On 'The Burning Sutta' (Ādittapariyāya Sutta)

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 52:36

So tonight we're going to look at the world of affect. Last night we looked at the world of concept. We're coming at it from a different direction, but the way we'll do it tonight is by going through one discourse: the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta, or in English, "Burning."

This is the third full discourse of the Buddha, which he gave some months after his awakening. He became awakened at a place called Bodh Gaya, which is near the city of Gaya in what is now southern Bihar state, south of the Ganga. When he started teaching, he began his teaching career by walking northwest to a place called Isipatana, at Sarnath, just north of Varanasi.

He stayed there a number of weeks. He taught his first two discourses, he accumulated disciples, and then he decided to leave. At this point he had sixty bhikkhus, sixty monks, and all of them were fully awakened. He sends them out to teach. He says, "Wander, bhikkhus, for the blessing of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of devas and people. Do not two of you go by the same way. Teach the dhamma, which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the end, in both its spirit and its letter."

Interestingly, he sends them off alone—not even two by two. This is no more than three months since his awakening, but he's already got sixty students in whom he has such confidence that he sends them off alone to wander and teach.

The Buddha has his own plans. He says, "I shall go to Uruvela, to Senanigama, to teach the dhamma." What he's doing here is retracing his steps, going back towards Gaya. Uruvela is to the southwest, on the near side of the Naranjana River. This is the river that flows through Bodh Gaya, and Gaya, the city itself, is on the far side of the river. He's aiming for the near side.

Now, this area is the Buddha's old stamping ground. This is where he did his ascetic practices, so he knows this area quite well. He knows the people in it, he knows the ascetics who are practicing there. And it's a good bet that the ascetics there know him—but they don't know him as the Buddha. They know him as a fellow ascetic who disappeared at one point. Now, several months later, he's turning up again, and this time he claims to be the Buddha.

He's going there for a very definite reason. He's on a missionary journey, and he has a very clear target, someone very specific that he wants to convert. With this mission in mind, he enters the territory of the Jaṭila, the dreadlock wearers. These are ascetics who wear dreadlocks and not much else. There are three brothers who are leaders of this particular sect: Kassapa of Uruvela, who's the head of five hundred

ascetics; Kassapa of the River, head of three hundred ascetics; and Kassapa of Gaya, head of two hundred ascetics. They're listed in order of their importance, and they're all living along this river. The one furthest upstream is Kassapa of Uruvela, who has the five hundred ascetics. He's the big guy, the number one. His hermitage is located at Senanigama, which is why the Buddha's going there.

These ascetics belong to a sect that combines aspects of the Northwestern Brahmanic tradition—what we know as Hinduism, and particularly the role of the Brahmins—which comes out of what is now Pakistan, out of the Northwest. Over the centuries, it gradually went southeast through the Ganges Valley. At the time of the Buddha, in this area in the mid to lower reaches of the Ganga, the Brahmanic tradition was relatively weak and the old indigenous traditions were very strong. This sect combines both of these. We'll talk more about them as we go through.

So the Buddha heads to the hermitage of Kassapa of Uruvela. He would have known him—either he'd met him before or he knows him by reputation, one or the other. This guy used to be a neighbor and he's very important. The Buddha rocks into town, goes up to Kassapa, and says, "Kassapa, if you have no objection, I should like to spend one night in your fire chamber." Basically, he turns up as a house guest.

And Kassapa says, "I have no objection, great Samana."

Now notice what he calls him—great Samana. The Samanas are the non-Brahman ascetics and practitioners. So Kassapa is a Samana. The Buddha is a Samana. Kassapa doesn't know him as the Buddha; he knows him as a Samana, as a practitioner, but a great practitioner. Everybody has a lot of respect for him.

"I have no objection, great Samana, but there is a savage royal Naga there. He has supernormal powers. He is venomous, fearfully poisonous, and he's quite capable of killing you."

So you get this dialogue between these two big figures. One's the local king, and the other—it's like the gunslinger who walks into town, throws open the door of the saloon, and strides in. Kassapa is giving a clear warning to this visitor: mess with our patron spirit at your own risk. The naga is a serpent, of course, a serpent spirit.

So the Buddha walks in as the macho man, saying, "Yeah, I'll just stay the night in your fire chamber." In other words, he's going to stay the night in the residence of a powerful spirit who doesn't like being disturbed, who is associated with the elements of earth, fire, and water, who is a shapeshifter. What the Buddha is doing is an absolute no-no—absolutely not. You do not just barge into the personal territory of a powerful spirit. In Australian Indigenous tradition, it's the same thing. You just don't barge in. Not if you know what's good for you. If you're going to go in, you ask for permission and you'd be very careful about it. But the Buddha's not doing any of this. He's just marching up saying, "Yeah, I'd like to sleep here."

So Kassapa says, "Sure, go ahead."

The Buddha walks in and makes himself comfortable. And the Naga, the serpent spirit, is really seriously displeased. So he produces smoke and flame to chase away this stranger. And the Buddha also produces smoke and flame. You can produce smoke and flame; I can produce smoke and flame. But the Buddha does it carefully so that it doesn't harm the Naga. The Buddha is a powerful shaman here—we have his shamanism coming out—but he also acts out of love and compassion. He doesn't hurt anybody. He doesn't harm anybody.

So the Naga angrily blazes up with flames. And then the Buddha enters into the fire element and he blazes up in flames. Our text says that with both of them ablaze, it was like the fire chamber itself was in flames, burning and blazing.

Now, by this stage, everybody has gathered around watching the show. They're watching this huge fire burning and consuming the fire chamber—except the fire chamber stays; it remains unburnt. And they say to each other, "The great Samana who is so beautiful is being destroyed by the Naga." You notice how the Buddha is perceived by others. His appearance was very striking. There are many comments about that, about people who meet him—the first thing they notice is how good-looking he is.

So you've got this fire show all night, and of course by the end of it, as far as the ascetics are concerned, there can't be much left of this character. And in the morning, out walks the Buddha holding his bowl. It's got a lid on the bowl. He walks up to Kassapa and lifts the lid. Kassapa looks in, and there is a tiny little snake. The Buddha explains how the Naga's fire was exhausted by his fire, the Buddha's fire. In other words, he's had this macho pitched battle with this powerful spirit and he wins absolutely convincingly, showing Kassapa the evidence.

And Kassapa thinks that the Buddha must be very, very powerful. But this visitor is not fully awakened like he, Kassapa, is. Because Kassapa thinks he's fully awakened.

So what the Buddha is doing here—he's putting on a performance as a mighty shaman. His audience is Kassapa. And what he's doing is challenging him. Kassapa's practice revolves around the elements, and fire element is very important to him. The Buddha, without saying it, is declaring: I am more powerful than you, and therefore I am your superior. He's showing himself to be a master of one-upmanship.

But Kassapa is not convinced, because Kassapa feels that power is one thing but awakening is another. So he respects the Buddha's power and welcomes him into the community as an honored guest—although one he treats very carefully. The Buddha is given a hut outside the main area, tucked away in a little grove.

But Kāsyapa does not take a demonstration of superior power as evidence of awakening. And therefore he doesn't take it as evidence that he, Kāsyapa, has got something to learn from this fellow.

Now, what you've got with Kāsyapa is first of all, he's very stubborn—very much like the Buddha himself, particularly the Buddha before he was awakened. But he also shows a very good instinct, because it's

absolutely correct that power and awakening are not the same. People often make the mistake of confusing the two. They go looking for the powerful guru or the powerful practice that blows your head off, and they think if it's powerful, it must be better. But this is not the case. Power is one thing. Awakening is entirely another.

And this perhaps indicates why the Buddha is so interested in him, because Kāsyapa is a man of wisdom. Yet he is deluded. He doesn't understand what awakening is. He thinks he's awakened, but the Buddha knows that he's not.

So the Buddha settles in as a kind of vaguely unwelcome guest—but the kind of guest you can't quite show the door to. And he stays there almost a month, performing ever more spectacular miracles, demonstrating shamanic power. I won't go through them all because that would take all night. But it's a very spectacular show, trying to convert Kāsyapa, yet always with the same result: Kāsyapa thinks, "Yes, he's very powerful, but he's not awakened like I am."

After about twenty-four days, almost a month, the Buddha's getting fed up with this game. He changes tack. He thinks, "This foolish fellow will continue thinking like this for a long time." So he changes tactics. He decides he has to generate some saṃvega in Kāsyapa. Saṃvega is a kind of spiritual fear or agitation. One old translation of it is "shock"—it's like, "Oh, I've got to do something about this."

And what the Buddha does is he verbally puts the boot in. He says, "Kāsyapa, you are not an arahant. You are not an awakened one. And you are not on the way to becoming one. There is nothing in your practice by which you might become an awakened one or enter into the way of becoming an awakened one." So he's giving a verbal bashing—bang, bang, bang—wake up!

Now finally Kāsyapa was convinced. It took almost a month. And why would Kāsyapa be convinced now? It's because over that month the Buddha had made it perfectly clear by his actions that he knew Kāsyapa's practice, and frankly he was much better at it than Kāsyapa was. So if anybody knows where this practice leads, it's the Buddha. And he clearly is saying this doesn't lead to awakening.

Kāsyapa, who's a very sincere character—although he had convinced himself that he was awakened, and he's in a difficult position to change tune because he's a big guru, a major figure in this region—he's prepared to give up this idea. He surrenders, and he converts.

But before he converts, he consults with his students: "Are you okay with this?" And they tell him, "We have long had faith in the great samaṇa. If you lead the highest life under him, we will do likewise." In other words, out of the five hundred students that Kāsyapa had, he was the last one to figure out what was going on. I find this very interesting because, in a sense, he's a typical leader—the last one to figure out what's going on.

And then, according to our text, the ascetics "took their hair"—so they shaved off their hair, their dreadlocks—their belongings, and their implements for the fire sacrifice, and they dropped them into the

water to be carried away. They took all this stuff and threw it in the river, in the Gaṅgā.

Now, why do they do this? Are they just throwing this stuff away? Are they saying, "Well, now we're Buddhists, so we don't have anything to do with this heathen shamanic stuff—get rid of it"? No, I don't think they are. What they're doing is making an offering to the devas who live in the river. They have a particular relationship with the gods and spirits who live in that river. Remember in the English language tradition, King Arthur got his sword Excalibur from the lady in the lake, a water spirit, and when he died he made sure he got back to the lake and threw the sword back in. What he was doing was not chucking it out—he was returning it. So that's what the ascetics are doing. They're not rejecting their gods; they're still paying their gods respect. They're giving back to the gods.

the implements which in their minds they got from them. But they're just changing their practice. Their way of practice has to be changed.

And this is typical of Buddhism. Buddhism absorbs. It doesn't simply reject. When Buddhism comes to a new culture, it doesn't say, "Okay, everything you practiced and believed in up until now, stop. You just do what we tell you to do." Rather, it absorbs what it feels to be good, to be wholesome, and encourages people to reject what is ethically unwholesome.

So all this equipment floats down the river and it comes to the territory of Kassapa of the River, the second brother. He fears that disaster has struck, so when he sees all this stuff flooding by, he heads upriver and goes to see Uruvela Kassapa. Uruvela Kassapa explains that he's converted, and Kassapa of the River says, "Is this better, Kassapa?" And Uruvela Kassapa says, "Yes, it is." And so that group converts. Then they shave and chuck all their stuff in the river, and the brother at the bottom of the hierarchy, Gayā Kassapa, he sees all this stuff floating down. He goes upriver and it's the same thing. So all of them convert, and then they're ready to be taught.

The Buddha takes them to a hill, Gayā Sīsa, where he teaches them this discourse on burning—the third teaching.

So after all that introduction, now we move into the discourse itself.

The Buddha has a thousand ascetics at the top of this hill. Now this hill is the one hill in the area. This is the flat plains of Southern Bihar, flat as a table. And in this area is one hill, Gayā Sīsa—Gayā Head. He takes them away from the river, across the land, and up to the top of that hill in order to teach them. We'll have a look at why he might do that later on.

But what he teaches them—he says, "Everything is burning. And what is this everything that is burning? The eye sensitivity is burning. Visual forms are burning. Visual awareness is burning. Visual contact is burning. And whatever feeling arises dependent upon visual contact, whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of obsession, with the fire of aversion, with the fire of delusion. Burning with birth, aging, and death, with sorrow,

lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

"The ear sensitivity is burning. The nose sensitivity is burning. The tongue sensitivity is burning. The body sensitivity is burning. The mind sensitivity is burning. Phenomena are burning. Mind awareness is burning. Mind contact is burning. And whatever feeling arises dependent upon mind contact, whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of obsession, with the fire of aversion, with the fire of delusion. Burning with birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair."

So this is the discourse, or at least the opening of it.

Now to get a bit of background here, the Buddha lived towards the end of the Vedic period, which was about 1500 to 500 BCE. The Vedic orthodoxy which was developing during this time and heading southeast is being shaken up and changed by the practices and ideas that are native to the Ganges Valley. And so you get this mixture starting to happen. The Buddha was part of this mixing.

Vedic worship centered around the elements like fire and rivers, and also the worship of heroic gods like Indra, the chanting of hymns, the performance of sacrifices. Fire was and is very important to Brahmins.

So traditional Brahmins keep three fires burning at their homes at all times. One to cook food, one to receive the offerings that are sacrificed, and one to ward off evil spirits. It was believed that the gods live in the fire. In fact, fire itself was a god—Agni—or is a god.

Now the dreadlocked ascetics, these are an offshoot. They're also focused on fire worship. They're also focused on shamanism and on sacrifice. They're not orthodox, but they're part of this broader tradition.

What the Buddha did in his teaching was reverse the Vedic symbolic imagery. Remember, he taught Nibbāna or Nirvāṇa—extinction, literally extinction, the going out of a fire. In other words, he inverts the image of fire. Fire becomes the problem; the going out of the fire becomes the solution. He completely reverses this Vedic imagery. This way of talking would really seize the attention of people who come out of this broader Vedic tradition, like this new audience of dreadlocked ascetics. So he's talking to them about burning—burning with obsession, burning with delusion, and so on. Clearly fire is not good. They're being taught something completely outside their expectations. This is completely new to them. This is quite shocking.

Now these ascetics—their practice revolved around a felt intimacy with the elements. It's a very powerful, direct practice, and it's largely focused on the body. It's very physical. A lot of physical labour, including preparing the fire sacrifice, ritual bathing. They would make a point of bathing in midwinter, in the coldest time of year, and so on. They're interested in fire and they're interested in water, the water of the sacred river.

These practices that they do are dependent upon specific conditions that they have to be able to fulfill.

Firstly, possessions—they need the ritual implements for performing their rituals. If you don't have these implements, you can't do it. Secondly, they're dependent upon certain places, the sacred places of river and forest.

Like elsewhere in the ancient world, spirits were very localized. A particular area is inhabited by particular spirits. When we had the welcome to country at the beginning of the retreat, we're talking about how a particular nation has a connection with a particular place. That connection is more than the physicality of the place—it includes the spirits who inhabit that area, and there's a very specific relationship. There's a sense in which you cannot do what you need to do if you're outside that area, because you don't have that immediate contact with the elements and with the spirits. The ascetics have that kind of relationship.

The Buddha's approach to practice that he's starting to teach them is very, very different. First of all, no special equipment is necessary. It's maximum simplicity. These days we do have equipment—we have nice meditation pads, cushions, a nice bell, and so on. But in ancient India, of course, you didn't need cushions and pads. You just sat on the ground. That's an approach to practice that does not require special implements. Maximum simplicity. And secondly, it's not limited to any special place. You can do it anywhere; one is free to move anywhere. This means that his approach to the practice is characterized by universalism. You see it before when he sends all his students out: wander wherever you like. There's no limitation. There are no special places that they need to confine themselves to. The tradition is portable. In fact, Buddhism is the first world religion, the first one that has this universal spirit.

So when the Buddha is teaching the ascetics, what does he do? First of all, they get rid of the implements that they normally depend upon. Then he takes them away from their familiar places. He takes them away from their sacred places. And he takes them to a place which is pretty much as opposite as possible to the place where they've been practising. They've been practising on the lowland close to a river, which of course is very low. He takes them to the highest place he can find in that region.

So he's telling them, without telling them, you don't need your sacred places.

And then he teaches them a felt intimacy with the elements in this burning. What is it that's burning? It's the six sensitivities. They have been practicing in a way that was intimate with the elements, and he's showing them another practice of intimacy with the elements, but it's turned around—it's a different style. The elements here come from the six sense fields: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, minding.

Now, these elements of experience are available to all of us, all the time. In other words, they're available to us right now. There's no need for special circumstances, spirits, sacred places, particular seasons. What's needed is an intimacy with the elemental qualities of experience—in other words, intimacy with vedana. This practice is all about vedana, the realm of affect. And you notice this intimacy comes via the body.

Now, when the Buddha talks about the human being, the two basic ways he does it are through the five aggregates, or five bundles, and the six sense fields. In his second discourse, he taught the five aggregates where he was teaching not-self, anatta, emptiness. And whenever the tradition talks about emptiness or not-self, they do it in relation to the five aggregates. So those of you who are familiar with Mahayana Buddhism—maybe Tibetan or Zen—you know about the Heart Sutra, which is all about emptiness. And it revolves around the five aggregates. This is very typical.

Now, if you look at the five aggregates—body, feeling (always important), perception, constructions, awareness—of the five, one is physical and four are non-physical. Then you look at the six senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, minding—of the six, five are physical and one is mental and non-physical. So it's a very different emphasis. It's a shift away from mind to body. But of course, as we've been discussing, you can't have body separate from mind, you can't have mind separate from body. But the emphasis here is quite distinct. It's focused on body. And the emphasis also is on the immediacy of experience.

This is contact. It's usually translated as contact. So looking at the first sensitivity, seeing—the eye sensitivity, visual forms, visual contact. Eye sensitivity, visual forms, visual awareness: the meeting of the three is contact. So experience is an event where at least three things come together—the sense sensitivity, what the sensitivity is sensitive to, and the awareness of it. These three things collide, bang, and something happens. And that connection, that collision, is contact. In Pali it's phassa, which literally means touch. So we are touched by experience through our sensitivities.

And when there's touch, there is affect or influence—vedana, feeling. And this link is very strong, as we've been discussing. And where is this contact clearest and most obvious? In the physical senses. That's where it's most obvious. So if we want to get in touch with the world of affect, of feeling—and this is something that arises with touch—then where would we go about looking for it? Well, the body. That's the obvious place: in the body, in the broad sense of the five physical senses. But the tradition also emphasizes in particular the fifth, which is touch sensitivity.

So there's an intimacy of experience. Experience is a stimulus—we're touched by something. And as soon as we are touched, we respond. This is contact and feeling. And this intimacy of stimulus is always available. It's always happening.

In other words, it's happening now, through the six senses, right now. So this is not an abstract third-person philosophical teaching. This is a felt, first-person teaching. It's about what's happening to us right now, and it's designed to bring us back to the feel of here and now. The feel of here and now is where everything is available. This is what the Buddha is teaching.

So we have touch and feeling, or contact and feeling, or touch and response—and it's already happening. This is really important when you work with vedanā, with feeling. I don't have to do anything to make this happen. It's already happening. We are already responding. We are already moved. We don't have to do

anything extra to respond. It's already happening.

"Burning"—this discourse points to the immediacy of experience. The use of the fire image puts an emphasis on the pain and drivenness of experience. There's a restless dissatisfaction at the heart of things, a dis-ease or an unease which is so subtle and so omnipresent that we've ceased to notice it. We notice our thoughts and our emotions blowing about in the wind, but we don't notice the restless, dissatisfied quality deep within the heart itself—the source of our restless thoughts and emotions.

So the practice of the senses begins with the acknowledgement of dukkha, of unease, and the need to become intimate with it. It's the opposite of avoiding. A lot of our thinking is really an avoidance strategy. "I don't find what's going on now amusing—I'll just have a little think about something." This practice is about not avoiding anything, but opening up to be intimate with what is happening right now, feeling our way into whatever is happening now.

The emphasis is on receptivity. And in particular, feeling or sensing what we normally resist or reject or overlook. Something is going on, and often it's something beneath normal awareness, and that something is subtly colouring everything that's happening. You notice how you can be going along and there can be just a slight shift in mood, and suddenly it's like you're living in a different world. The day is completely different. That mood shifts again—everything's different. This practice is all about what's underneath that's colouring everything above.

Now whatever it is, it's already here, and it's not a question of looking for it—because if we look for something, that implies it's something special that may not be discovered. It's not a question of looking for it. It's a question of feeling it, sensing what is already here, already happening.

As I said, as a practice style this would suggest something more receptive rather than active. In an active approach to meditation, we deliberately direct awareness to a meditation object and hold it in our awareness. For example, if breathing is my meditation object, I direct my awareness toward the movements of the breathing, and possibly I choose to do so in a specific area of the body—the abdomen or the nostrils—and then I hold my attention onto those movements. That's active.

In a receptive approach, we allow the meditation object to come to us. For example, if breathing is my meditation object, I begin with the obvious: that I am already breathing. I don't have to start doing anything special in order to breathe. It's obvious that I am already breathing. And then I let the experience of breathing come to me, rather than me going to it. It's more receptive. It can be the same object, but it's a different relationship.

In this scheme of the six senses, the emphasis is on the body. The sixth sensitivity is mind, mano. Its role in this scheme is that mind absorbs the data provided by the five physical senses, coordinates it, supplements it with its own particular form of data—mental data—and creates a sensual unity, a unity of the senses. If you consider your sense experience right now: right now there's seeing, hearing, smelling,

tasting, touching.

These are taking place now. Where are they taking place? They're taking place here. This practice emphasizes the here-ness of experience. Thought and story take us away from the here-ness of the sentient body to other places and to other times. The sense fields bring us back to here. Even mind is included in the sense of the here-ness of the mind.

So right now I am conceiving myself in my world. I'm creating an identity. I'm creating a world of concept. Where am I doing this? I'm doing it here. The mind creates worlds that are far distant in time and space. But where are these worlds being created and sustained? Here. So this practice is all about location—here.

You notice that with the ascetics, their practice is also about location, but their sense of location is that you have to have a special geographical area. And the Buddha is saying no, the special geographical area is the here that you have with you all of the time, that in fact you cannot escape.

Tracking the six sense fields as a practice centers on feeling, the world defined by affect. The world of concept is centered around story. The world of affect, of feeling, is more intimate than the world of story. It's fundamentally more real in the sense of its power, its power to move us. But paradoxically, it can be more difficult to notice, and we can have more resistance surrendering to it. We come to it primarily through the body. So our relationship to the body is absolutely central in this approach.

Now, one reason why we're attracted by stories, as we talked about, is because the mind has language, and it's the language of story. As human beings, we're fascinated by story. We're always interested in story. So we learn to listen to the language of the mind and to pay attention to it, to absorb ourselves in it.

The body also has a language. But it's different from the mind's language in that the body's language does not tell stories. The language of the body is sensational. And interestingly, the stories that the mind tells us are quite often false. But the body never lies. Everything it says is absolutely true. Yet we tend not to listen to it until it starts shouting at us, such as when we fall sick after a period of working too hard.

So this practice is very much about learning to listen to the physical senses—body in the broad sense, but body also in the narrow sense of touch sensitivity. The language of the mind tells us stories that involve the reality of time, of past and future. The language of the body is always about the present, always. The language of the mind tells us stories of places far away from here. And the language of the body is always about here, this place.

Vedanā is central to this. As we talked about, vedanā is associated with intimacy—intimacy with the immediate touch of the senses and with our response to that touch. As the Buddha says, the eye sensitivity is burning. Visual forms are burning. Visual awareness is burning. Visual contact is burning. And whatever feeling arises dependent upon visual contact, whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning. Whenever he talks about the senses, he talks first of all about the touch of the experience, and then he moves on to feeling. That's always central to it.

So when the sentient body is touched, it responds. And that response is motivated by feeling, by vedanā. We are moved by the touch of the experienced world. And as we said this morning, we're moved to hold on to what we experience as pleasant, to resist or reject what we experience as painful, and to ignore or be confused by what we experience as neither painful nor pleasant. Now this, as again we mentioned this morning, is not something that we have any choice about. It's just the way nature is.

It's just the way nature works.

So vedana, or feeling, represents the world as given, before we make any choice about it—but while we're already responding to it. These are the fundamental movements of the heart, and this discourse is directing our attention to these movements.

We are already entangled in the world of the senses. We are already moved. We are already responding. But what are we responding to? Are we responding to the fantasies that we create with our conceptual minds, or are we responding to the actuality of experience here and now?

The discourse goes on—we don't have time to explore it tonight—about the cooling down process. And it's basically the practice we've been doing over the past five days: recognising that the layers of meaning we construct on top of the immediacy of experience are just that—layers of meaning added on.

It's like we're building a skyscraper, and we tend to live in the penthouse. But in the practice, we're learning to move down, back to the ground, to get in touch with that foundation, to get as close as possible to what's actually happening here and now. And from here, we can then relate to the world of concept in a way which is much more useful.

The discourse ends like this: "As this explanation was being given"—and we've actually only looked at the first part of it—"the hearts of the thousand bhikkhus were liberated from the movements by not clinging." A thousand students became fully awakened.

This is actually, according to the tradition, the largest number of people to be awakened in one hit. It's one of the indications that the tradition considers this discourse very important—one of the ways they signal this. Numbers in the discourses are symbolic, as is typical of an oral society. You don't take them literally.

To return to the context of the discourse: Buddhism, the Buddha's organisation, is now getting very big. A month ago, he had sixty students. Now he's got over a thousand. It's exponential. And these characters are very well known in this area. The three Kassapa brothers are very distinguished gurus in this territory.

So what the Buddha has done is accelerate his rise as a top figure on the guru ladder. We don't have time to look at this in detail, but basically his career is now really starting to take off.

One of the things I like about this discourse, and in particular the stories around it, is that it shows the Buddha as a strategic thinker. He wants to establish Buddhism in this area. How to do it? He thinks: Kassapa. Uruvela Kassapa. Get him and I'm in. And he was right—he was in. And the rest, as they say, is

history.

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