Q & A, and Short Talk

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:44:54

I think we'll have some questions today, if there are any. If not, I've got some that people have left in notes and also just a few little things that I wanted to put out there.

Question on Emotion and Jhana

"My question is around emotion and jhana. Emotion is going to come up in practice and in a retreat. The first day's instruction to put down the difficult and to tune into the joy and the beauty and the appreciation. There's a certain point where it feels like they're not mutually exclusive. So noticing sadness coming up and noticing the beauty of the sadness, for example. In the body, rather than necessarily getting into a story and a selfie around some sadness, actually noticing just the warmth in the heart around sadness and the beauty of it. Noticing the sensations of the eyes watering up and that being seen as deeply beautiful. And a couple of times noticing how actually those sensations can become piti. I was like, oh, this is interesting. This could actually become a springboard into jhana from the sense of appreciation of the emotional spectrum.

"And also noticing actually that the quieter the mind becomes and the more the sense of the body and the mind become collected, that when there are thoughts around the emotions, there's a much deeper sense of personal insight around what can be revealed from those emotions and how to work with them in the life or in the imagination or on the cushion. Similar things with anger, having flavors of less ill will and becoming more a sense of personal power and conflict resolution. That sense in the body of, actually this could be a skillful place to be in.

"So I wanted to ask you, specifically in terms of this retreat, what would be your guidance on working with emotions when they come up, whether to hang out with them, listen to them, explore them, cultivate them in a quasi-jhanic state, or whether to notice them, steer into the joy, and lessen the fabrication of the emotions?"

Context, context, context. There's the context of this retreat, and this retreat - or each person's version of this retreat - is in the context of each person's life of practice, larger practice, and each person's life.

This thing about anger, actually being able to transform it, kind of filter out the poisonous elements and transform it into something that's just power - not power over, but just power - the ability not to shrink, not to go crazy, not to spit poison everywhere, but just to be powerful and upright and do what needs to be done. That's a really skillful thing. However, it's not the primary objective and intention of this retreat.

It may be that in practicing jhanas, as you say, there's just more clarity, there's more sensitivity, there's

more energy body awareness because of the way we're practicing the jhanas - or primarily because I'm emphasizing a lot about sensitivity and embodiment and all that. It could be that the possibility to make those kinds of transformations is actually increased on this retreat. A person sees, maybe for the first time, these kinds of possibilities. So that's great. And it's something to note. And on the course of this retreat, it still takes very much second place. So that when there's a choice, it's go towards the joy, go towards the piti, et cetera.

In the context of one's life, I will always say both/and. We want everything and we want to not be afraid of doing this because when I'm doing this, I'm not doing that, or doing that because then when I'm doing this, not be afraid of the territory there, be able to do both, have accessible to both and really just left with what would be skillful right now.

The kind of overriding determinative factor of this retreat is that if we want to do jhanas, like I said right from the beginning, the intention has to stay really steady. Otherwise very easily it gets into all these other explorations, wonderful as they are and really important as they are in the larger context. But for a jhana retreat - and this goes for a solitary jhana retreat or whatever it is - the intention needs to stay steady.

So I don't think I said put down the difficult in the opening so much as, again, this thing about context and let it take second place and what are we trying to do and can I see the context and see this retreat in that larger context, that larger freedom and range of possibility which I want and recognize, okay, but just for now I'm going to do this.

So you could, for example, just bookmark those possibilities that you mentioned. You could bookmark that and say, I'm going to practice that later. That would be the absolutely strict way of doing it. But of course you can have a little wiggle room at the sides of things. It's just if that gets too much, the whole kind of current of intention starts to fray. We really have to take care of the intention to cohere it.

You're absolutely right to reflect on that word choice. When the heart is deeply touched by beauty, the tears that arise are quite different from what we typically call sadness. They emerge from a place of profound appreciation and openness rather than loss or disappointment.

This capacity to be moved—to have tears come not from sadness but from being deeply touched by beauty—is actually a precious development on the path. As we grow more sensitive through practice, the heart becomes increasingly receptive to the profound beauty that surrounds us. This isn't a weakness or something to be concerned about; it's a sign of a maturing sensitivity that allows us to receive the fullness of life more completely.

Your exploration of this experience shows real wisdom. You noticed yourself investigating the secondary intention—being with the emotion—rather than staying with the primary intention of jhana practice. This kind of awareness is exactly what allows us to navigate skillfully between different aspects of our meditation. Sometimes we need to tend to what's arising; other times we need to return to our chosen

object. Learning to discern which is called for in any given moment is a crucial skill.

I'm particularly struck by your question about the stamina for perceiving beauty. What a wonderful inquiry! How far can we extend our capacity to receive beauty before we're so moved that tears arise? This kind of experimental attitude—playing with the edges of our experience—shows a mature practitioner's curiosity about the workings of their own heart and mind.

And yes, noticing what happens in the body when we're moved by beauty, and whether that can be perceived as pleasurable—this is exactly the kind of investigation that deepens our understanding of how pleasure and joy manifest in our experience. These bodily sensations that accompany being touched by beauty can indeed become part of the pleasurable territory we're exploring in jhana practice.

This is all really wonderful territory you're mapping. The tears that come from being touched by beauty are not something to move away from or transform, but rather something to appreciate as a sign of an opening heart. This is quite different from anger, which we might want to transform using loving-kindness. Beauty-touched tears are already expressing something beautiful in themselves.

It hasn't actually occurred to them that there might be tears or something, or there's a quivering in the heart, and they assume "I must be sad or I must be upset"—but not necessarily. So that's actually a really important distinction.

When we talk about emotions generally, I would say, and I have said, that I don't think we're ever going to exhaust what there is to explore about emotions as human beings. You just rattle off possibilities: "Oh, I could do this. Where's the boundary? How much can I tolerate? What if I see it this way? Can it turn into this?" These are just one, two, three questions right there. There's so much more in terms of experience, but also in terms of just how we're conceiving emotions.

To me, the exploration of emotion, along with several other aspects of our existence, is endless—endlessly fertile, endlessly rich.

The fact that you're moving into different intentions—it's not right or wrong, but there is something, as I said, really important about being really clear and staying with a central intention if you want to do jhāna practice, if you want that to develop. But that's great. That's really great, Lawrence. Well done.

Yes, so definitely that being touched, because it relates to—or being touchable because it relates to—a kind of openheartedness or openness of being, which I said, actually, is more primary than anything else in the arising of *pīti*, more primary than sticking your mind, nailing your mind to the breath or whatever it is. So you can understand how that fits together, yeah?

And then to be able to kind of ride that and help it go to peace—that's wonderful, you know, all of that.

There was another question woven in there, right? I've forgotten what it was.

"Yeah, I think it was around whether or not emotion can be another springboard to jhāna. And I think you've kind of answered that with the openness. I think there was another one hidden in the middle, but it doesn't matter. We can do it another time."

Yeah. Okay, great. Very good.

"So my question is around the word 'radical,' which you use a lot. You've been using it more over the years. And you've used it in other contexts in relationship to ethics, insight. And you've also used it now in relationship to jhāna practice. What does that mean? Why is that so important? I mean, you know, I think about the middle way—it's like, well, it doesn't fit in a way. Of course, the Buddha was radical in many ways. So I'm wondering if you could just elaborate a bit more. Why is that so important? Why has that seemingly become more important over the years of your teaching?"

Yeah. So I feel like the word "radical" gets used in at least three ways in English. One is kind of just crazily extreme, you know, like a radical fundamentalist terrorist or something like that. One is just as a kind of euphemism for something unusual: "It's radical. Wow, what a radical idea. It's unusual."

But the third, and there are others, but the third way is the way I usually mean it. "Radical"—the word in English comes from *radix* in Latin, which means "root." To go to the root of something.

To me, radical emptiness, for example, as an example I might use, would be an understanding of emptiness that goes to the root of absolutely everything. In other words, you can't even go beyond it. If my understanding of emptiness just pertains to selves—for example, the self is empty, what there really is is aggregates—then to me that's not radical, or one could have a more radical teaching, because the aggregates themselves might be empty. You understand? And then the time in which the aggregates exist is also empty, etc.

So I tend to use it that way.

When I used it the other way, I think I was talking about radical... practicing exchanging self and other radically. I think there I again really meant a mixture in terms of what I meant. So radically as sort of something like more extremely than you might think of.

We can do a lot of practices a little bit, sort of just dipping our toes in a little bit or a little bit half-heartedly. What would it be to really—I'm seeing here with this pain and this, and whatever it is, I'm dying of cancer—what would it be to practice exchanging self and other with all that? And I really mean it.

I came to this meditation retreat and I wanted it to go well, and it doesn't feel like it's going well. And just to completely turn it around—really, what, in this moment, I give up my desire for that because I'm taking on this frustration, this misery, this failure, these hindrances, this not going well in the hope that there's some kind of reciprocal gift for someone else that I may never even meet.

In that sense, to really do that full-heartedly with the totality of one's being. And if you know that practice,

you can get down to things like my very body, my atoms, my mind, this thought, that thought. So there's a radicality in terms of completeness to the fundaments of one's being.

I tend to use it that way, and sometimes it's a bit more just a sloppy word for more than you might usually think. Do I use it more over the years? Maybe, I don't know. It's a commonly used word now in the Dharma. So maybe I'm just upping the ante a little bit on what I mean by it. But I think that answers the question—it's just those two meanings.

And I had another question about the levels of mastery—which would indicate or at least assume that the next jhāna is sort of on its way, if not there already. On the other end, I'm wondering what would be some of the conditions or factors or indicators whereby we'd be spending too much time in a particular jhāna?

Maybe one might have very strong experiences of the next jhāna that just happens over and over again. That might indicate—it's not just, for example, in the second jhāna, it's not just happiness once in a while and a little bit, it just keeps going into the second jhāna. It's a very clear, very vivid experience where you can tick a lot of boxes.

And maybe if I've already got a lot of the elements of mastery of the first jhāna and I can already sit in there for hours, then am I learning anything new at that point about the first jhāna? That's another question. Am I learning anything new here? Of course, I may not be learning anything new because I'm not paying attention enough and I'm not playing enough, but I may not be learning anything new because I actually know that territory. That would be another criterion.

Shall I throw out a few things I was wanting to say? Some of them are quite little.

I made a couple of mistakes in yesterday's talk. The first is really not that significant, but just in case someone gets wondering and it gives them the wrong sense. In that simile about the wanderer through the desert—I said the desert represents saṃsāra. Actually, that can't be right because that would imply that the jhānas are nirvāna. Or maybe it's an oasis in a desert. Anyway, maybe the desert represents the life run by the hindrances. Maybe it represents saṃsāra, and the oasis is not the end of the desert—it's just a respite, and you've still got to go further. Either one, but it doesn't really matter.

Second mistake, slightly more significant, or I don't know if it was a mistake or just wasn't clear enough. I said something like experiences of deep equanimity or fairly deep equanimity that come from insight meditation are often not actually the third or fourth jhāna where there's the equanimity coming in such a strong and beautiful way.

However, experiences like—some of you know the practice, the kind of group of practices that I call the vastness of awareness—actually as you get into that, there is a real mystical sense of wonder. It is very beautiful. There is a sense of sacredness there.

It does really touch you, and it is an experience of deep equanimity. However, those kinds of

opening—what I call the practices of vastness of awareness—have a range of depths to them. So it's something that one can open up just a little bit and may not yet have that kind of almost divinity to it and sacredness to it and sense of almost the ultimate.

For example, at one level of depth, all phenomena seem to emerge out of that vastness and disappear back into it. It's like the womb or the source of everything. And that very seeing—it's a bit like when we talked about the nāda sound, how you can use it in an insight way—it's just a backdrop. Everything comes out of that, fades back into it. That level of seeing is very fruitful for the equanimity. It begins to have a kind of mystical flavor to the whole thing, a divine flavor.

As you practice more with the vastness of awareness and it goes even deeper, there's a sense where everything has one substance and that substance is awareness. Everything is awareness. So now we're really moving into a mystical sense of things, and that will have a lot of beauty.

When I said people have opened to equanimity through insight practice, I didn't really mean just basic insight practice. If by insight practice you just mean watching, just being mindful with that general encouragement to watch and let go, that won't take you to these deep levels of vastness of awareness. You actually have to direct it, do something more deliberate and change the practice slightly so that it goes there. Someone reported they got confused by that, so I hope this helps clarify things.

In other words, we make the vastness of awareness a practice in itself that's slightly different than regular insight practice. We have to change a few things in order for it to really go to these lovely deeper levels.

Now, a couple of people are struggling with working backwards—not being able to get the first jhāna, not even being able to get pīti or sustained pīti, but being able to get the happiness or something deeper. So I want to offer this in case it's relevant for anyone now or later.

There are a few different things you can try if that's the case. Let's say you can get the happiness and you're getting more fine with that, you're learning the happiness, but pīti just won't happen. If we think about the jhāna factors and everything we've said so far, we should be able to surmise these things ourselves.

Pīti and sukha are both energy body experiences. At first we think of sukha, the happiness, as a mental experience. But that's just initially—once a person has had the pīti and they want to make the distinction between pīti and sukha. Eventually one sees that actually they're both just frequencies of vibration of the energy body. Yes, they have mental components too, but really one could see sukha as just a more refined energy body vibration than the pīti.

So what that means, if I want to work backwards, is this: here I am in the happiness and it's going well and I'm in it, I'm stewing in it, I'm drinking it in. Then, listening to the mix of frequencies in the energy body, in the happiness, can I notice the coarser ones? Not the more subtle ones, but the coarser ones. And actually tune to them and find the enjoyment in them, because what I attune to is what gets amplified. We

said that much earlier. Do you understand? So that might be a way of working backwards.

It might also be that—and probably most people, not everyone, but most people notice this—the pīti tends to have an upward current to it. It tends to move up the body. And in a way, when I say opening and surrendering, abandoning to the pīti, you're really opening the body to that upward current. That's what all this head tilting back business is, if any of you get that. The body is naturally being opened, or like we said with the question about the feet, it's naturally being opened like that. It's opening to what for most people primarily feels like it has an upward current in it. It can be really strong, can be really subtle. It can feel like the pīti is actually pretty stable, but within that stability, it has slight waves of upward waves.

Here's a side point I've just remembered that might be important to say, and I'll come back to what I'm saying and enumerate it so we won't get lost. Sometimes people say, "I thought you said the pīti had to be steady before we work on it, but I feel these waves, like it comes in waves."

Then I ask them: think about the sea, think about the ocean. If you think about a wave in the ocean near the shore, near the sand, that wave or that portion of sand has times when it has water over it—a wave breaks over it—and it has times when the water recedes before the next wave comes and it's bare sand or rock.

If you go to a wave a hundred meters out where the sea is deeper, then I still see there's a wave. It doesn't break necessarily out there, but there's a wave. There's that undulating motion of the water. But out far to sea there, you're never going to get—unless there's a tsunami or something—you're never going to get bare sand or bare rock. You're never going to see the bottom.

In other words, out there, the pīti, the water, is actually steady enough. But within that steadiness—in other words, it never disappears—within that steadiness, there are waves. Do you understand?

So it's not that the pīti has to be totally still. By its very nature, pīti tends to have currents within it. What we don't want, though, in order to be able to work with pīti skillfully, is a pattern where there's a wave and then nothing—bare sand—and then a wave and then nothing again. Does this make sense?

So that was a side point. But generally, pīti has these upward currents.

If I'm in the second jhāna and it's going well—I've learned how to make it go well, I'm enjoying it and really getting into it—but I can't access the pīti or I can't get the first jhāna, then what I can do is see if I can simply notice any upward currents in the energy body experience, maybe within the happiness or whatever is present.

They might be quite subtle at that point, so again I have to get my antennae out. I have to cultivate that delicacy of listening, that receptivity. Within that receptive awareness, I start to notice, "Oh yeah, there are some upward currents." Again, attuning to them, they amplify, and maybe that takes me to the pīti or amplifies the pīti experience.

The third option is simply to imagine upward currents. Don't be afraid to use your imagination in these kinds of practices. I imagine them for a little while, and lo and behold, the next thing I know, I feel them. And then I can enjoy them, get into them, and the whole experience transforms.

The fourth possibility: here I am in the happiness, it's flowing well, but I still can't get the pīti. Here I am in the happiness though, enjoying it, getting into it. I've been established there for a while—really some minutes upon minutes—and then I just drop in a little magic formula, a little tincture. Maybe the word "pīti," maybe the word "rapture," maybe "ecstasy" or "bliss"—whatever your word is, in whatever language resonates for you.

The mind at these levels of samādhi becomes so malleable, so sensitive, so receptive that simply dropping in a word like this can have profound effect. This is a really skillful technique to master for jhāna practice in many different ways.

The fifth approach: generally, if this is the difficulty—I'm getting comfortable with the sukha and the second jhāna, but struggling with the pīti in the first jhāna—then you'd want to spend much more time in the really bubbly happiness rather than too much time in the more serene happiness. Because the bubbly variety, from our cooking ingredients exploration yesterday, has more pīti naturally present within it.

So there are five approaches you could try.

[Student question about experiencing pīti with breaks]

If your experience is feeling the pīti with these breaks—that there's "sand" between the waves—can you nudge it toward continuity? More often, it's a question of simply letting it ripen until that naturally occurs.

But having said that, like everything in this practice, it's not so black and white. There's an intermediate possibility: this choppy quality is naturally where it wants to go initially. Often the first experiences of pīti someone has are more like waves near the shore—coming and then going, coming again, without being sure how it's arising or what it even is.

In time, it naturally wants to mature toward that steady offshore quality. We can do things that slow down this maturing process, and we can do things to ease its passage. The best way to ease this passage is to ensure that when these waves come, I'm neither snatching at them—as the Buddha advises, don't snatch—but I'm truly opening to them.

Again, we return to this principle: if the wave comes, maybe it has a little afterecho, and I really want to open to that resonance. If I'm not fully opening to these experiences, that might be one thing actually slowing down this maturation process—preventing your jhāna boat from reaching those deeper waters.

Another possibility, without applying too much pressure: even if it feels like it's going badly and I'm believing the mind that's saying "I can't do this" or "I've lost it," sometimes it's worth saying, "What the hell? Let me just play with imagining my body full of pīti." Just a few moments of experimenting with that,

even though it feels like it might be pointless.

So you have a whole range of possibilities and approaches there.

How are your hindrances doing today? Or actually, how is your papañca today? How's your papañca compared with yesterday?

How's the suffering from your papancha doing compared to two days ago? It's going to be up and down. So wherever you are at the moment, it's going to move, it's going to move.

And we're so interested in that movement over time—from this high amplitude up and down business where we're really believing something and everything's grumpy and we hate Guy House and all that stuff—with applying the antidotes, but even more importantly with the wisdom. Am I believing? Am I just a sucker for this thing? With this kind of questioning of what am I believing here, this high amplitude wave over time, over time—and actually it may take weeks or whatever—but this is where we want to get to: that this high amplitude wave becomes just a little sort of placid caterpillar wiggle. It's really just a sort of energetic movement.

And so much rests on the belief. So much rests on what am I believing here. Without care, there's a hindrance. I believe the coloring of perception and the thoughts that the hindrance stimulates. The coloring of perception and thoughts are believed, and then it becomes papancha, and then that just snowballs.

So doubt and aversion—for example, I was talking with someone yesterday—even subtle doubt and even more powerfully subtle aversion will color the memory of, for example, yesterday's wonderfulness or the joy that you experienced two days ago or three days ago. Aversion, like craving, like grasping, is incredibly powerful. It cannot be there without shaping, fabricating, and coloring whatever phenomenon is in consciousness at the same time. Whatever phenomenon—whether that's a memory, a sight, a sound, smell, taste, touch, the sense of self, whatever—any degree of aversion is going to color that.

So yesterday it was wonderful. Three days ago it was wonderful. And now there's a little bit of aversion in the mind and I look back and it wasn't that good. Or whatever it is. This is what I mean by developing some insight and wisdom in relation to the hindrances and papancha and what the Buddha calls the defilements, the kilesas—greed, hatred, delusion. I think aversion is a much better word than hatred.

The same thing with the rest of the hindrances, subtle doubt, et cetera. I can't remember what stage it was—probably sounds like it was getting into the first jhana and really doing that over and over. At some point, doubt comes. And it wasn't even really strong doubt. And I was sitting cross-legged a lot. And I thought, I'm probably just sitting on a nerve. I was sitting with my heel in my perineum. It can't be jhana. It's just some—I don't know—I'm pressing on my perineal nerve, is there a perineal nerve? It's probably a group of nerves. Whatever.

And then the mind starts. Just these little things. But aversion is a killer. It's a killer. It kills joy. And connecting again to what we were talking about yesterday with dependent arising and the teaching about karma: a little bit of aversion. What kind of world do I live in? What does my self feel like? What does my practice feel like? What's my view of things? What's my sense of where I am? Who I am?

So the second hindrance—I should look it up maybe later. They're usually in the order: sense desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, doubt. The second one, ill will, usually means I wish someone harm. To me, that's a really extreme form of the hindrance. The killer at this point for you, I hope, will be aversion in a much more subtle way. It's not even toward anyone. You might get it toward yourself, but it's aversion.

Aversion will be the killer, and aversion can be to any phenomenon whatsoever—any sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought, memory, any phenomenon of experience, a situation, sensations, a state itself. We have aversion to a state. So this ends up being really like, oh, watch that seed, watch that seed, because it's extremely powerful. And it will either—that seed, like I said, will sprout and grow and it will be a whole damn forest if I'm not careful.

Or even in very subtle seed form, it already sends out its toxins, coloring the perception. Even if there's not a lot of thinking, we start believing what we're seeing, smelling, tasting, touching. We start believing what we're sensing, colored through the lens of aversion.

So there's something—again, so much of the gift of this practice is in relationship to hindrances and getting wise in relationship to hindrances. But this is a long-term lesson. It's not something we get just like that necessarily.

A couple more little things. I don't know if everyone needs this, but shall we very briefly review SASSI, not to get hung up on the wrong things?

SASSI—first S, suffused. I do want it to move towards suffusion. The whole body saturated and suffused, pervaded and permeated, steeped and drenched, and the whole body involved. Once I've got that, I tick it and I don't have to bother about it again. It's done. For that sitting, it's done. There is a goal there, and I try to move towards that goal.

Occasionally, depending on where you are in your evolution of practice, it won't spread everywhere. I've tried all my little tricks—it won't spread. Don't worry about it. Eventually it will spread. But there is a goal, and then I'm done with that job.

Whereas the A and the two middle S's—these are infinite. I will never come to a point where there's no more possibility. There will never be a moment in any meditation I ever do in my life where I cannot improve whatever degree of absorption I've had, where the object cannot sustain either longer in time—the pīti or the sukha—longer in time or with fewer nano, micro, pico interruptions. And the same goes with the mind, that the mind can't sustain either longer in time or with fewer kinds of nano, micro,

pico interruptions.

So they're infinite. Now, what does that mean about how I relate to them if they're infinite? It does something to the goal-oriented mind and the judgmental and the measuring mind. Wherever I am, the direction is that way. If I feel like, "Wow, I'm so far gone that way. I've never gone this far before. This is amazing"—great, that's wonderful. And the direction is still that way. And if it's not going so well, the direction is still that way. There's nothing to judge here.

These things will vary from time to time. I'm gradually working at my skill, but because they're infinite, it releases me from any kind of success-failure notion. Do you understand? This is really, really important. Don't get hung up on the wrong things.

So this is why I give the SASSI part—what do I do now, but also what's important and what is not so important. What do I need to complete, like the suffusion, and what do I just need to—it just tells me what direction to go in.

When we come to the I, the intensity of—let's say the pīti or whatever it is—it doesn't matter. As long as it's strong enough, meaning it's pleasant, it's obviously pleasant, it doesn't matter. I'm not trying to make it more intense. It will get more intense or less intense. It's irrelevant.

That completely lets me off the hook of having to worry about it. However much I'm enjoying the pīti, I can enjoy more. So in a way, that's infinite. But part of the art of enjoying is not to pressure myself to do that—it's simply a direction.

These orientations are important for our micro-psychological well-being, which if we're not careful can unfortunately blossom like a poisonous fungus into our macro-psychological well-being. We get hung up on the wrong things and keep judging ourselves by what's actually not the right thing to judge ourselves by. Does that make sense?

This relates to what I keep saying about marination and mastery—these are really important orientations and aspirations for how we're practicing and how I'd like to communicate all this. Mastery includes trying to sustain longer, to sit longer with the pīti-sukha, so I can sit an hour or more with whichever jhāna. Marinating involves playing with the elements of sampasādana and exploring all this richness.

Mastery also includes times when it's not going so well today. Then I might emphasize in this sitting, or for the next twenty minutes, just my steadiness of focus—partly what I've been trying to de-emphasize. There are times when that's exactly what I need to do. Maybe I can do that with the pīti-sukha, which is quite a refined object. I feel like I need to understand how to pay attention to more refined objects. It's actually hard—most people wouldn't be able to do that. So I need to train myself to stay with subtler objects.

That's the micro view, the subtle view of what I'm doing and what my emphasis is in the next twenty minutes sometimes. Other times I'm working on the eighth jhāna generally, but actually what I need to do

right now is go back to my base practice and work on my focus and steadiness there. All that's normal and available for someone who has the view that mastery is what I'm doing. It's wide, there's a range, and we're responsive to shifting emphasis at different times. It includes quite a lot.

So we have flexibility, responsibility, responsivity, and inclusiveness.

In relation to mastery, someone wrote a question. Let me read it: "We say that the arising of jhāna depends on causes and conditions. We also say that mastery of a jhāna includes being able to enter it at will, which could perhaps be understood as implying a certain independence of at least some causes and conditions. So there's an apparent contradiction there. Could you please elaborate on how to relate to these two statements and how to skillfully relate to the notion of entering at will?"

Very good. This is exactly one of those things where I will contradict myself. But more importantly, it's an instance where we want a range of views and don't want to get locked into this view or that view.

For anyone at all, give them the right medical drugs and their ability to enter a jhāna at will will be severely compromised. If you've had enough general anesthetics, or have illness, low energy, fatigue, digestive upset—a million different things will at times mean that even someone who's a master will not on those occasions be able to enter at will. It's never going to be 100% of the time. Never. But still, it's good to aspire to.

This relates to the whole teaching about self and emptiness of self. To see jhāna as depending on causes and conditions is a way to conceive of jhāna without self—without the self coming in and getting all tight about "Can I do this? Am I failing? What badge do I get? Have I achieved?" It's just causes and conditions.

From the point of view of emptiness of self, seeing in terms of causes and conditions is seeing not in terms of self. Yet we can also—and need to in life and in the Dharma—see in terms of self: I do this. I choose this ethically.

I make this choice. I cultivate this. I cultivate metta, and so forth. I choose to cultivate metta. All of that is normal and healthy and skillful—a kind of view or conception of what's happening.

In other words, setting up mastery as a goal actually gives us a direction. If I never mentioned it, then people might be sliding around all over the place and not getting as much fruit out of the whole practice, because it wouldn't occur to them to try for certain things that fall under this umbrella of mastery. Do you understand? It wouldn't occur to you to try this or that. But if you say, "Oh, there's this thing called mastery—see if you can do it," then something opens up. And mastery depends on intention.

So you can say intention is one of the causes and conditions. Going back to what I said earlier, is intention ever a completely sufficient cause and condition? It's necessary but not sufficient. Intention by itself—give me enough drugs, give me enough of this or that, starve me, make me too tired, and so forth—intention itself is not sufficient. You understand? But I need to mention it because it actually is a very powerful

ingredient among the causes and conditions. But it's never sufficient.

The larger point here has to do with teachings about emptiness. Again, I want the range of views. I want to be able to drop into different perspectives. Here's a situation. Here's something I have to do. Here's something that happened to me. Here's something that I did wrong. Here's something I succeeded at. Here's something I'm doing great. Here's something that people are praising me for. Here's something that people are blaming me for.

At times, I want to have available to me a way of viewing all that which deconstructs the self out of it. I see in terms of causes and conditions, and that can be extremely liberating and healing—taking the pressure off the self, the measuring of the self, the blaming of yourself at times.

But if I get stuck there and I say, "Well, that must be the right way to view things because that's Buddhist, right? Not-self, no-self, there is no self, and all that emptiness"—I think one gets stuck in a partial and incomplete view of emptiness.

The radical emptiness of self means actually that any view of self, even the view that there is no self, is eradicated, ripped up from its root. What that means is all views become available to us, including the view of self. So someone who's really understood the emptiness of things and the emptiness of self can move easily between views that look in terms of not-self and views that look in terms of self.

Is this making sense? This is really, really, really important. To my way of understanding, if one hasn't seen this, one hasn't really gone deep enough. It also just won't make sense in one's life.

Here, this collection of aggregates wants to marry that collection of aggregates. This collection of aggregates would like to have sex with that collection of aggregates. This collection of aggregates would like to compose this piece of music in praise of the collection of aggregates that is the universe, or whatever. If we just look that way, there are going to be enormous areas and dimensions of our being, of our lives, of our souls, of our existence that are not supported—and that's going to be a real problem. It would be a real problem for ourselves, it would be a real problem for our relationships, it would be a real problem for society and the planet.

Sometimes you get this shadow side of Buddhism that always wants to deconstruct things and see things that way, when actually I do need to be not just able to comfortably move into a self-view, but able to move into a self-view that's actually beautiful and soulful and enriching and gives meaning and all of that. I want both of those.

So these two seemingly contradictory teachings—mastery and at-will versus dependent on causes and conditions—yes, they're contradictory, complementary, but we want them both and they're helpful at different times. In a way, they're not completely contradictory. I suppose the truest one is dependent on causes and conditions, of which intention is one, but never completely a sufficient one just by itself.

Does that make sense? Is that okay?

Does that make sense? Is that okay?

"Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, thank you."

Marco was expressing gratitude to the jhāna practice for enabling him to see that there was a hierarchy of views happening. The perspective that "this is really just causes and conditions" was trumping the view that "I can do this with my intention." This recognition is really important.

If all these different views are available, the question becomes: why do I choose this one over that one at any time? If they're all legitimate, and I hereby give you permission to hold them, how will I choose between these different views? That becomes the criteria, and it's a really interesting question.

Classical Dharma offers a simple answer: What reduces the suffering here? We can get attached to a view of "it's really just causes and conditions" and "there is no self." There's a kind of attachment there, but if it comes in too soon, too quickly and too pervasively, it prevents a lot of other really good things from opening in our life. It blocks other views that might, in certain situations, deliver much more relevant fruit.

When someone is practicing the jhānas and starting to get grandiose—"look what I can do"—as I pointed out earlier, this is actually very rare. If they're real jhānas and the practitioner is going in and out enough, this grandiosity is uncommon. What's much more common is the opposite view: "I'm failing at something."

Then this view of "it's just something arising out of causes and conditions—when the causes and conditions aren't there, it's not there" becomes helpful for relieving the suffering and contraction of a certain self-view that judges oneself. I'm using it for that purpose.

But there might be times when someone adopts the other view—"I can do this"—and it actually feels like that's releasing some suffering or counterbalancing some history of being told "you can't do something." This could be anything. In classical Dharma, the framework is simply this: among all these views, which one do I pick up now to look through, to perceive this situation in order to reduce whatever suffering is there, to heal whatever suffering is present? That's the criterion for adopting this view or that view.

This is really important. We can add to this framework and enrich it and make it more complex, but I'm not going to do that now.

This question about mastery is also quite interesting, because it may well be that—and this is something each person should check in the larger scheme of things—do I have somewhere, maybe consciously, maybe semi-consciously, a kind of philosophy or psychology, or a mixture of the two, that doesn't like the idea of mastery? Or doesn't even like the idea of the self's autonomy?

As if I much prefer the view of things just happening: "This thing opened up so I flowed with that, and

then conditions were such that this thing opened up and I flowed with that." There can be a lot of beauty in that perspective, a lot of really lovely flow and even creativity and all kinds of things.

But behind it, usually semi-consciously, is a little bit of an entrenchment in a view that doesn't allow a notion of the autonomous self deciding and acting and choosing X or Y and perhaps even gaining mastery. Of course, one can be locked in the other view as well. But this tendency is quite interesting to check out, especially in spiritual circles.

Again, my opinion is: why can't we have both? Why can't we have both and explore the whole range? What might it be that we don't like that view so much? What's preventing us from seeing the beauty in the view of the self's autonomy and the self's power to choose and the self's decision to do something and work at something and accomplish something? Or vice versa, though this is much rarer in spiritual circles.

So explore what's holding us back, what we don't like about it, and actually liberate that resistance so both views become available to us. Why not?

These are subtle imprisonments that we can hopefully begin to see as we do more practice, whether it's jhāna practice or whatever. Jhāna practice, as I've mentioned a couple of times, ramps up our ability to see all kinds of really subtle locked places or defilements. People generally would have no idea that such a practice would do such a thing. You tend to think, "Well, insight practice where I'm just opening, or mindfulness where I'm just opening and being with whatever comes up and giving everything equal interest—that's where I'm going to notice these things."

But there are many hidden things that one cannot notice unless you actually try working in certain ways—for instance, with a goal, with the idea of mastery or this or that. That starts illuminating things, shining lights into hidden corners that we wouldn't otherwise have even realized were there.

To me, there are all kinds of secondary gifts to jhāna practice. Each of them is immense, though we don't tend to think that way or realize that at first.

Are there any other questions? Yes, is that Saber at the back?

Can I just say one more thing about that before you start?

So a very common experience as you develop jhana practice is that you almost feel like the mind has a momentum to go—let's say, to the third jhana. I was intending to go to the first jhana, and it just goes to the third jhana. As you practice more and more, that kind of thing becomes very common. I could just sit here and wait, and the mind will go somewhere. When we've done a lot of jhana practice, there's that propensity—it could be any jhana. It just wants to go, or I've aimed it there and it goes over there. This becomes increasingly common, so that many people actually end up practicing that way. If they've done extensive dedicated jhana practice, they simply sit down and see where it goes. There's not much intention at all. It's like seeing where I slide on the ice today.

I used to say it's as if the mind has a mind of its own. It really develops this kind of other intention. When you've done substantial jhana practice, this can be fine because they're all good places. But I would still balance it with the question: can I still retain some choice? Even if it wants to go there, can I still choose to go somewhere else at times?

So there's really this range. Sometimes you might need to let it go where it wants for a little bit—the horse wants to go to the carrot shop for a while, and then you direct it elsewhere. But this idea of keeping open the range of freedom, the range of possibilities, is something really important to me.

"It's a question about what you just pointed to regarding freeze-up, locked places. I've been seeing that process over the last couple days—psychological but also in the body. Places of deep, old, subtle holding and tightness beginning to move and open. There's so much beauty in that, and also it feels like it takes time. I'm curious about how to relate to this, because I see how my mind can keep sticking, going back to something I'm calling locked. Really it's opening, but..."

This is a really important question. Let me speak about three kinds of locks—to oversimplify for now.

There's a kind of mental lock in view, which is usually the hardest to even identify. Unless someone says something or you read something, you think, "Whoa, hold on." We don't even realize what views we're locked into. That's one kind of locking. Over the years, I've spoken extensively about that.

Then there's a locking in a kind of mental territory. Yesterday I was saying about the second jhana, for instance—don't neglect the really bubbly happiness, especially if that's alien to your personality. It's not congruent with the usual shapes the self takes. We can get locked into certain emotional bandwidths or territories. A person has a certain range, whatever it is.

Now, those first two—the locking in views and the mental territory locking—I would say regarding views, there are times when one has to be really vigorous and alert, actually trying to look, really trying to question things, to see where I might be locked and open things up that way. There's a real sense of actively trying to do this. One will never come to the end of that, but the intention can be quite strong and the action quite strong. I might start reading material about this or that.

With the second category, mental territory, there are also times when that becomes the most important thing in practice—actually the most important thing in one's life. It's looking at the views I have of all kinds of things: what the Dharma is, what awakening is, all manner of things. One needs to be active and vigorous in questioning and exploration, and that might mean wide exploration.

But the intention and the action can be quite strong.

In the second case—what I'm calling a lock into mental territory—let's say this example I gave: I'm very used to being quite peaceful and equanimous, but real bubbly happiness is kind of alien to me. Then I would say the middle version there is gentle unlocking. But the unlocking happens just by hanging out in

that kind of happiness, for example. I don't need to put too much pressure on the whole situation or too much pressure on that pattern, on that lock.

If something is opening that is expanding my heart range—effectively my soul range—then I want to linger there and let it do its work rather than just say, "Yep, taste of that one, tick, because I've experienced it once," and then go back to a kind of equanimity which is supposedly deeper. It can kind of go under the mask of a deepening of practice. Does this make sense?

But the third one, the locks in the body, is in a way a little bit more delicate. So yes, as we practice jhāna, and to the degree in any formal session that there's real absorption and suffusion, those physical locks tend to dissolve. And that dissolution may last after the session. It may last—if it's non-habitual, if it was just locked and I've never had that particular lock before—then it can just go. That was it. It doesn't come back.

If it's a habitual lock, something gets unlocked when there's the jhāna or whatever, and that unlocking can last some degree of time afterwards. I would just be careful not to put pressure on it because it may well come back. There's a kind of bodily karmic knot there that is just a tendency to create that kind of lock. We can play with perception and see the knot as pīti, see the knot as happiness—all that's going to really help.

But I would be really, really careful about two things. One is making too much of a project of unlocking the body. And a lot of people get into this. It becomes really a big deal. If I see that as a long-term project, that's not Dharma to me. I may unlock this or that at different times through different practices, through different playing with perception, through different states. And that's wonderful and that's great. But if I make that—if I get a bit obsessed with that—then that's something else. It's not Dharma anymore. I've shrunken my view of what Dharma could be into something much smaller and gotten a bit obsessed about something, using something as a kind of measuring stick for how I'm doing.

So sometimes with a lot of practice or a little practice, things that have been habitual may go forever. It's just gone. And sometimes they may go for a little while and come back. Sometimes they may go for a long while and come back. But I really have to have my view there quite right. The Dharma offers us much, much more than just that kind of unlocking of energy patterns.

Another way of saying all that is just to be very, very light when you're playing with that and hold it in a much larger context. And even the way you're playing with it—in playing with perception or the state—to be really quite light about it. How does that sound?

There was another piece that I feel is really important. If we go back to this thing about playing with perception: you can get into this enough that here's a lock, here's a contraction, here's a pain—whatever it is, and pain in energetic terms is just a contraction of energy—and you can play with perception, see it as pīti, and it unlocks.

But what's most significant about that shift, even if it never comes back and it's been mildly bugging me

for the last ten or twenty years—to me, what's more significant about that shift is the dependent arising of perception. For that coin to drop, it may well come back. It doesn't take anything away from the insight if it comes back an hour later, ten minutes later. In the long run of things, the fruit of seeing that through playing with perception, what I perceive as a lock actually is liberated, is unlocked. Understanding then the dependent arising of perception, therefore the implication for emptiness—that is way more significant than "I've got rid of a discomfort that has been bugging me for twenty years."

Yeah, I think that's the power of what I've been playing with—really seeing this tendency to look at the problem and the training in widening back out again and coming back to the fuller fabric of the energy body, even whether or not the lock is unlocking.

Yes, exactly. So thank you.

That's a middle ground as well. So we've got, again, these three things that we need to hierarchize. You've got this knot, this lock that has been with me for twenty years on and off, and I just wish it would go away. And it does—it goes away forever. Versus what you just said: I've trained the attention and the citta so that when there is some discomfort in the body, I don't have to go there. I can actually put my attention elsewhere and be pretty happy, and there's this lock there. And then the third one, where one actually sees that the lock itself is empty, because when I look at it in a certain way, it dissolves.

If I had to put that in hierarchy of order of importance, I would put the disappearing of this bugging thing at the bottom, then what you said, and then the emptiness one at the top. So this training—thank you for saying that—it's so important. Again, it's really understanding what's the relative significance of different experiences that we have.

But this has everything to do with—and I'll maybe come back to this—why are we practicing? What are we practicing for? And how easily we can have... I'll say this again: it's up to us why we practice. It's up to you. You can have any reason why you practice. It's not for me to tell you why to practice. That's for you to find out—why do I want to practice?

But the range of possibilities of what we're looking for when we practice is huge. And sometimes a person very consciously just chooses something quite small in terms of the reason they're practicing. What also happens, though, is over time the reasons for practice shrink somehow or other, and that's quite interesting as well. Or we've just not been told what fruit there is on offer, and so we're operating under a limited menu of potential. So all this is actually really, really key.

Does that make sense? I'm going to stop trying to remember what the other thing I was going to say was. Does that feel okay for now, Sabra?

"Definitely."

Yeah, okay, good. Someone else? Is there anyone who hasn't...? Yeah, Mikael, just to give more people a

chance. Mikael, please.

"I would like to ask in relation to this discussion about the malleability of perception in regard to pain. Because as you mentioned in some talk before, one can through this practice start to slowly notice that actually any vedanā, any experience, can be sort of looked at, can be seen as pleasant. If there is pain, one can sort of see and distill or somehow... What's the word you used? Filter out the pleasant out of the mix and just take that in. And once that really gets going, at least I got really excited about that. It was exhilarating—wow, this is meaningful, this is really deep.

And some intuition in me says that it's possible to go wrong, or it's possible to overdo this. If one gets first contact with such malleability of perception in regard to pain, one can get an impression that this is what freedom from suffering is all about, and then starts to apply this with almost like any experience, any pain, all the time—bliss, bliss, bliss, bliss—and it's wonderful for a time, for sure, but then an intuition in me says that that is not completely healthy in the long run, and there might be a sort of mistake or a risk of mistake in view. What would you comment on this?"

Yeah, trust your intuition. Absolutely. Because, you know, to me, if someone hears this idea—it came up recently on a seminar I did—someone can hear this idea and almost get the impression that, "Oh, if I just get really good at that, then I can have a pain-free life." And then they just start trying to do this everywhere.

That would be missing the point. The point is this ability to play with perception to the degree that something painful becomes something pleasant, for example, or becomes just an empty space or lots of other possibilities—or becomes the face of Buddha-nature or the face of God or whatever. This ability to play with perception, if I limit it to this pain-to-pleasure thing, and then I think, "Oh great, what a useful thing," and then I'm trying to live without pain—that's just, again, taking what's not... there's two gifts on offer and one takes the much, much poorer one, which is freedom from pain.

Now, that might sound like it's Dharma because the Dharma is about reducing suffering and all that. But that's not the real lesson here. The potential lesson from this experience—and it needs to sit within a context of other teachings on emptiness and different kinds of playing with perception—is that perception is malleable. Nothing exists as anything in particular. A thing is not fundamentally this or that, independent of the way of looking.

This eventually tells me about the emptiness of all phenomena. I begin to see this in many different ways, to various depths and degrees, through multiple directions. And this understanding starts revealing the emptiness of all phenomena: no phenomena whatsoever is fundamentally existent as anything in itself. It is this or that only dependent on the way of looking.

This is knowledge that can come not just intellectually, but into the heart. The knowledge that everything is radically empty like that liberates in a much grander way. It liberates independent of this pain or that

pain. It liberates in relation to the whole of existence and all phenomena. Even more importantly, it brings an unspeakable joy and wonder and sense of mystery and grace into the whole fabric of existence at a very deep level. To me, that's the point.

Rather than simply becoming really good at getting through life without pain, which seems narrow to me, this understanding opens something vast. Yes, you can use these techniques occasionally when things are rough, but that's not the point. The point is what this is teaching us about the nature of existence itself.

If I experience this transformation of perception just once or twice, it might seem like, "Well, okay." But as I begin exploring perception in many different ways, at some point the coin drops about the nature of existence itself—about the way things actually are, the true nature of things, the emptiness and suchness of phenomena. Knowing this liberates in a much broader and deeper way than just dealing with this or that particular instance.

I can still experience pain, but this understanding liberates in relation to life and death itself. It brings a wonder and sense of sacredness that's almost impossible to put into words. To me, that's the real point.

And just like the mastery question we discussed earlier, no one will be able to do this all the time. The Buddha experienced plenty of pain in his old age, and only certain kinds of meditation would release him from perceptions of pain. I myself have struggled with pain quite a lot at times. Again, it comes back to discerning what's truly significant and what's not. Your intuition is spot on here. The real gift is much vaster in scale than just a neat trick that helps us feel better.

Thank you. Perhaps we have time for one more question?

[A participant asks about somatic blocks and locks in the body]

Yes, some locks might indeed suggest lifestyle changes. I used to have chronic cramping in my lower intestine for many years—a very common, uncomfortable sensation that felt like something was constantly locking there. It was a regular visitor in my meditation practice for years and years. I learned tremendously from it about clinging and perception and letting go, for which I'm deeply grateful. What had been an ongoing difficulty became something I learned from profoundly.

In hindsight, though, it was also related to having ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. When I eventually found a certain probiotic and began taking it, that eased considerably. So yes, sometimes these physical manifestations do point toward practical changes we can make.

But I think you're asking more about psychological aspects—suppressed desires, projects we're not completing, things we want to say but don't. These may or may not express themselves as locks in the body. Often when someone suppresses desire or doesn't see a project through, there's no particular sense of bodily contraction. What's actually happening is they're not allowing energy to build up in the body, so they don't necessarily experience holding or contraction.

I'm hesitant to use bodily sensations as definitive indicators of psychological needs. At a very subtle level—and we'll return to this since we've already touched on it—the presence of any perceived lock or contraction in the body indicates that subtle aversion is present in the mind.

But that's more to do again with dependent arising and insight practices that can, when I release that aversion, lo and behold, the sense of the lock unfolds, dissolves.

So some of these more personality locks or patterns like that—they may or may not express themselves in long-term physical manifestations. Sometimes with people, they do very clearly, and it may or may not be related to these larger psychological issues. Sometimes they don't really express at all or in any noticeable way. And sometimes they express, but in a way that's not obvious to that person, even when they've practiced a lot with the energy body, but maybe obvious to someone else who's a bit more sensitive to that and used to it. The person doesn't realize they hold in a certain way.

And that may be to do with more psychological holding—they hold in relation to life or in relationship with someone or in relation to their self-expression, they're just holding back. Sometimes it's sensible to someone else, but they have no notion of it at all because it's actually quite subtle and there's no discomfort with it. Sometimes with these more civilized holdings, there's discomfort, and discomfort is like waving a red flag saying something's wrong here. So there can be the whole range there, really.

I think what's more important here is that if you look at your life and you feel like, "I am kind of squashing my libido"—in the larger sense, libido—"in a certain way, or I'm dampening my desire, or I'm not allowing... I'm in some way inhibiting either my desire to accumulate and burn or my desire to follow through or whatever"—that's extremely significant. I would say massively significant.

Again, all that can hide under a nice Buddhist facade of the well-behaved, equanimous yogi who lets go a lot very well. "Maybe you should be a teacher."

So this is a really, really important point, I would say. To take that up as an investigation, then you can see, okay, how much does that have to do with physical locks? How much are these physical locks really trustworthy as indicators of the relationship with desire? But probably if that's the kind of thing you're talking about—long-term projects and such—my guess is that the physical manifestations will only be partially helpful as indicators. There's a bigger thing going on, and your job will be to investigate that.

Going back to what we said in terms of the views as well—what views are operating? So in terms of those one, two, three that I mentioned earlier, what views am I locked into? Maybe a view about desire, maybe a view about self, maybe a view about Buddhist practice. It could be all kinds of things or nothing to do with Buddhism, but the views.

Then there might be—the other thing might be—the second one, it might be an emotional lock. That this territory of actually sitting with a really strong desire and everything I talked about the other day—if it's really strong, it will burn. And a lot of people say, "I don't like burning. There's a danger that I won't get

that. I'll be frustrated. I'll fail. People will think this or I'll think this or whatever it is. Or I just cannot tolerate that burn. I cannot tolerate that much desire. It's uncomfortable." Or it can be uncomfortable sometimes.

And so it might be I just have kind of shut the door on that emotional territory. And then some of that—again, the boundary between what's emotional, what's physical, what's energetic, there's not a clear boundary there. But again, it might be that a person just cannot tolerate that much energy in their being.

So there are a lot of things here. I think it's immensely important, immensely important. And what does it mean to be a liberated human being? What does it mean in relation to this? Am I really liberated if I can't actually feel any desire or I can't follow through on desire? If my only option is to let go, is that really liberation? You're not saying that, but it's a larger question.

So to me, it's really, really important. The investigation of all that is probably not something that's—it depends how long this has been around, but it's probably not something that happens with an "ah, I got it now." There may be long-term habits here of thinking, of view, of energetics, of emotional territory, all kinds of things. So it may take a while. It may involve approaches from all different angles and levels and all that. But I think it's hugely important.

And again, you could decide to see that as an investigation that's outside of Dharma.

Or you can expand your view of what Dharma is, and that becomes an investigation that's really at the core of Dharma. In a way that's up to you—it doesn't really matter—but there are certainly ways of doing it both ways, in or out. So I think it's very important.

I'm not sure whether to read these notes. Someone's written—it's anonymous, I don't know if that was intentional or not—but it says: "You don't even need the jhana to be happy. I realized this today and it totally blew my mind, just wanted to share that."

Yeah, that's totally right. I'm just wondering if I've missed something here or if the person wants to say a bit more.

[After some exchange about using the microphone]

Yeah, so this is what I wondered. This is really important. Two things here. One is that as we practice the jhanas more, the jhana factors like piti and sukha—happiness—can come up outside of a formal session very, very strongly. Sometimes it's very obvious to see the connection with, for example, a sitting we've just had. We get up and we're in the lunch queue and we're just overflowing with happiness. But sometimes it seems almost a bit random. It's just like it wasn't going so well and then suddenly there's this eruption of happiness. So that's all very normal.

The jhana factor of sukha can come up even very strongly outside of an actual jhana, outside of the total absorption in it. There is still an important difference between absorbing into a jhana where everything is

really collected and the happiness. But the happiness itself is also really a treasure. To savor it more, we marinate in it and sit in it. But this is really great.

But then also, as you said, it was a relief because—you know sometimes so much can happen—we say okay, this is the goal and there's these stages and there's eight of them and then there's this idea of mastery, and it's so easy for the self-measuring and the critic and all that to come in. And then we get, you know, it's all very tight. Then we realize oh actually it doesn't need to be so black and white—have I got it, have I not. It can come up anywhere, and that takes some pressure off. So that's great.

And then thirdly, you know, which isn't what you were saying, but yeah, it should be obvious. There's plenty of people who experience happiness in the world who've never heard the word jhana and never had jhana. So happiness is just—this wasn't what you were saying—but we should realize that too, that we're not saying here that no one who hasn't experienced jhana can ever be, ever experience happiness. No.

But there is something about the degree of jhanic happiness that I think is sometimes there that is pretty extraordinary. But that, as you've found, can come off the cushion and say, "I've never been this sort of happy." So all that is great.

And on that note, I'll just read this. I don't know, again, depending on how your hindrances are doing and how your papañca is doing and all that right now. Should I read this? Leave it?

[After some back and forth with the group]

Dear Rob, in second jhana, I heard the central heating as happiness, and that pretty much blew the roof off. So again, it's playing with perception, or a perception was played with just by being in the jhana. More joy than I have ever felt ever. Then I came out of third jhana—this is someone who's spent a lot of time working on this stuff in the past, so it's not their first jhana retreat—then I came out of third to walk, and everyone seemed like these radiant, translucent Buddhas. Which is what you are, by the way.

Wow.

So it doesn't sound like there's a question there, but there's some beautiful sharing. We should probably end here, as my interviews begin at seven.

Actually, there's one other thing I wanted to mention... No, I think I'll leave it for now.

Let's just have a bit of quiet together.

Thank you, everybody.

And time for tea.

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