed will be merely what is sensed, in the cognized will be merely what is cognized."

Bhante unpacks how this teaching directly applies to vipassanā meditation practice, explaining the six sense bases and how consciousness arises without the fabrication of an 'I' or self. The discourse reveals how to cut through conceptual elaboration and identification to experience phenomena as they truly are, leading to liberation from the three āsavas (taints): sensual craving, craving for existence, and ignorance.

The episode concludes with the Buddha's inspired utterance describing nibbāna as a transcendent state beyond the four great elements and conventional experience, yet not mere annihilation. This teaching offers profound insights into the nature of awakening and the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa
Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Very good. So last week we tackled this very cryptic teaching from the Buddha. He couldn't have reduced his teaching any further, I don't think. It was about Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth. I said that this week we would actually read the discourse and revise what we said, because it's quite difficult.

The collection that this belongs to is called the *Udāna*, U-D-A-N-A. I'll try to remember to put it in the chat box for you. You can buy it as a little booklet translated by John Ireland. That's where this translation comes from.

The Bāhiya Sutta

This is about Bāhiya. Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying near Sāvatthī in the Jeta Wood at Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. At that time Bāhiya the Bark-cloth was living by the seashore at Suppāraka. He was respected, revered, honoured, venerated and given homage, and was one who obtained the requisites of robes, alms food, lodging, and medicines.

We said last week that he was probably a follower of a particular Brahmin sect, depending on the Upanishads, and that their signature was wearing bark cloth. But here, it's talking about the myth that arose from him, whereby he gets shipwrecked and he must have had a Damascene moment out at sea. When he lands, he doesn't want to be a merchant anymore. He wants to be a *samaṇa*, an ascetic, and he gains the respect of everybody. These four requisites - robes, alms food, lodging and medicines - are the requisites of the Buddhist order. It's really basic. That's all you need to live: something to wear, something to eat, a roof over your head, and medicine when you're sick.

Now, while he was in seclusion, this reflection arose in the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth: "Am I one of those in the world who are *arahats* and who have entered the path of *arahatship*?" The word *arahat* is an honorific. It's the blessed one or the holy one, but of course, it's given to somebody who's completed the path.

Then a *devatā*, who was a former blood relation of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, understood this reflection in his mind. Being compassionate and wishing to benefit him, she approached Bāhiya and said, "You, Bāhiya, are neither an *arahat*, nor have you entered the path to *arahatship*. You do not follow that practice whereby you could be an *arahat* or enter the path of *arahatship*."

That's a bit crushing. I mean, a poor man's living, doing the best he can, and this *devatā* has told him he's wasting his time.

Then he asks, "In the world, including the *devas*, all the gods, who are the *arahats*, and who have entered the path of *arahatship*?"

"There is, Bāhiya, in a far country, a town called Sāvatthī. There the Lord now lives, who is an *arahat* and fully enlightened one. That Lord, Bāhiya, is indeed an *arahat*, and he teaches the *Dhamma* for the realization of *arahatship*."

Then Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, profoundly stirred by the words of that *devatā*, then and there departed from Suppāraka, stopping only one night everywhere along the way. He went to Sāvatthī, where the Lord was staying at the Jeta Wood at Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

At that time, a number of *bhikkhus* were walking up and down, doing walking meditation in the open air. Then Bāhiya the Bark-cloth approached those *bhikkhus* and said, "Where, revered sirs, is the Lord now living, the *arahat*, the fully enlightened one? We wish to see the Lord who is an *arahat*, the fully enlightened one."

"The Lord, Bāhiya, has gone on alms round among the houses."

Then Bāhiya hurriedly left the Jeta Grove, entering Sāvatthī. He saw the Lord walking for alms food in Sāvatthī, pleasing, lovely to see, with calm senses and tranquil mind, attained to perfect poise and calm, controlled, a perfected one, watchful with restrained senses.

That's a classic trope describing the Buddha. On seeing the Lord, he approached, fell down with his head at the Lord's feet and said, "Teach me *Dhamma*, Lord. Teach me *Dhamma*, *Sugata*, so that it will be for my good and happiness for a long time."

Sugata translates literally as "well gone." It obviously means somebody who's transcended, gone to *Nibbāna*.

Upon being spoken to thus, the Lord said to Bāhiya the Bark-cloth, "It is an unsuitable time, Bāhiya. We have entered among the houses for alms food."

A second time, Bāhiya said to the Lord, "It is difficult to know for certain, revered sir, how long the Lord will live and how long I will live. Teach me *Dhamma*, Lord. Teach me *Dhamma*, *Sugata*, so that it will be for my good and happiness for a long time."

A second time the Lord said to Bāhiya, "It is an unsuitable time, Bāhiya. We have entered among the houses for alms food."

But Bāhiya wouldn't give up. A third time Bāhiya said to the Lord, "It is difficult to know for certain, revered sir, how long the Lord will live and how long I will live. Teach me *Dhamma*, Lord. Teach me *Dhamma*, *Sugata*, so that it will be for my good and happiness for a long time."

This is one of these things that perhaps was part of the age. You could ask three times, and if the answer was still no, there was no point in asking again.

This time, the Buddha took pity on poor Bāhiya, and he said this: "Here, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In the seen will be merely what is seen. In the heard will be merely what is heard. In the sensed will be merely what is sensed. In the cognized will be merely what is cognized. In this way you should train yourself, Bāhiya."

Now this is referring directly to our *vipassanā* practice. The Buddha categorizes consciousnesses according to the sense base. You have eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose, taste, and body consciousness, and the mind consciousness. What the mind is aware of is the internal life, the interior life of emotions and thoughts. These are your six bases, and it's upon these bases that consciousness arises.

So he says, "When, Bāhiya, when for you in the seen is merely what is seen, in the heard is merely what is heard, in the sensed - which means smelling and tasting - in the sensed will be merely what is sensed, in the cognized is merely what is cognized, then, Bāhiya, you will not be with that. When, Bāhiya, you are not with that, you will not be in that. When, Bāhiya, you are not in that, then, Bāhiya, you will be neither here nor beyond, nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering."

He's saying to Bāhiya, "you will not be in that." Remember, if we go back to the Upanishads, they're talking about the unknowing knower, always pointing to somebody, the one who understands, the senser. What Bāhiya seems to have been doing is looking for this knower. Of course, he's not finding it. So the Buddha tries to avert him from that and draw him down to the level where he's just experiencing things without the sense of I.

At that very base level, there's always a sense base. A sense base has some object that it's sensing. Obviously, if you've got eyes and you're looking, then you'll see something. Like for instance, now you're seeing me. Those two then have to have some way of relating that information onto something that can be seen, can be known. That's what consciousness is. That's the *vijñāna* consciousness, the consciousness of the aggregates. All these consciousness are dependent on a sense base.

In our meditation, what we're trying to do is to get down to that level where there isn't an I. What happens normally is we see something. We don't see it as it is. We see it within a category, which is our conceptual understanding. When I see, for instance, an apple, I don't see that apple as something distinct and spare. I see it within my concepts of what apples are. Depending on that concept, I'll be able to say to myself, "Well, this is a sweet apple or it's not so sweet." Then, of course, there's "I like sweet apples. I don't like unsweet apples." Once you've said that, you have a relationship with it. "I want a sweet apple," and then you get "I want a sweet apple."

What he's asking Bāhiya to do is to cut through that whole mentation dependent on a delusion of an I and get down to basics. Once he does that, of course, he recognizes that there is something which is aware of what's on that screen of consciousness. That separation allows him to make the insight of what he really is before he becomes an I.

I hope that hasn't confused you completely. The teaching is quite difficult. When he says "you are not with that," in other words, you don't identify with the object by way of conceptual understanding - the apple. "You're not in that" - you're not identifying with the sense base, the taste, the sense of taste. When you don't identify with that, what comes up on the screen is pure without the manipulation, the distortion of liking, not liking, wanting, not wanting. That's when we're able to see that there is something which is distinct from everything that we're experiencing. That's the process of awakening. That's what it is.

Then he says, "Through this brief *Dhamma* teaching of the Lord, the mind of Bāhiya the Bark-cloth was immediately freed from the taints without grasping. Then the Lord, having instructed Bāhiya with this brief instruction, went away."

This is the point. This is what happens when we become fully liberated. We are freed from the taints. The word is *āsava*. There is in that word the meaning, a word *su*, which means to flow. It's like the corruptions are flowing out of us. Sometimes they're called inflows, sometimes outflows. They are the basic delusions that are affecting our lives for the worse. The first one is the taint of craving for sensual pleasure. The second one is the craving for existence - in other words, always becoming. That's why, anytime death approaches us, we panic. We want to continue from moment after moment. We want to be somebody. We're always redefining ourselves. Finally, of course, the taint of ignorance, which is not understanding the way things really are. So he's freed of all that. Because he's freed of all that, he's come to the end of suffering.

Not long after the Lord's departure, a cow with a young calf attacked Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth and killed him. When the Lord, having walked for alms food in Sāvatthī, was returning from alms round with a number of *bhikkhus*, on departing from the town, he saw that Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth had died. Seeing this, he said to the *bhikkhus*, "*Bhikkhus*, take Bāhiya's body, put it on a litter, carry it away and burn it and make a *stūpa* for it. Your companion in the holy life has died."

A *stūpa* would be a mound in those days, that's all.

"Very well, revered sir," the *bhikkhus* replied to the Lord. Taking Bāhiya's body, they put it on a litter, carried it away and burnt it, and made a *stūpa* for it. Then they went to the Lord, prostrated themselves, and sat down to one side.

Sitting there, those *bhikkhus* said to the Lord, "Bāhiya's body has been burnt, revered sir, and a *stūpa* has been made for it. What is his destiny? What is his future birth?"

"*Bhikkhus*, Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was a wise man. He practiced according to the *Dhamma* and did not trouble me by disputing about *Dhamma*. *Bhikkhus*, Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth has attained final *Nibbāna*."

I love the way this little phrase has been put in there: "and did not trouble me by disputing about *Dhamma*." He was constantly hassled by people questioning what he understood, what he taught. I find that a lovely little phrase to tell you something about the Buddha's life.

Then on realizing this significance, the Lord uttered on that occasion this inspired utterance. This is where he's stating what *Nibbāna* is:

"Where neither water, nor yet earth, nor fire, nor air, find a foothold. There gleam no stars, no sun sheds light, there shines no moon. Yet, there no darkness reigns."

The first, of course, is our physicality, which includes the whole psychophysical organism. "Neither water" - these are the four great elements: water, earth, fire, and air. And then the outer world, the material world that we live in: "gleam no stars, no sun sheds light, there shines no moon, yet no darkness reigns."

I was listening to a talk by Bhikkhu Bodhi, in which he was asked, "What is the understanding of this *Nibbāna*?" He said that in Theravāda Buddhism, there were two understandings. The first one was that when you finally purified your heart and it's time to become liberated, the five *khandhas*, the psychophysical organism, comes to an end, and that's it. I know people who believe that, that that's what the Buddha's teaching, and I cannot just cannot know the difference between that and annihilation. The Buddha often in the discourses says he is not teaching annihilation. He says the only things that are annihilated are greed, hatred, and delusion.

Bhikkhu Bodhi says the second understanding, which is the traditional understanding, is that when the psychophysical organism, the five *khandhas*, come to an end, there is a transcendent experience. That's what this "yet there no darkness reigns" is pointing to. If you actually get that book, the *Udāna*, the inspired verses of the Buddha, you'll see that there's a whole section on *Nibbāna*. They're all basically pointing to the same thing.

Dogen Zenji, the great Zen master, talked about his moment of liberation by saying, "The body and mind fell away. The body and mind fell away." That's another way of stating it.

Then he goes on: "When a sage, a Brahmin, has come to know this for himself through his own wise experience, insight experience, then he is freed from form and formless, freed from pleasure and from pain."

In other words, he's gone beyond. He's gone beyond all the amazing stuff you can get from absorption techniques, and he's gone beyond all that we can experience of pleasure or pain from our physicality. He's always pointing to something which is beyond. He doesn't want to give it a name. He doesn't want to substantiate it because then you end up like Bāhiya, completely confused looking for your soul, looking for your eternal self. That's why he's constantly pointing to it but not giving it a name. Of course in later Buddhism, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, they began talking about it as the *Dharmakāya*, the body of the truth, sometimes Buddha nature.

"This inspired utterance was spoken by the Lord also. So did I hear."

Very good. Well, as usual, I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your careful investigation, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 238

On Upāli: The Primacy of Mind in Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

In this engaging talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Upāli Sutta (MN 56), a discourse where the Buddha encounters Jain practitioners at Nālandā and engages in a philosophical debate about the nature of kamma. The central question concerns which type of action—bodily, verbal, or mental—is most blameworthy in producing unwholesome kamma. While the Jain tradition emphasizes the 'bodily rod' as most significant, the Buddha argues for the primacy of mental action, a position that aligns with the famous opening verses of the Dhammapada: 'All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind.'

The sutta tells the story of Upāli, a wealthy householder who confidently sets out to defeat the Buddha's teaching but instead becomes convinced through skillful questioning. The Buddha demonstrates that intention (cetanā) is the crucial factor in kamma—unintended harm is not as blameworthy as intentional harm, revealing that mind must precede and direct all significant action. When Upāli realizes this truth, he attains stream-entry and becomes a devoted lay follower.

This teaching carries profound practical implications for meditation and daily life. Since all wholesome and unwholesome actions originate in the mind, awareness of our mental states becomes paramount. By catching unwholesome thoughts before they manifest as speech or bodily action, we can prevent suffering for ourselves and others. The discourse reminds practitioners that mindfulness of mental intentions is the foundation of ethical conduct and the path to liberation.

On Upāli: The Primacy of Mind in Kamma

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

This little talk is around a discourse called "On Upāli." The Buddha meets this Jain who is called Upāli, and it links in with the previous talk about cetanā, about will—and what comes first in terms of creating kamma: the body, the mind, or speech.

I would like to start with the verses that open the Dhammapada, this collection of verses by the Buddha:

All experience, all actions are preceded by the mind, led by the mind, made by the mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of an ox.

And the opposite:

All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind, a wholesome mind, and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow.

So here we have this discourse. For those of you who want to know, it is in the Majjhima Nikāya, number 56—the Middle Length Sayings, number 56.

The Buddha is at Nālandā, which was a big town and became a very important university town, a centre of study. At the same time, the Jain leader had turned up with his group of monks and nuns. You will know the Jains—you will know the great Kumbh Mela that they have every twelve years in India, where, according to some figures, a hundred million devotees gathered on the Ganges. And you have seen those naked ascetics, the Digambaras, the "sky-clad" or "space-clad." They are Jain monks, but there is also a section of Śvetāmbaras, which means they are dressed in white.

So this Jain turns up. The text does not say whether he is a Digambara or not. By the way, they appear grey because they rub ash into their bodies, which serves as an antiseptic.

This fellow called Dīgha Tapassī turns up and goes to have a chat with the Buddha, just out of interest. The Buddha asks him, "How many actions does the Jain leader Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta describe for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma?"

Tapassī replies, "Friend Gotama, the Jain leader is not used to using the word 'action.' He uses the word 'rod.'"

Now, a rod was obviously used as an instrument of punishment, apart from anything else. What the Jain leader was saying was that every time you did something unwholesome, you were basically beating yourself.

So the Buddha asks, "Well, how many rods does the Jain leader describe?"

He says, "There are three rods: the bodily rod, the verbal rod, and the mental rod."

"And is the bodily rod one thing, the verbal rod another, and the mental rod another thing still?"

"Yes, they are all three different things."

"Of these three rods," says the Buddha, "thus analysed, thus differentiated—which rod does Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta describe as the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma: the bodily rod, the verbal rod, or the mental rod?"

The Nigaṇṭha replies that the bodily rod is the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma—not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.

Now you get this little bit of repartee. It seems that in those days, you had the person repeat what they said three times so they could not later claim, "I did not say that."

"Did you say the bodily rod, Dīgha Tapassī?"

"I say the bodily rod, friend Gotama."

"Do you say the bodily rod, Dīgha Tapassī?"

"I say the bodily rod, friend Gotama."

"Do you say the bodily rod, Dīgha Tapassī?"

"I say the bodily rod, friend Gotama."

I should think there was perhaps a little more to this exchange—something like, "Are you sure it is the bodily rod?" "I am absolutely sure." "Is this what your teacher told you?" "It is." And so on.

Now, having stated his position, Tapassī asks the Buddha, "Well, what about you, Gotama? How many rods do you describe?"

The Buddha replies that the Tathāgata does not use the word "rod"—he uses the word "action."

"Well then, which of these actions does friend Gotama describe as making evil kamma, the production of kamma?"

"There are three actions: body, speech, and mind."

"And is bodily action one thing, verbal action another, and mental action another still?"

The Buddha says, yes, this is so.

"And of these three actions, thus analysed, thus differentiated, friend Gautama, which action do you describe as the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil karma, the production of evil karma? Is it bodily action, verbal action, or mental?"

The Buddha replies, "Of all these three, it is the mental action which is the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil karma."

"Did you say mental action, friend Gautama?"

"I said mental action."

"Did you say mental action, friend Gautama?"

"I said mental action, Digha Tapasi."

"Are you sure you said mental action, friend Gautama?"

"I did say mental action."

So at this point, the Jain leaves. He's had enough. He can't take any more. He goes back to the Jain leader and explains what happened. The Jain leader praises him, saying, "You've rightly understood the message of the teacher." And then he makes fun of the Buddha, saying, "What does the trivial mental rod count in comparison to the gross bodily rod?"

Now, there's a certain Upali who's listening to this. He's a householder. I couldn't quite find out what he did, but he obviously lived in Nalanda and had some sort of huge mansion because he has servants. So I'm presuming he's either a landlord or a merchant, because merchants were becoming quite rich at that time.

He says to Nigantha, "Look, I'm going to go to the Buddha and I'm going to overthrow Gautama the contemplative's teachings on the ground of his position." Then he gives these wonderful similes about how he's going to treat the Buddha. He says, "Just as a strong man seizing a long-haired ram by the hair would drag him to and drag him fro and drag him all around, in the same way, I, statement by statement, will drag Gautama the contemplative to and drag him fro and drag him all around." He gives more and more similes of how he's going to treat this poor person, Gautama the Contemplative.

So the Jain leader says, "Yes, you go and refute his argument." But Digha Tapasi says, "Oh, I'm not so sure it's right that the householder Upali should try that," because, he says, "Gautama the contemplative is a magician and he knows a converting magic by which he converts disciples of other sects."

So the Buddha has this magic whereby he can convince you that he's right. By the way, Moggallana, who was one of the two chief disciples—if you remember, Moggallana and Sariputta—he was actually murdered, seemingly, by a sect for converting their members to the Buddha Dharma. He died in Rajgir, I think it's Rajgir today, yes. He died just shortly before the Buddha. He was killed before the Buddha.

Anyway, off Upali goes to see the Buddha. When he meets the Buddha, the Buddha says to him, "Householder, if you will confer taking a stand on the truth, we might have a discussion here."

"Lord, I will confer to stand on the truth. Let us have some discussion here."

"So what do you think, Householder? There might be a case where a Nigantha, a Jain, is diseased, pained, severely ill, refusing cold water and taking warm water. He, not getting cold water, would die. Where would the leader describe his reappearance?"

Now, exactly why he should die because he doesn't get cold water, there's no explanation for that. So Upali replies, "He would be born amongst the gods attached in mind. He reappears there."

"Why is that?"

"He is bound by mind when he dies."

So the mental state determines where he will be reborn. The Buddha says, "Oh, householder, pay attention. Answer only after having paid attention. What you said after isn't consistent with what you said before, nor is what you said before consistent with what you said after."

So there's a little bit of argy-bargy there. Then the Buddha gives him a second example: "There might be a case where a Nigantha is constrained by the fourfold constraints."

So this is the four precepts of not harming, not stealing, not being unchaste, and not lying. And then he says "constrained by all the constraints"—so this refers to all the rules and regulations of the order of Jains.

And as he walks to and fro, he brings many small beings to destruction. What karmic result would the Jain leader describe for him?

"What is unintended, Lord, the Nigantha Nataputta does not describe as greatly blameworthy."

But if he intends it, asks the Buddha?

"Greatly blameworthy, Lord."

And under what does the Nigantha Nataputta classify intention?

"Under the mental rod."

"Householder, pay attention. Answer after having paid attention. What you said after isn't consistent with what you said before, nor is what you said before consistent with what you said after."

So then he gives a couple of examples, which are a bit difficult for us. He asks Upali, for instance, if a man with a sword were to go into Nalanda, would he be able to kill everybody in that city? And Upali says no, this is not possible. The Buddha then says, but supposing he had through the power of mind, through the mastery of mind, superhuman power—could he do it then? Upali said yes, he could. So then the Buddha says, "Ah, see what comes first in terms of importance, the mind or the body?"

He gives another example about wildernesses, which we don't need to go into. Anyway, with the last example, Upali gives in and confesses:

"Lord, I was gratified and won over by the Blessed One's first simile. But wanting to hear these very artful ways of handling questions from the Blessed One, I thought I should treat him as an opponent. Magnificent, Lord, magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms—in this way the Blessed One, through many lines of reasoning, made the Dharma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dharma, to the Sangha. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone forth to Him for refuge from this day forward for life."

What the Buddha said next really impresses Upali, because he says, "Look, make a careful scrutiny, householder. It is good for well-known people like yourself to make careful scrutiny." In other words, don't make up your mind until you've delved a little more into the teachings. This impresses him greatly.

But the next statement is even more impressive, seemingly for that time: "Householder, your family compound has long been like a waterhole for the Jains, and you should consider that alms food should be given to them when they come for it."

Now, there's an occasion in the scriptures where the Buddhist monks and nuns are in the shrine, these big parks where they had their shrines, and there's lots of food left over after the lay people have offered. Ananda says to the Buddha, "What should we do

with all this food?" The Buddha says, "Well, offer it to these other sects." But when the lay people heard this, they were very angry. "We don't feed people who are Jains. We don't do that. We fed you—we don't want you to feed them with our food." So there's a rule: you can't offer food or a cup of tea to a priest, or to a Muslim mullah, or anybody who belongs to another sect. That's how it was in those days.

So this obviously impresses Upali—that the Buddha should say, "Look, you should continue to feed the Jains."

Then the Buddha gives him what's known as the graduated talk. He talks about generosity. He talks about virtue. He talks about what happens when you die with a virtuous, generous heart—you're born into a heavenly place. He then talks about the drawbacks of being devoted to sensuality and the rewards of renunciation.

And then, when the householder was of ready mind, malleable mind, unhindered mind, exultant mind, confident mind, the Buddha proclaimed to him the distinctive teaching of the awakened ones: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

And right there, there arose in Upali the householder, in that very seat, the dustless, stainless Dharma eye: whatever is subject to arising is subject to disappearing. In other words, he saw impermanence deep enough for him to become a stream-enterer, which is the first rung of awakening.

So now he's very happy. He goes home. And of course, the news gets back to the Nigantha, to the Jain leader, that Upali has now become a disciple of the Buddha. Well, he can't believe it.

"It's not possible," he thinks. So off he goes to see Upali.

He arrives at the household, but Upali has instructed his gatekeeper not to let them in. The Nigantha says to the gatekeeper, "Look, you go and tell Upali that I'm here and I want to talk to him."

Eventually Upali gives in, and he arranges the middle gate hall for the meeting. I presume there was a wall around the mansion or whatever he had, this large place. And when you came in, there was some sort of sheltered area where mendicants were invited in and fed. In it there would be a seat—a proper high seat for the leader.

Well, Upali takes the high seat. The Niganthas come in, the Jains, you see. And this is what the Jain leader says to Upali the householder:

"You've gone mad, householder. You're an arrogant fool. Having gone saying, 'Lord, I am going. I will overthrow Gotama the contemplative's teachings,' you've come back tied up in a web of his doctrine. It's just as if a man, having gone to remove someone else's testicles, comes back with his own removed."

That's good, isn't it?

"Or it's as if a man, having gone to gouge somebody else's eyes out, comes back with his own gouged out. In the same way, having gone saying, 'Lord, I am going to overthrow Gautama the contemplative's teachings,' you've come back tied up in the web of his doctrine. You've been converted, householder, by Gautama the contemplative's converting magic!"

And Upali replies, "Oh, auspicious, venerable sir, is the converting magic. Admirable, venerable sir, is the converting magic!"

At this, the Jain leader becomes so upset he spews blood, it seems. And so they leave. On this occasion, Upali goes on to create lovely verses in which he praises the Buddha.

So this whole story brings us back to the position that the Buddha articulates: nothing happens unless it has first happened in the mind. It is within the mind that we have this will, this *cetana*, and it is these decisions we make that produce our actions—in this case, unwholesome actions. It all begins in the mind.

As soon as we become aware of something unwholesome arising in the mind and we allow it to arise and pass away without grasping it, then it cannot express itself through our words, our speech, or our actions.

I would like to finish by repeating those opening verses from the Dhammapada:

All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind, and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.

All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind, a wholesome mind, and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow.

I can only hope this little discourse has been of some assistance, that it does not cause confusion, and that by your practice of the Dharma you will be liberated from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 239

Climate Emergency and the Role of the Dhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

> *In this timely talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the growing anxiety many practitioners feel about climate change, environmental degradation, and the troubling shifts toward authoritarianism in global politics. Drawing on current events—from record temperatures in the UK to devastating floods in Australia—he acknowledges the legitimate concerns while guiding listeners toward a spiritual response that avoids both denial and despair.*
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> *Central to the teaching is the Kakacūpama Sutta (MN 21), the Simile of the Saw, in which the Buddha instructs his disciples to maintain minds of goodwill even under the most extreme circumstances. Bhante uses this challenging teaching to illustrate how reactive emotions like fear, anger, and panic, while understandable, ultimately serve neither ourselves nor others. He invites us to examine: "In what way is this helping?"*
>
> *The talk offers a profound reframing of our relationship to global crisis. Rather than catastrophizing about collective doom, Bhante reminds us that death comes to each person individually, and our task remains the same: to cultivate the brahmavihāras—friendship, compassion, and even the capacity for joy amidst difficulty. When cure is impossible, care remains. This perspective transforms the climate emergency from a source of despair into an opportunity for genuine spiritual growth, grounding our practice in the Buddha's fundamental promise that there is indeed an end to suffering.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

A couple of moons ago, I was tackling the whole idea of social conditioning and how it becomes our karma—in the sense that we have to take full responsibility for the conditioning that we've been given and try to sort it out. Then I tackled the problem of neoliberalism and how mindfulness was being used to further their agenda. And so the third thing to tackle, I think, which everybody's probably very concerned about, is the environment and social collapse.

I thought I'd give a resume of where we are and then say how we can approach it.

In 2015, during the first nine months, global mean warming reached one degree centigrade above pre-industrial times. That was an important moment, and of course, it's continuing to climb. Here in the UK on the 19th of July, we passed 40 degrees—I think for the first time ever. As you know, there's a huge drought at the moment all over

Europe and massive floods in Australia. I was talking to a friend out there; it peaked at 14.4 meters high. Isn't that unbelievable? That's about three or four double-decker buses. The amount of water that must have been dropped is beyond imagination. These are all little signs preparing us for what's to come, and we're not seeing very much action about it.

It reminds you a little bit of Britain before the Second World War, where Chamberlain did his best to bring about peace for our time. He'd lived through the First World War and just didn't want to see the horror of war again. But of course, he was duped by Hitler, and he died shortly after he declared war.

At the moment, we've got all these terrible things going on apart from Ukraine and China. There's a terrible incident in America with Salman Rushdie being stabbed, and I was quoting him saying that he was concerned about democracy in the US. I think that's there as well.

Perhaps most disturbing is the general mood of the age, the zeitgeist, slowly moving away from liberal democracy to illiberal democracy—in other words, fascism, some form of authoritarianism. Many people were shocked by this Orbán movement, saying things like "we are not a mixed race and we do not want to become a mixed race." They are a mixed race—they're a combination of Huns, who were Mongoloid, and Turkic peoples, the same as Turkey. I don't know what he's going on about. He then went on to say that countries where European and non-Europeans mingle are no longer nations, and then he went off to America to give a talk to his buddies. The fact that a head of state in the EU can actually say that, and obviously there will be many people who will support him—that's the thing—really shows us where we're moving towards.

As these pressures grow, I'm reminded again of that poem by W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming." It's got this wonderful line: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." You just get the feel.

And our reaction—well, my reaction anyway—I've been very gloomy. I had two or three conversations where on two occasions I had to get in touch with them again and apologize for being so gloomy about the situation.

So it's a case, I think, of beginning to realize that we have to see this situation from a spiritual point of view. To deny it, to devote ourselves to escapism—sex, drugs, and rock and roll—or to become despondent and uncaring, disengaged, that's just going to lead to some sort of despair eventually. There's the fear that grows in us and a sense of panic, and again, that can lead to even suicidal feelings.

There was a case in 1938 where Orson Welles adapted the H.G. Wells novel *War of the Worlds*, and it began without telling anybody that it was a play.

It was presented as if it were a real broadcast announcing that the Martians had landed. People fled their homes in great numbers. Fortunately, nobody committed suicide, but it demonstrates what happens when something grips a population in that way.

In a sense, we've got to tackle these responses within ourselves. The other major feeling that might arise, of course, is anger. I thought I would read the Kakachupama Sutta, which translates as the Simile of the Saw. The Buddha says:

"Even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb from limb, with a two-handed saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of goodwill and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with goodwill. And beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.

"Monks"—and by the way, monks means everybody—"if you attend constantly to this admonition on the Simile of the Saw, do you see any aspect of speech, slight or gross, that you could not endure?"

"No, Lord."

"Then attend constantly to this admonition of the Simile of the Saw. That will be for your long-term welfare and happiness."

That is what the Blessed One said, and gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

I once read that out in a talk, and somebody said, "The Buddha had a great sense of humor." It is very difficult for us to follow that command. But in fact, all these emotional states that we might suffer from—the sense of fear, of not wanting to face reality as it comes, and of anger—the question to ask ourselves is: in what way is it helping? How does it help me? How does it help anybody else? That inquiry immediately, hopefully, cuts through the catastrophizing. We simply stay with the present moment, with what's actually happening.

Even if millions of people start to die from lack of food, from thirst due to drought, from overheating—even though that looks, from a total point of view, really quite apocalyptic—we have to remind ourselves that we all die singly. We all die just ourselves. We're alone when we die. Some will die in very painful situations. Others will die in beatitude. These are all still individual deaths. And again, we're left with the question: what can we do? We have to accept the limits of our ability, of our power, and even of our influence.

Beginning to see this whole situation as an opportunity for spiritual growth means we know we can benefit from it. We might have to come to that difficult realization that there's not going to be a cure for this situation, and all we can do is care. It's a bit like when somebody has a progressive illness, a chronic or even terminal illness. There's no cure. But you can develop care. And that means friendship, and at times even rejoicing. And of course, definitely compassion.

That's really where our spiritual practice is taking us. We have to look upon this growing situation as an opportunity for that. Otherwise, I can't see anything but despair.

This talk is an introduction to the six forums that Noreen will be leading, based on those six maxims sent last month by Schenck and Churchill. We're also going to circulate an essay written by Gwen Sanderson, one of our trustees, who is very much involved in addressing climate change and social breakdown. There's now a whole university study on collapsology, and she attended a meeting on this subject and wrote about it for us. Once that essay is circulated, we'll have a meeting on Zoom on the 12th of September—an opportunity for people to share their feelings, to explore their thoughts and feelings about all of this.

So that's what will happen in the near future.

The situation may get worse—indeed, it will get worse. There's no way we're going to stop it. So it's a case of really looking into ourselves and making that special effort to see it from a spiritual angle, to see it from a place which is going to give us that basic hope—that there is an end to suffering and that we can actually achieve it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not doomed you too much, and that you see the light at the end of the tunnel. May your practice liberate you from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 240

Non-Violence v. Pacifism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this timely talk given during the early days of the Ukraine conflict, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a nuanced Buddhist perspective on the distinction between non-violence and pacifism. He explains that pacifism is an ideological position—an 'ism' that can become disconnected from reality—while non-violence in the Buddhist sense emerges from direct experience and practical wisdom. The Buddha, teaching in a preliterate society, grounded his approach in personal experience rather than systematic philosophy, offering guidance on how to live ethically in a world driven by greed, aversion, fear, and delusion.

Bhante draws on several scriptural sources to illuminate this teaching. He notes that the Buddha never advised kings to disband their armies or cease capital punishment, suggesting an acceptance of worldly realities while still inviting rulers to cultivate non-violence. He references the Dhammapada verses on how all beings tremble at violence and fear death, and discusses the pārājika rule established after monks tragically misunderstood teachings on the body's unattractiveness and began killing themselves and each other. The story of the Cakkavatti (wheel-turning monarch) illustrates how ethical governance based on the five precepts creates peace, while their abandonment leads to social decay.

A crucial distinction emerges between force and violence: force is neutral action to address a situation, while violence carries hatred, anger, or revenge. This has profound implications for understanding armed conflict—soldiers defending others without hatred in their hearts occupy a different ethical space than those acting from malice. Drawing on later Buddhist traditions like the samurai ethic and Aikido, Bhante shows how this principle has been applied across cultures. The talk offers practitioners a framework for contemplating difficult ethical questions while maintaining the heart of non-violence as the foundation for compassion and eventual liberation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhasa.

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

A few things have happened since we last met, my goodness. I think it was Harold Wilson who said a week is a long time in politics. Although it was on the horizon that something was going to happen in Ukraine, I don't think anybody imagined what has actually eventuated. I thought I would clarify, or at least give you my opinion on, this business of nonviolence as opposed to pacifism.

Pacifism is really an ideal. It comes from some great concept about violence, making it a sort of global, total position. At its most radical, an absolute pacifist position would never take part in any war. It's normally centered on war, but of course it spreads out to killing as well. The basic position is that the value of human life is such that deliberately killing a person is simply not on. Unfortunately, with isms, they tend not to be in touch with reality as it is.

You do get types of pacifism that are a bit closer to reality. There are militant pacifists who oppose all violence and war, and then there is conditional pacifism, which acknowledges circumstances where war might actually lead to less suffering. Perhaps the Second World War would be one example of that—to overcome Nazism. Then there are selective pacifisms that really only concern weapons of mass destruction. But normally, when people talk about pacifism, it tends to be in that absolute category.

Nonviolence is of a different nature. One of the things I think we find hard to understand is that the Buddha's society was preliterate. There was no writing. If you don't have any writing, you really can't think about things in that systematic philosophical way. There are no isms during the Buddha's time. The Buddha is always grounding himself on actual experience—his personal experience of what actually causes suffering and how to get rid of it. There's nothing in the literature like philosophy as we would recognize it, or sociology, or systems thinking. Not that there weren't views and opinions, but there weren't these solid isms that we have these days.

What he's actually teaching is how to be in a world which is largely driven by greed, aversion, fear, and delusion. It's a very practical approach to the world, coming from a wisdom base—a practical wisdom base. It comes from his own personal experience and, of course, the good heart. What we're getting to is an ethical stand, a way of relating to people and, in fact, all sentient beings. These days, you can also add nature.

When there's no violence in the mind—and the mind is never empty in the sense that there's nothing there apart from maybe sleep—when it's in a state of nonviolence, then empathy and compassion arise quite naturally. Those two cannot exist together. That's the point.

Interestingly enough, in the discourses, when kings are talking to him and one or two of them go to war, he never advises the kings to get rid of their armies. He never tells them to stop executing people. And certain punishments were delicious punishments indeed—there was one I remember which involved rubbing the convict's head with a conch shell until the bone glistened. It's amazing how we can think up such

things. But the point is that he never actually advises kings to get rid of their armies. There's some basic understanding that this is the way it is. But he does, of course, invite them to develop this sense of nonviolence.

Basically, it's about principle rather than going into the details of how you ought to do something. He always leaves that to us. It's up to us to decide what we feel to be ethically good or bad.

This translated in later Buddhism, in later Buddhist cultures—for instance, the samurai. The samurai was taught, or developed himself, to kill without any hatred. There's one story where a samurai has beaten his opponent and the sword is raised high, about to crash down on his head, and he walks away. When they asked him why he walked away, he said he was angry. You'll also know the martial art of Aikido, which is really based upon the idea that you use the other person's energy to deflect their violence towards you.

Remember that when the Buddha was born, the Brahmins—one in particular, a sage—came to see him and determined that he would become either a world-conquering monarch or a fully self-awakened being. This alter ego of the world-conquering monarch appears throughout the scriptures as the Chakravartin. He possesses a wheel that appears and begins to roll, and he follows it with his fourfold army: foot soldiers, cavalry, chariots, and elephants. Wherever it goes, he naturally defeats the enemy. At times, he is actually invited to come.

Now, as soon as he takes over, what does he do? He establishes the five precepts. And in so doing, everywhere he goes becomes a peaceful and loving place. This is a motif that occasionally appears in the discourses. But then it reaches a point where one of these Chakravartins fails to follow the five precepts, and immediately society begins to corrupt; all sorts of problems emerge.

There is one rather interesting occasion where stealing began. The minister informed the king that the person was stealing because they were poor. So the king decided to give this person wealth, some land, so that he would have no reason to steal. But then others thought, "If I want more wealth and land, what I must do is steal." And so stealing became common. That is when the king had to start chopping heads off. So that is how it goes.

There is also an occasion that brings about a rule for the bhikkhus, for the monastic life—bhikkhus and bhikkhunis alike. The Buddha had given a very enthusiastic talk about the repulsiveness of the body. The purpose of seeing the body's repulsiveness, of course, is to become non-attached to it. However, the bhikkhus seem to have misunder-

stood this teaching. They went off into the forests and began this contemplation on the disgusting nature of the body, becoming so disgusted that they started killing themselves and asking other monks to kill them.

There is this remarkable story of a monk who has just stabbed another monk to death to release him from this disgusting body. He is wiping the blood off the knife. When the Buddha hears about this, he must have been in a state of shock, really, because his words had been completely misunderstood.

So he makes up this rule: "Should any bhikkhu intentionally deprive a human being of life, or search for an assassin for him, or praise the advantages of death, or incite him to die in this way—'Dear friend, what use is this wretched, miserable life to you? Death would be better for you than life'—and with such an idea in mind, such a purpose in mind, should in various ways praise the advantages of death and incite them to die, he is also defeated and no longer in communion."

This is what is known as a parajika. He is defeated in the sense that he can no longer be a monk in this lifetime, and he leaves the order. The people who actually committed these killings—this rule, of course, does not apply to them, because it is not backdated. It starts from that point onwards.

The other interesting thing about this rule is that the person has to actually be killed or die for it to be a proper parajika, a proper defeat. If the person whom the monk is attempting to kill fails to die, then it is a serious offense, of course, but he is not actually asked to leave the order.

So we have said this is not a philosophy as such. It is really just practical moral reasoning. These two verses come from the Dhammapada:

All tremble at violence, all fear death. Seeing others as being like yourself, do not kill or cause others to kill.

All tremble at violence. Life is dear to all. Seeing others as being like yourself, do not kill or cause others to kill.

A distinction here must be made between force and violence, and I think this is the crucial point. If you drop your mobile phone, you might simply pick it up, check whether you have broken the screen, and put it in your pocket. On the other hand, you might be quite angry with yourself, fed up with yourself, and so you reach down with extra pressure in your hand, grabbing this mobile phone and stuffing it into your pocket. One

is non-violence—the use of simple force to correct what has happened, to put right what went wrong. Whereas violence is the same action accompanied by some form of anger, hatred, or revenge.

So there are arguments to justify armed intervention.

and which would prevent further, worse bloodshed.

In this terrible thing that's happening in Ukraine, if the soldiers are following their duty—this is the Buddha saying, well, you've been given a command, this is what you've determined to do with your life—if they try to kill, or in fact if they kill soldiers and people of the other side, but there isn't any violent hatred in their hearts doing it, then obviously that would come under non-violence. But it still isn't something that they should be doing.

Now, the Abhidhamma, this later teaching, says that you cannot kill anything—you can't kill any sentient being without some negativity in the heart. But as you can see, to actually try to kill somebody with that sense of hatred, revenge, anger—that's a far worse place to come from than somebody who is killing in order to defend themselves.

So anyway, these are just some thoughts that I might put to you. It's worth looking into the back history of this Ukraine disaster. You can begin to see that it's a product, really, of all sorts of reasons that have come to manifest in this terrible war.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that by your devotion to non-violence, you will eventually liberate yourself from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 241

Neoliberalism and Mindfulness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

> *In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the troubling intersection between neoliberal capitalism and the commercialization of mindfulness. He demonstrates how authentic Buddhist teachings, particularly the Buddha's emphasis on generosity (dāna) and compassion, stand in direct opposition to neoliberalism's core principle of acquisitive individualism.*
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> *Drawing on the Buddha's encounter with Māra before his Awakening, Bhante illustrates how neoliberalism operates like Māra—promoting greed, competition, and self-centeredness that perpetuate suffering. He critiques how mindfulness has been co-opted by corporate interests at forums like Davos, reducing the Buddha's profound teachings on liberation into mere stress-reduction techniques that help workers cope with exploitative systems rather than question them.*
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> *The talk emphasizes the Buddha's teaching on generosity from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, showing how genuine joy arises from caring for others rather than accumulating for oneself. Bhante calls for a fundamental shift from 'me to we'—moving beyond the individualistic mindset toward community care and mutual support. This practical dharma talk offers both social critique and spiritual guidance for practitioners seeking to live authentically according to Buddhist principles in our current economic climate.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

So I thought this evening I'd tackle this neoliberalism and the role of Buddhism, of Buddha Dharma, in that particular ideology. Just to remind ourselves, an ideology is a set of beliefs and principles that go on to inform policy. But as an ideology, as an idealism as well, there's always some future goal, some Shangri-La that it's always heading towards. And it always has — even in Marxist terms, the seed of destruction is always in capitalism. But that's true, as we've discovered from the last century, of any ideology. Communism, national socialism, even democracy — but democracy at least has this self-correction every so often. And as we've discovered, it only really works when the society tends to be fairly peaceful with itself. As we see these days, there's a leaning towards the right again, towards authoritarianism.

So the Buddha himself didn't fashion Buddhism. He simply taught a practical path to liberation and the understanding that underlies it. So it's really about ethics, and he belonged to a period before writing. So therefore, there isn't this philosophy and systems theory and all that. It just didn't exist at that time. The thought was really very practical.

Now, the fundamental attitude that actually drives neoliberalism is greed, acquisitiveness. I'm just quoting here from Oliver Stone's movie, which was in 1987 called Wall Street. Some of you might have seen it. Gordon Gekko is the antihero played by Michael Douglas. And he gives this speech and he says, "The point is, ladies and gentlemen, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed in all its forms — greed for life, greed for money, for love, knowledge — has marked the upward surge of mankind." Doesn't sound very nice, does it? So what it does is it makes you a very special human being. You're out for yourself. This very selfish attitude that I should have what I want when I want it. If you remember Frank Sinatra's old song, "I did it my way."

And of course, it's a corruption of what Darwin said. Darwin — I quote him here — "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, not the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change." So this word "fittest" actually means adaptable. But ever since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, we've had this idea that there'll come a time when we can produce enough stuff so that everybody has everything. So there's a couple of books here that I can mention towards the end. I might come back to that. But I just mentioned this book by Sally Weintrobe called The Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis. And it brings together many things. But one thing that she points out is that the wealthy nurtured the concept of neoliberalism through right-wing think tanks, and they captured the Republicans and eventually the Tories. So that's dear old Margaret Thatcher for us.

So now this acquisitiveness, this greed, it operates in a market. So we're all now entrepreneurs in this market and we all want everything all at once. And what it does, of course, is it creates this competition. But of course, it's a competition that is antagonistic because either you're my rival, at best, or at worst, you're my direct enemy. So I'm always working against somebody.

Now, you can't say that competition is all bad, because it does actually create efficiency and inventiveness. In fact, in the worst cases where you have this aggressive competition — war, in the Second World War, remember — jet planes, jet engines, radar, and the computer were developed. So there's a tremendous irony there. But the

thing is that what neoliberalism presumes is that society is at best when it services the market. We're all individuals. We're all working against each other in order to get the biggest piece of the pie we can. And the whole process is very antagonistic.

But when you look at something like academia, where scientists from all over the world might be working on a particular project, they're very happy to share with each other their discoveries. Now, they're not motivated by power or money. I mean, they're given a salary. I mean, they might covet the Nobel Prize, but it's usually just sheer interest in the scientific investigation. So here we have a collaborative competitiveness, which is a very different atmosphere altogether. I think it's something the Buddha would have liked.

Now, the downside of this, of course, is that if you're not a player in the market, then in a sense, you've only yourselves to blame. And in blaming the victims — if you remember going back to the Thatcher period, those from the rest of Europe won't remember this, but we had this fellow called Tebbit who told people to get onto their bikes. Like, it's up to you. You've got to get the work. And if you don't get the work, well, that's your problem. You're to blame.

So workers begin to lose their rights because basically you have to negotiate with your employer. And the competition between workers determines the cost, which will go down and down. So this is the gig economy, isn't it? This is what we mean by the race to the bottom.

So I give a definition here of a race to the bottom: a competitive situation where a company, a state, or a nation attempts to undercut the competition's prices by sacrificing quality standards or worker safety or reducing labour costs. And you can see, for instance, when Uber started in London — I'm hoping that the situation is the same in the rest of the world, or I'm not sure — basically, those who wanted to join Uber were in competition with each other. So you can imagine: a parent who has children, holidays and all that sort of stuff; a young woman who has a mortgage; and a young fellow who's got no problems whatsoever, he's only about 21 or something. And they are bidding for your ride. Well, if the man with all the problems is charging you 30 and the woman charges you 25 and he charges you 20, then if the parent wants that ride, they've got to come all the way down to 20. And that's what happens. Everything starts moving downwards.

The worst example, of course, is this recent sacking of 800 workers by the P&O ferry line. Interestingly enough, they were losing 100 million, but at the same time, they paid out 270 million to their dividends, to their shareholders. So you can see it's not very fair, is it?

And we all know about this tremendous — well, it comes out to be a lie, doesn't it? This thing about trickle down, eventually the wealth trickles down and everybody's happy. But it doesn't trickle down to the unemployed, to the disabled or the old, the aged. And these players, of course, are not in the market. So now that would be a real drag, draining money from the market. So the only way to get around that is, of course, to privatise all the social services so that these companies get their 10%. I don't know what's happening in the rest of Europe, but now there are many GP surgeries that are being taken over by a company called Centene. And even the Daily Mail said it was the most avaricious of insurance companies. So it's all bad news, isn't it?

But the big thing is, of course, that this competition just undermines a sense of commonwealth. It's no longer a caring society. You're not actually caring for each other. You're just trying to find your way, make money. So that means that any government or charitable effort that tries to do something about your basic physical or material well-being, people in need, would undermine the entrepreneurial spirit of competition. See, people have got to get out there and get into it. And of course, neoliberalism hates governments interfering with the markets. So there was this whole business about very few regulations. Well, we knew what happened. The banks went berserk. And then who had to step in to save them? Us, the poor ordinary punter.

So you can see that this is diametrically opposed to anything that the Buddha would teach. And the wonderful thing is that, of course, people are highly stressed in that sort of system, all the way down from CEOs, all the way down to the ordinary worker.

Now, it seems that the World Economic Forum at Davos, where the rich and the powerful, the high and mighty meet to decide how to rule the world, they were overjoyed to hear about mindfulness. So mindfulness would help people with their stress. So they began to tell all the workers who were stressed out, you've got to take a course in mindfulness and stress reduction. And if you happen to be even more stressed by even more stress, well, all you had to do was find a place in the office or somewhere and just sit there for a while and watch your breath and it would all disappear — as though stress were entirely a person's internal response to a situation. But as we know, the stress that's put upon you from the outside has a great deal to do with our own mental states.

So this wonderful gift that the Buddha gave us of investigating our lives and our being in order to achieve complete liberation from suffering is now being used to support a system which is doing exactly the opposite. What an irony.

And of course, what the neoliberal system is doing is the work of Mara. Now, Mara is the evil one. If you remember, just before the Buddha's liberation, Mara came and gave him this great doubt. He said, "Come on, what are you doing? Why are you doing this? Why are you going through all this pain, this suffering? Why don't you get back to your family and get back to sensual pleasures and how it was in the old days before you took up this silly idea?" And of course, the Buddha touches the earth. Now, this is the important thing. He touches the earth and the goddess of the earth arises and says to Mara, "No, the Buddha has every right to do this because he has perfected the virtue of generosity."

In other words, the Buddha's commitment came from his desire also to free everybody from suffering. And this is really interesting — something that undermines the neoliberal agenda: the idea that we can actually be like citizens who are helping each other. So if you remember during the lockdown here, suddenly neighbours realised they could help themselves. It was unknown. You could actually knock on a neighbour's door and say, "How are you doing?" and be there to help them out. This was a new discovery, it seems.

So now, just before I carry on with generosity, the question is, what can we personally do? Well, the obvious thing, of course, is to be aware of what we're buying. So not to support these satanic factories in Bangladesh and Cambodia and even in China.

But coming back now to generosity, I'm sure you've noticed that when you do something out of a sense of care for yourself, like you might buy a warm jumper or something like that, there's always a feeling good about that. You feel good about yourself. You're caring for yourself. Have you noticed that when you care for somebody else, when you look after somebody else, when you buy something for somebody, when you give something for somebody or spend time for somebody else, the joy that comes from it is much more long lasting? And it's that shift towards going away from this "me" towards "we" is where we can begin to find a different sort of economic system.

Of course, that sounds a bit glib, "me to we" and all that. But basically, it's that sense of bringing back that sense of community.

And I would just like to end this with a lovely quote that I've got from the Buddha: "If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive the gift. But because beings do not know this, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given and the stain of miserliness overcomes their mind."

So it's possible that we can have a life of joyfulness, which is a shared joy with people around us. And to get away from this very tight sense of this little self, like a little castle, which has to defend itself against everybody.

And you see it in the new woke, especially Extinction Rebellion, which is trying to wake people up to recognising that things are getting worse. We have to do something about it. And you'll find great resistance from those people who, of course, are committed to neoliberalism.

So all we can hope for is a change of attitude. You'll get politicians saying, "Oh, well, what we need is better jobs and better housing." But that's all within the system of neoliberalism. So in a sense, if we're going to move towards something which is much more just, much more equitable, much more kind, much more caring, it's that fundamental attitude that has to change. And let's hope that when it does happen, because the seeds of destruction are within capitalism itself, when it does happen, hopefully in the near future, let's just hope it's not another ideology, because that again will create problems.

And what the Buddha is saying is, if you ground yourself in the right attitude, and you recognise that times, that situation and times are in a constant flux, then you can always come at a particular situation, not from some preset view and opinion, but from this attitude of compassion, of sympathetic joy, of caring, of love, for heaven's sake.

Anyway, I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your commitment to the good life of compassion and joy, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 242

Social Conditioning or Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

> *In this thoughtful reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a nuanced topic often overlooked in Buddhist discourse: the relationship between individual kamma and social conditioning. He clarifies that while kamma refers specifically to our volitional actions of thought, speech, and deed—the saṅkhāra we create through moment-to-moment decisions—social conditioning operates differently as the cultural matrix in which we're embedded from birth.*
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> *Drawing from personal observations and experiences, Bhante illustrates how we unconsciously absorb cultural norms, gender expectations, racial attitudes, and class structures. He candidly shares examples ranging from watching a grandfather teach a child to say 'please,' to his own experiences of prejudice as a Buddhist monk in Western society. He examines how ideologies like neoliberalism have shifted our collective attitudes from gratitude toward entitlement, with tangible consequences for institutions like the NHS.*
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> *Referencing the Sigālovāda Sutta's guidance on social relationships and the Buddha's advice to King Ajātasattu regarding the Vajjī Confederacy, Bhante emphasizes that while we may not choose our initial conditioning, recognizing it makes us responsible for working with it. The teaching offers a practical framework: we cannot speak of 'social kamma' as such, but we can acknowledge our social conditioning, take responsibility for examining it, and transform what is unwholesome—thereby affecting not only our own liberation but the wellbeing of those around us.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

This evening I thought I'd tackle the thorny problem of social karma.

According to the Buddha, the karma that we own consists of the actions we have performed. These can be thoughts, speech, or physical actions, and they are all products of the will—it is the will that manifests them. Some of these are automatic; we are habitually thinking and doing things. Speech tends to be spontaneous or, unfortunately, impulsive. But then there are times when our responses are measured, when we have to think about what we're going to do, and those often have the greatest force within our

personality. What matters in the process of liberation is the ethical value—or lack of it—of these actions. These mental states, these sankhara, are created by our decisions, moment after moment, whether they are habitual or considered.

Given this understanding, it might be confusing to talk about social karma. I think it's better to talk about social conditioning—that makes more sense.

The fact is that we're embedded in our culture. I was visiting my brother on the Isle of Wight, and I was watching a grandfather and grandmother taking their grandchild for a walk. The child stopped, turned around, and lifting her arms in the air was obviously asking her grandfather to lift her up. I could hear him saying, "And?" She was probably saying, "Lift me up," and he would respond, "And?" This went on for a little while. Unfortunately, my attention was drawn away, but I presume the grandmother cut in, unable to bear her husband's unwillingness to respond to the child's pleas, and prompted her with that magic word: "please."

Right there, he took it upon himself to teach the child that you have to say please. Usually, as children, we totally accept this conditioning. It's only when we become naughty teenagers, and later in life when we can reflect, that we begin to see the conditioning we carry.

We also pick up our prejudices. I remember my niece and nephew playing hospital. My nephew was two years older than my niece, but they were both under seven—perhaps six and four. Of course, he said, "I'll be the doctor and you'll be the nurse." Afterwards, I thought to myself: if she had been the elder, would she have chosen to be the doctor?

The same is true of racial prejudice. I was traveling home and had to get from Liverpool Street to Waterloo, which really is a pain. Unfortunately, I ended up in Canary Wharf, thinking it would be easier, and I hadn't a clue where I was. Everyone told me I should take the Jubilee line, so I was stuck, and everybody had disappeared apart from one black man. I asked him how to get there.

As I asked him, I could feel a sort of anxiety arise—that he might reject my request in some way, based on my assumption about how he might feel about white people. As it happened, I was fortunate. He worked near the Jubilee line, which was something like a fifteen-minute walk away through I don't know how many streets, and he was very glad to take me there. But I was interested in my own experience, in that idea that arose as I was asking him. I actually go out of my way to ask people of colour for directions.

Another example: we've just celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. There's no doubt she has fulfilled the role of monarch admirably. But have we ever actually considered the institution of monarchy itself? I have to confess, I am a lifelong republican—you'll have to forgive me for that. The monarchy as an institution is the preserve of nobility and privilege, the House of Lords and all that.

And it has an influence on us. It shapes how we see ourselves in society. How would you feel if you met her?

Then, of course, something I've been emphasizing these past couple of weeks is neoliberal ideology and what it's done to us—made us much more selfish. For instance, in the NHS, instead of being patients, we were told that we were clients. This meant that we moved away from an attitude of gratitude to one of entitlement. The amount of suing of the NHS went up enormously—last year it stood at £2.4 billion. Now, it's not that we shouldn't be compensated for poor treatment. That's not the problem. It's where we're coming from: the indignant entitled, as opposed to the injured patient.

So how do you feel when you go for a service and the bus doesn't arrive? My parents would have just felt grateful. There's even now, I don't know whether you know about this, defensive dentistry. Dentists won't do anything on your teeth unless they have proof of something wrong. They're absolutely scared of being sued for anything they do. There have been some really bad cases because of that.

At a deeper level, of course, it's our race. How do we feel if we're black, living in a white-dominated culture? Jews with their unrelenting history of persecution. And then there are whites who, at the moment, are being encouraged by extreme Brexiteers with their shining luminary Boris, projecting us as British, special, and so on. All this will be there within us.

I came across real prejudice when I became a monk. One time I walked into a shop and the assistant simply turned around and walked out. I was left standing there until I realized she wasn't going to come out to serve me. And then there was a quite nasty occasion in Dubai. I was flying back from Sri Lanka when a drunken Englishman just went on and on about how stupid and ridiculous I looked.

So it's worth catching how we are personally conditioned—not just societal conditioning, but personal conditioning. Although we've had little choice in that conditioning, the fact of the matter is, it's us. We are an expression of our culture, and it's our duty, our responsibility, to accept that and to do something about it when it's unwholesome.

I have stressed the unwholesomeness within society, but obviously there's beauty too. Just mentioning the NHS—it's a product of a society of care. Everything around us is influencing us, and we are influencing everything and everybody around us. So there's a certain responsibility to make sure we know where we stand with all these issues.

The Buddha has lots of advice for lay people in the Sigalavāda Sutta, where he talks in detail about relationships within the family. It's very patriarchal, of course, but then he was a man of his time. The monks were allowed to wander as they wished, but during the rainy season they had to come together and reestablish the fact that they were a community.

And of course, he goes on to say how good companionship is the whole of the spiritual life. Ānanda had come to the opinion that it's only half the holy life. And the Buddha replies, "Don't say that, Ānanda, don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the spiritual life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, he can be expected to develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path."

And there's the advice he gave to King Ajātasattu, who wanted to attack the Vajji Confederacy, pointing out that the nation's welfare was dependent on frequent meetings, that assemblies assemble and disperse peacefully and attend to their affairs in concord, that they do not enact new decrees or abolish old ones and proceed in accordance with ancient constitutions. That they respect, honor and esteem their elders, refrain from abducting women and maidens of good families, show respect and veneration to shrines, and look after their Arahants.

You can retranslate that for our own times. But here the Buddha is actually saying that the society we are in shapes our conditioning. We are dependent on it for our conditioning. We are responsible. Once we know our conditioning, we are responsible for it. And where we can, we develop right conditioning. In so doing, we affect the people around us.

So that's about as far as social conditioning goes. We can't really talk about social karma. We can only talk about our social conditioning within ourselves and then how we work with it, how we deal with it, and hopefully clear our hearts of anything that's negative.

or in some way brightened up this little dark area, which I don't think many people talk about.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that you will, by your endeavor to overcome all negative social conditioning, arise into the glory of Arahatship sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 243

Buddha Day Address: His Training — The Fetters

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 30 min

> *In this Buddha Day address, Bhante Bodhidhamma draws from the Mahāsaccaka Sutta (MN 36) to recount the Buddha's intense ascetic practices before his Awakening under the Bodhi tree. He vividly describes the future Buddha's extreme fasting and breathless meditation attempts, which nearly killed him, before his breakthrough realization that the jhānas could be used as objects of investigation rather than mere absorption states.*
>
> *The talk then explores the ten fetters (saññojana) — the mental shackles that bind beings to saṃsāra. Bhante explains how the first three fetters are broken at stream-entry (sotāpanna): self-identity view (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), doubt (vicikicchā), and attachment to rites and rituals (sīlabbata-parāmāsa). He traces the progressive weakening and elimination of sensual desire, ill-will, and the subtler fetters through the four stages of Awakening, culminating in the arahat's complete freedom from conceit (māna) and ignorance (avijjā).*
>
> *This teaching offers profound insight into both the historical Buddha's journey and the systematic path of purification that leads to liberation, making it essential listening for understanding the graduated training in Theravāda Buddhism.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Since it's been a while since we've done a proper Buddha Day here, I thought just to go over his journey. I was going to quote this Mahāsaccakasutta, the long discourse around this fellow called Saccaka, whom the Buddha also refers to as Aggivessana, which is his family name. So this is the Buddha expressing what he went through, his mortifications.

"Then it occurred to me, why don't I practice the breathless absorption? So I cut off my breathing through my mouth and nose and ears, and then there was an intense burning in my body like two strong men grabbing a weaker man by the arms to burn and scorch him on a pit of glowing coals. My energy was roused and unflagging, and my mindfulness was established and lucid, but my body was disturbed, not tranquil, because I had pushed too hard with this painful striving. But even such painful feelings did not overcome my awareness."

Have you tried that? I can't quite visualize it somehow.

"Then some deities saw me and said, the ascetic Gotama is dead. And others said, he's not dead, he's dying. And others said, he's not dead or dying. He's the ascetic Gotama as a perfected one. For that is how the perfected ones live."

Well, he isn't the perfected one yet. They've misunderstood his efforts. So that failed.

"Then it occurred to me, why don't I practice completely cutting off food? But the deities came to me and said, good sir, don't practice totally cutting off food. If you do, we'll infuse divine nectar into your pores and you'll live on that. Then I thought, if I claim to be completely fasting while these deities are infusing divine nectar in my pores, that would be a lie on my part. So I dismissed these deities and said there's no need. Then it occurred to me, why don't I take a little bit of food each time, a cup of broth made of mung beans, horse gram, chickpeas or green gram?"

So that's what I did until my body became extremely emaciated. Due to eating so little, my limbs became like the joints of dried bamboo or withered creepers. My bottom became like a camel's hoof. My vertebrae stuck out like beads on a string and my ribs were as gaunt as the broken down rafters on an old barn. Due to eating so little, the gleam in my eyes sank deep in their sockets like the gleam of water sunk deep down in a well. Due to eating so little, my scalp shriveled and withered like a green bitter gourd in the wind and sun. Due to eating so little, the skin of my belly stuck to the backbone, so that when I tried to rub the skin of my belly, I grabbed my backbone. And when I tried to rub my backbone, I rubbed the skin of my belly. Due to eating so little, when I tried to urinate or defecate, I fell face down right there. Due to eating so little, when I tried to relieve my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair rotted at its roots and fell out.

"Then some people said, the ascetic Gotama is black. Some said, he's not black, he's brown. And some said, no, he's neither black nor brown. The ascetic Gotama has tawny skin. That's how far the pure and bright complexion of my skin had been ruined by taking so little food. Then I thought, whatever ascetics and Brahmins have experienced painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to overexertion, whether in the past, future or present, this is as far as it goes. No one has done more than this. But I have not achieved any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones by this severe, grueling work. Could there be another path to awakening?"

So he's telling us that he took these ascetic practices to their limit. Now, that one about not eating seems to have been because he had some relationship with the Jains. The Jain teacher was an elder contemporary. In that teaching, your physical body is an

expression of your personal *kamma*. So by letting go of the body completely, your soul would then rise naturally into heaven. Jains to this day, when they're very old, they'll just stop eating. It's the way they choose to die. Often, not always.

By the way, those descriptions of him starving do remind you of the pictures we've seen of people suffering from famines. So you have to have that in mind.

"Then it occurred to me, I recall sitting in a cool shade of the rose apple tree while my father, the Sakyan, was off working. Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered and remained in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing awareness and keeping it connected. Could that be the path to awakening?"

Now, he had practiced these *jhānas*, remember, right at the beginning, according to the usual way that we see the way his life spanned out. He went, first of all, to two teachers who taught him how to practice these absorption states, which are very delightful. You do it inside yourself. You don't need anything outside. So if you practice loving-kindness and you get beautiful feelings, and they're such beautiful feelings that's all you want to do all day, sit on a tree and practice loving-kindness, you don't need anything at all apart from a bit of food. So he had dismissed that. The distinction here, I think, when he says "while placing awareness and keeping it connected," there's a suggestion there that he's caught on to the idea that although he's practicing these *jhānas*, they become themselves the object of investigation.

"Then it occurred to me, why am I afraid of that pleasure? For it's nothing to do with sensual pleasures or unskillful qualities. Then I thought, I'm not afraid of that pleasure, for it has nothing to do with sensual pleasure or unskillful qualities. Then I thought, I can't achieve that pleasure with the body so excessively emaciated. Why don't I eat some solid food, some rice and porridge?"

So I ate some solid food. Now at that time, the five mendicants who were his companions, thinking the ascetic Gotama will tell us of any truth that he realizes, but when he ate some solid food they felt disappointed in me saying the ascetic Gotama has become indulgent, he has strayed from the struggle and returned to indulgence. After eating solid food and gathering my strength quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities — so the greed wasn't there, remember — I entered and remained in the first absorption, which has rapture and bliss, born of seclusion, while placing the awareness and keeping it connected. But even such pleasant feeling did not occupy my mind.

So this tells you that here he's understood that the *jhānas* themselves become a way of investigation, whereas before when he'd started the path, he would absorb into them and just enjoy them. In other words, it's put here, "did not occupy my mind." A better translation would be, "and even such feeling did not occupy my awareness." If you read that statement on the window ledge out there from the Arhat Meiji Kyodo, you'll see that's exactly what she says. Everything comes in front of the awareness and never enters into what she calls her heart.

"When my mind was immersed in *samādhi* like this, purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruption, pliable, workable, steady and unperturbable, I extended it towards recollection of past lives and I recollected my many kinds of past lives with features and details. This was the first knowledge that I achieved in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed and knowledge arose. Darkness was destroyed and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen and resolute. But even such pleasant feelings did not occupy my awareness."

So this is where he understands that all his past lives were driven by his actions, his *kamma*.

"In the next watch, when my mind was immersed in *samādhi* like this, purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady and imperturbable, I extended it towards the knowledge of the death and rebirth of sentient beings. And with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, I saw sentient beings passing away and being reborn, inferior or superior, beautiful or ugly, in a good place or a bad place, and I understood how sentient beings are reborn according to their deeds."

So here he's understood the law of *kamma* is not just his personal law, but it's a universal law. It's interesting, later on we'll mention these four levels of attainment: the stream entrance, once returner, non-returner and fully liberated one. In the commentaries, it says anybody who understands the law of *kamma* is a *cūḷa sotāpanna*, a lesser *sotāpanna*, a lesser stream entrant, by which is meant anybody who understands the law of *kamma* is already on the path. It's inevitable that they will become liberated in the goodness of time.

"Then when my mind was immersed in *samādhi* like this, purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady and imperturbable, I extended it towards the knowledge of the ending of defilements. I truly understood this is suffering. This is the origin of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. I truly understood these are defilements. This is the origin of defilements. This is the cessation of defilements. And this is the practice that leads to

the cessation of defilements. Knowing and seeing this, my mind was freed from defilements of sensuality, desire to be reborn and ignorance. And when it was freed, I knew it was freed."

So when he attained liberation, he knew it. He knew he was completely free of these defilements. Now this word defilements, usually it's understood to be those things that come because of our immoral, unwholesome actions. But it's more than that. It's also the defilements that come from this fundamental misunderstanding about self. So one of the things that arises because of that misunderstanding is fear — fear of death, fear of illness, fear of others. That fear is also a defilement. Later, they made a list of these ten defilements. But actually, the way he uses defilements in the scriptures is just anything which arises out of this ignorance. And the basic ignorance, the basic delusion is to believe we are human beings in a complete total way.

"I understood. Rebirth is ended. The spiritual journey has been complete. What had to be done has been done. There is no return to any state of becoming."

That's a lovely little phrase there. "What had to be done has been done." You can feel the release, the relief of having finally arrived at the place of liberation.

"This was the third knowledge that I achieved in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed, knowledge arose, darkness was destroyed and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen and resolute, but even such pleasant feeling did not occupy my awareness."

So that's the ending of that discourse where he describes how he finally attained liberation.

We've talked about these defilements, and one of the discourses is on the Bhayabherava where he's in the jungle training, and this great fear comes upon him — wild animals and so on — and he has to overcome that. So that's not caused by some unwholesome action. That's just part of the structure that comes when you have a sense of self, of this body being a sense of self. When the body's in danger, then you get that fear. That would be included in defilements. Also these days when we talk about trauma from childhood and things like that, that's also part of the defilements, which is not caused by personal wrongdoing or anything. It's just something that arises because of our fundamental delusion.

So these four attainments, the stream entrant, he says it's like a flash of lightning. A person who has that stream entrant sees everything, but on the other hand, it's not deep, it's just a flash. Often when a person does have that experience, they can't really say. Sometimes they don't believe they've had it. It's that subtle, it's that underlying realization. But it's not big enough to be held, to be contemplated about.

The next one, when we rise to the once returner, he said it's like a starry night. So there you can hold, there's enough insight for it to be held and for it to be understood. But the *anāgāmi*, the one who is not going to return, and we'll explain that in a minute, it's like a full moon. So it's very clear, but there's still this darkness around it. Finally, the *arahat*, the one who's fully liberated, is like the full noonday sun.

So one way of looking at this process is through these fetters. *Saṃyojana*. The word *saṃyojana* has the word *yoga* in it. That fundamental word is one of those words that comes right through the Indo-European languages. Our word "yoke" comes from the same place.

There are ten of these fetters. The first three are what goes when somebody has this little insight, this first insight. So the first one is this *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, which is translated as self-identity view. So it's basically the view, the notion, the belief that I am this human being. I am this person.

Even at an intellectual level, when you talk about the body, well, we know it changes every seven years. They tell you all the cells have been changed every seven years. I mean, I've almost had eleven bodies by now. Time I got rid of it.

When you think about your thoughts and what you used to think when you were three years old and what you do now, your feelings, your emotions, you can see it's a flow of events, isn't it? It's just a flow of events moving one into the other.

The example I use is when you bite your tongue. So you're eating away and you're enjoying your food and you bite your tongue. For that one wonderful singular moment, you and the pain are completely one. That's identity. Then you jump out of it and you find yourself a little angry with yourself. Now you've become anger, you see. So identity is when you lose that sense of objectivity about what you're experiencing is what you are at that moment.

So you trap your finger in a door. Pain's wonderful at doing that for us. But sometimes great pleasure, great joy. Also, you absorb into it and become it. You lose that sense of somebody enjoying something, somebody feeling something. You are that feeling. You are that pleasure or that mental state. That's what we mean by identity. So that's the first fetter that goes.

The second one is doubt. So this is a particular type of doubt. It's the doubt that stops you doing anything. It's the doubt that will stop you from committing. Often you might find in life that you come across a certain situation like a job and you apply for it, but then you go through this doubt business. Can I do it? Should I do it? And all this. Sometimes that doubt, that self-doubt is so strong, you don't take the job. You lose it, you see. So you don't give yourself a chance.

It's the same in meditation. You sit and then you think, well, everybody else is amazing. I'm absolutely useless. And then you keep convincing yourself that you're no good at it. So you may as well stop. It's the same with the Buddha Dharma. There may come a time when you think, well, I don't know whether the Buddha is right, whether it's Dharma for me, and so on.

But that goes completely with somebody who has this level of insight. There's no more of that sort of prevarication, that doubt, that oscillating doubt. That's not the same as honest doubt. I mean, the Buddha actually wants us to investigate what he says because the process of investigation itself is the process of liberation.

And then the third one is an attachment to rites and rituals. So this goes back to those times when, for instance, say in Hinduism, just to bathe in the Ganges would get rid of your *kamma*. That reminds you of something I met. This is years ago when I went out there as a sort of pseudo hippie. And I met this young woman. I was young myself, of course, in those wonderful days. And I went to this yoga center and she was there and she had all these spots and things all over her face. I said, what happened? She said, well, you know, I went down to the Ganges and joined them in this washing, in this getting rid of *kamma*. And I drank some of it. And I said, what? And not only does everybody's toilet goes into the Ganges, we get dead bodies of all sorts, even humans. And this poor woman was just getting over what looked like almost blood poisoning or something. And she's getting over it.

So we do little rituals like lighting candles, repeating the refuges and precepts. But if we were to believe that that was a part, that itself would help us to become liberated, then that, of course, would be a severe delusion. So it's going back to those days where people might have thought certain rituals, undergoing certain rituals were cleansing.

So that would then be undermined by this insight, which would be telling the person who has it that the path is one of purification. So remember, the Buddha only taught two things: the path of purification, which is getting rid of all these defilements within us, and the path of insight, which is seeing things as they really are.

So what do we mean when we say things really are? Well, we mean how we cause suffering. So there's the process of desire and how it leads us into a certain ways of attachment. How that attachment then begins to create people, situations, things that we don't like. Because as soon as you're attached to something, you're cutting off the other bit that you're not attached to. So you immediately create a conflict. And then there's impermanence. So that's the three things: *dukkha, anicca, anattā.*

And impermanence is really driving home that everything comes to an end. I mean, we're very good at noticing beginnings, you know, the beginning of a film, the beginning of... Well, you see these pop stars come and then they disappear. You don't know what happened to them. There's all things like that. It's really beginning to recognize that everything comes to an end. So after you finish a meal to recognize this is one less lunch in this lifetime. After you finish the day, this is one day less of my living. And it's slowly driving it home, coming to terms with the fact of what impermanence really means for us.

Our gaze is always averted towards the beginning and sustaining. So as soon as the ending comes, we're thinking of something else. We're on to the next film. We're on to the next holiday. What am I going to do when I retire? What am I going to do when I retire?

And the final one is this *anattā*, this not-self. So the easiest way to investigate this *anattā* is, he states it in the discourse on not-self, is to see what, when you talk about this body or this mind or my mental state, how much control have we got of it? How much control do we have over it? Then you realize that your control isn't absolute. So if your control is not absolute over something, it can't be you. That's the definition of me, that I'm in control. So that's how he begins the discourse. He said, if this body were mine, I'd make it grow taller, I'd make my hair grow more, etc., etc. But you can't. There are certain things you simply can't do. So we find that this sense of control over us, over this organism, is quite surface. I can move my arms around and all that, but I can do things with my body, but once my back goes, that's the end of it. I've learned that the hard way.

So all those three chains, shackles, disappear. That fundamental idea of identity, even though the notion is snapped, it still stays with us to the very end as conceit. So it's not as though you get rid of that sense of self just because you've had this insight. The doubt goes, though it may reappear in different forms, but doubt in the Dhamma itself is usually rock solid. Sorry, faith in the Dhamma itself is usually rock solid. And a distinction

between why you do little rituals and they're not actually going to create salvation or purification. So that word salvation, although it's a Christian word, it actually does mean healing.

Now, it's only until we come to the second level, the once returner, that these two major things are undermined, which is our sensual desires and all our aversions. But they're only attenuated. They're not actually destroyed. And that only happens when you get to the third level, the non-returner. So that's why a person who's at the third level doesn't come back because they're not interested in sensual pleasure anymore. It's as simple as that. And their happiness comes from these absorptions and these beautiful mental states that they can achieve.

So finally, when we get to Arahant, these two things, the *jhānas*, these absorptions, are now no longer places to indulge. It doesn't mean to say that they can't achieve them, because the Buddha was often going through the *jhānas*. But they weren't something that they would be attached to as a source of personal pleasure. So the awareness would always be there.

Finally, this conceit goes, which is that sense of I am. So conceit always draws us into a comparison. So I'm better than somebody. All right. So that's obvious pride. I'm worse than somebody that often masquerades as humility. You know, I'm not as good as so-and-so. And then finally, there's a more subtle one about we. If I say, well, I'm right, and I can get a few other people to say, I'm right, I agree with you, this sense of I, of the conceit, grows because now it becomes we. It's not just I believe this, it's we believe this. So there's that more subtle sense of conceit, whereas normally we might think, oh, well, that's not conceit, that's not pride, but it's just an extension of our conceit.

Restlessness goes. This restlessness is all the remaining defilements that are there. But now they're so fine, they're so disempowered that they finally just disappear. But it's understood that even after liberation, there are still traces of those habits in the mind. And if you read what Meichi Kyao says, that's exactly what she says. She says she still gets these little traces in the mind of greed, aversion and delusive ideas, but none of them ever enter into her heart. So in other words, this sense of awareness is always something distinct. And that's where she is.

And then finally, that ignorance, really, that's just a blanket statement that all ignorance has gone and the delusion that arises from it. And that fundamental ignorance, of course, is the definition of who I am.

So these are your ten fetters and they are shackles. So if they're shackles, something must be unshackling. So something is being shackled by these shackles. So what we discover, of course, is that the very thing that's being unshackled is awareness. So every time you sit in meditation and you see an object, that object can't be you. No matter what you're seeing inside yourself, whether it's a feeling or a thought or some sort of physical sensation, as soon as you turn it into an object, this awareness is separating out from it. And that process of separation is the process of unshackling. And that's where the sense of release comes from, the sense of relief. And that's why the Buddha says the taste of Nibbāna is freedom. The taste of *Nibbāna* is freedom.

That's it. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. That it has not driven you into deep sleep and somnolence. And that by your diligence you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 244

Good Friendship, Good Companionship, Good Comradeship - Ubuntu

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 26 min

> *In this illuminating talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma unpacks the Buddha's profound statement to Ānanda that good friendship, good companionship, and good comradeship constitute the entire spiritual life—not merely half of it. Drawing from the Upaddha Sutta (SN 45.2), he distinguishes between these three levels of spiritual relationship: our broader friendship circle, the companions we practice with on retreat, and the wider saṅgha of all those connected to the Buddha's teachings.*
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> *Bhante then introduces the South African concept of Ubuntu—'I am because of who we all are'—as a lens for understanding our fundamental interconnectedness. Using the five khandhas (body, feelings, perceptions, saṅkhāras, and consciousness) as a framework, he demonstrates how everything we are is mediated through relationships with others: from the food we eat to the clothes we wear, from our emotional patterns learned from parents to our very capacity for language and social interaction. The poignant example of a feral child raised among chickens illustrates how profoundly our humanity depends on human connection.*
>
> *Connecting this to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's (MN 10) refrain of contemplating phenomena 'internally, externally, and both internally and externally,' Bhante encourages practitioners to recognize this constant flow of mutual influence. He also shares the Kukkuravatika Sutta (MN 57) about the dog-duty and ox-duty ascetics to emphasize how our habitual patterns—our saṅkhāras—shape our future. The talk offers a practical invitation to bring greater awareness to our interdependence, recognizing that through this awareness comes the power of wise choice and the path toward liberation.*

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I'm going to investigate this phrase that the Buddha says. Ananda was his companion for the last twenty years of his life. He was a cousin of his, and he had a contract with the Buddha that whatever the Buddha taught, even if it was to the devas, he had to come back and tell Ananda what it was. Anyway, Ananda used to get things wrong.

At one point he says to the Buddha, "Bhagavan, I think good companionship is half the spiritual life." And the Buddha says, "Oh no, Ananda"—he always says "Oh no, Ananda"—"This is the entire spiritual life, Ananda. That is good companionship, good friendship, good comradeship. And when a person has good friends, a good companion and a good comrade, it is to be expected that they will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path."

So we're going to investigate that a little bit.

Using these words in a slightly different way: good friendship—that's really all the people whom you know. They compete from the intimate to just acquaintance, your friendship group, your social friendship group. It's an encouragement if you have amongst that group people who are keen on the Dhamma. That's what you might say is an understanding of your friendship group. You can tell a person about the company they keep—you've heard that one.

Good companionship: these are the people whom you spend some time with. They might not be within your particular friendship group. They could have been here, for instance. The people who are with you on retreat are your companions, your spiritual companions for this time. You can be motivated by them. You can have what you might call a wholesome envy for people who seem to be able to practice better than you—because it's all in your mind, of course. You don't know what's going on in their head.

And then finally, good comradeship. We use the word comrade, don't we? It sort of connects us with the Communist Party, so it gives you an idea that your comradeship extends to all people who are connected with the Buddha's teachings. When you go to a festival or something—if you went to the London Buddhist Vihara for their Buddha Day, there'd be so many people there you wouldn't know any of them apart from just a handful. But you get that sense of comradeship.

So that's what the Buddha says, but exactly how deep does that go? I don't know whether you've come across Ubuntu. I'm not talking about the programming—I'm talking about the actual word itself. It's a South African word used by people even in Zimbabwe, all the people that live down there: Xhosa, Zulu and all that. And this is what they say: "I am because of who we all are."

You could translate that as "I am my relationships." For those of you who know Krishnamurti, that was one of his big statements: we are our relationships. How true is that?

If we look at the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse, there's a recurring phrase, a recurring refrain that says they meditate on an aspect of the body, or feelings, or mental states, or a teaching of the Dhamma, internally, externally, and both internally and externally. We're going to have a look at that.

To make it easy for us, I'll use the schema that the Buddha uses in terms of a cross-section of a human being: there's the body, there's feelings, perceptions, all our habits where the will comes in, and consciousness.

If you just think about the body itself, where does it come from? Did you choose it? You just ended up in it.

You woke up one day and thought, "God, this is my body." So it's a case of recognizing that the body itself is not something that you have or even own, because it has its own life force, doesn't it? I mean, what is it? It's just a collection of cells—billions of cells just doing their own thing. And we've also got these guest cells in the gut to keep us going. So there's this whole dimension of connection with the body itself.

And through the body, there's dependency obviously on nature—air, water, food, plants. But it's all mediated through human beings, isn't it? All the food we get is mediated through human beings. They grow it, they collect it, they sell it to us at ridiculous prices. And then we eat it. And most of it, virtually all of it, is processed—some of it just gently processed. All this stuff is cancer-producing, so we've got to thank them for that. And if you think about air, how it's being affected by human beings at this present time in our history... And the water, oh my goodness, the sewage and all that.

So you can see that even at that cellular level, there's this connection going on, this incoming information. And the way we produce and the way we work with it—then we produce it. If you're cooking, you're actually producing something from what somebody else is giving you. It's passing through you. So if you say, "This is my cheesecake, it's a wonderful cheesecake," it's not quite right to say it's mine, is it? Because all the ingredients belong to somebody else. And that goes for things like clothes—all our clothes are mediated through the fashion industry. Except mine. Mine was set by the brother. He gave me this great freedom that in the morning I don't have to wake up and wonder whether I'm going to wear blue. It's just there.

And the dwellings—they're all constructed, all designed by architects and builders. The medicines that we take are all invented, developed by people, and they're given to us by people—doctors, nurses. So you can see that everything we have is being mediated into us, and we then share it one way or another.

Since I had this sciatica, I've got boxes of medicines. I've got chemistry—I've got a chemist in my room at the moment because they keep giving you these medicines and then you read the label and the instructions and you think, "Oh my gosh." So they sort of build up on your shelf. Everything, virtually everything—even the water, town water, it's got chlorine in it and stuff like that. It's all coming in, we're doing something with it, and then we give it out.

And yet we still have this perception of a body, of something substantial that doesn't change. There's always some concept that we have about our bodies which remains static, even though it's changing before our very eyes. But the concept holds it together—that's what concepts do, they hold things together into a whole. And then we presume that that is real. That's the problem.

So for instance, if you were to lose an arm or a leg, it would be a loss, but it wouldn't undermine that sense of "I." It would change it, but you're still me, aren't you? I'm still me—even if you have to hop everywhere.

There's this word you might come across called proprioception. It means that you know where the body is at all times. It's not conscious—you just know whether it's standing up or falling over. You're generally aware of that, unless you've had too much to drink. And there's that sense of force, the heaviness of the body, the lightness of it.

Now, you might have noticed that when you're on retreat, you sometimes get this perception that your arm's over here, your head's on top of your knee—you've got this sort of dislocation of the body in places. That's because the information from the body is not coming up into the mind, the brain, to be able to position you. You've lost contact with the body. The body's become so relaxed that it's not sending the signals, so the mind makes things up. That should really warn us about the mind—it's constantly making things up.

If you think of the artistry of sports people—tennis players and footballers—they never think about their bodies, do they?

Those serves are coming at them about 100 miles an hour, aren't they? And somehow they hit it back. I've always been amazed at that.

So this body is always in relationship with something else. When you're walking down the street, you're constantly dodging pedestrians. If it's a crowded place, you don't think about it, but the body's always moving. Why? Because you're in relationship with these other people.

When you walk up a set of stairs, you might find yourself feeling enclosed, and your body shrinks a bit. If you're with somebody who has power over you—your boss or something like that—whether you like it or not, your body shrinks. And if you happen to be powerful and over somebody, whether you like it or not, you'll be extending your body. It's just the way we manifest these things.

You're always negotiating your situation with the floor when you're walking on it, or with the couch lying on it, or when you're in the bed. Even then you're constantly shaping your body to make it fit in with your surroundings. And when you walk with people, it depends. If they're fast walkers, you've got to adjust your pace to them. And if they're slow walkers, you've got to slow down a bit. So there's this constant communication going on. Most of it, of course, is completely subconscious.

Now, if you go on YouTube, there's an interesting little thing about a feral child, this poor man. When he was a young kid, his parents thought he had an evil spirit in him. So they stuck him in the chicken coop. Would you believe that? And he was in there from about the age of two or two and a half or something.

There was a woman, an Australian woman, Elizabeth Clayton, who lived in Fiji. And when she heard about this, she went to see him. Basically, if you look at the first video, he's standing like a chicken—these are his arms—he's standing like that. And he's clawing the floor with his foot, like chickens do. Unfortunately, we don't hear him squawk or anything like that. I don't know whether he actually copied their voices.

But when he got too big to be in the chicken coop around about eight, nine, ten, they stuck him in an old people's home and tied him to a bed. And that's where she found him. So he'd been like that for twenty-plus years. Twenty years tied to a bed.

When she found him, of course, she had some sort of background education, some training with children who had educational difficulties and whatnot. But she definitely took him under her arm. And then she went on to set up an orphanage. But he can't speak—he's gone beyond the ability to speak. If you don't learn to speak within four years or so, that's it, you've lost it. All the social graces, what people's faces mean and the way their faces change to express certain emotions and relationships, all that he slowly began to pick up. But he never will be fully adapted to human life. He's been absolutely crunched.

So that tells us how important our parents were, and our siblings, cousins, all the friends we've had, because it's this constant communication on how we speak and how we relate to people.

So when it comes to the senses, the senses themselves are just gateways for objects to come into the body. They themselves are empty of the objects, remember? That's why it would be horrible, wouldn't it, if your tongue had a basic taste of curry. How would you get to enjoy pizza? Or cheesecake, for that matter. It would be horrible.

So it's a case of recognizing that the senses themselves are absolutely empty of what they are aware of, what they sense. And that of course refers us back to awareness itself. Awareness itself is empty of everything it's aware of. And that's the process of awakening—but that's just by the side.

So a nose doesn't have a scent. Thank heavens.

Our relationship to the world out there is completely based upon what our senses will give us. Obviously, if you're colorblind, you're seeing a world different from most. If you're deaf, then you're unable to experience that level of communication.

What does the Buddha call it? *Ayatana*—that sphere, that dimension of human communication. If you're unable to access it, you're cut off from a whole realm of experience. A lot of people lost their sense of smell through COVID, you see. So flowers aren't what they were. They can see them, but they haven't got that ability to appreciate their fragrance.

And every time you sense something, it's always changing the concept you have of it. The word for that is perception. Every time you have an apple, it changes your concept of an apple. It might be ever so slight—you might not be aware of it—but every time you see an apple, your concept of an apple is ever so slightly changed.

So that also tells us about this constant communication, this interrelatedness that we have with the world through our senses, and even more so with persons. Every time you meet somebody whom you know, you have a concept of them, you have a way of being with them. And during that conversation, during that meeting, it'll ever so slightly change. So there's again that constant relationship.

When it comes to feelings and emotions, the medieval philosophers thought of human beings as four types: choleric is the angry type, melancholic the sad type, then there was the sanguine who was the happy type, and the phlegmatic—the one who was lazy, couldn't be bothered. If you actually define people in that sort of very simple way, then you can see they have a certain emotional life, which is then again mediated through the people whom they meet. And they probably copied their parents in some way or other.

So again, it's a case of recognizing that all this stuff is being mediated to us—through television, YouTube, social media, whoever you meet. We're constantly being changed. And we are changing, of course. Don't forget that. We also have an effect on others. But it's just a recognition that nothing is static here. Not even our emotional life is static. It's always changing.

And we have a power. This is the whole point of moving into habits. We have a power to change ourselves. This is the point.

So we've talked a little bit about concepts and perceptions—this word, our perception of how things change. Even on a wider scale of society, you know, there was a time in this country where if you insulted the monarch—*lèse-majesté*—well, you could have your head chopped off. And there was a time you could actually declare your desire for republicanism quite openly, even during the king or queen's appearance. But now you get arrested. So it just shows you how times change. You know that, don't you? There were the Republicans at Charles's coronation. They went and arrested them, for heaven's sake. That made world news.

So then we come to habits. These are *sankharas*. They are translated as volitional conditionings, by which we mean this is what we really have the power to change and the power to grow. The power to get rid of when we don't want them.

We find in our lives that we might have had a certain understanding which produced a certain type of behavior. And then when you came across the Buddha's teaching, you find yourself changing. That ability to change from one type of behavior to another is to do with our volitional conditionings. And this is our work. In terms of spiritual life, that's our work. You can't do much about your senses, but you can definitely do something about your habits.

So I want to read a little bit here from the discourses. This is a discourse about two ascetics. There were some very strange ideas during the Buddha's time—probably equally strange to some of the stuff you get these days. But the idea held by these two ascetics was that they were, in a sense, trying to beat karma by being what they might be at some future time. So they were practicing dog asceticism and cow asceticism.

I don't know—there's a lot of humor in the discourses, and you never know whether this is actually for real or not. But definitely it points to the fact that some people had some very strange practices.

So there was Punna, the son of the Koliyans. Now the Koliyans were actually on the opposite side of the Sakyans on that river. They almost got into a war over water rights. It's interesting, isn't it? Two thousand five hundred years ago they had water rights. And they would have been connected some way. They would have been very close as peoples, you know.

Anyway, the son of the Kaleans was an ox-duty ascetic, and also Seniya, who was a naked dog-duty ascetic, went to see the Blessed One. Punna, the ox-duty ascetic, paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at one side. Seniya, the naked dog-duty ascetic, exchanged greetings with the Blessed One, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, he too sat down by the side and curled up like a dog.

When Punna, the ox-duty ascetic, sat down, he asked the Blessed One, "Venerable Sir, this naked dog-duty ascetic Seniya does what is hard. He eats his food when it is thrown on the ground. That dog duty has long been taken up and practiced by him. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Enough, Punna, let it be. Don't ask me."

A second time he goes through this rigmarole—"Please, can you tell me what will happen?"—and a third time Punna, the ox-duty ascetic, asks, "Venerable Sir, this naked dog-duty ascetic does what is hard to do. He eats his food when it is thrown on the ground. That dog duty has long been taken up and practiced by him. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Well, Punna, since I certainly cannot persuade you when you ask and I say 'Enough, Punna, let it be, do not ask,' I shall therefore answer you. Hear, Punna. Someone develops the dog duty fully and unstintingly, develops the dog habit fully and unstintingly, develops the dog mind fully and unstintingly, develops dog behavior fully and unstintingly. Having done that, on the dissolution of the body after death, he reappears in the company of dogs. But if his view is such that 'this is virtue or duty or asceticism or religious life, I shall become a great god or some lesser god,' that is wrong view. Now there are two destinations for one who has wrong view, I say: hell or the animal womb. So, Punna, if his dog duty is perfected, it will lead him to the company of dogs, and if it is not, it will lead him to hell."

When this was said, Seniya the naked dog-duty ascetic wept and shed tears. Later in the discourse, of course, they become disciples of the Buddha. In the discourses, anybody who comes to ask the Buddha, it's very rare for them not to become a disciple.

To sum up, there's this lovely word: osmosis. In a chemical sense, it's when one solvent passes through a semi-permeable membrane into another one—the water goes into the salty one, trying to even each other out. But osmosis is also used figuratively to mean the gradual and unconscious assimilation of ideas and knowledge. I think that's what has been happening to us ever since we were born. Without knowing it, you take things in, you work with them from your own perspective, your own little experience of life, and then you give them out through the way you speak, the way you act, and what you do. There is this constant to and fro of things. Nothing is ever still, nothing is ever steady.

If you think about it, everything that we have or experience is somewhere connected to other human beings. In that sense, you can return to this idea of Ubuntu—"I am because of what you all are, I am because of what we all are." We've lost that sense in the West because we've gone for individualism, and that's unfortunate. We go around thinking, "I do my own thing in my own way, in my own time." That was the old hippie way.

Having reflected on that, it's a case of recognizing that this flow is constantly going on. That's what the Buddha says—to be aware of what is internally happening, to be aware of what is externally happening, and to be aware internally and externally. That's what he's asking us to do all the time in the discourse. Although the Satipatthana Sutta is centered upon the actual practice of meditation, remember there's a whole section about ordinary daily life, about how we behave in ordinary daily life. When he addresses that, the same refrain comes through: internally, externally, both internally and externally. It's simply making ourselves more and more aware of that, that's all. The more aware you are of something, the more your choice is there.

Now, it's not as though you've got free will exactly. It's a conditioned choice, because you know which way you're going to go. For instance, if you decide to go for a walk and you've got your map, and you come to a crossroad, you've got to figure out which road to take—especially if you've got multiple offshoots. It's recognizing that and beginning to make the right decisions that draw us closer and closer to happiness. That's all we want, isn't it? A bit of happiness.

For heaven's sake—that's all any of us really want.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and that through your practice—inwardly, outwardly, both inwardly and outwardly—you will be led to ultimate liberation sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 245

Paṭicca Samuppāda Revisited

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 44 min

> *In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides practitioners through paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), describing it as the central pillar from which all Buddha's teachings emerge. He explores how avijjā (not-knowing) creates the delusive self-relationship that perpetuates suffering, examining each of the twelve links: from initial ignorance through saṅkhāra (mental formations), viññāṇa (consciousness), nāmarūpa (mind-body), the six sense bases, contact, vedanā (feeling), taṇhā (desire), upādāna (grasping), bhava (becoming), jāti (birth), and jarāmaraṇa (aging and death).*
>
> *Drawing on the Buddha's victory verse, Bhante explains how the 'house builder' represents our false sense of self—not a thing but a relationship between knowing and experience. He illuminates two key escape points in the cycle: between vedanā and taṇhā (the primary focus of meditation practice), and at the root level of avijjā itself. The teaching emphasizes how renunciation—even small acts of non-indulgence—undercuts the delusive self that drives our suffering.*
>
> *Practical insights include understanding identity as complete absorption (losing sense of self), recognizing that all experience happens through the six sense doors, and seeing how consumer culture exploits our desire for excitement over genuine happiness. Bhante concludes by exploring the nature of awareness itself—empty like the tongue that can taste all flavors precisely because it has no inherent taste.*

I'd just like to begin by first of all apologizing to Cassidy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I thought just to go through dependent origination. I'm presuming that most of you haven't been through it in any detail. If you want, you can use this little booklet here and we'll just go through it. From dependent origination it forks off into all the other teachings of the Buddha. All these little sections fork away into other teachings. So it's a central pillar of the Buddha's dispensation.

We'll come back to the victory verse, but I just want to point you to the last line: *visamkāragataṁ cittaṁ*. *Samkāra* just means something compounded. *Citta* here is referring to mind, consciousness, and what he's saying is that there is an unconditioned consciousness. And there's nothing in our experience of the world which is not conditioned.

Page six. Everybody on it? We're on the same page. Very good. We'll probably come back to that.

So we start with this word *avijjā*. *Vijjā* just means knowing. So something's not knowing. It's not ignorance. It's not a pejorative thing. Just don't know. And it's a place where we don't like to be. It creates a little confusion for us. It creates a certain sense of anxiety because we like to know.

I just had an email from Wey who's coming to teach with me at Gaia. She says it's been yonks since I've been to Gaia - where do I park and what do I do? So I wrote back and said, as soon as you come in through the gate, you will see where to park because it's on your left. And then make your way to the office. So now I'm waiting for her to reply and say, where's the office?

So I think we'll all find that whenever you don't know something, there's always that little tremor. Like, don't know what's going to happen. So this place of don't know is a place for us to explore.

So what's happened is that we didn't know and we made a mistake. We presumed. What was the presumption? Well, if we go back to the Buddha's victory verse, he says, I've traveled through rounds of countless births, seeking but not finding the house builder. Who's doing this? Who the hell keeps making me go through life after life?

And then he says, painful is birth over and over and over again. Oh, house builder, I've found you. You've been caught, I've got you. You won't build another house for me. Your rafters have been broken, your ridge pole demolished. And of course, what he's referring to is this self.

So this self is a relationship. It's not a thing, it's a relationship. Selfing. It's about something in us identifying with something else. And something in us that through that identity possesses things.

So what do we mean by identity? If you catch your finger in the door or you bite your tongue, just for that one moment, you, the tongue and the pain are completely one. That is identity. And then you jump out and you punch yourself on the nose, which

means you're stupid. Because you're angry, or you're upset, or whatever. So now you're identifying with emotions. You've separated from the tongue, you can feel the pain, but now you're the one who's angry with it.

So identity is when you actually lose the sense of self. You become what it is that you identify with. So it happens, for instance, when you're watching a video. You turn the video on, two hours pass. Where have you been? Where's the sense of self gone? You've been completely absorbed in the story. Then you come out of it, you suddenly wake up and there you are. You say, that was a good video, wasn't it?

So identity is that point where you actually lose a sense of self. But it's also a complete identity with the self. And when you come out of that identity, you have a different relationship. You own it or you want to disown it. So obviously the pain in the tongue, from biting the tongue, you want to disown it. But if you have a mobile, you definitely want to own it.

And of course, what we discovered is that this self is a false identity. There's something happening there. We'll come back to it. And the sense of possessing something is a delusion. When a thief steals your mobile and you go around saying, somebody's stolen my mobile, he keeps saying, it's my mobile. It's not yours, is it? It's the thief's. It belongs to the thief now, but you insist that it's my mobile.

So what you begin to realize is actually with objects, you can only use them. To possess them is just going to cause problems. So sometimes it's helpful to imagine what would happen if you either lost or your mobile was stolen. So you have at least a strategy to work with such a situation. And it doesn't take you by so much surprise.

The amount of suffering that comes when you lose something is the measure of your attachments. The amount of fear you have towards losing something, your life, is the measure of your identity with this psychophysical organism.

So all these emotional states are actually telling us something about our relationship. And as human beings, that's what we are, isn't it? We are our relationships. So inwardly, it's my relationship to my body, my emotions, et cetera. Outwardly is my relationship to nature, to people, and so on and so forth. So everything is in this process of relationship, relating one to the other, the one affecting the other.

So although we get the sense of self, which gives us a feel that I'm in charge, that I'm the one who does this, I'm the one who does that, when we investigate it's always some recognition of something affecting me that I'm actually in some form of relationship, some sort of dance with. Well, if it's happy, some sort of dance with either people, objects and so on and so forth.

So this is what the Buddha found. He found that there was a core mistake being made and it was causing him to be reborn and reborn.

So now this *avijjā*. What it is suggesting is that something must not know. When you can't have not knowing and something that doesn't know, that doesn't actually have the not knowing. Something he knows, knows.

Now it's depending upon that *avijjā*, that not knowing, that we create this wrong relationship that we call a self. So a self is a relationship that's happening between the knowing and what it's actually experiencing. The relationship between the knowing and what it's actually experiencing.

So when you look into a mirror and you see yourself there, there's a relationship with what you're looking at. So this knowing has come into this life form, awakens into it at birth and presumes that this is it, this is what I am.

Now, because of that, it begins to create a delusion and it acts through the delusion. Now, what is the essence of that delusion? What's the essence of that delusion? What is this knowing searching for?

So we go back to the Buddha's verse. I've traveled through rounds of countless births, how painful it is to be born over and over again. So this not knowing, this delusion is seeking happiness. And it's seeking happiness in the world that it finds itself in, which is the world of the mind. So there's another little split, so we've got the mind-body split. Well, we'll come to that in a minute.

So what is done in the past is created a whole set of habits based upon this delusion. So all our habits have running underneath it this delusive understanding.

It's because of this movement in the mind that consciousness arises. So consciousness is dependent on an object, and it's dependent on an object because consciously – the English words, it's very difficult to not think of consciousness as something that thinks or that does something – but consciousness here is just a mirror. It's just a screen upon which information arises.

The information is the *samkhāra*. So the *samkhāra* are your habits. What's a habit? Well, it has a physical component, say like eating. It has an emotional component. There's always a feel to something. And it has an understanding component. So if you look at any habit, you can see there's always those three factors: the body, the heart and the mind. And that's the information that's coming upon this screen and that's the meaning here of *viññāṇa*.

Now it's because of *viññāṇa*, because of that consciousness, that there is a realization, a coming realization that there's the body and the mind. So we know that just in popular culture. So for instance a lot of people do yoga for the body and they might do meditation for the mind, so the split is there. We can see it. There are sports which are physically based – football, tennis, et cetera – and sports which are mentally based – chess and things like that.

So you've got this *nāmarūpa* split. Now, this *nāmarūpa*, so the Buddha says that mind is foremost, mind is at the base of everything. So what have we got here? We've got a sense base, the retina. And it's sensitive enough to actually feel subatomic particles. I mean, that's incredible, isn't it? I mean, a tiny, tiny, tiniest of all things, a photon. And it actually feels it. It has actually a felt sense to it.

And at that point of touch with the physical base, the mind is already there. The mind is already there. Otherwise, we wouldn't know it. So you know that from sleep, for instance, your eyes are not open, so you don't see anything. So there has to be a consciousness there. It has to be that screen.

And so as that photon hits the eye, it's not just hitting the physical base, which is a medium for that photon. It's hitting the actual mental, the process of mind. And it's the mind that creates out of that photon the color that you're actually seeing.

This is more obvious with hearing. So at the sense base of hearing, all there is, is a touch. There is no sound. There's no sound in the universe. Just a touch. You can actually experience this. It's just a touch. And then suddenly, not suddenly, next what you get is the mind translating that touch into a sound. And then it gives it a name – bell. Then it gives it a meaning – wake up bell. And only then does the idea of me – I've got to get up. That's the process. And you can actually experience that process in meditation.

There's a very good book on the process of seeing by a woman called Cynthia Thatcher. She died very young, unfortunately. But her book, Seeing – I can't remember, I can give you the name of it. It's a really excellent book on the Mahāsi process. And her big insight was on seeing. And what she says is that there's a point where you're so down at that base level before the mind can work on it, that the world splits into a sort of, you know, the pointillist paintings, little dots. That's what you see, just little dots. And it's all put together.

So here we have that first separation. We've got a couple of separations. We've got the not knowing separating from the habits that the delusive self which has been created has manufactured, and then we've got the split between the habits and how it manifests on the screen of consciousness. And then because of that screen of consciousness we can begin to separate out the body from the mind.

But of course, what we discover is that it's all mind. It's all mind. It's just that mind has a way of contacting matter. But it only contacts matter by way of that gate. It's called a door in Pali. It's a door. And therefore, our experience of the world is entirely dependent upon the sense base.

So obviously, if you're colorblind, you live in a different color world than somebody who has ordinary sight.

Now, it's dependent upon this body-mind split that you have these six sense bases. So again, in the Buddhist teachings, for something to be known, there has to be an object. There has to be a sense base and there has to be that consciousness. There has to be that screen upon which it appears.

And so one way of looking at the human being is that the human being is made up of these six consciousnesses. So there's the five ordinary ones and then the mind. And the mind here is really the mind which is interpreting information. So it's not the higher mind of thought or energetic work. It's just that part of the mind which interprets what's coming in.

So we have two splits. We have the body from the mind and then within that structure of body and mind we have these six sense bases.

Now once the six sense bases are there, once we get there, dependent on all that is the point of contact that we've been talking about, this point of touch. And it's at the point of touch that those three things need to be there, which is the object, the sense base and consciousness, the screen.

Now, once that point is created, the mind begins to separate out what is pleasant and unpleasant. So there's your next split – pleasant and unpleasant. There's a whole bit in the middle, which is neutral. But when you get really close to a neutral feeling, I think you'll see it either shades off into unpleasant or shades off into pleasant. So that's the dual world we live in. We can't go beyond that. Whatever we experience in this world will either be pleasing to us or displeasing. That's a given fact.

Now then we have this self coming in. So now at this point there's a movement towards or away from what we're actually experiencing. And this is that process of desiring. So when something is pleasant, when it's something that we think we're going to enjoy, there's a movement towards grasping it. And when it's something we don't like, we want to push it away, get rid of it.

So there's the beginning of suffering, but it's not actually suffering yet. And this is what we are discovering through this practice, that we can be aware of that process, but that which is aware of the process is not actually suffering. It's standing above it. It's standing apart from it. It's just watching that process.

Now, between those two, the recognition of something pleasant and unpleasant, and this reaction, a learnt reaction, it's coming from the *samkhāra*, the habitual nature, the habits that we have, that's one point of escape. Because by putting our attention there, and allowing this wrong relationship, which manifests as a form of desire, to slowly dissipate, we're undermining that bad habit.

So that's one point of escape from the process of creating suffering for ourselves.

Now, remember, underneath this process now, we've got two things that run underneath. One is the essential delusion. And all the habits are there all the time, just like programs on the computer. They're there all the time. The mind isn't like the computer, by the way, but I'm just... It's running under the mind. It's running underneath every moment of our lives. The habits and the delusion that's creating the habits. And it's dependent upon what's happening at the sense base, which awakens some form of habit.

So if your eye hits the ice cream button, then this desire for ice cream comes up, which will be based upon seeking happiness in food.

Now, once that desire has come up, we have this word *upādāna*. So desire here is translated, I've translated it as desire. They usually translate it as craving. But I've always thought craving was just over the top, really. I mean, at times we do crave, but even the smallest attraction is also part of *taṇhā*. It's not – it can be the smallest little movement in the mind to an addiction.

And then, because of that, we have this next reaction. So these are all reactions. They're not responses. They're not coming from wisdom. They're just something that happens habitually.

Is this *upādāna*. Now, *upādāna* is a grasping. And what's actually happening there is this process of identity. So now that this self manifests, and at that point, it's extremely difficult to stop the next point.

The next point is, of course, to empower the desire. But once you've identified with the desire, you've got to be right on the ball to stop it moving into an action. I've only ever done it once. I was just aware enough to see the desire, to see the grasping, and then just to pull myself out. And what I experienced was a sort of sucking into the object.

It was like I was being sucked in, like into a whirlpool. And I was able, and I just caught it and I pulled myself out. I've only ever done that once. I think it's extremely rare.

So that's why the whole attention of the practice is on the bit that we can grasp quite clearly, which is between feeling, pleasant, unpleasant feeling, and our reaction of desire or aversion. So now here the question arises, well, what is it that is grasping? So remember, although we say the grasping and that's where the me comes in, I, I, what is it that's doing that? So just keep that in the back of your mind.

So now we have, just to repeat that, the self isn't a thing. It's a relationship. It's an identity, it's a relationship that the knowing, some knowing has with what it's actually experiencing. It feels solid, but it isn't.

Now, the next one is dependent upon that, you get this *bhava*, this becoming. And the reason why the Buddha used the word *bhava* there, because he's referring to the self. So the process is not just one self doing things. The process is a continuous selfing. Every time you go through this process, another self is created. And according to the psychology, this can happen quite quickly, even within a minute. You can just be constantly reaffirming your connection to what you want or what you don't want.

But it also includes the becoming, it also includes an action. So whatever that desire was, whatever it attached to, now begins to manifest. And it either manifests as a train of thought or a train of speech or an action. So the becoming is referring back to the self acting out its desires. That's the *bhava*.

Now looking at this more as an immediate process rather than a more traditional way. It's not even traditional now because both ways are taught, but traditionally it was about past lives, this present life and future life. That's why the next one is *jāti* which means birth. But this *jāti* can also be understood as beginning. So as soon as you empower something, there must be a beginning to the action.

And dependent upon that power, you've now got ageing and death of an action. So you've got the beginning of an action, the process of an action, and the completion of the action. So that's seeing this dependent origination as something that's happening now, immediately.

And then, of course, there's this wonderful cascade of horror: death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. So that gets across the message that it's not, we're not having a great time sometimes. The process is not gonna, it's not gonna lead us to the happiness that we seek.

So what is it that doesn't know? What is it that's made the mistake of not knowing? So is it not so that when we are meditating, we're pulling out of what we're experiencing and we're finding this little observation post within ourselves? And in that observation post, we can sense ourselves to be the observer, the feeler, the watcher, the one who knows. And everything is just passing in front of us. Just like a show. Where does that sense of self come from? Because it's even there with the knowing.

So it must be coming because it's a reflection. You're aware of yourself being the observer. You're aware of yourself being the knower. So that must be a reflection. And the only place where you can have a reflection is on that screen of consciousness. So something has pulled itself out of the psychophysical organism, found a place to observe it, and sees itself doing so.

Now, in Buddhist understanding, that can't be happening at the same time. That screen can only flash one sense base. It can only do one at a time. But it's happening so quickly that we get the feeling of continuity and simultaneity. So, for instance, when you're watching a film and chewing your popcorn and you're hearing, there are many senses involved. And to us, it sounds like it's all happening at the same time. But in Buddhist psychology, it's a waterfall of sense bases being awoken one after the other in such a speed that it feels as though it's all at the same time.

And if you think about the old films, the old reel films, which I think is 26 frames per minute or something like that. As you slowed it down, the frames became obvious. So it's the same with us. That's one of the blessings, one of the benefits, shall we say, of the Mahāsi system is that as you slow the whole psychophysical process down, these processes become more and more obvious.

So what is the nature of that awareness? What is the nature of the knowing? So that's what we're chasing. Recognizing that the body and mind are two different things is, should we say, an important understanding because then you might open up the possibility of rebirth. So that allows there to be some sort of karmic justice in the universe. Otherwise it's a bit audible when you think that Stalin died in bed from a heart attack, I think, but he died in bed, nice and warm.

So you can understand that in terms of moral justice, in terms of some sort of justice in the universe, there has to be some movement from one birth to the next where our past behaviours are sorted out. Now, you have to be careful here because it's not at all mechanical. Not at all mechanical. Again it's all about relationship and it's all about how a habit will respond to a particular given situation.

So it might be for instance that somebody dies with a great feeling of generosity in their heart. So that's the main force that's within the next rebirth. So when they're reborn you might say that that's the habit which is uppermost. But they enter into a situation which undermines that quality of generosity, living amongst selfish people, cruel people, etc. And so that begins to undermine that generosity. On the other hand, they could be born into a situation where they are supported in that generosity and they grow more and more in generosity. So it's not a simple case of a direct connection. It's all to do with this relationship. And it's all to do with the being, whatever they are, recognizing where the suffering is and slowly purifying their own hearts.

So eventually, it's just us purifying ourselves of all this negative stuff. And as we were saying this morning, the transition, the movement towards what is beautiful just happens naturally. So putting our concentration upon what is unwholesome, the wholesomeness arises naturally. And that's what they say in Zen. With wisdom, compassion arises naturally. It's just a natural process.

So our spiritual aim is to find out what the nature of that awareness is. What is the nature of that awareness? And we're in a double bind here because the awareness cannot see itself. Just like the eye can't see itself. The tongue cannot taste itself. It doesn't have a taste. If your tongue had a basic taste of curry, how could you ever enjoy ice cream? It's because the tongue is empty of taste that it can have all these different tastes. It's because the eye does not have any sense of light within it that it can receive the light.

So this awareness has nothing in it and that's the meaning of emptiness. That's the meaning of *śūnyatā* that you'll come across which is pushed a great deal in the Mahāyāna tradition because they extend it to everything. Like everything is empty, but it's there in the Theravāda scriptures. The Buddha uses both the words *anattā* not-self referring to the idea of a soul which is permanent and has personality, but he also uses the word *śūnya* which means empty.

So here we have a rather unfortunate situation where we find ourselves in this position of an observer. We're slowly pulling away from everything that we thought was me because you're pointing at it. You're pointing at your body with its pains and its pleasures. You're pointing at the emotions and moods which you thought was really you,

which you felt was you. And you're looking at thoughts and images, especially images that come across the mind. Beginning to realize that this awareness which is pulling itself out isn't actually them. It's not, it's of another order. But in so doing, it creates this sense of self. Now there's your double bind. How are you going to get out of that sense of self in order to experience the true nature of awareness?

And of course, this true nature of awareness is exactly what the Buddha found. So Buddha means the one who knows. That's all it means, the one who knows. So here in his victory verse, the Buddha is talking about something which is being manufactured. That he's found it, he's destroyed it, he's destroyed the process of manufacturing through the delusive self. But he himself, of course, continues.

So once he was liberated, he didn't sit there like a blob and hope the world would come to an end very quickly. He got up and he began to teach. So everything that was already there, all his understanding, the intellect, his imagination, he loves to explain something intellectually and then he loves to give a metaphor. There are hundreds of metaphors in the discourses. And he likes to walk. He walks all over the place. I mean, I know he must have travelled thousands of miles right across that North Indian plain.

So it's not as though he was somebody different. And he also had the same personality. It's not as though his personality changed. It just became purer. He didn't have the nastiness of anger and resentment. And he didn't have the nastiness of indulgence and greed. But it was still, when he appeared to his disciple, they didn't say, have you had a psychotic breakdown or something? Because you're completely different. They immediately recognized him.

And as he's talking to them, this isn't in the scriptures, it's in the Vinaya, in the discourses about the monastic order. He approaches them and he starts talking about the Four Noble Truths. And he interrupts himself by saying, have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say anything like this before? And very slowly, these five disciples, who had rejected him because he'd gone soft, he'd given up on the mortifications, for heaven's sake, began to open up to him. And one of them actually made it. One of them had the eye of the Dhamma, the Dhammacakkha, opened. And the Buddha rejoices. And he actually calls him, oh dear, what's the word? It'll come to me, it'll come to me, it's gone. Aiyo... So annoying. You get to an age when words disappear. Very annoying. Koṇḍañña. Koṇḍañña knows. He's the one who knows. Koṇḍañña, Koṇḍañña. That's what he called him. Koṇḍañña the one who knows and that was the name he gave him.

So he used to give titles to people. So to Sāriputta who was a person who knew the Dharma perhaps as well as the Buddha, he used to call him the general of the Dharma, the Dhamma Senapatī. And then when he comes back, they've gone under arms round, I don't know how long that took, but when they came back the next talk he gives about not-self. And they all become fully liberated. That's how powerful it is.

Now you might think, what? He gives about a half an hour talk on not-self and they all become liberated. But then you have to understand that we have to accept that these people have been practising like mad for so many years with the Buddha. So they're on the edge of enlightenment. All they needed was some sort of guidance. And it was this guidance that liberated them.

So we're coming to the end, so just very quickly just looking down the order of ceasing. So we note here that undermining that delusive self cuts the whole thing. The whole thing collapses like a pack of cards. The entire cessation of this ignorance and all the evil stuff that we've created just simply collapses. That's how important it is. And we're undermining the self every time we renounce that desire to indulge. Because that's how the self manifests, remember. It manifests in indulging. Indulging in what we like and indulging in rejecting what we don't like.

So that greed and aversion is a manifestation of this delusion. And every time we undercut that, we're cutting deep down at the beginning, the root of all our problems. And that's where it begins. So with the entire cessation of this ignorance, all those unwholesome habits disappear. It's as simple as that. It's going to happen this evening.

And then, of course, because of that, everything else starts to disappear. This consciousness disappears. Now, it's not consciousness disappears, it's the consciousness of what is unwholesomeness disappears. If consciousness disappears, then the Buddha would have ended up being a blob, sat on a stone, waiting for the world to come to an end. So you have to read this in a careful way, or else you think, oh my goodness, Nirvāṇa is some sort of blackout, some sort of complete, total annihilation.

And really that's what happened when the Christian missionaries went out in all their forms to places like Burma, Sri Lanka and whatnot. They just couldn't get it. They just thought well this is just annihilation and they thought of Buddhism as being world negative.

There's a book by Schweitzer, Dr. Schweitzer, who was a great philanthropist of last century. And he trained himself to be a doctor and worked out in Africa. And he wrote this book, Buddhism and Christianity. And it was the first book that I read on Buddhism and Christianity. And it was quite clear. Buddhism was life negative and Christianity

was life positive. That was the book. I don't know why they didn't convince me to become a Christian, but it failed. But isn't the same one who was the musician, the organist? No. Oh, right. No, I think he's a philosopher. Dr Schweitzer.

So then everything else begins to collapse, but only collapse in the sense of supporting the delusion, of supporting those habits which are unwholesome. And as we pointed out, the other escape is between the *vedanā*, the feeling, and the reaction of *taṇhā*. So that's when we are renouncing. So the whole of the spiritual life is a process of renunciation. Let go, let go.

Now, at first, when you begin to renounce something, you might feel you've lost something. I mean, have you noticed that? If you don't react to the greed while you're eating, you can try this when, for instance, you prepare yourself something that you really like. And you're maintaining a distance and you're just tasting pleasant sensations. Now, because you're not indulging, there's a level of excitement disappears. And you're not enjoying the food as much as you did before. And you think, oh, there's something wrong with this. I've got to get back to stuffing myself.

But I'm hoping that the talk you heard this morning has convinced you that there's a penalty to pay for that excitement, which is, of course, the frustration, the anger, the anxiety, etc. So you have to let go of something in order to begin to experience pure enjoyment without the suffering. And that's what's so difficult because we just love to indulge. It gives us that little buzz.

And of course, the whole consumer society is based upon that. It's not based upon you being pleasantly happy. It's based upon you being excited. That's why these products change. Even if they only change the look of a mobile, they'll change in order to make you excited. So that, oh yeah, I've got to get that one. So the whole consumer process is driven by that desire for excitement, not happiness. Because when happiness comes, there also comes contentment. You are contented. So you're not chasing things at all. And that happiness is coming from within you, not because of an object.

Now that's a hard thing for us to move towards because it does feel you're losing something in not allowing yourself to indulge. And yes, just the final thing, every time, remember, you renounce that indulgence, even if it's only a little bit, even if it's just, you normally have three or four biscuits and you just say, well, I'm only going to have two. See, even a little renunciation is undercutting that sense of self.

Because it's that delusive self that's creating this wrong desire.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your devotion to the practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 246

Kamma: Specific Conditionality, the Five Laws, Ethical Behaviour, and Social Kamma—Neoliberalism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53 min

In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma begins by examining the Buddha's foundational teaching on specific conditionality (idappaccayatā)—the principle that when this is, that is; from the arising of this comes the arising of that. He explains how this understanding reveals causation as contingent rather than strictly linear, suggesting that multiple conditions converge in each present moment, making outcomes inherently unpredictable.

The talk then explores the five niyāmas or natural laws that govern existence: utu-niyāma (physical laws like weather and chemistry), bīja-niyāma (genetics and heredity), citta-niyāma (psychology), kamma-niyāma (ethical causation), and dhamma-niyāma (the Buddha's liberating teachings). Bhante emphasizes that only kamma-niyāma concerns our moral actions and their fruits—distinguishing clearly between what is personal ethical responsibility and what arises from other natural processes. This understanding prevents the harmful misattribution of genetic conditions or natural disasters to past-life misdeeds.

In the talk's most distinctive section, Bhante applies these principles to social kamma, critiquing neoliberalism as an ideology built on greed and aggressive competition—qualities the Buddha identified as sources of dukkha. He notes with concern that mindfulness has been co-opted as "the religion of neoliberalism," helping workers cope with systemic harm rather than addressing root causes. The teaching concludes with the Buddha's words on generosity from the Itivuttaka, reminding practitioners that purifying the heart and enacting wholesomeness in society creates conditions for collective wellbeing.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

So we're going to approach the problem of karma.

The first thing is the question of how does the Buddha describe how anything happens? How do things happen? It's called the law of this and that—also called specific conditionality. I shall read the equations:

When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the stopping of this comes the stopping of that.

When I first read it, I thought, "What?" But if we now put two statements together, it becomes a little more obvious.

The first pairing is: from the arising of this comes the arising of that, and from the stopping of this comes the stopping of that. This is linear cause and effect. The fact that you came here—you decided at some point to come on the course, you made that decision, you empowered it, and you came here. So from the arising of that, you arose at Gaia House. If you had thought about it, or you had some reason that you couldn't come, because you stopped coming, you did not arise at Gaia House. This is a linear way that we would normally think about cause and effect.

The other pairing is: when this is, that is, and when this isn't, that isn't. Now that brings us directly into the present moment where things happen simultaneously. We all arrive here and the course begins, and every time you arrive it's a new occasion for meditating together, listening to a talk. If you didn't arrive, it wouldn't happen. It's extremely simple.

Now, if it were just linear, then where would creativity come in? Wouldn't it suggest a repetitiveness, a monotony, one after the other? There'd be nothing to stop the original intention; it would just keep repeating itself. But if it were just immediate, then there would be no order—it would be chaotic. Things would arise, collapse, and then for no other reason things would arise and collapse again.

When you put these two together, you get a cause coming from the past into the present moment where it meets other causes coming from the past into this present moment. So it's much clearer to talk about how things happen as a process of contingency. Every moment, lines of decisions—not only that, but nature, whatever's happening in the outside world, the birds—constantly coming to meet in this present moment.

When we think about karma in that sense, you can see it's very difficult to sort out what's my personal karma, what's the karma from somebody else, what's the karma of the situation. But we'll come to that in a minute.

If we have this idea of contingency rather than some linear process, we're getting close to what the Buddha talked about. This is suggestive of chaos theory, which some of you might know, where an initial impulse supported by conditions just changes and grows or diminishes. The example that's normally given is the weather. One scientist said that a butterfly wing in the south of America, with supporting conditions, becomes a tornado in North America.

In any given moment, we don't actually know what is coming into that present moment. Luckily, when you live in a peaceful country, you can almost predict what's going to happen. But of course, that would lead us into a delusion that the future is predictable.

This specific conditionality underlies everything. It not only underlies what's happening in the world out there, it underlies our own minds. Because you don't know what is coming in from the outside and how you're responding from the inside. So it's a constant moment-after-moment creativity. Nothing can repeat itself.

Now, when we come to the actual karma that's important—which is our moral actions, our ethical actions—again, it's very difficult to know what is actually happening. When we're receiving something, when something is happening, it's hard to know whether it's personal karma or not.

The Buddha talks about five different laws. The first one is called the law of heat, and it refers to just basic chemistry and physics. Something like a tsunami, for instance. A tsunami is caused by shifting plates, and when the tsunami hit Sri Lanka, Thailand, places like that, of course a lot of people died.

Some would have thought that this was caused by bad karma in the past. Somewhere in the past they'd done some harm—they'd have to find some sort of excuse for that tsunami creating such suffering. Others would have been a bit more philosophical, in the sense of saying, "Well, everything's impermanent." These sorts of perspectives can undermine the strength of trauma that people can have when something like that happens.

I was told that when Western counsellors went out there to see if they could help, they found that people weren't particularly traumatized because they have this understanding. Nothing is safe, nothing is permanent. Things happen.

So that's one law, which is to do with nature, you might say.

The next one is to do with seed—that's what it's called—so it's genetics. The body you've ended up with is not your personal karma. We know it's part of the family, coming from your family's genetic history. So if somebody is born with a genetic disease, that is not personal karma. That is something that has happened through the birth process. If somebody has a difficult birth and ends up with trauma, that isn't their personal karma. It's not as though they were meant to have that. It's just that when you enter into this life form, things happen, and that's the end of it.

You have to be careful here because sometimes people get confused, thinking that what happens to them physically through their genetics is somehow caused by some bad action, always in the past life.

The third one is citta, the mind. This is our psychology—the basic ability of the mind, its capacity to think, to speak, to solve problems. It's what we would normally think of as our psychology. We're born with this body, and perhaps the brain is not quite so quick as somebody else's brain, but if you were to say that this is your personal karma, that you've caused it because of some action in the past, that would be either untrue or unprovable. It seems the whole body-mind process that we have is not specifically caused by moral or immoral actions in the past.

The fourth one is karma, but I'll move on to the fifth, which is dharma. That's all the teachings of the Buddha—the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, Dependent Origination. All these are dharma, the teachings which allow us to escape from suffering.

So if we go back to karma: an intention comes, we've seen that clearly, we empower it, and it produces an action. When you repeat similar actions, you develop a habit. When you put all your habits together, that's your personality. Once you've got a personality and character, you're moving towards your destiny. Things will happen because of your character and personality. Our job from a karmic point of view is to realize that it's our moral decisions that will determine whether we suffer or not.

In the Buddha's own experience, when he went through the process of awakening, he saw three things clearly. He saw all his past lives, which showed him how he ended up being fully liberated. He saw how beings moved from one realm to another according to their moral and ethical actions. And he knew that he himself had no more defilements—he was purified. What was a personal insight for him, seeing the process of his life after life and how he became fully liberated, then became a universal law as far as he was concerned.

So our actions, our intended actions, even habitual actions—actions that we don't consciously decide but which have a moral or ethical quality to them—are going to produce certain results. The general law is: if you do something good, good comes of it. If you do something harmful, harm comes of it.

But it's a case of recognizing that even if you do something good, you could undermine it by doing something harmful. And if you do something harmful, you can undermine its effect by doing something good. For instance, if I were to say a sharp word to somebody and upset them, I can very easily stop the possibility of their hating me by simply apologizing. It's not as though there's some rigid process where once we do

something harmful, a fixed consequence will follow. Because it goes into a sort of matrix out there in the world and a matrix in us. The effect we can never be absolutely sure of.

There was a charity, for instance, which sent secondhand clothes to an African country. What happened was it undermined the local tailor trade, and in doing so, undermined the local economy. They had to pull out. Compassionate action also has to be accompanied by wisdom, by knowledge. You can't just do something because you think it's a good thing. They did something they thought was good, and it was—there's no problem with it—but within the situation it created an unfortunate outcome and they had to withdraw.

So you can see that the whole process of karma is very difficult to work with if you're going to be logical, if you're going to try and think about consequences. A person might do something terrible, but because of the surrounding situation, nothing happens from it. We know that so many burglaries aren't even being approached by the police. There are many burglars out there who are getting away with it.

Now, they might be getting away with it in terms of society, but not within the heart. Because every time they burgle, they are actually developing that desire of taking something not freely given and enjoying it, taking it for their own personal enjoyment. At some point there has to be some reflection of that—either in themselves as something harmful, where there's a sense of guilt and shame, or they get caught and end up in prison.

In the process of rebirth, it's not as though it's a linear thing—that in the next lifetime they will be caught and punished. It's not quite like that. It simply is that when they are reborn, they take with them that attitude. And at some point, the universe, you might say, or the cosmos, or the people around them—perhaps a bit more grounded—begin to mirror back to them exactly what they're doing. So there's a sort of moral justice that's written into this process, as far as the Buddha's concerned.

Now, some of the talks mention this rebirth business. Do remember that this isn't a belief system. It's not as though you have to believe any of this stuff, because the process of liberation is the process of investigation. If you believe something, then there's a possibility you don't make it true for you. It doesn't work to just say, "I believe what the Buddha said, and therefore I'll become enlightened." It doesn't work like that. He's always putting to us certain propositions and saying, "Is this true for you?" So it's not a matter of whether we believe in rebirth or not. It's a case of just leaving open that possibility. Don't shut it down.

I'm reminded of Pascal's dictum. Pascal was an eighteenth-century mathematician, and during that era of growing science, there were people who didn't believe in God anymore—positivists and such. What he said was: there may or may not be a God, but it might be wise to act as if there was one. Similarly, there may or may not be rebirth, but it might be wise to act as if there is.

So that actually takes us to this law. We've understood this basic underlying conditionality, which has to do with contingency. It's not linear. You never know exactly what's going to happen. And then within that we have all these laws—laws to do with nature, with heredity, with psychology, which of course is also connected to society—and I'll come back to that when we discuss social karma. And then finally there's karma itself, which is this specific area to do with suffering, and finally the dharma.

So be clear about the ethical part. What the Buddha is saying is that it's the way we behave ethically which is either going to make us happy or unhappy. And that's what we've been really investigating with this whole business of eating, for example. We notice that when we fall into a habit of "me" or "mine," some level of greed or self-service, there's always going to be this dissatisfaction. That's where the suffering lies—in trying to seek happiness in the wrong place. And this seeking of happiness in the sensual world is the cause of all our mental diseases.

If we go back to, say, a child—and this is quite difficult to accept—if a child is abused, the reaction is the child's reaction. It's not caused directly by the person who abused the child. The abuse is physical, it may be emotional, but the suffering comes because of that reaction. The trauma is an inward process.

For instance, if somebody came and hit me on the nose and shouted at me, the pain stops here, and the feeling of anger hits me here. Everything else is an internal process, a reaction, and that's my trauma. That's why I can be cured of it. If my suffering was caused by you, in order to bring about the end of my suffering, I'd have to get rid of you. It's only because my suffering is caused by me that I can be rid of it.

Now, when we think about that, it doesn't excuse the abuser. It's not a case of saying, "Oh well, the abuser didn't cause the trauma, so we don't have to worry about that." No. The abuser also has to accept that he was the initial impetus that caused the whole problem.

And the triggers? They're just opening up that trauma. So it's an occasion for the person to work with it. Why not? In my own experience, I've had true childhood traumas come up. When we talk about traumas, there's undoubtedly harm done by parents,

family members, and others to children—that's the last word on it. But remember also that the child comes in with their own mentality. So, in my own experience, I walked into the front room—

My grandfather was sat on a chair. I couldn't have been much more than two years old—two, three months, four months. And I went to shake him and he didn't move. So I said to myself, "They've killed him. Now they're going to kill me."

When that memory came to mind, I was that child. That's always the sign of a trauma—that you relive that moment totally. And it's the same with past lives. If you have a memory from a past life, you remember it as that person. You're not this person remembering something. That's the telltale sign of a past life memory. And my body was suffused with fear. It was total.

Fortunately, my father was still alive, so I said to him, "It was me that found grandfather dead in a chair in the front room." He said, "No, he was in bed when he died." You see? So the child—somewhere in me there was a fear, and I can only presume that my parents were arguing, and I decided they were arguing against me. I don't know, but that's what happened.

It's good for us to remember that a child is also living this imaginative life arising out of their own particular conditioning.

Now I want to move to an area which isn't often dealt with. Sometimes we talk about collective or social karma. The last century saw three secular ideologies unfold. The first was communism, the second was national socialism, and the third was neoliberalism.

An ideology always has some Shangri-La that you're moving towards. If you do this and this and this, you end up tremendously rich, or tremendously happy, and so forth. In which case, it always loses its grounding in what's happening in the present moment. And as Marx said of capitalism—and he could have said it of communism as well—all these isms have the seeds of their own destruction. The reason is that they're always trying to fit the present moment into some future heavenly place.

I'm fortunate to be old enough to have lived through two different systems. The system that came here after the war had many effects of socialism, a sort of very watered-down communism. This was expressed through the National Health system, through support for people to move from one class to another, through the system of grammar schools. The caring was taken on by the state. There was a whole movement after the war to create a state-based service which was for the benefit of the people.

Running alongside that was industry. I remember being told that if you went into industry, you got more money, but your job was insecure. But if you worked in one of the government-based systems, your job was secure. So if you became a teacher, your job was secure. That was the little bargain between the two, and they ran fairly parallel.

But then, as always, there's this grit which is going to undermine the system. What happened was the workers began to gain tremendous power, and perhaps it can be argued they went over the top. I know that the union boss, the head of the automobile union, Scanlon, confessed that he'd actually ruined the auto industry because they were demanding more and more and more. And of course then we got Mrs. Thatcher.

Now what Mrs. Thatcher did was to begin changing the system to neoliberalism. This neoliberalism is another ideology. It's a sort of corruption of capitalism in a way. I'm not an economist, by the way—this is just general knowledge, and you'll have to check it all out for yourselves.

When Adam Smith wrote the basic paper on capitalism, he always had a sense of social justice in there. And when he talked about "the hidden hand," what he was being, according to one writer, was sardonic. Because all these selfish, self-serving businessmen were unwittingly creating jobs that helped people who would have been poor. It was a side effect. That's what he meant by the hidden hand.

What neoliberalism did is make the market the purpose and be-all of society. Everybody has to be part of the market. Everybody is an entrepreneur.

You've got to make your way in the market. We've seen Uber in London trying to do exactly that. And there's an immediate lowering of wages because you have to bid for a lift—to take the person, you have to bid for it. Three or four bids come up, and of course it's the lowest that gets the job. So there's a constant pushing down of wages. It just happens naturally. Luckily, they were taken to court, and now they have to employ people properly.

But we saw a worse case just recently with the P&O ferries, where they simply fired eight hundred people. They were losing a hundred million a year, but they'd just paid out two hundred and seventy million to their shareholders. So the idea that the money will trickle down is actually a tsunami going up, as we know.

The fundamental attitude driving all this is acquisitiveness—it's to get money, because when you get money you can do what you want. So greed is actually driving the system, and what it does is put us into an aggressive competitiveness. This was never clearly defined. It was just slipped in as a sort of economic program, and nobody quite articulated what the underlying understanding actually was.

And it's coming to something. I think Carl mentioned that on these programs, from America especially, when somebody offers to do something, they're always asked, "How much do you want?" Everything has to be some sort of transaction. The idea of giving something or doing something for nothing goes out of the window. This has become a sort of general feeling in our societies, so that when Covid hit, everybody suddenly realized they were neighbors and they started helping each other. People said, "Oh look, we're neighbors—we can help each other!" It was like a revelation, because before you just worked out your own life and they lived over there.

So now what happens is that it's the one with the best talent, with the greatest greed, with the ability to fight this competition that's going to win. But that's not what Darwin said. It's not greed that determines survival. He said it wasn't the strongest or the most intelligent, but the most adaptable. Yet it's been translated through neoliberalism as "greed is good" and competition—aggressive competition—is what we really want.

In a pure neoliberal situation, the worker has no rights. They have to negotiate individually with the employer. The government must keep away from restricting the market. Those of you who remember Gordon Brown's "light touch" regulation—well, it led to this huge collapse in 2008 because the banks were greedy. Everybody's greedy.

Trade unions are simply not to be allowed because they undermine this bargaining, this entrepreneurial spirit. Just recently, Amazon fired all the managers in New York because the workers were beginning to form a union. And charities—charities are a real bind because they're doing something you could make money out of. So these things are not particularly welcomed; they undermine the entrepreneurial spirit.

What about the unemployed? What about the sick, the aged, and the mentally ill? Well, they become drags on the whole system. They're just drawing money out. And you shouldn't tax people who've made all this money—that's simply not fair, because they've actually won in the system. So the only way to make it work within a neoliberal framework is to privatize it. Then somebody makes the money. Somebody rents the system out to you.

This is exactly what's happening now with our GPs. They're selling practices to a company called Centene, which even the Daily Mail calls rapacious. And it's going on all the time. I hate giving you all this bad news.

In this system, there's no particular social responsibility. Everything, of course, is privatized—the water, the electricity, the transport. Everything becomes owned by somebody else who takes their little percentage. The electricity companies, for instance—I know because we had to have three-phase electricity put into our center. I was talk-

ing to the man who organized it, and they take ten percent. Now, I don't know whether that's ten percent after they've paid their shareholders or before, but they take ten percent.

So they're all 10-percenters. All these companies have taken their little 10%.

And this really comes down to that wonderful phrase which most of you will remember from Margaret Thatcher: that there is no such thing as society, there's only individuals. Now in doing that, you see, you isolate people. One person is up against the other. And what's missing there, of course, is that the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. When you have people together, you create community.

And that's why the miners were so angry when they gave her a state funeral—because she completely ruined their community and gave them nothing back. It wasn't as though she said, "Well, you know, I'm taking the coal industry away from you, but instead I'm going to put this in its stead so you can earn money and maintain your community." No, she just took everything.

I was in the midst of that process. I was teaching at the time at an FE college, a Further Education college, and when she took away all the support for industry, the Chamber of Commerce was going berserk. There were so many collapses of businesses. And the unemployment rose from 6% to 16% in six months. That's what happened. And if you look at what happened in Chile and to Russia after the collapse of communism, you'll see that's exactly what they did, and it just created enormous poverty. And it's something that sticks in the craw of somebody like Putin, that they were so humiliated.

Sorry about that. I'm on my hobbyhorse, as you can see.

And of course, when it comes to opposition, then we're beginning to see this suppression and oppression. A bill has just been passed—the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill—and you can now be arrested for being a single protester. If you go out with a placard and protest, you can be arrested. So you can see, they don't like people who try to buck the system.

Now the real point of this from a Buddhist point of view—and I'm really getting to it—is that the report from Davos, where all the rich and mighty meet, was that they were absolutely overjoyed at hearing about mindfulness and stress reduction. Because now, when their workers said, "Look, I'm absolutely stressed out," they could say, "Take this course, go sit in the corner for a while." And it's been called the religion of neoliberalism.

So this amazing technique that the Buddha has given us to liberate ourselves from suffering is actually being used for a system which is so contrary to the Buddha's teachings. It's unbelievable. It's based on greed, for instance.

So finally, what can we do in this sort of situation? Well, it's the usual thing about consumerism, because that's what's powering it. And remember that boredom is a big underlying engine to greed. Because if you're in a bored state, well, you go out and do some retail therapy again. And it's a case of recognizing that what we buy is fuel in the system. That doesn't mean you can't buy anything, but you might just consider where it's made, and whether you need it.

And the other thing, from a personal point of view, is just to get back to generosity. Have you noticed—you might not have noticed—but when you do something good for yourself, like you might buy some thermal underwear... I say that because I did it for myself. And it feels fantastic, it feels so warm, you know, you think, "My God, why haven't I discovered this before?" And you feel very good about yourself, you've been so kind to yourself, you see.

Now, if I had bought thermal underwear for somebody else, and they had said, "I'm really grateful for this thermal underwear," the joy that I get from that would have lasted longer. Check it out. When I do something for myself, I get a joy, and it lasts a little bit. But when I do something generous and beautiful for somebody else, it lasts. And every time I bring that to mind, it gives me that little lift of the joy of having brought some happiness into somebody else's life.

And I want to quote the Buddha here, and it's around eating:

If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared if there was somebody to receive the gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of miserliness overcomes their minds.

So I'm done with neoliberalism. The next topic is something which brings us into what's happening in Ukraine: what was the Buddha's position when it came to war? He himself was involved in three conflicts of one sort or another.

The first instance involved his own clan, the Sakyans, and the neighboring Koliyans. They shared a river and had gotten into a real dispute about it—they were preparing to go to war over this water. The Buddha happened to be in the area, and he must have spoken to them about the unwholesomeness, the unskillfulness of war. What he asked

them was simply this: "What is more precious—the water in the river or the blood in your veins?" This question seemed to bring them to their senses around the conference table, and they came to an agreement.

There's another case involving King Vidudabha, who was the king of Kosala. His father, Pasenadi, had been a great supporter of the Buddha. This young fellow was now the ruler, and he had asked for a bride from the Sakyans—aristocracy marrying into aristocracy, though the Sakyans were vassals of Kosala, under the Kosalan king. It came about that Vidudabha discovered this woman he'd married was actually of low caste, and he was furious. He vowed to wipe out the Sakyans and gathered his fourfold army—elephants, chariots, cavalry, and infantry.

The Buddha must have heard about this because he went to speak with him. Who knows exactly what he said, but probably arguments on an ethical basis—the idea of rebirth, how carrying hatred and revenge in your heart creates ongoing problems. So Vidudabha turned back. But no sooner had he returned than he got back on his elephant, and the Buddha was out there again. Once more he was able to convince him to turn around. No sooner had the king returned than he mounted his elephant yet again, and once more the Buddha was there to meet him and convince him to turn back. But when he got on his elephant the fourth time, the Buddha said, "I can't do any more."

So Vidudabha went and razed Kapilavatthu, the capital of the Sakyans. I don't know whether he killed anybody—presumably they just fled. He damaged the city and then went back home. They built another capital, it seems. Interestingly enough, one site is in India and one in Nepal, with just a border wall between them. But at least it gives some credence to that story. So again, the Buddha is trying to stop war, and I presume his arguments concerned morality.

The final case is a rather interesting one involving Ajatasattu, who was the son of Bimbisara—another great supporter of the Buddha and the king of Magadha. Ajatasattu sent his counselor to talk to the Buddha and ask him—it's rather remarkable when you think about it—whether it was a good time to attack the Vajjian Confederacy.

The Buddha did not reply directly; he didn't say it might be good or it might not. Instead, he gave principles about what makes a society strong—principles that also applied to the monastic order. This particular counselor went back to Ajatasattu and reported, "Well, he gave these principles for a strong sangha, so he must be telling us that the Vajjians are strong." That's how they interpreted it. But what they did was send in spies, and through bribery and setting people against one another, they finally undermined the Confederacy, and Ajatasattu simply walked in and took it.

So in all these cases, the Buddha is definitely working against conflict, against any form of conflict. Now, some writers argue that while he would never have supported an offensive war, he would have supported a defensive war. But frankly, I don't really see that.

These two kings I've mentioned—Pasenadi of Kosala up toward Delhi, and Bimbisara down on the Ganges—at one point Bimbisara attacked Kosala and defeated them. But Pasenadi gathered his army and came back and defeated Bimbisara in return. In those days, believe it or not, armies just fought against each other. There's a Greek ambassador who recorded that he watched a battle between two armies, and while that was happening, the farmers were still working in the fields around them. Those were the days of chivalry.

Now, by this time, especially as the Buddha's order grew, his community was everywhere. There were Buddhist monks everywhere, disciples, lay disciples, stretching right across the north of that Gangetic plain—from about a bit east of present-day Benares all the way up toward Delhi. He gave talks to people called the Kurus who lived close to present-day Delhi. So he was walking around this whole area throughout his life, always on the move.

If he were to side with anybody—and this is the Buddha being pragmatic—obviously the king he argued against would have expelled all his monks and all his community members from that kingdom. Now, that makes the Buddha sound like a schemer, but on the other hand, he was pragmatic. He was grounded in the reality of what would happen if he were to support one king against another.

But there's, I think, a deeper reason why he doesn't talk about defensive or offensive war. And that's because his teaching is always concerned with the individual. It's always about you. And I think what he would say to somebody who was going to war would be: can you kill another human being without anger or hatred in your heart? And if you can't do that, then there's going to be consequences for you, and the violence will carry on. The Chinese have a saying: those who seek revenge should prepare two graves. So there's no end to that violence if you're going to meet violence with violence.

In Buddhist history, in China for instance, the monks, the orders, and the Buddhists were persecuted or supported depending on the winds of the emperor. And that's why the monks disappeared into the jungles and developed this form of fighting—Kung Fu. The idea was that you stop the enemy from damaging you, from killing you, but without any hatred, without anything in your heart. This ethos passed over to Japan.

There's the story of a samurai who has beaten his opponent and raised his sword to cleave him in two—and he walks away. When they ask him why he did that, he said, "I felt angry."

So here's, I think, a more nuanced way of looking at the Buddha. He's not supporting any sort of war. But if you are going to go to war, then you have to be very careful that you're doing it not from a heart of hatred or revenge.

I read an article about this actually. It's very difficult to kill a living human being—to actually stand in front of them and kill that person. They did a survey of American soldiers, and I can't remember the percentage, but it was shockingly high, around forty-five to fifty percent who did not shoot to kill. They either shot over the enemy or around them. They couldn't bring themselves to do it. That tells you it's something very difficult for a human being to do. And the way they can do it is by giving them an object of hate. So if you want to get a Russian soldier in a truly hateful mood, you tell them their enemy are Nazis—because they lost twenty million in the war against the German invasion. And that's what happened.

So I think that brings me to the end of my little effort here. We've been through this whole business of karma, and the real message in terms of ourselves, our personal self, is to purify the heart of what is unwholesome and to build up wholesomeness. And then to try to enact that wholesomeness in society in one way or another. And then society begins to mirror back to us the wholesomeness that we have put into it.

So we are intimately connected. Intimately connected. In fact, we are our relationships. That's what we actually are. We're in a constant state of relationship—either with the physical world, the human world, the animal world. As soon as you get up in the morning and hear the birds, you're in relationship. And our job is to get that relationship into a place which has rid itself of this wrong attitude of seeking happiness in the sensual world. But that doesn't mean we cannot enjoy life, or that we can't enjoy pleasures. It's just recognizing that this is not the end-all and be-all of our existence.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your commitment to the ethical and spiritual life, you will be relieved of all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 247

No More Ideologies!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 31 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the rise and fall of three major secular ideologies of the past century: communism, national socialism, and neoliberalism. He shows how each ideology, despite different foundations—the commune, the nation, and the sovereign self respectively—ultimately leads to authoritarianism and social fragmentation when pursued as absolute visions of the future.

Drawing on contemporary examples including Douglas Rushkoff's encounters with tech billionaires preparing for societal collapse, Bhante illustrates how neoliberalism's emphasis on the "sovereign self" has created unprecedented inequality and social disconnection. He contrasts this with the Buddha's approach, which avoided ideological thinking entirely, focusing instead on present-moment ethical reasoning and community building.

The talk explores key Buddhist teachings on social harmony, including the Buddha's advice to the Vajji Confederacy on maintaining a healthy society through regular assembly, respect for elders, and protection of the vulnerable. Bhante emphasizes the six qualities that foster love and respect in community, showing how Buddhist ethics provide a grounded alternative to the endless cycle of failed ideologies. This teaching offers both a critique of contemporary political discourse and a practical path toward genuine community based on moral reasoning rather than utopian visions.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I've entitled this talk "No More Ideologies." Looking back at this past century, we've had these three secular ideologies. The idea of ideologies really began when writing began, and of course for something like 2,000 years or less than that, it was a Christian ideology. What we mean by that is that there is some sort of vision in the future to which you're heading, whether it be the promised land, the final days, or the wonderful communist state.

This last century we've had these three. Communism posited the idea that the ordinary person should be the focus of all state activity — it should be the commune, it should be the society. As we know from Animal Farm, even though everybody was

equal, some became more equal than others. Of course, if you have an idea of where you want to go, some sort of vision, you've got to force people there. So you naturally move towards authoritarianism.

The next one, which came after that, was National Socialism. If communism arose as a response not to industrial society, but to pre-industrial society — the terrible sufferings of the Russian peasants — National Socialism, especially in Germany, was a response to the really atrocious retributions that were demanded after the First World War, which drove the Germans to real absolute poverty. There, of course, like all nationalisms, the nation is the focus. You have an ideal as to what your nation is, and when it's wrapped up with racial ideology, then you've got a real toxic mix. That's what happened in Germany — it wasn't so much in Italy or indeed in Spain. But again, once you have a vision, you've got to force everybody to get there. Anybody who gets in the way, you basically get rid of.

So the first one was dependent on the people, the commune. The second one was on the nation. Now the third one is dependent on the sovereign self. And that's neoliberalism. It came in very sneakily. It came in as an economic program, not as an ideology. But in fact, at the base of it, there was definitely the understanding that the primary person was the entrepreneur. The whole of society should make the market, the free market, their basic platform for the entrepreneur. Everybody had to be within the market. If you're not in the market, then you're useless — you're not part of that process. Anybody who made lots of money, like these billionaires, were the heroes. The whole idea, of course, is that the money would trickle down. Well, it has, but it really is a trickle, and it's all swamped upwards.

So this idea of having some sort of aim, some sort of ideal — the free market at all costs, no matter what — and then the ideal of this wonderful individual. To quote Margaret Thatcher, for which she's very famous, you can see the shift away from communism: "I think we've gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand, 'I have a problem, it is the government's job to cope with it.' Or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it. I'm homeless, the government must house me.' And so they are casting their problems on society. And who is society? There is no such thing. There are only individual men and women and their families" — note that, families — "and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first."

What's missing in that equation, which is strange for a scientist — she had a chemistry degree — is that the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. If you've got oxygen and hydrogen, they're completely separate. Put them together and you've

got this magical substance called water. When people get together, what you form is community. We know from the way that she behaved, she was quite happy to destroy communities in order to get her aim. But it wasn't so much her specifically — this was the ideology that the neoliberals brought in. If you really want to see how bad it was, read The Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein. You'll see what a horror story it is for places like Chile. Of course, it was tremendously humiliating for Russia when they gave up, especially with the Americans going around saying, "We won." I mean, that was really crass.

This is individuals seeking their own self-interest benefiting the economy as a whole. That goes back to Adam Smith, where he's trying to explain what the so-called hidden hand of the market is — even though you're working for yourself, you're actually creating benefit for others.

What I was particularly interested in was this idea of a sovereign self: "I do my own thing in my own time, in my own way." You'll all remember Frank Sinatra: "I did it my way." The West has really developed, especially in America and Britain, this idea of the solitary person who makes things happen without anybody else. The fact that they become billionaires on the backs of everybody is immaterial — they did it.

It's the same here. Occasionally people say to me, "You've done an amazing job, what a vision." But there's nothing specifically wonderful about this vision. Anybody who's been to something like fifteen meditation centers like I have knows what a meditation center is supposed to look like. The reason why this has happened as it is, is because when we bought the place, it was already set. There was already a bungalow there and an annex which ended where that wall is. It was only working with that and then asking people — it was people's ideas. It wasn't my idea to have decking, for instance. The fact that we ended up with an accommodation block was because people were moaning about sharing rooms. Everything happened gently. The only thing I take perhaps a little bit of credit for is the *stupa* — that was my ideological statement.

There was a wonderful article from "The Survival of the Richest" by Douglas Rushkoff. He says: "As a humanist who writes about the impact of digital technology on our lives, I'm often mistaken for a futurist. The people most interested in hiring my opinions about technology are usually less concerned with building tools that help people live better lives in the present than they are in identifying the next big thing through which to dominate them in the future. I don't usually respond to their inquiries. Why help these guys ruin what's left of the internet, much less civilization?"

"Still, sometimes a combination of morbid curiosity and cold hard cash is enough to get me on a stage in front of the tech elite, where I try to talk some sense into them about how their businesses are affecting our lives, out here in the real world. That's how I found myself accepting an invitation to address a group mysteriously described as 'ultra-wealthy stakeholders,' out in the middle of the desert."

"A limo was waiting for me at the airport, and as the sun began to dip over the horizon, I realized I'd been in the car for three hours. What sort of wealthy hedge fund types would drive this far from the airport for a conference? Then I saw it, on a parallel path next to the highway, as if racing against us, a small jet was coming in for landing on a private airfield."

"The next morning, two men in matching Patagonia fleeces came for me in a golf cart and conveyed me through rocks and underbrush to a meeting hall. They left me to drink coffee and prepare in what I figured was serving as my green room. But instead of me being wired with a microphone or taking to a stage, my audience was brought in to me. They sat around the table and introduced themselves. Five super wealthy guys — yes, all men — from the upper echelon of the tech investing and hedge fund world. At least two of them were billionaires."

"After a bit of small talk, I realized they had no interest in the speech I had prepared about the future of technology. They had come to ask questions. They started out innocuously and predictably enough: Bitcoin or Ethereum? Virtual reality or augmented reality? Who will get quantum computing first, China or Google? Eventually, they edged into their real topic of concern: New Zealand or Alaska? Which region would be less affected by the coming climate crisis?"

"It only got worse from there. Which was the greater threat, global warming or biological warfare? How long should one plan to be able to survive with no outside help? Should a shelter have its own air supply? What was the likelihood of groundwater contamination? Finally, the CEO of a brokerage house explained that he had nearly completed building his own underground bunker system and asked, 'How do I maintain authority over my security force after the event?'"

"The event — that was their euphemism for environmental collapse, social unrest, nuclear explosion, solar storm, unstoppable virus, or malicious computer hack that takes everything down. This single question occupied us for the rest of the hour. They knew armed guards would be required to protect their compounds from raiders as well as angry mobs. One had already secured a dozen Navy SEALs to make their way to his

compound if he gave them the right cue. But how would he pay the guards once even his crypto was worthless? What would stop the guards from eventually choosing their own leader?"

"The billionaires considered using special combination locks on the food supply that only they knew" — it's crazy, isn't it? — "or making guards wear disciplinary collars of some kind in return for their survival. Or maybe building robots to serve as guards and workers, if that technology could be developed in time. It's as if they want to build a car that goes fast enough to escape its own exhaust."

"I tried to reason with them. I made pro-social arguments for partnership and solidarity as the best approaches to our collective long-term challenges. The way to get your guards to exhibit loyalty in the future was to treat them like friends right now, I explained. Don't just invest in ammo and electric fences. Invest in people and relationships. They rolled their eyes at what must have sounded to them like hippie philosophy."

"This was probably the wealthiest, most powerful group I'd ever encountered. Yet here they were, asking a Marxist media theorist for advice on where and how to configure their doomsday bunkers. That's when it hit me. At least as far as these gentlemen were concerned, this was a talk about the future of technology. Taking their cue from Tesla founder Elon Musk colonizing Mars and Palantir's Peter Thiel reversing the aging process, or artificial intelligence developers Sam Altman and Ray Kurzweil uploading their minds into supercomputers, they were preparing for a digital future that had less to do with making the world a better place than it did with transcending the human condition altogether."

"Their extreme wealth and privilege served only to make them obsessed with insulating themselves from the very real and present danger of climate change, rising sea levels, mass migrations, global pandemics, nativist panic, and resource depletion. For them, the future of technology is about only one thing: escape from the rest of us."

It's stunning, absolutely stunning. That's where we're at. That's the end game of neoliberalism, the sovereign self.

What we have still, just about in this country I think, is a liberal democracy which is trying to hold the balance between social demands and personal needs, allowing individual liberty within the constraints of community. But as you know, when it comes under pressure, then you have these two wings come up.

So where can you go now? What's the next ideology? We've done the community bit with communism, we've done the nation bit, and we've done the sovereign self. There's nowhere else to go. You've got to go back — become a communist or a national socialist or keep banging on about being a sovereign self. We seem to be locked now in an ideological cul-de-sac. Can you think of any other ideology? An ideology, remember, is some futuristic aim that you're going towards and you just make for it.

There's a lovely little tale about a big communist conference in Moscow — it was a French writer, but I can't recall the name. They were talking about the perfect communist state. What would constitute the perfect communist state? Someone asked, "What about accidents?" Seemingly there was a silence. Then a voice came out from the darkness: "In a communist state, there will be no accidents." That would be brilliant.

The question is: What can Buddhism offer? By the way, I love quoting this — you see it quoted all over the place now. "The Second Coming" by Yeats: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer." That's wonderful — the rich can't hear the poor, the powerful can't hear the powerless. We sort of separate — natives can't hear the immigrants and so on and so forth. "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." It's great, isn't it? "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."

You might have come across Jem Bendell and others trying to work on catastrophe studies. There are actually university departments now — collapsology. There's an actual discipline now. That's how bad it gets. "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned. The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." You can see that, can't you? The liberal establishment is confused. It doesn't know what to do about mass immigration. It doesn't know what to do about climate change. It doesn't have a clear direction, which it would have had after the Second World War.

Somehow we have to transcend this. If we go back to the time of the Buddha, there are no ideologies, because nobody was writing. There wasn't anything written. He was illiterate. There wasn't the opportunity to think about thinking — no systems theory, nothing like that at all. What there are are customs, laws and customs that have been worked out through ages and ages, and moral reasoning. If you look at Hinduism or Jainism or Buddhism, it's all about the psychology of moral behavior. Their language is that — whereas we would talk about the purification of the heart, these days it's medicalized, it's a therapy to get over your internal problem.

If you now put aside any idea that we're going anywhere, right? There's no such thing as a perfect society. There's no such thing as moving towards some sort of future Shangri-La. It's always going to be like this. There's always going to be misery, suffering, spiced with an occasional bit of joy. This is what we call *samsāra*.

But we do have an aim, but the aim is completely beyond the phenomenal world. It's beyond anything that you can imagine. It's beyond anything that you can create with your mind as a beautiful and wonderful society. The fundamental error or delusion that we suffer from is to believe that we are human beings and therefore we do seek happiness in this form, in this world. It's because of that that we create all this business about selfishness, which is translated as the sovereign self — "greed is good." Of course, that creates problems for us.

So we push away, we get rid of anything that we don't like. So you get the aversion. If it's too big, you run for it. So there's your basic fundamental attitudes that arise from that delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion and fear. And from there, all our actions spread outwards and create a second tier of horror, of shame, guilt, remorse and all the rest of it.

So if we start from a basis of no ideology, in other words, we're not going anywhere to some great, amazing place and instead draw ourselves, like the Buddha would have done, down to his present day situation... And obviously it wasn't perfect. For instance, there's lots of talk in the scriptures about these useless, massive sacrifices that were made on the understanding that the gods would respond so long as the sacrifice was done perfectly.

So this had moved away from the time when they were petitions to gods, where the gods might or might not reply, but it came to a point by the time that the Buddha was alive that if you did the sacrifice perfectly—we talk about hundreds of cattle, hundreds of horses, the king's sacrifice—then the gods had to reply. And of course it probably wasn't working, just like in Socrates' time people were losing faith in the gods.

And so it's not as though everything is right at the Buddha's time. I mean, obviously not. And there were kings who were creating war and all sorts of messing about. And there was ordinary crime, etc. But there was no sort of, as I say, this Shangri-La.

So all the teaching of these dispensations were always drawn towards the society as it is now and how you could make it better. And so when it came to the Buddha's own thing, he has quite a bit of advice on what keeps a society together as a community.

And so this is it here. See, at the time when the venerable Ānanda was standing behind fanning him, the Blessed One addressed him. This had happened because the son of Bimbisāra, whose name just escapes me now, had sent a diplomat or one of his ambassadors to see the Buddha to ask whether this was a good time to attack the Vajjis. I mean, what an interesting question to ask the Buddha. Is this a good time to attack them? Well, he didn't actually answer directly, but he gave these things to consider.

And he asks—he's asking Ānanda, you see. He says, "Have you heard, Ānanda, that the Vajji Confederacy has frequent gatherings and their meetings are well attended?" And there's a refrain after each of these questions: "I have heard, Lord, that this is so." "So long, Ānanda, as this is the case, the growth of the Vajjis is to be expected, not their decline."

And then he goes on. "Do the Vajjis assemble and disperse peacefully and attend to their affairs in concord?"—considering our politics. "Do the Vajjis neither enact new degrees nor abolish existing ones, but proceed in accordance with ancient constitutions?" That sounds very conservative, small c, but that would be the basis where you start from. You accept those and then presumably you'd move from them.

"Do the Vajjis show respect, honour, esteem and veneration towards elders and think it worthwhile to listen to them? Have you heard, Ānanda, do the Vajjis refrain from abducting women and maidens of good families and from detaining them?" So this, of course, you could extend to all the prejudices—sexual, racial, and I may as well plug ageism here.

"Do they show respect, honour and esteem and veneration towards their shrines, both of those in the city and outside, and do not deprive them of due offerings as given and made by them formerly?" So this of course is pointing to freedom of belief, freedom of speech and so on. And then finally, "Do they duly protect and guard the arhats so that they can come to the realm and live there in peace?" So this is really respecting both religious and civic leaders.

If all these are followed, then according to the Buddha, then you can expect growth and not decline.

So I mean, you have to always translate this stuff, of course, into our present day. But you can see that he's very much about community, about people talking to each other and discussing things, coming to agreements.

And then a passage here where he talks about six things that foster love and respect, helpfulness and agreement, harmony and unity. So again, this is just basic ethics. So he's talking to monks now, but you can translate it, obviously: "When one acts with love

towards one's companions in the spiritual life, both in public and in private; when one speaks with love towards them, both in public and in private; and when one thinks with love towards them, both in public and in private; when one shares with them, without reservation, whatever one has acquired justly, even if it be no more than the food in one's alms bowl; when one possesses together with them virtues that are complete, unbroken and freedom-giving, praised by the wise and conducive to concentration; and when one possesses with one's companions in the holy life, both in public and in private, the understanding that is noble, leading to freedom, and which conduces to the complete destruction of suffering. Then will there be love and respect, helpfulness and agreement, harmony and unity."

So again, you have to translate this into ordinary daily life. But you can see the directions are always about ethics, about moral behaviour.

And then finally, there's a lovely passage where he meets some *Arahats*, I think three of them living together, and he asks them, "How do they live in harmony, mutual appreciation and agreeability, like milk and water mixed, regarding each other with kindly eyes?" And one of them, Anuruddha, replied, "I always consider what a blessing it is, what a real blessing, that I'm living with such companions in the spiritual life. I think, speak and act with love towards them, both in public and in private. I always consider that I should put aside my own wishes and acquiesce to what they want, and then I do that. Thus, we are many in body, but one in heart, one at heart."

So here we have both an idea of what the Buddha—an approach—what we're interested in is not exactly what he says, but his approach to community, which is to establish that sense of togetherness and the whole business of sharing and of kindly love, etc., etc.

So I think if we could just for one minute abandon all ideologies and just come down to a basic grounded moral and ethical reasoning, with a present day aim of creating a consistent state of community with everything that word means—that is my hope.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion or argument, and that you will, by your devotion to practice, liberate yourself and help others liberate themselves sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 248

The Mahāsī Technique and What We Need to Understand to Practice Vipassanā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 46 min

In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers detailed guidance on the Mahāsī vipassanā technique and its three distinguishing features: noting, going slow, and noting intentions. He explains how the noting word serves not as a mantra but as a tool to direct awareness beyond conceptual thinking toward direct experience of sensations. Using the Mahāsī's own analogy of throwing stones at bottles, Bhante illustrates how the label points attention to the actual object of experience rather than becoming the focus itself.

The talk explores the nature of right awareness (sammā sati) as distinguished from ordinary awareness, drawing on the Buddha's own journey from concentration practices to the investigative approach that led to his awakening. Bhante introduces the concept of 'original mind' or pure awareness—likening it to a child's fresh, unconceptualized seeing—and explains how the hindrances cloud this clarity. He offers practical guidance for working with both agitating hindrances that scatter the mind and the dullness that pulls consciousness into oblivion.

Bhante then examines the three characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) as objects of investigation: impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha) arising from desire, and the crucial distinction between the sense of self and the deeper delusion of self-view (sakkāya-diṭṭhi). Using the myth of Narcissus and the development of infant consciousness as illustrations, he describes how meditation systematically objectifies experience—body, heart, and mind—allowing awareness to recognize its own nature as distinct from what it observes. This process of clarification, he explains, is the very path to liberation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

This evening, I want to go over the technique we're actually practicing, especially for those for whom it's quite new or completely new. Then I want to look at what the Buddha means by right awareness, take a quick look at the hindrances—what stops us from achieving this right awareness—and finally examine the three characteristics, what it is we're supposed to be investigating after all.

Remember, a technique is meant to get us into a certain place. The technique itself doesn't produce anything. It's not the technique that allows insights to come. Insights, whenever they arise, are always achieved by the intuitive intelligence that is the active part of awareness.

Awareness has two sides. It has a receptive side—what we would in English simply call awareness—and an active side of grasping the situation in its fullness. This intuitive awareness is working for us all the time. Every time in ordinary daily life when you have a sudden brainwave, or you hear a scratch and think, "What could that be?" and then realize, "Oh, that's the cat"—all of that is part and parcel of this intuitive intelligence. It's not to be confused with the intellect. It uses the intellect, but the intellect itself is not intelligence.

I don't want to get into all that just now. First, let's look at the actual technique. The intellect, which is a collection of concepts, ideas, views, and opinions, is always a product of our history. It's a way in which we can remember things. So even at the simplest level of an orange, you must have had lots of experiences with oranges, and you have this concept of an orange.

Somehow we have to release awareness from its confusion with the intellect especially. Thinking is our biggest enemy. This technique actually draws the intellect down to a single, simple, concrete word, so you're not thinking about anything. The intellect is there, as it were, pushing you towards the object.

If you've got pain in the knee, for instance, a bit of discomfort, the word "pain" might come to mind to describe what you're experiencing, or "aching." You just keep repeating that: pain, pain, ache, ache. But your attention is not on the word. It's not on the concept. It's on the actual sensations.

Now, when some people use this technique, they find the word is so strong, so obvious in front of them, that they can't seem to feel anything, or they barely feel something because the word is so dominant. What that is mirroring back to the meditator is that this confusion of awareness with intellect is very strong. So somehow you've got to keep looking through the word, over the word, behind the word. You've got to keep pointing the attention to what it is you're actually experiencing.

What this does is draw us down beyond the intellect with all its opinions and concepts to direct experience—which is, of course, the sensations, the sensations in the knee. The word has to approximate what you're actually experiencing. It's no good saying, if you've got a pain in the knee, "banana, banana." That's not going to help you focus on the pain. It's got to be something relevant to what you're experiencing.

It must also be done at a rate that keeps the intellect occupied, or else it'll shoot off: "Maybe I should move, maybe I shouldn't move, should I move now?" It just goes on and on, so you've got to close that down with this very simple word. Whatever you're doing, if you can find a word and then draw your attention to what you're actually experiencing, that releases awareness from its delusion of thinking that it is the intellect. The same applies to imagination. Imagination and intellect work together; there's always an image that comes with a concept, unless the concept is entirely abstract, like liberty or whatnot.

The danger, of course, is that the noting becomes a sort of mantra, just working in the background and losing its ability to point awareness. Mahāsī Sayādaw himself talked about throwing a stone at bottles on a wall. Your eye is on the bottle, right? Not on the stone. It's not on your hand. It's actually on the bottle, and what your intention of hitting that bottle does is put your attention directly on the bottle.

It's the same with this technique. You've got this ache in the knee, and your attention wants to be right there with the ache. You have to use the word to get closer to what it is you're experiencing.

Now, the technique itself is designed to get us beyond the technique. It's drawing us towards a concentration whereby we are just aware of the sensation of what is actually happening. If you think about it, if I have an ache in my knee and I say "pain," there are two consciousnesses there. There's one where I'm receiving this information about pain, and the second one is actually giving it a name. So there's restlessness in the mind.

By constantly making that effort to drive the attention towards the pain, time begins to collapse. And there will come a point of what we might call absorption, where there's no time to note because you're completely absorbed into feeling the sensation of pain. That's what it's leading us towards. Now that doesn't come easy. You can't just sit down and get that. You have to keep working at it very slowly, very patiently. And it might only come in a little blip or a little blob before you're out of it again. But at least it manifests to the meditator that there is a level of concentration, a level of focus where you are completely involved in the object.

At that point, of course, the sense of self will disappear because self is also a reflection, and with it the sense of time. Time and self always arise together. So those moments of just being the knowing of what you're actually experiencing are precious little moments, and this intuitive awareness is very clear. It's not being fogged over by emo-

tions or by images or by intellect. And that's when little insights come. Now of course, occasionally a person might have a big insight, but generally speaking they're small little insights which accumulate over time and change our attitude to things.

So the real message here is to really put effort into that noting. If you slacken on the noting, it becomes a mantra. "Rising, falling, rising, falling." And then you're off to Costa del Sol. And when you come back, you can hear yourself saying "rising, falling." So you've taught yourself to say rising and falling, which is absolutely useless. It has to be something really direct and pointed.

The other thing is you get bored. So you have to be careful of boredom. If you get bored, that's your object of meditation. That's when you say, "Oh, this is boredom. That's interesting." And you move towards it and you feel it. And your noting word is boredom, boredom. So it is this constant effort. And if you find yourself getting tight, just relax, open the eyes, settle a bit and come back to the practice. If you find yourself getting a bit lazy about it, then talk to yourself. Stop this immediately. Let's get back to the practice. Don't let yourself off.

So that's the noting. It is in a way specific to the Mahasi technique, although I did hear of a Zen teacher, Maezumi Roshi, who used to work in America and used noting. Now the fact is, of course, that this labeling, this noting is going on anyway. That's the point. Even if you're not aware of it, as soon as you experience something, you're putting a label on it.

Now, the next thing is going slow. Well, that's pretty straightforward. It's just that the slower you go, the more you see. It's as simple as that. And by slowing things down, you begin to see minute movements, minute movements.

There's a lovely incident in one of the commentaries called the Visuddhimagga, the Path of Purification, which is a sort of medieval text. It's a great spiritual manual, but you wouldn't want to read it from page one to fifteen hundred. You'd go driving potty. But it is a great encyclopedia. You just open it, and it'll tell you something. It talks about this particular teacher who was giving a talk, and he suddenly raised his hand and stopped, then put his hand back down. All the students said, "What happened there? What happened?" He said, "I didn't note the intention to raise the hand." So that's how fine it can get.

And if you think of how many automatic movements we make, which are perfectly ethical—opening a door, closing a door, switching a light on, switching it off—we don't see that every action we make, whether it's a thought pattern, a pattern of speech, or an action, always begins with an intention.

And that's so important because that's the only choice we have. Once you're committed, that's it, you're done for. So it's a case of catching the intention. And when you can see the intention, the desire to do something, that's your moment of choice. Will I do it? Will I not do it? That's the only little bit of freedom that we have, you might say.

So going slow really helps us to see this, the role of intention, and with it coupled, of course, the role of action. Once you empower it, you've done something. That's why the Buddha says the will is action. You can't separate the will from the action. It's a bit like throwing a stone into the air—you can't separate the force from the stone. You can't say, "Well, this is the force and this is the stone." They're both completely at one with each other. So it's the same with an action and a will.

And I think you'll find that if you get the habit of stopping—and this also applies in daily life—to stop after you've done something, after a phone call or anything, you do get more of a sense of presence. You find that you've been here most of the day, that you've been here most of the time. It really does keep bringing you back into the present moment.

So this going slow, that's the third part—this noting intentions, and understanding kamma, meaning action, and of course the product. Being aware that whenever we do something, there's always going to be a product from it, always going to be a consequence. So those are the three things that we say mark out the Mahāsī technique as such: noting, going slow, and noting intentions.

The next task, of course, is to understand what the Buddha means by right awareness. A bank robber has awareness. Somebody who's fraudulent has awareness. Awareness is with us virtually all the time. Even in sleep, there's a sense of awareness—otherwise you wouldn't hear the alarm clock. It's there in a residual sense. So when the Buddha talks about right awareness, he's talking about something quite specific.

And it has two qualities. It has the quality of coming from a place of not knowing. In other words, not coming from a place of "I know, I'm sure." As soon as you do that, then whatever you experience will only be something that you agree with, only something that you've already imagined. This would be a classic terrible mistake about, say, the Nibbāna. If you have an idea of Nibbāna, then if you attain it, you'll definitely be deluded because it's not imaginable. It's gone beyond imagination.

The awareness has to be clear, you see, and when it becomes clear, it becomes original. This is why in Zen they talk about original mind. What they mean is original awareness. The example I use is of a little child. Everybody's seen a three-year-old, especially around about that age—three, four, five—and they see for the first time something like

a spider. You can see their eyes glue on it. They just stick on it and the world disappears. And the other thing that happens is the jaw drops and they look gormless. Our job as adults is to wake them up, which is a terrible thing actually.

So there they are, glued onto this spider, and then after they've received enough information they always turn around to mummy or daddy and say, "What is it?" Then they get this label: spider.

Now, the next time they see a spider, they rejoice. They say, "Spider, spider!" And mummy and daddy say, "Very good." But the problem is, they haven't seen this other spider. What they've seen is a concept, the idea of a spider, which they're already plunking onto this new spider. In other words, they've lost the original mind. They've lost that original way of receiving information before concepts get in the way.

So our job is to get back to that point where there are no more concepts or ideas coming in to distort the way we are looking at things. That doesn't mean to say that you lose the concept. It's always there. In fact, it's rather useful in daily life. But in vipassanā, it's a bit of a pain.

If we have that image of the child with the glued eyes and the jaw relaxed—the reason the jaw is relaxed is because there's no thinking. In your meditation, you might find that when you're thinking, you might just catch these little movements on your tongue, caused by the thinking pattern. So when the jaw is relaxed and the tongue is relaxed and the eyes are fixed, when you take that inwardly into yourself and you're just observing, just feeling, just experiencing, then we're getting to original mind or, better, in my language, pure awareness. Intuitive awareness, remember. IA, not AI—there's nothing artificial about it. This is the real thing.

So that's this intuitive awareness, and this really comes about through the story of the Buddha, which many of you will already know. Remember that when he left home, he was in a bit of a crisis—what we would call an existential crisis. It's put down as these five messengers, where he sees somebody very sick, very old, a corpse, and somebody sitting under a tree suggesting that there might be a way out of this sickness, aging, and death. His first two teachers teach him how to attain beautiful mental states, and these you find in all religions—devotional religions especially, through repetitive prayer, mantra, and so forth.

Even music, repetitive music. And of course, when he comes out of those absorptions, well, he's back to being anxious and depressed again. So it didn't really work.

The next thing he tried was, of course, this very severe asceticism. It's suggested he was following the Nigantha, the leader of the Jains. In Jainism, the understanding is that the body is the expression of your bad karma, and if you can get rid of the body, the soul would rise naturally to heaven. So the Jain reduces their body, and it's considered a saintly thing to slowly starve oneself to death. Many elderly people in Jainism actually will do that, letting go of the body. And I would have thought that if done properly, that's quite a spiritual journey, letting go of the body.

But he said he got so thin that he could hold his spine through his stomach. So if you try that, you'll see how thin he was. And he said it was just more suffering.

When he comes out from that, you can imagine he's quite despairing. He's now been to all the teachers, he's been to all the discussions. And he's stuck. He doesn't see a way out.

That's when he is sitting by the road and a woman comes who's called Sujata—I think it was a name given to her later on, it just means a happy birth, an auspicious birth—and offers him some sweetmeats that she was going to offer to a local shrine. And I think that at that point he remembers this childhood memory of watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. He remembers himself being as absorbed in that watching as he is when he's in these absorption states, but with something extra—with this sense of enquiry. What is my daddy doing?

I think that turned his whole meditation round upon itself. Instead of trying to escape unhappiness, escape sickness, disease and death, and trying to achieve happiness, trying to achieve something, he just turns round upon the actual suffering and inquires: How does the suffering arise? And it's in chasing that avenue of investigation—where is the kernel problem of suffering—that he finally awakens to the truth, or finally discovers the truth, which is, of course, this sense of identity. But we'll come to that in a minute.

So here we are now with an image of a child. The awareness is clarified of all conceptual thinking, and you're just inside yourself. You're using a noting word. It might be, going back to the old knees, you might be using "pain, pain," and you're just feeling it. You're going into the sensation.

Now at first it'll just be a pain or an ache. But as you go into it, as you enter into the pain, of course it begins to deconstruct. And the Buddha's big on deconstruction. What you find is probably a lot of heat, a lot of pressure, a lot of movement, and your noting word changes. You're no longer saying "pain," you're saying "heat, movement, pressure."

At that point, you're right there at the sense base. You're right there where the information is coming from the body into the mind. And it's at that point that you can begin to see impermanence much more clearly because everything is really arising and passing away.

Then when you come out to the second position of perception, where you give it a label—"pain, pain"—that's the point where you decide whether it's pleasurable or unpleasurable. So you can see this movement. And as soon as it's perceived as unpleasurable, there will be the desire to escape. You can see this process very clearly just by doing that.

And you can do it with emotions. If you feel very sad, your first word is "sadness, sadness." But when you go into the sadness, what is it that you actually experience? It's not sadness. It'll be some form of heat, some sort of movement, but it won't be sadness. And then when you come out again, it'll be sadness.

Now it doesn't deny the fact of sadness, it just takes away that sense of solidity. And interestingly enough, with emotions, when you're down at that level of just perceiving them, just allowing them to manifest, they're actually curing themselves. They're actually expending that energy.

So the awareness—what we're trying to do is keep on focusing in on whatever we experience, and the word, the label, should help us to get there. Then at some points we'll find ourselves dropping into moments of just pure absorption. Difficult over a weekend, slightly possible over five days. Unfortunately, this stuff doesn't come easy.

So that's the awareness. Now, what clouds the awareness is the hindrances.

Tomorrow Wei will give a much more detailed talk about the hindrances, but basically they split into two types. There's the type which sends the mind all over the place, and the type where you disappear—dullness, lethargy, and all that sort of stuff.

In a sense, it's always the same technique. As soon as you are aware of how you're reacting to something, how you are indulging what is pleasant or trying to push away what is unpleasant, then you allow that to manifest in your mind. You put your attention there. And when it disappears, you're left with the original hindrance, so-called. But when it's like that, it becomes your teaching tool, because now you can investigate it. As soon as you give in to a desire of not wanting to feel the unpleasant or wanting to indulge the pleasant, then of course you're actually creating, recreating the same old problems.

So these hindrances, as soon as you feel something—for instance, you might be planning. Everybody's planning to get a holiday in at some point, so you might be planning this amazing holiday. And when you come off that planning, you come into the body, and what you're feeling is the agitation of planning, the excitement of it in the body. The idea is to actually sink into that and allow it to manifest. That hindrance of wanting to escape the present moment and find ourselves in a beautiful place is slowly exhausting itself.

Now, when it's something slightly more unpleasant—say we have some anxiety, some worry in our lives, and it becomes a sort of obsessive thing in the mind—just be very patient. Keep bringing yourself back to the body and feel the worry. Often, if it's a worry you can't do anything about anyway because you're on retreat, it's a little trick to actually write it on a piece of paper: things to do when the retreat is over. That often undermines its urgency. Because if it is of immediate urgency, then you need to deal with it.

So again, it's a case of recognizing the emotional state, the mental state, the mood, and just coming off that thinking business and into the body to feel it. And then to be aware of your reaction. Often you'll find yourself with two states to look at: the original thing coming up—the pain, the emotional agitation, whatever it is—and this reaction. You always stay there, always keep your eye on this reaction, and you wait for that to completely pass away. If not, it remains there as an energy. And you only have to have a moment of inattentiveness and you're off. That's it, you're gone. Then you have to pull yourself back from the moon and come back into the body and start all over again.

So it's a case of keeping that awareness very sharp, both aware of the original information coming in—the emotion, the mood, the pain, whatever—and your reaction. You just stay there, dead still. You don't have to do anything. That's the wonderful thing—you don't actually have to do anything. Because all this is just energy. It's just conditioning, that's all. And you're just allowing the conditioning to manifest. It's as simple as that.

Now, when it comes to dullness and lethargy—whereas these other hindrances, everything we want, everything we desire, everything we don't like, all the doubts that sometimes assail us, the guilts, the shame, all that sort of stuff—they're all whirlwinds. They're all taking us up. But dullness and lethargy is a whirlpool. It's taking us down into oblivion. And the wonderful thing about oblivion is there's no suffering there. But unfortunately, you always come out. So it's not a permanent place to be.

When we get that dullness in the head, just remind yourself that you've got to stay awake. That's the big command you have inside yourself: stay awake, don't fall asleep. And if you get that heaviness in the body—and you're going to get both, unfortunately—then you stay with it. One way to keep yourself awake is just keep moving around. Keep buzzing around inside the head, keep moving around the body. That way you remain awake.

Look upon dullness and lethargy this way: we're not talking about sleep here. We know we need sleep. We're talking about this overlay which comes from laziness, from indulging in too much sleep sometimes, and often from using sleep as a way to escape something. When you're a bit depressed, you sort of just lay yourself out. I think somebody called it the duvet dive—you just disappear for an hour or so. It's a case of recognizing that this is an unwholesome conditioning. In Buddhist terminology, it's just as serious as anxiety, depression, all the rest of it. It can suck the energy out of your life if it becomes quite bad.

So those are your methods for working with the hindrances. Now we have to be clear about what it is we're trying to investigate. We've already talked about this process of reaction—how we've taught ourselves to grasp hold of what's pleasant, to maintain that grip, to try and develop something out of it. And when it's something unpleasant, we've taught ourselves to run for it or to push it away. Fight or flight.

Our job now is to let go, to allow those reactions to exhaust themselves, and to be open to what's actually there. It's not a case of forcing the issue. You've got to be careful here that you're not fighting the mind or anything.

As soon as you see the reaction, your attention goes to it, and you just sit back within yourself and feel it. Just know it's there. Allow it to express itself. And then when it passes away, you're undermining a particular habit—a habit that is unwholesome for us.

The Buddha points to this desire as being the direct cause of our suffering. It's a manifestation of delusion—seeking some form of real happiness in the sensual world, which simply can't deliver. If only because we die. That's a good enough reason for not being deluded.

The second contemplation is impermanence. The mind is extremely good at stringing information into a line, which gives us a sense of continuity. This continuity allows us to believe in some sort of substantiality—that there's something real there. One of the things we do in meditation, by closing in upon sensations and feelings, is to see that they're made up of little bits. They're not only made up of different sensations—this

concept of pain, for instance, is composed of different sensations—but they're always changing, always moving. Nothing's ever still, and they're never the same. They might seem the same, but they can't be, because whatever has happened has gone, and now we've got another sensation. So it's catching that movement, catching the fact that the mind is creating continuity for us. And the delusion that comes with it is that sense of substance—that there must be something real there.

Now there's also, of course, on a greater level, the whole contemplation of sickness, aging, and death. I'm getting to know this very well. Aging is something that is going to happen if you live long enough—just one of those things. Even in your daily life, every time you look in a mirror, you might catch the extra wrinkle. People tell me when they see me on screen that I look young. I say, well, the camera is very kind, but the mirror is brutal—absolutely brutal. There's no escaping the mirror.

So it is a case of reminding ourselves. In the medieval world, they always had this memento mori, this reminding of death—like a little skull on their desk. The way to remind ourselves is that after every action, after every meal, at the end of a day, just know that that is a mini death. Once you've finished a meal, that's it—it's gone. The most beautiful meal you can have, and then it's finished. You're never going to have that meal again. You might have something similar, but you'll never have that meal again. It's really driving home that every moment, there's a collapse, an ending, a completion.

Of course, while we're still human beings wandering around, we rise again. But there will come that day, inevitably, when we disappear completely from the world. The Buddha says the contemplation of death is the most efficacious—it's the contemplation that leads to liberation. Because right there, the whole concept of self is totally undermined.

Interestingly enough, the more you contemplate these things, the more you realize how precious life is. I was just reading in the newspaper about one of our rugby heroes—I can't remember his name—and the poor man has motor neuron disease. He's only about forty, with two young children, and has about a couple of years to live. He was a great rugby player. And he talks about the sheer joy of living in the moment. I think that's what happens when we find this real strength within ourselves, when we actually have to face our death. It was so lovely to hear him talk in a way you would expect every meditator to talk—like he knows he's got probably a year left, and he's speaking about the sheer beauty of every moment, the wonder of it. The contemplation of death is absolutely wonderful.

Now, when we get to identity, the sense of self—here we have a deep problem. The sense of self that we experience is a consequence of a deeper delusion. The deeper delusion is a view of self. We don't really know the view of self until something undermines the whole structure, which is, of course, death itself. That's why contemplation of death is so powerful.

The image I use for this sense of self is Narcissus. As you know, Narcissus was this very beautiful young man who looked into a pool and saw his image. He fell in love with his own image, you might say, and he embraced it and drowned. The Greek myth is normally understood to be about self-pride. But in terms of the self, it works perfectly. Water in mythology normally has to do with creation—so it represents the world of your mind. The awareness comes into the mind; it does this every morning when you wake up. And as it wakes up into the mind, it catches its own reflection there. That's the awareness becoming aware of itself. Then, of course, it goes through that door of "this is me, this is me"—it enters into the world of the mind, and that's the world we create, this little universe we're in, constantly being created and recreated through all the information coming from the outside and from the inside.

What we're doing in meditation is pulling ourselves out from that pond, pulling ourselves out of the mind and sitting back onto the bank—aware of this image of the self, aware of that self-image. But that still isn't attacking the real problem, which lies in the awareness itself, in the way that it's looking. That's the view of self—it's a delusion. And the problem with a delusion is that you don't know you're deluded. So it's a big problem. The only way we can deal with it is by continually being aware of the sense of self.

And self-awareness. So now I'm giving this talk and I'm aware of myself doing it. If I put a lot of attention towards me giving a talk, I'll lose my place in the talk, because my attention is going back into myself. So I'm aware of myself giving this talk, but that is just a reflection—it's not the delusion.

Now, when you fall asleep, you might think, well, where does that sense of self go? It disappears because the mind's gone to sleep, but the awareness is still there. It's not lost. If the awareness is lost, well, you're dead.

Just think for a moment: if the doctor said to you, "If you fall asleep, you're dead"—would you fall asleep? We fall asleep because we're absolutely sure that tomorrow morning we'll wake up. If there was any doubt in your mind that you might not wake up, I'm pretty sure you'd be sticking pins in your eyes to keep awake.

So that sense of self we can get rid of very simply. We get rid of it in ordinary daily life. We lose it when we watch a good video. You just absorb into it, and you come out saying, "Well, that was very good, wasn't it? That was great." The sense of self can disappear, can come back—but not the delusion of self. That's much harder to get rid of. And that's really what we're chasing. We're chasing this delusion that we have about what our real identity is. And it's done through this slow process of observation and feeling.

To give you another image that I work with: consider a baby. When we're born, it seems for about four months all we have is this shower of information. We're bombarded by all sorts of information which we can make no sense of whatsoever. But we do know one thing: we know when we are happy, we know when we're in a pleasant state, we know when we're not in a pleasant state. And that's when, of course, we give these shrieking cries and mother comes to comfort us.

Then round about four months, it seems, we create an object. From all this chaos, we start making sense. And the first object is your caregiver, your mother, normally. Very slowly, this baby pushes this inner world of confusion out and creates an objective world. Even the sense of self begins to formulate as something separate from that world. So by the age of three, we know that we are a boy or a girl or whatever, and we're very clear: this is me, and everything else is not me. We've already concretized the sense of self around the body.

Now, what we're doing in our meditation is we're sitting back within ourselves and pushing the whole of the mind and heart and sensations out into an objective world. That's all we're doing. All the sensations that before—when we were completely deluded before we came to meditation—which we thought we were, we're now making into an object. You're pushing out an emotion and saying, "There's an emotion." You can see images in the mind and your thoughts. Everything you're pushing outwards, and what's pulling itself out to observe this is your very awareness.

As it begins to release itself, clarify itself as opposed to the body with its sensations and feelings, the heart with its moods and emotions, and the mind with its thoughts and images—as it clarifies itself as not that—it begins to experience its own true nature. And that nature is Nibbāna. That nature is one of unshackling from the imprisonment of the heart, body, and mind. That's the process of awakening. That's what we're doing. Even if you don't believe me, that's what we're doing.

To make this easier for us, we have various techniques. There are as many techniques as original teachers. I must have practiced at least four or five in the Theravāda tradition. Then you have Zen, and they have their way of doing it, which I did for a

couple of years. And of course you have the Tibetans with Dzogchen and all that. Every culture, every form of Buddhism has some form of technique to help the meditator begin to really investigate this so-called human being.

Mahasi Sayadaw himself developed this idea of really noting—something to help the mind, to help that awareness clarify itself from thinking, and to go slow so that we can really begin to see the tiniest of movements. And to note intention, because that's so important when it comes to conditioning. When we talk about kamma—kamma in the normal sense of your comeuppance—it's always your conditioning. It's your conditioning that's causing you to be either happy or unhappy.

So basically, that's it. I hope you will give yourself to the practice. And I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that you will, by your constant effort, be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 249

Dependent Origination and How All Other Important Teachings Are Included

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 49 min

In this comprehensive talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma guides practitioners through the twelve links of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), demonstrating how this foundational teaching contains virtually all other essential Buddhist doctrines. Beginning with a powerful quote from the Thai arahant Mae Chee Kaew, he illustrates what liberation actually looks like in practice before deconstructing how we become entangled in suffering through avijjā (not-knowing), saṅkhāra (habitual formations), and the subsequent chain of conditions.

The talk illuminates key points of escape from dukkha, particularly at the junction of vedanā (feeling) and taṇhā (craving), where unwholesome desires based on the delusion of seeking happiness in the sensual world can be recognized and allowed to exhaust themselves. Bhante explains how the Buddha's analysis intersects with the four great elements (mahābhūta), the five khandhas (aggregates), and the six sense bases (saḷāyatana), showing how each moment of experience can be deconstructed to reveal the absence of a permanent self.

Practically, Bhante emphasizes that meditation is primarily about purification of heart rather than seeking pleasant states—sitting in the 'bonfire' we've created for ourselves. He explains how awareness itself is suñña (empty) of everything the psychophysical organism produces, and how insight into impermanence, suffering, and non-self progressively undermines our identification with the aggregates. The talk concludes by describing how accumulated insights lead to stream-entry, a transformative shift from which one cannot fall back into complete delusion.

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

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

This is what she says:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, because of this body and mind, nāma rūpa paccayā salāyatana. So the salāyatana are your six senses, dependent on the body and mind. This is important because a consciousness is dependent on one of these six senses. You can't have a con-

sciousness that mixes them both. Now it feels that way—you know, like you're at home watching television, having a coffee and biscuit or something, and it seems all one. You're watching, you're hearing, you're tasting, and it's all heavenly. But actually, in Buddhist psychology, these are all very separate consciousnesses, just running one after the other. A bit like the old film, really, where you get twenty-six frames per second or something, and that gives you the illusion of continuity.

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

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

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

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

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

So that's the point of vedanā, feeling. And it's at this point that this underlying business begins to manifest. Remember, underlying we've got this ignorance, this not-knowing, this delusion, and all these little habits that we have. And so in comes this contact. We're walking down the street and we see something—well, not these days; we don't go shopping anymore. You're on the screen and it comes up with this thing that you're looking for, a new whatever, a new mobile, and it shoots up on the screen. Immediately you get this little movement from a habit, which is not only to do with all the stuff that you know about mobiles; it's also to do with "Oh, I'd like that." So there's your taṇhā, there's your desire.

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

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

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

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

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

Once we understand that, we've got to be absolutely aware, we've got to be attentive to the arising of desires. And it's very difficult unless we're in a calm state, unless we're actually not rushing, we're not caught up in something. If we can keep bringing ourselves back to a sort of stillness every so often throughout the day, we become much

more aware of these little pushes. And it's not about getting all guilty and awful if you actually give in and find yourself eating a whole packet of biscuits. It's just a case of recognizing that's what you've done. Then you make the decision that next time this comes up, you have to have some sort of strategy. For instance: I won't buy any more biscuits.

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

Now the next point is also where the fundamental delusion comes in, and that's the point of identity. The first thing that we're aware of is liking. Like the other day, we were walking down on the Shropshire Hills and went into Church Stretton, and the chippy was open. I hadn't had chips for so long, you see. And when we smelled those chips, there was no way we could drag ourselves out of the shop.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At contact, for instance – the first deconstruction is the body and mind. The next one is that contact, where we're actually down in the body, down at that physicality. We can discern that the sensations coming in are usually of four types: the sense of pressure,

the earth element; the sense of lightness; the sense of fluidity, of cohesiveness, that's the element of water, the movement there; and of course the temperature, the fire element, warmth or cool.

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

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

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

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

That's why pleasure has such a hold on us. That's why we get glued onto videos and such things. Anything but to actually go into ourselves and feel these very unpleasant mental states. But of course, that is very much part of our practice. I would say it's about 99.9% of our practice—this process of purifying the heart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And it has a sense base. The sense base is that field, that screen of consciousness. And this is mirrored in the senses. The senses themselves don't have the object of themselves. So, for instance, if your tongue had an innate taste of curry, it would be very difficult to experience the wonder of vanilla ice cream. It's because the tongue is empty of taste that it can taste all the other tastes. It's the same with the eye. Because there's no light in the eye and the retina, it can experience light. And the same with hearing—unless, like me, you've got tinnitus. Then you've got interference coming from who knows where.

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

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

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

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

sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches, and here it says emotions, but it's actually everything that the mind experiences—both the imagination, the thought patterns, and the emotions.

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

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

"All are known. I know them all as they exist"—in other words, as they arise—"in their own natural states, just as they are." I'm not playing around with them anymore. They're just arising and passing away. "But no matter how much I'm exposed to them, I'm unable to detect even an instant when they have any power over my heart." This is, of course, heart meaning the basic quality of awareness, affectionate awareness. "They arise and cease, they're forever changing. But the presence"—see, that's another word for awareness—"the presence that knows them never changes for an instant. It is forever unborn and undying. This is the end of suffering."

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

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

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

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

into a full delusive state.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 250

The Axial Age and the Momentous Discovery of the Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 43 min

> *In this wide-ranging dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma places the Buddha's awakening within the broader context of the Axial Age (roughly 800-200 BCE), when transformative spiritual insights emerged across various civilizations. He compares the Buddha's revolutionary understanding with contemporary figures like Lao Tzu, Socrates, and Moses, each of whom broke through the mythological frameworks of their time toward new philosophical and spiritual insights.*
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> *Bhante explores how the Buddha's unique contribution was his direct investigation into the cause of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), moving beyond the jhānic states taught by his teachers to discover the three characteristics of existence: anicca (impermanence), dukkha, and anattā (not-self). He discusses the gradual formulation of Buddhist teachings, noting how fundamental discourses like the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11) developed over time.*
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> *The talk addresses the ultimate nature of nibbāna, acknowledging the apparent contradiction between viewing it as cessation versus pure awareness—a debate found in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. Bhante emphasizes how the Buddha's teaching remains grounded in individual experience rather than metaphysical speculation, focusing on the practical liberation from suffering through understanding the delusive nature of selfhood.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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

I just realised that it's been coming on for two years since I gave a talk which was much more than ten or twenty minutes instead of the Zoom sessions we've been doing. So I've lost all my confidence. I used to be able to rattle off forty or fifty minutes no problem, and I'm suddenly wondering what the hell am I going to say.

So I thought, well, I'll make it easy for myself. I thought I'd just wander, just let the mind wander around the Buddha and the story and all that.

Just to put him in perspective, he was born during what we call the Axial Age. And there were other beings at the time who were making leaps, you might say. So everybody knows Lao Tzu and the Tao. And he starts his work, as you know: the Tao that can be expressed is not the Tao. And then, of course, continues for many pages telling you what it is. And there you have a conundrum really about the absolutes. It's inexpressible, but it has to be expressed. So the Buddha himself, once he'd had this understanding, even though it was inexpressible, ineffable, he spent what, forty-five years trying to express it, but his manner was to tell you what it wasn't.

Then we have Socrates. That's a really interesting thing, which I came across fairly recently really, was that in all these societies that moved, mythology, which held the wisdom of that society, wasn't able to hold the new logical thinkings of philosophy. And it was out of the myth that philosophy grew. And that's where Socrates stands. And of course he was condemned to death because he was undermining the belief in gods. And his final words were something like, "Crito, make an offering of a cock to Asclepius," the god of health. So one wonders whether he himself had actually escaped, whether he still secretly believed in the gods. But at least that was a move, and really the West was stuck with that. We didn't have a Buddha to lead us, we had Socrates.

And when this spread, when the Roman Empire came, it was still stuck in that earlier religion which is about power. It's about gods having power and you have to appease them and you give them gifts and then the rain comes. And if it hasn't, well either you've done the sacrifice wrong or you've done something that's upset them.

However, at the same time, in the desert there was Moses. So he's also a contemporary. And Moses made an enormous break because I believe it took a thousand years for the Jews to accept it. Because they moved out of the polytheistic religion of the Egyptians. And interestingly enough, they were slaves. Had been slaves in Egypt and it may be that they had rejected the whole of the Egyptian stuff. And when they got to the Holy Land, the land they thought had been given to them, they came across other false gods. And Moses seemed to have leapt into a different place up on that mountain, a real spiritual insight, which really meant that what was governing your happiness was your moral life. And that was the next step, to have a God who really was concerned about whether you were good or not, not whether you'd made the right sacrifice or not.

But again, when Judaism in the form of Christianity moved into the empire, then of course it moved that way into a creator god or a god who's affected by your moral behaviour. And it's only certain mystics who rose beyond that. The most obvious one is Meister Eckhart, the German mystic, thirteenth century. And this monk, he's a Dominican. And he posited that behind the three persons of the God—the Son, the Father and

the Holy Spirit—was a Godhead. Well, the Franciscan bishop was very upset with him. And towards the end of his life, actually, they were carting him off to Rome to be tried. And of course, they would have burnt him unless he was ready to recant. Fortunately, he died. So he got let off. But if you read his work, he's really got where the Buddha was, in a sense. Something that was absolute, something that was beyond.

And then there was the Buddha himself and that time in India. So it would seem that there was not only a movement politically, they were all moving away from democratic tribal stuff. Actually, it was aristocratic. It was the Kshatriya class, the warrior caste, who were electing their leader. So it wasn't a democracy as such, moving towards monarchy. So by the time the Buddha was born there were established kings—Kosala, Magadha, places like that—and he would have known them all. He was in that caste. During his upbringing he must have known them as playmates and stuff, fencing matches and throwing spears at each other.

So by the end, when he leaves and becomes a *sadhu*, he has that natural support from, especially these two kings, but they all did, they all supported him. And during that time, you can see there was a huge effort to try and understand this whole thing about suffering. I mean, it was the obsession of the age. And you've got that varied rainbow of people from materialists, absolute outright materialists, who said there was just the body and that's it, to people who were amoral. One of them said you could go down one side of the Ganges committing murder, mayhem, and the other side doing massive compassionate acts and it wouldn't make a difference at all. And then you had people who were like the Jains, who had understood *kamma*.

And that's, by the way—just going back to Moses—the breakthrough was about moral behaviour. Now, interestingly, in Buddhism, later commentary that is, this first level of attainment, the stream entrant, the commentaries went on to say those people who really accepted the law of *kamma* were *chuḷa sotāpannas*—they were lesser *sotāpannas*—which meant in that language that anybody who really understands karmic consequence dependent on moral behaviour was actually on the way to become liberated. In other words, that was the baseline really of the spiritual life. So Moses was at that point, understanding the importance of ethics.

So during the Buddha's time, there were those people, like the Jains, who also understood that, but had an idea that the soul was the sense of self or whatever. I mean, you don't know really because Buddhists, of course, tended to see them as not being enlightened. But what happened was the Jains said that your *kamma* manifested as your body. And therefore, if you wanted to go into a complete heavenly state, you had to stop doing any harm whatsoever, even if you did it involuntarily, like standing on an ant or

something. And the idea was that you drew the body down. And as some of you might know, it's still considered a noble thing to do, is to slowly starve yourself to death, to let go of the body.

So there was all that fermentation going on. And right there within all that, so he's in a *saṅgha*. He's in a supportive environment. And it was acceptable for somebody to leave their family and to really give their life to this search. So we tend to look upon it rather negatively, that he left his wife and his child and all that. But remember there's an extended family. And he himself had been brought up by his aunt. His mother died. And I often wonder whether that didn't leave a scar. I have a cousin whose mother died giving birth to him and I've lost contact now, and I often wondered whether when that happens to somebody whether there isn't some sort of background guilt or something or something lost that's niggling underneath the whole psychology—his whole psychology, Siddhatha.

But as you know, he goes through this crisis, which is not so regular in our society. What we call spiritual emergency and stuff like that, where people have to confront at some point in their lives the fact that they're going to die. And it hits some people really badly and others not so much. So he's at that point and he's in his twenties. So that's normally when, not when I say normally, people sometimes wake up in their twenties knowing that's the end of youth. And what they're looking forward to is sickness, ageing and death, which is miserable. So you can see he's caught into that mentality of despair.

And in those days they would have understood quite clearly that, or at least most would have understood, that you just keep coming back, just keep coming back. And that was the way it was. You might be born in a heavenly realm, you might be born in a hell realm, but you would just keep on this rotor, this wheel of rebirth, or reincarnation as they would say. So that was on his mind, he says that, or at least that's what the scriptures say, that's what drove him to seek this liberation.

So obviously he goes to his teachers, he goes to the ones that are famous, and it seems as though the ones that he went to were ones who could really establish these very beautiful states of mind through meditative exercises, especially on the breath, mantra and all that sort of stuff. And when somebody does that, and that you can find in all religions. All religions are into the ecstasy. They go into it different ways. So, for instance, in Christianity, it would be through devotion. So this wonderful devotional mental state. I was once, there was this Catholic monk turned up at Kanduboda where I was, and it was funny, he left me, we had a discussion about something, and as he was going, he said, something along the lines of, "Now I'm going into my delicious devo-

tions," which meant that he would go into these beautiful places which is just filled with delight, of devotion, praise. I mean, you get it in a lesser way from pop idols and people like that, when youngsters go berserk. So they're in that place aren't they, very heightened state of happiness or excitement. It's not quite the same mind.

So what he was taught there were these *rūpajhānas*, and that's built upon your breath and whatnot. And eventually, it's as though the mind, the heart-mind, extracts itself from the body and establishes this very beautiful mental state within you. And they can last as long as your strength of concentration. And once that goes, it disappears. And he was such an adept that, as you know, he was invited to be a teacher. He went to a second teacher. It looks as though he wasn't the teacher. The teacher had recently died. It was his son. And he learns how to go through the *arūpajhāna*, or at least the last one, anyway. It's not particularly said. But each time, remember, these mental states, he comes out of them. And he still discovers himself to be in a state of despair over the purpose of life. I mean, that's what it's about. Meaningfulness. What's the meaning of going round and round and round.

And so then, when he's left everything and he's absolutely desperate, he then, through that little, I mean, what I normally point to is this incident in childhood where he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. And somehow, somewhere along the line, he turned it around. Instead of seeking escape from suffering, he turned inwards to find out what was the cause of it. And that really, I think, was his inspiration.

So now he's sitting under this Bodhi tree, what we call a big fig tree, very shady, by a river. And he's got a village to nip down to, to get his grub. And he sits there, and he has this really quite colossal breakthrough, which I say really, in Christianity, really only belongs to the mystics. If you talk to an ordinary Christian, they keep talking about this God who does all sorts of things. And occasionally you get, like Saint Francis, or Meister Eckhart, Dionysius the Areopagite. Now there's somebody to look at. He wrote a tract actually in the medieval ages saying what God was and it told you what he wasn't virtually, and it was a document which became very famous in the medieval ages. But of course he didn't get very far and he's basically taking away the idea that it's a person completely.

So he has this experience and he's got to try and explain it. And he's trying to explain it in the language of the earlier religion. And I think everybody who makes a real breakthrough like that finds it almost impossible. Even, for instance, like Freud. He's got to search for new words. Ego, id, superego. Because of his insight, the old language won't do. So the Buddha is trying to use language which is commonplace: *vijñāna* which just means consciousness, *citta* which means your heart or your heart mind—is what

the old word soul used to be—and he's got to juggle these words and sometimes he comes out with what seemingly on paper looks like a complete contradiction. And it's only when you realise that he's actually using these words in a slightly different way, pointing to something different, that you see his difficulty.

So, once he makes this break, he's stunned by it. I mean, if you can imagine having that experience, and there's nobody to support you. There's nothing in the society that supports what you're actually experiencing. I mean I have had people come to me who've had an experience and it's knocked them out and they can't understand it at all and it's unbalanced them. And when they realise when I tell them well this is what we mean by a Nibbānic experience and then it puts it into some sort of framework, it all makes sense. But without that there's this dislocation. They can't understand it at all.

So he sat there for quite some time, let's say, what, a week or something, where he's trying to work out the meanings of all this. Now, if you look at the early scriptures, you can see that really what happened was, as he began to teach, the Dharma began to manifest. It began to become more regularised. So he doesn't start off by teaching the Four Noble Truths. I mean, that's the *Dhammacakkappavattana*, the discourse on turning of the wheel of law, lays it all out beautifully. But everybody understands that now to be something later and it's put as the first because it manifests the basis of his understanding: Four Noble Truths. But he obviously starts by trying to explain what he's just experienced, and he goes, of course, to his first companions, whom he feels have some sort of insight or something, and he was able at least to get Kondañña to have an experience, and he gave him a special name, Añña Kondañña, Kondañña the one who knows. And most of you will know that I've taken this little phrase from Ajahn Tate: make it simple, take it easy and stay with the one who knows, that's Añña Kondañña.

And then of course he does begin to teach and very slowly the whole teaching begins to formulate itself and we end up with masses of lists. Ten of these, four of those. And it's all nicely laid out for us. But I think it took some time for him to get that together, especially so that, as you know, he hasn't got a recording machine. And he can't even write. I mean, how can he be a Buddha and not write and read? It's ridiculous. So you can see he's hampered really. And you can imagine everywhere he goes, he's asked the same questions.

I mean, I know this as a Dharma teacher. Questions are always the same. There might be a twist on them, a certain angle, but they're basically always the same. And wherever he goes, he's got to say this and say it in a way that sounds spontaneous, straightforward, etcetera, etcetera. In fact, one of the things he says when he considers

teaching is that it would be bothersome. But then he overcomes that sort of judgment about what teaching might be by saying that his compassion to help people would guide him.

And he roots the whole of his teaching on this one word, this *dukkha*, which translates directly as hard to bear. And I suppose what it's saying is that it's not possible to achieve a steady state of happiness in this life or in any form of consciousness, any form of consciousness, right? And that consciousness itself, in a way, is a disturbance. At its most subtle level, consciousness itself is a disturbance from the Nibbānic state. And it's normally, of course, expressed in a much more obvious sense, like physical pain, painful people, all that sort of stuff. Remember, there are no painful people. That's just me being cheeky. It's only us finding them painful.

So this dukkha, that's the ground of all his teaching. And to understand that this dukkha arises out of a misunderstanding, a wrong way of looking at things, a delusive way of, A, this whole business of trying to find happiness anyway in this life and grasping onto it. That's what we mean by attachment. You become dependent on something for a mental state. I mean, that's what happiness is to most people. It is to me—a sense of happiness, an emotional feel, an inner atmosphere. And of course, Nibbāna has nothing to do with that. When somebody says to Sāriputta, you talk about the bliss of Nibbāna, when there's no emotions in Nibbāna, he says, that is the very bliss of Nibbāna, that there's no emotions there, which is a bit confusing. Because we always define ourselves by how we feel, right?

So this dukkha, this hard to bear, arises out of that initial mistake of wanting to seek happiness in the world. And then there's a trick of the mind itself, this brain-mind complex, which somehow creates this continuity and gives us a feeling of actual stability. So even if you ask yourself, well, how long is a second? How long is a moment? When you say, "I won't be a moment," how long is a moment? It stretches, doesn't it? It does for me anyway. I mean, it's not immediate and then gone. It keeps stretching. And if you think about listening to music, somehow this complex organism is able to hold the tune so that each note fits in and builds up an atmosphere. But actually what's happening is just this little ping on the ear every so often. It's magic, isn't it?

And it's really breaking down that sense of continuity which gives us also a sense of being. It's a wrong sense of being. So it gives us a sense of solidity. So that's the other bit about *anattā*, not self. And when you move over to the understanding of anattā, it's always about control. So in the discourse on anattā, which again is put as his second discourse, but it's obviously something that was developed later and then put into this form, he goes to the root teaching as to where the real problem lies. And of course that

is expressed through his victory verse where he says, "I've seen you house builder, I've seen you, I've seen where the initial problem is, this arising of a sense of self. And I've broken your raft. I've messed you up. I've kicked you out. That's the end. You're not going to be there for me anymore."

So this sense of self expresses itself—it's not the sense of self, even though you might have it. Like when I say I'm talking now, I'm referencing myself. I can hear myself talk in the sense of me there. It expresses itself in terms of a sense of control. What you can control. And a sense of that identity. So that's why we have this dual relationship to the body of "I am sick," but "I have a headache." So we've got these peculiar relationships which we don't really acknowledge. So undermining that sense of self is part and parcel of our process.

So these three characteristics he discovered to be a way in to undermining that delusion. And with the delusiveness gone, there was an awakening to the way things really are. So the question is, well, what is it that holds the delusion? What is it that holds the delusion? And it can only be whatever's looking. There's something wrong with the way we're looking. So it reverts back to this sati, this awareness. So the delusion is actually in the awareness itself. And when that delusion disappears, the awareness finds itself in that bright spot, in that bright area where there is no more delusion, and that is the awakening. So our whole process is to look at these three characteristics and slowly begin to realize that there's something wrong with the way that we're looking at the world, the way that we're relating to it.

Now, if it were just that, we'd all be enlightened very quickly. That's not really a big deal. You just sit down and observe these three characteristics. But unfortunately, there's this backlog of horror that we have to make our way through. And they constantly interfere with us. It's what we call the hindrances. All this depression and anxiety and the whole horror story of our lives, all keeps coming up to sort of drag us away and entertain us. It's sometimes not a particularly happy entertainment. And we're caught up in the mesh of this delusive thinking.

So that without us even trying, we're creating massive stories in our heads of being either angry with somebody or saving the world from climate catastrophe. So the mind is full of these wonderful ideas and creative ideas. And when we're doing something in life, even though we're grounded on what we're actually doing, whatever work we're actually doing, we're doing it always from this delusive angle. It's always me doing something for somebody else. It's always me creating something. Me, me, me, it's al-

ways there. Whenever you find yourself in a fantasy or anything, it's always you, you're always there in the middle of it, you're always leading it, you're always winning, one way or the other, unless you really hate yourself.

So, this whole business of the I is what the Buddha centres on as one way of undermining that fundamental delusion that the self has about its relationship to the world. And that's of course what makes the practice so difficult because especially in a society that offers us everything we could possibly want to get us away from Nibbāna. It's like anything you need to escape Nibbāna is handed to you on a plate unless of course you happen to be unemployed and one of the—what do they call them? People who can't afford heating or eating. Destitute. I was thinking about that. They use another word. What's the other word for it? Homeless. Yes, homeless. No, there's another word. Somewhere there's another word for people who are beyond poverty. Who've gone beyond poverty. So we have them now, don't we, in our society? And... it'll come to me all of a sudden. Actually, you've got it. You've got it. So... I haven't found it yet. It's coming. Any moment now... It'll drop down from the sky and I'll know exactly the word I mean.

So that's really our task in hand. And talking about society, we talk about social kamma. But actually, in Buddhist understanding, there isn't a social kamma as such. Because we ourselves contain the history of our culture. We ourselves contain it within ourselves. We are an expression of our culture. And in our little worlds that we create, the one that I'm actually experiencing now, this little bubble that I'm in, is expressing both the culture, both the history, and its onward movement. And if it's skewed, then of course I'll be moving towards what's unwholesome. And if I'm using what's in the culture which is beneficial, that's the way I'll be using it.

Now, what we tend to do is congregate around people who think like us, and there you've got a group, and there you think you have some sort of—you're holding something which is meta, above the individual, that it's some sort of social thing, a social kamma. But it's not, in Buddhist understanding it's just individuals getting together to achieve some sort of aim. And that's the same when you have a catastrophe. So the tsunami for instance that killed thousands. So when you think about or the bombings and all that stuff and you think... I've just been watching, I've just watched all through The World at War which was a '60s program I think or early '70s, and Laurence Olivier narrates it. And the pictures of Europe after the war, it's just stunning. I mean, they're just skeletons of buildings. The whole city is just skeletons of buildings. 9/11 day. It is indeed, yeah. Thanks for reminding us. 9/11 day.

And it's just skeletons of buildings. And people without homes, without food, without water, it's just everything that we can see in other parts of the world. We went through during the World War, especially Germany, of course, but Russia too, but especially Germany, which we bombed heartlessly. A thousand bombers. Every night, a thousand bombers every night. That was the British. Then the Americans went in during the day with a thousand bombers. It was absolutely, when you look at what was happening and then you get these pictures of cities, it really is, it really takes you aback.

So, where have I gone now? I've lost myself. Oh yes, thank you. Social kamma. So even when you get millions of people dying, right? And there was, weren't there, in the Second World War, something like, I don't know, 65 million? 65 million altogether? You think of it as a mass thing and it's overwhelming. But actually it's just individuals. And some would have died immediately from an explosion. And others would have died in terrible agony over some time. So, eventually, it always comes back to us, the individual. That's really where the Buddha is at.

And then, of course, he leaves us high and dry, really, because having established this Nibbāna, that's as far as he goes. He won't go into anything which is beyond Nibbāna as a personal experience. So there's no understanding of a god or as Hinduism went into some sort of Brahma, a neuter, so Brahma was the creator god and then they moved beyond that to this Brahma who was a neutral but it's an understanding of some consciousness of or something great of which we are all part. So every atta is coming from the Brahma and it's finding its way back. One explanation I heard was that Brahma sort of burst himself into all these attas and then all these attas have to find their way back to Brahma. So you can understand that once you try to explain anything beyond a personal experience of the ultimate, you're into really creative theology.

Or, you know, you've got, like for instance, I know there's one South Sea Island, believes that the world was created from a coconut. Now, you might think at first, ha ha. But of course, what they're saying is, there must be a seed, there must be a beginning, there must be something out of which something grew. And you get that in all early mythology, especially the Aborigines in Australia. They had this wonderful mythology about how the earth began.

And so the Buddha never goes there. He doesn't tell us how the earth, how it all began. He doesn't tell us where we're going. Once you've achieved Nibbānic bliss and you die, there's no inkling as to what happens. Who do you join? Do you go into this massive other consciousness which envelops the world and is saturating the world and we just disappear into it? That's a nice thought except I don't want to lose myself.

And then there's so there's all these wonderful ideas you can come up with, but the Buddha never goes, they say. And I think it's just something we have to accept that is unknowable. It's something that cannot be known. And I came across this through science, actually. I listened to a lecture by a physicist who was saying, we know that there's dark energy. We know it's there because we can tell it through mathematics and through its effect. And we know there's dark matter. So there's something which is similar to what we're experiencing, energy and matter, but there's no way they can find of actually experiencing it. It's not to be experienced, and yet we know it. You know it's there. So in a sense, it's a sort of leap of confidence or faith that this Nibbāna is the end. That's it. And that when you've achieved that state, there aren't any more questions. That's it. It's completely self-fulfilling.

And when you read the nun Mae Chee Kaew, that I put there, she doesn't talk about God or anything like that. She's completely, she just, her heart, as she calls it, she has other words to refer back to the Buddha within, is enough, that's it. You're completely satisfied. There isn't an effort to try and get beyond that. It's completely self-satisfying. So that's why you don't get any metaphysics from the Buddha as such. He just doesn't go there. And he doesn't go there for another reason. From his point of view, it's an absolute waste of time anyway. Even if he knew that there was this wonderful thing that you're going into and whatnot, it wouldn't actually help your situation here and now.

Because the whole process is the individuation, the maturation of this self within us. The higher self, I shouldn't say that, should I? It's not Buddhist at all. Of this Buddha within. It's the extraction by the Buddha within of itself from its own delusion with the world it finds itself in. And in that individuation, in that realisation of its own true nature, that's enough. You've done it. You're out. You won't be born again into this world.

Now having said that, we have this seeming contradiction in Buddhism as a whole. There are those who believe that when the Buddha dies, it's unknowable, but basically it's not something, it's not an existence, it's not a becoming. So it's a darkness. You go into it and that's it, completely happy. And people who experience it normally talk about it as a blackout. Although that particular phrase is limited to people who are non-returners. The point is that when people experience this moment it's usually a sort of, it's a blackout and yet when they come out of it something's changed and their lives are changed by it, so it's not going to sleep, that's for sure.

On the other hand there are people who have the experience of pure awareness. So you get these two schools, you've got them in Theravada. You've got, say, the Burmese especially, who love the Abhidhamma, who say it's a blackout, that's it, you're gone. There's no reason to come back, there's nothing attracting you to come back. You remain in that restful darkness.

And yet we have the forest tradition coming up from Ajahn Mun, and Ajahn Sumedho, whom many of you know, who talk about it as an awakeness, as a consciousness. And in the scripture you get statements saying exactly that. That there is a consciousness which is without boundary, no limits, not touched by any of the senses, so it's not phenomenal, and in all directions full of light.

In Mahayana, you again have that split. You have the Nagarjuna, the great philosopher of the Madhyamaka school, who says it's a blackout, who says that's it, it's finished. And then you get the Yogacara school, of Vasubandhu especially, who rewrote the Abhidhamma as something which was pointing to something beyond just this blackout saying that in fact the Buddha can reappear both as a being in his delightful body which we would call a spirit or a deva, a god, and it can be coarse and have a more sort of physical representation. So we had those three bodies, the body of the Buddha himself that's the Dharmakaya, the body of the apparition Buddha, like...

spirit Buddha anyway is the *sambhogakaya*, the body of delight, and the *nirmanakaya*, which is the body of some substance. And so you've got these two apparent contradictions.

I don't know of any school that commits itself to combining them at all. So it remains something for us personally to explore and to find out what's actually true.

But as you see on the logo of Satipanya, I've included them, you see. I'm a heretic. In the center is that black spot, which is representative of this *nirodha*. And then there's the bright white light of pure awareness. And then, of course, the manifestation into the world.

So, yeah, that's it really. And then, of course, he gives us the practice to be able to attain that. So it's a fabulous, a fabulous legacy that he's left the world, the Buddha.

I think I'm drying up now. It's really what time it is. How are you? Good heavens, I have done it. I've done 40 minutes, haven't I? I have actually, I've made it. That's it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. They have not caused greater confusion. And that you will, by your efforts, liberate yourself from all suffering.

Thank you.

CHAPTER 251

Dependent Origination is Based on Not-Knowing and Innocence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41 min

> *In this comprehensive dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a detailed exploration of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), the Buddha's complete map of how suffering arises and how liberation becomes possible. Beginning with the Buddha's victory verse from the Dhammapada, Bhante explains how the entire teaching centers on dukkha—not merely as suffering, but as the full spectrum of dissatisfaction from subtle disturbance to existential horror. He clarifies that dukkha refers not to life's inherent difficulties like aging and death, but to our relationship with these experiences.*
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> *The talk traces the twelve links of dependent origination, emphasizing that avijjā (not-knowing) should be understood not as culpable ignorance but as innocent not-knowing—we simply don't know from birth that our sense of self is a construction. Bhante illuminates how by age three, we have solidified the delusion of 'me' and 'mine,' which then generates saṅkhāra (habitual formations) of acquisitiveness and aversion rooted in our need for safety. He explains how consciousness (viññāṇa) functions as a screen or mirror upon which experience arises, and how the six sense bases create discrete channels of experience.*
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> *Crucially, Bhante identifies the escape route from suffering: the moment between pleasant/unpleasant feeling (vedanā) and craving (taṇhā). He reveals the Buddha's profound insight that the 'I' arises after wanting, not before it—making liberation possible. Through vipassanā practice and renunciation understood as allowing unwholesome states to arise and dissipate naturally, we can interrupt the chain before identity solidifies. The talk concludes with practical guidance on the observer position in meditation and the paradox of awareness becoming aware of itself.*

It's been a while since I've given a talk, much longer than 20 minutes. After one and a half years, I've lost all my confidence. Even so, we'll have a go at fulfilling 45 minutes.

I want to take the Buddha's victory verse, which tells us what the end game is—the moment where he breaks through the veil of delusion. He says: "Through many births I have wandered on and on, searching for but never finding the builder of this house. To be born again and again is suffering. Oh house builder, you are seen. You will not build a house again. All your rafters are broken, the ridge pole destroyed. The mind has gone to the unconditioned and has reached the end of craving."

I don't know whether he said this immediately after he was liberated or whether it was composed later, but it's really an insight about identity. So I thought this evening just to run through the dependent origination, which is really the fullest expression of his understanding. It contains the whole teaching, because each link substantiates all his teaching. Once we've grasped it, it gives us at least some sort of map whereby we can see where our practice is going.

It's centred really on dukkha. This word dukkha—its root meaning is "hard to bear." Then it becomes anything that is suffering. It was originally translated simply as suffering, but in a sense that doesn't capture the fullness of the word. The word also means a sense of dissatisfaction, all the way from the littlest, minutest disturbance, all the way to existential horror. It's the whole gamut of human misery that this word dukkha is trying to capture, and he centres the whole teaching on that fact. He really grounded it: there is dukkha. I don't think the human being could ever deny that.

But this dukkha must not be confused with life itself being unpleasant. The whole process—being born, growing old, falling sick, dying—that's inbuilt in our process. And that isn't what he's talking about when he talks about suffering. He's talking about our relationship to that.

He himself, of course, was born and his mother died at birth. I often wonder whether that sort of remains in the psyche of the person, the loss of that mother, and produces some underground disturbance which may have caused his existential crisis in his twenties. Anyway, that's just an interesting thought.

He grounds all of his teaching on this word dukkha. And then the next statement is, of course, the cause of it. He points to the specific quality of desire. Now remember, we're translating this word tanha, which comes from the word "thirst." So it's a wrong desire, a desire based on wrong understanding. That's his statement. And then he gives the path leading to the end of suffering.

So where is the original mistake? When we look at dependent origination, what we start with is this word avijja, which just means "not knowing." It's not a culpable not knowing—you just don't know. It's translated as ignorance, but that adds a connotation not present in the word itself. The word is simply "not knowing."

Because we don't know and we're born into a situation, we make that connection: "This is me." And that's your basic delusion. If you can imagine as a baby, we come out and we have this catastrophe of information which we can't make any head or tail out of. Then somewhere around four months, it seems, we start to distance and push the outer world outwards—the first object being your caregiver, your mother usually. By

the end of three years, the child is very clear: I am me and everything else is not me. That's really the foundation. And of course the child knows what it possesses: "This is mine." I used to have lots of fun with my nieces and nephews stealing their toys.

There's always that look of surprise on their face, and I'd say, "Oh, I like that. I'll have that." And that would send them running straight to mother, shouting in protest.

So, anyway, apart from that bit of teasing—by the age of three, we have a very concrete idea of me, of me-ness. And that delusion, we say, is underneath everything we do. We never lose it. It's underneath the whole of our lives, this fundamental delusion, running beneath all our programs.

And what it's producing is the next phase: the saṅkhāras. Because of this delusion, we produce certain habits. And these habits based on the delusion of a self have to do with our relationship to the world. In order to substantiate ourselves, to make us feel more real, more safe, we collect things—we become acquisitive. That's where we get the greed, the lust, the lust for power. It makes us feel much safer. If you've got a million euros in the bank, it feels far safer than just a few euros.

So the basic ground of our happiness as deluded beings is safety. That's what we expect of our governments—to keep us safe from COVID and all the other stuff. You can see that's the ground. As soon as you don't feel safe, the fear comes, tremendous fear. And to make ourselves feel safe, we collect things. So there's your—it's normally translated as greed, but it's far better to think of it as acquisitiveness.

And then of course you have to protect it. Anything that undermines what you've collected, you have to push away. There's your aversion. And if it's bigger than you, you have to run for it. There's your fight or flight.

So that's what's coming out of this delusion of a sense of me, which of course is based on this body. The sense of me is grounded very much in this actual body that we inhabit. That's why anything that affects the body is of course very frightening—whether it's affecting us on a physical level with physical illness or a mental level with mental illness. The sense of being me is grounded in this body.

So what we have then is consciousness. Dependent on these habits, this fundamental delusion—dependent on the habits—there arises consciousness. Now this consciousness is not a knowing consciousness; it's a mirror. It's a screen upon which information arises. That's where it actually is.

Some of you know the five khandhas, the five aggregates as it's translated. The Buddha again splits us up into these to give us a cross-section of the human being at any given moment. At any given time, you have a body—your physicality—you have all your feelings and sensations in the body, you have all your perceptions, concepts, memories, and then there is consciousness. But you have to be careful with words in the scriptures, because here we have somebody who has made an insight for which the language of the time had no way of describing. What happens is you get the use of the same word to describe something mundane and a word describing something transcendent.

One of these is viññāṇa. It translates as consciousness. But in the khandhas, it is just the screen upon which something arises. With the arising of a habit, it must display itself on this consciousness.

Dependent upon this consciousness, we have nāma-rūpa—materiality and mentality. These terms are often translated in different ways, but if you think of it simply as your body and your mind, that gives you an idea of the first deconstruction.

The Buddha's big on deconstruction. What he's doing by deconstructing something that feels so substantial—"I am me"—the first deconstruction is to see that the body is one thing with its own processes and the mind is something else.

That's what we experience when we do this eating meditation. By driving your attention into the tongue, you're actually right up against where the mind touches the body. And that's all we can know—we can only know the point where the mind touches the body.

We can't know matter in itself. Even though we can feel our bones, we can't actually get into them. We don't actually know what a corpuscle is in the blood. We don't know what the liver's doing. There's a presumption that I am the body, but when you investigate it, we know very little about it through our direct experience. And then we find that actually we don't have that much control, because things go wrong and that's the end of it.

So that first split—believe it or not—that clarity about body and mind is the first insight of the process that leads us to liberation. And the next one is to realize that the one is always firing off the other. If you stand on somebody's foot, there's a mental reaction of anger. If you feel angry, the body gets hot. They're completely intertwined. You can't separate them in any real way, but you can, through your meditation, realize that these are two very different systems working with one another.

This becomes important in the longer term, particularly regarding rebirth, because it's the mind which separates from the body at death. Some people have that experience directly and they know. But that experience is not necessary for us to have an insight which takes us towards liberation.

Because of this consciousness dependent on body and mind, there are the six sense bases. Here it becomes obvious that the Buddha is talking about some sort of screen, because your consciousness is dependent on the sense base, and they are discrete experiences. You can only hear with your ears. No matter how hard you try, you'll never hear with your nose. This is another deconstruction—realizing that there are six sense bases, five being of the body, the sensual bases, and the other being of the mind. Emotions and thoughts must arise on that screen of consciousness for them to be known.

We have this concept of the subconscious in our psychology. That's there within the teaching, but it's never actually pointed to, because there's no point in knowing that there are things you can't know. You can't guess what's in your subconscious. You can only know what's there when it arises on that screen, that mirror.

Those six sense bases again deconstruct our experience, and this is much closer to our actual experience. The world we live in is given to us by those six sense bases. Whatever world we are creating now, the little universe we find ourselves in, is all dependent upon them. If you lose your sight, you lose one dimension of experience.

Moving on from that: dependent upon your sense bases, you have contact. This contact is the moment-to-moment experience where an object, a sense base, and consciousness come together. That's a moment of contact. When you're doing the practice of eating and burying your attention directly into the tongue, just tasting—that's the point of contact.

There's always that moment before feeling anything. What we do then is give it a quality as to whether it's pleasant, unpleasant, or in that shady area of neutral. Before that, there's no pleasant and unpleasant—there is just sensation, whatever it is. Then the next point is a definition of that sensation in terms of whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. That's the world we actually live in. We live in that duality, moving from pleasant, joyful situations to unpleasant, unjoyful situations. There's a small area of what we call neutral, but when you investigate a neutral sensation, you'll find that it shades off into one or the other, because that's what the mind does—it's constantly making this division for us.

And then, of course, you have this reaction. This is where the problem starts. Once something is pleasant, you want it; when it's unpleasant, you don't want it. Very, very simple. But right there is the escape route. To put the attention right there, at that moment where the reaction arises, is the point of liberation. From that point on, there's very little scope for escape. The next position, if we don't catch that, is one of identity. As soon as something is described as pleasant and we want it, the "I" comes in immediately. Unless you're extraordinarily attentive, you can't stop the next action, which is the empowerment of the desire.

There's a crucial point where we can see this reaction to something. That's possible just by being generally awake. You pass a coffee shop, you smell the coffee, and there's a desire. Now, that process of wanting and not wanting is also part of these *saṅkhāras*, part of the habitual actions we have concocted throughout our lives. That's why it's so difficult to change ourselves. Even though we can see quite clearly at breakfast this process of desiring, and that it will take us towards some level of suffering, and we see it clearly, we still can't stop ourselves. We keep on overeating or doing something harmful.

So that's when the practice comes in—that's when this practice of renunciation begins.

Renunciation, which you might say is the core spiritual practice, mustn't be confused with what they sometimes translate as self-mortification. You're not trying to punish yourself. We're not trying to punish ourselves for stopping greed. We're not trying to kill greed. We're just trying not to indulge it. And that is a process of letting it go, allowing it to arise and for its energy to dissipate. That's what we mean by renunciation—we're renouncing that.

It's the same with the negative stuff. Renouncing, letting go of anger, letting go of shame and all the rest of it. It's a case of bearing with it, knowing it, feeling it, and letting it go.

Now when we say letting it go, that's not active on our part. We're not *letting* anything go—we're letting it *go*. If you think, "Oh well, I've got to let this go," and you get active about it, then you're putting that energy, which is a disguised aversion, into the system. And of course the devil keeps biting you back. So it's allowing things to arise and pass away, which is what we mean by letting something go.

This process of seeing something but then not being able to change our habits—I think that came to me very forcefully when I was thinking about smoking. I never did smoke myself, but it was very clear during the sixties that the tobacco companies were

telling great big porkies and that smoking was actually killing you. The science came through, and then everybody began to wake up and realize that in fact smoking kills you, one way or another. But it was so difficult to get over. It wasn't possible.

But you would hear of people—like the father of a friend of mine who had a heart attack and stopped immediately. He had to first have a heart attack in order to stop smoking. So sometimes you just need that little kick.

Once we perceive the problem, then the practice begins. Then the process of renunciation begins. And that's why it takes us so long to become liberated. If it were just a matter of seeing the way things are, well, we can figure out how to do it. Unfortunately, we've also got to purify the heart. So it's known also as the path of purification. And that's what we read: this is the path to purification.

Remember that this *avijjā* is normally understood as wrong understanding. That's of course coming from the point of view of wisdom, and this process is moving us away from that not-knowing and delusion towards wisdom. But remember that from the heart's point of view, we start from the point of innocence. There was no time that we really, really meant to do harm. We might have done so, but fundamentally, there wasn't any real desire to do harm. It was always to do with this self-protection and this crimped sort of love.

Even when you think of people like Stalin or Hitler and all that—they did actually love their people. Hitler loved his dog, things like that. He wasn't incapable of love. It was just crimped. It was just torn. It was just brought into this very specific definition. And of course, everything else became their enemy.

So remember that when we talk about *avijjā*, and it does come across in the literature as wrong understanding—which is true, and the Eightfold Path begins with wrong understanding—remember it's also referring to the heart in terms of innocence. Even though we create all these mistakes, and we've got all these problems, emotional problems and all that, and we mess people up and everything else, we're heading towards that original purity. So it's from innocence to purity.

And when that purity is conjoined with right understanding, that's when you have proper compassion, love, and joy. That's how it expresses itself through this medium, through this psychophysical organism. It expresses itself that way.

So going back to this Dependent Origination, which is only describing how we create suffering—we've got this point: I want.

Now, in our language, the "I" always comes first, right? "I want a cup of tea." "I want to go here." From the language point of view, from our personal experience point of view, this "I" always comes first. If the "I" always came first, there would be actually no escape. The identity draws us into a connection, an inner connection with something from which there is no escape. Once you've said "I" and you've empowered it, that's it—you've done it. You've created something: an action of speech, of thought, or of the body.

So it's because—and this is for me such a crucial insight that the Buddha had—it's because the "I" comes *after* the process, or in the middle of the process, that the escape happens. Otherwise, see, if it were pleasant feeling followed immediately by "I want pleasant feeling," there would be no escape. It's the fact that there is, first of all, the wanting that allows us to see where the escape is. And then there's the "I want." And then, of course, there's the empowerment.

If you were to say something like—you're passing a coffee shop, and you say to yourself, "I'd like a cup of coffee"—if you go back on that, in the proper process of psychology, it would be: smelling, seeing coffee. There's your contact. There would be pleasant. Very pleasant. Then there'd be wanting. And then there'd be "I want." And then you'd be into the shop, buying coffee.

So it's: coffee smell, pleasant smell—that's the contact. Coffee smell. Pleasant coffee smell. Want pleasant coffee smell. "I" want pleasant coffee. "I" get pleasant coffee. So there's an empowerment of that desire. That's how the actual process is working all the time, you see. And that's why there's this escape. But to see that escape, you've got to be completely awake. You've got to be aware of it.

So we all know it's there. In our daily lives, the idea is to maintain that sort of mindfulness so that we're quickly at the point before we become identified with it. And this can be difficult in areas where you're irritated by somebody. Normally speaking, you'd be out there quick, you know, reacting. But if we're there and we can feel that irritation growing in us, we can hold it—hold it there for a second—and raise the attention towards what the person is saying. So we're stopping that reaction. And if you stop the reaction, you stop the identity.

When you go home, you make an effort. Once we see that process, it re-empowers us. It gives us our power back, you see.

Now, the next point of interest: apart from this, *upādāna* is translated as "grasping"—that's how it's translated. So it's craving, which obviously doesn't—what the word "craving" is telling us is that it's a wrong desire. But it's two stronger words, from tiny desire to something that is overwhelmingly desired. And then there's this process of identity.

The next word is *bhava*, which translates as "becoming." At that point, the self keeps on recreating itself.

So remember, that process isn't a one-off thing. It's constantly going over and over and over throughout the day. There are some times when it's not happening—if you're just resting and being silent, then that dependent origination isn't working. It's only working when desire comes up, or aversion, the opposite.

At bhava, the becoming, there are three things: the becoming itself, the will that allows something to manifest, and in the Buddha's understanding, the action and the will are the same thing. Just in ordinary physics, as far as I understand, when you throw a stone into the air, you cannot separate the force from the stone. It's the same with an action. You cannot separate the will from the action that you're performing. If you were to withdraw your will, then the action would stop. So at that point, several things are happening. The will produces a consequence—the beginning of the action, the process of the action, and the ending of it.

Now, that dependent origination is also posited as a three-life process, but for us it makes much more sense if we reduce it to moment-to-moment experience. There it is: underlying every moment of our lives is this delusion. Even if we have an inkling of it, even if we're aware of it in some way, it still remains as a habit of identity. And upon all these habits, all these programs running underneath this little being, you have a moment where some information comes in. It could be information from the outside—you hear something—or it's information coming from inside, some thought, some emotion arises. And as soon as that happens, the reaction comes in, the identity comes in, the empowerment comes in, and the whole process turns over. And every time it does that, it makes things worse.

If we can just stop it at the point of reaction, that's when the whole thing collapses. So there are two points of collapse. The first is to recognize when desire is there and to allow the desire to exhaust itself, which drains this underlying habit of its power. If we work on a habit that we don't want and keep working on it, keep draining it of power, eventually the habit runs, but we're not fooled by it. We're not sucked into it. And it's often a good thing to go for the big one, because if you go for the big one, it seems to drain all the others too. All the time we're growing in that spiritual energy of not being caught up in things that are unwholesome for us.

The other point is sakkāya. Recognizing that sense of self—that's how you know the process is activated, that it's there within us. This sense of self, as I think we went through this morning, this identity: if you bite your tongue for just one moment, you are the body. That's what we mean by identity. And the subtlest form of identity is this position we take when we are practicing vipassanā.

Here, whether we are aware of it or not, we've pulled ourselves out of the whole psychophysical organism. We've found a place within us, which one writer calls—a great book to read, by the way—the observation post. You've found this place, usually just behind the forehead, where you are centered, where you are positioned, and you're able to observe and feel everything that's being offered from that position as an object. Now, as soon as something is an object, you can't be it.

That's an important thing to keep hammering home. Even when you're sitting by yourself and you get a pain in the knee, you say, "There's a pain in it"—not "my knee"—"there's a pain in it." And you point to it and say, "Well, it's down there and this is up here." That separation, that distance, is disidentification. You can do that with emotions, you can do that with thought.

Now, this isn't the disidentification that comes from mental illness, because that just causes confusion. What this should do is ground you in the observer, the position of the observer. You're more grounded in that ability to observe, to feel, and to know what's going on.

Yet even that is a delusive self. How do you know that? Because you're aware of being the observer. If you're aware of being the observer, you can't be that either. Everything you're aware of, you can't be. So you have to go even one step beyond that.

But here we come across a real difficulty. As soon as you try to get rid of the observer, you create another person who's trying to get rid of it. We're into a real deep paradox. And here's where the Buddha's teaching is, shall we say, at its most clear. You don't worry about that at all. You just keep pointing your attention to what you're actually experiencing. And then, when the time is ripe, there is an experience of just pure awareness. At that point, the person knows: this is the real, everything else is not the real.

So that process of not identifying—what you can do, as I was talking to somebody today—is this: in your meditation, when you're very calm, when you're very peaceful, everything is very still, the mind's not wandering all over the place, and you have this very clear identity of the observer...

That image of the observer, the feeling of the observer, is actually also coming up on this mirror, on this screen of consciousness. That's what's happening. So awareness itself is becoming aware of itself because it feels its own presence on that screen.

When you look at your face in the mirror, it gives you some idea. If you haven't done the two-mirror trick, it's always instructive. You look in the mirror, you have another mirror looking at the mirror, and that's the one you look at because it's turned your face around. That's where you see how other people see you. For some people, it's quite a shock—so beware.

There's something about the observer, the feeling of somebody observing, that tells us something about the actual awareness itself. As it's put in some literature—and this is more Mahayana than Theravada—there's a sort of glancing back into the awareness. And once you've done it, ask yourself: What was there? What's it made of? What wasn't there? This gives us an inkling that awareness is something that transcends, something of a different order from the psychophysical organism we find ourselves in. People who have had out-of-body experiences would know this for sure as a real experience.

The process of vipassana is helping us. It's helping us in daily life to see this process of desire and not get caught up in it. And it's helping us in our sitting to begin to undo the veils of delusion we've fallen into through simple mistakes—quite understandably so. You can read about it, mull it over. But when you sit in vipassana, you forget all that, put it completely to the side. We have to have this clear confidence that intuitive awareness actually has the power to liberate itself. And that's really the paradox. It's the Buddha within that's doing the unveiling, and the disappearance of delusion is the process of awakening—awakening to the way things really are.

That's basically what we're in the process of. So there's hope, you see, somewhere.

I can only hope my words have not caused even greater confusion, and that you will, by your practice, liberate yourself from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 252

Khandha, the Aggregates, as Person and Sati, Awareness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the fundamental architecture of the Buddha's teaching, beginning with dukkha as the ground of existence—encompassing not just obvious suffering but also the transient nature of pleasures and the existential challenges of aging, sickness, and death. He then offers a detailed exploration of the five khandhas (aggregates) as the Buddha's systematic deconstruction of what we conventionally consider our "person."

Using the myth of Narcissus as a metaphor, Bhante explains how awareness becomes entranced by its own reflection in the "pond" of psychophysical experience. Through Vipassanā meditation, we learn to step back onto the "bank" and observe from the position of the knower. He guides us through each aggregate: rūpa (body) and our minimal actual knowledge of its biological processes; vedanā (feeling) and the deconstruction of emotions into component sensations; saññā (perception/concepts) and their limiting nature; saṅkhāra (volitional formations/habits) as our personal karmic creations; and viññāṇa (consciousness) as the screen upon which all experience manifests.

This teaching clarifies that our true karma lies not in external circumstances but in our volitional habits and the fundamental delusion of selfhood. Through understanding impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self at this deep level, we can begin the process of liberation from wrong concepts and unwholesome mental habits.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhudassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambhudassa

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

I thought this evening we'd have a look at the ground upon which the Buddha builds the whole architecture of his teaching: the word *dukkha*. And then to look at the five *khandhas*, which is really a deconstruction of our person, our personhood. And then just see what we mean by *kamma* from that point of view.

This word *dukkha* — the root meaning is two words: *du* and *ka*. *Du* just means hard and *ka* means to bear: hard to bear. And it's variously translated as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, etc. But this doesn't simply include those things that are obvious suffering

like physical pain. That's pretty straightforward, physical pain. But it also includes pleasure. Pleasures are pleasant while we're enjoying them, but the problem is they're transient and therefore they never actually produce what we want, which is — I mean, what we're trying to head for is a continuous and perfect happiness. I mean, that's the definition of *nibbāna*. But it's not quite an emotional happiness, but we'll come to that, hopefully, in the fullness of time.

So this word *dukkha* includes all our physical problems, all our mental sufferings, our emotional problems. But it also includes all the delightful side of life because it disappears. And at base, it includes this existential angst, all this business around sickness, ageing, and death. So in a sense, *dukkha* is a view of life as basically unsatisfactory.

And that in itself isn't a problem. That's the thing. The actual sufferings of life and the joys of life and sickness, ageing and death are in themselves not the problem. The problem is how we relate to them. And this is the problem of attachment, indulgence, wrong view. And this roots itself in this whole idea of a self.

So if we just for a minute stop with this business of a self. Now, what do we actually mean there? What the Buddha is proposing is that there is something in us which doesn't belong to this psychophysical organism — and we'll deconstruct that as he does it in a minute. He says there's something in us which is not that, and the discovery eventually, of course, is that it's none other than this very awareness.

Now, the image I use, or should we say the myth I use, to give us an idea as to what's happening is the myth of Narcissus. So remember, Narcissus looks into this pond and he sees this beautiful youth and he falls in love with it. And that draws him into an embrace of this figure in the pond. And of course, he drowns.

So water is always — not always, but mostly in mythology — something that's creative. And so if we think of the mind, the heart mind, the body heart mind, this whole organism as a pond, the awareness is looking into it, and it looks into it and it has that feeling of presence. So when you're in a very quiet moment and you're just with yourself and you just get that sense of just presence, right? It's not the self of embarrassment. It's not the self of trying to get something. It's just that sense of being, that sense of presence. That is our first construction, right? And it's through that that we enter into the world that's being created by this psychophysical organism.

So what we're doing in meditation is we're pulling ourselves out of that pond and sitting up back onto the bank of that pond. And when we do that, we get that sense of being the knower, the feeler, the one who is experiencing. And everything that's happening is happening on that screen — you might say the surface of the pond. But of course

you can see through the pond into the pond. So this consciousness that we have is multi-dimensional and it contains everything that we experience both at a physical level and a heart emotional mood level and at the intellectual level, the imaginary level — everything has to manifest on that surface, right? And that's the *khandha*, the aggregate of consciousness.

Now, these consciousnesses are arising and passing away because they can only hold one sense base. So if you're watching a film on the telly and you're having a biscuit and a cup of tea or something, and you're hearing what's happening, you're seeing what's happening, we get that impression that it's all happening at the same time. But actually, in Buddhist psychology, these are all minute, infinitesimal little consciousnesses that run one after the other and give us the impression of wholeness. And that's really seeing impermanence at the level of how we create the world we experience. And that's all based upon this psychophysical organism.

If we understand that when we are pulling ourselves back onto that observation post within ourselves, and we're observing and feeling and knowing physical stuff that comes up, emotional stuff, and even mental stuff, then we've already pulled out of that delusion of being this organism. Now, in order to reinforce that, the Buddha then, as it were, begins to deconstruct this very organism, and he splits it up into these aggregates, heaps, right? And the first one is the body.

Now, it's a very strange situation we're in, because I definitely feel myself to be in the body, and often when I'm enjoying something, or when I've got a headache or whatever, I definitely am the body, right? And yet, when I question myself and ask, well, what is it I know of the body? It's an infinitesimal amount. For instance, at this present moment, our toenails are growing. Have you any idea that that's happening? It's only when you look down every so often and you think, well, I've got to cut those toenails, right? We never actually experience a toenail growing.

And I've got this book on biology, which every page has some detail in it, which is quite amazing. I mean, it's beyond acceptance in a way. For instance, I picked up this little bit of fact — the brain has 12, I mean, you might know this, of course, but for me, it's a bit shocking. The brain has 12 billion neurons and 50 billion supporting glial cells. Now, I haven't a clue what a glial cell is, but there's 50 billion of them. And they're all up here in my head. At least I think I've got that amount. I might have a bit less. But even so, there are billions, not thousands, not millions, billions — 12 billion neurons and 50 billion supporting glial cells. And the fact is that if I hadn't read that book, I basically

wouldn't know that. I've no experience of a single neuron. And that shows you how ignorant I am of how my brain works, but it works. I mean, generally speaking, I'm fairly happy with it. I could wish it to be just a little bit more quick, but there we are.

So wherever you look at the body, what you find are these cells. What they say is there are trillions of cells that make up the body and they're all dying, they're dying and then they're replacing. And they tell you that every seven years you've got a new body, but not for an instant have I felt anything dying as such. And yet this is what I'm told that's happening. So there's a disconnect between my experience of the body as something that I feel I'm in, I'm of, I feel it, I can move it around, wave my hands about, and yet the body itself has its own agenda, and its own agenda which I have no control over. Obviously the most shocking one is growing old and dropping dead, which is not something I'm particularly looking forward to.

So you can see that when you actually contemplate the relationship we have with the body, it's very minimal, very minimal. And it's all dependent upon our senses. So these five physical senses give us information and it's from this information that we construct the world that we're experiencing, the outer world at least, and of course some of the inner world, the pain, the pleasures, etc.

If we then ask, well, what is it that we're actually experiencing right down there at that physical base? The Buddha points to these four great elements. And that's what they're called, the four great elements. And this includes, I'm sure you know them, earth, water, fire, and air. And what they're referring to are specific types of sensations.

Somebody once asked me or somebody once had this big doubt and said that these things don't exist in the actual material world. It doesn't match with science, as it were. And that's where the confusion sometimes lies. The Buddha is not talking about the external world as a scientific object. He's talking about the internal world and how we experience the external world.

So when it comes to feeling, we can always go into feeling and discover the basic pieces or parts that make up that particular feeling. So if we take a very simple instance of just pain in the knees from sitting, first of all, you get this word "pain," right? And you draw your attention to it. Now, in the process of *vipassanā*, we also see the reaction that we've got to the pain. But what we're interested in at the moment is recognising that the word "pain" is a concept, and it carries with it all our understanding about pain, all our personal experience about pain, what we've read about pain. So we're not actually experiencing the pain as pain, as a sensation — we're experiencing the concept

that we're putting onto the pain. In order to experience the pain as pain, you have to go into the pain. And when you go into the pain, what you discover is things like heat, pressure, tightness, etc.

And so there, we're beginning to deconstruct our physical nature. And in so doing, we're taking away this concept of pain and we're just there with the body as it gives us information. And that's where the Buddha is pointing to because right there we can see this process of impermanence much more clearly. These little sensations are continuously arising and passing away. But it also deconstructs for us this pain, right? So that's this process of really understanding what he means by our physicality.

So it's the same with our eating — we're getting down to the actual experience of just the taste before we describe what food it is. So you have to go right down to that physical base. It's the same with hearing, but the other senses are much more difficult to grasp — the hearing and the seeing.

There's a book called "Just Seeing." I can't remember her name now. And obviously her insight was the way that what she was looking at broke up into all these different little pixels. And she talks about seeing the world like these pointillists, those artists that use little dots to create the image, trying to copy photography, I think. And just for a moment there the world split up into all these pixels, and that's the information that's coming in on the retina.

When it comes to the ear, right there at the ear drum, there's no sound. There's only pressure. It's the pressure of the waves of the pressure waves of air that are hitting the drum in the ear. So there's no sound in the universe. There's only these pressure waves. But because we have this mechanism inside us to determine what the meaning of it is in terms of sound, from that point, from that point of just this pressure, these little drummings on top of the eardrum is taken into the mind and it's the mind that creates the sound.

So this driving our attention closer and closer to the physical base begins to deconstruct our experience, and in deconstructing the experience and seeing it as a process, one thing after another, it just takes away that sense of something substantial, some entity, some wholeness, right? So that's all the business to do with the body.

Now, we can take that investigation into feeling. Now, again, feeling comes at the point where you're describing to yourself, where you determine to yourself whether something is pleasant or not, pleasant and unpleasant. That's how we immediately categorise feeling. And that's the dual world we live in, right? I mean, there's a whole area of neutral feelings, but if we really look into those neutral feelings you'll see they shade

off into slightly unpleasant and slightly pleasant, and that's the business of the mind. It's part of, I suppose, just being able to survive in the world — to know what's pleasant and what's not pleasant if you're a hunter or something.

So as soon as these basic sensations come in, they are immediately described by us to ourselves as being pleasant or unpleasant. And that's what the Buddha means by feeling. And these feelings are two types. There are the ones that are coming from the body itself and there's ones that are coming from the heart mind. So our emotional mood life.

Now, just as we penetrated down into a physical feeling to discover that it's actually just made up of all these various different little sensations, so we do it with an emotion. So an emotion comes such as, say, anxiety. And by first of all, recognising this is anxiety, this is anxiety. And then when you're steady, when you're feeling at ease with it, to actually go in and sink into it. Sink into it and to discover the sensations that make up this feeling of anxiety. And you may discover a lot of heat, a lot of agitation. And by doing that, you're deconstructing anxiety and beginning to realise actually, it's just a feeling.

That somehow we take this feeling, we give it a perspective by putting a concept on it — anxiety — and then we identify with it. We say I am anxious. And that's how the suffering builds up. But actually when we go down to the feeling of anxiety as a direct physical experience in the body, well it's just a bit of heat and commotion. That's all, see? And it's by deconstructing these emotions like that, that we lose a fear of them, that we begin to get a handle on them. And we recognise that anytime I feel like this, all I have to do is just sit with it, you see. And of course, there's the therapy because the heart then releases that energy outwardly as a feeling. And of course, it dies out.

So these feelings, Buddha collects all that in one word, *vedanā*, just feeling. And so he doesn't make a distinction between, at the base, he doesn't make a distinction between mental and physical feelings. That's the next step up when he says, well, if you look again, you'll see that some sensations, some feelings, pleasant, unpleasant, are coming from the body and some are coming from the heart-mind. And when it comes from the body, sometimes you can't do anything about it. I mean, physical pain, chronic pain and all that. And one of the techniques of getting used to chronic pain, if somebody has such a thing to suffer, is to begin to deconstruct it and see it just as sensation. And then at least it's bearable, it becomes bearable. It can never become a pleasant experience, but at least it becomes bearable.

When it comes to emotional stuff, it's surprising how close sometimes it relates to physical feelings. I mean, heat and agitation — these are actual physical feelings in the body. So this touching of the body and mind, is the place where we put our attention and that's where we see it as feeling. And in both cases, you can then penetrate it to find

out the little bits of sensations that make up this so-called feeling, such as the heat and commotion or agitation that goes with anxiety. So that's the second *khandha*, the second heap of experiences that we have. And this is how we explore them.

Now, the third one is a little bit more, shall we say, difficult because it's to do with concepts. It's to do with perception and concepts. And what we have to recognise there is that when we have a particular experience, we create a photocopy of it in the mind. It can be a physical thing like eating an apple. It could be something that you see, a visual thing. It could be some intellectual understanding. But at some point, there's a copy of it in the mind, a little photocopy. That's your perception. And the more you have of that experience, this perception grows into a concept. So if for instance — I mean apples for instance, everybody's eaten an apple, and we have a concept of an apple.

Now there are all types of apples, sweet apples, sour apples, cooking apples, small apples, big apples. There are lots of types of apples, but we definitely know they're not oranges. And that's what a concept does. It allows us to categorise everything.

But unfortunately, it also distorts what we're actually experiencing. So these concepts of an apple also come with a value judgment, what I like. So I like sweet apples. And if I chew into an apple that's sour or that has a certain bitterness to it or that it's too soft or whatever, I immediately get that reaction of not wanting it. But if I'd never tasted an apple before, and this was the first apple I had, which had a little bit of bitterness and a little bit of softness, I'd say, well, this is an amazing fruit. And you would build up your concept from there about apples and what you like.

So our concepts are quite constricting. And part of our process is to get beyond concepts and to get to a point of no preference. I mean, that's one of the signs of liberation that we don't worry about whether the apple is soft or hard, bitter or sweet, you just eat the damn thing. So concepts are really one of our biggest enemies when it comes to the process of liberation.

You can have even a concept of *nibbāna*. You read about it and there's this idea about it being blissful. You'll often hear the bliss of nibbāna. And so we immediately think that it must be some amazing emotional experience. But there's no emotions in nibbāna. So when somebody says to Sāriputta, how is it you talk about the bliss of Nibbāna when there's no emotions, there's no moods, there's nothing there? He says, well, it's the very absence of emotions and moods. That is the bliss of Nibbāna. Try to get your head around that one.

So as soon as we have some sort of concept, it's immediately limiting and distorting by the very nature of concepts. And of course, when these concepts become great, big, grand things like freedom, democracy, well, I mean, it just becomes personal ideas.

And our process of meditation is really, when we're sitting in vipassanā, is to really stop all that business. And that's one of the purposes, remember, of using a single word. Because what that word does, at least it draws this intellect down to a very simple concrete concept. So you're lifting or moving or pushing or pulling. These are still concepts, but at least it's not creating a process of thinking about something. And we're always looking through the word, right? The word isn't meant to be right in front of us.

Some people who begin noting find that they can't actually get to the feeling of things because the word is so tight up against them. It's like a barrier to actually feeling something. And what this tells a person is how this awareness, this ability to feel, to directly experience is being locked into a concept. And it's only by... so we say looking through the word or around the word or under the word or finding some way of, as it were, letting the word go and actually getting down to the feeling of it, that this awareness, this intuitive awareness, liberates itself from conceptual thinking. And that's really very much part of our process.

And that doesn't mean to say you can then forget all about concepts, not at all. You use them when you have to use them. But in order to begin to see the world as it really is, we have to see the limitation of these concepts.

I mean, just on a grand scale, you can see that people in the East, I'm thinking of places like China, Japan, etc. People there have a very different concept of society. They have a feel for a community in a way that the Westerner, because of this accent upon the individual, doesn't have. So for us, our rights are so important. We jump up and down. It's my right, it's my right. Whereas for somebody who sees themselves as part of a community, it's much more in a sense of connection, a sense of beauty to others.

So it's a real alive present day separation because of this concept we have of who we are. As a Westerner, I think of myself as an individual pod and I can do my own thing in my own way in my own time. And if I were an Easterner, I'd be thinking much more, well, what are the others doing? How can I work with them? So you can see that these concepts that we have of ourselves are by definition limiting.

So for the Easterner, the idea of being your own agent is difficult. And that's why I presume, this is my own little understanding, why they're much more happy with authoritarian regimes. So you can see that conceptual thinking is quite a problem for us. And we have to really see it.

And the greatest concept, of course, that really is at the root of everything is this concept of a self, this concept of that idea of being a me, an individual, whole, entire person, the basis of everything that we build up into being a person. So this is undermined by really understanding ourselves as a collection of these different heaps, these different aggregates.

And it's not just an intellectual process, remember, it begins there, but you actually have to see it, you have to feel it, you have to see that a sensation, that an emotion is just sensations, that's all it is. And that thinking, you don't have to believe a thought, you don't have to describe yourself by a particular set of concepts, being able to step outside them.

So that's this whole business of perception and conceptualisation. And remember, this also includes memory. Often, my teacher once said, he said, there are these five aggregates, and he went through the five aggregates, and then he said, and there's memory. The Buddha forgot memory. It was like everybody's jaw dropped.

And the reason why the Buddha doesn't talk about memory as such is because our memories are hidden from us. What we're working with moment after moment are these concepts and these ideas, these feelings, et cetera, et cetera, that arise in the present moment. So the Buddha is not denying memory. It's just that as soon as you remember something, it becomes something that's actual. But all the past is hidden to us unless it comes into our consciousness. So in terms of the Buddha's understanding, it's not pertinent to seeing ourselves as we really are.

And then the fourth one is *saṅkhāra*. Those things that are compounded. I mean, people try to translate it in some ways like volitional conditionings or concoctions. One writer called them concoctions. But I think it's much easier for us to see them as habits. These are our habits.

And the thing about a habit is that it's driven by will. So the Buddha is quite clear that an action and the will are the same thing. And that's why, when we are having a meal, that's the time to really make that distinction between a desire, which is only potential, and then it's suddenly empowered by an act of will. A decision is made and the power goes into that desire and it begins to manifest.

Now, the process is that with an action, so you've performed an action and there's consequences, of course. That's the kamma. We'll come to that in a minute. But once you produce an action and you repeat an action, then you're building up a habit. And when you put all these habits together, that's our personality, that's our character. And once that's set, your destiny is right ahead of you. And it's only by reflecting upon our

habits and beginning to see that some of them are taking us to the cliff edge, and some of them are taking us up to the mountain, up the Nibbānic mountain, that you begin to try and get rid of some and increase the others.

So these habits are a collection of things that we ourselves have created. We've done it from our sense of wisdom or lack of wisdom. We've empowered these desires. This is what we have created within ourselves. My habits are my creation. Now, it might have been done because of somebody's advice. It might have been done because somebody told me to do it. It doesn't really matter. Eventually, the process is internal, and I've made the decision, and I've created the habit.

And in this sense, you begin to understand that nobody can actually make you suffer. Nobody can make you suffer. All the suffering is made by us. These are our habits, our mental states, and I've created them. And once we recognise that, then we also begin to realise that just as we've created them, we can uncreate them. And that's part of the therapy of our process when we sit in meditation.

Because when you sit with a habit which is causing you problems, I don't know, something like a quick temper. So by sitting with that feeling of anger and allowing it to evaporate, to release itself, we're undermining the habit of anger. Now, anger itself is like a balloon inside our psyche. And it is not actually attached to an object. This is a funny thing. So for instance, it's not that somebody standing on my toe is causing the anger. It's my reaction to somebody standing on my toe, which is causing the anger to arise.

So in other words, these mental states that we have, these habits, these emotional habits that we have, don't actually have an object. They are a way of reacting to something. And because of that, because the outer world and other people are not the direct cause of my unwholesome mental states, because of that I can actually heal myself. If other people caused me suffering then the only way to achieve Nibbāna is to get rid of all these other people. But that isn't the way that the Buddha pointed. He said, no, the problem is us internally.

So these saṅkhāras, these habits, our job is to allow these unwholesome ones to evaporate and to build up the ones that are beautiful. And we can do that. In the sitting, we're tending to allow the more unfortunate mental states to evaporate, but then in our daily lives, that's when we can build up our goodness, our goodness power, puñña. Sometimes that's translated as merit, but it's much better to think of it as goodness power.

So that's where this transition comes from vipassanā into daily life. That's where the Eightfold Path comes in. Right speech, right action, right livelihood. So it's through action in the world that we can actually change these habits also. In fact that's the most powerful place to do it because it's only when we come up against things that make us anxious, depressed, angry and so on that we can actually work with it right there as it takes place and undermine the energy that we put in reinforcing those states.

So these saṅkhāras include that sense of desire, the wrong desire, the reactions that we have to things. And it's seeing the reaction and allowing the reaction to dissipate and allowing the original mental state to arise and evaporate. That is the process of healing, of healing the heart with therapy.

And as I say, it definitely happens when you're sitting. And if we've got this awareness, this mindfulness in daily life, it'll also happen just in ordinary daily life. Because you're aware, like for instance, you talk to somebody and you can feel a little bit of irritation coming. So that awareness has to be both on the person who's talking, but also inwardly. And when you see this irritation rising, you don't join in. You just let it burn a little bit. You put your attention on what the person is saying. Whereas often what we do is we immediately identify with this. I'm right and that person's wrong. And before you know it, it's all shouting.

So the saṅkhāras are all the habits that we have, that we've created ourselves, and that this is where our creativity actually lies, that we can move away from all those habits that we find unwholesome and which are a pest to other people and move towards habits which make us inwardly happy and delightful to other people.

And then finally, there's this consciousness, right? And we've already touched upon that with Narcissus looking into the pond. Everything has to arise on that consciousness. Now, unfortunately, the Buddha, like he's had this massive breakthrough and the language, he can't hold it in the language. He can't make up a word to actually express things. So he's always playing around with words. Words depend upon the situation that he's describing.

And so often he'll talk about vijñāna, consciousness, as something that discriminates, which actually is the effect of these saṅkhāras, this ability to understand on the screen of consciousness. But when we go down to that root position, which is the contact, that place of contact of consciousness with the physical body, consciousness with emotions, consciousness with thought, when we get down to that point, there's always an object, the internal object or the external object. There's always a sense base. The sixth sense, remember, is the mind itself. It's the mind that senses emotions and images and all that, and consciousness.

So this consciousness turns out to be just a screen. And the whole position of vipassanā is to step, as it were, backwards outside the screen. But there's always that sense of a self, which is awareness itself actually catching its own sense of presence on that screen. And that's the first object that we make. That's the first concept we have. And it's breaking through that, that is the point of liberation. And then to be able to sustain that separation in ordinary daily life, that of course is the sign of someone who's fully liberated.

So finally, what then is our kamma? When you look at all this, when we talk about kamma, when we talk about what is it that we are responsible for? What is the consequences? It actually is confined to what we will. So it wouldn't be right to think, say, this body is my personal kamma. This body is a construction that's arisen out of generations of people. And I didn't choose it. I would have preferred a better body. But this one's okay. I'm not complaining. Oh, no. So this one's been healthy, et cetera, et cetera. So I'm definitely not complaining.

But the body, of course, has been given to me. I find myself in a body. The society I am born into with all its language and its concepts and its art and all that is all given. That is also not my personal kamma. If I happen to cross a road and get knocked over by a car, even if I'm not seriously injured, just bumped, you might say, we can't say that's my personal kamma.

Personal kamma, the kamma which is to do with liberation, is this process of purifying the heart of its unwholesome conditionings and beginning to see where the delusion, the fundamental delusion rises, which is this sense of self. So if we go backwards and recognise that what's happening is this awareness, this intuitive awareness, sees itself, gets a feeling for itself, a sense of presence on that screen of consciousness. And it sees on that screen of consciousness the world which the body, heart and mind are creating. And it moves into that world with the idea of becoming happy.

Hence, it has to acquire things, right? The whole position of acquisition is to make us safe, to make us happy. The more you have the better we think we're going to be. It's much better to have a couple of million in the bank than just a couple of pounds. So we're always trying to accumulate things. Once we've accumulated, we find that other people want what we have and therefore you have to defend and you have to protect and that's the aversion. And when the...

when the enemy is a bit too big, you run for it, so there's your fear, so there's your reaction of fight and flight. And these are our basic, unwholesome motivations that run through from that initial delusion.

So it's by doing the opposite, it's by renouncing ownership of things, it's by giving that we begin to undo the delusion, right? So that's the whole process of the Eightfold Path. And undoing the delusion, of course, we go right back to this sense of self. And that's when, at some point, there is this opening of the heart and recognition of this community, this communion that we have with not only people, but all beings. And that's when you might say the path of love takes us towards the end of this very tight sense of me.

And that leads us to a deeper concept about this awareness. But ultimately, through the process of insight, there comes this realization of the uniqueness of this intuitive awareness. And this is what the Buddha is pointing to when he talks about there is an unborn, undying, uncreated, unconditioned, and that's it, that's the statement. He makes other statements too, such as there is a dimension, *ayatana*, there is a dimension which doesn't have any of the other dimensions in it.

Now the word *ayatana* refers to the dimensions of each of the sense spaces. So the sense spaces can't be mixed. You can't hear through your nose, even if you try. So these are different dimensions of experience. And he says that there is a dimension where none of these dimensions can be found, where there's no hearing, no seeing, et cetera, et cetera. There's many times that he points to something which is beyond transcendent of the world that we're actually experiencing.

So our process is through *vipassana* to begin to see these three characteristics. We haven't talked so much about this reaction, which is also part of that *sankara* business of the habits. We pointed to it in terms of acquiring of acquisition, greed, avarice and so on and the opposite of fight and flight. That's all in that habitual thing. That's all part of our true *kamma*.

So the process of *vipassana* is partly to do with purifying that which happens quite naturally. But it's also, or should we say, more pertinent in that we're actually seeing the process of desire. We're seeing the process of impermanence. And we're seeing that from that position of the observer, that things arise of their own accord, that they don't have a possessor. They just happen through habitual practice. So these are your three characteristics.

And in ordinary daily life, it's this process of undoing that sort of selfishness, that sort of constant looking after me as opposed to others, that opening of the heart to other people. And that undermines the self as a concept, as an emotional concept. And that's the process through love, compassion, sympathetic joy, that undermines the idea,

the notion of a self. And eventually, of course, there is that liberation. The liberation is from all these wrong concepts, from all these wrong habits. That's what the liberation is.

Very good. So I hope that's been of some use. It's not caused even further confusion, and that you will, by your effort, liberate yourself sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 253

Misunderstanding re. the Self, Karma and Transcendence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 54 min

> *In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses fundamental questions about self, karma, and transcendence from his explicitly transcendent perspective within Theravāda Buddhism. He clarifies that the Buddha's teaching on anattā (not-self) is not a denial of the conventional self, but rather an inquiry into whether an eternal soul (atta) actually exists as described in Hindu traditions.*
>
> *The talk explores how awareness gradually separates from identification with the five khandhas through meditation practice, leading to the observer position where one becomes "aware of being aware." Bhante explains how this process can culminate in nibbānic experience, where awareness completely withdraws from the psychophysical organism.*
>
> *Addressing karma and rebirth, he explains how intentions (cetanā) create karmic consequences through our relationships with pleasant and unpleasant experiences. The discussion includes practical guidance on noting intentions before they become actions, emphasizing this as our only moment of genuine choice. The talk also covers rebirth mechanics, past-life memories, and how saṅkhāras (mental formations) transfer between lives while being purified of their historical content.*
>
> *This teaching offers profound insights into the transcendent dimension of Buddhist practice, distinguishing it from materialist interpretations while remaining grounded in canonical Theravāda teachings.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Some of these questions are really to do with self and awareness and all that. So it's important to know where the speaker is coming from. When I'm speaking, I'm always coming from a transcendent position. That's not true for every teacher in the tradition. If you belong to the Mahāyāna schools of Zen, the Tibetan schools or not, it'd be very difficult not to be a transcendentalist.

But the thing about Theravāda and its scriptures is that it has an interpretation which sometimes confuses you and you can end up being a materialist without any problem. This happened to me when I was in Sri Lanka where I was reading and trying

to work out, at a deeper level, the Theravāda position — the five *khandhas*, the five aggregates, all that. And I came to a point where none of it seemed to make sense to my own personal experience. So I thought basically *Nibbāna* was just a very subtle form of annihilation. That's what I came to the conclusion. And this is what, of course, the Christian missionaries came to. They just thought it was just playing around with words, really. *Nirodha* — blackout, finish. When the flame goes out, there's nothing there. So what is that?

So I wrote quite a long piece, an essay, trying to express all this, and sent it to Bhikkhu Bodhi, whom I'd met briefly. And he very kindly read it and sent me a letter. I had occasion to go up there, and he himself was a transcendentalist, you see. So it took me quite some time really to establish that transcendentalism in the Theravāda scriptures. The language is so negative in a sense — the flame goes out and all that — that it's very difficult not to see it as some form of annihilation.

Now, what's happened is, of course, the strength of scientific materialism, which basically has the tenet that if something cannot be discovered by science, it frankly just doesn't exist. That's it. That's the platform. That, in so many words, is what Bertrand Russell said. And that's the position, really, for people who come into Buddhism with already an established faith in that, a belief in that position.

And so you'll find the speakers whom you get, for instance, on Dharma Seed — some of them will be coming from the position of materialism and really just talking about how to make this life bearable. And then when it's gone, thank heavens for that. And often it moves towards psychotherapy. A lot of the teaching is really just about purifying the heart and making your life much more pleasant through this understanding mainly of dependent origination.

And then there are, I think, a lot of teachers who haven't made up their mind yet, who perhaps haven't had an experience either one way or the other. And so you get this business of teachers who are hanging about, really, waiting. And that's mirrored in the people who come to Theravāda Buddhism, *Vipassanā*, that school. You'll find that there are some who are transcendentalists, some who are materialists, and many of them just — it doesn't really matter. It doesn't really occur to them as important because they've come into Buddhism to find a better way to live. And so it doesn't really matter to many people whether *Nibbāna* exists or not, or whatever it is.

So anyway, whenever you're listening to me, you know you're listening to a transcendentalist. And I think I've tried to make what that position is as I answer some of these questions.

There are clusters of these questions. The first lot are: Could you explain what is understood by self in Buddhism, particularly around caring for ourselves as we explore not-self? Is it correct to say that there's a little self — the ego and thinking mind — and a big self, awareness? When we meditate, can we see awareness doing the meditating? And if we see awareness as an object, how can we actually be awareness? Is it the case that over time Buddhist practice changed focus from the experience to the experiencer? Did the teachings change?

So this is all really about awareness and self. Now the first thing to understand is that this word *attā* has been translated into English as self. But the word *attā*, as used in India and Hinduism, is rightly translated as your eternal soul. That's what it actually means. So when the Buddha is asking, do you have a self? He's really asking, do you have an eternal soul?

And that's where he's asking you, well, if there is an eternal soul, A, it must have complete control over itself. It must be happy. I mean, it must determine that it's going to be happy. No point in having an eternal soul that's unhappy. And it can't arise and pass away. It can't change in that fundamental way. And so that's his questions when it comes to what's traditionally known as his second discourse on not-self.

So he asks these five companions — he looks at the five *khandhas*. He's first of all cut the human being into these five heaps: material, physical stuff; all the stuff around feeling in the body, emotional and mental; all the perceptions, conceptual stuff; all the habits, mental habits, physical habits that we have; and then finally this consciousness, this ability to know.

And then he says, well, choose any of that. And he says, is any of it under your direct control? Of course, we do have small direct control. I can wave my hands about like this, you see. But I don't have any real control over the length of my arms, et cetera, et cetera.

So the next business — when he says that, the next thing is: do you see anything which is not transient rather? Is there anything that you experience which is not arising and passing away, which is not changing? And then he says, well, if it's changing, does that create a sense of safety? Does that create happiness, or is it an unhappy state of always having things changing?

So you can't control stuff, and of course the five who've become disciples now very dutifully say, "Well, yes, no, Bhante. Yes, no, Bhante." They agree with him entirely. There wasn't any argument there, was there? So he's asking us to look inward and see if this eternal soul actually exists.

So this business of not-self is a teaching tool. That's right. It's not a statement "there is no self." That wouldn't make any sense because everybody experiences a self. So what he's saying is, is it real?

So that's the first thing to grasp about that. And then as we progress in our meditation, the first thing that we begin to realize is that everything's an object. So we're looking at stuff and everything is an object. And this business of an object means that there must be a subject, there must be some perceiving going on to perceive the object.

And that business of pushing ourselves away — I'm sure you've heard me talk about these little babies. When we're born, we just get this flood of information, and through stretching and banging rattles and doing all sorts of silly stuff, this outer world gets pushed out from that and it becomes an objective outer world. And the little being comes to realize itself as an integer — like it's me. And so that business takes about three years in total, it seems, especially that separation from mother, which actually never ends. I don't think it ends. But it ends to a point where you realize you aren't your mother. That's important.

So what we are doing, of course, is pushing the inner world out. We're making that an objective thing to observe, you see. And as we're doing that, it occurs to us that something is looking at that, is investigating that, but has taken a position in which it's not part of that process.

So Nyanaponika in his book — what's it called? Ah, dear me, it's gone. Okay. Now, in his book, he calls it the observation post. So it's somewhere inside us where we take this position of being seemingly quite separate from everything that's happening. And it's from that position that we can see these characteristics of not-self — by which we mean everything is shifting, it's moving, nothing remains permanent. Everything is an object and in that position, definitely not under our control. The psychophysical organism is just manifesting.

And then we realize that if we form any relationship with it of "me" or "mine," then suffering, some sort of unsatisfactoriness, some sort of stress arises. So that's this slow pulling away of awareness from its confusion with the psychophysical organism.

And there comes a point where you're aware of being aware. So in some of the Mahāyāna literature, they talk about awareness of awareness, which I think can be a little confusing. The way I put it, of course, is the observer. So that's the sense of somebody observing. So there's an awareness of being aware, right? But in our personal experience, it feels like the observer. I am the observer. I am the feeler.

Now, that separation that takes place between the observer and the observing — that sense is, of course, the core spiritual insight. So what's happening there?

Well, this consciousness the Buddha talks about — and I think I've mentioned this in another talk — he's having to work with words that mean certain things. Like our word "self," you see. To say "not-self" is very confusing. The word "soul" is very confusing because it has Christian overtones, et cetera. So he's having to work with words, and in a given conversation they take on slightly different meanings.

But the one meaning that seems to make most sense for consciousness is when he talks about it as a mirror. So something like a screen — I prefer the word "screen" myself — where it's receiving information from the mind. And that's the only thing you can be aware of. You can't get behind consciousness and you can't peek behind it and find out what's causing all this rubbish. You can't look over it, through it. That's it. What we're actually experiencing now is that screen of consciousness.

And you can see it has no boundary itself. The boundaries are created by the room you're in. If there was no room here, you'd have the sky. So it's completely open, entirely, of course, dependent on the senses, but it is a mirror.

Now, the awareness is in the five *khandhas*. It hasn't separated out completely, normally speaking. When I'm speaking now, my awareness and the five *khandhas* are hopefully in unison. If my awareness was elsewhere, then I presume I'd stop or talk gibberish. Something weird would happen.

But when you sit in meditation, you pull yourself out and suddenly you're aware of sensations down there in the body, images and stuff in the mind. You're also aware of being this observer. Now that sense of the observer is a double take. You're aware of being the observer. So you're saying to yourself, "I am aware of myself as an object." So that must be a mirror image of awareness itself coming back from that mirror.

And so to separate that, of course, means that the awareness completely pulls out of the five *khandhas*. And that's what we mean by a *Nibbānic* experience. And you can't do that by will. This is the unfortunate thing. You can get to that position of the observer by will, by just keep looking at it, pointing to, noting. But you can't actually go beyond that particular thing by will, or at least I've never been able to, because it's basically a mirror image of the constant presence of the awareness.

So that's this business of the observer and awareness. And you can see that in time, the accent shifted. So from the Buddha's teaching, what he's specifically interested in is getting people to experience *Nibbāna*, the experience of *Nibbāna*, which is, in his words, *suññā* — it's empty. Empty of what? It's empty of whatever the heart, mind, thoughts, our psychophysical organism can produce. It's empty of that.

And then later on, of course, the movement is towards, well, if there is this experience, what is it that experiences it? And that's where the Buddha himself wanted to keep off. Because once you start talking about an "it" that experiences, you're into the old terminology of soul, self, et cetera, et cetera. And he seems to be very shy of that.

But of course, he does come close to it because he has to make some sort of declaration about *Nibbāna*, about what that experience is. So every evening I say, "There is an unborn, an undying, an uncreated." And I'm using the word "an" — in the Pali, it's just past tense. There is unborn, undying *Nibbāna*, and so on and so forth. You see, there's no "a" or "the." So it leaves it very open. And then he says, if there were not this, there'd be no escape from birth and death and so on and so forth. So that's one of the very famous verses that come from what's known as a collection of his inspiring verses, the *Udāna* Sutta.

And the other one is the *āyatana*, which you can translate as a dimension. So remember, the *āyatana* are your six sense bases and each base is discrete. It's separate from the other. You can't see through your nose, although people have tried. And they're completely separate from each other. And you can talk about them as different dimensions of experience, different spheres of experience.

So then he says that there is this sphere where none of this exists, where there's no coming, no going, no standing still, there's no time, there's no space, there's nothing. He's saying that just this is the end of suffering. So it's not as though he doesn't try to get across some idea of what *Nibbāna* is, but he's very coy of turning it into a soul or a self or anything like that.

And I think that was because of his time and place where the other sects were quite clear. The Jains, the Brahmins — all those were quite clear that there was this soul, an eternal soul. The Hindus now of course talk about "I am that. I am that." So that's one way of neutralizing it without creating too many concepts. "I am that."

So that gives you, I think, some pointers hopefully. There is of course the lovely verses from Huineng. Huineng was the sixth patriarch. He was a very poor fellow — he ended up working in the kitchens and stuff. And the master was retiring and so he wanted somebody to take over the heir to his monastery, or to the tradition rather, the whole Zen tradition, or Chan, as they would call it.

And so he asked people to write their understanding. Well, there was a monk within the monastery who was considered to be the successor by everybody, and he wrote this verse. He says, "The body is like the bodhi tree, the heart is a mirror bright. Every day wipe it clean, so no dust may alight," you see.

And when Huineng saw that, he reckoned he hadn't quite got it. So without putting his name to it, he wrote, "There is no bodhi tree and the heart has no stand. There's nothing whatsoever. Where can the dust alight?" And the master then realized that he was, of course, the sixth patriarch. So he had to escape. He told him to go and hide himself because the other monks would have killed him, I think.

So there you've got a materialist view — basically, it's just the mind. You're polishing the mind to make it perfect and beautiful and wonderful. And then you have a transcendent point of view where it says that there's something else beyond that.

So then we come to the next section of questions. Things like: Could you say more about intentions and why it's good to note them? If memory is a part of perception, then how are past lives experienced transferred via rebirth? If these memories transfer and form the new *saṅkhāra,* then what is the difference between them? Does Freddie the pheasant have Buddha nature?

Looking very strange. How can it have karma when it has no conception of right or wrong?

And then the final one which is a bit... It says that—I asked the person who wrote this but he couldn't remember—but he says that Thich Nhat Hanh says that the idea of rebirth was only included in Buddhism to make religion palatable to Hindu society at the time. That's basically the argument of the materialists. But a recent book by Analayo, who is now the sort of doyen of Buddhist studies on rebirth, proved without a shadow of a doubt it was the Buddha's teaching. He definitely taught rebirth one way or the other.

And he also makes—so as to make Buddha's unpalatable to the common people and he gives them a reason to live meritorious lives. Well, that sounds awful to me. It's like you're kidding people just to make them live well, and then they're going to annihilate. I mean, it's just weird. But instead, I think he said the energy of the being simply returns

to the greater energy when we die. Well, that's very much a Hinduistic idea as well. So I don't know whether Thich Nhat Hanh said that or not. It's definitely not. Whoever says that, I think the book by Analayo created quite a commotion really because it makes it quite plain. It's just part and parcel of that teaching.

So now how is it that karma is so important? Well, we have to go back again to this sense of self, because it's through that sense of self—the mirror image of a sense of self—that you enter into the world of the mind, the heart mind, the body heart mind.

I'm sure you've all heard my use of the Narcissus myth, where he's looking in the pool, he falls in love with this very beautiful young man, and when he goes to grasp him, he drowns. And water is usually creativity in myth. So basically what—I mean, normally that myth is about self-love or self-pride and whatnot, but it works perfectly as a spiritual image because that's what we're doing. Awareness becomes aware of itself only through the phenomenal mind, through the body and mind. And in so doing it forms a relationship with that very same body and mind. And that relationship is me. That's where this idea of me turns up. My body and mine, me and mine.

So because of that, it forms a certain relationship with it concerning to make itself happy. Remember, all we want is to be happy for heaven's sake. And so it tries to do that by accumulating things, because it recognizes that when it enjoys something it's happy. So remember with the food—we don't often eat food for nourishment, we normally eat food because we want to feel happy. Like when you're traveling and you see a cafe, you don't go in there for a cup of coffee for the benefit of your body—to raise your spirits and all that.

So you form a relationship with the world whereby you're accumulating things, those things that make you happy. So it can be all sorts of things—it can be friends, it can be fame, it can be riches, whatever you feel makes you happy. And of course it's often determined by your talents. I mean, if you're good at making money, then you're going to make a lot of it. If you end up making friends, you try and make a lot of them. And so it goes on.

And eventually you've got this accumulation of stuff which makes you feel happy. And you're now saying, "I am my feeling." So we know that when I'm thinking, I'm saying, "I am my thoughts," but you're also, "I am my feelings." That's your romantic position. In our history, the Enlightenment was about "I think, therefore I am"—Descartes and all that. And it was all about rationality. And the movement against that is what we call romanticism. And they brought us back to the heart, to feeling, to nature and beauty and all that. And so for them, it was "I feel, therefore I am."

And you get that today, don't you? You get some people who say, "Well, I think," and the others will say, "Well, I feel." And they don't like each other. The person who feels thinks thinking is rigid and all that. And the person who thinks thinks that feeling is some mushy intuitive rubbish. They don't meet very well. So you've got this... I've lost me train of thought now. We've been... romanticism—where was that? Karma—thank you. Keep saying the word karma, I'll get back online.

So once you've accumulated stuff, of course then you're going to find other people want the same stuff as you. There's always that bit where either nature—like you might love walking in the hills and you get up one morning, it's just rain, rain, rain, and you feel disappointed for it. So nature, everything, is not always at our service. Friends are not at our service. So all these things that we've accumulated sometimes don't work. And that's when we either change position and seek something else to make us happy, or try and get rid of something that is upsetting me. So that's where your aversion comes from.

So there's your duality. As soon as you enter into this relationship with the world that we experience of wanting what is pleasant, holding on to it, maintaining it, developing it, pushing away what is unpleasant, you're into this constant contradiction. This contradiction or this conflict with the world as it is. Sometimes it works, but then it just gives—you can't hold on to what's making you happy at any time. So you can see, if we keep on going that way, then life's just going to get more miserable, especially as you get older, because all those things that used to make you really happy begin to disappear.

So the effort then is to seek out how—not why, how—we're creating suffering. This is the Buddha's question. He's not into metaphysics. He's into how do we create suffering?

So the one phrase about to see and understand suffering, things as they are, is actually to see and understand how things come to be. That would be the more direct translation of it. It's a past participle. To see and understand how things come to be. And that's why he gives us all this teaching, to look at ourselves from various standpoints, from the khandhas, from the ayatanas, the six sense bases, through the dependent origination as process. And he wants us to understand exactly where the kernel problem lies. And it lies in that moment of attachment of a wrong desire. And that's the word *tanha*, which is translated, because there's no words for these things—there's no direct words—it's craving. But as you know, it can be the simplest of desires, which can cause a lot of heartache because you're not getting what you want.

So that process is creating karma in the sense of future problems. So that as you run through the dependent origination, you'll see when something comes up, which is pleasant or unpleasant, there's this reaction and then there's that reaction—identity

with it. So remember it's see, I scream, I scream see, like, want, I, see there's the I, and then get. See, nothing happens until the I comes in, which empowers the process into an action. And once the action is done, then you have the beginning of it, the whole process, and the end of it.

But then, of course, you have the sankaras, which are sitting underneath the whole process, which are our conditionings. And every time we act in a way which is unwholesome, it reinforces a certain karma. So you've heard me say that emotions are like balloons inside us. They're not actually attached directly to the object that we're averse to. The balloon of attachment is not directly connected to the object we're attached to. It's our own internal reactions. And therefore it can be displaced anywhere. And the slightest pinprick can send out this huge addiction or this huge anger process.

So that whole process is the process by which we create karma in the sense of consequence. The sense of consequence. So that's why it's so important to catch these intentions. Because remember, an intention is a possibility. Nothing's actually happened. So if I get this thing about a cup of tea, if I'm aware of that, then I can make a decision as to whether it would be good for me to have a cup of tea or not. I haven't come across any time when it's not been good for me, by the way.

So it's a case of recognizing, all right, okay, now I have a choice. I can either let that desire burn out and therefore liberate myself from what might be an unwholesome habit, or I can reinforce it by acting upon it. That's the importance of noting the intention. Once it's moved into an act of mind, a thought pattern or speech or an action, then you've sent out a certain wave of energy which will have consequences.

And these waves of energy, this karma, not only is outwardly, especially through speech and action, so it affects other people and they might respond in ways that seem completely out of sync with the way that you had expressed yourself. It also has an internal wave. So it comes back into that attitude, that balloon, and it reinforces it. So remember, there's the other side too, which is all the beautiful things that we have inside us. And so when we see an intention, which is wholesome, our intention is then to empower that. And so that particular conditioning then becomes reinforced and just very slowly the heart begins to be purified and becomes more beautiful.

That's the process of recognizing intentions, catching them before they activate, and then having that moment of choice. That's the only bit of free will, inverted commas, that we've got. We haven't got a choice of no conditioning. We haven't got a choice of choosing one conditioning over another in any given moment—every given moment comes up with a conditioning, a sankara. And all we can do is have a look at that and see whether it's wholesome or not. And then we have that choice. And that choice is

coming—the choice itself, the act of will is neutral, it's how you use it. That choice is coming from our discrimination, which is the level of our wisdom. And if people don't have that wisdom, then of course they just run along with their emotional states. And that's what makes people so blind sometimes.

The understanding is that when we die, the mental body rises out of the physical body. And it's the mental body that will seek another rebirth. What's actually seeking is the awareness, but it still has this mental body. Now, unfortunately, we have to use words which are pretty debased these days because of science and whatnot, like the word spirit and ghost—a disembodied entity. There's all sorts of ways of trying to describe that. But that's what happens. So you're actually carrying your sankaras, you see.

And then when you find rebirth in another being, those sankaras come with you. And in a sense, they're purified of their history. What you're actually carrying from one birth to the next are your attitudes. And so, for instance, it says in the scriptures, if you're stingy, you'll be born poor. Now, if you take these things literally, it doesn't work. But if you take it as a mental attitude, it does work because before you were stingy because you thought you didn't have enough. And when you're reborn, whatever you have, it's never enough. You're always born poor. A stingy person is always poor just by nature. Just that sense of poverty is with them all the way. So it's the sankaras that come with you.

Now, these sankaras do contain memories because people do have past life recall. And that's all you can say. It's been studied. And again, it's up to you to decide whether these things are true or not. In his book, Analayo does point to the works of Professor Stevenson, who did a lot of work researching children's past life memories. Because often children have it round about the age of three, four or five. If they have them in the West, of course, they're told to stop dreaming or something. But in the East, they're taken a bit more seriously.

And if you read his book, there's some remarkable things. The one that comes to mind—I barely remember it really—was a five-year-old who wouldn't call his parents his parents. He said they lived over in such and such a place. And it turned out to be true. He knew all about the family.

I've put a YouTube thing on the website about this little boy in America who, at the age of three or something, going around a museum seemed to know everything about aeroplanes. And it turns out that eventually, as the memories came back to him, he'd been a pilot in the Pacific War and had been shot down. And the Japanese take him out there and he's visibly upset at the place where the previous self... And he went to see

the sister of this particular airman. The sister of this particular airman was alive and he was telling her things that only she would know, only family history and stuff. So that's on YouTube if you want to get over it, it's pretty well known now.

And that's pretty extraordinary to have such a clear recollection. Normally they're just flashbacks, but the one telltale characteristic of a past life experience is that the person experiences it as that person. You're not you, as you know. It's not a memory. Just for a moment, you are that. And in that sense, that's the same as bringing up a trauma from this life. You can have a past life memory from this life. So if a trauma comes up from childhood, you'll actually be that child re-experiencing it. You see what awaits the meditators. And it's usually—maybe that's too big a statement—but if you think of the mind as something much bigger than what we've experienced in this life, then the mind becomes pure by getting rid of its turbulences. So often in meditation, when people meditate, what actually comes up are past lives which are not pleasant at all, which have to be expressed and blown out to the system.

Now, if there wasn't that process whereby the awareness became more and more aware of its nature, which is the process of wisdom, there'd be no way really of escaping this constant rebirth. I mean, that was, remember, the obsession of the Buddha's time. The idea that he'd be constantly reborn, reborn, reborn, back as a human being, or if he did something wrong, he'd come back as a buffalo and stuff like that.

That reminds me of a story. Some of you may have heard it because I've told it a few times in past talks. But there was a very famous case in Burma when I was there. Actually, no, I shouldn't say that because he was thought to be an Arahant. He had died and a few years after that, not so long after that, farmers were talking about him, two farmers, and this buffalo moved towards them. So they became rather suspicious, they moved away and tried it again, and every time they mentioned his name the buffalo came towards them. And so the rumor went around the whole village that in fact this was... and that was horrific for the family because he was a good man. So then there was a case. They brought a court case against defamation of character.

And so he's saying that this is the story. In court, the defendant said, "Well, we'll bring the ox, the buffalo to the door and it's up to you, judge. You call out the name and see what happens." So the judge calls out there and the buffalo comes. Case dismissed. That was it.

So anyway, how does that happen? You see, if you heard that story you'd think that's a lot of rubbish, right? But not in Burmese folklore, not in Burmese understanding. If you fall in debt to somebody, you have to repay the debt. And if you die in debt to somebody, you have to come back as one of their chattels. So here's this man, he's gone to

Yangon to earn a load of money and he's died. And his last thought, which is meant to have tremendous power in your rebirth process, he has this sense of guilt: I've got to go back and pay this debt. And that's how he becomes reborn as a buffalo.

So there we are. I always tell another one too, actually, just to counteract that. There was an elderly woman came to see a monk and she said that her niece was having a baby. And she would dream, a very clear dream, that the energy was going from her heart to the niece's womb. And he told her, "Well, that's where you're going to do your next rebirth." So she didn't want to do that. So he said, "Well, you must pull it back mentally. You must pull back the energy to yourself." And as the story goes, the young woman had a miscarriage. So who knows? So all these tales from the East.

But you can see the logic of that *karma* in that particular story about the man who went to Yangon. So in a sense, what we're talking about, first of all, is a sort of cosmic moral justice, just as there's a law, subatomic laws and laws of chemistry and biological laws. There's a sort of moral law within the universe whereby a being begins to cleanse their karma and eventually liberates themselves from suffering. And you can only do that really through rebirth, with the idea of rebirth.

Again, they don't like using the word reincarnation, which brings in the idea of this eternal self. See, the Buddha doesn't like personalising it. He doesn't like personalising that process. He tries to remain completely impersonal.

So what about Freddy? Freddy the Pheasant? How's he not going to be born a pheasant again? Do you remember, you might have read the biography of this nun. What's her name again? Mechi Chow. Yeah, Mechi Chow. And she has this ability to talk to animals. And I've also got a link on the website to a woman. I think she's a South African woman who is able to communicate with animals. And there's this cow being very badly treated and dies. And she comes to her and says, "I'm really fed up. How do I get to be born a human being?" And it's very difficult, very difficult for a lower being to move to a higher level. But she doesn't explain how or how it might happen.

There's also YouTube, I think I've got it on the website too, which asks the questions, do animals have a morality? And definitely the higher animals, the apes and stuff, they definitely have a sense of shame and a sense of guilt, it seems, when they do something which is harmful to one of their own.

With old Freddy, well, who knows what... Freddy's making decisions all the time. He made a decision to stay here. So he's got that feel for a meditation centre. So it might be that as he dies, he thinks, oh, got to find a meditation centre. Might not be verbal. They

have to be verbal. Animals think, remember, they just don't have the verbal, but they definitely have images. And I mean, a dog remembers who their owner is, things like that.

It's not as though they aren't also building up *sankhāras*, but of course they don't have this ability to reflect and that of course is a bit of a drawback when it comes to trying to become liberated. So it's just the general understanding that over time the chain of being just moves upwards, one way or the other. But again, that's not really explained. The process whereby that happens, the Buddha doesn't explain.

So that... Oh, look at the time. So that brings to an end our business of karma.

Well, just as a little aside to that, is the five hindrances are related to the *sankhāras*. The five hindrances, they're all *sankhāras*. So they're all our habits. They're just the negative ones, just as the seven factors of enlightenment would be our positive ones.

And then it says, could you explain the heart base, the physical base for the mind consciousness? How do we use it in practice? Well, I was very relieved to hear that the heart base was something that was concocted by commentaries. It's not in the scriptures and it's not in the Abhidhamma. And what they did, what the commentaries, whoever was writing the commentaries thought, well, seeing the process of vision has a physical base, the eye and so on and so forth. So the mind itself, the heart mind must have a base. So they decided it was this phial of blood, which is in the heart, the physical heart, which nobody can find, of course.

And the Buddha doesn't say what the base is. So I think the mind base is the whole body. It's the whole thing, the emotional, the thought thing. It's all within the body itself. I've tried to find out, but I don't think the ancients knew what the brain was for. I mean, if you think about it, the brain doesn't feel anything. So for instance, like my father had a stroke. He didn't say my brain. I mean, we now know there's something happened in the brain, but that's not what he experienced. He experienced a loss of movement and stuff on this side. So if you don't, if people know that there's this grey floppy stuff up in the head and it falls out and you can see it, I mean, you wouldn't think much of it, would you? You'd think, well, what is that?

Because remember, people before, well, Westerners really, before the rational sort of Enlightenment period, thought and feeling weren't separate. In the East, you often get people saying, "I think," meaning they're coming from their heart base and their mind is expressing what they feel. It's not, they're not so head-based. I think that's probably more and more untrue as they become more and more sort of Western educated in a sense, by which I mean, the process of rationality and stuff.

So the heart base is the body. It doesn't say.

And that gives rise to, see it says, the question is, how does consciousness give rise to body and mind? That's the wrong, it's not put quite rightly. They are dependencies. For the body and mind to arise, consciousness has to be there. That doesn't mean to say consciousness creates body and mind. It just means that you don't know you've got a body and mind until consciousness arises. So when you're in deep sleep, there's no consciousness, right? So you don't know whether you've got a body and mind. So that dependence origination is dependent. No, it's not caused. It's not caused by anything. It's dependent on this. This arises dependent on that. And that's the whole business about how everything arises dependent on so many other factors.

Yeah. So you have to be slightly careful with the language there. The Buddha talks about it as two sheaves of hay, how they would stack them after being cut, leaning against each other. So that's it, it's consciousness and body and mind. The one is dependent on the other. That's his sort of image for it.

So I think we'll have to leave it at that. I've not missed out... Yeah, the other bit gets a bit... So what I'll do is I'll finish off this on tomorrow evening. I'll tell you afterwards what I said.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance that I've not created even greater confusion and that by your devotion to practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 254

Q&A: Kamma/Free Will, Mettā/Attachment, Momentary Concentration (Khaṇika Samādhi)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 39 min

In this comprehensive Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddhist understanding of causes and conditions through the lens of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), examining how our personal conditioning (kamma) always operates within a web of relationships and circumstances. He addresses the question of free will by presenting the Buddhist middle position of compatibilism—acknowledging that while some aspects of life are determined by past conditioning, the faculty of discrimination (paññā) offers genuine choice when aligned with the path. The discussion clarifies how vipassanā practice cleanses old vipāka (karmic results) by allowing accumulated turbulences to manifest and burn out through awareness.

Bhante offers a particularly insightful treatment of 'spiritual bypassing,' the term coined by psychotherapist John Welwood, warning against using meditation techniques to distance oneself from dukkha rather than fully opening to it. He explains how the three characteristics—anicca, dukkha, and anattā—each provide distinct avenues of insight that must all receive full attention, referencing the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's instruction to see 'feelings in feelings' (vedanānupassanā). The talk also clarifies khaṇika samādhi (momentary concentration), explaining that this technical term refers to steady concentration with changing objects—the hallmark of vipassanā jhāna—rather than unstable attention.

The session concludes with reflections on the Noble Eightfold Path, particularly sammā saṅkappa (right intention) as the attitudinal shift from selfishness to generosity, hatred to love, and cruelty to compassion, and touches on the contemplative value of chanting within the Buddhist tradition.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble, and Fully Self-Awakened One.

What I've done here is put a few questions together since they revolve around the same theme. The first question is: what does "causes and conditions" mean? The next one: what about free will? Then there is: why is it that we clean our kamma when we

practice vipassanā? And as a side issue to that, the term "spiritual bypassing"—does that mean one unskillfully uses the practice to avoid unpleasant feelings and emotions, and if so, what might some of the more subtle indicators of this be when it occurs?

This all revolves around the Buddha's teaching about kamma, and the main teaching is really around dependent origination, because that's how we create kamma—kamma here meaning our conditioning, our own personal conditioning. This conditioning is always within conditions; we're never completely separate from the world around us or the relationships around us. It's always a sort of negotiated process where we're working in a situation from a particular intention, and you haven't a clue what's going to happen once you activate it. The general rule, of course, is that if you do something wholesome, something wholesome arises out of it, and if you do something unwholesome, unwholesomeness arises.

Causes and conditions—that was, of course, what drew Sāriputta to the Buddha when he met Assaji, one of the five companions who had been with the Buddha before his liberation. When Sāriputta asked what his teacher taught, Assaji said, "Where there's a cause, there's a reason for it"—I'm paraphrasing. That somehow clicked with Sāriputta, who then went off to search for the Buddha.

Everything is conditioned. So how is it, in all these conditions which have their own causes? Remember, there are two types of causes, put as the idappaccayatā—the law of this and that. When that happened in the past, this happens now, and when that didn't happen, this doesn't happen now. Then there's the immediate present contingency: because this happens now, this happens; because this doesn't happen, this doesn't happen.

My usual example is the group. You've all come from different pasts, different places, different reasons. And once we are here, we create something just out of that. When you're here, there's this relationship going on all the time—both with you and the meditation, and with others. Causes and conditions are all mixed up in a process happening in the present, affected by the past.

You can't separate these, because if you think everything is from the past, then you're into fate. And logically, as one writer said, if everything was just cause and effect from the past, where would creativity come from? It would be a sort of repetitive universe or cosmos. On the other hand, if there's no past, if everything happens just spontaneously, you have some sort of chaos. So there's the creativity: things come together from the past to create a present moment, and that present moment is the creative moment.

You can see it in our round of politics—how the world slowly moves towards psychosis and war, then there's a healing period and you're all right for about twenty or thirty years, and then it all starts moving up again into catastrophe. This happens both on the wider scale and in ourselves.

If you take the view that causes and conditions determine everything, then you're on the far side of free will, which is fate—everything's conditioned. There were people in the Buddha's time who taught that everything is determined, so why bother? It'll just happen. I don't have any modern philosopher who has that extreme view, though I'm sure there are some hidden somewhere on YouTube.

The other side, of course, is complete free will. The teacher of that was Jean-Paul Sartre, who said every conscious moment you have the freedom of choice—you're completely free. But what stops you, of course, is your neuroses, your hang-ups, and so forth. In a very narrow sense, if each and every moment presents us with an opportunity for choice, then we could say there is some sort of free will.

But Buddhism is normally put in this middle place, which they call compatibilism. Obviously, some of our lives is fated—the fact that you're born into a society, you've got a language which gives you certain structures. You can't get out of that easily; you have to learn another language, you have to enculturate, you have to go native into another language to realize how caught up we are in our own concepts and ideas.

One obvious example is the way the West is so individual—"I did it my way"—whereas in the East, they see themselves very much as part of a group. That's why we find the Japanese and Chinese quite difficult to understand. We think they're just being manipulated or following the group, but they're very much family-centred, group-centred, nation-centred. For me, that's a very obvious difference.

So there's a part of us which is already set—just part of our conditioning in the world, the society. And there's a part of us which has a choice. Now, here we've got to be careful. When you see somebody going down the biscuit aisle thinking they have a choice as to what they're going to select—I've done this myself, where you go in thinking, "Right, I'm going to have something new, I'm fed up with chocolate biscuits." You go all the way along, a hundred biscuits at Tesco's, and you keep coming back, centering on chocolate biscuits, and in the end you think, "To hell with it, I'll have my usual." The conditioning is so great.

When we're deluded, the idea of choice is obviously something that consumerism works on—the delusion that you have a choice, that you're the one who chooses this particular piece of clothing, that it hasn't been chosen for you. From a Buddhist point of view, that's a very delusive area, because it's being manipulated by your desires, your attachments, your following of the crowd, being one of the many.

But once we start meditating, then this faculty of discrimination comes in. What discrimination does is look at choices that come up within us from the position of the path—where are we heading? This is the business of the aim and the objective. The aim is to get fully liberated from all suffering. The object arises every present moment, which is either off the path or on it. Because of our strong conditioning for certain habits, certain indulgences, we're always slipping off on these little side roads. But eventually we drag ourselves back and get on the path.

And what facilitates that return to the path, of course, is this discrimination. So you might say that even for somebody who's completely caught up in their desires and whatnot, there remains some sort of choice—or at least the potential of choice. They can say "no chocolate biscuits today," you know, but it's difficult. And then there are those of us who are on the path who are dragged by old habits, but this new understanding keeps bringing us back.

So in what way do we have free will, in any extent? But it doesn't quite work, does it? Because once you know where you're going, then the path is set for you. It's just like when you go for a walk. Tomorrow's my day off, by the way, so I'll probably climb a hill with Mark, depending on the weather. And of course, once we've decided on a hill, that's it. It's not as though you go halfway up and say, "Hold on, let's do the other hill." You set your pace and you stay on that path. If you come off piste, there's a chance of getting lost in all the other side routes, but you keep coming back to the path because you want to get to the top.

So in a sense, I would argue that the idea of choice is—well, it's there. You can choose not to be on the path. But in terms of where your heart is, where your direction is, where your objective or aim is, you don't have much of a choice. This is the path; I've got to stay on it.

So for me, it's a funny one. I try to come off the whole idea of free will and just talk about discrimination and what that actually leads us to do. And then to have the commitment—the understanding comes with the discrimination—to know, "Well, this is what you're going to do."

Part of that clarity, part of that discrimination, comes with the purity of the heart. Because it's the turbulences in the heart, it's the little delusive habits that we have in the heart, that keep taking us away. And so whenever we're meditating and we can see this stuff coming up—irritations, anxieties, overexcitements, planning, planning, all that sort of stuff—for us, that's recognizing that these are little devils that sit behind us and keep prodding us, unwittingly guiding our lives without us being fully aware of it. As these come into awareness and we recognize them as unwholesome, we allow them to burn out.

And that's really getting rid of old vipāka. If we want to be strictly correct, kamma is your action; the consequence is vipāka. But I know these days we just use the word kamma to mean consequences. So these are the consequences that are in us, in our own hearts, because of past action. And you can't get rid of them just like that. You have to allow them to express themselves. That's one reason why the meditation is so difficult—because it's ninety-nine percent purification and one percent chocolate biscuits. There isn't much sweetness at first. But as you progress, of course, you get more chocolate biscuits. Or at least the misery tones down a bit. That's what we can say: the misery tones down. Remember, right to the very end, there's some form of restlessness in the person.

So a lot of our practice is, first of all, releasing this turbulence in the heart, allowing it to manifest. And the other side is, of course, this discrimination—that's the wisdom factor. That's this satipaññña, this intuitive awareness, coming to realize that it's not looking at things properly, it's not engaging properly, and that's what's creating the problem.

So there is a process of purification and a process of insight. And this insight slowly but surely guides us out of those habits that create problems for us. That's how it happens.

And remember that these internal turbulences need not come out as memories. They need not come out as emotions. They can just come out as pain. Unfortunately.

And when the pain comes out, you know something's gone because you simply feel it, but you haven't a clue what it was. And the wonderful thing is you don't have to know. You don't have to do psychotherapy on yourself. It's always a waste of time anyway.

I remember way back when I read all those books—Freud, Jung, Laing—just reading and reading. And I came to this amazing conclusion. I always remember this. I was about twenty-five and I thought, "Finally, I know myself." Yes. Delusion.

So one of the dangers of this process is what's been known by—I should have looked it up, I'm sorry—his name's Wellwood, I think. He's a very good writer, both a psychotherapist and a very good meditator, belonging to the Tibetan tradition, I believe. And it was he who coined this phrase: *bypassing*, spiritual bypassing.

This happens when you're not really into dukkha. You don't want to sink into proper dukkha—real, burning, hot, fiery, squeegee suffering. And so what you do is distance yourself from it. That's one of our mistakes, especially with the noting. You say something like, "Anger, anger, anger," and actually you're pushing it away. You're keeping it well away over there. And of course, that doesn't give it the opportunity to burn out. So it rests there as a sort of dis-ease in the mind.

All the while, the meditator is saying to themselves, "I'm liberated from anger. I never react to anger. I see it coming and it's fine. I can see it purifying." But actually it's not happening. They're keeping it distant.

This happens when you're interested in impermanence. "Oh yes, very good." And "not me, not mine." But this "not me, not mine" is really being used to push things out of consciousness, to keep it in consciousness in a way that feels comfortable. What you're not looking at is the reactivity—the not wanting to feel this stuff.

So what happens is that all the stuff accumulates. Because remember, every time you sit, you're beckoning the heart to manifest itself. You've pulled off the suppressive measures. You've found this observation post inside yourself—this place where you're above the mind, or should we say slightly beyond it. And so you're not reacting with fear or aversion, and therefore the heart feels free to begin to manifest. But in so doing, it can come up to such a point where the meditator keeps pushing back.

In the Mahasi tradition, and in fact in Theravada in general—just as we chant in the morning—it's impermanence, suffering, and not-self. That's the process. The reason why impermanence is put first is because it's a way into the other two. What arises and passes away radically can be seen as having no substance. It's not real. It's insubstantial. And what arises and passes away makes it useless to grasp onto something, to attach to anything, because it's gone anyway. It's only by dint of force that you hold onto things.

So anicca is a way into seeing these two, but not actually experiencing them. That's the problem. You see it from one angle, but in a sense you've got to also see it from the angle of anatta and the angle of dukkha.

The angle of anatta is, of course, to see that you're not in control—you don't have full control. That's the opening part of the discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, the discourse on the characteristic of not-self. The first question is—I'm paraphrasing—"If this were my body, could I make it grow taller, have more hair?" Things like that. And the answer is, "Oh no, Bhante, no." So you can see there are limitations of power over the body, the heart, the mind.

That limitation of control is one of the sources of insight from the point of view of anatta—not from the point of view of anicca, though it might hint at it. And when it comes to dukkha, that's what dependent origination is pointing us to: this whole business of reactivity, of how we react to things and unwittingly cause ourselves more and more problems. There's that little escape route between vedana, feeling, and tanha—that movement towards wanting something or pushing it away.

In the discourse on the Satipaṭṭhāna, there's this recurrent phrase: *vedananupassana*, which means to see feelings in feelings, to feel feelings in feelings, to understand feelings in feelings. Similarly, to understand the mind in mind, to understand the body in the body. To me, this always suggests that the Buddha had this difficulty of getting people to actually open up to and receive fully what's actually happening.

One of my teachers, Sayadaw U Pandita, used to use the phrase "plunge into it." You have to go into it deeply, you have to absorb into it, you might say. And this allows us to recognise this reactivity. You can't do that while the reaction is there. If you can't investigate a physical pain or an emotional pain, something is getting in the way—you don't want to go there. And if something is stopping you from seeing things as they really are at the pleasurable level, at the emotional, joyful level, it's because you're colouring it with wanting more, demanding more from it. There's your indulgence.

So although you can get a grasp of dukkha from impermanence—if everything's impermanent and you see that, what's the point of attachment?—you're not dealing with this reactivity. That's the problem. You're bypassing it. And of course, you can remain cool in life. Somebody gets angry with you, and you can immediately pull back and say, "Well, I'm a peaceful person. I don't get angry at all." You can kid yourself into thinking you don't have any anger.

So the three avenues of insight—dukkha, anicca, and anatta—they each have their own specific ways of looking at things, which connect with the other two. One connects with the other. But even so, you have to give all three of them your full attention.

There's a quick question here about khaṇika samādhi. In his book *In This Very Life*, Sayadaw U Pandita explains this completely, I think. He talks about vipassana jhana, vipassana absorptions, as opposed to samatha jhana. In the commentary, you get *ārammaṇa jhana* and *tilakkhaṇa jhana*. Ārammaṇa means object, and tilakkhaṇa means the three signs, the three characteristics.

When you're practicing jhana, when you're practicing absorption, you really just want to have one object. You definitely don't want to discriminate or try to understand it, because then it shifts over to vipassana. You just want to absorb into it—that's all—and into the delight of it.

That sort of practice, when paired with vipassana, is of course a strengthening thing, because when you come out, you have a very sharp concentration. Much the same as when we practice walking meditation—although it remains a vipassana practice because of the impermanence, the rising and falling, it is also very much about a sense of ease, a sense of collectedness, a sense of concentration. When you come in from walking meditation, you can keep that with you.

With tilakkhaṇa jhana, the concentration is known as khaṇika—momentary—meaning it's one object, then another object, then another object. But that's not relating to the strength of your concentration.

That's something else. The strength of your concentration can be described at different levels. For instance, as you begin to quieten down on the objects that are arising, there may come a moment when you feel quite still. That's the moment of what would be termed *vitakka*.

There's this image they use in the commentaries—it's in the Visuddhimagga, for those of you who know it—of a bee flying around a flower. It's flying all over the place and then it finally finds this flower. It's going around, but it hasn't landed, and it can shoot off anywhere at any time. It's the same with the mind. You think you're there, and then you stop noting—which is a sin—and the mind wanders.

But then there comes a point where you sort of drop. Often people experience it as an actual drop. And then you're set. You're in there. That's known as *vicāra—vitakka-vicāra*. The bee has landed. It's sucking on the nectar.

When you've finally landed like that, slowly, driven by your interest—this is what it is, driven by your interest, looking at it, wanting to know—there's this tremendous support that comes, and your concentration, all the faculties, the seven factors of enlighten-

ment become more and more strong. It becomes more laser-like. But still there might be a changing object. By then, usually you're down to one object like the breath, or a pain, or something that's very steady in its process. Usually the breath.

So the distinction is this: when you hear "momentary concentration," it doesn't mean you've got concentration this moment and then the next moment you've lost it. It sometimes feels like that, but that's not what this phrase is referring to. It's referring to a steady concentration with changing objects. And that should be vipassanā. Whereas samatha—the *ālambana*, the concentration based on an object—is usually the same object: some sort of repetition, some mantra, some image or whatever.

The term "momentary concentration" is a bit scholastic, really. You wouldn't find it in an ordinary dictionary. But I'm pretty sure that Sayadaw U Pandita talks about it in his book.

Now, there are two questions here that link together—actually, it's the same question—about the Noble Eightfold Path and where mental chatter comes in. Some thoughts come under right intention, which is *sammā-saṅkappa*. And Bhikkhu Ñāṇatiloka has "right thought" for step two. But I've seen it translated as right intention, right resolve, and so on.

If we go down the path, *sammā-diṭṭhi* is to see things clearly. Now, in a sense, that has to become systemic. You can't just see. If the whole process of liberation was just seeing that things were rising and passing away, not-self, then I think we'd have made it by yesterday, frankly. That's not a big deal. You can see those things at various levels. But somehow it has to become systemic, and the first thing it affects is the way you're seeing. It affects your attitude. It affects your relationship.

Sammā-saṅkappa is described as moving from selfishness to generosity, from hatred to love, and from cruelty to compassion. So you can see it's to do with some sort of change of behavior, right? As an attitude. It's not actually hit the behavior yet—that comes in the next three steps.

I know some people describe it as "right thought," but I don't think that hits the nail on the head. I think it's more to do with right attitude and how that brings about—sometimes you say right intention or right resolve. That's my own understanding. The attitude would, of course, produce resolves and intentions. It's dropping down from your attitude, isn't it? And then it has to be activated. So that's your right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

Although right speech is normally put out as what you actually say, if you look internally, you're always talking to somebody. There's an internal dialogue going on with everybody you hate and everybody you love. So I don't see a distinction between that. It's still talking. It's still speech. When I swear at somebody in my head—and hopefully it never comes out through the mouth—it's still unwholesome. It's not as though it's okay to have these murderous thoughts in my head, and only wrong if I actually do it.

In one of the discourses, the Buddha addresses this question directly: what is worse, what is more dangerous—something happening in your head, something you say, or something you do? He points out that it all begins in the head. It all begins in the way you think. If you're going to rob a bank, you've got to plan it first. You look at the maps, figure out how to do it.

As a little aside, I always remember there was a very famous bank robber up in Alcatraz or somewhere. When they asked him, "Why do you rob banks?" he said, "That's where the money is." That was very funny—what a stupid question! That's where the money is. He obviously had wrong intention, driven by money.

So that, I think, brings us to the end of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Now, someone mentions finding chanting helpful and asks where it comes from—whether it's part of tradition or something more general.

Chanting, of course, has its roots in the oral tradition. Everything was learnt off by heart, remember, for five hundred years. Five hundred years. And it came to a point, in Sri Lanka, at the great monastic universities, where they felt they were losing it—either because monks and nuns weren't making the effort to remember—so they decided to write it down. That brought to an end that particular way of remembering things.

When you read the scriptures, they're very repetitive, because that's how you remember things. You keep at it, and you get line after line after line, with just one word changing. That's the chanting—you keep at it.

But it's also, of course, a contemplative practice. If you're a monastic, you can't go shopping. You can't do any cooking. So what are you going to do? You can sit in meditation for some time, but not all day. You can do a bit of chatting, have a conversation with people. And then you think, well, why not do a bit of chanting? Some monks do a lot of it. It's a way of developing concentration, a way of lifting the heart.

There are phenomenal feats of memory in this tradition. In 1956, I think that was the date, they held the Sixth Great Council in Rangoon—there have been six great councils since the Buddha's time. This was a Theravada council, and there were, if I remember rightly, six monks who knew all the scriptures by heart. All of them—all the discourses, all the Vinaya (the rule of the monastics, which is another six books), and all the Abhidhamma as well. These were the ones who would sit there, and the Mahasi Sayadaw was the *pucchaka*, the person who asked the questions. He himself was a renowned scholar in his own right. He asked the questions as they went through certain problems, and it would have been these six monks who decided whether everything was being properly remembered. I don't think there were any major changes—small ones, I believe, but nothing of importance.

So chanting really works on a heart level. It obviously has meaning when you chant, but if you put a certain emotional quality into it—when you're chanting about the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha—the heart can be filled with gratitude, a sense of praise, a sense of awe. Then chanting has the ability to raise and develop the heart towards the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. And the *mettā* chanting is easy, of course, in the sense that you just want to send out this goodwill.

Now, remember that when you actually say to yourself, "I'm very grateful to the Buddha," don't always expect the heart to suddenly beam with this wonderful feeling of gratitude. The heart has its own ways of doing things. But with practice, it will come, quite naturally.

Music, you know, has a huge effect on us, on the heart. I was brought up Catholic, and the High Mass was a huge theatrical occasion—unbelievable, really, with the incense, the colours, the music. It's absolutely transporting. You get lost up in the clouds somewhere, in the heavenly realms.

So that's the chanting, and where it comes from.

This chanting that we do, I used to chant with my teacher. It was quite regular, I think for town monks—short, about half an hour. We used to chant the first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, together every morning.

When you first start off, it's lovely—you're chanting with your teacher and all that. Then you think, "Couldn't we chant something else?" And then you go through this bored phase, and finally you just chant, and it is a relief simply to chant.

But the actual music of the chants here, I'm afraid most of it is my own concoction. The reason for this is that Ajahn Sumedho was utterly and totally tone deaf. He had this sort of monotone bagpipe drone that went on, and I wove around it these little tunes, which seemed to work well.

We went to a funeral once for a Tibetan lama, and he had this way about him—like a bishop, you know—he was going to walk in and walk straight to the top. So we sat there at the top, and then they said, "Would you chant the metta?" So we did—we chanted the metta together. You can imagine me chanting that metta with this drone at the back. And then, it was so funny, as we were coming down, this Tibetan nun came up and said, "That was the most beautiful chanting, Bhante." I thought, "What?" But it must have worked, you know, like bagpipes.

So yes, that chanting there—if you listen to Thai chanting or Sri Lankan chanting, you'll see it's slightly different. That's where ours comes from. But the actual content, what we're actually chanting, is something that we used to chant at the Vihara. And they still do. When I go there now, they chant for half an hour.

I think that brings us to the end of the questions. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your devotion to practice, you will be liberated from all suffering—sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 255

Q&A: Emotions, Awareness/Delusion, Insight, Masculine/Feminine, Sense-of-Self, Porridge-It-self-Has-No-Taste

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48 min

In this illuminating Q&A session, Bhante Bodhidhamma responds to student questions covering a rich range of topics central to vipassanā practice. He begins by explaining how emotions arise during meditation—not because we fail to be present, but because taking the position of the objective observer allows the heart's hidden turbulences to manifest naturally. He emphasizes that emotions are not attached to their objects but are conditioned responses seeking expression, like balloons waiting to release their contents.

The discussion moves to a profound question about how awareness can be deluded if it is unconditioned. Bhante explains that the Buddha deliberately avoided metaphysical questions about origins, focusing instead on the practical path of liberation. The delusion lies in awareness's identification with form, preventing clear seeing of the tilakkhaṇa—impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). He references the famous quadrilemma from the suttas where the Buddha remains silent on questions about existence after death.

Bhante also explores the difference between masculine and feminine modes of thinking—deductive versus inductive approaches—and how these affect both meditation practice and worldview. He addresses the persistent sense of self that remains even when mental chatter subsides, pointing to how self-awareness itself becomes an object of consciousness, revealing the emptiness of awareness. The session concludes with an exploration of sense perception, explaining how the sense bases receive raw data that the mind then constructs into experience—porridge offers only chemicals; sound requires ear consciousness to arise.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

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

The first question is about emotions. Since they're conditioned, how can they arise when we meditate in the present moment? Is it because we're not fully in the present moment?

In vipassanā, remember, we are standing off from the whole organism. We've found a place, this observation post, this place within ourselves where we're looking into ourselves. And emotions, when we actually experience them in the body, are just some form of feeling. We give them a name—might say anxiety, for instance. But as soon as we give it a name, we slot it into a particular category, so it becomes unpleasant, and so on. You can't stop that happening. That's just part and parcel of recognizing the emotion that's arisen.

Because we are standing off from the whole process—the whole process going on psychologically and physically—the heart expresses whatever turbulence is at the surface. These turbulences that we call emotions or moods, and the thought patterns that go with them, are part of that category of the aggregates, the khandhas, which is the sankhāras. The sankhāras are something that we manufacture. All the rest of it is a given.

The sense base sees something and it moves back into the memory, which is part of our perceptual process. And then that memory, the image, with the concept or the perception that we have with it, brings up the feeling tone of what we're experiencing. Altogether, we just call that a mental state. An emotion is pointing to that feeling value, the affective value of our experience.

There's no telling what the heart's going to offer. This is one of the understandings we have—that we don't actually know ourselves in that way. You're sitting there and just out of the blue some memory comes from childhood when somebody hit you on the head with a bat. That's what happened to me, you see. I've never been the same. And suddenly you remember it. I even remember his name, Ken. And suddenly I think, "I'll kill him." Where's that come from? It's all mixed up inside yourself. And then suddenly, for apparently no reason—like just now, I haven't thought of this for years—it just came up out of the blue. And it latches on to an emotion.

That's the important thing to realize about an emotion: the emotional state is not attached to the object. Your emotions—all these things to do with desire, hatred, aversion, fear—are like balloons. You've got a balloon of anger and a balloon of excitement and joy. What happens is something comes up which puts a little pinprick, and all that emotion wants to get out through there. That's where we get this sort of inappropriate reaction to things, road rage and such. The emotion itself is a conditioning that we have developed towards an object. It's not caused by the object.

Very simply, if somebody hits me on the nose, the pain stops there. It doesn't travel anywhere else—it's on the nose. The feeling of anger that I get from them, it hits me and I can feel it, and it stops there. But what I do is react to it with anger or fear. That's what

I'm generating—the anger and fear that I have towards what's coming at me. And that anger and fear is not specific to the object. It's just something I've developed whenever I see something that's dangerous to me.

So you're sitting there in meditation and there's Ken again with his bat—and he bonked me because I beat him, you see. He was a bad loser.

And I think what's happened in my own mind is that the turbulence of anger has sort of begun to rise to the surface of consciousness, of the mind, where it touches consciousness. And it's seeking an object. It's seeking something to grab hold of. So it grabs hold of this memory, and off you go. You start then thinking about this memory and you're developing this anger through developing a storyline around this Ken, whom I'm still hunting for. I sent out a search warrant.

So it's nothing to do with the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. Now, normally speaking, you're engaged in the organism and therefore you seem to be, as it were, in charge of your emotions. So you might say to yourself, "Well, you know, I'll go to the cinema and I'll watch this film. It's a horror film and I know it's going to frighten me. That's great because I like being frightened." So you sit there and watch the horror film. That's your decision. You've made that. You seem to be in control of it.

But at other times, for instance, you wake up—you never say, "Tomorrow I'm going to wake up depressed." But you wake up and you're depressed, and it's just come up. It's just come up of its own accord. And that's what we're discovering: that when you take this position of the observer within yourself, the feeler—remember, the awareness is multiple in its sensitivities; it can feel, it can see, it can understand—what you're saying to the heart is: manifest. Manifest yourself. What have you got hidden from me?

And that, remember, is the process of therapy. We're not doing the practice in order to have psychotherapy or for the mind to heal itself. It's just a natural process that the heart does when you come off it. The turbulence itself begins to manifest, and so long as we don't get lost in that thinking and all that, that energy begins to evaporate. But it doesn't disappear, remember. It always moves towards its opposite. So whatever was a hateful, angry mood will move towards love, you see.

In Zen they say, with wisdom, compassion arises naturally. And we practice mettā just to give it a little bit of a push. But in the process of purifying the heart, in the process whereby the heart purifies itself, it's always moving towards purity naturally, and towards the virtues. I always say it's very cheap.

So it's nothing to do about being—it is to do specifically about being present in the moment in that particular way. And the heart then manifests its turbulences. And it can throw up even traumas from early life, real traumas, that can be liberated through this process.

Are there any questions arising out of that?

So in answer to the question: emotions are conditioned, yes, so how can they arise when we meditate? They arise of themselves—this is what you realize. The knee hurts of itself. It doesn't ask you for permission, does it? "Do you mind if I scream?" No. It just starts screaming.

And is it because we're not fully in the present? No, we are fully in the present, but in a particular way. We've taken this objective position within ourselves. That's not the same as being fully present when you're doing something, because then you're engaging the organism and it will come up with a certain mental state to support your engagement.

So if you say to yourself, "Right, I'm going to wash the pots," or do this piece of work on the computer, then you are ordering the organism to do this particular task. It might be that during that, some little bit of irritation comes up because of your reaction to what you're doing, or boredom suddenly arises—all that sort of stuff. But the point is that we can use this organism to do stuff. And that's different from being in this position within ourselves of the objective observer, where we're just leaving the organism alone. We're just watching the process.

And remember, that's the Buddha's approach to things. He's not interested in why something's happened, but how something's happened. Because in seeing how we create suffering for ourselves, we should be able to undo the knot. We should be able to undo the process.

This is a tricky question: how can awareness be deluded if it's unconditioned? I'm no great scholar, and I can't say I've read all the scriptures—I've read the main ones—but I don't think this question ever actually comes up in the texts. I must ask a scholar sometime.

The question of being unconditioned is not relevant to whether awareness is wise or deluded. It's simply unconditioned. The unconditioned refers mainly to the fact that it is not dependent on anything. It has its own existence, its own being. I'm using words very loosely here, because the Buddha doesn't like to talk about the qualities of the unconditioned. He just points to them. He points to them with metaphor—the island, the refuge, and so forth.

As to how awareness appears in a deluded state and then moves towards a wise state, as to why that happens, I don't think that's ever discussed. The only thing that's ever discussed is how to do that, but not why. There's never any ontological question in Buddhism—no question about why something has come to be in that ultimate sense. No questions about why it was created in the first place. The Buddha shies away from all those sorts of questions. Anything to do with metaphysics, he doesn't answer. He says it's a waste of time.

This is expressed in the famous quadrilemma—not dilemma, quadrilemma. The four main questions: On his death, does the Buddha exist? Does he not exist? Does he both exist and not exist? Does he neither exist nor not exist? It goes on and on, these negatives. And the Buddha, of course, is silent. He says it's not a question that leads anywhere. It's just the intellect thinking, thinking.

But what we do know is that we are deluded, in his terms. And the delusion lies at its base in identity. We identify with this form, and it leads us into all sorts of mess. Every time we move back into the position of the observer—unwittingly, even if we're not fully aware of it—we're disidentifying. As soon as something's an object, you can't be it. And that's one of the things we can say to ourselves. We can reflect upon it in the meditation. We can look at something—an image in the mind, an emotion—and say, "Well, I'm looking at it. It can't be me." And then, of course, you abandon thinking and just watch. Because even that thought is stopping us from having a direct experience of not me, not mine.

So there's no answer to that question.

Someone asks what it means for awareness to be deluded. What would be an example where one says, "My awareness is deluded"?

Awareness here is short for intuitive awareness. And the delusion, in Buddhist terms, is that it doesn't see the three characteristics clearly. It doesn't see. Because it's so committed to this life form, it doesn't really catch impermanence. Although we in our practice get down to this business of arising and passing away of a breath and all that, remember the real point of impermanence is death. That really manifests our impermanence. And it's one place we don't like to go. Death is something that's going to happen to everybody else, and maybe to me at some point in the future.

So that's impermanence. And we do what we can to ignore it, to entertain ourselves away from it. There's a fantastic book called *The Denial of Death* — the author's name has just flitted through my mind — and it's a classic, written I think in the seventies or eighties. The effect of the denial of death is unbelievable. It makes us run, you see. It makes us accumulate.

So this intuitive awareness, because of its identity with this form, doesn't see impermanence directly. It sees it superficially — day and night and all that — but it doesn't really see the cause of suffering. It doesn't really see it. And if it does see it, that is a breakthrough, but it finds it very difficult to let go. One example which I often use is smoking. In the fifties, it was still understood that smoking was okay, didn't do much harm. Then as the science came through and people realised they were killing themselves, they didn't stop smoking. They just couldn't stop the process. It's like with us — we can see the process of craving, and we can see it's doing us harm, but it's very difficult to stop going for that tenth biscuit. You know what I mean? And that's the power of our cravings, which is the psychological cause of our suffering.

Sometimes I talk about it as desire, because I always think craving is far too strong a word. It covers the whole range from simple wrong desires to great big wrong desires. But remember that desire in English also covers all those beautiful things that we ought to desire, arising out of our social virtues — love, compassion, joy and so on.

And when it comes to not-self, that's what awareness doesn't know. Because of that wrong identity, it's lost its own identity. It's lost its own sense of what it is. Now, whether it ever had that is difficult to say. I can't see it ever having had that in some other rebirth, in some other place, and have lost it. I can't see that happening. So it's going back to that question of time, of the origin of awareness, of how it arose in the first place. It's simply unanswerable.

All we know is that we aren't happy in that absolute, fundamental way. There is an alienation with life. We don't feel we fit completely in with life. And what tells us that is, of course, the body falls ill and you die — because you don't want to do that, really. Usually, you know. Jesus says it in that lovely poetic way, doesn't he? The birds have their nests, the fox has its holes, but man has nowhere to rest his head. So we're always out of sync with nature.

We're not like animals that are very in the moment in that totally immersive, deluded way. But they are at home. This is where it makes sense to them, for want of a better word. They don't think about death. You never see sheep or cows having philosophical arguments as to whether they could do something about this problem.

So there's no answer to the origins of awareness. All we know is that it's within us. We experience it. And through our practice, we're slowly isolating its qualities. It's individuating out of the mass of those five aggregates, the psychophysical organism. People who have had an out-of-body experience know this. It's a very clear experience.

"Do you not see animals grieving death?"

They do, don't they? The higher animals. Elephants and the higher apes.

Would that not suggest that they have an understanding of death? I don't know whether they have an understanding of death. It's probably the sense of... well, understanding in the sense that they know that's a corpse now. It's becoming more and more obvious as they study the higher animals that they're far more intelligent than we would presume. Elephants grieve, don't they? It's a spectrum, isn't it? And then something happened to a particular ape and we went into a different category.

Is the insight into the true nature of ourselves something that can change? Or is it an insight into the world and others? Well, these insights are accumulative. As soon as you hear the Buddha's message about anicca, dukkha, and anatta, there's a click—our awareness or our relationship to the world just clicks. It clicks every time you have a new understanding of things. Even at an intellectual level, you can have a different view of something, and this feeds into your attitude and how you speak. That's the Eightfold Path, you see.

So all our insights are slowly changing our relationship to the world. And it's moving us towards this position: the world is not me, it's not mine, but I have to be engaged in it. And the reason you want to be engaged in it is because you've made a connection with other beings. You're drawn by compassion.

Compassion is understood to be—the Buddha talks about it as—a trembling in the heart when you see other people suffering. And it draws you. That would be a certain sorrow. And if you don't react to it, it remains unrequited. It remains within you, and you might feel guilty or sad that you didn't respond at the right time. That's just a natural thing that happens. I don't think you have to work at it. It just comes with an insight into ourselves. It's a universal insight. These are universal insights that all human beings are capable of.

The insight itself doesn't change. You just get further insights. It accumulates. So in these four stages of liberation—the stream entrance—the Buddha says it's just like a flash of lightning. The person sees everything, but it's like that was it. It's not really a full grasp of the situation. The second one, I think he says, is like a full starry night.

Again, there's a deeper seeing, but it's not complete. And the third one is like a full moon night. In the East, you can see color; it's very bright. And then you don't get to see the world like the sun until you've finally cracked it.

So it's slow, but the insights are always the same. They're always around impermanence, the creation of suffering through wrong relationship—desire or craving—and not-self. It's always the same thing. Once you've understood that, there's nothing more to be known. There's only the practice.

That's why people can be fully liberated who in society are considered to be dull-minded. Because you don't need the intellect. What you need is the liberation of the intuitive awareness, the intuitive intelligence, from its confusion with the intellect. And in fact, people who are intellectual, or even those lost in art, are less well disposed.

There's a story that runs with the Dhammapada of a monk who had disciples, something like ten of them, and all his disciples became liberated while he wasn't. He was a teacher and he knew everything. So he thought, well, he'd better bite the bullet. He went to see one of them and said, "Could you teach me how to become fully liberated?" And the fellow knew this guy was too intellectually conceited.

He couldn't help him. So he told him, "Well, actually, the person you want to see is this other past student of yours." And so he's passed on down the line. And he got to this point where a monk said to him, "Well, you need to work with this boy. He'll show you."

So this little child, you see, and the little child took him to an anthill. Do you know this story? He took him to an anthill and said, "Now in an anthill, when the ants leave, a snake often lives in it." And he said, "Supposing this anthill has six holes, how would you get the snake out?" And he said, "Well, you'd stop up five holes, you see." And the boy said, "Yeah, very good. So you stop the five senses and watch the mind." And of course, in no length of time, he became fully liberated.

His problem was conceit—thinking that because he'd understood something so well, he must be liberated from delusion. And that's what the intellect can do. It can fool you.

So the question is, can the insight into the nature of ourselves change? Yes, the insights grow. Look at it that way. They expand, they accumulate, they develop one on top of the other.

Insight into the world and others—remember, in the Buddha's teaching, whenever he talks about the world, he's talking about the world we're creating. He's not talking about the scientific world, the objective world. It's not that the world out there doesn't come up, but when he's talking spiritually, it's always the world that we're creating through this organism. In this fathom-length body is suffering and the end of suffering.

Is there a fundamental difference between men and women, in your experience? There's definitely—I think you've got to be careful because some women shade into—let's talk about masculine and feminine. Some feminine types move into the masculine and some masculine types move. So there's always that, you know. But if we talk about the two extremes...

When I used to teach in Dublin, there was a time when I used to stay with a very elderly lady called Beatrice. She was blind from diabetes. She'd lost her husband, her two sons. And she was an extraordinary person—a lovely feel about her. We got into a conversation, and she said to me, "You know why we're taking different positions?" And I said, "No." She says, "Well, men think deductively and women think inductively."

And I said, "No, that's interesting, Beatrice. What does that mean?" Because I couldn't remember what deductive and inductive thinking was. And she said, "Well, the feminine takes the particular and from the particular produces a concept. Whereas the masculine starts from the concept and draws it down to the particular."

Later on, we were talking about the war in Afghanistan—so that's when I was with her. And I suddenly went, "We're doing it, aren't we Beatrice?" She says, "Yes, you do it naturally. You don't know you're doing it. It's just the way you think."

So from a feminine point of view, when they look at a war, they see people being blown to bits, dead. So the obvious conclusion is we mustn't fight a war. From the deductive masculine point of view, there's the bigger picture, right? We've got to get rid of these terrorists. So those people become collateral. They become part and parcel of this greater view.

And so in a patriarchal society, women are stupid because they can't see the bigger picture. But what happens is that then you have a patriarchal society that loses contact with the suffering, with what's actually going on. So that is quite a distinction on the ends of the spectrum.

The other distinction is will. The masculine will is the will of the storm, whereas the feminine will is the will of the mountain. My parents were like that. My father was a get-things-done type, but when my mother didn't want to do what he wanted to do, she simply said no. And that was it. He couldn't move her. The mountain does not move.

Emotionally, that's also quite a distinction at the far ends. The masculine experiences emotions in the head. I often see this with meditators—when they're angry, the anger is up here. The fear is up here. It's all up here. Whereas the feminine will feel it in the body as an emotion. In my own case, I had this insight that changed my life. I remember my next task came up: What is an emotion? I was twenty-five years old, asking myself this question. Because up until then, it was always in the head. There was no distinction between the thought and the emotion. I had no contact with the body as such.

So in meditation, in terms of the practice, the masculine has to come into the body to feel emotions—sometimes for the first time—as real feelings in the body. And for the feminine, because they're so locked into emotion, they have to lose their connection with emotion as emotion. The process then is to go down to the sensations, the four mahābhūta, to see that an emotion isn't real. It's just feeling, just sensation. These are all generalizations, you understand, but the masculine and feminine views of life represent genuinely different experiences.

After all the chatter of the mind has quietened down, a sense of self remains. Let me talk about this perception that I am in my head looking out at the world. Just to remind you of my imagery around this—the most obvious one is looking into a shop window. As you look into the window at the things you might want to buy, you suddenly become aware that there's a mirror image, and you catch yourself looking into the window. That window pane functions as a screen. All the light from the shop is moving out onto that screen, and that's what you're looking at, but the screen is also catching your image looking into it. That's consciousness.

When you're in that position of the observer, the knower, and you become aware of it, the object you're seeing—the sense of self, the observer—is also an object. Everything we experience from that position of the observer is an object. Pain in my knee, emotions, an image in my mind—they all become objects because I can actually point to them. I can give them names. And when I become aware of being the observer, of being the one who knows, then somehow that sense of self, that sense of the feeler, is also an object. So I can't be that either.

At that point, you can stay there and just sense that sense of presence as an object, a sense of presence. But it's telling you something about this quality of intuitive awareness. What are you actually experiencing when you're in that very clear state of the observer? In Mahāyāna, they sometimes tell you to glance back, as it were, glance back into the observing state. And then when you've done that, you can reflect: Was there a body there? Were there any feelings, sensations, emotions? What was in it?

These little insights, little seeings, begin to change our relationship. Of course, you can pull yourself out of all these different selves—an emotional self, a thought self, a job self, a relationship self. You can pull yourself out to this business of the observer, but you can't get rid of that self. You can't get rid of that self. And consciousness is arising and passing away. It's not steady.

It's not something that is always there. It disappears in sleep, for instance. And in the Abhidhamma, they say these consciousnesses are flashing at an enormous rate, picking up information from various senses so fast that it gives us that sense of continuity. So you're hearing and seeing at the same time—but not in Buddhist psychology. There's one consciousness seeing and one consciousness hearing, and it's happening so fast that it creates this illusion.

Now, being aware of that self, the consciousness that that sense of self is arising in is also still arising and passing away. And if you keep your attention there long enough, you might catch that.

So in terms of the question about self-awareness—that perception of self-awareness is telling us something about the nature of awareness. It's emptiness. So you get this word *emptiness*. The awareness is empty of all phenomena. It's empty of whatever the psychophysical organism manifests. That's what it's empty of.

But of course, what you're beginning to experience when we're in the position of self-awareness—that *is* the real. Everything else is an object of awareness arising and passing away, but this awareness seems to be there all the time.

The last question commented that porridge itself has no taste, asking whether I was referring to the conditions of sense object, sense base, and sense consciousness needing to be present in order for sense contact and perception to arise.

Yes. The sense base has this sensitivity—in the case of the eyes, to amazingly sub-atomic particles, photons, for heaven's sake. The ear sense base is sensitive to pressure. So they're all sensitive. But then as that information is taken into the mind, the mind plays with it and creates something.

So if you make a determination before you fall asleep that you will see the process of hearing when you wake up, you'll see that the first sign of the bell is just pressure, as if your hands are touching like that. And then as it's taken in, you get the sound. And then the sound is given a name: bell. Then it's given a purpose: alarm bell. And then it's given the person: me. I've got to get up. It's right at the end of the process.

So it's the same with all the senses. It's always being taken into the mind, and then the mind makes sense of it. But at the sense base, it's just very simple information coming in.

You might have seen those photographs of how the eye moves around a picture when it's looking at a piece of art in a gallery. The eye is moving at a tremendous rate all over the place, often centering on something you're particularly interested in. But you don't see that. What you see is the picture.

So the porridge is only offering you chemicals. The tongue and the nose are sensing it, and then it's going in, and then there's all this mental activity going on around porridge. And there was a program I saw where the process of smelling is also at a subatomic level. I can't tell you quite how that works, but it's not a simple case of a cell touching a chemical. It's actually happening at an atomic level. Remarkable.

The next part of the question is this: "This reminds me of the question, if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? I guess the answer is no, in the absence of an ear and ear consciousness. But if you leave a tape recorder in the forest, it picks up the noise. Can you comment on this?"

Human beings are incredibly clever at extending tools. All animals use tools—I just read an article about a puffin that picks up a stick in order to scratch itself. So it seems even birds, which are dinosaurs, can actually use tools, but they can't develop them further. They can't then think, "Oh, well, I'll manufacture this as a steel object."

Human beings, however, have been able to extend through their imagination. We have these massive machines that do all our heavy work for us, and they're just an extension of an arm. Our groundsman Roy, if you ever see him moving his machine around—it really does look like his arm. He's got complete control over it as he's shifting soil here and there. It's quite remarkable. And all he's doing is this little business with a lever.

When it comes to hearing things, of course, we've manufactured gadgets that are sensitive to sound waves. That's all. There's nothing magical. It's not an ear. It's just sensitive to sound waves, and it repeats those sound waves. So the sound waves are what you're hearing. The recorder has caught the pressure waves coming from the falling of the tree, and then it's able to repeat them so that you then hear the tree falling. But the recorder hasn't heard the tree falling. The recording has simply recorded the pressure waves.

So it doesn't upset the Buddhist psychology. Porridge still has no taste, and the tree doesn't make a sound.

And then there's the old Zen kōan, isn't there? I can't remember the story exactly, but there's a flag, and the student says to the master, "The flag is flying," and the master says, "Is the flag flying, or your mind?" So what are you actually seeing? Are you seeing the flag, or are you seeing your mind? That's one of these kōans, you see.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that I have not created even greater confusion—and that you will, through your arduous practice, soon be liberated from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER 256

Aṅgulimāla: A Monologue

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 54 min

> *This powerful dramatisation brings to life one of Buddhism's most compelling stories of transformation—the tale of Aṅgulimāla, whose name means 'Garland of Fingers.' Through vivid first-person narration, Bhante Bodhidhamma portrays the journey of a promising Brahmin student named Ahiṃsaka ('the Harmless One') who descends into horrific violence after his jealous guru demands an impossible gift of homage: one hundred human fingers.*
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> *The monologue explores the psychological unravelling of a brilliant young man caught between devotion to tradition and moral conscience, his descent into bloodlust, and his eventual encounter with the Buddha on a forest road. The famous scene where Aṅgulimāla cannot catch up to the walking Buddha, who tells him 'I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla—it is you who haven't stopped,' becomes a turning point that awakens deep remorse and opens the path to liberation.*
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> *This dramatisation illuminates profound teachings on the nature of kamma, the possibility of transformation regardless of past actions, and the liberating insight that suffering is self-created through delusion rather than inherent evil. The story demonstrates how true remorse, combined with diligent practice, can purify even the most corrupted heart. Aṅgulimāla's eventual realisation—that because no one actually caused his suffering, there was no one to forgive, and because his harmful actions arose from ignorance rather than malice, he was intrinsically innocent—offers a radical understanding of moral responsibility and liberation.*

I am amused when I look back on my life. To say I lived it wouldn't be the truth. To say I did not live it would be a lie. In the clarity and distance of old age, it seems a tale of another age, another person. Yet I remember it all as clear as day.

I was born at the beginning of the cold season, the Himalayan wind chilling the dying embers of a warm sun. My mother rejoiced, of course, as did the household of relatives and friends, but my father was more concerned with my horoscope, and he slipped away with colleagues to study the charts.

That next morning it was an anxious father who hurried to the palace to fulfil the morning rituals of a royal chaplain. There he found the king troubled and agitated.

"Ah, Gagaji, I was dozing after my evening meal when I woke into a living nightmare. All my armour was shaking, clattering, flashing."

"Oh, that would have been the time Mantani gave birth to us, Your Majesty, and... I'm afraid, into an inauspicious constellation."

"Inauspicious?" A worried king has no time for sympathetic joy.

"There are signs that show great promise indeed, and yet others that indicate something quite terrible."

"Something terrible, such as?" The king wanted precision.

"I can't say, Your Majesty." And at the king's growing frustration, he quickly added, "Perhaps it may be prudent to be rid of him."

My life hung on a thread. Thankfully, this king was not so easily frightened. Indeed, he was surprised my father should put such little value on my life.

"But he's born a Brahmin. Surely, properly educated and carefully nurtured, he'll overcome any evil tendencies, and that promise will shine through."

This was not the first time I was to owe my life to the compassion of this young, arrogant king, Pasenadi of Kosala.

My parents expressed their uneasy hope in naming me Ahimsaka, the Harmless One. My childhood was happy and untroubled. I was my mother's favorite. I do remember being offered all manner of bribes to be good—not that it had much effect. It seems I had an insatiable desire to chase mosquitoes, cockroaches, frogs, anything that moved, and squash them.

However, there was one extraordinary incident that shook my usual happy composure. Suddenly, a gang of boys, all friends, playmates, stood around me. One of them, a big boy, Vajiro, began jeering at me.

"Creep, think you're better than all of us."

They all joined in. At first, I thought they were joking. Then they began to push me around. All of a sudden, everything went blank.

When I came to my senses, the children were staring at me. Before me lay Vajiro. One by one, they sidled away. When the big boy got up, his blood-stained lips flamed with implacable revenge.

"I'll get you for this!"

I laughed at his threat. I felt only the power and grandeur of a conqueror. But, more ominous, I was savouring the exquisite pleasure of drawing blood.

By young manhood, I was well practised in the arts of war, and showed such potential in my studies that my father sent me to Takasila, the foremost seat of learning. Such was my reputation that the most learned teacher wanted to see me.

Agamaha Pandita Abinyana, a small, rotund, elderly man, was revered for his incisive intellect. That, coupled with a stentorian voice, made him a formidable debater. He fired all manner of questions at me, jabbing them at me with his little finger that seemed to turn them into sharp needles. It was a trait that was to take on a sinister meaning for me.

"You'll outshine them all, even me," he announced with great delight.

I felt a great devotion to my guru. I began to treat him with a special veneration due to a natural father. I felt sure he saw me equally as a natural son. It was my devotion to learning and a desire to please my guru that caused me to excel.

Then, one day—I remember it too well—he glanced at me in a way that greatly disturbed me. There was suspicion in his eyes, a tightness to his face suggesting fear, or was it hatred? As the days passed, he grew more and more distant. During the final days, there were awkward silences and false smiles. I felt hurt by our loss of intimacy, too confused to ask what the matter was. I decided to put it all to one side, especially since my final exams were starting—the recitations, the public debates, the competitive games.

I performed very well. In fact, I was acclaimed foremost student of my year.

On the very day the results were given, my deepest anxieties were confirmed. My guru called me to see him. I expected praise. I wanted to express my unrequitable gratitude, and indeed that's what I did. But then he said, "You know, it is the duty of every student to offer a gift of homage to their guru."

"Oh, indeed!" I exclaimed. "Name it, Guruji."

What he asked for came as an utter shock. "For *dakshina*," he said with absolute authority, "bring me a little finger of one hundred people." His eyes demanded obedience.

"I can't do that," I remember stuttering.

He was silent, his glare insisting submission.

"My family are all Brahmins. We live as harmlessly as possible, to the highest standards of one who is born of the mouth of Brahma."

"Those who refuse to pay the ceremonial gift of homage—a sacred duty to their guru—are to be detested. Such a person tramples on our time-honored tradition. All their learning will produce but sterile fruit. Is this the behavior of a son born of the mouth of Brahma?"

There was an inexplicable hardness to his tone, a sneer in his question. I simply had no response. I bowed, mumbling that I would follow his wishes. When I looked up, he'd turned away and was calling for his servant. I backed away, cowed and confused. The guru had a right to name his gift of homage, but why was mine so terrible? Why had he not asked similar of others? All he asked of them was fruit, clothing, medicine.

That night I fell into a heavy, disturbed sleep. I woke into a terrible night terror. Pointed fingers like darts burst upon me from every angle. I fought furiously with sword and shield, writhing in agony. When I came to my senses, I was lying on the floor, soaked in cold sweat and shaking, awake to the full horror of my duty.

In a daze, I got my belongings together and began to make my way homeward, a journey of two weeks or more—time to clear my head and cool my heart. I stayed in the villages en route, hardly talking to anyone, and all the time I was convincing myself of my duty. I must get one hundred fingers. How else could I possibly do so without killing? People aren't just going to let me walk off with their little finger. I have to kill. There's no other way. Such killing isn't murder. I have to fulfill my sacred duty. Who am I to renounce a time-honored tradition? I have to do it. I have to.

In this way, by the time I arrived at the dark and dense Jālini Forest on the border of my country, Kosala, I was steeled for my first killing. I found a cave on a hill that looked down on a stretch of road traveled by hunters, gatherers, and merchants. Water and forest food—banana, mango, rich papaya, various nuts—were all in abundance. And I spent my first day.

That evening, in the pearl-white silence of a full moon, soft with the scuffing of cicadas, I dug a fire pit to Kali Durga, Divine Mother, womb of all creation. It was into this cremation ground that I would offer the flesh of my victims to gain them her protection, and so sanctify my deeds.

I cut my little finger and into the sacrificial fire I offered my blood as libation. Staring at the flames, I began to develop a fierce concentration. It was going to take all the courage and strength I could muster. For all my battle skills, I had never yet killed an animal, never mind a human being.

In the dark dawn of early morning, I rubbed the sacred ash into my body. Filled with religious confidence, I made my way down to the path. There I hid, waiting. And sure enough, in that early hour, the shuffle of a wood-gatherer with his axe and bundles of rope.

I had imagined a swift dagger attack from behind, but instead pulled an arrow into the bow. A more easy prey there couldn't be. But I couldn't let that arrow fly. I continued to stalk him, all the time urging myself to fulfill my duty. And anyway, what had life left for this old, feeble man but a miserable diseased end? It was a mercy to kill him.

I took a deep breath. As quick as lightning, I thrust my sword. It seemed to penetrate like a knife through butter. His body startled, tensed, and suddenly slumped, dragging me downwards so that I tumbled onto him. There I looked into his face. His eyes glazed, empty and deaf. His mouth wide open, locked in shock.

Horrified, I leapt up, hardly able to catch my breath. Suddenly there were great cries. A small crowd of men were racing towards me, their axes shaking in the air. All went blank. I remember nothing but standing there with these same men strewn around me, twisted and bleeding.

As I realized what had happened, there came upon me a strange feeling of omnipotence. I stood towering above the slain bodies—the skill, the power, the glory of it. Like the all-conquering hero, I sliced off each little finger with a flourish. And I rejoiced. I've done it. I've done it. And it's easy, so easy. I danced for joy and relief.

I then hid the bodies. The more I could keep the killings secret, the easier would I capture my victims. I returned to my cave. There I cut what flesh I could from the fingers into the sacrificial pyre. I then threaded the bones with vine and tied them onto a branch. Once they were picked clean by birds or ants, I would hang it around my neck as a divine amulet.

Late that same afternoon, I heard in the distance a calling—names being called by many, over and over again. Intrigued, I went down. Of course, family and friends had come to look for the wood-gatherers. Again I stalked and pounced like a tiger. My attacks were swift and smooth, the blows of death precise, clean.

Having taken the fingers of two men, moving around a bamboo coppice, there in front of me stood three women. Yes, I stopped. For a moment there was doubt. I felt something tight against my heart. But by now I was too committed. Two were dead before the other could turn. She stared at me, paralyzed in fear—and that was the face that fell into the embrace of soft grasses and wildflowers.

Did I feel pity? None. I was drunk with conquest. I could have easily killed the rest, but for a scream of horror some distance from me. I was moving so fast I hadn't bothered to hide the bodies. The game was up. It was now a matter of stopping the news from travelling beyond the village.

I ran at maddening speed until I arrived at a large clearing. Many buildings nestled there among the palm trees, the place littered with busy chickens and scrawny dogs. I was certain that once the villagers returned, they would send a party off to the king at Sāvatthī. It was on that road I lay waiting.

And sure enough, a handful of men came bearing the usual crude weapons. I followed them until they had gone quite some way from the village and well out of earshot. It was then, full of the courage of invincibility, that I pounced on them. None of this low caste would have had my training. It was all becoming too easy.

I decided to take full advantage of the situation. I made my way back to the village, and in the early hours of the following morning, just when colour begins to seep into the shades, I crept into the first one-room hut. The air hung hot and stale with the exhausted slumber of grief. Husband and wife lay together, the children—seven, or maybe eight of them—snuggled in the opposite corner. Their pitiful defencelessness couldn't soften my cruel resolve.

I bathed myself in the blood of carnage. First the man, then the woman, then the children. Quietly and speedily, I slit their throats and stabbed their hearts. And so I savaged hut after hut. I could see streamlets of blood picking their way down the slope towards the well.

Suddenly, as I left a large wooden house—a scream. I lurched back inside and grabbed that child by the throat. A rage took me. I lifted the little body until it dangled in the air, its little arms flailing, mouth agape, eyes bulging in terror, its tiny fingers wrenched into my hand, its little feet kicking the air. My grip tightened until the tiny body seized and fell limp.

I stared at that beautiful little face as in a trance. I couldn't bear to acknowledge what I'd done. As I dropped the body to continue the slaughter, it was the one finger I left behind.

But that little child's cry had stirred the village. It was only because of the poor light that I was able to disappear unseen into the forest.

I arrived back at my hideout, exhausted. As I lay down, the child's face returned. I turned on my side and slept through the heat of midday. Late that afternoon, I woke refreshed and of a sudden decided to hunt animals. Each kill reaffirmed my command over life and death. In the cool of that evening, for the first time in my life, I sank my teeth into roasted boar. It was delicious. Again, I rejoiced.

Soon I'll have my hundred fingers. The debt will be paid. I'll return home in secret triumph and through my father's good offices enter into the service of the king. I'll marry a beautiful girl, inherit the farm, have many children, and my life will be a rolling countryside of nothing but contentment and joy. I danced in joy. I danced in gratitude. I danced for Kālī, my divine protectoress.

The following morning I woke in more sombre mood. I realised that even now a platoon of soldiers would be searching for me. There was only one thing for it—to keep on the move without coherent plan and to range as far as possible. In this way I could attack unwary travellers along any road, enter any unsuspecting village in the dark. The kill was easy so long as it remained unexpected. Even the soldiers proved useless defence. Such was their clatter, I could always hear them coming.

On one such outing, I overheard a conversation that first made me laugh, and then showed me to what depravity I had descended. I heard a small crowd talking about this madman who murdered for little fingers. A demon. Aṅgulimāla.

Me? I was Aṅgulimāla—Garland of Fingers.

Returning that evening, I caught my face in a pool of water, and what I saw truly shocked me. My black hair was tortured, spiking around my head. My face lay hidden beneath a matted, grubby beard. My eyes seemed to bulge. My lips and tongue were blood red from betel leaf, which I chewed to calm my nerves. My clothes hung torn, filthy, and bespattered with human blood.

And there, around my neck, the garland of fingers.

Yes, a demon.
A yakka.

Over this period of but a few weeks, as I gathered my tally of fingers, my bloodlust consumed me. My dreams were full of it. Daydreams addicted to it. To see the horror in their eyes, to hear their screams—this was my joy.

Yes, I remember. I remember it all, as clear as day.

I had now but one finger to go, and I thought to come full circle and return to the very spot on that road where I'd stabbed that poor old wood-gatherer. Then at last I would present this blood homage to my guru, against whom I'd built up a healthy hatred and often plotted how to avenge my humiliation.

As I hid in waiting, I began to hear a calling. Oh, my heart jumped into my throat.

"Ahimsaka! Ahimsaka!"

My mother. My mother calling me as she'd always done. How could she have known it was me? Her mother's intuition...

Mother or no, there raged inside me a desire to kill. A loud, clear "no" arose, yet against my will my legs began to move—nearer and nearer—until I saw her. I couldn't stop. I just kept advancing, my hand now taking the sword from the scabbard. I was all but ready to pounce when a tall, bald-headed monk suddenly appeared. My mother bowed to him. He must have said something to her, for my mother turned and walked back the way she came. He then continued along the road.

I was intrigued. I began to stalk this monk, moving faster and faster, yet the faster I moved, he seemed to be the same distance away. Finally, frustrated, I burst out of my hiding into the road and ran towards him. Faster and faster I ran, yet never getting any closer. He kept on walking at the very same easy pace.

Finally exhausted, I shouted out, "Stop!"

And he did.

While I panted, he turned round, quite unhurriedly, and replied, "I have stopped, Angulimala. It's you who haven't stopped."

I was full of rage and yet taken aback. He was smiling at me. We stood facing each other for what seemed a long time.

Finally, my curiosity—at his supernatural ability to walk faster than I could run, his obvious fearlessness, and this strange reply—brought the student out of me.

"You've stopped, but I haven't?" I shouted angrily.

"This vicious craving and enjoyment in making others suffer—do you think it will end with your hundred fingers? With the murder of your own mother?"

I was dumb.

"And the consequences, the karma. Don't you believe the torturer reaps in kind?"

Of course I did. Do harm, and surely harm will follow as a cart follows the ox.

"I'm fulfilling an ancient obligation to my guru," I offered in defense.

"Ha! Put yourself in the place of your victims. How would you like to be murdered, just so that some bright young Brahmin can offer your little finger as a present to his guru?"

The absurdity of my position hit me like a bolt of lightning. Why had it never occurred to me to take the victim's point of view?

"So come then," he said. "You may as well finish the job." He offered his hand. "You needn't kill me for it."

I stared at him in disbelief.

He was a big man, beyond his prime, but still strong enough to defend himself—and here he was, offering me his little finger. His fearless act of generosity made my own courage seem puny.

"You've been amazingly stupid," he continued. "What happened to your common sense? It just goes to show how brilliance can service the most ludicrous delusions." Then, not to despair, he added that this very dedication to my studies—and indeed to my murderings—was a virtue that would help perfect contentment even in this very life.

His compassion had utterly exposed my callous logic. The full horror of what I had done was upon me. I could hardly bear to look into his kindly yet penetrating eyes. He indeed was a guru of another kind.

He asked me to take him to my hideout. We talked of how we'd both been brought up in the lap of luxury—he, the son of Suddhodana, king of the Sakyas, north of my own country. How even as a young man he'd become weary of courtly life. How he had an insatiable hunger to know the true destiny of a human being. Were we to wander around aimlessly from life to life, suffering this, enjoying that? Or was it simply death, annihilation? Or was there something else?

On the way I came across some jungle fowl. I grabbed an arrow, only to feel acute embarrassment. Such was his immediate effect upon me. I returned to gathering fruits and nuts. That midday, we ate together in silence.

It was late afternoon when I woke from a heavy sleep. Suddenly, seeing the monk again, I jumped and grabbed my dagger. He chuckled at my ferocious posturing. "Angulimala, when will you again be Ahimseka, the harmless one?"

He asked me to sit in meditation with him. "Just observe and feel anything that comes into your attention." I couldn't sit for long; I was so restless. "Walk up and down, slowly," he said, "but again, just to be aware of any thoughts and feelings." I would sit and walk in fits and starts—I just couldn't stand still.

"Patience," he said. "This is going to take some time. Don't worry, I'll stay with you till your future is clear." I immediately relaxed with this assurance.

It took a few days to calm down enough to sit still and watch. Again and again, I reenacted my killings, endlessly working over the same old themes: the chase, the battle, the kill—and always the excitement, the enjoyment. I couldn't stop them from dominating me.

"Don't indulge these fantasies," he warned. "Take away their nourishment and they'll simply die away. Or else they'll drive you to further atrocity. And where will it all end? The king's prison? To be publicly tortured?" That sent a cold shiver up my spine. "And," he added, "undermine these overpowering cravings by considering how much your victims suffered."

That was hard. I still wanted to justify myself, make light of their suffering. Disheartened and weary, I stretched and looked into the dark emptiness of a starlit night, and there caught the first delicate arc of the new moon. I decided to meditate just once more. As if by magic, the focus of my fantasies began to change. Instead of relishing the chase and the kill, I began to see the pain and panic of my victims. It was with these images that I fell asleep.

It was still dark when I felt a hand rock my shoulder. I woke with a start. "Continue," he said. He must have felt the change in my heart. "Get up. Shake off the sloth of sleep." The voice was sharp, but his smile completely disarmed my angry indignation. I had by now unwittingly become a disciple.

Like any good student, I obeyed. I splashed water on my face and began to sit in meditation. And there they came—the faces tortured in pain, weeping and pleading, vivid and alive as if risen from the dead. I began to feel their agonies, and there arose a remorse that began to shake my body, until it started to release: first in little spurts, then in cries, and then in loud moaning and weeping. I cried and cried and cried. I felt my very insides were being gouged out. Who knows how long I filled that jungle with my wailing.

"Excellent," said the monk, smiling. "Only when true remorse arises can the heart begin to heal."

I did find his joy in my discomfort a little disconcerting.

The images of my cruelty continued to haunt my every meditation, my every action, my every dream. Every moment was shame, guilt, and remorse. And I was so angry with myself. Why had I not seen the sheer idiocy of my guru's request? The gall I felt when I realized I could have said no! What had stopped me but vile servitude to custom, enslavement to tradition? And how was I ever going to compensate for such monstrous crimes? My remorse turned to despair when I saw they were too terrible to be forgiven.

"How can we compensate for murder, of all things?" this gentle monk asked. "What could replace the loss of grandparents, husband, wife, children? In such a case, we must simply bear the consequences. Isn't that enough? Do we have to punish ourselves as well?"

I began to realize that in the end, I would have to give myself up to the authorities. They would mete out a terrible, torturous death. My identity would be revealed, my family shamed and ruined, my mother... Oh, better for me to live wild, or go to another country far away, take my chances with uncivilized tribes—or better still, to commit suicide secretly, somewhere the body would be eaten by wild animals, so that I remained anonymous.

He listened to my ranting and raving. Then again, in a moment of calmness: "Do you want to be a fugitive or live like an animal all your life? And having murdered so many people, you now want to murder yourself? Is there no end to your stupidity? Past deeds cannot be altered, and they will produce present and future consequence. The true question is: do you have the courage to face it, to suffer it? For this is the only way you can drain the past of its effect."

His eyes looked steadily into mine.

I jumped up. I had to walk. The arguments went round and round, but the truth stood out. It was better to face the consequences. Surely the king would have sympathy for me—he'd known me since I was a baby. We'd even wrestled each other. He would understand my dilemma. What else could a disciple do but obey his guru? There was my father's influence, the standing of my family. Indeed, I could defend myself before the king as I defended my actions to my own self. And if I was shown no mercy, well, then I would have to suffer the consequences. At least, as this teacher says, I'd wipe the slate clean.

I returned and told him of my decision to give myself up to the authorities. He nodded, as if in approval. There was a long silence in which we gazed into each other's eyes.

Then he said, "Would you not rather put an end to this whole weary round of births and deaths?"

"Is there an escape?" I asked.

His face shone with a smile, and he spoke with that absolute assurance of one who knows: "There is, Ahimsaka. That which is not born does not die."

It is not created, nor can it be found where there is earth, fire, water, or air. It cannot be seen or heard or in any way perceived. It is the deathless, the unconditioned. If this were not so, there would be no escape from birth, sickness, aging, and death, and the endless, endless rounds of rebirth.

Suddenly I heard myself asking, "You would accept me—Angulimala, a criminal, a murderer—as your disciple?"

"You can stop, Ahimsaka, as I have stopped," he replied.

A huge burden seemed to lift, and an enormous joy, born of hope, settled upon me.

"First," he said, "you must bury the tools of your abhorrent profession. You must no longer harm any living being, not even a cockroach."

For the last time, I caressed the beautifully wrought weapons, especially the slender blade with its snake-embraced handle. I stabbed out a trench. There I placed these precious jewels, gleaming and glistening in the noonday sun. How difficult it is to give up an addiction, an obsession. I forced my hands to cover them with soil and placed heavy boulders on them until I felt sure that I had truly buried them, and for good.

Then he asked me to go in search of suitable robe cloth. The cemeteries—oh, disturbing places, those charnel grounds. Corpses steaming the air with their sickly, sweet, pungent stench. Dismembered limbs half-eaten by tigers, rodents, and vultures, strewn around the white shrouds that mourners had wrapped their dead in.

I was about to wash the cloth when my teacher told me I had not yet fully buried the past. I looked at him, puzzled. He pointed to a tree. There, hanging forgotten around my makeshift shrine to Kali, was the garland of finger bones, gently swaying in the sighing breeze, their chimes hollow and choked.

I laid them down in a circle, each finger pointing inward to the now empty pit. And on the burial mound over these sacred bones, I planted a frangipani tree, whose white, sweet, perfumed flowers would ever shower their sad grave. I watched over this cemetery, recalling their murders, begging forgiveness, until sleep overpowered me.

The next day I washed the white cloth, and with my teacher's needle and thread made robes. He then shaved my head and beard, and finally all was ready for me to make my request.

"Bhagava, may you be my guide. I shall live dependent on the Bhagava."

"Come," he replied, "and conduct yourself diligently according to the customs of ascetics."

That evening, for the first time, bliss was the object of my meditation.

The following day, he wanted to return to his monastery in Savatthi. He sensed my fear.

"No one will recognize you," he assured me, knowing how different I looked.

When we arrived at the first village, there were shouts of recognition. "Bhagava Gotama!" A great thrill passed through my body. I had only heard of this great teacher. I could not believe my good fortune.

The villagers told their tales of Angulimala and how they thirsted for revenge.

"Ah," said the Bhagava, "your revenge makes you no better than he. Let the king deal with him according to the law of kamma. Better to live good lives and offer your merit to your departed loved ones. That is what they need."

None recognized me. As a young, clean-shaven disciple, it was proper for me to keep my eyes lowered and remain silent. He asked them to help me dye my robes.

That evening I approached the Bhagava in ochre robes. I knelt before him and asked him for a name.

"You shall be known by the name of your innocent childhood," he said.

I was to be known as Bhikkhu Ahimsaka, the Harmless One.

That day all the villagers took a day away from their labors. He talked both to the group and to the individual, calming and consoling them. And so we continued, staying at village after village, until we saw ahead of us the walls of the capital city, Savatthi.

The monastery on the outskirts of the city was a set of buildings with a large meditation hall, neat footpaths, bushes, flowers, and trees bordering well-kept lawns. Everyone stood waiting, hands joined before them in anjali. They greeted him with silence and smiles.

I was shown to a hut hidden in the tamed forest grove close by—a sturdy little bamboo affair covered in layers of banana leaves, no more than two good strides in length and one in breadth.

I had that strange feeling of coming home.

I lay there that night on the soft-plaited palm-leaf mat, listening to the crickets and the conversation of owls, musing how my life had so quickly turned around. Truly miraculous.

During the first few days I would constantly visit the Bhagava, but his attendant, the Elder Ananda, would always tell me to go back to my hut and practice. I felt annoyed and frustrated.

Then one day the Bhagava asked to see me. "Dear friend," he said, "it's not proper to develop an affection for the teacher. I can't bring about your deliverance from suffering. You must take refuge in the teachings and the practice, but above all in yourself. I can only point the way. So please don't come unless called."

That day I felt utterly dejected, abandoned. So much so, I even began to dream of being Angulimala, and all the pleasures of hunting assailed me. I was guided skillfully, and I came to realize that it was this craving to be teacher's best boy that had so angered my fellow students. I was a creep.

Then early one morning there were drums, and the occasional salute of trumpets. The king and his army were en route somewhere. To my horror, I suddenly realized they were coming to the monastery. You can imagine my alarm. I'd all but decided to run away when a young monk came and told me to come at once.

As I entered the Bhagava's room, he saw the look of anxiety on my face and smiled. With an insistent gesture, he motioned me to sit by him. We sat and waited as the marching footsteps approached us. And suddenly at the door stood the king—a short, stocky, heavily bearded man, the warrior in his eyes.

The king and his officers paid homage to the Bhagava. I knew all of them, though none recognized me. In mind, I did keep my head low. After the usual pleasantries were exchanged, the king explained. They had come for the Bhagava's blessing. "It's this An-

gulimala. I've sent out dozens of platoons, but to no avail. He's murdered hundreds, wiped out whole villages. Extraordinary. But how to deal with a deranged madman? Why is he collecting fingers?"

There came a burst of suggestions. He's possessed. A demon. A lunatic.

When the excitement had calmed, the Bhagava said, "What would you say, your majesty, if such a dark-hearted murderer were to become a monk?"

I could feel the panic rising in me.

"What?" shouted the king, his mouth agape with incredulity. A chorus of scoffing supported his scorn.

"Don't be so dismissive," urged the Bhagava. "Even this Angulimala can transform himself."

"Transform himself?" The king continued to shout. "When I catch him, I'll transform him. I'll have him roasted alive."

There were great guffaws and equally delicious torments suggested. But one especially made my hair stand on end: "I'd have him slowly cut to pieces so that he could watch his body being eaten by dogs."

It wasn't the horror of it, but the voice. It was that childhood enemy, Vajiro, now an officer in the king's guard.

The Bhagava spoke. "Do you really think that revenge can ever be satisfied? Whatever you do, the bereaved will complain it wasn't harsh enough. Violence breeds violence. It can only be appeased by compassion."

This is an ancient law.

There was an uneasy silence.

"You did come for my advice."

Again that smile.

The king looked around at his company. Everyone was baffled.

"So you want us to catch him and bring him to you, Bhagavā?" suggested the king.

"No need for that." And turning to me, the Bhagavā cheerfully announced, "Here he is—Angulimala, now Bhikkhu Ahimsaka."

The whole company, to a man including the king, instinctively grabbed their swords. There was a stunned silence.

"Perhaps you know him?" asked the Bhagavā.

I looked up in surprise. The king glared at me.

"Ahimsaka," he said at first in shock, and then in growing surprise. "Ahimsaka, son of Gaga and Montani."

He related the circumstances of my birth. "But why," he asked, "why the fingers?"

I then told him about the gift demanded by my guru. Realizing my predicament, a sympathy grew towards me among the king and his company. Indeed, I could see sadness shadow the king's face.

After a long pause in which the king kept looking at me and then to the Bhagavā, he said, "You're a lucky man, Bhikkhu Ahimsaka. A very lucky man."

With that they began to leave. But the king, as he reached the door, turned and warned me not to leave the Bhagavā's Order.

We listened to the marching steps. The Bhagavā turned to me and smiled. I took a very deep breath.

The very next morning, as I was preparing to go on alms round, there was a knock at my door. I opened it to find what I most dreaded standing before me.

My mother.

Was a basket of food enough for an elephant? Here and then I began to sob, to sob uncontrollably. No doubt she thought it was remorse for the shame I had brought upon the family. Not so. Not so many days ago, I was stalking this very woman, intent on stabbing her through the heart, slicing off her finger. This woman—my mother—who bore me, suckled me, tended to my every care.

My heart cramped into a solid spasm of agony. If ever I were to describe hell, it would be the heart-wrenching compunction I felt that day.

Happily, even hell passes. But this was the bloodiest of daggers I had pierced into my own heart.

I told her my tale, and of the king's stipulation not to leave the Order, and that I needed time to cure the festering in my heart. I sensed her disappointment. She had wanted grandchildren and all that.

And as for my father—he wasn't surprised, of course. Hadn't he foretold it? It was that I had become a disciple of someone who wasn't a Brahmin that he found offensive. Eventually, he offered me his blessing.

Not everyone came to accept me, of course. On alms round, children poked fun at me, making up silly songs about Angulimala. But more serious, people threw stones at me, some bouncing off my head. I would just walk on. They would eventually tire.

But I was attacked viciously once. A few of the aggrieved families whipped up a crowd to such a righteous frenzy that they beat me with sticks and were taking me out of the city to kill me, when the guards at the gates stopped them. Ironically, it was Vajiro in command of the post. With a great look of disdain, he ordered a platoon of soldiers to escort me back to the monastery.

It took days for the bruises to heal, but luckily there were no broken bones. I said to myself, if this is all the karma I have to suffer, how fortunate indeed.

It was on one of these alms rounds that something quite remarkable happened. I had stopped in front of a house in case someone should want to offer food, when I heard great cries.

A man came out, looking desperate, saw me, and shouted, "This is no time to come begging! Can't you hear my wife?"

Her cries resurrected the screams of my victims. I was so depressed by this that I went to see the Bhagava.

"Go back and offer this blessing," he said. "Say: By the power of a harmless life, let that mother's pain cease and the child be born safe."

"Harmless life?" I said incredulously.

"Since your spiritual life began," the Bhagava replied. "From the day of your ordination."

Yes, I thought, at least I could make an offering of my harmless life, albeit a little short. How wonderful if I could actually assist a birth—I who had assisted so many deaths.

She was still crying out and praying to the gods. Quite a crowd had gathered outside the house. I stood at the gates and offered my blessing: "Sister, since I was born into the noble life, I do not recall having ever intentionally killed a living being. By this truth, may you be well, and may your child be safe."

Everyone began to scoff and jeer. I could feel the anger rising. I left at once.

That evening, the clamour of a crowd approached my hut and called for me. I began to panic again. I took a deep breath and opened the door. And there before me stood a man holding a baby. There were shouts of "Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu! Well done!" Presents were laid before me, and a garland of the most beautiful white frangipani was placed around my neck. They told me that almost immediately after my blessing, the baby was born, and both mother and child were well. I was to be honoured guest at the feast.

It was all I could do to blubber my thanks.

Oh, to my surprise, my chant has become a magical mantra for mothers-to-be. And from that day on, the children stopped poking fun. Coarse words became kindly greetings, and the stones turned into flowers, incense, and sweets. My heart ached with relief and joy at their forgiveness.

After many years, once I felt sure enough in my practice, I decided to go to the neighbouring kingdom of Magadha, where no one would recognise me, in order to live a more solitary life. I found a secluded forest not far from the prosperous capital of Rājagaha. It was the dry, hot season, so I made my home beneath a great shady fig tree. In time, the villagers generously built me a hut.

There I continued to work—work hard—through all the mental anguish. There were the burning hurts and scorching revenge towards my enemies, especially my guru. It stung to know, to find out, that he had believed the malicious slander that I had been scheming to have him removed so that I could take his prestigious post, and that he had given me such a heinous obligation out of hateful spite. Then there was the nauseous guilt and agonising remorse towards my victims, as well as all the usual unquenchable lusts, paralysing fears, and so on. Oh, I thought they would never end.

And yet, over the years, everything began to subside. And in the clearings, it became so obvious: no one had actually ever made me suffer. No one. Not the plots of my enemies, not the punches of Vajiro, not even the vicious malevolence of my guru. All the ensuing hurt and hate was of my own making. Was it not my own befuddled thinking that led me to murder? The demonic delight I took in killing—was that not mine to develop? And all the self-pity, self-hatred, guilt, remorse, and so on, and so on, and so on—was that not all direct consequence? All the time I was blaming, unwittingly I was creating my own hell.

And so it was that since none had actually caused me to suffer, I lost all reason, all need, to forgive anyone.

And it was then I saw as clear as day: but for mistaken understanding, deluded reasoning, I had never actually meant any harm, never meant to cause anyone any suffering whatsoever. And so it was that I lost all reason, all need, to be forgiven.

I was like a man who, wandering through a forest, kicks a crooked stick only to disturb a viper. Just because he is mistaken does not mean he and others will not be bitten. Is this not a great paradox of human life—that we are at once responsible for our moral behaviour, yet because we are fundamentally not immoral, not bad, not evil, but ignorant, mistaken, deluded, we are therefore intrinsically innocent?

Indeed, if this were not so, how could we ever attain purity? And without purity, there can be no liberation from suffering.

These insights came early one morning. From my hut, perched on the side of a wooded valley, I watched the sun rising through the golden air, full of sweet early monsoon blossom and the trill of songbirds. And there arose in me such relief and release.

And I remembered how the Bhagavan had answered me on the killing road: "I have stopped, Angulimala."

Now, I've stopped too. I've done what had to be done. My heart is purified of all defilements, and I live in utter contentment and peace.

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