The Buddha Knows the Dhamma

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:02:04

The subject of this evening's talk is "The Buddha Knows the Dhamma."

As you know, a few of us just finished spending time with His Holiness the Dalai Lama down in Mountain View. About two weeks before that, we also had the opportunity to sit with another great teacher here at Spirit Rock—Ajahn Sumedho. Ajahn Sumedho is a Theravadan monk who's been in robes for thirty-five years. He's really the senior person in the Western form of the Vipassana teachings as they come from Asia. He's an American who lives in England, and I had such deep appreciation for his teachings and so much respect for his being and his development. I really think he is one of the very few Western masters that we have today.

In tonight's talk, I have borrowed his title, and I'd like to share some of the teachings from that retreat with you because they're still alive for me—still resonating. If I was going to be cynical, I might say that I was stealing some of his thunder, but I prefer to think of it as paying tribute to a great teacher.

This title, "The Buddha Knows the Dhamma," was a line that he used again and again throughout the retreat, and it was kind of cryptic. The Buddha knows the Dhamma. I thought, well of course he did—he made it up. Who else would have invented it? But when he explained the meaning of it, I got a different slant on it.

When Ajahn Sumedho talked about the Buddha, what he meant was the way we describe the refuge in the Buddha, which is the refuge in our own awakened attention. The Buddha being that part of ourselves that is the pure awareness, the awareness that's uncluttered by any afflictions. And then the Dhamma in this case means the truth of the moment, the truth of this present moment's arising, which means all the phenomena that we experience in the here and now—the sights, the sounds, the smells, the bodily sensations, the thoughts and emotions that go through our mind, everything that makes up the quality of our life as we feel it here and now. Because dhamma with a lowercase "d" from the Pali just means thing, object, phenomenon, event, sense experience.

So "The Buddha knows the Dhamma" means that what's actually going on in our life is that this awakened intelligence of ours, this pure awareness, greets and receives all the different arisings that are generated through our sense contact of our five physical senses and the sense door of the mind. So "The Buddha knows the Dhamma" is kind of an enlightened view of our experience of the world.

I just want to put that in as a kind of frame for the talk, and we'll get into the pieces as we go.

It's really quite encouraging to me that the Buddhist perspective on life is that our basic nature is

good—our basic nature is really good. It's considered to be pure from the very beginning. Even today, after all the struggles of our life, it's considered to be untouched or unstained by our suffering. And it's a resource, it's a treasure that we uncover through the practice of meditation as we walk the path.

Sally and I were teaching earlier this year in Australia, in Perth. Perth is a really interesting place. It's kind of the farthest edge of the Western world. You go from the East Coast and you go through California. You know what they say about California—they turned the country on its side and all the loose pieces ended up here. Then you go a little further and you get to Hawaii. Then you still go further and you get to Australia, still going west. Then you go all the way to the other side of Australia and you get to Perth. Perth is actually in the same time zone as Singapore, so there's a big Asian community in Perth.

This retreat was the first time I actually had the chance to meet a number of Asians in a practice setting. It was such a delight because I love Asian culture. I've spent over three years living in Asia, practicing in Asia, and it was a chance to give just a little bit back of what I had gotten from the Asian culture.

We were talking about the state of mind of Westerners and the state of mind of Asians with a psychiatrist there. He's of Sri Lankan descent, but speaks very good English and is a practicing MD and psychiatrist. We were talking about how a lot of people in the West have a feeling of not being very good about themselves, not being very worthwhile. I said, "Do the Asians that you come in contact with tend to have this feeling?" And he said, "No, by and large they don't." I said, "Well in the West it seems like an epidemic. What do you think the difference is?"

He said—and I don't know if this is true or not—"I think it comes down to the concept of original sin." It's very interesting that this concept, which goes so far back in our Judeo-Christian heritage, really could be coloring our whole culture and our whole view of what it means to be human. And it's radically different from the Buddhist view, which is that the core of us—the part we get closer and closer to as we get right down to the center of who we are—is pure and good and wholesome.

The Buddha described this in the Anguttara Nikaya in a sutta where he said: "This mind is radiant and brightly shining, but it is colored by the attachments that visit it. This the untaught person does not understand, and so for them there is no cultivation of this mind."

There's actually a lot in here.

The mind is radiant and brightly shining, but it's colored by visiting attachments. So the qualities of fear or aggression or desire or sadness or self-criticism that come in color the mind so that we don't quite see that natural brightness. But these visiting attachments are only temporary. They're only visitors, and the goodness is a resident. That's the home base.

But if you don't understand that, then you take the visitors as real, and you don't realize that there's a way to develop this basic goodness. And the sutta continues: This mind is radiant and brightly shining, and it is free from the attachments that visit it. This the noble follower of the way understands as it really is, and so

for them there is cultivation of the mind.

When we sense our potential of purity, of freedom, of awakening, then we know that all we have to do is work to purify these temporary obscurations and we have the possibility of abiding in that purity and in that freedom, in that goodness. This is really the work of our practice.

This description brings together the two halves of the Buddhist teaching. The Buddha said over and over again, "I teach suffering and the end of suffering"—always these two together. So we look at the visiting attachments as the source of our suffering, the difficult emotions that we encounter in life. And then the end of suffering is the touching, the uncovering, the living more and more in this place of innate freedom and purity.

Because there's so much talk in Buddhism about suffering, some people think it's gloomy. "What a pessimistic religion. Why are you guys always going on about dukkha, dukkha, dukkha? Geez, can't you lighten up?" But it's so interesting that it's almost always in the suttas paired—suffering and the end of suffering—in this beautiful balance.

When we start to look, of course, suffering is pervasive in a way. If we look into our own life with a really impartial eye, we can see the suffering that we have touched from early childhood on up through our teenage years and into our adulthood. If we look in the outer world, the world is full of conflict and fighting and argument and destruction. Even in places where we don't expect to find it, it kind of pops through.

A newspaper reporter visited Disneyland not long ago. You may have seen the ads—the Disneyland tagline is, "The place where happiness never ends." So that's a destination where there really shouldn't be suffering, right? He was backstage, and you know the characters are actors who dress up in the outfits of the Disney characters. So he was backstage and there were a couple of the actors who were just taking a quick break and hadn't gotten out of their costumes. He was basically watching a conversation between Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. And Mickey was saying to Donald, "I've really got to get in some overtime hours. I don't have enough money to pay my therapist." Even for Mickey Mouse, this life is not so easy.

So as we sit and practice, of course we're going to experience both these elements of the Buddha's teachings. We're going to come in contact with suffering, and hopefully we're also going to touch that point of the end of suffering, where the mind is steady and clear and not under these visiting attachments. And I hope you really start to get a sense of even moments of that in your practice.

The objects of our practice seem really interesting at times. At times they seem incredibly boring—the breath and the sensations of walking and the sounds and the sights and the tastes and so on. But over time what tends to happen is the objects which are so primary in the beginning—our understanding starts to shift and what actually becomes to the forefront is the mindfulness itself. The mindfulness being this thread that kind of weaves together all the different objects.

You notice that in the instruction that whatever the thing we're pointing to—breath, body, sound—the constant factor is the mindfulness. And this really becomes our home over the days as we practice together. Whatever object it's illuminating, the mindfulness or the awareness starts to take the center stage in our view.

And this is really the discovery of our Buddha nature, the discovery of that purity. It's very closely tied to the awareness. This is something really precious, this ability to understand our experience. It's said that this constitutes the preciousness of our human birth, and that the creatures don't have this capability. So this is really something that we're blessed with as human beings.

And I think this is true. Sally and I have a few cats. You may have heard from earlier talks. And one of them is very fearful. And since her birth she's been fearful. And even though we've given her a lot of love over the years, that fearfulness hasn't changed.

And there's a way in which it really can't change because she can't understand it. She just sees it as the true nature of the world. So she doesn't have the capacity to see it in context of this purity of awareness.

We have this capability. We have this ability to find our home in our basic goodness and to see the attachments in perspective.

In Asia, an important part of practice is reflecting on our own goodness. People are instructed to do that, they do that, they're comfortable with it. One of the ways that they take to reflect on it is through acts of generosity. So they are generous to their parents, to their relatives, to their family members, in their support of the monks and nuns, and then they're told to reflect on how good the generosity feels.

And in fact, there's kind of a science of it in Thailand. There are sort of outlines of if you do this act of generosity, this will be your return. One of our friends told us that if you'd like to be beautiful in your next life, you should bring flowers to the temple. I won't vouch for that. But I do know that giving creates joy when we reflect about it.

So Ajahn Sumedho was talking about this practice of reflecting on our goodness. And he put it in a way I hadn't heard before, but that rang true for me. He said when he reflected on it, he realized that as a child, he was always a good child. He tried to be a good child. He wanted to be good. And that in his life, he was always drawn to what was good and what was noble in character. He said, "You know, I realized I'm basically a good person."

And I thought about all the people that I meet on meditation retreats and the people who come to dharma centers, and I realized we're all basically really good people. And sometimes we lose sight of that view because we don't see the broader society of the six billion people on the earth. How many people would dedicate a week just to developing their goodness? A week that's quite difficult, quite demanding. In order to do that, you have to have a really strong conviction in what's wholesome and what's beautiful. And people who are dedicated to this kind of practice have that.

So I think we can remind ourselves that we are basically good people. Even though we make mistakes, even though we hurt others, that there is a real purity in our intention to do what's good in the world, to seek what's just and true.

When we come into meditation, actually that tendency to goodness creates its own problem. Because as good people, we tend to want to do it right. We tend to want to do in our meditation practice what's really good, what's really perfect sometimes. And that can be a great burden.

So we can approach our meditation with a sense of trying to get it right and being afraid of getting it wrong. And that creates a kind of tension of success and failure, just like in worldly life.

Ajahn Chah said that in worldly life, success and failure are opposites, but in spiritual life, success and failure are of equal value. I thought this was a beautiful reminder. Ajahn Chah was Ajahn Sumedho's teacher and Jack Kornfield's first teacher, a great master. Success and failure are of equal value. Therefore, you can learn from both. And he said that success actually is noticing what's happening. So whatever you do, if you do it and pay attention, you can't really go astray. You'll be succeeding.

And that can actually, when we take that into our meditation practice, give us a real confidence. For instance, people wonder about which technique to use at a particular point in their practice. It doesn't really matter. You can try all the choices, see what works for you, and learn from it. Sometimes we learn a lot more from failure than we learn from success.

So as good people, there's a way in which we need to be bolder about our practice and be more trusting in ourselves. Not be afraid to make mistakes with our practice. It's a way we learn in practice like in life. And especially for those who have been doing it for a while and who have some faith, as James talked about last night, to be in a way a bit more nonchalant in your practice. Because we can monitor it and kind of stay on top of it a little too closely. So to develop this confidence that we can't really go wrong with it, then we can give ourselves or we can surrender even more to the practice.

And the reason that it's so safe is the truth of impermanence. Because we're not going to get stuck anywhere. Impermanence is what makes it safe for us to feel.

I want to read this poem from Rilke, the German poet. It's from a book called Rilke's Book of Hours, subtitled Love Poems to God.

It's translated by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows. It was written when Rilke was quite young and had gotten onto a religious path. He was in Russia visiting many cathedrals, and he was deeply touched by the power of the religion he found there. So he returned home and these overtly religious poems poured out of him.

This is one where God is speaking to human beings as he creates each being before their journey into life:

God speaks to each of us as he makes us, then walks with us silently out of the night. These are the words we

dimly hear: You, sent out beyond your memory, go to the limits of your longing. Embody me. Let everything happen to you, beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final. Don't let yourself lose me. Nearby is the country they call life. You'll know it by its seriousness. Now, give me your hand.

Experience the beauty and the terror. No feeling is final. This is really the kind of trust that opens us up to the whole range of our experience.

In this evening's talk, I'd like to explore some of the difficulties we encounter in meditation practice. The Buddha spoke about them repeatedly. Working with these states of heart and mind forms a huge part of what meditation practice is about.

When we consider what's difficult in life, there's the difficulty of the body's vulnerability—the body is vulnerable to sickness, pain, aging and death. The other main source of vulnerability is our mind and our own tendencies toward difficult states of heart and mind: our sadness and grief, reactions to loss, our fears, anxiety, and worries.

We can't do much about the illness and aging of the body and its eventual death, but we can make a huge difference in how we relate to the emotions. A very significant part of our practice is coming to understand how to work with the difficult emotions that we all face.

The Buddha had several lists of these qualities of mind, and the one I'd like to discuss tonight is what he called the five hindrances. He identified five particular states of heart and mind that always arise for meditators. As soon as one begins the process of deepening awareness, these states come up almost as a reaction or response. The five are: desire, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness, and doubt.

I want to explore each of them this evening.

Desire is this force in the mind that seeks satisfaction in the future. Something feels not quite right as we are. We attach our wanting to some object we don't have right now, that we hope to have in the future. There's a storyline underneath: when I have it, it will make me happy. There's an incompleteness now, and I'll reach that completeness when I get that object. You can feel this moving in your practice—it may be connected to objects outside, or to objects or experiences here. But when desire is present, it brings with it a sense of incompleteness, a sense of insufficiency.

We were teaching a retreat in Italy last summer—Carol, Franz, Sally and I were all there. It was actually a delight to work with Italians. I'd never taught in Italy before, and everything you imagine about Italian people I found to be true. They were very warm. Their emotions were really close to the surface.

It's not that they didn't have difficulties in their lives—everybody did, just as we do here. But they would come into interviews, and there were some quite serious things happening for people in that retreat. There was one woman dealing with a recent diagnosis of terminal illness, and she was there to try to find some equanimity with it. There was a mother, a young woman probably in her early thirties, whose

seven-year-old daughter had been diagnosed with an illness that would probably lead to her death within a year or two. She was dealing with that profound sadness.

But as people came into interviews—and they were very open in talking about what they were going through, even though we worked through a translator since they didn't speak much English and I don't speak Italian—they would preface these moving stories with this sort of rueful smile. "Oh, I'm having such a hard time today," they'd say with a smile, and then tell me these deeply touching stories.

And they would often smile as they were telling me about it. What it communicated to me was a kind of fluency with their own emotions that I found just remarkable. They were at home with this whole range of feelings that we all have as human beings. So it was very uplifting to be with them.

One of the guys who came in for an interview early on was a young Italian man, and he said, "Well, I'm having trouble settling into the retreat." I said, "Oh, really? What's going on?"

"Well," he said, "I'm having doubt."

I said, "Okay, that's a hindrance. I know about that hindrance. We can talk about that hindrance. What's up for you?"

He said, "Well, I don't really want to be here."

"Oh, okay, well, what's happening?"

And he said, "Well, you know, this is August. This is my vacation time. And some friends of mine had booked a vacation in the Caribbean. And they asked me if I'd like to go with them. And I thought, oh, the Caribbean. What great beaches. What beautiful women. I really want to go to the Caribbean." And he said, "But I couldn't get a ticket. The flights were all booked. This was my second choice."

So it didn't stack up to the Caribbean beaches for him. He was constantly in these fantasies of being in the Caribbean with his friends and having a really good time, and then he'd sort of come back to the present moment and his body was sore and we were in this Catholic convent and what am I doing here? So he had a little bit of struggle coming back to Earth.

But he'd been on a retreat before and he knew how to work with it. He could see that it was just a form of wanting. And when he could let go of the wanting, there wasn't really a problem. And this is what's so interesting. The desire makes us feel incomplete. But then you have to stop and ask: is it really the absence of the object that's the problem? Or is it the feeling of the desire that's the problem? And it was clear for him, it was the feeling of the desire that was the problem. When he could let go of it, the present was actually fine.

So what's important with desire is kind of tuning into how it feels in the mind, how it feels in the body. I've started to recognize that desire is active when I feel a strain with the present moment. It's like there's a

force that's pulling me in a different direction. And I've started to recognize how that feels in my body. There's a kind of distortion that comes into the way my body appears to me. And I've started to notice that there's a leaning forward or reaching out connected with that.

So then I just stop to look. Can I connect with something that I'm wanting? Can I tune into an object that I'm looking for? And often I can. And tuning into it and being willing to feel it means I can bring awareness to it. And if I can bring awareness to it, then I'm partway there to being able to let go of it.

One of the tips that a friend gave me—I have a good friend who's a greed type. I tend to be an aversive type, so I wouldn't have thought of this myself. But being a greed type and having a lot of desire, he said he'd worked with it often. When he felt the presence of desire, he would ask himself the question: is there anything truly lacking in this moment? Is there anything truly that I need that I don't have? And the answer would almost always come back, no. And that would help him just settle in and kind of appreciate the moment that was here.

The second of the five hindrances is the state of aversion or negativity. And this is a particular term that has a lot of different blooms, a lot of different forms. Aversion can be expressed through disliking, through hatred, through negativity, complaining, criticism, impatience, anger, fear.

These are all different expressions of not liking. Sadness is another one—not liking the past. Fear—not liking the future.

Retreat seems like particularly ripe ground for aversion to bloom, which makes it a good training ground in this practice. So I want to pass on a prayer to you that may be helpful. The prayer goes like this: "Dear God, thank you for your strength and comfort today. Thanks to you I haven't been impatient or grumpy or cross with anyone so far all day. But I'll be getting out of bed soon and I think I'll really need your help then." You can take this as your mantra if it helps.

Often the thing that's so tricky with aversion is that we think it's appropriate to the situation. We think the situation is the cause of the aversion. It's not in my mind. It couldn't be in me. It's definitely the outside situation.

I was on a fairly long retreat a few years ago. I'd been on retreat for about two weeks and had a favorite walking spot that I went to every walking period. I would walk there for the whole walking period. I'd worn a track in the grass, done everything short of spray painting my initials in the track.

One day I went out from the meditation hall and was walking very mindfully down to my track—lifting, moving, placing. And I saw somebody was there. Someone had gotten to my track before me. I immediately felt annoyed. I thought, "What are they doing there? I've been walking there every walking period. Don't they know that?"

Lifting, moving, placing, lifting, moving. I was very mindful, I thought. I wondered, "Is this some kind of

weird head game? Did I cut in front of them in the breakfast line or something? Are they trying to get back?" Lifting, moving, placing, lifting, moving, placing.

So I kept being irritated and trying to figure out why someone would do that. They must not be very well developed. Then I just walked to a different walking place, which was absolutely fine. I had a walking period that was just as good as my old spot.

But it wasn't until about halfway through my walking period that I noticed, "Oh, I'm angry. I'm actually irritated." I'd just been putting my attention on lifting, moving, placing, and I hadn't even noticed the anger that was there. I thought I was being mindful.

This is what these hindrances do, and aversion is a good example. We set up the early warning system with the radar of mindfulness. We're really looking out for what's happening. But these states of mind zip in underneath our radar. They take us over and we may be feeling them and acting from them for quite a while before we even know what we're feeling.

This is actually a great challenge in practice—to know at any given moment what we're feeling as we're feeling it. This can become a whole avenue for practice, an excellent reflection throughout the day. Just checking in every five minutes if you like: What am I feeling right now? What's the predominant mood, state of mind, state of my heart?

Because until we can identify what we're feeling, we're a slave to it. We're taken over by it. We're caught in a reaction. And there's no freedom in that. As soon as I could identify it as anger, I could start to relate to it. I could be aware of it. I could start to investigate it. I could question it.

Is he really out to get me? Or could that be a projection? Maybe he's just as confused as I am. And I could start to work through it. Actually, once I recognized it and could let go, it started to fade quite quickly in just a few minutes.

So this tuning into what the experience is, is really the key with these hindrances. To know this is what aversion feels like. To feel it in the body, to feel its tone in the mind, and then to start to relate with it.

What happens with all the hindrances is that they generally come with some kind of story, some kind of line of thought that justifies them. With desire, the story is: "I'll be happy when I get that thing." With aversion, the story is: "This situation is the cause of my unhappiness." We don't see that the source of desire and fear is actually in our own mind. We get deceived by the story about the hindrance.

If we keep focusing on the story—"You made me angry, it's your fault"—we can never get to release the feeling. So as far as possible with the hindrances, it's really helpful to drop the story that thoughts are feeding us and just come back to the bare feeling. Just feel the desire, feel the anger, feel the fear in the body and the mind.

Sometimes aversion sets in as a long-term situation. I think this comes when there's been a lot of pain in

our life that we haven't been able to open to. The mind can get locked in a state of resistance or not wanting that experience of pain. When we're in a mind state like that, it's as though everything in the world is unsatisfying and is a source of friction.

There's a story from the Buddha's time. He was in the forest with a group of monks and he asked them if they saw the jackal that was running out of the forest in the morning. He said, "Did you see the jackal run out of the forest into this clearing? It came into the clearing and stood for just a short while, then was obviously uncomfortable and ran away into the hollow of a tree. It lay down in the hollow of a tree, but it didn't stay there very long either. It quickly got up and ran into a cave. It sat down in the cave looking out, but it wasn't comfortable there either. And it ran out of the cave back into the forest."

The Buddha said that the jackal was uncomfortable in the clearing and blamed its discomfort on the clearing and on standing. Then it went into the hollow of a tree and wasn't comfortable—it blamed its discomfort on the tree and on lying down. It went into the cave and blamed its discomfort on the cave and on the sitting posture. The Buddha said the problem was with none of these. The jackal had mange. It wouldn't be comfortable anywhere.

When aversion sets into our being in this way—as a long-term or entrenched state of resistance—then we're not comfortable anywhere. We're not comfortable until we can accept the very fact of the resistance and open to that level of pain. When we do that, we find the heart actually has the capacity to accommodate it. But we have to move out of the sense of struggle, a resistance to the resistance itself, a resistance to the aversion, to open up to feel it directly. Then there's the possibility for peace, some softening, and some release.

One of the ways that aversion expresses itself often on retreat is as negativity toward ourselves, criticism of ourselves. This was strong for me in the early years of my practice. I sort of staggered out of the 60s, kind of a product of all the excesses of that era. I came into practice with a lot of confusion and unhappiness. In the early years of my practice, which were not at all easy, I had a lot of self-criticism, a lot of self-judgment.

I remember sitting on one retreat and getting very, very unhappy. I came in for an interview with my teacher, and he said, "How are things going?" I said, "Oh, I'm having a hard day." He said, "What's up?" I said, "Well, I'm having a lot of difficult thoughts, a lot of aversive thoughts." See, I put it in meditation terms. I thought that would be good enough. A lot of aversive thoughts. Let's move on and talk about something else.

But he kept probing. He said, "Well, what kinds of thoughts?" I said, "Well, I'm feeling like I really don't like myself very well."

And he said, "You're not seeing things as they are. Your problem is that you don't accept yourself." So this really came home like a lightning bolt to me—that I didn't accept myself the way I was.

This is an important facet of our metta practice. Sometimes when we say "may I be happy," happiness can seem too remote. A really good phrase instead is "may I accept myself just as I am." I didn't have the metta practice back then, I didn't know it, but I took this theme of self-acceptance for a long time, for years in my practice, and really struggled with it.

I didn't understand it at first. Accept myself? Wait, I thought in Buddhism we don't have a self. How can there be a self to accept? Am I supposed to find some little being inside me and kind of wrap my arms around him? So I had to work with it and find my own way.

What I came to realize is that accepting myself just meant accepting my experience moment after moment after moment—accepting my experience in whatever form it came. That's what I needed to be at peace with. That was my direction for years, and it was a really helpful direction.

It's amazing for me to be around people who have come to such deep levels of self-acceptance. Ajahn Sumedho was inspiring in that way. He would talk about himself very honestly. We had a teacher's retreat for the Spirit Rock teachers after the public retreat, and we had a discussion group in the afternoon. He just started off the discussion group saying, "You know, when I sat down to teach you all this morning, I was very nervous. I didn't know if I had anything to say to a group of people who'd been doing this practice for a long time. I was quite anxious." I thought that was very self-revealing of him.

I was also encouraged to find out that when he started teaching, he didn't have a great deal of self-confidence at all. He said the first time Ajahn Chah asked him to give a Dharma talk, it was in Thai, and he was really nervous. But he really prepared, made some notes, and the night came when he was supposed to talk to the villagers in Thai. He was getting more and more nervous as the time for the talk approached, really working himself up into quite a state of anxiety.

Ajahn Chah said, "It's time to give the talk, Sumedho."

And Sumedho said, "I can't do it. I'm just too nervous. I can't do it."

I thought Ajahn Chah would push him and say, "You have to anyway." He didn't. He said, "Okay, okay, okay. You don't have to do it tonight."

Then just a little while later, villagers were at the temple again. They'd done chanting and some meditation. All of a sudden, Ajahn Chah turns to Ajahn Sumedho and says, "Sumedho, give the talk." He didn't have time to get nervous, so he got up and gave the talk. He said it was a little bit primitive—he was saying things to the Thai people like, "Buddhism is good. I like it very much." And he said they gave him really great feedback on his talk.

Now he's so self-confident. He spoke impromptu at these retreats for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening every day, and I was rapt. I loved the talks.

Another person who has this incredible self-acceptance is the Dalai Lama. You could see it again when we

were down with him in Mountain View. I don't really like to get into news reports in the middle of retreats, but there's one piece of news I did want to pass on: today the Dalai Lama had a meeting with George W. Bush. It was a formal and scheduled meeting that was on Bush's agenda. There are official photographs of the two of them sitting down and talking together.

And yesterday, he also had a formal meeting with Colin Powell. The Dalai Lama said that both men listened to him very intently, and he found them quite sympathetic. Afterwards, Bush expressed something quite significant—he wanted to convey the United States' commitment to the religious freedom and cultural traditions of the Tibetan people. He said it very strongly and directly. That was very uplifting, very nice to hear.

The Dalai Lama was in Mountain View last week, teaching to probably six or seven thousand people. It was a big deal. This event took probably a year to organize. There were three days of teachings and then a couple of other events. The stage was huge—it's Shoreline Amphitheater, so it's a place where Bruce Springsteen can play, so of course it's massive. The Dalai Lama was sitting on a high throne in the center of the stage, with about a hundred monks and nuns on either side, facing toward the center. That's kind of an imposing situation in itself, looking out on a sea of six or seven thousand faces. His image was projected on one of these huge video screens above him, so the people in the very back on the lawn could see him too.

He actually talked about the situation of being on the throne and said, "We do this often in Tibet. We have teachings from a high throne." He explained that it's important to understand the throne is there not because the person is important, but because the teachings are profound and important. "Some teachers confuse these two," he said. "For them, feelings of pride and self-importance arise because they're sitting on a high throne talking down to people. We actually have a name for this in Tibet. We call it the high throne syndrome. But I don't have that problem. Pride and self-importance don't arise for me in this situation."

It was amazing—looking out on seven thousand people, with the talks being webcast live so you could listen anywhere in the world, being videoed and recorded—and he was completely at ease. He would sit up there, and while the translator was translating his Tibetan, he would be smiling at people in the audience, looking at his watch, scratching the back of his head, examining his fingernails. Totally at ease. There is this really beautiful possibility of this really deep inner peace and acceptance that's just one of the qualities he manifests so beautifully.

The next of the hindrances is one you're all familiar with, generally called sloth and torpor in the old Victorian language. Dullness and drowsiness felt through mind and body. But I like this term sloth and torpor—it's really quite evocative. Also in the early days at Insight Meditation Society, our sister center in Massachusetts, Carol and I were on staff together in the late seventies. We had a maintenance crew that were not exactly known for their work ethic. They got nicknamed—the pair of them got nicknamed

McSloth and McTorper. I think of them fondly when I think of this.

With drowsiness, we can't see clearly. Everything's like in a fog. The body is in a fog. The breath is in a fog. Sounds are in a fog. We can't connect directly with anything. This is not actually that unpleasant a state often. I have personally spent many happy hours fully asleep on my meditation cushion and not falling over.

But the problem is that the meditation doesn't really develop from this place. The dullness obstructs the deepening. So it is useful to start to probe it a little bit, to work to bring up energy. Energy is the antidote to drowsiness. All the things that I've seen a lot of you doing are right on track. Sitting up a little straighter, taking a few deep breaths to bring up the energy, opening your eyes. And then if you're still sleepy, standing up. It's much harder to fall asleep standing—although someone in this retreat said they just about did it the other day.

So it's possible. During the next walking period, perhaps take a brisk walk. Over the days, this drowsiness tends to get cut through as different sources of energy arise from our meditation.

If the drowsiness persists beyond these first three days, become curious about it. Get a little skeptical, because sometimes the dullness can be a defense. What happens is we're moving along in our practice when we catch a glimpse—out of the corner of our eye—of some feeling, some memory, some situation we don't really want to know about. Then almost automatically, it's as if a curtain descends, cutting us off from whatever was arising.

If this occurs after the first few days, start getting curious. Simply look: what was there right before the drowsiness came in? Was there a glimpse of anything? There may not necessarily be, but if the dullness is acting as a defense, there may be something worth investigating.

The next hindrance is restlessness—the other end of the spectrum from drowsiness. Instead of being too low on energy, we're far too high on energy. The physical body is full of energy, thoughts race at lightning speed, perhaps many emotions surge through us, and it feels like there's a swirl inside. We can't even untangle what's the body and what's the mind—it's all a big blur.

In such moments, trying to find the breath is like trying to find a piece of straw in the middle of a tornado in Kansas. It simply won't work. Often our tendency when there's abundant energy is to think, "Oh, I need to get concentrated. Let me find the breath again. If I can get really close to the breath, I can cut through this swirl." So we struggle and strain.

But this approach—trying to be really precise—bottles all that energy up. It's like taking a ten-megawatt reactor and forcing it into an incredibly tiny space. This is usually counterproductive.

The most helpful approach is to make the awareness really broad, really spacious. Sounds offer a good avenue into this spaciousness, so you might try listening at that point. Have the sense that awareness is

truly vast. Also cultivate the sense that you're grounded to the earth, connected through your sitting. Feel the touch points of your sitting bones or feet—whatever connects you to the earth so you feel some stability.

Then simply be willing to let all that energy rip within the big space you're giving it. Don't feel you need to be precise or calm—it might not be possible. Just let the wildness of that energy move and stay in touch with it, perhaps by noting "restlessness." Or as James mentioned last night, "confusion." That's enough. That's mindfulness. It's a different lens opening, as James said, but it's still awareness of what's true in the present moment. The meditation will develop.

So let yourself feel the restlessness. Let yourself know what that experience is actually like.

The last of the hindrances is doubt—the question "What are we doing here? Why am I doing this practice?" James spoke about this beautifully last night in discussing the development of faith, so I don't want to explore it in further detail. But know that if you can see doubt as doubt, you don't have to buy into it. That's the key. If you don't buy into it, it will pass. Just keep doing your practice—keep doing the sittings, keep doing the walking periods. The doubt will pass, and the connection will return.

These are the five common states of mind that meditators encounter.

Desire, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness, and doubt. The beautiful thing in our practice is that these all purify as we go. But the purification doesn't mean that we get rid of them, because the beautiful thing is we don't have to get rid of them in order to purify. What we purify is our relationship to them. And we do that through the tool of awareness or mindfulness.

So please don't have it as your goal that it's wrong to feel desire, it's wrong to feel aversion or judgment or sadness or fear or doubt. That's not the message. The message is that we want to use this meditative space to understand them. Because when we understand them, we don't have to be fooled, deceived, and misled by them.

Ajahn Sumedho had a line that I really liked a lot in describing this kind of relationship. He said, when you experience desire, know: "Oh, desire is like this." When you're in a state where desire is absent, know: "Oh, non-desire is like this." Aversion is like this. Non-aversion is like this. Suffering is like this. Non-suffering is like this.

So you really get the feel of that state of mind, that difficult state of mind and its absence. You understand how it feels when we're in suffering and also the end of that suffering. You know the state of bondage and you know the state of freedom. And in a way, we don't even have to have in this retreat a very preferential attitude toward those two. That's one of the things that it's really helpful to give up as you're in the process of this kind of training.

We're really here to learn about these experiences. Because in learning about them, we develop wisdom.

And it's the wisdom that brings the freedom.

So it's actually a great gift to be able to explore fear in this setting, to explore anger in this quiet, silent place where we really don't have anything else to do, to explore our sadness, our grief, our self-judgment. Then just to know: that's what this feels like, that's the truth of this Dhamma, this current phenomenon is like this. Its absence is like this. Then we really get an understanding of the way that the mind works when it goes in the direction of suffering, of clinging, of attachment, of bondage. And we also know firsthand the quality of the mind when it's in that state of purity, of freedom from the attachment, of ease, of peace, of that lack of struggle. So it's very helpful to know both sides of this equation extremely well.

In relating to the emotions directly, it's very helpful to name them. Because that naming is activating the wisdom factor. And it's activating the awareness. So we name it as anger. We name it as fear. Then having named it, we can start to relate to it. We can bring it within our field of awareness. Then the Buddha is knowing this Dhamma. This pure awareness is starting to create a relationship with this difficult, painful state of mind that has often led us into suffering again and again and again. And it's the contact between this clear awareness and the painful mind state that starts to purify it. We don't have to do any more than that—touch it and know it for what it is.

And then these states are so deeply conditioned in us. They've been active for so long. They've fascinated us for so long. They've gripped us. More exactly, we've gripped them for so long. But the awareness starts to loosen that. The awareness and the influence of the wisdom, the wise seeing, starts to loosen the hold of that conditioning.

In classical terms, it's said that this is a path that leads to the end of karma. Karma is the investment in all our conditioning from beginningless time. And the influence of awareness undoes karma and that investment in those mind states.

And we find as we start to move in that way, one, we understand the state of mind and the emotion through seeing it clearly again and again, but then we also start to shift our sense of identity. The more we can trust in the seeing, in the awareness, the energy comes out of the mind states. It's like a balance pan. You take the weight off of one side and the other side goes up. In this case, you take the energy out of the mind state by putting it into the awareness.

The awareness gets stronger, the state gets weaker. And so we just constantly keep poking holes in it, aerating it through this steady application of clear and kind attention, again and again and again.

And then we actually start to see that our sense of self changes. Who are you? Are you the difficult mind stuff? Are you a sad person, an angry person, an unhappy person? Is that really a constant and ongoing identity? Or could you more appropriately take your identity from this steady and clear attention that's always accessible?

The mind states are just visitors. They come and go. So why should I claim that as my personality or my

being? Why not more take it in the sense of this pure awareness that's intrinsic and deep and in a way unchanging? Maybe that's who I really am. And maybe that's how I should consider myself.

Ajahn Sumedho said, if you believe that you're an unenlightened person and you have to totally change through lots of work in order to become awakened, you'll never arrive. But if you hold the view that your basic being is this clear awareness, you're already there.

So then the means and the end come together. Where we want to be in the path is how we walk the path. By abiding in this clear and pure awareness, we're activating our Buddha nature and we're arriving at the destination at the same time.

This pure awareness has a tremendous spaciousness to it. It can hold all these difficult emotions because of its basic emptiness. It can hold them all without reacting. This is how the Buddha knows the Dhamma. The changing Dhammas of life are all held within this steady and ongoing pure sense of presence.

I'll just close with a quotation from Ajahn Mahabua, who was a colleague of Ajahn Chah's. They were both students of the same teacher. And Ajahn Mahabua is still alive, teaching as an abbot in Thailand today. This is his comment on the Buddha knowing the Dhamma:

"There's no escaping this truth. Whatever arises has to vanish. Whatever is true, whatever is a natural principle in and of itself, won't vanish. In other words, the pure mind won't vanish. This vanishes, that vanishes, but that which knows they're vanishing doesn't vanish. This is what's called the pure mind. All that remains is simple awareness, utterly pure."

Let's just sit for a minute together, please.

Whatever arises has to vanish. Whatever is true won't vanish. This vanishes, that vanishes, but that which knows they're vanishing doesn't vanish.

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