The Insight Chorus Part 1

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 50:19

Tonight and tomorrow night we're going to look at the chorus of the Satipatthana Sutta, the discourse on the applications of mindfulness or the establishing of mindfulness. This is the root text of the practice that we're doing.

In the Buddha's teaching you find references to satipatthana—the cultivation of mindfulness as a practice—scattered throughout the teachings. There's also one discourse devoted to it specifically, which comes in two forms, one slightly longer than the other. And there's a Satipatthana Samyutta as well. A samyutta is a collection, so there's a collection of discourses about satipatthana too. We're looking at the discourse itself.

It's rather unusual. There's no story involved, virtually no narrative framework. It functions as a kind of technical workbook, and it may well have been compiled as a training manual for students. As the Buddha's sangha grew and more and more people were taking up the practice, this discourse was likely composed and memorized—nothing was written down, of course; this is an oral tradition—to be used as a kind of technical training manual. What it does is create a fixed structure that underlies the practice, and it's used for that purpose to this day.

The discourse, the version that we're looking at, which is the shorter version, consists of twenty-one sections—let's call them verses. Each of these twenty-one verses looks at one particular aspect of the practice, classified according to the four categories: body, feeling, heart-mind, and dharma. At the end of each of these sections or verses, there is a chorus that specifically introduces the subject of insight, vipassana. The chorus that follows each verse refers back to the preceding verse, and it's identical in every case except for the bit where it's referring back to the just-completed section. So it lays out the same way of insight for each one of these sections. The sections are basically meant to cover all of human experience, and the insight chorus describes how insight arises in relation to each aspect.

If you're reciting or chanting this discourse—and again, in an oral tradition, that's how information is passed on—the Pali word for "to learn" or "to study" is actually the verb "to listen," because that's how information would come in. A student was a listener. They would listen as the teacher recited, then recite back. The recitation would go forward and back, forward and back. They'd move on to the next section, forward, back, forward, back. And so people would memorize whatever they were studying.

In Burma today, they use a kind of half-oral, half-written approach. They have books and everything's written down. But if you go into the monastery as a boy or a girl, as a novice monk or novice nun, the education system is all memorization—all of it. If you visit a traditional Burmese monastic school, there

are no classrooms. What you'll find instead are students sitting cross-legged, swaying backwards and forwards with a book open before them, chanting. Sometimes they're chanting lines individually, sometimes chanting together, but they're memorizing the book.

The Sayadaws, the monks, and the Sayalays, the nuns, are great Pali scholars. How do they learn Pali? Imagine you're a ten, eleven, or twelve-year-old entering the system. Your first book is a medieval Pali grammar written in Pali. You memorize the book. In the examination, you recite the book. If you pass that, you're given the Burmese translation of the Pali grammar, and you memorize that. In the examination, you recite the book. Then you're given another Pali text, then Burmese, then Pali, then Burmese. By the time you get out of the school in your late teens, you know Pali—and you know it really well.

If you go on to higher study, the undergraduate degree is called Dhammacharya, "Teacher of Dhamma." In fact, it's illegal to give a public Dharma talk in Burma unless you have that degree.

They guard their orthodoxy carefully.

But if you want to go on to higher study, you study for Dhammābhivamsa. My main teacher, Sayadaw U Pandita, he was a Dhammābhivamsa. Sayadaw U Janaka, another teacher, he also was Dhammābhivamsa. And if you go to the very top, then you study for the Tipiṭakadhara examination. Tipiṭaka—the three baskets: the suttas, the Vinaya or monastic discipline, and the Abhidhamma. Dhara—one who holds it. But they hold it in their memory. They memorize the entire Tipiṭaka, which is roughly forty large volumes.

When I was there, in December they would hold the examination for Tipiṭakadhara at the Mahasi Centre. You could go along and watch. Very few candidates pass. The failure rate is extremely high.

Now think about these exams. You cannot sit for them once you reach thirty, because it's considered that if you haven't passed by then, you're never going to. This is a young person's endeavor.

They would hold the exam in the main women's meditation hall, which is enormous. They set up rows of these little seats where the candidate sits slightly elevated. In front of him and beside him are examiners. The monk undergoing the examination recites the Pali while two examiners follow along with the texts, checking everything. In the oral portion, you're allowed a maximum of three mistakes, and then you're out—you've failed. There's also a written section, because they're modernizing, you see. In the written part, candidates are asked to write out certain sections, and again, three mistakes maximum. Any failure in either the oral or written section means you fail completely. Come back next year.

So there are very few Tipiṭakadharas. But if you achieve that, your career is set.

It's memorization. In Burma today, if you give a book to a young monk and say, "I want you to study this book," what they assume you mean is memorize it—and they will. They have phenomenal memories.

In the Buddha's time, memories would have been even more extraordinary, because studies have shown something remarkable. In India, research was conducted on a particular caste in Rajasthan where the

men's traditional role was to recite the great epics by memory. That's how they made their living, and they would raise their sons to memorize and recite as well. But modernity crept in, and eventually the sons had to attend school for a minimum number of years. What researchers discovered was striking: graduates of those schools, even just primary school, had memory capacities that had dropped precipitously—far worse than their fathers'. It seems that even a small amount of education in literacy begins to torpedo the memory. Which is fascinating.

So in the Buddha's time, memories would have been phenomenal, beyond anything we can comprehend today. Because we don't have memories anymore. We have phones. We have Google. We don't remember anything—except maybe the password to get in there, and even that's a challenge.

But we're talking about people with phenomenal memories, beyond anything we can ever experience.

So in an oral tradition, repetition signals importance. Even in our own culture, the classic popular song has three verses.

Verse one, boy meets girl. Verse two, boy and girl get together. Verse three, boy and girl – tragedy, party. So the verses tell a story; there's some kind of narrative arc. And the chorus is exactly the same, repeating at least three times. The chorus provides the essence of the song. And if twenty years later you're meditating and feeling a bit bored, and your mind starts throwing up this song you remember from a few decades ago – how did it go again? What do you remember first? The chorus.

So the chorus in this discourse, you can see that's the centre. And everything builds off that. The chorus is very important. And yes, that's how they memorised – they chanted. They either chanted alone, but in particular they chanted in choir. This means that the transmission of the text was much more accurate than writing it down. Because you've got a group of people chanting a particular section of teachings, and if anybody chants anything different, if a single word is different, everybody knows. Everybody knows we've got a problem, and you've got to work it out.

But when they started writing the discourses down – and as far as we know, this happened first in Sri Lanka during a period of famine and civil war – circumstances became dire. If you have famine, for whatever reason, and the monks and nuns live off the gifts of the laypeople, but the laypeople don't have anything to give, then the monks and nuns starve. Basically, they've got a choice: they could disrobe and fend for themselves, or they could die.

During this particular famine, compounded by civil war, when society was finally reconstituting itself, one of the first things the authorities did was ask: how many monks have we got left who actually remember the teachings? There were so few that they got really worried and decided they had to write it down, just in case. And this was seen as evidence of the decay of the Dharma.

So you've got people copying every single word. In modern volumes, you've got forty large volumes, but they were scratching it on palm leaves because they didn't have paper. It's a tedious, humdrum,

never-ending job. And it has to be done again and again because the palm leaves rot in the monsoon. So they've got to do it again and do it again. And who gets to do that job? The people at the bottom of the hierarchy – the novices. "You take care of it." So they make a slight mistake in writing it out, where one letter looks rather like another. Who picks it up? No one. And then the mistakes start to creep in over the centuries. So the oral tradition is very powerful.

Anyway, that's enough preliminary. Let's get into it.

We're looking at the first instance of a chorus, in the section on tracking the body. The Buddha says – and again he's describing the practitioner. Often when he's talking about the practice, he doesn't define it; he describes someone doing it. This is the way that he conveys it.

"In this way, she lives tracking body as body internally, or she lives tracking body as body externally, or she lives tracking body as body both internally and externally."

Now, in the first verse, it's all about the practitioner lives tracking body as body. So tracking physical experience. Body as body means it's just this sensation. That's it. It isn't anything else. Just this. Just this. So this is the boot camp of the training.

But here, she tracks body as body internally, externally, both internally and externally. So what's this about? Basically, as the practice deepens, our sense of the solidity of the body fades away. As does the sense of an absolute boundary between self and other, between in here and out there.

Where is the border of the self? For practical purposes, for most of it, the border of the self is here. The self occupies this body. And just outside the body is the world—internal, external. But as the practice deepens and perception starts to change, this sense of a boundary begins to get aberrant. It's more dynamic and more shifting than before, and may even start to disappear.

Now, this boundary gives us a sense of subject-object duality. Our normal relationship to the world is based on the fundamental perception: I am in here, and you lot are out there. And what is happening in here, to me and to mine, is far more important than what is happening out there to you and yours. This is bleeding obvious, but if you behave in a way which indicates you don't understand this, I will correct your mistake.

So this is, of course, the construction of self. Now this fundamental sense of duality or separation is not inherent to awareness. It's a structure imposed upon awareness. It's a product of habitual grasping. And as the practice develops, what we begin to recognize is that this way of structuring our experience—me here, you out there—is not fundamental. At first I assumed that it was, but it turns out that it isn't.

So our sense of an absolute boundary between inner and outer starts to fade, and with it, our sense of an absolute boundary to I and mine, him, you and yours, there. We begin to realize that the movements of mind and body that we are experiencing in the practice are not mine. They're not unique. They don't

define me. They're universal and they're fundamentally not personal.

And I begin to see that what is true here is true there. It's true everywhere. I recognize that the experiences arising here in this sentient body are not personal and not mine. They're just nature. And nature belongs to everyone and to no one. So this sense of a boundary between self and other starts to weaken.

And then the Buddha goes on to say, she lives tracking the nature of arising as body, or she lives tracking the nature of ceasing as body, or she lives tracking both the nature of arising and the nature of ceasing as body.

So again, the language changes. Again, it's all about tracking, the continuity of awareness. But here, the tracking is the nature of arising and ceasing as body. And this represents a shift of perception. We begin with a meditation object—let's say the breathing, which is part of the body. And as we track it over a period of time, we notice that it changes. Has anybody noticed that the meditation object changes? Yes.

So what the Buddha is talking about here is a shift in perception from tracking the meditation object and noticing that it changes, to tracking the fact of change itself and noticing that it's happening in the meditation object. And this means what's being introduced is insight. Because insight is always characterized by generalization, by universality. And strictly speaking, according to the tradition, this is where insight meditation actually begins.

It begins when the object of awareness, the meditation object, is the universal characteristic of impermanence itself. Until then, we're doing a kind of preliminary serenity practice to get us to this point.

And alongside impermanence, the anicca lakkhana, we find dukkha lakkhana and anatta lakkhana—change, pain, not-self. They always come together as a package. But the first one to be introduced, the first one the Buddha talks about, is change. Basically because it's the most obvious. It's the easiest to recognize.

So what we're talking about here is what we could call a foreground-background shift. At first, let's say I'm actively aware of a meditation object. That meditation object—let's call it a breathing object—is at the foreground of my awareness. But just because I'm tracking the breathing doesn't mean that everything else is disappearing. Other things are happening: sounds, temperature, thoughts. But they're in the background. I'm aiming at one thing or a group of things, and that is in the foreground while other stuff is going on in the background.

Sometimes they swap around. Let's say I notice in the background there's a bit of thinking, and the next thing I know, breathing is in the background—or gone—and the thinking is in the foreground. But I've still got foreground and background. And then I realize I've got to establish a new foreground, put the thinking aside, bring the breathing back. Foreground, background.

So I'm tracking the meditation object, and I notice that it changes. In the foreground there's the meditation object and all the different changes that are happening to it. And one of the things in the background is the observation: oh yes, it really does change. I had a good sitting with the breathing in the last period, and this sitting was complete rubbish. So it changes. It's different. I can't really rely on it. That's a background observation. Then in the foreground, come back to the breathing, come back to the breathing, come back to the breathing.

Then at some point, there's a foreground-background shift, and the meditation object as an isolated entity or process slips to the background, while the foreground is occupied by the universal fact of change itself. If we're talking about breathing, it may be that it's no longer my breathing—it's air element. And air element is by nature impermanent. It doesn't belong to me. It's not restricted to me. So we begin with perceiving the object of awareness as both internal and external. This sense of things opening up starts to happen. And then there's a shift, and the universal fact of change itself occupies the foreground, while the object which changes fades to the background. It's still there, but it's no longer where the action is. The action is in the foreground—the fact of change itself.

Now this shift is very subtle. So much so that sometimes it can happen without the practitioner even noticing it. Sometimes the practitioner is reflecting on their practice and they think, "You know, it's different these days. I can't quite put my finger on it, but it feels a bit different." And then they realize what's happening: "I'm no longer actually preoccupied by the meditation object which is changing. What I'm looking at is the fact of change, and it includes the meditation object."

This shift is very subtle and it's not something that we can do. It's not part of our agenda. We cannot do it. It either happens or it doesn't happen. But we can prepare for it by ripening the circumstances that will give rise to it. And this is done by cultivating the perception of impermanence, or the perception of change. We'll talk more about this later in the retreat.

So there's a shift which just happens, and then the meditation object becomes one or more of the three universal characteristics. At first there's a meditation object which begins to display the three characteristics. And then at some point there's a very subtle shift. And actually the meditation object becomes the three characteristics—that is happening in that meditation object.

And now we have entered into the world of insight.

The Buddha says further, "Her mindfulness is established as body is." Sometimes you see this translated as "there is body." The Pali is *atthi kāyo*. "Further, her mindfulness is established as body is, just for understanding, just for continuity of mindfulness."

This is the third sentence, and the rest of the talk will unpack it, because there's a lot here. Here we enter into what some traditions might call non-duality, or at least non-duality becomes clear.

Let's begin with "body is." Again, we have some aspect of body as the meditation object. At the beginning

of the retreat, when we were introducing all this, we talked about awareness. We said awareness always has an object—if I'm aware, I'm aware of something.

Now let's compare this to grammar. In English grammar, we have verbs that are transitive and verbs that are intransitive. A transitive verb is one that has a direct object. For example, the verb "to see": "I see you." In that sentence, we have a subject (I), a verb (see), and an object (you)—the one whom I see.

An intransitive verb is a verb that does not have a direct object. For example, "It rained." We have a subject (it), we have a verb (rained), but we don't have an object. It's just rain.

The sentence "I had a bad dream"—the verb is transitive. We have a subject (I), a verb (had), and an object (bad dream). The verb links subject to object: I had a bad dream.

Now contrast this with the sentence "I was sleeping." We've got a subject (I), we've got a verb (was sleeping), but we don't have an object. I wasn't sleeping something. I was just sleeping.

Notice how intransitive verbs without an object are about process. They're about doing. They're not about the things that are processed or done. They're just about the process, a doing, an activity.

When we begin the practice, we emphasize the transitive nature of awareness. If I'm seeing, I'm seeing something. If I'm hearing, I'm hearing something. If I'm thinking, I'm thinking something. This is transitive awareness—the fact that we have a subject (I), an object (something), and a verb.

This distinction goes deeper than just grammar. Transitive awareness is awareness that is structured by subject-object dualism. Duality. So "I see you" doesn't just convey a grammatical structure, but an existential structure. There is I here, there is you whom I see—someone who is separate from me—and there's seeing, awareness that links the two.

And in this distinction, what is the most important?

What is primary? It's I. Everything revolves around I.

But when the Buddha says "body is," he seems to be speaking about intransitive awareness. Body is. What exactly? Well, he doesn't say. There's nothing there. There's nothing filling in the gap. He just says, "body is." So there's no object. But if there's no object, there's not really any subject in it either. So there's no dualism. There's no one experiencing body. There's no one whose body this is. There's just body. Body is.

And this represents a relationship to experience which is characterized by radical simplicity, by intimacy. This relationship lies beneath all the normal layers of concept and meaning that we pile on top of our experience in order to make sense of it.

So her mindfulness is established as "body is." And then he adds: "just for understanding, just for continuity of mindfulness."

This "just for understanding" expands the significance of the intransitive or non-dual awareness. It indicates the natural arising of wisdom. Because when the conditions are right, understanding arises. And remembering that I cannot do insight—looking for it or trying to make it happen is completely useless. Because this is just the agenda of I, locked into the subject-object duality.

In the Pali, this "just for understanding" is *ñāṇa-mattaya*, where *ñāṇa* conveys knowing, understanding, and *mattaya* conveys the sense that there's nothing beyond this—it's just this. It also conveys that the understanding itself is not for anything. It's not instrumental in its nature. The practice and the understanding that it generates is not instrumental. It has no goal within itself. We're not trying to get something out of it. It simply is what it is, full and complete within itself.

"Just for continuity of mindfulness"—this is *paṭisati-mattaya*. And this takes things a step further by introducing intransitive or non-dual mindfulness, conveyed by adding the prefix *paṭi* to *sati*. So *sati* is mindfulness, and again and again the Buddha talks about mindfulness using the word *sati*. But sometimes, like here, he uses the term *paṭisati*. So what is this prefix *paṭi* about?

In Pali and Sanskrit, prefixes don't have an exact one-to-one meaning. Prefixes have a cluster of possibilities, and the person reading or reciting the text can reach in and pick out this possibility or that possibility. So there are inherently different ways of reading this. That's very typical of the Indian tradition—they play with language and draw out different possibilities. Often this is what you see in commentary. If you ever look at the Pali commentaries, the main commentator is Buddhaghosa, and sometimes he'll ask, "What does this word mean?" and then give a list of four or five meanings.

Then he would give a Dharma talk based on each one of them. It's not that there's one meaning. He's being playful. He's saying, well, you can play with it this way, you can play with it that way, you can play with it the other way. So there is this playfulness with language that's built into this method.

Pati can be taken to indicate again—in other words, continuity over time. And as we've been saying, continuity is built into mindfulness. What's the difference between awareness and mindfulness? Mindfulness is awareness continuously over time. So continuity is built into the concept of mindfulness. There are no gaps of forgetting. *Pati-sati* indicates really strong continuity—the continuity is getting very powerful.

But *pati* also indicates "back" in a recursive sense. In other words, it refers to what we could call awareness of awareness. The awareness comes back. The mindfulness comes back. This is what we've been calling intransitive awareness. We could say it's awareness, awareing, awareness.

Now, this indicates mature mindfulness. The continuity emphasizes maturity. But the intransitive nature of it—the awareness awareing awareness itself—also indicates maturity of the mindfulness. And this mature mindfulness is associated with clarity and depth. This is going very deep.

So *pati-sati* can be read as indicating both the continuity of mindfulness, the unbroken nature of

mindfulness, along with its depth and its clarity. Look at Anālayo's translation. He translates it as "continuity." He emphasizes the first meaning.

So, *yāvati ca sati matāya.* And again, *matāya* indicates that this is not for anything. It's just itself. It's just for itself. Both of these indicate a radical simplification and maturity of the practice.

Notice how the practice becomes simpler when it matures. On Wednesday night, we were talking about Mahasi Sayadaw, and he was describing how the stream-enterer—let's say the graduate of the whole system—will never forget how to meditate. He points out that the mature level of this practice has got nothing to do with the method. It's got nothing to do with the technique. It's simply tracking what's happening over a period of time. Just: this is what's happening, this is what's happening, this is what's happening. This is what the Buddha was talking about here.

And it is the simplicity of this practice that makes it so difficult. We want to make things more complicated. We make things more complicated by judging them, by manipulating them, by massaging them. All of this is trying to make the experience fit me and my concerns.

Have you ever come into the meditation hall and sat down? You start, and the experience could be regarded as dukkha-ish. You respond by thinking, "Oh, well, conditions aren't so good this morning. I didn't get much sleep last night. I'm a bit tired. Maybe I should take a break. Then I'll come back later on and it'll be better." So we're overlaying the experience with judgment, manipulation, and so on. We're making it complicated.

But it's actually very simple. I'm sitting here, and I'm tired. That's it. That's what's happening.

So what the Buddha is talking about here is a practice where there is no agenda, and therefore there is no practitioner. Because the practitioner always has an agenda. The self always has an agenda. But once the agenda is dropped, the practitioner is dropped. What we have is complete intimacy with no sense of any purpose to the practice beyond this situation, even now.

So mindfulness and understanding are strong, and with them come equanimity and balance, and the three characteristics simply appear by themselves. They're kind of bleeding obvious. And this is insight.

I think that's probably enough, really. I've got more I could say, but I think it just makes things more complicated. Let me try to make it less complicated with a story.

Many years ago, I spent much of the 1980s in Asia, and a fair amount of that time as a monk. I was ordained in Burma, doing relentless Mahasi meditation. Mercifully, the visa ran out and I went to Thailand. Phew!

There I established myself as a monk in the Thai system. I stayed in various places during my time in Thailand, but I would always come back to one monastery in the deep south—Ajahn Buddhadasa's monastery. At the time he was alive and flourishing. The abbot, Ajahn Po, started running retreats for

farangs—mostly Westerners.

If you're familiar with southern Thailand, the isthmus gets very, very narrow. And in the Gulf of Thailand, there are two big islands, Koh Samui and Koh Phangan. Have you heard of those? They've become these huge resort islands now. But in the early 1980s, it was just the hippies who had discovered them, and the infrastructure was very, very primitive.

Ajahn Po, who ran Wat Suan Mokkh, was actually a native of Koh Samui. *Koh* means island, so Samui Island. Every now and again he would go home to visit family. And as he would visit, he noticed an increasing number of young, obviously prosperous people from the West who had come to Koh Samui to enjoy themselves—which they could do very easily because everything was so cheap. The more he saw these people, the more sorry he felt for them. Because, he said, they all seem to be miserable. They all seem to be suffering. So he thought, we've got to do something for them.

They started running these retreats, and gradually it built up. But this particular retreat I'm about to describe was very early in those days, and the retreat itself was held inside Wat Suan Mokkh, which was on a hill. It still is a hill.

Ajahn Buddhadasa moved to the base of that hill, I think about 1932 or 1933, early 1930s, and at that time it was all jungle. He tucked himself away and practiced and studied and tried to avoid people, except his reputation spread and monks came to join him. Gradually a monastery developed. People came to support him. And then as development came and forests were being chopped down, the lay people protected that area by building a wall around it.

So when I was there in the early 1980s, everywhere outside the wall the forest was gone—just paddy fields—except for what was inside this wall and on the hill. That was all covered in the original jungle, and that was the monastery.

They started running these retreats, but the facilities weren't really developed for them. The meditation hall was at the back of the property—just a hall and a playing field. Obviously at some point it had been used for the local kids to play whatever they played. That field was just outside the jungle, and inside the jungle, in different buildings, they had worked out primitive accommodations.

And they built kind of bush toilets and bucket bathing facilities. There was a dining area—a big tent put up to keep the rain off with open cooking facilities. That's where the food was.

For the Dhamma talks, you'd go into the heart of the monastery, which was all properly constructed, and enter the Bort. The Bort is the main ceremonial building, very elaborate, built of concrete. And Ajahn Buddhadasa would give these Dhamma talks seated on a traditional Dhamma throne. It would go up from here to the ceiling, the height of it. He must have climbed up a ladder to get there. He was towering over everybody else—because if you're higher than others, it means you're on top of the hierarchy. The Thais are very aware of altitudes in terms of how to show respect. So it was quite an affair. Up the steps, get in

there, and he gave his talks.

One of the reasons they were running this program was because there happened to be a resident at the monastery, an American monk from Chicago originally. He'd gone out to Thailand on the Peace Corps and had learned Thai, become fluent in it. When his time was up, he ordained. And he was a superb interpreter, a superb translator. Buddhadasa would rattle off these Dhamma talks and the interpreter would go for it. He was just really good.

Anyway, one day Buddhadasa is explaining the ultimate truths of Buddhism. These were in terms of—I think there were nine *tās*. *Tā*, T-long-A, roughly in English is "-ness." It turns something into an abstract. So *anicca*, impermanent. *Aniccatā*, impermanence. *Dukkha*, painful. *Dukkhatā*, the fact of suffering. *Anattatā*. And so on.

So he's going up this kind of ladder of increasing philosophical sophistication and deep realisation. And finally he comes to the top. And at the top is *tathatā*. And *tathā* means "just"—just so, just this. And he's explaining that this is the ultimate truth of Buddhism, and we're kind of sitting in it.

He tried to explain it. He said, "Look, it's wet season." And in fact it was monsoon season, which meant every day it just poured down. And it's a jungle. The jungle is seething with life of all forms. Everything is incredibly humid. Nothing dries. Anything that can rot does rot, including human flesh.

And if you do this retreat, it means you've got to slosh around from one place to another—from the hall across the park to your accommodation, from there to bathe, back to the accommodation, then to the dining hall, and from there trudge to the centre of the monastery for your Dhamma talk. So everybody was completely sodden.

The Thais had pity on us because we'd sit on this concrete floor and people would begin to whinge. They were not comfortable. Can't you get comfortable on concrete? So feeling pity on us, feeling compassion, they arranged that each meditator would have their very own hessian bag—an empty hessian bag you could sit on during the Dhamma talks—which of course became completely sodden. So we're sitting in this hall on sodden hessian bags, dripping with water.

And he looks down on us and he says, "It's raining."

And you think, the rain is bad because you're sloshing around in the mud all day.

"Well, let me tell you something. On the other side of this hill, there are farmers who right now are dancing for joy in their fields, because this rain means that they can feed their families for another year. So you think the rain is bad. They think the rain is good. You're both wrong. The rain is wet."

And this is the highest truth of Buddhism.

That was the end of the talk. A very fitting and appropriate end. This is the ultimate simplicity that the

Buddha is getting at in this chorus. Rain is wet. I'm sitting here and it hurts. I'm sitting here and it's really nice. That's it. That's all there is.

But we're not satisfied with that. We're driven. "Oh, I want more of this. Oh, I don't want that. But if only I can negotiate it so that I can get what I want, then I'll be okay. Then I'll be able to meditate." Endlessly. And this is just endlessly adding complication upon complication upon complication.

But the practice is taking us towards radical simplicity. And if we hit it, we actually find out what the Buddha is talking about.

Okay, that's enough for tonight. Any questions?

Let me anticipate one question. No, it won't work if next time it rains you just go outside. That shortcut doesn't work. Believe me, I've tried.

Any questions?

"I have a question. Sometimes in the news, you hear about people who have just responded in a moment to a situation. You know, like you've probably all been in that situation where somebody drops something and you just pick it up—there's no thought, it's more of an impulse. Sometimes you can see these poor people that the news reporters have got hold of and made a story out of, and they say, 'Oh, you caught some child, or something that was falling.' And I think these poor people, they just don't look at the camera—I don't know—because you get the sense that there's no one doing it."

This is what the Chinese call no action. And in Zen it's quite significant. You just live. And there's no one living life. It's just life.

Thank you very much.

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