The Third Jhāna

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:22:15

Today I want to talk about the third jhāna. Remember what we were saying: the pacing of the teachings will almost certainly not be the pacing of your practice, and if it is, we actually don't want that. Your optimal pacing of practice for this retreat may intersect the trajectory of the pacing of the teachings at one point, but it shouldn't more than that. You're going at your optimum pace for marination, for mastery.

So, the third jhāna. What does the Buddha say about the third jhāna? If you get hold of the text of the Pali Canon, it's about a shelf load full of volumes. I don't know if anyone's counted how many times he talks about jhāna in there, but it's really, really a lot—so much so that they barely print it again. They just say "as before, as before, as before." This gives you a sense of how much priority he put on the jhānas in his way of teaching.

That doesn't mean everyone needs to learn the jhānas. Some people think that. One of my teachers said, "If there's no jhāna, there's no liberation." I'm not sure I agree—we tend not to agree—but it does seem, looking at the Buddha, that he put considerable emphasis on this practice. There are, I think, two suttas where he really talks about mindfulness. I don't know how many suttas are in the whole Pali Canon—does anyone know roughly? A thousand? So two of those thousand are about mindfulness, one of which you'll be very familiar with: the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. And then there are a lot of suttas on jhāna practice. We've kind of inherited a sense of a norm that probably doesn't actually historically reflect the kinds of practice that certainly the monastics were doing.

Here he is speaking about the jhānas again, addressing a group of monks. He's just gone through the first and second jhāna, and then he says: "And furthermore, with the fading of pīti, with the fading of rapture, he—the monk practicing—remains in equanimity, mindful and alert, and physically sensitive to sukha. With the fading of rapture, he remains in equanimity, mindfulness, and physically sensitive to sukha. He enters and remains in the third jhāna. And of him, the noble ones, the enlightened ones, declare: 'Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding.'"

The monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the sukha divested of pīti—with the sukha, with the pīti removed, filtered out, gone from it. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with happiness divested of pīti, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with sukha divested of pīti.

And then comes a really gorgeous, appealing simile: "Just as in a pond of blue, white and red lotuses, there may be some of the blue, white or red lotuses which, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded,

suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those blue, white or red lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water. Even so, the monk permeates this very body with the sukha divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with sukha divested of rapture."

When we come to talk about jhāna factors, I couldn't find the sutta—it's possible that there are times when the Buddha actually says the first jhāna has five factors, the second jhāna has three factors, the third jhāna has two factors, and so on. But I couldn't find it. Anyway, most people agree that the third jhāna has only two jhāna factors: sukha and ekaggatā.

But this text I've just read from the Buddha says all this other business. It says, "With the fading of pīti, he remains in equanimity, mindful and alert." "Mindful" is sati, "equanimity" is upekkhā—in Pali you probably know those words. "Alert"—the actual word is sampajañña, which some people translate as "clearly comprehending." It goes a lot with the mindfulness language and is very prevalent in the mindfulness sutta.

So you've got these other elements or aspects that clearly the Buddha is pointing to, but they don't qualify as jhāna factors. I think there's something that—once you practice third jhāna, we'll see something similar in the fourth jhāna—there's something a little bit misleading about the Buddha's description. It's not at all the case that there isn't mindfulness and alertness and equanimity in the third jhāna—there absolutely is. But the primary nimitta is sukha without pīti, or actually sukha—pure sukha, if you like.

Now, pure sukha—sukha without piti—is actually quite a rare thing for a human being. Mostly, even in non-jhanic states, we experience happiness with a bit of that upwelling quality. Certainly when we're laughing or giggling, it has that kind of bubbling up to it, those proto-jhanic factors of piti and sukha within it. It's quite rare to have happiness without piti.

I use a word that I think is more accurate, speaking from an experiential point of view: the primary nimitta of the third jhana is peacefulness. And that peacefulness is almost unbelievably lovely. It is warm, tender, and very, very refined.

If you're ever in doubt—have I reached the next jhana?—one way of knowing is to ask: is it more refined than the jhana I've come from? You may have moved from something where the dominant element in the citta is happiness to a state where the dominant element is something like peacefulness. But if that peacefulness is not a total quantum leap in refinement, then it's unlikely you've moved from the second to the third jhana.

This is one thing to look for, and remember what I said: what's actually happening throughout the whole spectrum of the jhanas is this increasing refinement as we develop through them. That's one of the key elements.

There's something very lovely here. There's a warmth, a real tenderness. It has heart qualities in it, but in a very soft, undramatic way. Well, it might be dramatic when you first enter it—it really is

breathtaking—but the way those qualities pervade the space is not dramatic in terms of the heart qualities.

There's an increase in refinement. It's a very refined state, and I would say it's very beautiful. There's something again almost breathtakingly beautiful about it. It feels very healing. There's something about that space—bathing oneself and dissolving one's body and heart and mind in that space—that just feels naturally, organically healing. Again, in a very undramatic, quiet, but very powerful way in terms of healing the heart.

There's love in it. There's metta in it organically. You don't have to make that happen. All these qualities are just part of the radiant glow of that space, of that jhanic territory.

So yes, there's mindfulness. Yes, there's alertness. And yes, there's equanimity. But we would expect mindfulness and alertness in any jhana. Here, they may be upgraded quite a bit beyond what most people experience, unless you've really gotten into momentum on a mindfulness retreat where there's a lot of mindfulness and alertness.

And yes, there's equanimity. But let's come back to that one because most people who haven't experienced the third and fourth jhana—what one will understand by the word equanimity, based either on daily life or on insight meditation practice—we're really talking about a different level here, a different flavor. That's why I said it can be a little misleading if we focus on the other words right now. There is equanimity, and I'll come back to that.

In my experience and the way I teach this, the third jhana has three levels. I did read a text somewhere, I think in the Visuddhimagga, saying different jhanas break into three levels or two levels, but I don't recall it actually describing what those levels are. Whether this division I'm making based on experience and teaching experience corresponds to the Visuddhimagga, I don't personally mind either way. I just find this very helpful, and so do many others.

The first level—following the Buddha's lovely simile of a gorgeous cool pond in a hot climate, near the top, as there's a descent through the jhanas and one feels them that way—is characterized by what I would call contentment or satisfaction, or perhaps fulfillment, though that's a more complicated word. Something like contentment and satisfaction. But the level of contentment, the fullness, the degree of contentment and satisfaction at the beginning of the third jhana is unlikely to be something we've experienced in daily life. It's really of a different order.

The second level, the middle level, is where the peacefulness comes to dominate. But it feels like my peacefulness. I'm peaceful, this space here is peaceful. It's not that I'm thinking "mine, mine" and hanging onto it in any way. I say this only in contrast to the deeper level, the third level, which feels more like a realm.

of peacefulness. One's in a realm, one's in a vast space—or one has a sense, that's a better way to put

it—one has a sense of a space of peacefulness, a vast space pervaded by peacefulness, a world of peacefulness.

So at this point it really is—and I'll come back to this—it really is like I've entered a different world here. As opposed to first jhāna, second jhāna, where something extraordinary is happening in my body, in my citta, in my consciousness, in my energy body, here at times it can feel like I've really entered a different world.

So those are the three levels that I would demarcate and encourage people to find, but the order in which they will be revealed to you may not be one, two, three. In other words, you may find yourself first in the middle one or the third one. No rush. In time, they will all become apparent, and we want them to all become familiar. Just as we have mastery with regard to a jhāna—I can go there directly—you can also navigate within a jhāna. So if you wanted to, you can go from the fourth jhāna to the most superficial level of the third jhāna, that contentment. You can just jump to wherever.

No rush with that. It's part of the mastery. It's part of really knowing them. It will emerge just from everything that we've been doing—sitting with it, walking with it, being in it, but keeping the sensitivity, the antennae tuned, alive, alert, subtly discriminating, noticing and enjoying. And these things will get revealed.

So how does one access, how does one enter the third jhāna? One way is to just be in the second jhāna with the happiness, but really drink it. Really drink and drink and drink that happiness. Drink and drink and enjoy that drinking. We have a thirst we don't even recognize. And in a way we need to slake that thirst, just drink and drink and enjoy.

And at a certain point, one may realize, oh, the most prominent emotion has changed. It's actually gone from happiness to this satisfaction, to this contentment. Why? Because I've drunk enough. I've actually satisfied that thirst. And sometimes at first one may not realize that shift if it goes to that deeper level. But one way of moving here from the second to the third jhāna is really drink that happiness and really, really enjoy it and really open to all the things we've been saying. We need to really tune to it, really stay with it and take it in and bathe in it and enjoy it and drink it.

A second possibility, though, is that—as we've mentioned a couple of times, it's come up in questions—the happiness of the second jhāna has a range to it. At the shallow end, it's actually more rapturous. Technically speaking, it's got more pīti in it. And at the deep end of the second jhāna, it's got less pīti in it. The pīti is drained out. That's why the happiness there is more serene. That corresponds with the Buddha's description.

But in a way, there's a way of understanding the second jhāna as a kind of transition jhāna. Pīti and sukha in the first jhāna with a lot of pīti dominating. Less and less pīti all the way through the second jhāna until the pīti is drained out and you're just left with this purified sukha. That's one way of understanding it.

There's a kind of spectrum of less and less pīti, and correspondingly there's a spectrum of more and more subtilized happiness.

So you can either drink your fill with the happiness or go with this, ride the spectrum down into more and more subtlety.

Eventually, like all the other jhānas, if we're talking about mastery, you can just summon it. You don't need to go from the second jhāna. You don't need to do anything. You just remember the third jhāna and call it back by a subtle intention.

If one is going through letting the happiness get more and more subtle, it's absolutely, totally crucial that the attention needs to get increasingly subtle with it, and that you need to get really into it. Again, if it's like subtle pīti, subtle happiness, it doesn't need to be strong for me to totally relish it and totally enjoy it and totally get into it.

So if the attention is not fully maximally subtle, and if I'm not fully maximally enjoying it, what I will end up with is a state of peacefulness—or perhaps I will end up either getting lost or falling asleep, or with a kind of state of peacefulness that is actually slightly dull, slightly insensitive. And the peacefulness will not be so alluring and so magical in that way.

But even these words "dull" and "insensitive"—again, to most people, they mean something quite gross. At this level, we're talking about dullness. We're also talking about really subtle dullness, really subtle insensitivity. So compared to our normal state of consciousness, they're not gross, obvious defects.

But if I'm taking that second method of going down in terms of the subtlety of the happiness, I absolutely have to really be on my toes with the attention, really subtilizing the attention, really getting into it, really making sure I'm opening, enjoying, penetrating. So there's a slide, but where that slide takes us depends very much on what the mind is doing and what the relationship with it is.

What this all implies to me is that the safest bet is actually the first way: just drink that happiness. Drink it and drink it and drink it, open it, slake your thirst. This avoids that kind of satellite, non-jhanic state of equanimity or peacefulness.

As we've mentioned several times, it can be likely that one goes there because of the habitual tracks and momentum of previous insight meditation practice. If you practice mindfulness, once that gets going you're basically practicing a kind of let go, let go, let go, and as I'll come back to at the end today, that will take you into some state of equanimity. It's a very okay state—relatively speaking, it's a skillful state—but it's unlikely that it's the third jhana. If it's just, "Oh, I recognize this place from before, this kind of quiet place I've gotten to sometimes on retreats," it seems to match. There's peacefulness, there's mindfulness, there's equanimity, there's alertness, but it's unlikely to be the third jhana. It might be, but it's unlikely.

Again, what this partly implies to me is maybe safest to go with the first approach: drink, drink, drink the

happiness. See if you can keep it at a certain bandwidth where it's really obvious happiness and not something quite subtle.

It may be possible that that kind of non-jhanic equanimity, peacefulness state can get kind of nudged, maneuvered into a jhanic state like the third jhana. If you hang out there—this state you remember from insight retreats—and if you hang out there, but the attention has to be really, really alive, really subtle, and really maximizing the enjoyment. Really trying to find what's most pleasurable. It may be possible for some people that this more familiar insight state of equanimity, with very careful work and play, becomes the third jhana.

But you'll much more likely have more likable and much clearer experiences of the third jhana if you go through the second jhana in one of the ways I was talking about, more likely that drinking approach. You'll more likely end up in what's definitely jhana territory rather than a sort of relatively skillful but only relatively skillful peace or equanimity.

In relation to differentiating this third jhana from those kind of relatively peaceful states that we might know of equanimity or peace, what we might call satellite states: the third jhana is breathtakingly touching. There's something that touches the being, impresses on the body, the heart, the soul, very profoundly. It's really very touching. There's a beauty there. It's very beautiful, really an extraordinary state, and it really does impress on the whole being.

So yes, this differentiation between states—and remember I said I contradict myself many times, and sometimes we don't need to worry so much about am I in it, am I out, where exactly is the boundary. Instead, just work and play with this care, which gets very fine now. The work and play is still sassy, still sassy at this level. Rather than am I in, am I out, just keep playing with the sassy and let your work and play be also quite subtle and intense, but in this very subtle, very gentle way. I have to learn how to work intensely without being too crude and too heavy-handed and too pressured.

I can't remember if it was in the Pali Canon—something the Buddha said—but it might be in the Visuddhimagga. There's a simile of a desert traveler, someone who's been walking for days and days across a desert, going from somewhere to somewhere. They're parched with thirst and weary and dirty, sand everywhere, staggering along. Then in the distance they see—or even someone tells them—they see an oasis. That relief and glee and excitement that they feel corresponds to the first jhana. It's not a mirage; it's an actual oasis.

The second jhana in this simile: they reach the oasis and flop down by the side of it on their hands and knees and just drink and drink and drink that cool water. Their thirst, which has built up over wandering the desert—samsara, basically—their thirst begins to be slaked. They need to drink a lot; they're pretty dehydrated. They need to drink and drink and drink.

The third jhana: at a certain point, they just decide, "I'm just going to get in." They just immerse

themselves into this beautiful, cool, spring-fed pond with lotuses. They just dunk themselves and wash their body and submerge themselves and drink some more.

Like I said, the ordinary usage in English of words like happiness and peacefulness and equanimity doesn't really capture the kind of degree and depth and beauty and impact, the whole other level that we're talking about here with jhanic factors and jhanic words. And certainly when you get to the third jhana, that's the case.

A little bit about working in the third jhana. As I mentioned, the third level feels like a kind of sense of a realm, of a much wider, perhaps a vaster space even. But this is quite important: the focus within that sense of "I'm in a whole other world here"—the focus, the primary focus—needs to still be the whole body space, the energy body space. You can still be aware you're really in this other realm, but the jhana will only stabilize and deepen and you'll only get its maximal fruits if the primary focus is on the whole body space, just actually a bit bigger. So it might be as much as two feet in front of you, that sort of space around the energy body.

You work with the same—you might work with these two modes of attention, the narrow focus penetrating or the wide open receiving, abandoning, surrendering, or you might find others: wrapping around or dissolving into, all kinds. But basically the focus is the energy body and moving gently in a very unhurried way, playing with these different modes of attention. That's what's going to consolidate it, allow it to get deeper.

So in the third level, the sense of that realm, that sort of vast realm is still there, but it's not the primary focus. Yet we can still be touched by it, allow ourselves to have a sense of the appreciation of that lovely space, that larger lovely space. Appreciate it, be touched by it—that kind of otherworldly sense.

The sense of really visiting another realm, of being admitted into another kind of more blessed realm in a way. When I say the primary focus is with the whole body and the energy body, it doesn't mean that I'm still not aware of this realm and I can't still feel the beauty of that and the loveliness of that. One can kind of invite or imagine bringing in that sense of peacefulness from the bigger space, or just allow it in, opening the energy body space to it. In some way or another, all that lovely, lovely peacefulness from that space—you bring it into the energy body if you need to.

Sometimes what happens—and this should only be the kind of thing that happens and that you're playing with after you've had quite a lot of experience with the third jhana—is that it hasn't quite settled yet. It's not quite consolidated. I'm not quite into it yet, though I've had many experiences before of it. All I can find then is like a filament, the barest, subtlest sort of magical thread, very, very faint, very subtle, that has the taste of that peacefulness.

All I can find is one, and maybe it's in one place in my body. When I say body, it might be the anatomical body—in my belly, or whatever—or it might be the energy body, remembering that when I say whole

body, it means the space, right? I'm not necessarily correlating it with any part of my anatomy. It's just somewhere in this space, but it feels like it's connected with my body. Usually things feel like they start getting lower down. The center of the attention starts getting lower down. Maybe even the place where initially, in this case, the peacefulness is stronger is lower down the body. That's common, but there are always exceptions. Eventually, obviously, we want the whole space to be filled with that peacefulness.

But sometimes what happens, with a lot of experience, and this session it's not quite going so well, but it's fine—I can tell I just need to play a little bit. All I can find is this one really, really subtle thread. I start to follow that. I'm tuning to it and I'm just enjoying that thread and attuning the attention to it and finding the beauty in it. Just that relationship with that thread, so to speak, that filament of it starts to allow the whole thing to spread, starts to allow the peacefulness, the fabric of that filament, of that thread to spread throughout the whole space. Often by itself. You can still do the spreading stuff, of course, but often you'll find it just spreads by itself at this point.

Something similar can happen with the second jhana. If you've had a lot of experience with the second jhana, a really clear experience with it, going in and out many times, then sometimes again it's sort of, "Oh, today's not quite kind of got into it," or "It's there, but it's really not strong." It's kind of in boundary territory, in borderline territory. Again, sometimes it might be a trickle—I'm drinking from a trickle, just a little trickle from a fountain, but I'm drinking it and I'm really enjoying it. If I don't get into that "oh, it was better yesterday" or whatever, and I'm just really drinking, then that trickle—I follow that trickle, I tune to its qualities, I enjoy it, all the same things—and it can build from there.

In a way it's true for the first jhana because of how we've been talking about the two possibilities of pīti arising, that one of them is like the ember and glowing.

Sometimes what happens with, again, with quite a bit of experience with the third jhana already—remember, when you encounter a new territory, a new jhanic territory, a new level of consciousness, whatever you want to call it, a new state of consciousness, the first few experiences are often like a dam bursting. Everything is perfect and wow, and there's no effort involved, or very little effort. After a while, then it's like, "Oh, then certain subtle work, subtle play is obviously needed." It's not that one's gone backwards. This is just the natural maturation of things.

If one is not noticing subtle work and play, I would say I'm not sure that one is practicing what the Buddha would call right concentration, because there isn't that degree of sensitive, subtle discernment to actually notice, "Oh, I see, that's different," or this thing or that thing.

One of the things that one can notice after a while that can happen sometimes is that it's almost like there's a mental aspect of this lovely peacefulness, this gorgeous peacefulness, and there's, so to speak, a physical aspect of this gorgeous peacefulness—in other words, felt in the energy body—and they can become separated sometimes. The mental and the physical peacefulness can become separated. We want them integrated. We want the whole thing. Clearly jhanic experiences have integrated all these elements,

so we want them integrated.

It could be that you've practiced really a fair amount with the third jhana, in and out, and you've really got used to it, and then you start to notice this sometimes. Occasionally you start to notice this. It could be that either of those comes first. I'm experiencing a mental peacefulness that I recognize from the third jhana but not the bodily, or the other way around. It could be either, but they're not integrated. One is present, one is not absent.

The breath can really help integrate them, or I suppose the metta at that point. But the breath, particularly if you've been doing breath practice, is something that the mind can follow—not just follow with attention, but the way the breath is tells us how the mind is. The way someone's breath is, you know this at a very gross level—the mind and breath are quite related. So bringing the breath back in, if you've been working with the breath, can be quite helpful at integrating the mental and the physical.

This is why this relationship between breath and mind is so significant. Mostly we're taught not to manipulate the breath in meditation, right? You just watch it. But how my breath is at any moment does reflect how my mind is at any moment. And so, in a way, the mind is shaping the breath. But it also—like so many things, if the causality seems to work one way, it often works the other way too. If I shape the breath, I can affect my mind.

That's why when we started with those really long breaths and with the energy body breathing—really long breaths—because we often need more energy. And that's why the Anapanasati Sutta starts with breathing in long, then breathing in short. To me it's deliberate because the manipulation of the breath manipulates the mind, which if you're trying to settle the mind is what you're trying to do anyway. So you actually settle the mind, shape the mind through playing gently, subtly, responsively with the breath.

The breath integrates or is a bridge that straddles body and mind. And so at this point, if the mental peacefulness is there but the bodily peacefulness is not, or vice versa, bringing the breath back in can help. It's one of the things that can help integrate them.

But really with these rupa jhanas, with these first four jhanas—body, body, body, body, body—it's maybe more likely for people to feel like they're experiencing a mental peacefulness but there really isn't the sense of that peacefulness pervading the body to that degree. So as I said, there may be a thread or just a place in the energy body. It's just a location in this space of the energy body. It may be very, very subtle. And tuning to that, focusing on it, following it, enjoying it can help.

Or it may be there's a sense of this realm. Maybe I've already got a sense of the third level, but it's still not integrated and settled. And I want to kind of immerse the body in that realm, immerse the body in the peacefulness. But I have to get the body involved.

Always you hear in the Buddha's description—he says it in each short paragraph, he says it twice—about getting the whole body involved. "No spot untouched, pervading, suffusing." Over and over again: body, body, body with these form jhanas. So I really have to make sure I work to get the body sense filled like that and really involved and really pervaded.

I can immerse my body in this space of peacefulness. I can dissolve my body out, so to speak. I dissolve my energy body out into that peacefulness, or I dissolve the peacefulness into the body. But so much has to do with tuning again. What's happening in each jhana is not that we're paying attention to one small physical location or keeping our mind fixed on one small location in space. We're tuning to a certain frequency, and the frequency that we're tuning to in the third jhana is very, very refined.

So it's really about tuning at this point—tuning to that radio station that has that really otherworldly, transcendently peaceful music. And I just want to learn to tune there and really get that fine tuning, and then pay attention, attune, and let things amplify from there.

Experientially, the third jhana is—there's a quantum jump in stillness from the first to the second jhana, and then there's a whole other quantum jump in stillness from the second to the third. So it's a very still state. And sometimes people's initial descriptions when they first enter it in an interview, they say, "Oh, it was really still." It is very still compared to what most human beings will ever have remotely come near experiencing. But yet there is actually a very, very subtle, gentle movement in it. It's possible that there are very, very subtle, gentle movements within it.

Almost—if the breath is your base practice—it's almost as if you'd forgotten about the breath and then it's almost like it can re-emerge at this point, but just really, really faint echoes of the breath. It's like one is almost not sure: is that the breath or is that me just imagining a very subtle breath? In a way, it doesn't matter, but there can be this very gentle breath or very faint echoes of the breath, whatever it is, and they carry this very subtle, gentle movement that's somehow there within the stillness.

It doesn't in any way disturb the stillness, this movement. So it's almost like the very gentle movement is somehow integrated into the stillness without disturbing it. The movement itself, this very gentle movement, seems itself—the very movement seems to express stillness, which in English is a contradiction in words. But there's something very beautiful about the movement, so it seems to really manifest or express this lovely stillness.

The image I had, and I think I've shared it with a few of you, might be helpful as a gentle guide at certain moments. Imagine a lagoon or pond with fairly deep water, and beneath the surface, a few long strands of seaweed swaying really, really gently and slowly. There may be some movement in your experience that's akin to this graceful underwater dance. This movement might manifest with the breath or something else entirely.

As I mentioned, if breath has been your base practice, it may reemerge at this point and reintegrate

naturally. After giving all your attention to piti and sukha, after all that delightful commotion and bubbliness, the breath begins to surface again—almost as if saying, "Oh, I can notice it again, and I can welcome it back." But it's very subtle, very delicate.

The breath has become peacefulness itself. Just as the body has transformed into peacefulness, the breath too has become peacefulness. This gentle swaying movement, like that underwater seaweed, expresses peace through its very motion. The movement itself manifests stillness—a beautiful paradox that transcends ordinary language.

Let's think about jhana factors as ingredients in cooking or alchemy, whichever metaphor resonates with you. Working backward from the Buddha's definitions: the first jhana contains both piti and sukha, with piti being prominent. The second jhana spans a range where both sukha and piti are present, but throughout this range, piti gradually filters out. The third jhana contains sukha without piti—the effervescent quality has been completely refined away.

This understanding opens up fascinating possibilities. When I'm established in third jhana, if I want to explore second jhana, I can simply take some piti from the shelf, so to speak, and add a measured amount. Depending on how much I incorporate, I'll find myself in different regions of the second jhana. A little piti takes me to the deeper end of second jhana; more piti brings me to the more effervescent, bubbly regions.

This is part of the art, the creative range possible in this practice—consciously titrating jhana factors to build or open particular states. The same principle applies to fourth jhana, where sukha too has dissolved. If I'm in fourth jhana and add sukha back, I return to third jhana. A whole alchemy of possibilities emerges—mixing ingredients, exploring the spectrum of consciousness with intention and skill.

As the third jhana deepens, you may notice something remarkable quite early in your explorations. If your senses remain open—and the Buddha is very clear that closing the senses is not necessary in the first four jhanas—you continue hearing birds, traffic, or other sounds. What becomes extraordinary is that all phenomena begin to be perceived as having one taste.

This taste pervades not just the inner landscape of jhana but extends into the world of the senses. Even unpleasant sounds—drilling, lawnmowers, harsh noises—begin to carry this same taste of beautiful, profound peacefulness. A cosmic deep okayness spreads throughout everything, and all of existence seems imbued with this singular flavor of peace.

This experience naturally extends beyond formal meditation. When you rise from sitting and move into informal practice—walking, having tea, simply being present—pay attention to what I call the aftereffects on perception. This is a crucial concept that probably becomes most clear here in third jhana and grows increasingly significant as we progress through the deeper states.

In these aftereffects, while remaining open, sensitive, and present, you'll notice that the world itself appears imbued with that gorgeous, delicious, almost mystical peacefulness. It's as if this peace is revealed

as the very nature of things—not something imposed upon reality, but the fundamental fabric of existence itself.

Peace is the fabric of the cosmos.

This is pointing to what is probably the most significant thing in the Dharma. We have to pick it up though. We have to make the connections and we have to see it and understand it and see it many, many times through this kind of experience, through other related kinds of insight experience.

But it's pointing to the dependent arising of perception. The world, how the world appears to me, the very world that I live in is dependent on how I look at it. So everyone is living in the same world where we are, but we also aren't. Dependent arising. The world is empty of being this way or that way, ultimately. Any one thing is empty of being this way or that way ultimately.

And one way, and I think one of the most powerful ways and one of the ways I like to emphasize in teaching is seeing that through—again, we're back to—through playing with perception and seeing the effects of this way of looking on the perception of self, other, world, time, everything. And then playing with that way of looking and seeing the effects on perception of self, other, world, time, phenomena. And then another way of perceiving, another way of perceiving. And actually one can integrate the whole of the Dharma into that exploration or even sum up the whole of the Dharma as that exploration. The most significant thing, dharmically, I would say.

So even something like generosity, we don't tend to think of that as playing with perception. But if you practice generosity and you pay attention and sometimes you practice a really radical generosity and see what happens to the perception of self, of other, of world. The whole of the Dharma, all the qualities that the Buddha is pointing to, can be seen to be integrated into a certain movement of exploration, which is this exploration of dependent arising through playing with perception. The appearance of the world, the whole world depends on how I'm looking at any moment.

So we could also say that's a teaching about karma. Where am I reborn? Do you understand that? Do you understand how that makes sense?

Another way of saying all this is a teaching on karma. If I, let's say... Let's take two things. Let's take two pairs. Kindness or unkindness and generosity or stinginess. Kindness or unkindness, generosity and stinginess. And I practice those things. I practice stinginess to different degrees. And I notice the effect on how myself feels. Not that I'm judging myself so much, but just how does myself feel? How does my energy body feel? How does myself feel more solid, more contracted? How does the world feel? Do I feel connected with the world or does the world feel somehow separate? Do I feel a kind of oneness or do I feel a separation? All these things.

Same thing with kindness. I practice unkindness or kindness or I practice generosity. So basically what you'll realize, what you'll come to realize, if you pay careful attention to these things, really go for it as a

practice, is that the world I actually perceive that I live in can either be, if I practice a lot of unkindness and a lot of stinginess, I will perceive the world as a hostile place more and more. A cold, barren, hostile place. I have to keep looking over my shoulder. There won't be a sense of the world is a lovely place full of love and warmth and actually somehow we're all one despite the appearances of separateness. The energy body will feel brittle and hard and separate and cold and all the rest of it.

So these are just everyday examples outside of meditation. What happens in meditation is you're taking some of those kinds of things and just cranking them up to a whole other level of power where the effects on perception of self, other, world and all that just become way more powerfully obvious. Does that make sense?

So one way of understanding what actually holds everything in the Dharma together is that exploration. So we will return to this just because it's so important. And as I said, it's even more important when we get to the formless jhānas. But this whole shifts in perception with different ways of looking. We call it the dependent arising of perception, the dependent arising of the world, dependent arising of the self. I need to see that loads of times and let it really impress on the citta. So it's through repetition but also again through extending the degree of range of ways of looking, how many and also how powerful they are.

We can think of that also as a teaching about karma. I practice this, I do this or I think this repeatedly or I view the world repeatedly and I will end up being reborn.

I don't mean a thousand years from now, I mean now—and ten minutes from now, whatever—I would end up being reborn in a world that's colored a certain way. And if I practice kindness and generosity and all the other lovely, really good stuff, I'm reborn in a world. It's the same world, but actually it's very, very different. I'll talk about it again.

We need to see that so many times and see it over so many different kinds of ways of looking, really making the connection. Actually, I have to put this whole idea—I have to, in a way, load it in as a cartridge as the whole way I'm seeing practice, and then follow through with it and then see what it does. If I don't do that, it won't impress so deeply, and I have to do that many, many times through a range of different, variously powerful practice and a range of kinds of practice.

Until we get it and the heart, the citta, gets something really deeply and it's profoundly liberating, there's a mystical beauty and wonder that comes from that, from the kind of insight that comes from that. I would say an insight of a whole other level.

Going back to something I said before, there are three things we can extract out here experientially, and then relate them to insight.

Experientially, I can have—one can have—in the third jhana this sense of one taste. Either in the meditation or outside, everything has this one taste. And so there is actually less duality. Once one opens repeatedly to that experience, there's less duality between the jhana and not-jhana, or meditation and the

rest of the world, or even the jhanic realm and the rest of the world. One sees that actually that's the nature of the whole world.

So there's less duality between a place I need to get to and the rest of the world, because all of it has this one taste of peacefulness. Does that make sense? So that's a certain opening and perception that we can have that's very fruitful. We could call it—let's just stick the label on it for now—kind of non-dualistic between jhana and the world, let's say. The jhanic realm and the worldly realm.

But sometimes we can have a much more dualistic sense of the jhanas. They are—and there's a passage, I think it's in the Majjhima Nikaya, there's certainly more than one passage, where the Buddha describes each jhana as an escape. Nisarana is the Pali. So they're realms of escape.

So this lovely, gorgeous realm of peacefulness is a realm of escape from the world. He's actually describing Sariputta meditating. I think it's Sariputta who says, "Actually there's a better escape than the first jhana—the second jhana. That's a better escape than the first jhana." Then in the second jhana, after a certain time, there's a better escape. The third jhana is a better escape from the world than the second jhana, et cetera, et cetera, all the way through.

Nisarana—now it's true that word can mean other things. It can mean things like just a sort of result, or when something issues in something else, like a result, or it can mean a flowing out. But it's also related to the word nis, which is a prefix that means "out" or "outside" or "going out," and sarana is a word you may know: "Saranam Buddhang saranam gachami"—what does that mean? Refuge or shelter. So a jhana as a refuge outside—outside of the world.

And experientially, to me, there is very much that thrust in the Buddha's teachings. Again, in the context of really looking at the Pali Canon and noticing how much he talks about jhana, how much he talks about not being reborn, et cetera. Let's not go there right now. It can also mean leaving behind.

But there's a case for—he's really saying there's this escape from the world. And there are other escapes from the world: the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth jhanas, et cetera. You could say they're also an escape then from the non-peacefulness that characterizes the world. They're an escape from the non-sukha that characterizes the body as it's usually experienced, and the mind as it's usually experienced, and the world as it's usually experienced.

There's quite a dualistic teaching. And it points the way, or paves the way even—each jhana is a step or a further escape. It paves the way for the total escape of the arahant not to be reborn into this world.

So we've got this non-dualistic teaching, or this kind of non-dualistic teaching—everything's all one taste, world and meditation. And then we've got this kind of dualistic teaching—meditation or jhana as escape from the world. And what I would like to stress is actually that we can have both of those as experiences, and they're both very valid.

And we shouldn't make a duality between duality and non-duality. To me, that's really, really important, because some of the most entrenched, unbudgeable, dualistic thinking people I've met call themselves non-dualists. To me, that's actually really, really important.

So both as experiences, both of these are blessings that we can enter this realm. You know, I've been very sick and in a lot of pain and just to be able to go into a realm where there's none of that, there's no discomfort—it's really a blessing and really a gift. But one can also have the other view. Everything becomes that. So they're just views. They're just views that we can move between.

What's the deeper view between, what's deeper than these two views, is this third thing that we were talking about: dependent arising. Because dependent arising, when I really understand that, legitimizes and opens the door for all kinds of different views. One can view dualistically and one can view so-called non-dualistically. One understands this or that perception arises dependently. It's empty and that gives me freedom.

There's no perception of anything that is not empty. Since all perceptions are empty, in a way, there's not a hierarchy. There's not an intrinsic hierarchy. There's a hierarchy dependent on what I might want at any time. I might want to reduce suffering, but then, okay, which way of reducing suffering right now helps the best? The hierarchy is not intrinsic. It's not, so to speak, ontologically intrinsic, but it might be practically. One might hierarchize practically, so to speak.

So a realm of escape, in this case, from the usual realm, which is non-peacefulness and non-sukha, and that's the world. And that's the world as we know it. So how does this peacefulness arise? How does it arise? Peacefulness arises from the quieting, from the attenuating of the push and pull of the citta in relationship to phenomena. We push away what we don't like. I prefer this thing to that thing so I push that one away and pull this one towards me, or I prefer this one and I don't want it to go away so I keep pulling on it so it won't go away.

Now we all know that happens at an extremely gross level. We literally—don't leave me—and pulling someone or whatever it is or literally pushing something or someone away. But the amazing thing is it happens more subtly as well, and more subtly and more subtly, and we can trace that investigation into more and more subtlety, into more and more subtleness.

Peacefulness arises from attenuating the degree of push and pull. And the degree of peacefulness will correspond to just how much push and pull we let go of. Equanimity also, which is a kind of peacefulness we'll come back to, arises from lessening the push and pull in the moment. I'm talking about meditation—I'm not talking about ways of living. Equanimity also, which is a kind of peacefulness, arises from an attenuation of the mind's habitual moment-to-moment push and pull with experience.

So, practically speaking, the question arises: how do we attenuate? How do we reduce? How do we dampen the push and pull? If dampening the push and pull gives such profound rewards, then I want to

know how do I dampen the push and pull?

Well, in a way, drinking from the second jhana, drinking and drinking and drinking, as I described earlier, until satisfaction arises—in a way, that's dampening the push and pull, because satisfaction implies that I don't need to push and pull. If I'm satisfied, I don't need to change what's there. I don't need to pull this thing towards me. I don't need to push this thing away. I don't need to hang on to anything. I'm just satisfied.

So drinking the second jhana is, I don't know if it's officially the proximal cause of the third jhana, of the equanimity that the Buddha is talking about in the third jhana, that degree of equanimity. So the equanimity that Buddha's talking about in the third jhana—this is a little side note now—it's related to that kind of peacefulness and the sense of being in a realm that's just free of disturbance and kind of undisturbable, or that the one taste has spread everywhere and then it's just undisturbable. Undisturbable is another word for equanimity or imperturbable; the Buddha sometimes uses that word, not perturbable.

But one way that we might attenuate the push and pull is through just drinking and drinking from the second jhana. Another way, or actually a whole set of ways, is by deliberately practicing attenuating the push and pull. This is actually almost any insight way of looking—what I call insight ways of looking. Any insight way of looking is basically doing that. If it doesn't do that, it doesn't qualify for the name insight way of looking.

So there are loads of them and some of them it's very obvious that's what I'm doing. For instance, some of you will know this—if I'm working with what I call the second dukkha method, I'm actually feeling into the sense of pushing away or grabbing on or holding on. I'm feeling in, in the energy body, in the mind, in the subtle awareness to any sense of contraction, push and pull, and then I'm relaxing it.

And then I'm noticing another one, relaxing it, noticing another one, relaxing it. So it's very obvious that in a deliberate and sustained way, that's exactly what we're doing. And if we just keep doing that, a profound, lovely peacefulness will open up because the push and pull is being attenuated.

There's something else—practicing the view of anatta, of seeing phenomena as not-self, or practicing the view of seeing phenomena as impermanent, anicca. It's not often immediately obvious to people that that's what we're doing. When we see things as impermanent, moment to moment arising and passing, effectively what we're doing, as well as obviously seeing the impermanence, is that the result in the moment of seeing the impermanence—not ten years later, not even a month later, but in the moment—should be that because we see everything's flowing so fast, we just let go. We don't even have to think, "Oh, it's impermanent, therefore I should let go because I don't want to suffer a sense of loss." It just happens automatically.

It's like trying to catch sand that's pouring and pouring through a net with completely the wrong size meshing—it just keeps falling through. If you keep trying to catch it, you just haven't realized it's

impossible. You don't have to think about it; it's just obvious. Similarly, when we're practicing with impermanence, effectively what we're doing is attenuating the push and pull. And the same with anatta practice—actually the same with any of what I would call insight ways of looking. It's a deliberate moment-to-moment sustained attenuating of the push and pull with all phenomena, or just a certain set of phenomena that you've pre-circumscribed.

So that's the second way. A third way is going back to this other element we've already pinpointed—the one taste. If everything has one taste as its most salient characteristic, I don't need to choose. It's all the same. It's like I'm not going to choose this molecule of water over that molecule of water to drink—it's all just water. And so what's my reason for push and pull?

Now, I'm not talking about living your life that way—that would be utterly, utterly stupid. Some people get the idea that Buddhists are supposed to have that attitude to everything. I'm talking about a meditation practice that one does for a period of time for the sake of seeing what the results are, because it's telling. It's opening up a beautiful resource and space, and it's going to tell me something about emptiness and dependent arising, which is the most liberating insight or range of insight that I can have.

But if I, in some way or other, practice perceiving things with equality—there's equality, everything is the same somehow, either everything has the taste of love or it has the taste of this peacefulness, but everything is that—then just that perception, with no differentiation, there's nothing to hook any reason to push this away and pull that. Do you understand? That makes sense? So that's another way that one might practice in meditation.

In a way, those second and third approaches—deliberately practicing attenuating the push and pull and the one taste—are more insight practices. Primarily on this retreat, if we talk about how the push-pull gets attenuated so that the peacefulness can arise, it's primarily through the second jhāna and the satisfaction that comes there.

The same deal applies with the third jhāna, with mastery and everything we've been talking about. The different elements of mastery, which you already know, and the issues of pacing—when is it the right time for me to play with trying some of that? When is it premature? Am I being too heavy with it? Or can I keep it very light and very much like a game?

Now we've expanded our possibilities for leapfrog and ping-pong. You can jump—let's say you've been in the third jhāna and you can jump to the first, and then the third, and first. That's ping-pong: first, third, first, third. But it's also leapfrog, so it's a leapfrog ping-pong. Do you see? Or three, one, three, one, three, one, three, two, two... You get the idea. You start to move in any permutation and combination just at the end of sittings for fun. You're exercising the malleability of ways of looking, and it's an element of mastery.

So including going out of any jhāna at all—let's just go back to normal consciousness and then jump from

there to the second or the third or whatever it is. These are little games you can have in the last five or ten minutes if there are batteries left, if there's energy left.

Okay, so let's stop there and have a bit of quiet together.

Thank you everybody.

These are little games you can explore in the final five or ten minutes of your sitting if there's still energy remaining, if the batteries haven't run down completely.

The invitation is to exercise the malleability of ways of looking—it's truly an element of mastery. This includes the capacity to step outside any jhanic genre altogether, returning to ordinary consciousness and then leaping directly from there to the second or third jhana, or wherever your practice naturally takes you.

So let us pause here and rest together in some quiet.

Thank you, everyone. As I mentioned, I'll be moving my interviews to seven o'clock. I strive to be as punctual as possible, though I hope you can extend a little patience if the timing isn't perfectly exact.

It's tea time now, so please go and enjoy your tea.

Thank you for your deep listening and practice.

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