Jhānas and Insight

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:36:21

Thank you.

What I would like to talk about today is primarily the relationship of jhanas and insight—something about that at least, quite a lot about that. In a way it's fortuitous some of what came up in the Q&A yesterday regarding some of the questions really elicited a sort of outlining, explaining of a kind of different way of framing what insight could be. So we've already made good headway with a lot of this, the insight part at least.

Some of you have heard or read many times this regarding the insight part, have heard or read this kind of thing many times. It's been framed to you many times. For some of you this will be really quite new. Fine either way. My experience teaching this over the years is that to really fully understand what we're saying here—or rather this framework for an understanding of what insight could be or how we can understand the journey of insight and what we're doing and actually the journey of Dharma—so it's not just insight meant, it's actually how the whole thing fits together and can kind of fit together quite coherently in a way that it just goes really into the depths in a very coherent way and the whole Dharma coheres in that. That framework really takes a while to fully understand. It takes really a while to really understand the implications of it.

To me part of the reasons for presenting the Dharma this way or presenting insight this way is because the implications are profound and coherently profound. It's very, very rare for someone to fully understand this and fully understand its implications on two or three hearings or readings or something like that, or even sometimes ten. You may think you do, or one may think one does, but experience has shown me over some years of teaching that actually even when people think they do, there's more here to really grasp this.

So if it feels like, "What the hell are you talking about?" That's all fine and normal because this is a process of understanding something and it should be. If you feel like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know all that," then maybe that might be the time to sort of question a little bit. It takes time. It takes repetition. It takes pondering. And again, this kind of active pondering.

Someone told me they came, did a long retreat and we worked together. And then they went back home and very wisely, I thought, were trying to fit this framework that I'm going to explain about insight and that we've already touched on, were trying to fit it into frameworks of Dharma or insight meditation that they already knew. "It must just be aversion at that or whatever." And after a lot of hard thinking and a lot of intelligence, they realized that they couldn't. Actually, it was something quite different. But the point

I'm trying to make is about the active pondering and the active wrestling with something and practice. So it's quite rare for someone to have done all that with this. So if you feel confused, there's good grounds for that. Hopefully not just because I'm completely incoherently babbling. That may be the case.

It's also, some of you will know, a lot of what I'm going to say today regarding insight and emptiness and that business forms really the conceptual foundation for soul-making Dharma and it's kind of what gives legitimacy to soul-making Dharma and doesn't just make you as a soul-making Dharma practitioner easily consignable to the fruitcake bin.

So, back to repeating. Some of this we've said already, either yesterday or earlier in the retreat, but still, because it's difficult to really see how it all coheres and really digest that in one's being, repeating a bit. And some will be repeat from, as I said, near the beginning and some perhaps from yesterday, but perhaps in different words, different approaches.

Perhaps most common in the Dharma world with regards to jhana practice is a kind of view: first you practice your jhanas and you get that together, or rather first in a session even, first you do your jhanas, then you do your insight. And if you're not into jhanas because either they're dangerous or taboo or they're ridiculously too difficult to reach, first you practice your concentration, you're steadying your mind, then you do your insight. That's a kind of normal way to come across that.

That's perhaps the common view. First the concentration, if no jhana or concentration, then the insight. As I pointed out in one of the other talks and I gave that example when we went through all those Pali words, to me reading that passage and kind of getting a sense of the context of it and similar passages in the Pali Canon, this is really a very contrived formula that the Buddha is presenting in a certain teaching situation. The whole thing is probably a contrivance. First you do jhana one, then you do jhana two in a session, then you do jhana three, then you do jhana four, and then you do vipassana or whatever.

If you kind of get a grasp of the session and who he's talking to, it's not really an instruction for the meditator who sits down and does this thing in order. I don't think you could, but to me it doesn't read—there's nothing convincing there at all to suggest that this is what you need to do in your 45 minutes of sitting or whatever.

So first the usual view: first your concentration, then your insight. And you can, one could look at passages like that and say, "Well, the Buddha's saying it, look at this." But I don't actually view such passages as actual meditation instructions really at all.

And again, repeating other stuff we've said, there's a view that when you're concentrating the mind, you're sharpening the mind, you're making it more pointy, its ability to point, and you're sharpening Manjushri's sword. Manjushri is the bodhisattva of wisdom. So really what you're doing in concentration, the most important thing that you're doing is sharpening the mind.

Making the cut so finely through its profound sharpness that it reveals the ultimately true atomic nature

of things—the momentary arising and passing of the five aggregates through time, occurring with extraordinary rapidity. If I sharpen my sword enough, I can perceive this fundamental process.

Or again, as we explored earlier, one might hold the view that concentration practice essentially gathers the energy of the mind like a laser beam. This laser beam of intense energy becomes focused on something—directed at layers of rock. Because of its intensity, because of the power of this gathered and concentrated mental energy, the laser beam can drill down through successive layers: through rock layers of construction, through rock layers of fabrication, through rock layers of illusion, penetrating all the way down until it reaches something called reality.

Or there's the perspective that concentration makes the mind so steady, so imperturbably steady, that this unwavering gaze cannot help but see the truth of things. We don't perceive the nature of things clearly because our gaze lacks sufficient steadiness—it wobbles, becomes micro-distracted or hugely distracted. But if we can simply gaze unwaveringly at something, this will reveal how things truly are.

Another idea, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit in teachings, suggests that eliminating thought is the primary goal of concentration practice. In this view, thought becomes the problem, the enemy, the obscurer of truth. When we eliminate thought through concentration, we lift the veils concealing reality, because thought itself obscures our vision. We lift these veils to reveal the real world beneath.

These represent various explicit or implicit conceptions of what we're accomplishing and how concentration fits into our practice.

Then, perhaps more recently—though to some degree present throughout Buddhism's history—there's the idea that awakening doesn't actually involve any extraordinary or deep insight or realization. In this understanding, awakening simply involves an ordinary sense of things, the ordinary sense of the world that everyone would agree upon, but without the tendency toward gross papañca—that familiar pattern of becoming caught up, self-obsessed, and making mountains out of molehills. Just the ordinary sense of things, no extraordinary insight, without the tendency for gross papañca, and with a reduction of the three kilesas: the three primary defilements of greed, aversion, and delusion.

This raises the question: what exactly do we mean by delusion if there's no extraordinary realization involved? In some models, delusion and papañca become equivalent. Papañca, because it creates chaos everywhere, essentially becomes delusion—believing all kinds of nonsense, swimming in that murky, turbulent soup of proliferating thoughts and reactions. This is what we eliminate when we uproot avijjā.

Alternatively, avijjā might be more precisely defined as belief in a real personality—believing in the self as a concrete reality. In this framework, awakening doesn't involve any special change or insight about the nature of things, just the ordinary sense of the world with less papañca, less greed and ill-will, plus the end of belief in personality. Instead, one develops belief in the process of aggregates unfolding through time—understanding that the true nature of the self is this process of momentary aggregates arising and

passing: five aggregates of body-mind arising, passing, momentary.

In this last system and its variations, jhāna practice may have no place at all. Why would you need jhāna practice if there's no extraordinary or deep insight or realization into the nature of things? It's just the ordinary sense of things with less papañca.

Perhaps jhāna finds its place precisely in this—as a kind of retraining of the mind into the habit of non-papañca. This is what occurs in jhāna: the papañca quiets significantly, and that becomes jhāna practice's purpose. You're simply accustoming yourself to less papañca until the mind is weaned off the habit of papañca entirely. So jhāna either embodies that state or somehow contributes to the lessening of gross papañca.

There are variations of this view to different degrees.

As I pointed out before—and this is absolutely crucial—all of these perspectives quite rightly need to situate the view of concentration, and thus of jhāna practice, coherently within a larger framework that must begin with the fundamental question: where am I going? What is awakening?

The view of awakening must be intimately connected with one's understanding of truth and reality. These go together—the view of awakening and the view of truth and reality are inseparably linked.

Someone may not have even thought this way, but it needs to be to some degree coherent this way. The view of awakening is tied in with what is the view of truth and reality. If I'm absolutely fixed on a certain view of truth and reality—this world as it seems to common sense post Isaac Newton and Descartes and all those people is the reality of things—my awakening or my vision of awakening has to fit into that view.

Whatever it is, the view of awakening tied in with that is the view of truth and reality, and drawing on that or emerging from that is the view of what insight is. Do you see how these fit together? View of awakening, truth and reality, insight. Insight is what opens up truth and reality, and that gives me awakening.

And then the last stage: within all that framework, I have to situate coherently what is my conceptual framework, what's my view of jhānas or no jhānas, jhānas, what for? And as we said before, what do I emphasize within jhāna practice? So what I emphasize moment to moment—am I really fussing over this, can I stay with the nostrils or whatever—how much I emphasize that and how much I even get upset or not at its success or failure in the moment is actually determined by this larger scale structure. How does my ability to stay at the nostrils relate to insight? What do I mean by insight? Is it related to what's my view of reality and truth? And that's related to awakening. You see how all this nestles together? It must.

Now, it needs to be to some degree coherent, but all this fits together in different models, different paradigms. What's also quite common is that if someone is supportive of jhāna practice, then jhānas contribute to insight—so jhānas lead to insight. Much less so the other way around. Insight is much less

regarded as insight practice, as a process, or insight per se, having insights as something that opens up the jhānas or delivers the jhānas. So the causality is one way. And that's probably, again, what most of you have come across, right? Jhānas go to insight.

What we were saying here earlier in the retreat is that jhānas are not enough for liberation, which we said, but they have their part in what contributes to liberation alongside other factors—not just insight, but other factors that we talked about. So jhānas contribute to liberation, awakening. Jhānas are part of the pool of factors that open up liberation. Insight is a large contributing factor to liberation as well.

Jhānas can bring insight, absolutely. Jhānas should deliver insight. What we want to go into today is how. How do jhānas bring insight? But also I want to stress that insight leads to jhānas. So another way into jhānas is through insight. Or if you're doing insight practice in what I would say is the most fruitful way, jhānas are going to be very available on that road. And so insight leads to jhānas. And the question in both directions is how? How?

So, not wanting to dismiss any of these other conceptions at all, but really wanting to add to them. There are some modifications I would definitely make to some of them regarding views about what's ultimately true and what's ultimately real, but it's all good. There is a place for the laser beam. There is a place for all the rest of it.

But in addition to all those views, all those ways of conceiving with necessary ontological modifications, what we would like to say is that an awakened person knows something deeply. To know something deeply means not just as an idea, not just in the head, but in the heart and in the being. They know something deeply and they can engage that knowing in their very sense of things. And they can engage that knowing deliberately in their very sense of things. It's a deep heart knowing.

And what do they know? They know the emptiness of all phenomena. That's what an awakened person knows. The emptiness, the total emptiness of all phenomena, the total radical emptiness of all phenomena. Which means a phenomena is empty and it doesn't leave any bit of itself or any level of itself that's not empty. That's what the radical bit means—it goes to its root. An awakened person knows deeply the emptiness of all phenomena. There is no electron, no basic unit of matter that is not empty. This happens to agree with current understanding of physics, but that may or may not change.

But there's no electron, there's no basic building block of matter that's not empty. There is no self or self-view or conception of the self that is ultimately true—or to say it the other way around, that's not empty. All conceptions, all views of the self are empty. This is what an awakened person knows.

The energy body is empty. Space is empty—and not just empty of having things in it, but empty of having independent existence, of existing independently of the way of looking, of having inherent existence. Awareness is empty. Awareness is not fundamental. Consciousness is not fundamental. It too is empty. Time is empty—not just past and future, but the present moment too, empty. Awakening is also empty. So

this is what an awakened person knows.

And to say they're empty means, as we said yesterday, that none of these things, no phenomenon whatsoever, exists independently of the way of looking. It exists as this or as that, dependent on the way of looking. And it exists as anything at all, dependent on a way of looking. It does not fabricate as a phenomenon unless the way of looking makes it fabricate as a phenomenon.

So what's that got to do with freedom from suffering? Is it obvious what it's got to do with freedom from suffering?

As Derek said, we only cling to what we think is real. When I first started teaching this, and I realized I was going on and on about this stuff, some people would ask, "Well, why are you talking about this?" It was as if it was some abstract philosophy. But no, it's intimately, directly connected with suffering.

Suffering comes from clinging and craving, right? That's pretty much what most Buddhists believe. Soulmakers also believe that—we have something else called eros, but we're not going into that today. Craving and clinging are what cause suffering. Take them away and the suffering goes away. You should know this at some level, or you wouldn't be here if you didn't know it.

But we only crave and cling to what we sense is real. When we realize something is not real, we don't cling or crave. We don't try to get rid of it. So the sense of self, the sense of an object or other, the sense of time—all these things. Seeing the emptiness means seeing that they're not really real in the way that we thought they were. We say they're neither real nor not real. But that's enough to take away the sense of inherent reality that we usually have in relation to things, dependent on which our craving and clinging gets established, and dependent on that craving and clinging, our suffering.

Do you understand? This is really important.

How does an awakened person get to such knowledge, such a far-out-sounding understanding? Knowledge, again, is in the heart, in the whole being. One way is by playing with what we call ways of looking, which we talked about again yesterday and several other times. Way of looking means the way of relating, the way of conceiving, the way of viewing, the way of sensing—everything that's wrapped up in that relationship with any phenomena, any experience, perception, appearance in the moment. That's what we mean by way of looking. Everything that's wrapped up in there.

One can begin playing with different ways of looking and one starts to see, like a scientist—oh, well this way of looking, when I look that way, like when we're in the middle of papañca, when I look that way it actually fabricates more suffering. Suffering gets worse or gets locked into place. And it actually fabricates more sense of self. The self feels more solid, more separate, more contracted. It fabricates more of whatever it is that I'm tussling with or grasping after, more of an object and more sense of time. Time itself also feels heavier, more pressured. One starts to realize all this.

And because I'm playing with ways of looking, I also start to realize, oh, there are some ways of looking that do the opposite. They release suffering. They unfabricate the self to some degree. They unfabricate objects and things to some degree. They unfabricate—eventually one sees—the sense of time as well.

So those are the interesting ones.

Actually, it's all interesting. Those are the ones I want to follow and develop—the ones that unfabricate suffering, and with the unfabrication of suffering, they unfabricate self and the world of objects and eventually time as well.

One can grow into practicing this way, getting really interested not just in the art of it but in the freedom it delivers in the moment. The delight of practicing this way becomes palpable. Looking at this thing in this way means I'm relating to this thing in this way, and right there and then—I don't have to wait ten months or ten years—right there and then the suffering goes out of experience. The self is less fabricated. The object itself gets less fabricated. There's release, relief, ease, openness. All kinds of mystical states of consciousness begin to open because the self and objects and time are not being fabricated in their usual way. Other senses of things open. Delightful ways of practice.

One gets really interested in that and develops one's range of ways of looking, as well as one's depth. In other words, learning to—as we said yesterday—recognize that some ways of looking let go of a little bit of clinging, while some ways of looking that we can develop let go of clinging at a whole deeper level, a much subtler level of clinging. Because they do that, they have even more power in unfabricating, because it's the clinging—and I use that word very widely—but it's the clinging that's fabricating. It's fabricating not just the suffering but also the self, objects, the world, time, and so on.

So one develops one's range and one's skill and one's depth, going deeper and deeper into this learning to unfabricate more through the ways of looking that one is developing through practice.

We talked about, for example, pleasure and pain and equanimity, and said equanimity is a letting go of push and pull. In other words, it's an attenuating and letting go of clinging. As I just do that and do that and do that, the pleasure and pain get less, eventually. The pain might go to pleasure and then get less. I get left with neutral vedanā, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, and eventually that fades. Eventually, as we touched on yesterday, eventually everything fades. No thing, no self, no consciousness in the usual sense, no time, no present moment, no space, no world.

The Buddha had different names for that: the unfabricated, the deathless, cessation of perception and feeling, the unborn—lots of different names. We can open to that something that's incredibly hard to put into language because language is based on a world of things and subjects and objects. But this is possible for us if we just take this one idea of ways of looking. Notice that some fabricate more and some fabricate less, get really interested in that, and just keep going. You can get all the way to the unfabricated just following one principle and playing—having a fun and delightful time doing it.

It doesn't stop there, I would say. Some people would say it stops there: "Now I've realized the unborn." I would say it doesn't stop there, because then one can also see that time is empty as well. One may have seen that getting there, and one may need additional little ways of seeing that. And also, what is fabricated is empty. Fabrications are empty. The things that are fabricated in this process—they're not real things either.

So if time is empty, the time in which the process of fabrication happens also is empty. That means the whole notion—and fabricated things are empty—that means the whole notion of fabrication is empty. So the very idea and thread that we were following, this idea of fabrication, ends up dissolving as well. It's empty too.

When one has reached the unfabricated, the unborn—whatever you want to call it; some people use the word nirvāṇa for that—there can be an extreme duality between that transcending of the world in the unfabricated and the world. The world of saṃsāra, the world of form, the world of struggle, this world that we all agree on. And then there's this that's completely transcendent. This is holy; this is essentially worthless except as a potential stepping stone to that.

Once one has seen that fabrication too is empty, then actually the whole duality collapses as well, because there is no fabricated, and without a fabricated, the unfabricated as an idea doesn't make sense. So that hierarchy of sacredness collapses. Everything empty, everything sacred. Unfabricated, fabricated—no ultimate truth, no place that has, ultimately speaking, more reality, no view that has ultimately more reality than another.

There are only left ways of looking. That's what we have as human beings, as awakened human beings. Only ways of looking.

A huge range and depth of ways of looking. Ways of playing with perception and the art of that. And we can do that then. An awakened person can do that for different ends.

In classical Buddha Dharma, of course, why do I choose this way of looking over that way of looking? It's because I want less suffering. So in this situation, I look at it this way to reduce the suffering. It's just basic Four Noble Truths in condensed version. When you get into soul-making dharma, actually you might choose other reasons for ways of looking that are not primarily the reduction of suffering. That's not really what you're going for. You're going for something else sometimes. There will often in soul-making dharma, of course, be an overlap—in other words, when we choose a view because we want the sacredness there, or the beauty, or the soul-making, that most often also reduces the suffering, but sometimes not. But classical Buddha Dharma, that's why we choose certain things. Everything's oriented to reducing suffering.

Practicing what was that word the Buddha used? Mudubhūta—the malleability of mind, the malleability of perception, the malleability of ways of looking, of views. Or we say playing with perception, meaning

playing with perceiving. This is a way of construing what insight practice is: playing with perception and seeing, through playing with perception, what happens when I look this way, when I look that way, when I look a third way, when I look a fourth way, seeing what the perception is. I perceive a certain way, the perception is. The experience, the appearance, the phenomenon depends on the way of looking.

So that in a nutshell is what we could say insight practice is and how it all hangs together.

Now we can understand—and in a way we've hinted at this quite strongly several times already—we can actually understand the jhānas as doing that too. As well as being these really, really valuable resources in all kinds of ways that we've talked about, as well as being certainly the way we're teaching them here and the way you're practicing, as well as developing our sensitivity and our attunement and all the beauty of that and the gifts that gives in all kinds of realms of our life—relational, emotional, energetic, soul-making, et cetera—also for emptiness practices. But as well as resources and sensitivity and everything else we said about the jhānas, we can also view them as playing with perception and begin to understand actually there's one spectrum, one spectrum of more or less fabrication.

Of suffering—dukkha is a better word if we're really... suffering is such a heavy word in English, but dukkha. Sometimes you open to a new level and you wouldn't have considered where you were before has any dukkha in it whatsoever. And it's only when you go deeper that you realize, relatively speaking, the older level, which you've now transcended, had some very subtle dukkha in it. So I prefer the word dukkha because it's a foreign word, it can keep for us a much subtler range than we tend to associate with the word suffering.

But you realize there's one spectrum, one spectrum of dukkha. We can be fabricating a lot, really a lot, somewhat less, somewhat less, somewhat less, all the way down. But that spectrum of fabrication of suffering is the same spectrum as the fabrication of self-sense. They're just two threads of the same rope, of the same spectrum. When we're suffering a lot, the self-sense is fabricated a lot—much more solid, much more contracted, much more separate. But so is the world fabricated. The perception of the world is correspondingly, it's just another thread of that rope of one spectrum.

Is this making sense? And so is clinging, if we use the word broadly enough. This end, the dukkha end, has got a lot of clinging and craving in it. And as I said, when you start engaging practices and really sustaining them and playing with them—practices that take away clinging, craving repeatedly, moment after moment—then we move down that spectrum. And as we take away more subtle levels of clinging and craving, we just find it's the same spectrum.

So this is a spectrum of suffering, it's a spectrum of self-sense, it's a spectrum of object-sense, thing-sense—because they fade as well: sensations, things, sights, sounds, all the rest of it, the world—also of clinging, and also of jhānas. The whole thing is just one... Do you understand? It's one spectrum. We're just talking about different, if you like, threads of a rope. Does this make sense? I'm going through it quite quickly.

A few little things I want to throw in at this point. A little bit came out of Andy's question yesterday, which I'm glad you asked. After a jhāna, in a jhāna, or kind of around the territory of a jhāna—and Andy was asking about the happiness and the sense of self in relation to the happiness—but let me say a couple of things. In the territory of the jhāna, after, in, or around it, sort of perijhānic, a few things happen in relation to classical insights, again, which is tied into what I've just been saying. We're more clear and we're more spacious, so that something like impermanence is just completely obvious to us.

It's just in that space it's obvious that things are impermanent.

Also, because of the yumminess of a jhāna—whichever jhāna—because of the yumminess, it's much easier to see the dukkha, the relative dukkha of other pleasures, or the fact that other pleasures are far less satisfying. When you've tasted a certain, let's say even just really strong pīti and you're truly absorbed in it, it would be hard to match that with any sensual experience, certainly in terms of happiness.

More saliently for what I want to say today—and these are all related because they all have to do with this unfabricating—is that in, around, or after a jhāna, it's much easier to see that phenomena are not self. They're not me, not mine. It's much easier to see. Why?

Tying it to what we just said about this rope, this spectrum of fabrication which has different threads in it—different aspects of the same process that are being fabricated together—the jhāna already is less fabrication of self. And so because the self is less fabricated, what the self habitually does is also less fabricated at the time. One of the things the self habitually does is appropriate: me-mine, me-mine, me-mine, me-mine, without thinking about it. That's what the self does. The more self, the more me-mining, the more appropriation.

As the self gets fabricated less naturally in the jhāna, there's less me-mining. And because there's less me-mining, less appropriation, things are much more likely to appear to us as not me, not mine—anattā, as the Buddha said, not me, not mine. The transition from that point to deliberately viewing things as not me, not mine, is just a very small step because it's already moving in that direction.

So there is in jhānas this attenuation, this unfabricating of self, and that has all these factors unfabricated together. Self is one of them.

However, I want to read a note that I received. This is really, really important:

"You talked about resistance against the idea of having an autonomous self. I felt this was blocking the whole process and made me believe that I had matured in some jhānic states when actually this wasn't the case. Today it feels more like this belief of having matured took me away from actual learning. I then noticed that I tend to stay in a passive, receptive mode during meditation but also in life. When today I actually tried to play with active and receptive modes, finally a strong felt sense of 'I' arose. I am alive. I exist. I am here in this world. I can influence. I can be active. I felt very powerful. Now I can actually find my pace and my way of working. This psychological basis just wasn't developed. What a blessing and

lovely fruit of this retreat."

This is really, really important because it stands in apparent contradiction to what I just said, but an important contradiction. I've just said jhānas are about fabricating less. And here a person was saying that actually, by the way we're practicing jhāna, it does invite the self to be active, to be more autonomous, to see itself and feel itself as more active and autonomous. That sounds like a more separate and more fabricated self, right?

This is why I said at some point in the last few days: careful. You may think, or one might think very understandably, "I need a jhāna to heal something." And it may be that it's not the jhāna itself that we need to heal something. For some people it is—they need to just really bathe in that third jhāna, whatever it is. But probably more often than not, it's something in the ways that we're adopting to work that heals something psychologically and has its mirror in life. The freeing and opening and reclaiming that's mirrored in life may be more significant than whether I have attained this or that jhāna.

When we talked about this, I mentioned the ability to stay and choose to be intense and choose to show up that way—me being intense, and the "me" can be quite a subtle sense but it's still there. I have to sustain something, or opening, really opening the being, surrendering, abandoning. Or what this person is sharing, or the happiness that's a kind of emotional range that I don't usually let myself experience. There are many examples, but here's a very important exception.

Can you understand what we're saying here? Everything's tied together—these threads of one rope.

So revisiting our idea of working with pain and being able to look at pain so that it unfabricates, or we refabricate an unpleasant sensation in the body as pleasant pīti or happiness or whatever it is—let me be clear about this, because someone might hear about that and think something particular.

When you're meditating, there's pain. But sometimes, because of the meditation, you're relaxing, and the relaxation allows the tissues—the muscular tissues—to relax and therefore expand. They're not squeezing on the blood vessels (excuse me if my biology is completely wrong), so I'm not getting pins and needles. They're taking the pressure off the system and the tension. Some pain disappears just because of organic biological relaxation reasons.

So yes, absolutely, there's a level that happens there. And to start talking about emptiness just for that would be a complete misuse of the word emptiness and would be easily dismissible. But there is some of that going on. There's an organic reality to it—we can explain it in real organic terms, in terms of real organicity.

Secondly, though, is the level of the energy body. So there's the level of physical body—muscles and blood vessels and nerves and all the rest of it. But then there's the level of the energy body. And the energy body changes. This was like a definition of the first four jhānas, certainly the first five jhānas at least—there are changes in the energy body, and the energy body becomes more homogeneous, more unified, and has a

different vibration.

Another way we could understand what the energy body is: the energy body is a kind of reality that straddles the physical and the mental. It spans those strata, so that it is, for instance, susceptible to the mind state. The mind state changes, the energy body changes. Mind state is obviously a mental factor. It's extremely susceptible and malleable through the mind, and we've talked about using the imagination. Why? Imagination is in the mind, and the energy body experience—the way the energy body is, how the energy body is—will be affected by what's in the mind. If I imagine this, if I imagine that.

We don't tend to think in these terms anymore in our culture. Probably back in medieval times there were certain strata of reality, ontological categories that spanned both the physical and the mental. The energy body is one of them.

So there's that level too, and that's happening in jhāna and that's happening when a pain dissolves through meditation, through jhāna. And there's a level of playing with perception and the fact that actually the pain is unfabricating and it's empty and therefore malleable and therefore can be refabricated.

So there are all these three levels: a level of organic reality, so to speak; a level of energy body, which spans physical and mental; and the level of emptiness and playing with perception. They're all part of that experience.

Yesterday when we talked about Bāhiya and this idea of bare attention—which that sutta doesn't use those words, "bare attention," nor are they anywhere in the Pali canon, nor to my mind do I even know what the Pali would be for bare attention—but anyway, or even mindfulness, the way many people would understand what mindfulness is, or in the past have understood what mindfulness is (maybe it's changing now, I don't know)—it's still, despite not being ultimate, if we fit it into this whole idea of a spectrum of fabrication, then actually it just fits nicely at some point on the spectrum of fabrication.

When I'm engaging bare attention, there are certain things I'm not adding to the experience. I'm not adding a lot of papañca. I'm not adding a lot of views and concepts, and I'm not layering over that way. That's probably how you've been taught about bare attention, right?

So I'm doing a similar thing here. When we talked yesterday about taking things out of the way of looking that are automatically there—also in bare attentional mindfulness, the stuff we're taking out. So it's a relatively skillful way of looking. There's a modicum in it of unfabrication, or it involves a modicum to a degree where we're fabricating less. You understand?

The mistake would be to think that what we sense through bare attention is an unfabricated reality.

If I've approached this whole question of fabrication with a presupposition about where unfabricating stops, about what actually is real and what is not, do you understand? It makes a huge difference. I'll come

back to this. The concept that I've started with was limited. It wasn't an open-ended investigation, despite whatever rhetoric might be dressing it up. I've actually limited something. I arrive at that limit and then call it ultimate reality. It's still very skillful though. On this rope of unfabricating, on this spectrum of unfabricating, it's still somewhere. It's more toward that end, but still, relatively speaking, it brings less suffering, less self, less of all the rest of it.

Thinking about the jhānas and their relationship to insight, I mentioned this phrase that I use—it must be a more elegant phrase, but what I call "after effects on perception." This, to me, is hugely significant: this idea of the after effects of certain states of consciousness on our perception. These after effects imply something about the dependent arising of experience, and correspondingly they imply something about the emptiness of our perceptions.

So these after effects, as we move through more territory jhānically and in other kinds of states, there's a spilling over outside of the meditation into how we sense the world. After effects on perception—out there on the lawn, on your walk, with the lunch bowl in front of you, whatever. They open new worlds and new experiences for us.

Usually this business about after effects on perception gets really potent with the formless jhānas. But I tend to think the first glimpses of it come with the third jhāna. I mentioned that world of peace and so forth. However, the other day I got a lovely note—actually from a few days ago. "For some reason I hesitate to write these non-questions, non-issue notes, but since you seem to enjoy the one from earlier, here's the epilogue." This is from our friend of the radiant Buddhas.

"Seeing everyone as radiant Buddhas was so lovely, so delightful that I was back in the second jhāna by the time I made it outside. I then spent forty-five minutes wandering around the grounds and marveling at how everything seemed shot through with joy."

So the after effect on perception is basically that the primary nimitta starts to color things. Things are colored, things are seen that way.

"I stopped in my tracks and mouthed 'wow' at the sight of the old fruit crates piled by the outdoor loo, the bins by the hermitage, the hedge by the nuns' graveyard, the dead leaves on the path—all of it radiant with happiness and light and something beyond, something blessed. And if that's not enjoyment... wow."

Sometimes this is subtle and sometimes very powerful. It can happen not just from jhānic states, but from all kinds of states. I said usually you get the first glimpse in the third jhāna—this person is saying no, earlier—but it gets very marked in the formless jhānas. It can have a very clearly, very profound and touching impression on the being, on the sense of existence.

If these experiences are repeated enough—if it's just a one-off, you tend to think something was weird in your brain, or you forget about it, or it becomes just this thing you don't quite know how to get back to. But if it's repeated enough, and they can come from lots of other non-jhānic states as well, other

perceptions, other ways of looking, you're going in and out of normal perception and this kind of perception. For example, let's take from this person's note: in and out, in and out. Many times. At some point you start thinking, "Well, which is the real way things are? Which is real?"

Are things not shot through with joy? Is the universe just purposeless and cold, or very hot matter in the Newtonian sense? Or is there some way that joy is mystically woven into the fabric of the cosmos? That joy perhaps is the essence of things—the divine essence of things? Or that there's a joy that shines through things, a transcendent joy, and that transcendent joy shines through this world of appearances, this world that we call the world, this world that we've grown so accustomed to sensing in other ways, in disenchanted ways?

It goes back and forth, back and forth so many times. Which is actually real here? Which is real? How do I know? Which mind state, which way of looking reveals the way things really are?

Do you have that? Or lines, you know what lines are? Kidding. It's good that I've practiced a lot of equanimity.

Years ago, we did a retreat - I think three years in a row - called "Loving-kindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening," something like that. Maybe some of you were even on it. This was 2006, seven, eight, I think. It was a three-week or three-and-a-half-week retreat. First week we did metta, second week compassion, and by the third week, after people had developed this really quite strong current of metta and compassion - people would say you could walk into the meditation hall and it was like cutting through thick air, so saturated with love.

After they had developed that stream, I gave them a practice of deliberately directing that metta and compassion not to beings, self or others, but to phenomena. This sensation, this sound, this pain, whatever it was. I let them explore this for a while, then came back and asked, "Did anyone notice that when you were doing that, the phenomena you were directing metta to actually faded?"

There's almost a law here. That's what the Buddha calls it - dependent arising is the law. The word for Dharma is law. To trust this enough is like putting a cake in the oven. You set it, go away, come back, and this will have happened. For most people, yes. It's a law. They faded.

Then there's a question. Here was a phenomenon, a sensation, an experience, a perception. When I direct metta or compassion to it, it fades, it unfabricates, it disappears to some degree or completely. Amazing. Similar to the kinds of things we've been exploring.

Then you ask, "How much metta reveals the real thing? The real sensation? The real self? A little or a lot, because metta is a skillful quality? Somewhere in the middle - do we need exactly a medium amount to reveal the real way things are?"

Mindfulness, as we said yesterday, is actually a composite. It's all attention. Mindfulness is always with

something else, with many other things. Those qualities, that composite of qualities, determine the fabrication, the unfabrication, the locking into a certain level of fabrication of whatever phenomenon the mindfulness is observing.

Derek might like to say, "Not mindfulness - equanimity," because equanimity gives this sense of balance. But we've already explored that. The more equanimity means the less push and pull. That's how we've defined equanimity. Less push and pull is the same as less clinging. If I just practice that, getting more and more equanimous, at a certain point the phenomena will fade.

How much clinging reveals the real object? Here's this phenomenon, this pain, even a sight or sound that's continuous. How much clinging reveals the real object? A lot? A little? None? If it's none, then where's the object, because it's completely faded? A medium amount?

This is what we mean by saying something is empty. I cannot privilege a certain amount of clinging or metta or equanimity. I cannot privilege any particular way of looking or any amount of what's wrapped up in the way of looking to reveal the real way something is. In other words, it's empty. It doesn't exist independently. There's no zero point anywhere.

When we get to the formless realms - although clearly someone has already had very strong experiences, maybe others as well - these aftereffects on perception start to go up a notch in their power. What they can deliver in the worlds they open up, these aftereffects and the sense of things, the way they influence the sense of existence, impact the sense of existence, open up the very sense of the cosmos.

An interesting thing when you get there is that the strength and even the impact of the aftereffect on perception is not actually predictable from the strength and degree of absorption of the meditation just before. I take that as good news. You might think, "Oh, I got a really strong seventh jhana, so I expect a really strong aftereffect." Maybe, maybe not. Or you got there sort of - it was in the neighborhood of the seventh jhana, but it wasn't really...

It wasn't really... I was not quite consolidated or deep or whatever. And I get up and afterwards, the after effect is really strong.

So it's telling me something: don't worry too much. It's samyojana all over again. Yes, I go for more absorption. Yes, I go for more samadhi, and so forth. But there's no end to that. And now we're adding, in terms of these after effects on perception, which again, in terms of liberation, the way I would conceive it - a whole different sense of the cosmos, a whole different sense of existence is what the awakened person knows - how absorbed I am at any time in any sitting may not relate to how much opening there is afterwards in terms of the after effect on perception and the world, the sense of the cosmos that opens up.

To me, that's good news. I don't have to worry about it too much. I've got direction to go in, but I'll be surprised by the fruits afterwards.

So we said one spectrum, one spectrum of fabrication - more or less, one way of viewing things. And in a way, like I said, you can actually put the whole Dharma in kind of... the whole Dharma can be seen as relating to or pertaining to or even emerging from that one understanding. Everything. We talked about generosity - same deal. Things that don't seem like they have to do with obvious ways of looking - same deal.

But to be less fabricated means less is getting fabricated, less is getting built. There's less there in the perception. So less solidity, less substantiality. Going back to earlier in the retreat, I was saying, well, it looks like things are kind of... almost like I could put my hand through the walls. There's a perception of less solidity and less substantiality also to the body, also to the energy body.

Another way of saying that is there's more refinement. We've talked about this word "refinement" and the refined cloth - less substance, less solidity - or refining gold or flour or something. There's less solidity, there's less substance.

Again, something I've said before: if I'm unsure with this new experience I've had, if I'm unsure, "Is that the next jhana? Is that the next deepest jhana?" One probably almost more important clue than any other is: Is it more refined? Does its texture feel more refined? Which isn't the same as "Is it stronger or calmer or weaker?" Is it more refined? Its actual texture is more refined.

I think I'll come back to this another time, what I'm going to say right now, but I'll mention it now. There are several suttas - I think I mentioned it yesterday, where the Buddha talks about establishing oneself, I did mention it yesterday, establishing oneself in a jhana, any jhana, and actually taking that jhana itself as an object on which to practice certain insight ways of looking. Let's come back to it hopefully later in the retreat.

In other words, you hold that jhanic perception in attention - the primary nimitta and everything else that's involved - and very precisely, in a very exact way, you start removing different kinds and levels of what I'm going to call clinging in relation to that jhana. I use that word "clinging" to include also appropriation, me-mine, or even me-mine of the attention - not just the primary nimitta, but also the attention being paid. That's also not me, not mine. So clinging is a big word. I use it to mean that and more.

But basically that's what you're doing. With the jhana - and it's helpful because it's a steady object, it's very, very steady - and then you start taking things away. So this is a kind of very advanced way of practicing, but it's actually very powerful and very available for people who want to go down that road and develop it.

What happens when I do that? What would we expect to happen if I do that on the first jhana? I think I'm hearing all the right things. It will fade. Piti will stop, or it will go to the second jhana. All of the above.

So it could just go to the second jhana. Why? Because the second jhana is a less fabricated state. If piti fades completely, something is fading and it will go to the third jhana if it fades completely. Or just

generally speaking, it will fade.

But the spectrum again is all one thing. So it will go down the spectrum of the jhanas. But this fading business is unfabricating business. You know, sometimes it's like being in an elevator and it just... okay, stops at every floor. But sometimes you're just in an elevator and it just goes whoosh and you've missed all the floors.

It's just gotten like, oh, everything's gone now. But the point is that there's an unfabricating going on. And again, the jhanic spectrum fits into this spectrum of unfabrication.

Why do things fade with an insight way of looking? Why is there less fabrication with an insight way of looking? That's not entirely a fair question, because to explain something, you have to rely on something else to use it to explain it.

If we think about the twelve links of dependent origination, how do we explain fading, unfabricating, based on the twelve links of dependent origination? Where does that fit in? Where exactly?

Everyone's right. Nama-rupa is the fourth link. It's presented as if it's in order, but that's not a really helpful way of looking at it. Usually the first—but it's the first in terms of being the most fundamental—is avijja, which means delusion. The fourth one is nama-rupa, and nama-rupa, the Buddha says, involves different factors. It includes vedana and perception. The way I'm using the word perception, going back to the beginning of the retreat, is synonymous with phenomenon, experience, appearance, perception. They're all the same thing.

Clinging and craving come later, or they seem as if they come later when it's thought of linearly, but it shouldn't be thought of linearly. It should be thought of as a completely interlinked web that's not a linear process in time. And self seems to come really at the end with becoming and birth, right, if you think of the whole thing in a momentary way. But to think of the thing more, as I said, not as a linear process in time, not a process in time so much—when I'm engaging an insight way of looking, what defines an insight way of looking is clinging less, craving less.

So it seems to come afterwards. But if we don't think of it linearly, it basically has an effect on the fabrication of self, which seems to come later after craving, clinging, becoming, birth. That's where people usually put the self. So you can see that: less clinging, less self is fabricated, and then less dukkha and all the nasty stuff at the end. That bit's clear.

But it works, as I said, not linearly as well. So it will work back to this—what's actually the fourth link, nama-rupa—of which one element is perception and another element is vedana. So that decreasing clinging decreases—they're not on-off switches. Again, each one is a slider switch. Less clinging, craving; less self; less dukkha; less also nama-rupa, which means less perception and vedana, less experience and vedana. There's a fading, right?

Avijja is the first link, and as I said it's not the first in a temporal process; it's the first in terms of what the Buddha said: this is the fundamental problem. Everything rests on this in that sense. What's avijja? Avijja is a lot of things, or rather has a lot of different levels. When I'm engaging an insight way of looking, you could say I'm engaging a view that has less avijja in it.

So when I—going back to what Andy shared, this example of seeing something, sensing something as not-me, not-mine—to sense something as me or mine habitually, unconsciously, has more habitual ignorance, delusion, avijja in it than to sense it as not-me or not-mine.

Let's contrast two ways of looking. One is the normal way of looking that we have in 99% of our states of consciousness: something is always me-mine. This pain is me-mine, or this pleasure is me-mine, or whatever. It's always me-mine. I'm not thinking it, but it's just there—me-mine. That's one. The Buddha calls that appropriation. It's based on a self-view.

He calls it avijja.

When I engage an insight way of looking—for example, anatta—I'm actually looking at "not me, not mine." So you could say what I've done there is take away that particular element, that particular level of avijja, which usually sees things as me or mine.

So avijja, again, it's not an on-off switch. Less avijja in any moment, in a way of looking, means less perception. And it also means less clinging and less self. Do you understand?

So this is mapping this understanding onto the twelve links of dependent origination. They're not on-off switches. If you put a lot of avijja in your way of looking, you're going to get a much more fabricated perception, much more clinging and craving, much more suffering, much more self-sense. If I take away a lot of avijja—let's say I've got it half full—then I'm going to get less perception, less suffering, less clinging, less self.

If I get avijja really, really low, that's another way an insight way of looking can work. It's not so much by relaxing clinging, but actually by changing avijja. In the moment, I'm taking away—again, I think I'm doing, but I'm actually non-doing—I'm taking away the habitual avijja that's programmed in my way of looking at any point.

Does it make sense, how all this fits together with dependent arising? And this, to me, is what the Buddha is pointing at when he talks about dependent arising—what's the most important thing the Buddha's pointing at when he gives this teaching.

What one finds is that with a lot of this, and especially with the formless realms, a specific insight way of looking kind of goes with a specific jhana. If I practice a specific insight way of looking, it leads to a specific jhana, and a specific jhana opens me up to a specific insight way of looking.

A very good example of this is the seventh jhana, the realm of nothingness. After one emerges from the

seventh jhana, if the aftereffect on perception is reasonably strong, one can be moving around and looking around and recognizing there are things, but there's a more compelling sense that these things are not really things. The thingness of them is an illusion. There are no things. So the jhana, in its aftereffect on perception, has delivered an insight that there are no things.

But one can also work the other way around. If in meditation I sit down and engage the way of looking—no thing, there are no things, everything is a dependent arising, everything is fabricated in this way—it will take me to the seventh jhana. So specific insights and specific jhanas correspond, and the causality, as so often is the case, works both ways.

Or the eighth jhana. One might emerge from that and one of the senses one can have is called "neither perception nor non-perception." One of the aftereffects on perception is "all this is just a perception." And again, one could take that view—just a perception—and engage it repeatedly in meditation, sustaining that view on all phenomena: just a perception, just a perception. It will take me to the eighth jhana. Specific insight, corresponding jhana.

"Is that true for someone who has spent no time in the jhanas?"

It gets qualified a little bit. If you've never spent time in any of those jhanas, but you really engage that practice—I could teach my little niece when she's five to just look at everything and say "no thing, no thing," or "empty of inherent existence." It's not going to take her to the seventh jhana.

But if you understand what that means and very, very delicately, very subtly—it's not a big cogitation thing; we're really talking about a very subtle, delicate, beautiful way of looking—if I understand what that means so that when I say "no thing," it's got all my understanding wrapped up in the way of looking very subtly, very agilely, even if I haven't gone to the seventh jhana, it will take me to the seventh jhana.

If I practice, let's say, anatta—not me, not mine—and I understand that one, I don't quite understand this nothingness thing, but I understand not me, not mine, I know what that means, I can make it work—if I do that and I've already been to the seventh jhana, then the not me, not mine may well take me to the seventh jhana. But if I haven't gone to the seventh jhana before...

It may well not. In other words, sometimes what happens is people open up from these practices as far as they can go. But with training—actually, you can kind of... If they go together, the jhanic training and the insight training, you can kind of stop the elevator. You press the button on the elevator: "I want to get off at floor seven," or whatever. Does that make sense?

So usually we think of insight as something we get. You're meditating, you're being mindful, and you receive an insight—suddenly you really understand the fact of impermanence at another level. And that's a good way of thinking about insight. But this way of thinking about insight is insight as ways of looking. Insight is something we do. We actively decide to perceive in a certain way, to look in a certain way.

Once it gets to a certain level, there's a way that what we're engaging is provisional truths, if you like—a certain degree of less avijjā. So even this thing about no-thing is not quite an ultimate truth. It's pretty deep, but it's still a provisional truth. And what you're really doing is engaging a provisional truth as a way of looking. Through the jhana, you're gaining access to that level of provisional truth, of skillful opening perception.

Jhanas, then, are—as we said—huge resources in all these ways that we've talked about before, as well as providing both indirect and direct insight. Even the second jhana—I think I mentioned earlier on the retreat—just to know and really know firsthand that happiness, that degree of happiness and that much happiness and that depth of happiness is available and is not dependent necessarily on getting something from the external world or from someone else. That's an insight.

We also talked very briefly about the relationship between letting go of aversion and the arising of happiness. So that's also part of the insight there. Or in the third and fourth jhanas, the fact that that kind of peace, that kind of stillness really happens when we let go of push and pull. So all this is this kind of insight woven into jhanic openings.

So jhanas—what can we say? They loosen attachments and they relativize objects for us, meaning our usual sense, our usual perspectives and beliefs about things in the world, about objects, about things that we can get. They certainly relativize, as we were just talking about with the second jhana, they relativize the pleasure that we can get from sense objects. Leaving aside the soul-making teachings of sensing with soul, there's no way that one would get that degree of happiness that you get in the second jhana from any sensual object. It's just of a different order, as we said earlier on the retreat.

In time, or later on, or more and more in time, they relativize the nature of objects too—the relative nature of objects too. So all these perceptions open up, these insight ways of looking, these provisional truths, and we start to see: a thing is a thing, and it's also not a thing. So my very sense of something is different when I've seen that. So not just the relative pleasure of something, but actually the relative nature of something becomes more relativized.

Soul-making Dharma, just very briefly, is dependent—as I said right at the beginning—on this understanding of emptiness and the flexibility of the idea, the potential flexibility of ways of looking. That's at the basis of soul-making Dharma. And soul-making Dharma, for those of you who are into it, also leads to that. It opens up more flexibility and it calls into question the whole idea that there is a fixed way things are: "This is like this and that's like that and that's just how it is." Soul-making Dharma is another way you can pry that open, and it breaks open the whole idea that something is this way or that way in itself.

So both insight into emptiness and also the jhanas, in the way I would teach it, they depend on our willingness to play with perception, depend on our willingness to be malleable with perception. But they deliver for us, they open up for us a malleability of perception—both the insight work into emptiness and

the jhanic work.

And we talked about that with pain, and some of you have been experimenting with this and been almost startled at what's possible with unpleasant sensations—that they can become pīti or happiness. What about the mind? Foggy mind, dull mind, agitated mind. To the degree that I know that it's empty, that's also a perception. I have a perception of a mind state. It's a perception. Everything's a perception—just a perception. And knowing that it's empty means, the implication of knowing that it's empty means that it's malleable. It's not a fixed thing. The mind state too.

So that's maybe at some point something one can experiment with too. I've seen it with physical things—pain, unpleasantness. Can I also see the mind state in that way? It's flexible.

And then shape it.

I don't know. I would probably say that all jhānas open up for us or deliver for us a kind of more intuitive capacities. Sometimes that's related to creativity—poems and music and whatever else. There's something in the jhāna, it's almost like they become sources of creative potential or become sources of creativity or creative openings. Intuition, let's say.

But also intuition regarding insight. One of the blessings of jhāna in regard to insight is that it opens up our capacity for intuition in the realm of insight—our intuitive seeing and grasping of things, insight.

I would still say though, other factors are more important. So no matter how much intuition seems like it's opening up intuition regarding insight from jhānic experience, I would still say that gets trumped by what our conceptual framework of the Dharma is and what our conceptual framework of insight is. That will be more important. And if that's limited, it will limit what insight is possible, no matter how much the jhānic opening and how much it feels like, "Yeah, I'm super intuitive and I must be really seeing reality and all that."

So the question comes back to: is my conceptual framework for insight—or of insight—is my conceptual framework of Dharma actually big enough, helpful enough? Will it lead me—because it should, the conceptual framework should actually lead me to more insights—or actually does it hinder and limit? And that will trump any sense of intuitive opening or whatever from the jhāna.

We talked about three ways it's possible to get attached to jhāna. This is the last point now. But when we went into those three ways—attached to the pleasure, attached to the sort of self-grandiosity, or attached to view—actually as we investigated each one, I kind of suggested that it's more likely that the jhāna experience, repeated experience of jhāna releases attachments, including attachments to certain insight views.

I gave the example of the sixth jhāna and just the fact that one experiences something beyond that infinite consciousness—one experiences the seventh jhāna and the eighth jhāna. Just that, and the fact that it's in

the map. Both the map and the experience, the conceptual framework and the experience help me go beyond. So I don't get too entrenched and too attached to such a view.

If my conceptual framework—and I might not even be someone who thinks I have a conceptual framework because I don't like conception or I think it's intellectual or I think it's not the real deal or whatever—I do have a concept. You do. Everyone has a conceptual framework. It might be conscious, semi-conscious, or relatively unconscious. It might be coherent or incoherent. It might be muddled or not. It might be mixed with whatever, but you can't not have a conceptual framework, I would say.

But if my conceptual framework, for example, says something like, "This vastness of awareness, that lovely opening that I was describing the other way, precious opening—that sounds like emptiness. When I hear talk about emptiness, it sounds like that. That sounds like the ultimate. When I hear talk about the ultimate, that sounds like the nature of mind. When I hear talk about the nature of mind as the sort of ultimate thing that one wants to open to, or the nature of awareness, that sounds like rigpa." If you know the Vajrayāna teachings, that sounds like when the Buddha talks about consciousness without limit, without feature, that sounds like the radiant mind or whatever that I've heard the Buddha talk about or other teachers talk about or read about.

Especially when we get into Vajrayāna teachings, the language can get quite confusingly similar and not differentiated enough, really, as signposts.

So if I've got that kind of conceptual framework and I experience this vastness of awareness and I've got no further or deeper experience than that vastness of awareness, nor have I got any way—any way—I don't even, not only don't have the experience, but I've got no way of going beyond that experience of vastness of awareness, no way of going further. I wouldn't even know how to try to go further. None of that fits into my conceptual framework, but my conceptual framework doesn't support any of that or doesn't suggest or suggest how. Then I'm limited and maybe trapped and maybe forced into a kind of attachment to a certain view—entrenched, to use the Buddha's words.

But that doesn't have to be the case, obviously. If I have a conceptual framework that actually can keep going beyond these things—and partly the jhānas can be part of that, and they're woven into the same conceptual framework—then, and this isn't for everyone, but some people will say, "Oh, that makes sense," and it allows more. There's more potency there, there's more distance, there's more depth potential there—less likelihood of getting entrenched in a certain view of anything as ultimate or of "this is how things are." This is the reality of X or Y. And that's what an awakened person knows.

Okay. Let's sit quietly together for a bit.

I don't know how all this lands. Don't worry if it doesn't all, as I said at the beginning, if it doesn't make complete sense right now. Maybe that's the case. But it may still be, even though it doesn't make sense, that there's some kind of sense of beauty there or something that calls you or draws you. Maybe, maybe

not of course. Some perfume, some sense of possibility.

Maybe that's the important thing. If it feels like it doesn't quite make sense, maybe that sense of beauty, that calling, that possibility is still there—and perhaps that's what matters most.

Thank you, everybody.

Time for tea. Enjoy.

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