Sutta Study Class: The Madhupiṇḍika Sutta (part 1)

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:30:06

My name is Guy Armstrong. I'm one of the teachers here at Spirit Rock, and I appreciate you all coming out this afternoon when there's a 49ers playoff game in progress. I know it might have been divided loyalties, but the Buddha is winning in this case, so I appreciate that. And I also appreciate your interest in taking a look back at the original texts. These texts are a little dense, sometimes hard to penetrate, sometimes a little confusing, and take some effort to get in and find the meaning in them. So I appreciate people coming out and making that effort.

What we'll be doing over the next six months is offering one of these afternoons every month. It's on a dāna basis, which means Spirit Rock isn't collecting a fee for you to be here. The teachers who are doing the series are not being paid. And so to the extent that you find the class helpful and wish to express your appreciation, there will be the opportunity to offer a donation or dāna at the end of the afternoon, and as always, it's gratefully received on behalf of the Center and on behalf of the teachers as well.

We have a few teachers in the series over these six months. I'm going to begin, then Richard Shankman is coming in, James Baraz, and Temple Smith. I think those are the four of us who will be covering these six months. I can't promise that there will be a sequence to the teachings. Each of us is going to do our own thing, but I think you'll find them all interesting, and all these people have a lot of familiarity with the text, so I think it will be a good foundation for us to begin with.

Our text for today is taken from the Majjhima Nikāya, which literally means middle-length collection. I'm using a translation from Bhikkhu Bodhi from around 1995 when he published this whole collection as The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha. I just wrote a review for Inquiring Mind of his new book, which is the translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. This book, now called Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, has just come out. And so there will be a review of it in the next Inquiring Mind.

As I was writing and thinking about Bhikkhu Bodhi's contributions to Dharma in the West, I came to feel that this book, the Majjhima, was a revolutionary work for serious students of Vipassanā and Theravāda because it was the first time that the whole collection of a Nikāya had come out in a readable translation with an excellent introduction and good notes and indexes. There are five Nikāyas in the Sutta collections, and this was the first time that a full translation of a Nikāya was available. So we have in this book a way for those who want to kind of self-guide themselves into the study of the Buddha's original words. If you were going to start with any one volume in looking at the suttas, this is the one I'd recommend.

I'm picking one sutta today from this collection for us to look at, which is called the Honey Ball. That's sutta number 18. There are 152 discourses or suttas in this whole collection, and we're looking today at number 18. In Pāli, it's the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta. It's only at the very end that we find out why it's called the Honey Ball, so you have to stick around for the afternoon to find that out.

I think it's a really fascinating and important discourse, but it's one that we haven't spent much time talking about as Spirit Rock teachers. So some of it may be new. I know you're going to be familiar with some of the key concepts because you've heard the term papañca a lot, I bet. But the way that it's explained here, I find really interesting and insightful. And there are some other threads, other suttas that we'll pick up that highlight the profound significance of the term papañca and the way it affects our human lives.

I'd like to start with a little bit of an experiential reflection and ask that we all just step back a moment and with a broad view of Dharma, take a look at the question: How does suffering arise in our lives? You might say, what are the things that lead us into suffering? Where are the difficult areas of our life? What is it by our own activities that lead us into suffering? And of course this is the central question of the Buddha's teachings. We want to understand what leads to suffering and then how to release it, how to become free.

When I ask that question, I'm sure you're not at a total loss for answers. What are some of the things that you see in your own life that lead to suffering?

"Wanting things to be different from the way they are."

That sounds a lot like one of the noble truths. That's a very nice formulation of the second noble truth, which is craving. Wanting things to be different than the way they are. Sometimes that expresses itself in desire terms: I want to get something pleasant. Sometimes it expresses itself in aversive terms: I want to push away something threatening or unpleasant. But in any case, we're always trying to manipulate our experience to milk it for something a little bit better. And that's the operation of craving. How does this activity reflect itself in your experience?

This preference of wanting things to be one way and not wanting them to be another way—how do you notice it comes through in your direct experience of living? How do you see it happening in you? What's the mechanism?

Anxiety. Sadness. Habitual patterns of thought and action. And in action, can we include emotion? Thinking, feeling, acting. Emotion is also karmic, sort of volitional. So anxiety and sadness are two expressions of this. The more general formulation is habitual tendencies and ways of thinking, acting, and feeling.

Does that formulation pretty well cover it? It's quite comprehensive, isn't it? Under these habitual patterns, we could include desire and fear and anger and regret and all kinds of other particular

expressions. But it's these habitual tendencies of thinking, feeling, and acting that get us into trouble.

In the realm of acting—what we might call the realm of sila, of ethical conduct in the Buddha's teachings—we're more or less covered by the five precepts. If we clean up our lives in terms of the five precepts—not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not abusing drugs and intoxicants—we've covered the purification, you might say, or the cleaning up of the conduct of speech and body.

Then, a lot of emphasis in meditation—this is where we go next—is put on working with emotions. We start talking about the five hindrances and then open up beyond that to look at the full range of emotions that people feel: sadness and grief and anger and desire and frustration and self-judgment and loneliness, embarrassment, regret, all of those. We work with those emotions one by one to become comfortable with them.

Now, the area of thinking—why is thinking a problem? I mean, we can all relate to the distress of these difficult emotions, right? This is one of the hardest things to bear in life. Life has physical pain and life has emotional pain. That is a lot of our dukkha. What's the problem with thinking?

We make it worse.

We make it worse. How? How does thinking make things worse?

Dwelling in a mind state which is not helpful.

Yes. Thinking helps us dwell in a mind state which is not helpful. It takes hold of some situation that causes an emotion and then dwells on it, meaning we go over and over and over. As we dwell, what's happening to the mind state or the emotion? We blow it up, don't we? So thinking gets us involved in multiplying the emotional pain.

If I have an interaction with you and you do something that offends me and I feel some annoyance at the time, once your words stop, who's harming me if I'm getting upset? It's just me, isn't it? Your words have stopped. Any unskillful action from your side has ceased. It's my own thinking about and dwelling on that past situation that causes the harm again and again, that causes the suffering.

This realm of thinking is intimately connected with the difficult emotions. If we didn't dwell on the difficult emotions, what would happen to them? They'd arise and they'd pass away. But by dwelling on the situation, on the people, on the episode, on the emotion itself, we fixate on it and we keep blowing it up. So this area of thinking becomes really crucial if we want to step out of the suffering that we create in our lives.

Do you feel in control of your thinking?

For seconds at a time.

A second at a time? When the mind is steady in meditation, do you feel more secure from thoughts?

More aware.

More aware. Being able to pause. Yes. When you're mindful of your thoughts, can they impact you as strongly?

No. This was pointed to in a really fascinating sutta. I'm just going to digress for a moment. It's in the Majjhima, number 123, called "The Wonderful and Marvelous."

In this sutta, the Buddha describes—or is said to describe, though I actually don't believe a lot of this—his birth, where he descended from a heaven realm. Coming out of his mother's womb, it's said that he stood up as soon as he was delivered, took eight steps and declared, "This will be my last birth." I have a lot of general trust in the suttas, but I don't have trust in stories like that.

So he's describing the wonderful and marvelous qualities of a Buddha—his life and his understanding. He gets to the very end, talking to his attendant Ananda, and says: "That being so, Ananda, remember this too is a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Tathagata. Here, Ananda, for the Tathagata, feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. Perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. Thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear."

So in the middle of all this miraculous material attributed to his life, he adds: "I know my thoughts, I know my feelings, I know my perceptions as they arise, as they persist, and as they pass away." If we set this as our goal as meditators and achieve it, we would be well down the road to freedom, to liberation. This is a wonderful aspiration for us. If we can bring mindfulness to the arising of our thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, we will discover a huge amount of inner freedom.

That's really the theme of this sutta—to start taking a close look at this habit of thinking that we've developed without much attention, without much mindfulness, and to strongly encourage making wiser choices in relation to our thoughts. That's the background and territory where this sutta is leading, pointing to some of the potential for freedom that can come.

All right, let's begin. I'd like us to read through the sutta paragraph by paragraph out loud. If you don't want to read, just say "pass" and we'll go to the next person. Max, could we begin with you? Since it's short, could you read the first two paragraphs?

"Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Sakyan country at Kapilavatthu in Nigrodha's park. Then when it was morning, the Blessed One dressed and, taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Kapilavatthu for alms. When he had wandered for alms in Kapilavatthu and had returned from his alms round after his meal, he went to the Great Wood for the day's abiding, and entering the Great Wood, sat down at the root of a bilva sapling for the day's abiding."

Thank you. This describes a fairly typical day in the life of the Buddha. He wakes up, gets dressed in his

robes, wanders for the morning meal of alms food, then comes back and simply abides. Why not, when your mind is really peaceful? He doesn't need television, DVDs, or even the New York Times and a latte. He just sits at the base of a tree, present, available for people to visit with him, as we'll see happens next.

Let me say something about the setting here. How many of you have been to some of the Buddhist holy sites in India? I thought there were a few. This is set in Kapilavatthu. Anyone been there? I think you were, Maggie. This is where the Buddha grew up—not his birthplace, which is Lumbini, but where he grew up. It's not far from Lumbini, but Lumbini is in Nepal and this is just across the border in India.

If you go to Kapilavatthu today, there's nothing there—empty farmland by and large. I don't know where the Great Wood would have been because there aren't many trees left in that part of northern India. But you can see some remnants of where monasteries were erected at the time of the Buddha. This is basically his homeland.

The clan who lived here were called the Sakyans. The Buddha was a Sakyan—that was his tribe or clan, his affiliation. His father was the head clansperson. Sometimes it's put out that his father was the king, but the king was actually in a different area. They paid obeisance to King Pasenadi, who was further west. So his father wasn't a king, but his father was a well-off, well-to-do chief of this clan. The Buddha grew up in very comfortable surroundings, and you'll see how comfortable in another passage.

This is Nigrodha's Park—not a place of huge significance in the suttas, but there are a couple of little stories about it. It's a park that was given to the Buddha in the first year after his enlightenment, presumably by a wealthy landowner. It is the site where Mahapajapati first asked the Buddha for ordination.

You know how he established the Bhikkhu Sangha? He didn't establish a Sangha—an ordained Sangha—for women. Then his stepmother, his aunt who had raised him because his mother had died, named Mahapajapati, came and said, "There are a group of us women who would like to follow you also. Please ordain us." And the Buddha said no. She asked three times and he still said no. That was at Nigrodha's Park in Kapilavatthu. Again, the family connection. You'll see a lot of these Sakyan people are related—close family ties.

Then he left and went to another town called Vesali, which he also spent a lot of time at. She followed him there, along with a few of the other women who wanted to be ordained, caught up with him, and Ananda interceded, so the story goes, and convinced the Buddha to ordain women. So he set up full ordination for bhikkhunis shortly after he had turned it down, fairly early in the life of the teachings. That's why we had the bhikkhuni order for a thousand or more years until it died out in India and Southeast Asia. Now it's coming back, which is wonderful. So that was the site at Nigrodha's Park.

So he's just hanging out in the Great Wood. He's sitting, and section three describes this next little encounter.

Dandapani—this may not have been his given name. This may be something of a nickname. It means "stick in hand." So he's leaning on what was said to be a golden stick or cane, although he was actually quite young. It gives the impression that he's a little pretentious. You have to be wealthy to have a gold stick. He didn't need it for walking, but he liked to brandish it, like a dandy. So his name, Dandapani—he's kind of a dandy. That's the trip with him.

Now, in the vernacular of the day, just coming up to a renunciate and saying, "What do you assert? What do you proclaim?" is not a very friendly way to get started. Usually they say they exchange courteous and amiable talk, and then the person sits to one side. So Dandapani is still presumably standing, leaning on his cane. "What do you teach?" He's coming across a little arrogant. He's fairly young, so he doesn't have the stature of an elder. And he's kind of spoiling for a fight.

If you know about Indian religious circles of this time, there were a lot of different sects with a lot of different views and they loved to argue. So it's kind of like, "What do you teach? And I'm going to tell you what I think." That's the way he's provoking the Buddha.

Now interestingly enough, he is the Buddha's uncle on his mother's side.

He is a brother to Maya, who was the Buddha's mother, and also a brother to Mahapajapati, who became the first ordained woman. Nonetheless—or perhaps uncles can be a little more assertive than anyone else—he's not particularly friendly in this approach.

So let's see how the Buddha reacts. Here comes this somewhat dandyish fellow who wants to argue with him. He asks, "So what do you teach?" He's just spoiling for a fight. And the Buddha responds, "Friend, I assert and proclaim my teaching in such a way that one does not quarrel with anyone in the world, with its gods, its Maras, and its Brahmas, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and its people, in such a way that perceptions no more underlie that brahmin who abides detached from sensual pleasures, without perplexity, shorn of worry, free from craving for any kind of being."

It's quite clever, isn't it? He doesn't answer directly. Instead, he picks up on the energy and responds to it. "I proclaim such a teaching that I do not argue with anyone in the world."

You'll notice that many of the Buddha's discourses are delivered to one person specifically. He might have said something very different if someone had approached him respectfully. In many situations, he's looking for the one person in the crowd who can understand his message to the deepest level possible. He may talk past a number of people there, and the whole teaching may be oriented to that one person who, we're told, got it in the course of that discourse.

Sometimes we want to take these exchanges in the discourses and say, "Well, this is the Buddha's teaching" or "This is the central truth he was pointing to." But many of them are very situational. This is one that's very situational. "I teach in such a way as to not argue" is not the central crux or the most profound center of the Buddha's teaching. But it was the teaching for Dandapani on that day.

Let's pull out a key teaching here: "A teaching such that perceptions no more underlie that brahmin"—here brahmin is being used not as a caste, which it was at the time, but in its more basic meaning of holy person. "Perceptions no more underlie that holy person who abides detached from sensual pleasures without perplexity, shorn of worry, free from craving for being."

This basically refers to someone whose heart is liberated. They're not drawn to sense pleasures and they're not invested in becoming something great. They're free, in other words. But what's key here is "perceptions no more underlie them." This is a subtle point, but it's the heart of the sutta. Perceptions don't underlie one whose mind is liberated.

So we have to stop and ask: what does this word perception mean in the Buddhist language? In Western psychology and philosophy, perception is sense datum—the registering of a sound in our experience. But in the Buddhist language, it's something different. That registering is called contact.

In Buddhist understanding, the impinging of sense data on us through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thoughts and feelings is called contact. We're always contacting the world through these six senses. The word for contact is phassa. We'll meet it later on.

The word being translated as perception is saññā—a key term. Perception or saññā means the recognition of a sense datum. So hearing the sound pre-verbally, that's contact. But when your attention turns toward it and you recognize "that's the meditation gong," that's perception.

This labeling faculty, the naming, the categorizing—which is based on memory—is perception. You wouldn't know to call something a meditation gong unless you'd met one before. It's a mental activity. Animals have this quality too. When you open a can of dog food at 5 p.m., your puppy knows what that is, doesn't she? She comes bounding over because she recognizes that sound.

So perception is a part of the normal functioning of mind. It's not in any way wrong or to be gotten rid of. Sometimes people think, "Oh, I was sitting in meditation, I heard the sound and I immediately thought 'footsteps.' I shouldn't do that. I should just stay with the bare experience of hearing." But actually this perceiving faculty is one that goes on all the time. Our minds simply organize that way.

I'm sure it has something to do with survival. Millions of years ago we had to recognize what might eat us or what we might eat—very handy for survival. It's an integral part of us. We don't need to worry about it. We don't need to turn it off. So don't worry that it comes in with some verbiage overlaying your basic sense experience. It's not a problem. Words are the way we meet the world. That's okay.

If perception is wrong or inaccurate, then it can create problems, but the fact of perceiving is not a problem. This faculty of saññā takes our experience and categorizes it. As you look around the room, you are categorizing and seeing women, men, chairs, tankas, Buddha, Kuan Yin, bell, and so forth. We may not be verbalizing it, but our mind is organizing all the time. If we stuck with the bare sense data, all we would see is form and color—turquoise blob, brown blob, blonde blob. But we do more than that. We

interact with that form and color and we give it names. That's okay.

This is the quality of perception. It's a recognition. It does more than just put things in a category—it brings along all the associations that we have with that sense object based on our past experience. As I entered the room, I saw people that I knew, and I perceived them as people I had known before and had warm feelings for. When you go home and meet friends or family, you often have many, many years of associations with those people, both pleasant and difficult.

When we walk out to the parking lot, we'll see a range of cars out there. When I go out to the parking lot and see a Prius, I think, "Oh, beautiful. I love Priuses. I don't have one, but if I had to buy a car, that's probably what I would buy." And if I go into town somewhere and see somebody driving a Humvee—great apologies if there's somebody like that today—I think, "I don't like that car so much because it uses a lot of gas."

We have all kinds of associations with the things we perceive, and they're very deeply conditioned. If you've ever tried to change the dynamics in an intimate relationship, you know how fixed some of those patterns of perceiving are. We perceive our partner in a certain way. We perceive our child in a certain way. They perceive us in the same way. Not so easy to undo those associations.

As soon as we connect with the world, which is really just arising fresh in each moment—there's something very unspoiled about the reality of the present moment—we have this quality of perception and it pulls along a bunch of the past and past associations. It mixes into our mind in a way that we can easily get entangled.

What is being pointed to here is that for someone who is free, they're not bound by their perceptions. Perceptions don't underlie them. So often we construct ourselves on our perceptions of our role, of our personal history, of our relationships, of our status, of our car, our home, our wealth, or whatever. We overlay on the basics of what we have contact with all sorts of interpretations that come automatically based on those old associations. All of that is part of perception. That meaning comes with a perception. That's why perception can be quite entangling. Can be, but doesn't have to be.

This little piece right here that is the reply to Dandapani in a way lays out the gist of the sutta and what's going to be explained in more detail.

So let's see how Dandapani responds to that teaching.

[Question from participant about pure perception versus elaboration]

So it's really helpful what you're saying, but I'm thinking of experiences when there was a moment of just hearing the bell that momentarily was not elaborated and how freeing that moment was. So it seems to me that there's still—it can be useful to see that overlay, not to make it a problem, but to see that there's pure perception, sound, awareness, and then there's mental elaboration that names and identifies it and

associates to it.

Yes, thank you. I think that's very true. There are times when the little verbal overlay on sense datum either doesn't come in or comes in very weakly, very faintly, and there's a greater feeling of spaciousness as a result. Just being able to stay close to the bare sense data gives a greater feeling of inner peace, spaciousness, presence. When it happens like that, it's a good sign of meditation developing.

But I wouldn't want to hold that up as the way meditation should go. The most important thing is if it's like that, you notice it's like that. If you hear the sound and then the thought arises "bell," that's okay too. But you know the difference. You don't think that the sound is the bell. You understand that "bell" is a conceptual overlay that you're putting on the sound. So if you see the sound as a sound and the perception as a perception, then you're clear.

So let's see how Dandapani responds to this opening teaching.

When this was said, Dandapani the Sakyan shook his head, wagged his tongue, and raised his eyebrows until his forehead was puckered in three lines. Then he departed, leaning on his stick.

We have to value these small moments of humor in the suttas because they don't come all that often. But this is a good one. What do you read of his reaction? What's going on at his feeling level? It's kind of cryptic, right? What do you suspect?

[Responses: Lack of comprehension... skeptical... grumpy...]

Yeah, and then he goes away. So he's kind of uncomprehending, confused, frustrated, annoyed, and then he just stalks off—which is not a bad outcome from the Buddha's point of view. He doesn't have to get into a dispute. We kind of knew Dandapani was a little bit ill-tempered when he arrived, and this sort of confirms it.

So he walks off, and then let's see where the story goes next.

Then when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from meditation and went to Nagrodhas Park, where he sat down on the seat made ready for him and told the bhikkhus what had taken place. Then a certain bhikkhu asked the Blessed One, "But, venerable sir, how does the Blessed One assert and proclaim his teaching in such a way that he does not quarrel with anyone in the world, with its gods, its Maras, and its Brahmas, in this generation with its recluses and Brahmins, its princes and its people? And, venerable sir, how is it that perceptions no more underlie the Blessed One, that Brahmin who abides detached from sensual pleasures, without perplexity, shorn of worry, free from craving for any kind of being?"

So in this passage, it just describes the Buddha going back to Nagrodhas Park where he's actually living. That's where his hut would have been and where other bhikkhus are staying also. As he often does, he relates the events of the day as a teaching story for the people who are still there around the monastery, and then they question him about it.

This introduces one of the other common traits of the suttas, which is repetition. We heard the dialogue, didn't we? We read that once, but we're going to read it again. You'll find that many of the key passages get repeated once, twice, sometimes many times.

I think there are a couple of reasons for this. The repetition does bring them home more deeply. So I would encourage you when a repetition comes, don't just get frustrated and skip it.

So let me read this again, because this is really the heart of what the Buddha is pointing to in this teaching.

As to the source through which perceptions and notions born of mental proliferation beset a person—if nothing is found there to delight in, welcome, and hold to—this is the end of the underlying tendency to lust, of the underlying tendency to aversion, of the underlying tendency to views, of the underlying tendency to doubt, of the underlying tendency to conceit, of the underlying tendency to desire for being, of the underlying tendency to ignorance. This is the end of resorting to rods and weapons, of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malicious words, and false speech. Here these evil, unwholesome states cease without remainder.

There's a tremendous amount packed into this paragraph. This is quite dense, so we want to slow down and take time with this.

First, notice that the Buddha has changed his language slightly from the opening. It's not just perceptions anymore. Now it's "perceptions and notions born of mental proliferation." The Pali word here is actually a phrase—three words strung together. This is truly the heart of the sutta.

The key word is *papañca*, which is being translated as "mental proliferation." This entire teaching is really about the theme of *papañca*—the tendency of the mind to spin out in an uncontrolled way with thinking. Someone mentioned earlier that we dwell on our thoughts, running the same thoughts over and over again, somewhat out of control. This is the thrust of *papañca*. It's like thinking has gone amok, running away with us. When it does that, it can wander into all kinds of pleasant and unpleasant territory, finding its way into everything.

Let's look at the terminology more carefully. We have "perceptions and notions"—*saññā* and *saṅkhā*. So the phrase is *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*: perceptions and notions born of mental proliferation. *Saññā* is the word for perception, which we know well. The word for "notions" is *saṅkhā*.

As we spin out through our thinking, we see things in our life that we react to through our memories or projections. We think things based on those proliferations.

And then those disturb us. They beset us. They trouble us. Like the person who thinks about a tiger and then gets afraid of the tiger. This is what we're doing with our thought all the time. So papañca-saññā-saṅkhā is this whole fabrication through the wandering mind of all kinds of conceptual imaginings that lead us into difficulty. This is a key phrase that we'll come back to again.

Then, how do we relate to these? When these perceptions and notions that we've been proliferating about come into contact with us, how do we relate? Do we delight in them, welcome them, and hold on to them? This is that quality of fixating.

You're rummaging through the memory storehouse and you remember something that happened last week with a friend or a colleague. How do you relate to that memory? Do you let it come and let it go? As the Buddha said, he could see his perceptions, feelings and thoughts arise, persist and pass away. Or do we delight, welcome and hold on to that memory?

Some plan about the future occurs to us: "I could go for a vacation in Costa Rica this winter. Wow." Now, do I let that thought come, see it as a thought, or do I fixate on it and take hold of it and start planning? "Am I going to use Kayak or Expedia for my airfare? Do I have to rent a car or do I stay in a resort where I don't need to go anywhere?" And then we can spin out about that for a while.

So as these thoughts and perceptions come out of proliferating, do we fixate on them, hold on out of some kind of emotional investment, or not? What's recommended? Let it go. Let it come, let it go. Of course, some of them we may need to do our work effectively, to take care of ourselves and our families, but those are relatively few in the whole number that we cling to unnecessarily.

If we delight and hold on, we are not ending these underlying tendencies. This is an important list—one of the other lists that we don't talk about a lot, but it's actually very central. These are called the anusaya. It means underlying tendency. There are seven of them, which he lists here: lust, aversion, views, doubt, conceit, desire for being, and ignorance.

Have you heard some of these before? The Buddha focused on unwholesome states of mind and wholesome states of mind, and he made different lists of each of them. What are some of the lists of the unwholesome states? Five hindrances. The poisons or root causes. The fetters—ten fetters to keep us bound. Vipallāsas, perversions of understanding. The taints, the āsavas—that's a big one. There are a number of these lists, used in different contexts.

The anusaya are in some ways a very fundamental layer of the mind. The taints, or āsavas, also have this very fundamental nature. You might say the most deeply conditioned tendencies of mind are in the taints, and they reappear here. Lust is basically the desire for pleasant experience. Aversion or resistance is disliking. These are so fundamental to the mind—basically two of the poisons and two of the hindrances.

The underlying tendency to views. Views are one of the four types of clinging. Buddha said there are four things, four ways we cling. One of them is views. So we'll get into views more as we go through this sutta.

Of the underlying tendency to doubt. This includes perplexity, uncertainty, particularly about the path.

Of the underlying tendency to conceit, desire for being, and ignorance. Though conceit is this quality of comparing ourselves. It's basically considering ourselves to be something. But once we're something, we

compare—are we better than, worse than, equal to other people? So the judging mind, that takes us to be something.

One of the most deep-rooted tendencies that only is uprooted at full liberation is the tendency to desire for being. How did we get here? How did we get in this body? The Buddha said it was because there was a desire to be. Why are we afraid of dying? That's a gut fear, isn't it? Quite independent of the pain, you might be assured that your death was going to be painless, and yet there would often be fear connected with that. Why is that? Desire for being. We want to exist. Most things that take birth want to exist. Everything that I know of that is born wants to exist.

And the tendency to ignorance. Ignorance is not understanding things the way they are, believing that there's a self when there isn't one.

So these seven things are very deeply conditioned habits of the mind. I find it so interesting, this translation, "underlying tendency." I think this is probably a faithful translation. People felt when Freud came along that he invented the unconscious—that he was the first one to notice that there were things going on under the surface. But this word anusaya has been around for 2600 years.

As I see it, this is kind of the level of what we might call the unconscious, because these things are sort of lying dormant in us until something happens to trigger them. But because we have these tendencies, these inclinations, we're not safe. Any of them can be triggered at any moment. And then they come through as a suffering state. So this is the realm of the anusaya. They're dormant tendencies that are in all of us until they're worked out. All of them can be purified. All of them can be released. But it's not easy, not quick.

And then it gets into a very interesting section. It goes from the underlying tendencies to "This is the end of resorting to rods and weapons of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recriminations, malicious words and false speech." In other words, this is where the underlying tendencies lead—to this whole area of dispute.

It's interesting, we don't talk about this a lot in the West. I don't hear us talking about it a lot, but the Buddha talked about it a lot. What creates disputes for people? I think this is really important because it shows the breadth of his interest in teaching. He was looking upon society, looking upon life as it was at that time, and he saw one of the great sources of suffering were people arguing with one another, quarreling, entering into disputes, and then taking up rods and weapons and actually coming to blows.

This hasn't exactly stopped today. But we tend to, as Buddhists, leave that to civil society. We're more focused on how can we cultivate heart of loving kindness? But in the broader society, this is a really important question. He has a lot of teachings on why disputes arise and what's the cause. So I'd just like to read you a few. They're in suttas other than these.

This analysis of what causes arguments generally runs on two tracks. One is views and the other is craving.

So in the society at his time, where there was so much religious debate, there was a lot of argument about views. You can see this in the academic world today. I don't know if you ever peek into the academic world, but there are some very nasty fights that go on because one person's theory is different from another person's theory. And what difference does it make? But they get very upset. Buddhists can do that too. So these are good admonishments, cautionary words for us as Buddhists.

Views are one key way that disputes, arguments, hurt feelings, grudges, and insults come about. Another one is craving—I want something and I don't want you to have it. You can see that in the conquest of land, in the pursuit of money, in all kinds of criminal activity.

I want to read some of these passages because I think they're quite illuminating, quite wise. This is from the Samyutta Nikaya, spoken by the Buddha: "I do not dispute with the world. Rather, it is the world that disputes with me. A proponent of the Dhamma does not dispute with anyone in the world."

Now that's not to say you can't sit down with a good friend and have a discussion where you take differing views of what a passage means or how you apply it in your life. That can be a healthy discussion. But when he says dispute, in this context it means argument where there's a real sense of conflict and somebody's coming away feeling like they won, somebody else feeling like they lost. So there's suffering involved in this situation.

"I do not dispute with the world. It is the world that disputes with me." And in another place he mentioned something like this, he said it's because one who sees the truth knows it and they don't have to argue about it. You can kind of see that, can't you? If we get into an argument, there's usually a little insecurity underneath because we aren't resting in real knowing. We're resting in some kind of belief. This is a very interesting thing to look at.

In the Sutta Nipata: "The sage does not get involved in any dispute that has arisen." I think he means emotionally involved because he was actually asked to mediate disputes. It happened toward the end of his life. There were some water rights that became the source of a war between two neighboring clans up north, and he did help mediate that.

Again from the Sutta Nipata: "Desisting from all theories, the wise one does not enter into dispute in the world." Desisting from all theories. So when we're talking Dharma with someone, are we talking from our personal experience and something that we know and feel confident in, or are we attaching to a theory that we think is the way things are and we want to argue with somebody who holds a different theory? The Buddha says, "Desisting from all theories."

And then I love this passage, also from the Sutta Nipata: "This I do now declare. After investigation, there is nothing among all the doctrines that such a one as I would embrace." That's a strong statement. "This I do now declare. After investigation, there is nothing among all the doctrines that such a one as I would embrace. Seeing misery in philosophical views, without adopting any of them, I discovered inner peace."

Isn't this interesting? We're not in Dharma practice to make up a theory, even if it's the best theory in the world. "I have a theory, there is no self. And I think this will free you if you take it up." "But I feel like I have a self." "No, you don't have a self. I know you don't have a self."

In all his understanding, he didn't come up with one thing that he would cling to as a doctrine that should be believed, that he would try to defend against all comers and say, "This is my philosophical view." "Seeing misery in philosophical views, without adopting any of them, I discovered inner peace."

That's our mission—to find inner peace.

It's not to develop philosophical views or cling to them. For one who is free from views, there are no ties. For one who is delivered by wisdom, there are no follies. But those who grasp after views and philosophical opinions wander about the world annoying people.

It's true, isn't it?

So I always look for this in Dhamma discussions and teachings and in teachers. Is there a general sense of metta in the discussion? Or is there a fixed holding, a rigid holding on to a view that will create conflict? I think that's a very helpful way to look at views.

So even though there's something in Buddhism called right view, that shouldn't be clung to either. Because right view is more a way of seeing than it is a philosophical doctrine.

That's one way we get into disputes: by holding on to views. The other way is basically this force of desire. Again in the Sutta Nipata, quarrels and disputes come from having preferences, from holding things dear. We hold on to the things that we treasure—whether it's our reputation, our money, our home. Once we stake out "this is mine" and hold that and cherish it, then we'll come into conflict.

In another section in the Anguttara, the roots of dispute are said to be if someone is angry and revengeful, contemptuous and domineering, envious and avaricious, deceitful and fraudulent, has ill intent or wrong views, or clings tenaciously to one's own views. This covers a lot of ground.

There's a passage in the Anguttara that is interesting because it shows the progression. "I will teach you nine things rooted in craving. And what are the nine things rooted in craving?" This is a step-by-step building, one step on the next.

In dependence on craving there is seeking. In dependence on seeking there is gain. In dependence on gain there is judgment. In dependence on judgment there is desire. In dependence on desire there is attachment. In dependence on attachment, there is possessiveness. In dependence on possessiveness, there is miserliness. In dependence on miserliness, there is safeguarding. With safeguarding as the foundation, originate the taking up of rods and weapons, quarrels and disputes.

It's a step-by-step analysis of how we form a relationship with something and turn it into possession, and

that becomes the ground for argument.

This is quite a dense paragraph, this paragraph eight. Let's continue with a couple more paragraphs.

"That is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Sublime One arose from His seat and went into His dwelling. Then, soon after the Blessed One had gone, the bhikkhus considered, 'Now, friends, the Blessed One has risen from His seat and gone into this dwelling, after giving us instruction in brief, without expounding the detail and meaning. Now, who will expound this detail?' Then they considered, 'The Venerable Mahakaccana is praised by the teacher and esteemed by his wise companions of the holy life. He is capable of expounding the detailed meaning. Suppose we went to him and asked him the meaning of this.'"

You'll often see this in the suttas. The Buddha will say something that's a little cryptic, and then they'll go to some senior monk or nun—because nuns also get questions in this way and answer, and there are suttas in the Majjhima delivered by nuns as well. Then they will give a detailed explanation. Mahakaccana was said to be the monk who was most skilled at giving in detail the meaning that the Buddha had explained in brief.

"The Venerable Mahakaccana replied, 'Friends, it is as though a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, thought that heartwood was to be sought among the branches and leaves of a great tree standing possessed of heartwood after he had passed over the root and the trunk. And so it is with you, venerable sirs, that you think that I should be asked about the meaning of this after you passed the Blessed One by when you were face to face with the teacher. For knowing, the Blessed One knows. Seeing, He sees. He is vision.'"

He is knowledge. He is the Dhamma. He is the Holy One. He is the Sayer, the Proclaimer, the Elucidator of Meaning, the Giver of the Deathless, the Lord of the Dhamma, the Tathagata. That was the time when you should have asked the Blessed One the meaning. As he told you, so you should have remembered it.

It's a little bit of a scolding, isn't it? And he's right. They should have asked the Buddha. So Mahakaccana, though he's a senior monk, is very deferential to the Buddha in this passage and goes into several lines of praise for the Buddha.

This is one of the things you'll find in the canon from time to time—these words of praise for the Buddha, for the Dhamma, for the Sangha. These are wonderful sources for reflection. That's why I included that extra page in your handout, the one that starts with "preliminary homage." These are traditional chants in praise of the Buddha that are chanted frequently in monasteries and have been handed down for many years. In many cases, the words come from the suttas themselves.

I thought it might pick up our energy a little if we did some chanting at this point in the afternoon. The way this is structured, I borrowed from the Abhayagiri monks' chanting book. The phrase in parentheses is usually chanted solo by the person leading, and then all the other phrases are chanted in unison. We'll

do first the Pali, then the English. The English is a translation of the Pali in both cases, so you'll get a sense of the meaning.

I brought this in because I want you to get a sense that there's a devotional quality that comes through the suttas—a quality that is part of monastic life that we don't often include at Spirit Rock events. Some people resonate strongly with it and love it as part of practice. Others resist it, perhaps recovering from other religious traditions, and don't want anything to do with it. So I offer it in this light way to see if it's something you might enjoy.

We'll chant the preliminary homage three times in both Pali and English. When there's a mark above a syllable, you chant that on a higher tone. When there's a mark below, on a lower tone. When there's no mark, it's on a middle tone.

[Chanting of Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa and English translation follows]

[Chanting of Buddha recollection in Pali and English follows]

If you were living in a monastery, you might chant this a couple of times a day. It does a few things: it tends to pick up the energy, it puts a nice melody in your head—not very stirring, not like Tchaikovsky's Fifth that's going to rouse the emotions, but pretty mellow. And it reminds you of the beautiful qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. It's nice to have these images and words accompanying us as we practice.

The qualities of the Buddha that are pointed to here are blessed, pure, and enlightened.

And it's said that these stand for the three key qualities of the Buddha. The blessed stands for compassion because he is able to offer blessings to people out of his love and compassion. The pure stands for his purity—that is, the mind that has been freed of greed, aversion, and delusion. The perfectly enlightened one refers to his wisdom, that he is awakened by developing penetrating insight. It's the insight that liberates.

So these three qualities of compassion, purity of heart, and wisdom are summed up in this one line. And as we reflect on that, it can remind us what we're practicing for. I'm sure you can see these qualities in teachers that you connect to strongly, that you admire.

The Spirit Rock staff is going to be doing a retreat this week. Dana is going to be leading—Dana is our staff dharma teacher. The theme of the retreat is Brightening the Mind. It's a wonderful thing to take into daily life.

One of the ways to brighten the mind is to reflect on the qualities of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. If this seems a little too idolatrous or worshipful, think about the qualities of a teacher that you love. By reflecting on those qualities, you can inspire yourself anytime that you feel the mind needs brightening. It's really a wonderful exercise.

Why don't we take a break here? You've been very patient. And suttas are hard work—listening for over an hour is a lot of hard work already. So let's take a ten-minute break. I'll ring a bell, and then we'll come back together.

Thank you for listening.

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