
SATIPANYA BUDDHIST RETREAT

DhammaBytes

Short teachings on key Buddhist concepts and doctrines

Bhante Bodhidhamma

SHROPSHIRE, WALES · UNITED KINGDOM

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Views about Spiritual Paths

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this opening talk of the 'Approaching the Dhamma' series, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines various attitudes toward spiritual paths and teachers. Drawing from Bhikkhu Bodhi's 'In the Buddha's Words,' he explores how the Buddha's teaching differs from secret doctrines or dogmatic belief systems, emphasizing instead the direct investigation of the visible arising and passing away of dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness).

Using the metaphor of mountain climbing, Bhante categorizes five types of religious ideologies: fundamentalist, relative fundamentalist, relativist, relative universalist, and universalist. He contextualizes the Buddha's teaching within the religious landscape of ancient India, where various spiritual teachers competed alongside Brahminical traditions, Jainism, and emerging Upanishadic thought.

The talk emphasizes the Buddha's unique approach of encouraging direct investigation rather than belief, warning how preconceived notions can distort our understanding of liberation. Bhante illustrates this with examples of how mistaking temporary blissful states for nibbāna can mislead practitioners, stressing that true awakening must come through personal experience and discriminative wisdom rather than blind faith.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So I'm going to carry on with Bhikkhu Bodhi's book, *In the Buddha's Words*. This chapter is devoted to what he calls approaching the Dharma. It's basically our attitude to spiritual teachings, to those who teach spiritual teachings, the teachers, and so on. And how to be discriminative about spiritual practice and stuff.

He's got certain headings, and so we'll go through them. So it's not a secret doctrine. So what he's teaching is not a secret doctrine. It's not a dogma. You don't need blind belief. It's the visible origin and passing away of suffering. It's something that you can actually perceive yourself. Investigate the teacher himself. Heaven forbid. Don't look at me like that. And steps towards realization of the path. I think that's his fullness of it.

So this evening, really, is just an introduction to this. And in his day, there were a choice of teachers. It was a time when the old Brahminical religion of the Rig Veda, which was based on control of the gods through various sacrifices. And there was, of

course, the understanding of rebirth. But that, as I understand it, that was mainly about power rather than whether one was good or not, depending on how you were born. So Brahmin was born from the head of Brahma and therefore was destined to join Brahma somewhere up there.

But by the time of the Buddha, for some time, there'd been people who had really investigated the truth of all that. And that's the beginning of, in the Hindu tradition, of the Upanishads, which are really saying a lot of the things that the Buddha said. And there was... The Jains began there. The Jain leader, the Nigantha, was an elder, contemporary of the Buddha. And it's thought that the ascetic practice that the Buddha did was either connected to him or under some of his disciples. That very fierce sort of ascetic practice. And of course there was the Buddha himself.

And most of the teachers would have been within the tradition of the Brahmins, the Brahminical tradition. The interesting thing about Jainism and Buddhism is that they left that particular tradition entirely and formed their own scriptures from the words of the teacher. So it's a completely different line, you see.

I wrote an essay around the Eightfold Path, and I started off by trying to distinguish five types of ideologues. So I thought I'd read it to you and then see what you think. So there seem to be five types of ideologues in the religious arena. So these are the five, you see. They are the fundamentalist, the relative fundamentalist, the relativist, the relativist universalist, and the universalist. I will now explain in great detail.

The mountain is a good metaphor to illustrate these five different positions. Mountains come up in most spiritual literature. The interesting thing about mountain climbing is that when you're making the effort, when you're moving, all you can see is the ground ahead of you. And then finally when you get tired or you need a rest, you turn around and there's a view. You suddenly realize you're in a different place. And you never see the full 360 degrees until you get to the top. The Buddha talks about the Arahant who really doesn't see, it's only until we become fully liberated that we can really see things as in the noonday sun. So there's something about that end point which is quite awakening or enlightening.

So the fundamentalist says that his is the only true mountain. You think you're climbing a mountain but actually you're descending into a pit. Whereas my mountain will take me to ultimate happiness, yours will take you to utter perdition. I'm right and everybody else is wrong. Utterly wrong. I mean, that's your fundamentalist, isn't it? Just basically, what can you say?

The relative fundamentalist has respect for the traditions. Yes, indeed, they're all mountains. But my mountain is bigger. See? Whereas mine will reach the ultimate goal, yours will stop short, and at some time you'll have to cross over. Everyone is right, but I'm more right than everybody else. So it's compassion for other people's parts, but ultimately, you know, this is the right one.

It's funny because when I was in India once, I went to this Tibetan doctor, as I've been coals or something. He actually said to me in so many words, look, you're a Theravāda. They've got it all wrong. What you want to join is the Mahāyāna. I was taken aback by it actually. Just the Hīnayāna, the lower path. These days they tend to refer to the two types of Buddhist traditions as the northern and the southern path. Northern and the southern Buddhisms.

The relativist, acknowledging his ignorance of other religions, declares all mountains to be equal but different. They lead to their own idea of what is the ultimate good is, and there's no way of telling which is more true. Everyone is right but different. You take your pick and you guess what you choose. There's a postmodernist view that, you know, you live in your own reality, and if you think you've achieved great happiness, then that's it, you know.

The relative universalist argues that once we look below the surface of culture and words, we find that all religions are actually on the same, the very same mountain, all going up the same place. But that each path is distinct and separate. And we're all going in our own religious and cultural way to the same place. Everyone is different but right, and we all end up in the same place. I think probably a lot of people kowtow to that one, I think.

And then finally there's the universalist who takes this position a step further. So espying that indeed beneath the paraphernalia of rites, rituals, customs and culture there are three paths. The way of knowledge, the way of love and the way of action. And that is why many of the actual spiritual practices such as compassionate service, repetitive prayer, mantra, yoga and indeed *vipassanā* can be practiced by people of different religious persuasions. These three paths are intertwined within the individual according to their temperament, all leading to the same place. The outer form is simply a metaphor for this deeper truth. And indeed, a Buddhist universalist may go so far as to say that even those who disavow all spirituality are also on the spiritual path. Eventually they will bump into the truth, everyone is actually on the same path and heading for the same destination. The ultimate universalist.

I don't think you'll find Bhikkhu Bodhi particularly attracted to that one.

It's interesting because Hinduism knows these three paths quite clearly as Jnāna Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga. The path of understanding somebody like Ramana Maharshi. You've heard of him? Nisargadatta Maharaj, one of my favourites. Do you know him? Yeah, do you know him? Yeah. Yeah. Bhakti. Who was the great Bhakti Guru? Mother. He was into the Great Mother. Was that, was it? Yeah. There are a few like that. Just through love, really. Through the heart, you see. The connection to the ultimate through the heart, rather than through understanding. That's right. Hare Krishna. Yeah, that's right. And then there's the path of action, which is compassionate engagement in the world.

It's interesting because, I don't know, it's just my own take on things, but of the three world, the ones that you can call really world religions, the ones that have transcended national boundaries in a real way, like are Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. And each have a particular bent, don't they? Buddhism is definitely the path of discrimination leading to the path of compassion. Christianity turns that around, doesn't it? The path of compassion leading to understanding. And Islam is the will, you see, the will of the Dharma, the will of surrendering to the truth. You've got these three. So the will, I mean, that's action, giving oneself.

So it's a case really of being aware of our position and not taking it too seriously. And when we approach the Buddha's teachings, his is always one of investigating it. And we'll go into that more deeply later. How he doesn't want us to believe anything. That would be, in a sense it would make, it would distort the investigation of the truth if you come from a position of belief. The liberation in Buddhist terms has to be through something that we have explored and experienced directly for ourselves. And the problem is that if you approach something with a particular view or prejudice, belief, then that's what you'll experience. And that's where the mistakes can be made.

So if you have an idea that *Nibbāna* is some sort of blissed out state, an emotional blissed out state, something like that, a mental state of being blissed out, then in your meditation if you get a blissful moment you'll think, oh that's *Nibbāna*. But it ain't.

So there's a, I always forget her name, but there's a woman who had this terrible stroke. She's fairly famous and she's written a book on it and how she overcame it completely it seems. And the right brain shut down and because the left brain was the only part working it... She was just in this total euphoria all the time. And she expresses this as *Nibbāna*. See, this is the point. So that's one way to get *Nibbāna* is to have a stroke so you can get rid of your right brain. It's a strange thing, you know. Left brain. Left brain, excuse me, left brain. I'm getting confused. It just shows you what I am.

So there's a little, just an introduction into something that we can look more closely at. The way the Buddha asks us to approach the spiritual life, really.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

Discourse to the Kālāmas

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the renowned Kālāma Sutta (AN 3.65), often cited as exemplifying the Buddha's non-dogmatic approach to teaching. The discourse addresses the timeless question: how do we know what is true? The Kālāmas faced competing religious teachers, each claiming their doctrine was correct while disparaging others—a situation remarkably similar to our modern spiritual marketplace.

The Buddha's response was revolutionary: don't accept teachings based solely on tradition, scriptural authority, logic, or respected teachers. Instead, examine through direct experience whether teachings lead to harm or benefit. Using the concrete examples of greed, hatred, and delusion versus their opposites, the Buddha shows how we can evaluate teachings by their fruits in our lives.

Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's emphasis on personal investigation over blind faith, connecting this ancient wisdom to contemporary challenges of discerning truth in our information-saturated world. The talk concludes with the Buddha's famous deathbed instruction to Ānanda: 'Take the Dhamma as your lamp, take yourself as your lamp.' This foundational teaching establishes the principle that ultimately, each practitioner must verify spiritual truths through their own careful investigation and experience.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

There's a very famous discourse that people always quote to express the non-dogmatic way that the Buddha taught, and it's known as the *Kalama Sutta*, the discourse to the Kalamas. The question, of course, is how do we know something is true?

Here's a time where all sorts of gurus and ideas are coming forward. It's quite an exciting little time, really. And you're living in a town, a small town, with only a few thousand inhabitants. These gurus keep turning up and telling you what for. They're all saying slightly different things, and of course, saying everybody else is absolutely useless. So you're stuck. You wonder, well, who's right and who's wrong?

If you think of these days, somebody who's been brought up in a non-religious family suddenly becomes interested in the religious field and goes out in search. I mean, it's colossal, isn't it? Where will you start? So this is, in a slightly lesser degree, the situation of the Kalamas. It's very modern in a way.

So I'll just read it through so you get the feel of the discourse, and then say one or two things and continue next week.

Thus have I heard. So remember all these scriptures were related by Ananda, his assistant, remembered by him. He had to repeat them all at this meeting.

On one occasion the Blessed One was wandering on tour with a large sangha of monks when he arrived at the town of the Kalamas called Kesaputta. Now the Kalamas of Kesaputta had heard: "It is said that the ascetic Gautama, the Sakyan son who went forth from the Sakyan family, has arrived at Kesaputta. Now a good report about that master Gautama has been circulating thus: that the blessed one is an Arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the enlightened one, the blessed one. And having realized, with his own direct knowledge, this world, with its devas, mara and brahma, this population, with its ascetics and brahmins, with its devas and humans, he makes it known to others. And he teaches a dharma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, with the right meaning and expressions. He reveals a spiritual life that is perfectly complete and purified. Now it's good to see such a worthy one."

Then the Kalamas of Kesaputta approached the Blessed One. Some paid homage to him and sat down to one side. Some exchanged greetings with him and after greeting and cordial talk sat down to one side. Some saluted him reverentially and sat down to one side and some remained silent and sat down to one side.

And the Kalamas said to the Blessed One: "Venerable Sir, some ascetics and Brahmins who come to Kesaputta explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and Brahmins come to Kesaputta and they too explain and elucidate their doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of the others. For us, venerable sir, there is perplexity and doubt as to which of these good ascetics speaks truth and which speaks falsehood."

"It is fitting for you to be perplexed, O Kalamas. It is fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter. Come, Kalamas, do not go by oral tradition." So this is the bit that's always quoted. "Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage

of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think the ascetic is our teacher. But when you know for yourselves these things are unwholesome, these things are blameable, these things are censured by the wise. These things, if undertaken in practice, lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them."

"Now what do you think, Kalamas? When greed, hatred and delusion arise in a person, is it for his welfare or harm?"

"For his harm, Venerable Sir."

"Kalamas, a person who is greedy, hating and deluded, overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them, will destroy life, take what's not given, engage in sexual misconduct and tell lies. He will also prompt others to do likewise. Will that conduct be to his harm and suffering for a long time?"

"Yes, Venerable Sir."

"Now what do you think, Kalamas? Are these things wholesome or unwholesome?"

"Unwholesome, Venerable Sir."

"Blameable or blameless?"

"Blameable, Venerable Sir."

"Censured or praised by the wise?"

"Censured, venerable sir."

"Undertaken and practiced, do they lead to harm and suffering or not? Or how is it in this case?"

"Undertaken and practiced, these things lead to harm and suffering, so it appears to us in this case."

"It is for this reason, Kalamas, that we said, do not go by oral tradition..." I'm going to repeat that. Remember, this is the oral tradition, so it's put in a very repetitious way so people can remember it.

Now he goes on to the opposite. "So what do you think Kalamas? When non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion arise in a person, is it for his welfare or harm?"

"For his welfare, venerable sir."

"Kalamas, a person who is without greed, without hatred, without delusion, not overpowered by greed and hatred and delusion, his thoughts not controlled by them, will abstain from the destruction of life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct and from false speech. He will also prompt others to do likewise. Will that conduce to his welfare and happiness for a long time?"

"Yes, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think, Kalamas? Are these things wholesome or unwholesome?"

"Wholesome, Venerable Sir."

"Blameable or blameless?"

"Blameless, Venerable Sir."

"Censured or praised by the wise?"

"Praised, venerable sir."

"Undertaken and practiced, do they lead to welfare and happiness or not? Or how is it in this case?"

"Undertaken and practiced, these things lead to welfare and happiness. So it appears to us in this case."

"It is for this reason, Kalamas, that I said, do not go by oral tradition, and so forth."

And then he gives them this practice: "Then Kalamas, that noble disciple, devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unconfused, clearly comprehending and ever mindful, dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving kindness. Likewise the second, the third and the fourth. Thus above, below and across and everywhere and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving kindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility and without ill will."

And this he says also of compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity.

"When Kalamas, this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won four assurances in this very life.

The first assurance he has won is this: if there is another world and if good and bad deeds bear fruit and yield results, it is possible that on the breakup of the body after death I shall arise in a good destination in a heavenly world.

The second assurance he has won is this: if there is no other world and if good and bad deeds do not bear fruit and yield results, still right here in this very life, I live happily, free of enmity and ill will.

The third assurance he has won is this: suppose evil befalls the evildoer. Then, as I do not intend evil for anyone, how can suffering affect me, one who does no evil deed?

The fourth assurance he has won is this: suppose evil does not befall an evildoer, then right here I see myself purified in both respects.

When Kalamas, this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won these four assurances in this very life."

"So it is, blessed one, so it is, fortunate one, when this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won these four assurances in this very life."

And then the usual ending: "Magnificent Venerable Sir, Magnificent Venerable Sir, the Blessed One has made the Dharma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what had been hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the darkness so those with good eyesight can see forms. So now we go for refuge to the Blessed One, to the Dharma and to the Sangha of Monks. Let the Blessed One accept us as lay followers who have gone to refuge from today until life's end."

Very successful, eh? So let's just look at this, the main thing that he says. The first one he says is don't believe anything. Don't believe anything just because it comes from these things that are established by scriptural authorities or something coming from the past - so oral tradition, lineage of the teacher, hearsay, collection of texts. So fundamentalists might be described as people who believe that the texts are infallible, that they are true records and that they have to be entirely and fully believed.

My brother-in-law believes that the whole of the Bible is the word of God, full stop. And you'll find people in the East who believe that all the scriptures are actually the word of the Buddha, I mean the direct word of the Buddha. Sometimes you can get the flavour of the Buddha's teaching coming through, but to say, you know, to make a statement that it's the actual words he spoke... but it gives them assurance that, you know, it must be right. Of course they don't recognise that the way they read it is their own interpretation. Putting that aside, they just take it for real.

Then there are the four rational grounds: logic, inferential reasoning and reasoned cogitation and the acceptance of views after pondering upon it. Now most people would think that if they'd thought something through it must necessarily be true. But we know from the history of our own rationality that it can lead you in a very strange place.

I mean, our 18th century enlightenment, which was about rationality, and probably its greatest product was the Declaration of Human Rights, also produced communism and Nazism, which were very rational doctrines. Remember, all rationality has to be based on a premise. And if the premise is wrong, then you're going to end up somewhere else. A lot of people would believe that just because they've thought something through, it must be therefore right. It's a dangerous one, eh?

And then there are those on authoritative persons, the impressive speakers and the respected teachers. So we've had the sad death of... maybe that, yeah. I was just reading some of the responses. It's unbelievable, actually. It's as bad as it was when she was there. The opposing views. And, you know, you just don't believe somebody because they have authority.

So now you've got this real problem of how do you find out whether something is true or not? Then on top of that, you've got the post-modern understanding that all our truths are completely relative to the individual person. So whatever's true for you, well, it might be true for you, but it's not true for me.

So you have these three ways of trying to decide for ourselves as to what's true: what's given to us from traditions, what we can think about and rationalise with others and come to some understanding, and what's true for me. So the Buddha simply says well go back to your experience and that's why he talks about something which is so concrete as greed, hatred and delusion and he asks you well does this create harm or not. So he's always going back to direct experience and to using that as a basis for our understanding of what truth is.

So remember that when he died, when he was dying, Ananda asks him, are you going to leave somebody to lead us? And he says, no. He said, take the Dharma, the teaching, as your light, as your lamp. Take yourself as the lamp. See? So the Dharma, of course, is the tradition and all that, and the logic and all that. But eventually, I'm afraid it's us. And if we get it wrong, it's only us that suffer.

So it's a very important point for us to think about. How do we know something is true? How do we know something is true?

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your investigation of this, arrive at that place of utter happiness sooner rather than later.

Desire the Root of Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a powerful sutta dialogue where the Buddha demonstrates his masterful teaching method. Rather than discussing abstract concepts about past or future suffering, the Awakened One brings the teaching directly into the present moment, asking a village headman about his relationships with people in his town.

Through careful questioning about the headman's attachments to his son and wife, the Buddha reveals how taṇhā (craving or desire based on wrong understanding) creates psychological dependency and becomes the source of all suffering. Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies that not all desires cause suffering—only those rooted in misunderstanding and seeking happiness in things that cannot truly deliver it.

The talk explores the Second Noble Truth and demonstrates how the Buddha's oral teaching tradition used repetition to allow profound truths to be absorbed rather than merely intellectually understood. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides listeners in understanding how spiritual phrases can transform our thinking through contemplative repetition, drawing parallels with the Benedictine practice of lectio divina. This teaching offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners insight into the Buddha's pedagogical brilliance and practical wisdom for recognizing the roots of suffering in daily life.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened.

This particular passage is called the visible origins and passing away of suffering. But the reason I want to use it in this little section which is about approaching the Dharma is that it gives us an even clearer view of how the Buddha taught. It's just nice to see how he very carefully guides people to understanding and reinforces it.

So I'll read through and then we'll stop for little comments. So on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at the town of the Melians named Uruvelacapa. Then Bhadraka, the headman, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side and said it would be good venerable sir if the blessed one would teach me about the origin and passing away of suffering.

If headman I were to teach you about the origin and passing away of suffering with reference to the past saying so it was in the past, perplexity and uncertainty about that might arise in you. And if I were to teach you about the origin and passing away of suffering with reference to the future saying so it will be in the future, perplexity and uncertainty about what might happen might arise in you. Instead, headman, while I'm sitting right here and you're sitting right there, I'll teach you about the origin and passing away of suffering. Now listen and attend closely and I will speak.

Remember, these are all remembered and it captures the manner in which they spoke to each other. Yes, venerable sir.

The Blessed One said now what do you think headman are there any people in Uruvelacapa on whose account sorrow lamentation pain dejection and despair would arise in you if they were to be executed in prison fined or censured? Well there are such people when it was there. But are there any people in Uruvelacapa on whose account sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair would not arise in you in such event? There are such people. So why is it, headman, that in relation to some people in Uruvelacapa, sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair would arise in you if they were to be executed, imprisoned, fined or censured, while in regard to others they would not arise in you?

Well, those people in Uruvelacapa, Venerable Sir, in relation to whom sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair would arise in me if they were executed, imprisoned, fined or censured, these are the ones for whom I have a desire and attachment. And for those in relation to whom they would not arise in me, these are the ones I have no desire and attachment. Probably the opposite.

Headman, by means of this principle that is seen, understood, immediately attained, fathomed, apply the method to the past and the future thus. Whatever suffering arose in the past, all that arose rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering. Whatever suffering will arise in the future, all that will arise rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.

And you get this and the usual great praise. He's wonderful venerable, it's amazing venerable sir, how well that was stated by the Blessed One. And then he tells the Buddha what he just heard. Whatever suffering arises all that is rooted in desire has desire at its source for desire is the root of suffering. That's what therapists do, isn't it? They listen to you and then they tell you what they've just heard. So he's pretty good to tell the Buddha that in fact he's just heard what he said.

Now you'll notice here that the Buddha always starts with what a person can experience right here and now. So he doesn't start talking about suffering and pain in the past like why did it happen in the past, now I've got this pain, if I do this, what will happen? He brings it right down to the very present, to the very present now, and he's just asking a very simple question. If anybody whom you have a love for, an attachment for, were to suffer some sort of misfortune, would you suffer for them? Yeah, I would. But of course, other people whom you don't know, or those people whom you dislike, as a result, you might rejoice.

So very quickly brings the person to understand this role of desire. Now remember that whenever we're talking about desire we're always talking about a specific type of desire because translating words from one language into another is always very difficult to get the exact translation. This desire is translating the word *taṇhā*, and *taṇhā* is the desires that we have based on wrong understanding, and that wrong understanding is seeking happiness in something which is not going to deliver basically that. And what happens is we form a psychological dependency on something and that's where the problem lies.

So desires to do with wanting to become liberated, desires coming out of a pure act of love or a pure act of generosity or an act of compassion or joy like giving somebody a present for their birthday but doing it just for the joyfulness of it to increase the other person's joy, all those desires are to our benefit. They make the heart grow. But as soon as something creeps in there which is to do with I give a present so somebody will like me, then I'm into a relationship which eventually can cause me suffering.

So now he wants to reinforce that. So now he gets to be more personal. So this man repeats to the Buddha, right, well, this is the root of desire. And then he tells him, he says, look, Venerable Sir, I have a son called Chirovati. So now this man, in his insight, is now linking it to the relationship he has to his son, who stays at an outside residence. And I rise early and send a man, saying, go, man, and find out how Chiravasi is. And until that man returns, Venerable Sir, I'm upset, thinking, I hope Chiravasi has not met with any affliction. So there's a parent's worry.

And what do you think, headman, replies the Buddha, if Chiravasi were to be executed in prison, fined or censured, would sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair arise in you? Venerable sir, if Chiravasi were to be executed in prison, fined or censured, even my life would seem futile. So how could sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair not arise in me? In this way, too, headman, it's to be understood. Whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire, with desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.

Now, you have to make these statements, you have to repeat them and let them sink in. They have to be digested. What the Buddha is saying is, whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire. You have to keep repeating that. Remember, suffering is not the same as pain, physical pain. That's a given. But whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire. With desire as its source, for desire is the root of suffering.

These phrases have a real power when you just gently repeat them to yourself in the quietness, in some way in which you can feel the digestion. You don't have to think about it, because it's going in, it's like osmosis, you're absorbing it, and it's actually beginning to change your attitude by doing that. That's the way spiritual reading works. You don't have to think about it.

And then he wants to really drive it home. This is the final nail. What do you think, headman? Before you saw your wife or heard about her, did you have any desire, attachment or affection for her? No, venerable sir. Then was it, headman, only when you saw her or heard about her that this desire, attachment and affection rose in you? Yes, venerable sir.

Now what do you think, headman? If your wife were to be executed, imprisoned, fined or censured, would sorrow, lamentation, pain and despair arise in you? Venerable sir, if my wife were to be executed, imprisoned, fined and censured, even my life would seem futile. So how could sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair not arise in me? He drives home the point. Well, in this way too, headman, it's to be understood. Whatever suffering arises all that is rooted in desire with desire as its source for desire is the root of suffering.

So there's something about the oral tradition where you repeat it and repeat it and repeat it, and these phrases if you when you read the scriptures, when you come across a phrase which catches you, and it doesn't have to be the scriptures, it could be any spiritual work, and a phrase catches you, or a sentence catches you, or even a small paragraph, and you think, that's interesting, don't think of it, just keep repeating it, keep repeating it.

And you find that you keep going back to it, it's like a piece of music, and then eventually you get fed up with it. And at that point, you know it's been digested. And then it comes out in funny ways. It actually changes the way you think. It comes out, as it were, through the back entrance. And that's a beautiful way. This is the way that the Benedictines, that's their *Lectio Meditatio*, isn't it? *Contemplatio*. I think that's right. So they read. And they do this repetition business. And then they sit in stillness. If thoughts come up, it's fine. It's not as though you're trying not to think. But what you want to do is to absorb these little sentences that you find. Little paragraphs.

There we are. Suffering is rooted in desire. Second noble truth. I can only hope that these words have finally driven home the truth. Suffering is in fact rooted in desire. And hopefully you'll work towards your liberation and find *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

How to Test the Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a remarkable discourse where the Buddha instructs his followers on how to investigate whether a teacher is truly awakened — including the Buddha himself. Drawing from the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta, this teaching reveals the Buddha's extraordinary openness to scrutiny and his insistence that spiritual claims must be verified through personal experience.

The discourse outlines a systematic method of investigation: observing a teacher's conduct and speech for defiled, mixed, or purified states; examining whether their attainments are stable over time; assessing how they handle fame and renown; and determining if their restraint comes from genuine freedom rather than fear. Bhante shares the story of Ajahn Chah's investigation of a supposedly liberated teacher, illustrating how authentic spiritual realization manifests in consistent behaviour.

This teaching emphasizes that faith (saddhā) in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha should ultimately be 'rooted in vision' — grounded in one's own direct experience of the path and its fruits. The Buddha's radical transparency and invitation to question everything reflects the Dhamma's foundation in verifiable truth rather than blind belief, making this essential listening for anyone serious about authentic spiritual practice.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-enlightened one.

If you remember, we read the Kalama discourse, where the Buddha is basically saying that you have to question everything that's been taught to you, and it has to be true for yourself. You have to put it into practice and make sure it's true for yourself. Then, of course, he takes the opportunity of telling them what the Dhamma is. But this here, this particular section is the Buddha actually telling people how to investigate whether the teacher is fully liberated or not. He was talking about himself.

Thus have I heard: on one occasion the Blessed One was living at Savatthi in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's Park. And there he addressed the group of monks. Remember in the scriptures "monks" refers to the listeners, so it could have been quite a large congregation really. "Venerable Sir," they replied, and the Blessed One said this: "A monk"—

occasionally I'll translate that as a person—"a person who is an inquirer, not knowing how to gauge another's mind, should make an investigation of the Tathagata in order to find out whether or not he is perfectly enlightened."

So he's already saying that to these people who are his followers: How do you know I'm the Tathagata? How do you know I'm fully liberated? And they reply: "Our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as their resort. It would be good if the Blessed One would explain the meaning of these words. Having heard it from him, we shall remember it." "Then listen and attend closely to what I shall say." "Yes, Venerable Sir."

"A person who is an inquirer, not knowing how to gauge another's mind"—in other words, not being able to see a person as they are—"should investigate the Tathagata"—remember that's what he referred to himself as; he translates rather sillily as "thus gone," just "the transcendent" I think, because he always talks about the other shore, so "the transcendent one" I think is the best translation I've come across—"should investigate the Tathagata with respect to two kinds of states: states cognisable through the eye and through the ear. Thus: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear?"—in other words, how he behaves and what he says—"And when he investigates him, he comes to know: no defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata."

That's the first thing, right? So, in other words, observe a person's behaviour and listen to what they say.

"When he comes to know this, he investigates further thus: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? When he investigates him thus, he knows: no mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata." So mixed states refers to the fact that sometimes we behave well and sometimes we behave awfully. Sometimes we say things are good and sometimes not. So these are mixed states. But these are not found in the Tathagata. That's the important point.

"When he comes to know this, he investigates further: Are there found in the Tathagata or not cleansed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? When he investigates this: cleansed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata." And of course those are your beautiful states.

There's a little story that I remember hearing about Ajahn Chah, which if I remember rightly goes something like this. He'd heard that there was somebody who was fully liberated. And so he thought, well, I'll go and live with the person. And for a long time, I

don't know how long, he was quite convinced that this person had in fact was fully liberated and he had that reputation. And one day he caught—what had happened was somebody had offered meat to the monks there, and a dog had got onto the meat, and he saw this, the Tathagata, this very liberated person, get very angry and give the dog one hell of a kick. And upon that, it seems, he left.

So he doesn't say—it's not actually in this particular discourse, or at least he's not quoted in this discourse—that you have to live a long time with somebody to know what they're like.

So that's the first thing, you see, to actually observe the person, the Tathagata, to see what they do and what they say.

Now the next thing is, he investigates further: "Has this venerable one attained the wholesome state over a long time, or did he attain it recently? When he investigates him, he comes to know: the venerable one has attained this wholesome state over a long time and has not attained it just recently." So that gives a certain depth to his practice, you see.

"Now when he comes to know this, he investigates still further: Has the Venerable One acquired renown and attained fame so that the dangers connected with renown and fame are found in him? For as long as a monk has not acquired renown and attained fame, the dangers connected with renown and fame are not found in him. But when he has acquired renown and attained fame, those dangers are found in him." So the dangers are, of course, conceit, arrogance, etc. "And when he investigates him, he knows thus: this venerable one has acquired renown and attained fame, but the dangers associated with renown fame are not found in him." That's another way you can tell whether somebody is fully liberated.

"And when he comes to know this, he investigates him further: Is the Venerable One restrained without fear, not restrained by fear? And does he avoid indulging in sensual pleasures because he is without lust through the destruction of lust? And when he investigates him, he comes to know: yes, the Venerable One is restrained without fear, not restrained by fear, and he avoids indulging in sensual pleasure because he is without lust through the destruction of lust." Lust here refers to any sensual pleasure.

"Now if others should ask that monk thus: What are the Venerable One's reasons and what is his evidence whereby he says that Venerable One is restrained without fear, not restrained by fear, and he avoids indulging in sensual pleasures because he is without lust through the destruction of lust? Answering rightly, that monk would answer thus: Whether that Venerable One dwells in the Sangha, or alone, while some there are well

behaved, and some are ill behaved, and some there teach, and some there teach a group, while some here are seen concerned with material things, and some are sullied, are unsullied by material things, still the Venerable One does not despise anyone because of that. And I have heard and learned this from the Blessed One's lips: that I am restrained without fear, not constrained by fear. And I avoid indulging in sensual pleasure because I am without lust through the destruction of lust."

In other words, even though he himself is fully liberated, he does not despise people who aren't because of their behaviour. He remains impartial, faithfully enough.

"So the Tathagata monk should be questioned further about this, about this: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? The Tathagata would answer: No defiled states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata. And if asked: Are there found in the Tathagata or not any mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear? The Tathagata would answer thus: No mixed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata. And if asked: Are there found in the Tathagata or not cleansed states cognisable through eye or through the ear? The Tathagata would say: Cleansed states cognisable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata. They are my pathway, my domain, yet I do not identify with them."

So now he's answered these questions, you see, but he makes the clear statement that this is the way he lives, but he does not identify with them. So again it's a statement of the Tathagata being the transcendent one. Transcendent but also immanent in the world.

"A disciple should approach the teacher who speaks thus in order to hear the Dhamma. The teacher teaches him the Dhamma with its successively higher levels, with its successively more sublime levels, with its dark and bright counterparts. And as the teacher teaches the Dhamma to a monk in this way, through direct knowledge of a certain teaching here in that Dhamma, the monk comes to a conclusion about the teachings. He places confidence in the Buddha thus: the Blessed One is perfectly enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, and the Sangha is practising in a good way."

So here we see the growth of faith, and the growth of faith drawing the monk, or the practitioner, into further practice. There's a note here which tries to clarify that. I may as well try and read it: "When the Dharma has been taught by the Master"—this is from one of the commentaries—"when the Dharma has been taught by the Master, the monk, by directly knowing the Dharma, through penetration of the path, fruit and *Nibbāna*, comes to a conclusion regarding the preliminary teachings of the Dharma about the

aids of enlightenment, which are the factors of enlightenment." In other words, it's a long-winded way of saying that as the person becomes, has his own experience of path and fruit, he understands the factors of enlightenment.

And then finally: "What are the Venerable One's reasons and what is his evidence whereby he says the Blessed One is perfectly enlightened, the Dharma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, the Sangha is practising the good way? Answering rightly, that monk would answer thus: Here friends, I approach the Blessed One in order to hear the Dharma. The Blessed One taught me the Dharma with its successively high levels, with its successively more sublime levels, with its dark and bright counterpart. And as the Blessed One taught the Dhamma to me in this way, through direct knowledge of a certain teaching here in that Dhamma, I came to the conclusion about the teachings, and I placed confidence in the teacher thus." So in other words, at this point he's actually had the experience of path and fruit, and the confidence is a strong one in the Buddha. "The Blessed One is perfectly enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, and the Sangha is practising well."

"When anyone's faith has been planted, rooted and established in the Tathagata through these reasons, terms and phrases, his faith is said to be supported by reasons, rooted in the vision"—in other words his own experience—"firm. It is invincible by any ascetic or Brahmin or Deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world. That is how, monks, there is an investigation of the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. And that is how the Tathagata is well investigated in accordance with the Dhamma. That is what the Blessed One said, and the monks were satisfied"—the listeners were satisfied—"and delighted in the Buddha's words."

So, the Buddha here is telling us that we just need to keep that questioning going. We need not to take anything just because he's the Buddha. Everything that has been handed down to us has to be verified by our own personal experience. That's what it comes down to.

I can only hope this small exposition has been of some assistance and that you may be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu.

01 Introducing the Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

In this opening talk of the series, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how Buddhism has been reinterpreted in different cultures throughout history, from Tibet to Japan to the modern West. He discusses the various ways Western practitioners view the Buddha - as ethical reformer, empiricist, existential psychologist, or agnostic teacher - while emphasizing that the Buddha's own self-understanding transcends these limited interpretations.

Drawing from passages in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Bhante explores the Buddha's declaration of himself as the Tathāgata - one who has 'gone beyond' or 'come from beyond' the ordinary psychophysical organism. The talk covers the Buddha's description of his unique arising "for the welfare of the multitude, out of compassion (anukampanā) for the world," and his mastery of the six unsurpassed qualities, four analytical knowledges, and the four stages of awakening from stream entry to Arahatship.

This foundational talk encourages practitioners to remain open to the Buddha's own understanding of his transcendent nature, while acknowledging the empirical approach that makes his psychological insights so accessible to modern practitioners. The discussion touches on challenging topics like rebirth, emphasizing the Buddha's emphasis on direct experience over blind faith.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm going to start on this new chapter, which is entitled "The Bringer of Light" from *The Buddha's Words* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. I want to begin by quoting something from his foreword.

When Buddhism first came to the West, they thought that the Buddha was really the sun god, a mythical figure. It was only later that, when they rediscovered the sites in India—I think it was Cunningham, who was an army surveyor—found the actual sites and therefore established the truth that in fact he was a human being, lived about 500 years before the common era. At the same time was the Jain leader, the Mahāvīra. And at the same time that the scriptures were being developed in the Brahminical religion, which we now call Hinduism.

But it says here, depending on our biases and predispositions, we may choose to regard the Buddha as a liberal ethical reformer of a degenerate Brahmanism, as a great secular humanist, as a radical empiricist, as an existential psychologist, as a proponent of a sweeping agnosticism, or as a precursor of any intellectual faction that meets our fancy.

Whenever Buddhism has gone into a different country, it's always been reinterpreted by that country. And it's always kept the basic tenets. Nobody can declare Buddhism without the Four Noble Truths. It's absolutely basic. But the way that a country receives it depends on their tradition they receive.

So, for instance, in Tibet, the shamanism of Bon had a great effect on it. And then when it moved to China, Taoism had a great effect on the reinterpretation of the Buddhist teachings. When it got to Japan, it was similar. The Japanese had a similar problem with things like rebirth, because they didn't have it. They had ancestors and they worshipped, but they didn't have this idea of onward-going rebirthing. And their way of tackling that problem was to simply centre the teaching on the immediate presence. So whenever you read Japanese Buddhism, it's all about the here and now, rather than these future lives, which you would get from the scriptures.

When it comes to the West, what's happened in the West is that a whole load of stuff has come. All types of Buddhism have landed on our doorstep. From every country where there is Buddhism, it's here. It's here in Britain, it's here in Europe, it's definitely here in America. So as it comes in, we ourselves have our own interpretation. Not only as a society as a whole, but individually.

Here we have a list of ways that people have seen the Buddha. Often he attracts people who believe in only one life, who are based in science because the way the Buddha talks about the psychology is so close to the way we understand it. And that's one of the reasons why all this mindfulness has entered into the mainstream. It's because we can understand it, we can understand the human being from that point of view. It's almost basic psychology, and the role of desire, addiction, all that. So it makes immediate sense to us, that part of the Buddha's teaching.

He's an empiricist. In other words, nothing is given to us without it being tried out. If it doesn't work, it isn't Buddhism, full stop. So everything that he puts to us through the meditational practices, which isn't just this *vipassanā*, it includes the goodwill practice and all. There's a whole flurry of practices. And they're there as something for us to try. It has to be something experienced. And it either works for us or it doesn't.

One of the things that annihilationists in his day, materialists, would say to the Buddha was, "I don't believe in all this rebirth stuff." He said, but even so, if you follow the Dharma, if you follow these teachings, you'll get benefits in this life. And if after this life you're just annihilated, fine, but at least you'll have the benefit of it in this life.

And then existential psychologist. So it's a psychology for this present moment with nothing beyond really the psychophysical organism. It's like defining a human being only by their body and their minds. Their mind meaning their emotional life and their thoughts.

And then a sweeping agnosticism, like not believing in anything. This often refers to a discourse where he goes to these people called the Kalamas, and we'll come to that later on in the book, who are very confused because this teacher says this, this teacher turns up and says that, so they're completely confused. And by the end of this talking to them, he says, "Look, if it's not right for you, it's not true. You've got to try it out. You've got to actually make it true for yourself."

So in a sense, it's that sort of not believing anything, not believing anything in the sense of a blind belief. It's more in the sense of a confidence. So we have this quality of *saddhā*, which is translated as confidence, not so much faith, because if you say faith to people, it tends to give the suggestion that you've got to believe it, whether it's true or not. But that would be the wrong attitude. From the Buddha's point of view, that would actually undermine your investigation. And it's the process of investigating ourselves which is the process of liberation. So if you don't investigate yourself you just stay as you are. You can read as many books as you want which is not going to liberate you from suffering.

So that's the first thing, that basically we have to remember that when we read about the Buddha himself, the Buddha as a person, we're always interpreting what he does from what satisfies us. But, unfortunately for a lot of people, the Buddha doesn't talk about himself in quite such humanistic terms, in terms of "I am just this body and mind." He actually refers to himself as the *Tathāgata*.

Now this word, the word that it is, is *Tathā*, which means "there", and it can be either translated as "come there", *Āgata*, or "gone there". And basically it translates as transcendent. It's somebody who has transcended the psychophysical organism. Now that's a very different sort of statement. And in that sense, he's fulfilling, in his own terms, some very deep, original archetype that is within us, that there is something in us which is actually beyond this body and mind.

So, depending on where you stand, that would either be an impossibility, and you're not prepared to accept it, or it opens up a possibility. I had a person come there. He was studying some sort of science. It might have been biology at a university. And he came on one of the courses I was holding at Gaia House, and he came to me after two or three days when I'd given these talks, and he said, "I came here to meditate. I don't believe all this stuff about afterlife and all this stuff." And he couldn't handle it. Off he went. I would never put it to him that he has to believe this in order to get the benefit of the meditation. But he just couldn't handle being in any situation that suggested that there was anything beyond this body and mind. The human being as you can actually see them.

This idea of something beyond, all over the scriptures, the explanation of *Nibbāna* is always something beyond the phenomenal. It's an island. It's something which is separated from, that you have to move towards. So that's there within the scriptures. But again, you have to remember that that's not something you have to believe, but it's something we need to know. That he doesn't talk about himself as just being a liver and heart and a bit of emotions and the brain.

And the one that I think where we associate with the Buddha is, of course, with his humanness. So he goes through that struggle. He actually liberates himself as a human being here on this earth. And the path that he treads is the path that he's actually pointing to. And he says that he's not inventing the path, he's discovering it, he's rediscovering it. It was always there, it's just that he was able to rediscover it and lay it out before us. So it's not that he invented Buddhism. And that's what I think to us as Westerners, that's where we make our connection to him as somebody who also practiced, who also went through all the problems that we have and then declared that he didn't have those problems anymore.

And of course included in this business of things that we find hard to believe is the whole teaching around rebirth. And we'll come to passages which presume that that's exactly what happens to us. Now, I've put on my website, if you go onto it, on the front page on the left panel there, there's a special page. I've named it "Subjects." And if you click on that, it'll take you to a page which looks at certain things that we have difficulties with. So rebirth, euthanasia, vegetarianism. And there's a link there to a YouTube of a young American boy who remembers his past life as a pilot being shot down by the Japanese in the Pacific. And if you follow that through, you see him both as a little kid, about four years old, and later on as an 11-year-old. And there's no doubt that he... It's astonishing because he knows things about the family. He doesn't belong to his old family. But he remembers them. He remembers who it is. And when he goes to see

his sister, who then is an elderly lady, he tells her things that only the family would know. So you've got a big problem if you think it's something that comes through on your genes, because he's come from a completely different gene family.

So I just want to read this opening passage which actually is the Buddha declaring himself as to who he is and what he is. And remember when we say monks it's anybody who's listening.

"Monks, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of *devas* and humans. Who is that one person? It is the *Tathāgata*, the *Arahant*, the perfectly enlightened one. This is that one person."

Now, you'll notice here he says, for the multitude. Often that's translated as "the many." He doesn't say for everybody. Some people just aren't ready for it. And this word compassion is a lovely word. It's not the usual word that some of you might know, *karuṇā*. It's *anukampanā*. And *kampati* means to shake, to tremble. And *anu* means to tremble towards. So you get the feeling of a resonance, out of resonance with other human beings, he offers this teaching to alleviate their suffering.

"There is one person arising in the world who is unique without a peer, without counterpart, incomparable, unequaled, matchless, unrivaled, the best of humans. Who is that one person? It is the *Tathāgata*, the *Arahant*, the perfectly enlightened one. This is that one person."

Now it sounds really sure enough, doesn't it? I mean, can you imagine saying something like that about yourself? "I am the one." So here we have to recognise that these scriptures were worked on and there are three levels to the scriptures. The original level you can see, it's very chatty, it's very conversational and you can see that his teaching has not been formalised so greatly as it becomes. Then there's the middle section which is the formalised part and this would be part of that. And then towards the end of the scriptures, you get these lists, lists which move then into a later work, which is called the *Abhidhamma*. And he obviously said things about himself, which were then built up into these statements.

"The manifestation of one person is the manifestation of great love, of great vision, of great light, of great radiance. It is the manifestation of the six things unsurpassed, the realization of the four analytical knowledges, the penetration of the various elements, of the diversity of elements. It is the realization of the fruit of knowledge and liberation,

the realization of the fruits of stream entry, once returning, non-returning and *Arahat-ship*. Who is that one person? It is the *Tathāgata*, the *Arahant*, the perfectly enlightened one. This is that one person."

Now there's a hell of a lot in that little paragraph because it presumes that we understand all these different things that they're talking about. But what he's saying here is that he has discovered this path, and he's not only discovered it, he knows it root and branch. And he's been able to lay down all the facets of that particular path. And you can see that from the massive amount of teaching that there is around these scriptures. So that every part of that journey is covered. And that's what he's saying here.

This stuff comes up later, so we needn't go into it in such great detail. But just so that the six things that are unsurpassed is the unsurpassed sight of the Buddha and his disciples. The unsurpassed hearing of the Dharma from the Buddha and his disciples. The unsurpassed gain, the gain of confidence in the Buddha and his disciples. The unsurpassed training. So this is the higher morality, higher mind, higher wisdom as taught by the Buddha and his disciples. The unsurpassed service, the service to the Buddha and his disciples, and the unsurpassed recollection. So that's meditating, contemplating the Buddha and his disciples. These are the six unsurpassable things.

When it comes to the analytical knowledges, the four analytical knowledges, it's basically a way of discussing things, a logical way, a philosophical way. And they include an analysis of a meaning of something, the reasons and causes and conditions why they arise, an analysis of the language that you're actually using, and understanding all the processes that bring about something. It's an analysis of that. So the Buddha's teaching is really about deconstructing things, about analyzing things and seeing how they come to be.

And then finally, all that business about the elements, all that is to do with what makes up a human being. Again, there'll be another time we can go into that in more detail. Obviously, the first two big elements are the body and the mind. And then these things that we mentioned at the end, the stream entry, once returning, non-returning, and *Arahant*, these are the four paths and fruits that are entered upon on the path. And they are gradations of insight as you go through. And they each have an effect on our personality and on our characters.

So, for instance, by the time that you're a non-returner, you've lost, really, any attachment, any psychological dependency on any pleasures of this world for your happiness. So your happiness is based on something else. That's what attachment is. Attachment is psychological dependency on something outside ourselves for our personal happiness.

So that gives you some idea of how the Buddha talked about himself. So, although there are these interpretations, remember that it's for us, really, to decide where the Buddha stands for us in our lives, and yet not to be closed by that definition that we've put on that person, just to be open to the fact that actually what he's saying about himself may actually be true.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that in contemplating the Buddha's life it may bring about a certain urgency to your own spiritual practice that you may arrive to that lovely place of *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later. *Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.*

The Birth of the Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min

In this second episode of the series on the Buddha's life, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the traditional account of the Buddha's miraculous birth from the Accharyabbhutadhamma Sutta (MN 123). The talk explores how the oral tradition developed mythic elements around the Bodhisattva's descent from Tusita heaven, his pure birth, and his first proclamation as a newborn declaring his final rebirth.

Bhante contextualizes this narrative within the ancient Indian worldview of cyclical time and multiple Buddhas, while noting parallels with other religious traditions. He explains the six realms of existence and the concept of the Bodhisattva - one aspiring to become a fully self-awakened Buddha who establishes a dispensation.

Crucially, the Buddha concludes this mythic account by returning to the essence of his achievement: perfect awareness of feelings, perceptions, and thoughts as they arise, remain present, and pass away. This juxtaposition highlights how the ultimate 'marvel' of the Tathāgata lies not in supernatural birth circumstances, but in the complete awakened awareness that defines true Buddhahood.

The episode offers insight into how early Buddhist communities understood their teacher both as a historical figure and as part of a cosmic pattern of awakened beings, while emphasizing that the Buddha's true significance lies in his discovery and teaching of the path to liberation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — honour to the Blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

We're using this book, *In the Buddha's Words* by Bhikkhu Bodhi, to investigate the discourses. We've moved into the chapter concerning the Buddha himself. Last week we discussed how people see the Buddha, either as a humanist who came up with a wonderful ethical code to make us all happy, right over to as far as a supra-human being who's capable of enormous and amazing things. There's a vast way that we can interpret the Buddha.

Here, of course, in the West, we tend to see him much more as a human being who discovered a path. Some of us believe that this *Nibbāna* that he talks about, you can get it, but you've only got one life, so you've got to be pretty lucky. Others think that you go on, and so in future lives you'll be able to get it.

This particular discourse that has been chosen gives us these two sides and we'll see how the mythic side of the Buddha was built up. It concentrates on the conception and birth of his life. I'll read it and then make comments as I go along. Remember that this is an oral tradition and therefore it has a repetitious feel about it. I won't actually put you through that misery. I'll just read out the kernel bits.

Thus have I heard. Remember it's Ānanda who remembers all that the Buddha said, and at the first meeting after his death, he's the one who related the words of the Buddha. All these discourses begin with "thus have I heard." On one occasion, the Blessed One was living at Sāvattthī in Jeta's Grove and Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

Now, Anāthapiṇḍika was one of these new breed of people who was a merchant. This was something quite new, within the last hundred or so years of the Buddha's time. It's all part and parcel of a change in that society towards ruled by a group of elites, which was what we would call a sort of democracy, to kingship. Anāthapiṇḍika was a very successful businessman, a merchant. In those days they were moving away from barter to using money. That was the shift. Anāthapiṇḍika, upon hearing of the Buddha, had goose pimples all over his skin. When he finally met him, he determined that this was the man. He determined to buy him a piece of land for his monastics.

By this time, the Buddha had gathered around him some monks and some women, some nuns. He bought this field from Prince Jeta. Jeta didn't want to sell it. He said, "Well, what would you sell it for?" He said, "Not even if you covered the whole ground with gold coins." So Anāthapiṇḍika went on to cover the whole ground with gold coins. In this way, it became the Buddha's first monastery. It was at Sāvattthī. Sāvattthī was the capital of Kosala, which was north of the Ganges. King Pasenadi was a great supporter of the Buddha. Same caste, the Khattiya caste.

They're in this grove, they're in this monastery. A number of monks were sitting in the assembly hall when they had met together on returning from alms round. After their meal, this discussion arose amongst them: "It is wonderful, friends, it is marvellous how mighty and powerful is the *Tathāgata*. For he is able to know about the Buddhas of the past who attained final *Nibbāna*, cut the tangle of proliferation, broke the cycle, ended the round and surmounted all suffering. For those blessed ones, their

birth was thus, their names was thus, their clans was thus, their moral discipline was thus, their qualities of concentration were thus, their wisdom was thus, their meditative dwellings were thus, their liberation was thus."

Here they're saying it's an amazing thing that the Buddha also knows all about the past Buddhas. Remember, the East and the ancient world always thought in cyclic time. They didn't think in linear time. You always get this with all these saints at the time, like the Nigantha, who was the head of the Jain sect — there are always the Jinas, the victorious ones. They always look back to a whole train of them. If you know a modern Hindu saint called Nisargadatta Maharaj, he wrote I Am That. He also says that he's part of a row of equally enlightened persons. The Buddha's obviously been talking about these past Buddhas and they were quite amazed that he knew so much about them.

When this was said, the Venerable Ānanda said to the monks, "Friends, *Tathāgatas* are wonderful and have wonderful qualities. *Tathāgatas* are marvellous and have marvellous qualities." Remember the word *Tathāgata* is what the Buddha referred to himself as. It means one who has gone there, one who has arrived, best translated as the transcendent.

However, their discussion was interrupted for the Blessed One rose from meditation when it was evening, went to the assembly hall and sat down on a seat made ready. Then he addressed the monks, "For what discussion are you sitting together here?" "Here, Venerable Sir, we were sitting in the assembly hall when we met together" and then they go through the whole business that I've just told you. They came back from alms round and said how wonderful he was. The Blessed One said, "That being so, Ānanda, explain more fully the *Tathāgata's* wonderful and marvellous qualities."

Now Ānanda really settles down to explain the wonderful things that happened around the Buddha's birth. "Mindful and clearly comprehending, the *Bodhisattva* appeared in the Tusita heaven."

The *Bodhisattva* is the name we give somebody who has determined to become a fully liberated, self-liberated being. The *Bodhisattva* — this translates into Mahayana as the *bodhicitta*, the mind seeking enlightenment. Some of you might know about Ajahn Mun, who was a modern saint. He died in the early twentieth century. He's very famous and from him there came a group of monks who were all also recognised to be fully liberated. Ajahn Mun, whose biography is written by one of his disciples, Ajahn Mahā Boowa, came to a point where he realised that in his past life he had made this determination to become a fully self-enlightened Buddha, decided it was too hard, gave it up and just became an Arahant. They say that in Sri Lanka now there are five

Bodhisattvas. There are five monks who've declared themselves as seeking fully self-liberated beings. This means that they start a dispensation like the Buddha did. They start a line of teaching.

He's in the Tusita heaven. There are six realms. The hell realms, the animal realms, the realms of the hungry ghosts, the human realm, the realm of the angry gods, and the deva realm, the realm of the happy gods. All these can be, if you're not into this sort of stuff, all these can be translated as human mental states. When you're pathetic and find yourself in a gutter, you're definitely in the animal realm. If you were to really be born in that state, there wouldn't be much hope in Buddhist understanding.

The hell realms would be equivalent to our ideas of psychosis and deep depressions and such. There are places where you don't see an escape. Remember Dante wrote over the gates of hell, "Abandon all hope ye who enter here." That is hell. The difference between hell and purgatory is that it's just as painful but purgatory offers a way out. There's no permanent hell in Buddhist understanding. Everything is impermanent. It just lasts a very long time.

The hungry ghost realm, that's the place where we suffer our griefs. The human realm we know. The angry gods are really the place where you have these battles between good and evil. Then finally, of course, the happy realm where all the millionaires live.

"Mindful and clearly comprehending, the *Bodhisattva* remained in the Tusita heaven." It's understood that that's the last rebirth before he takes his final birth as a human being. This Tusita heaven is a very happy place. "For the whole of his lifespan the *Bodhisattva* remained in that Tusita heaven. Mindful and clearly comprehending." He's fully aware as we are presumably now. "The *Bodhisattva* passed away from the Tusita heaven and descended into his mother's womb."

Now we get this wonderful passage which is really quite cinematic. "When the *Bodhisattva* passed away from the Tusita heaven and descended into his mother's womb, an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, with its devas and human beings. Even in those abysmal world intervals of vacancy, gloom and utter darkness, where the moon and sun, mighty and powerful as they are, cannot make their light prevail, there too an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of devas appeared, and the beings reborn there perceived each other by that light. 'Ah, so indeed there are also other beings born here.' And this 10,000 world system shook, quaked and trembled and again an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world."

That's a lovely vision. Whether it's true or not is immaterial.

"When the *Bodhisattva* descended into his mother's womb, four young devas came to guard him at the four quarters so that no humans or non-humans or anyone at all could harm the *Bodhisattva* or his mother. When the *Bodhisattva* descended into his mother's womb, she became intrinsically virtuous, refraining from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech and from wines, liquors and intoxicants, the basis of negligence."

It's interesting. A lot of the Christian mythology you see mirrored in these sorts of stories from the East.

"Other women give birth after carrying the child in a womb for nine or ten months, but not so the *Bodhisattva's* mother. The *Bodhisattva's* mother gave birth to him after carrying him in a womb for exactly ten months. Other women give birth seated or lying down, but not so the *Bodhisattva's* mother. The *Bodhisattva's* mother gave birth to him standing up."

I was thinking about that, and I presume it's to do with dignity, rather than flat on your back with your legs up in the air. You're standing in a very gentle pose. I remember seeing a clip of a film of a woman in New Guinea, actually, hanging from a branch giving birth. So it's not unknown. And by herself, by the way.

"When the *Bodhisattva* came forth from his mother's womb, first devas received him and then human beings." After all these phrases, he's always said, "This too I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One."

"When the *Bodhisattva* came from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. The four young devas received him and set him before his mother saying, 'Rejoice, O Queen, a son of great power has been born to you.'" That sounds biblical, doesn't it?

"When the *Bodhisattva* came forth from his mother's womb, he came forth unsullied, unsmearred by water, mucus, blood, or any kind of impurity, clean and unsullied. Suppose there were a gem placed on a fine cloth, then the gem would not smear the cloth, nor the cloth the gem. Why is that? Because of the purity of both. So too, when the *Bodhisattva* came forth, he came forth clean and unsullied.

"When the *Bodhisattva* came forth from his mother's womb, two jets of water appeared to pour from the sky, one cool and one warm, for bathing the *Bodhisattva* and his mother. As soon as the *Bodhisattva* was born, he stood firmly on his feet on the ground, and then he took seven steps facing north, and with a white parasol held over

him, he surveyed each quarter and uttered the words of the leader of the herd: 'I am the highest in the world. I am the best in the world. I am the foremost in the world. This is my last birth. There is no more renewed becoming for me.'

That's an image, isn't it? That little baby. That little scrunched up creature. It's a great image.

"When the *Bodhisattva* came forth from his mother's womb..." Again, we have that repeat of the immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world. "And the 10,000 world system shook, quaked and trembled and there too an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world."

We have all this mythic stuff around the Buddha. The Buddha now brings us back to ground. This is what he says:

"That being so, Ānanda, remember this too as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Buddha. Here, Ānanda, for the *Tathāgata*, feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. Perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, and as they disappear. Thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, and as they disappear. Remember this too, Ānanda, as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the *Tathāgata*."

He brings us right back to what the *Tathāgata* actually is. He's the one who knows. All this other stuff is, in a sense, immaterial.

Then, "Venerable Sir, since the Blessed One's feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. Perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. Thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. This too I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One."

That is what the Venerable Ānanda said. The teacher approved and the monks were satisfied and delighted in Venerable Ānanda's words. I can only hope that this has been a tremendous inspiration and that you will continue in your practice and attain that awareness of the Buddha sooner rather than later. The listeners were highly delighted.

The Bodhisatta Leaves Home

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

In this third episode of the series on the Buddha's life, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the profound reasons behind Prince Siddhattha's decision to leave the householder life and embark on the noble search for liberation. Drawing from the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta (MN 26), he explores the distinction between ignoble search—seeking what is subject to birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement—and noble search for the unborn, unaging, deathless supreme security of Nibbāna.

The talk covers the future Buddha's encounter with his first teacher, Āḷāra Kālāma, who taught the attainment of the base of nothingness (ākiñcaññāyatana), one of the formless absorptions (arūpajhāna). Despite mastering this profound meditative state and being offered joint leadership of the community, the Bodhisatta recognized that such attainments, while impressive, do not lead to true disenchantment, cessation of suffering, or final liberation—only to rebirth in corresponding realms.

Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies common misconceptions about the Buddha's attitude toward lay life, emphasizing that the problem lies not in possessions or relationships themselves, but in being "tied to, infatuated with, and utterly absorbed" in them. He also introduces the five spiritual faculties (saddhā, vīriya, satī, samādhi, paññā) essential for spiritual development.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Now in the next passage that Bhikkhu Bodhi has chosen, The Quest for Enlightenment, there are a few discourses that describe what happened on his journey to become enlightened, and they're all slightly different, but generally speaking, the thing was he went to these two teachers who taught him how to do the absorption states, then something like two years, and then he spent four years doing these very hard self-mortification exercises, and then he became liberated. But here in this one, it doesn't mention the fact that he went off and did these self-mortification exercises. But it does tell us at the beginning why he left home.

Among these, there are two kinds of search: the noble and the ignoble search. And what is the ignoble search? Here, someone, being himself subject to birth, seeks what is also subject to birth. Being subject to ageing, seeks also what is subject to ageing. And being subject to sickness, he seeks also what is subject to sickness. And being subject to death, he seeks also what is subject to death. Being subject to sorrow, he seeks something which is subject to sorrow. And being subject to defilement, he seeks what is subject to defilement.

So remember that one of his big awakening moments was the realisation that there's sickness, ageing and death. And like the comedian says, life's hard and then you die. So that was one of his reasons for leaving the lay life, the life of the householder, as it's put usually here. But seeking himself subject to sorrow, seeks what is also subject to sorrow. So that again comes back to the idea of impermanence. So the loss of someone you love. So you're seeking something which eventually is going to bring you sorrow. Subject to defilement, he seeks also something subject to defilement. So that can range from anything which forms an attachment like pleasures to something illegal and horrible.

So having stated his ground, he then says, "And what may be subject to birth, aging, sickness and death, to sorrow and defilement? Wife and children." Remember, he's a bloke. So obviously for a woman it's a husband and children. "Men and women slaves." So remember all ancient societies had slaves in one way or the other. It didn't really move very much in the medieval ages either. The word serf comes from the Latin servus which meant slaves. We now have servants and serving. "Goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, gold and silver. These acquisitions are subject to birth, aging, sickness and death, to sorrow and defilement, and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them and utterly absorbed in them, being himself subject to birth, to sorrow and defilement, seeks what is also subject to birth, aging and death, to sorrow and defilement."

So now, whenever I read something like this out, and of course, in the story of the Buddha leaving the lay life, and the fact that after he was fully liberated, he didn't go back, there's a tendency to think that the Buddha had a real downer on lay life. But remember you have to read it slightly carefully because he doesn't say that. He says "tied to these things, infatuated with them, utterly absorbed in them." That's the problem. Remember the problem is our relationship to the life that we're living, and the usual question that comes up is whether it's better to become a monastic in order to achieve full liberation.

Well, ideally speaking, no. One is either drawn to an institutional form of the spiritual life or a non-institutional form. An institution is defined by its rules and regulations. So there's a lay institution. Before he died, he said he was quite happy because the four assemblies had been established: the monks and the nuns, the lay women and the lay men. He called them the four assemblies. And he felt that these were now grounded and established and he was happy for them. And for each of these he established a certain rule. So the rule of the nuns was slightly different from the monks, and the rule for men and women were generally the same. But even so, as you read the scriptures, there are different advice given to both. But generally speaking, it's the same *sīla*, the same five precepts. So you have to be careful when you read this sort of stuff. The Buddha's not got a downer on the lay life.

So then he says, so what is the noble search? Well, it's someone being himself subject to birth, having understood the danger of what is subject to birth, seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*. Being himself subject to aging, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, he seeks the unaging supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*. And being himself subject to sickness, having understood the danger in what is subject to sickness, he seeks the unailing supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*. Being himself subject to death, having understood the danger in what is subject to death, he seeks the deathless supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*. Being himself subject to sorrow, having understood the danger in what is subject to sorrow, he seeks the sorrowless supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*. And being himself subject to defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to defilement, he seeks the undefiled supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*. This is the noble search.

And often you'll see in the discourses that's exactly how he describes *Nibbāna*. It's unborn. It's unaging. It's unailing. It is the deathless. That's a very regular one, the deathless. It is undefiled and it is sorrowless. There's no *dukkha*, there's no sorrow in *Nibbāna*. So whatever is the cause of our unsatisfaction in today's life, that you will not find in *Nibbāna*.

"Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened *bodhisattva*" – remember this word *bodhisattva* means someone seeking, in Theravāda Buddhism it's someone who seeks full self-liberation – "I too, being subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth." And then he goes on and he says, "And I considered thus: why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement, do I seek that also which is subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement? Suppose that being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, I seek the

unborn supreme security from *Nibbāna*. Supposing that being myself subject to aging and sickness, death, sorrow and defilement, having understood the danger of what is subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement, I seek the unaging, the unailing, deathless, sorrowless and undefiled supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*."

Now this word, seeking from bondage, one of the definitions of *Nibbāna*, the words that make it up, is to be unshackled. Unshackled. And one of the things that you're liberated from are the ten fetters, so it's another way of describing *Nibbāna*. And he talks about the taste of *Nibbāna* is what we read in our little verses here. The taste of *Nibbāna* is freedom, is this unshackling freedom.

"So now later while still a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness." So his mum and dad were really upset. There, of course, it says ochre robe. See, that again is an anachronism because at the first, he would just do what a lot of the ascetics at that time were doing, which was just picking up these rag robes from the charnel grounds, or any old robe, and just sewing it together in any bits and pieces.

And it's interesting that in the West, we have the example of St. Francis. He did exactly the same. If you ever see his robe in Assisi, it's just a patchwork of sackcloth. Very inspiring. I suppose that's how bad it can get. Wait till the day of floods, wait till the day of doom. We'll all be out there collecting little bits of rags and trying to keep warm.

"Having gone forth, monks, in the search of what is wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I went to Ālāra Kālāma and said to him, 'Friend Kālāma, I want to lead the spiritual life in this dharma and discipline.'" Now, in those times, there were, of course, many teachers who had their own disciples and who taught a particular way of meditation, particular attainments. And here, all of them had a dharma and a discipline. So the dharma is the truth, the practice and the way of the truth. And the discipline was the rules and regulations to support it. And that's exactly what the Buddha said he left when he died. He said, "I've left you the dharma, the theory and the practice, and the vinaya, and the rule, the *sīla*." And that's your institution.

"And Ālāra Kālāma replied, 'The Venerable One may stay here. This dharma is such that a wise man can soon enter upon and dwell in it, realizing for himself through direct knowledge his own teacher's doctrine.' I soon quickly learned the dharma. As far as mere lip reciting and rehearsal of this teaching went, I could speak with knowledge and assurance and I claimed, 'I know and I see.' And there were others who did likewise. And I considered, 'It is not through mere faith alone that Ālāra Kālāma declares, by

realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, I enter upon and dwell in the dharma. Certainly Ālāra Kālāma dwells knowing and seeing this dharma.' Then I went to Ālāra Kālāma and asked him, 'Friend Kālāma, in what way do you declare that by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge you enter upon and dwell in this dharma?' And he replied, in reply he declared the base of nothingness."

Now, you'll see here a distinction which the Buddha makes between knowing the dharma as an intellectual understanding and actually realizing it for himself. And now he's asking Ālāra Kālāma, "Well, what is your realization?" And he says it's the base of nothingness. In other words, what is your *Nibbāna*? What is the point of this whole practice?

Now, the base of nothingness is what we call one of the *arūpajhānas*. So, the *arūpajhānas*, these absorption states, these ecstasies, are based on something which is created by the mind. So it could be through a mantra, it could be through the breath, it could be through *mettabhāvanā*. But then, and you can go right up with certain, not all of them, like you can't get the fourth *jhāna* with something like *mettā* because it's a feeling. But with the breath you can, you can attain this state of equanimity. Here meaning this absolute stillness of the mind. But then there's a flip, and the mind, as it were, leaves the phenomenal life and enters into this other state called the *arūpajhāna*.

And these *arūpajhānas* have the same quality, but within them there is a different perception, for want of a better word. So the first one is the perception of space and then the perception of consciousness, the perception of nothingness and the perception of neither perception nor not perception. So all these are words you might say, but the point is that in that realm of the mind, completely abstracted from the sensual world and from the perceptions and feelings of the sensual world created by the mind, so the mind has now completely abstracted itself from connection with the world, there is this state called the state of nothingness, which means that there's nothing in it. So it's like being conscious, being fully conscious with nothing in it. As an image of that, being in a completely dark room and yet being awake, being conscious in it. You're not conscious of anything. So that was what he got to, this state of being.

"So I considered, 'Not only Ālāra Kālāma has faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, I too have faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom. Suppose I endeavor to realize the dharma that Ālāra Kālāma declares he enters upon and dwells in by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge.'" Now, you'll notice here that even at this stage, before he's fully liberated anything, he's saying that he was aware that you needed these five spiritual faculties: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration of wisdom.

So the faith, of course, is basic. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates it as faith, but that has all sorts of connotations for us in the West because of belief. It's more like confidence, a complete confidence in the teacher and in what he's suggesting that we can attain. The energy, of course, is the energy to be mindful and to continue with the investigation, or the practice, rather. And then there's the concentration, which is that steadiness of attention. It doesn't wander all over the place. So here already, he's suggesting that he understood what the five faculties, the five spiritual faculties were.

"I soon quickly entered upon and dwelled in that dharma by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. Then I went to Ālāra Kālāma and asked him, 'Friend Kālāma, is it in this way that you declare that you enter upon and dwell in this dharma by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge?' 'This is the way, friend.' 'It is in this way, friend, that I also enter upon and dwell in the dharma by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge.' 'It is a gain for us, friend, it is a great gain for us that we have such a venerable one for our fellow monk. So the dharma that I declare I enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge is the dharma that you enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge. And the dharma that you enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge is the dharma that I declare I enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. So you know the dharma that I know and I know the dharma that you know. As I am, so are you. As you are, so I am. Come friend, let us now lead this community together.' Thus Ālāra Kālāma, my teacher, placed me, his pupil, on an equal footing with himself and awarded me the greatest honor."

"But it occurred to me, 'This dharma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*, but only to rebirth in the base of nothingness.' Not being satisfied with that dharma, disappointed with it, I left."

So here, even though he attained this very high state of concentration, very high state of stillness, complete stillness in the base of nothingness, yet he realized that it was only going to produce more rebirth into this state and therefore did not undermine his enchantment with life, his lack of being caught up in life, the dispassion. It wasn't a cessation of suffering. It wasn't going to bring an end to his unsatisfactoriness. It didn't lead to peace. And it wasn't a direct knowledge of enlightenment itself and therefore was not what he was really seeking, which he's already calling *Nibbāna*. Even though if you remember, Ālāra Kālāma also thinks that he's also achieved *Nibbāna*. But he now comes to the conclusion that he hasn't. And he says, "Not being satisfied with that dharma, disappointed with it, I left."

So I shall leave that for this evening. And if you come back next week, there's a very exciting installment when he meets Udaka Rāmaputta. I can only hope that you have been greatly excited and drawn to deeper practice. May you be fully liberated from all suffering and not be confused by different *Nibbānas* sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

04 The Essence of the Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's own account of his Awakening, focusing on the central discovery of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination). Drawing from the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta and related texts, he explores how the Buddha's insight into the twelve-link chain of causation—from consciousness and name-form (nāma-rūpa) through to aging and death—revealed both the origin and cessation of dukkha (suffering).

The teaching illuminates the Buddha's methodical investigation: 'When what exists, does aging and death come to be?' This careful attention (yoniso manasikāra) led to the breakthrough wisdom that aging and death arise dependent on birth, birth dependent on becoming, and so forth, tracing back to the mutual dependence of consciousness (viññāṇa) and the psychophysical organism (nāma-rūpa). Bhante explains how we cannot escape 'the bubble of consciousness'—consciousness requires the body-mind complex, while the body-mind complex requires consciousness to be known.

The Buddha's beautiful simile of discovering an ancient path through the forest illustrates how he rediscovered the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga) that leads to the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. This teaching offers both intellectual understanding and practical insight for anyone walking the path toward Nibbāna, emphasizing that this ancient road remains open to all sincere practitioners today.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So now the next passage I want to read is the one where he tells us really about what constitutes his awakening, or at least the main thrust of his awakening we can say:

"Monks, before my enlightenment, while I was still a Bodhisattva, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: 'Alas, this world has fallen into trouble, in that it is born, ages and dies, it passes away and is reborn, yet it does not understand the escape from this suffering, headed by aging and death. When now will an escape be discerned from this suffering, headed by aging and death?'"

So this is an old theme, isn't it? This goes back really to that youthful time when he wakes up to the existential problems of life. But this seems to tell us that it was on his mind really, even when he was becoming ascetic. This is all before he became liberated.

"And then it occurred to me, when what exists, does aging and death come to be? By what is aging and death conditioned? Then through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: When there is birth, aging and death comes to be. Aging and death has birth as its condition."

It seems pretty obvious really, doesn't it? The scriptures make it a huge breakthrough. But he says, well, what is the primary condition for aging and death? Well, it's birth. So we have to be a little patient because he now goes deeper, of course. So that was his first thought. Well, you've got to start from somewhere. So how is it I'm growing old and having to die? Well, it's because I was born. That's pretty straightforward.

"Then, monks, it occurred to me, when what exists, does birth come to be, existence come to be, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense bases, name and form... by what is name and form conditioned? Then through careful attention there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: When there is consciousness, name and form comes to be. Name and form has consciousness as its condition."

So here we're running through dependent origination, usual stuff. So these all refer back to themselves. Clinging is dependent on existence, craving dependent on clinging, feeling... it's going back on itself, right? But then he comes to this point of consciousness, name and form. Name and form is really the psychophysical organism. Remember that when he talks about form, at its most subtle level, it's the point where mind and matter meet. So in other words, we can't know a fingernail. You can't be in a fingernail. You can only know it by the sense of touch. So that's at its more subtle level. So he's come now to this point about consciousness.

"Then, monks, it occurred to me, when what exists does consciousness come to be? By what is consciousness conditioned? Then, monks, through careful attention," so this is the *vipassanā*, "there took place in me a breakthrough of wisdom: When there is name-form, consciousness comes to be. Consciousness has name-form as its condition."

So without the psychophysical organism there can't be consciousness, basically.

"But then it occurred to me, this consciousness turns back. It does not go further than name form. It is to this extent that one may be born and age and die, pass away and be reborn. That is, when there is consciousness with name and form as its condition, and name and form with consciousness as its condition. When name and form is

conditioned, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as conditioned, contact; and so on, the whole path of dependent origination, such is the origin of the whole mass of suffering."

So, he's taken us back to this point of consciousness. Now that consciousness is disputed a little bit. It's an act of knowing. If there wasn't consciousness, there'd be just an automaton, wouldn't there? Just a machine. There's something that knows. But it can only know what it knows through the psychophysical organism. And the psychophysical organism is unknowable without consciousness. So if you took away the psychophysical organism how could consciousness of anything arise? If you took away consciousness how could the knowing, how could you know anything about the psychophysical organism? So these two rest against each other, the one arising completely dependent on the other. That's where the origination starts and ends. You can't go beyond that. You can't go beyond the bubble of your consciousness. Basically what he's saying. You can't get outside the bubble of your consciousness. And you can't get outside the bubble of your psychophysical organism. That's it.

Then he says, "Origination, origination. Thus monks, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration and light." So these are just synonyms for enlightenment, awakening, understanding. And then of course he goes back on it. So now he's understood how we come to exist, how we go through this process of becoming. So now of course he goes back on that.

"So when what does not exist does aging and death not come to be? With the cessation of what does the cessation of aging and death come about? Then monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: when there's no birth, aging and death does not come to be, and with cessation of birth comes cessation of aging and death."

So then, the process of cessation, right? Without the psychophysical organism, you can't have the sixth sense basis. You can't have contact, you can't have feeling, you can't have craving, so on, so on.

"And then it occurred to me, when what does not exist, does consciousness come to be? When what does not exist, does consciousness not come to be? With the cessation of what, does the cessation of consciousness come to be? Then monks, through careful attention, there took place in me this breakthrough by wisdom: When there's no name and form, psychophysical organism, consciousness does not come to be. With the cessation of name and form comes the cessation of consciousness."

So now he says, "This occurred to me, I have discovered this path to enlightenment. That is, with the cessation of name and form comes cessation of consciousness. With the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name and form. And with the cessation of name and form, there comes the cessation of the six bases, and through the six bases, contact, and so on and so forth. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. Cessation, cessation, thus monks, in regard to things unheard of before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration, and light."

That's why here we chant this dependent origination because it's so core to his understanding of how everything happens and everything disappears. And because he saw that, he saw there was nothing in it that was substantial. All this is not self, all this also doesn't have any substance to it. And it's in constant motion, you're constantly turning that wheel, going through that process.

And then as usual he gives us an image: "Suppose a man wandering through a forest would see an ancient path, an ancient road travelled upon by people in the past. He would follow it and would see an ancient city, an ancient capital that had been inhabited by people in the past, with parks and groves, ponds and ramparts, a delightful place. Then the man would inform the king or his royal minister: 'Sire, know that while wandering through the forest I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, travelled upon by people in the past. I followed it and saw an ancient city, an ancient capital that had been inhabited by people in the past, with parks, groves, ponds and ramparts, a delightful place. Renovate that city, sire.' Then the king or the royal minister would renovate that city. And sometime later that city would become successful and prosperous, well populated, filled with people, attained to growth and expansion."

"So too, monks, I saw the ancient path, the ancient road travelled by the perfectly enlightened ones of the past. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. I followed that path and by doing so I have directly known aging and death, its origin, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation. And I've directly known birth and existence," I always prefer the word becoming, frankly, "clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense bases, name and form, consciousness, volitional formations," that's your *saṅkhāra*, "their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation. Having directly known them, I have explained them to the monks, to the nuns, to male lay followers and the female lay followers. This spiritual life, monks, has become successful and prosperous, extended, popular, widespread, well-proclaimed among the *devas* and humans."

I can only hope that this little reading and small explanation will drive you swiftly along the road, travelling to *Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

Anusaya - Latent Tendencies

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 8 min

In this DhammaBytes talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the concept of anusaya - latent tendencies or predispositions that lie dormant in our psychic system, ready to manifest when conditions arise. Drawing from early Buddhist scriptures through to the Abhidhamma, he explores how these seven fundamental tendencies evolved in the Buddha's teaching: sensual lust, attachment to existence (bhava), aversion, conceit, wrong views, doubt, and ignorance.

Using the compelling analogy of a computer's latent potential, Bhante explains how these anusaya exist not as stored memories but as pure potentiality - conditioned by past saṅkhāra (volitional formations) yet having no substantial existence until activated. He maps their psychological structure, showing how ignorance forms the foundation, branching into conceit and wrong views, which then manifest as the three primary responses: greed (wanting pleasure and becoming), aversion (not wanting), and confusion (doubt).

This teaching offers profound insight into how our conditioned responses arise and why insight meditation is essential for liberation. As Bhante emphasizes, until these latent tendencies are eradicated through wisdom, unwholesome actions will continue to arise. The talk connects ancient Buddhist psychology with modern understanding of subconscious conditioning, showing how paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) can be broken at the crucial point of ignorance through vipassanā practice.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

So the word tonight is *Anusaya*, A-N-U-S-A-Y-A. And the translation in the Pali text dictionary is a bent, a proclivity, latent tendency and predisposition. And the one that really interests me is this translation of latent tendency. But we'll come to that in a minute.

In the early scriptures, the Buddha only talks about *anusaya*. He doesn't actually say what they are. It's just latent tendencies. We've all got latent tendencies. But later on, in the scriptures, a different level of the scriptures, perhaps as his teaching matures, things are added to this latent tendency. Pride, doubt, ignorance, lust, and so on. And in the end, in the Abhidhamma, they list it as seven.

So the first one, well, the way they list it is sensual lust. I think it's probably better, even though it says *kāmarāga*, it does mean body lust, but anyway. Attachment to existence, aversion, conceit, wrong views, doubt, and ignorance. So none of them have come as a big surprise, eh?

Now, to try and make sense of this list... It seems to me that you've got to just turn the order around a bit for some reason. If we take ignorance as a basic platform, as a latent tendency in the sense of not knowing, then you immediately enter into the delusion on the one side of wrong views and on the other side of self, which expresses itself as conceit. So it's, I have this view, I'm right and everybody else is wrong. That's your basic position.

And from there, you fork into three, which relates to the way that the self relates to the world. Sensual pleasure and becoming. So that's to do with greed and acquisitiveness. Then you've got the aversion, so that's the negative side, not wanting. And then the doubt, which is the befuddlement that comes because of this basic ignorance. So that's your sort of latent dispositions.

Now, these latent dispositions, what... It can't be the fact that, at least as I understand it, the Buddha didn't teach that we had some sort of store memory that you pick books off, like a library or something. It's more like, and that's why I like this word, latent tendency, some sort of predisposition, but it doesn't actually have any actuality.

And I think one of the best analogies is of a computer really because if you take metaphor to a logical end it's normally a sign of madness so it only works at certain levels so when we shut the computer down and unplug it and all that it's dead it's not but we know it's got this tremendous latent ability and then when you plug it in You can connect to the whole worldwide web, for heaven's sake. I mean, that's the potential of it. But when it's unplugged, it remains there just as purely latent.

So all these conditionings, see the other word it uses, predisposition, and that links us with these *saṅkhāras*, these volitional conditionings. So they're lying there in wait, you might say, but in this sort of non-existent form. But it's there within the psychic system, you could say. So something happens and they're there to be pulled out.

And that I think connects rather nicely with our modern psychology about subliminal stuff and subconscious stuff. Although you do get the feeling from Freudian stuff and all that, that's already there as it were. It's in a sort of stored memory. But I think this is slightly more subtle in the sense that every moment comes to an end completely. It's a radical impermanence. So you can't hold anything, and yet there's the potential. So it's one of these little mysteries, really.

So really, without going into all these different things more deeply, those are your seven latent tendencies. Ignorance, the not knowing, which forks into this I am conceit with wrong view. And that again forks into these three avenues, the sensual pleasure, the becoming...

There's always that. There's the *bhavataṇhā*. When he describes *dukkha* as such, it's attachment to pleasure, the desire to keep becoming, becoming a self, in other words, keep being reborn as me. And the opposite is *vibhava*, which is the desire to put an end to that. And that comes into the other fork, the aversion, not wanting. It comes in obvious forms of not wanting something and not wanting to live. And the third one is this doubt which comes from befuddlement, which comes from confusion that arises out of this self.

So those are your seven *anusaya*. And in a sense, if you think about it, that is the platform out of which we then create the world. We create these *saṅkhāras*, create these volitional conditionings.

So underneath it, there is that not knowing. It's creating a certain disposition, which then manifests a disposition of I am with a view, then manifests as this more obvious psychological thing of wanting, not wanting, being confused. And then as something happens to us in daily life, it picks up on one of these and then you suddenly find yourself being greedy or being hateful or being confused. And that's basically, I think, how it is.

So these *anusaya*, you could look at them as the potential which has been created from past actions that we call these *saṅkhāras*, volitional conditioning. So these volitional conditionings become, sink, as it were, into this level of sheer potential. And I think that's what the Buddha is saying.

And the final thing is that until these *anusaya* are actually eradicated from the system, there's no way our unwholesome actions can stop. And the only way you can undermine them is through insight, which breaks the delusion. That's why in dependent origination the real break is at that point of ignorance.

So that brings to an end my little homily on the Anusaya. I can only hope it has been of some benefit. May you be liberated from all your Anusaya sooner rather than later.

Āsava-Taints, Ogha-Floods, Yoga-Yokes

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 8 min

In this DhammaBytes talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the profound Pali term āsava - mental taints or corruptions that intoxicate and enslave the mind. Drawing from traditional definitions, he explains how these psychological 'outflows' or 'floods' (ogha) yoke (yoga) us to suffering through four key manifestations: kāma (sensual desire), bhava (becoming/identity formation), avijjā (fundamental ignorance), and diṭṭhi (wrong views).

Bhante connects these taints directly to the progressive stages of liberation, showing how wrong views are eliminated at sotāpanna (stream-entry), sensual desire is transcended by the anāgāmi (non-returner), while ignorance and becoming persist until full arahantship. This teaching provides essential understanding of what binds us to saṃsāra and what the path gradually dissolves.

Practical for meditators at any level, this talk clarifies fundamental Buddhist psychology while highlighting the systematic nature of liberation. Understanding these mental corruptions helps practitioners recognize what needs to be abandoned and provides confidence in the gradual but certain progress toward the goal of complete freedom from all āsava.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

I want to look at this word *āsava*, A-S-A-V-A. The V is always pronounced with a W. Let me start off by giving you the Pali Text Society dictionary definitions, and it gives you an idea of what they are.

The first is an intoxicating extract or secretion from a tree or flower, a bit like opium or whatever. That's an *āsava*. The second is it's used to describe the discharge of a sore. It gives you another feel for the word. In psychology, it used to befuddle—I came across another word I'd never seen before: to befoozle. Befoozles the mind. And it's normally translated in terms of the Buddhadhamma as cankers, taints, corruptions, intoxicants, biases. That's what they are.

Later on, just to give us another idea of what they are, it seems that the word *ogha* was used, O-G-H-A, which means a flood, floods. And even *yoga*, yoking, something that yokes you. So you've got a couple of images there. You've got things that are corrup-

tions, intoxicants, that are outflows. Sometimes they're an influx, but I don't quite understand that. It's either an outflow or an influx, but anyway, maybe both. They flood the whole psychophysical organism. They yoke us, they tie us down, enslave us. They're corruptions. They're horrible.

So what are they? Well, they won't come as a surprise. The first one is *kāma*. That's not the same as *kamma* with a double M. That's sensual desire. Remember, it's not sensual desire in itself. It's always this relationship we have with sensual desire and seeking happiness there. That's the first one.

The second one is *bhava*. So that's this becoming. Whereas sensual desire brings us into the present moment of wrong relationships—and we can also include in that sensual desire, remember, those things that we don't like. Normally this is translated as things that you do like, but I don't see why we can't also include things we don't like, because that brings out a negative desire, not wanting. But the *bhava* gives us this sensual desire of what happens to us in terms of time, passage of time, becoming.

The third one is *avijjā*. This is basic not knowing. Later on, it would seem, it was added, *diṭṭhi* was added. This is in the scriptures. It seems as though the three that we've mentioned—the sensual desire, the becoming and the ignorance—were the original. Then, as the Buddha began to explain it more, he brought in this added *diṭṭhi*, which is wrong view.

And wrong views, of course, are the product of this *avijjā*, this ignorance. Ignorance—another word that we come across is *moha*, remember, this is that delusion. So the delusion is a consequence of ignorance. Often that's confused, but the one is prior to the other. Not so much prior in time, but the delusion arises out of an ignorance, and it produces these wrong views. So these wrong views are not to understand the Four Noble Truths. That is basic understanding.

So that's what these *āsava* are: *āsava-kāma*, which is sensual desire; *bhava*, becoming; *avijjā*, ignorance; and *diṭṭhi*, wrong views. And the reason that I've done them now is because of their connection to dependent origination, which is all about liberation.

So this actually connects us to the paths and fruits. The first path and fruit, the *sotāpatti*, the *sotāpanna*, the one who's attained first path and fruit. In the second path and fruit of the once-returner, the sensual desire is lessened. It connects us with the non-returner and it connects us with the Arahant.

So once we enter into the *sotāpanna*, the wrong views disappear, just the wrong views, misunderstanding, and there are three of them: this personality as a self, sceptical doubt—meaning that no doubt in the Buddha remains, the *Buddhadhamma* remains

—and clinging to wrong rites and rituals, which is basically thinking that rites and rituals will help you become liberated. That's the clinging to wrong rites and rituals. Not that rites and rituals are wrong in themselves, they have their place, but it's when you think that they are material or essential for the process of liberation, that's when you've got a wrong view.

When we get to the non-returner, the one that goes is *kāma*, the sensual desire, seeking happiness in the sensual world. And the other two, the *avijjā*, the ignorance, and the becoming, don't disappear until right at the end. So the self is always there. The becoming, remember, and the idea of self are synonymous. They mean the same thing. Self, in a way, doesn't get across the idea that it's continually changing. Our identities are continually changing. So often you'll hear writers or people use the word "selfing" to get across the idea that in fact we're constantly in this state of *bhava*, this state of becoming, which is a state of continuously renewing the idea of who we are. It's identity.

So that concludes my little talk on the *āsava*, the outflows, the influxes, the cankers, the taints, the corruptions, the intoxicants and the biases. Oh, that's something else I should mention, by the way. That whenever they're describing an Arahant, when somebody makes the full liberation, at the end of the sutta describing it, you'll read the scriptures and say something to the effect of: while listening, the hearts of the bhikkhus, or the hearts of those listening, were freed from the cankers through clinging no more. And that's one of the definitions of an Arahant. He's a *khīṇāsava*, somebody who destroyed the cankers.

May I hope that my words have been of some assistance and that you are liberated from all the *āsava* sooner rather than later.

Buddha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this Vesak Day reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the profound meaning behind the word 'Buddha' and the traditional nine qualities recited in morning chanting. He explains the three types of Buddhas in Theravāda Buddhism: the Sammāsambuddha (fully self-awakened Buddha), the Pacceka Buddha (private or solitary Buddha), and the Sāvaka Buddha (disciple Buddha).

The talk focuses primarily on the nine qualities of the Buddha found in traditional Pāli chanting: Arahat (one whose defilements are destroyed), Sammāsambuddho (perfectly self-awakened), Vijjācaraṇa-sampanno (accomplished in knowledge and conduct), Sugato (well-gone), Lokavidū (knower of worlds), Anuttaro purisadammasārathi (incomparable trainer of persons), Satthā devamanussānaṃ (teacher of gods and humans), Buddho (awakened one), and Bhagavā (blessed one).

Bhante Bodhidhamma illustrates the Buddha's skillful means through stories, including the famous account of the slow-learning monk who achieved full liberation through a simple mindfulness exercise with a cloth. He emphasizes how contemplating these qualities can become a devotional practice that brings joy and inspiration to the spiritual path, particularly complementing the sometimes challenging work of vipassanā meditation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So I thought I'd look at the word Buddha. Since this weekend we celebrate his birth, enlightenment and *parinibbāna*, total *Nibbāna*. We don't say his death, although he died. It's celebrated properly at the full moon of May which is towards the end of the dry season so you're looking to the rains. It's like spring really so that's the traditional time. Other forms of Buddhism celebrate it at other times of the year.

So the first thing is that there are three types of Buddhas. There's the self-enlightened Buddha. There's what we call the private Buddha. And there's the Buddha who was a follower of a Buddha.

So if we look at the first one, the *Sammāsambuddho*, we have nine qualities and we chant them in the morning: "*Itipi so Bhagavā araham sammāsambuddho vijjā-caraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā.*"

The first one is *Araham*, and that refers to the fact that all his defilements have been destroyed. So that's not only the moral stuff, killing and all that, it's also depression, anxiety, all the secondary stuff about guilt and shame. So the heart's completely purified. So the word *Araham* refers to the end of all defilements.

Sammāsambuddho refers to the fact that he's self-enlightened. And what that means is that there was nobody around at that time who knew where the path was. So he worked with various teachers, he did various mortifications, all that was offered at the time, but they didn't seem to get him anywhere. And it was a memory from childhood, which, as it were, set him on the path. So it's because of that, because of that memory, because he goes back to his own life, that we say he's self-enlightened. And that's what that *Sammāsambuddho* refers to.

Vijjācaraṇasampanno means, the *vijjā* means knowledge, wisdom, and the *caraṇa* means his conduct. So it wasn't a case of, you know, do as I say, not as I do. Both his behavior, the way he conducted himself, and the knowledge, the wisdom he had were concurrent, were accomplished. There was no distinction between the two. So his wisdom was expressed through his compassionate action, through his general demeanour. Whenever he went to a room, even when he was very famous, he would never just enter it. He'd always cough and knock. There was a sort of gentility about it. So that's the *vijjācaraṇasampanno*.

The *sugato* means that he fares well, both in his own self and in the world, as a teacher. It's basically a life of ease, a life of accomplishment, you might say. It's a similar sort of understanding.

The *lokavidū*, so he's a knower of the worlds, meaning that he discerned that there were different spheres of existence and moved within them at ease, it would seem. He's a knower of the worlds.

Anuttaro purisadammasārathi, he was the supreme trainer of those who need to be trained. Sometimes "tamed" is used so he had some rough people who came to take his teachings and he had to be firm. So as you know from your own experience there are teachers who carry with them a certain authority so that when they say something you just do it. My teacher was like that, Sayadaw Janaka. If he said you get up at half three,

you get up at half three. He didn't discuss it. He wasn't that type of person. And there are other teachers who are more cajoling, more easy to bend and get them to do what you want.

So the Buddha was very clear about the teaching. He was very clear about the training. It was once when one of the monks came to him and said, "Look, what is this business about the self? And I want these questions answered. Is the world infinite or not infinite? Does the Buddha exist or not exist? Does the *Tathāgata* exist or not exist? I want these questions answered or I shall leave the order." And he said, "Since when did I make it a condition for you to be a member of the order that you had to have these questions answered?" Basically, fine, you want to leave, go. But there was no... so he pulled him up short on that one. In the end, of course, he stayed.

But he was also a *satthā devamanussānaṃ*. He was also a teacher of gods and men. And this refers to the skill, to his seemingly very clever skill at getting people to understand, to directly experience what he was talking about. I suppose the most outstanding one was of the dull monk, whose brother had actually suggested he might leave the order. Because in those days, of course, you had to remember the Buddha's teachings. And it was said that when he learnt one line of the teaching, it knocked out the line he'd just learnt. So he couldn't learn anything apart from that.

When the Buddha heard this, he said, "No, no." So he gave him a very simple exercise, took a cloth, and he said, "Wipe your face, you know, the sweat on your face, and keep rubbing it, and just keep observing it, and keep saying, impermanent, impermanent, *anicca, anicca*." And he became fully liberated. It didn't work for me, but there we are.

So he was very skillful in his teaching. He knew where people were at and was able to give them all sorts of little exercises. And that's why there's no specific technique left by him. So every good teacher that comes along, like the Mahāsi, works on the way he spoke, what things were left, the tradition, and they come up with these techniques. That's why there's such a plethora of techniques. He didn't say one technique is good for everybody. That was his way of teaching, skillful means. So in that sense he was an incomparable teacher.

So *buddho* means, the last two are more to do with acclamations or honorifics really. *Buddho*, the awakened one. It comes from the word to awake, to come out of a dream. So life's a dream, a bubble in a stream and all that. And then he's awakened, he's come out of that. And we often use the word enlightened for it. There are more adjectives in the scriptures to suggest an enlightenment, a light coming on in the dark, rather than awakening, but both are used. That's the *buddho*.

And finally, *Bhagavā*. This also refers to teacher. But I think here there's a certain idea of respectfulness about it. Because you would go to the *Bhagavā*. "Where's the *Bhagavā*?" So it's more to do with where is the enlightened person? Where's the holy one? Where is the noble enlightened person? So that's more of a sense of someone to be venerated.

And those are your nine basic qualities of the Buddha. And although the exercises there in Theravāda... but it's never really taught. But it's on meditating on these qualities, meditating here in the sense of contemplating these qualities, that one gains a certain relationship to a personage of the Buddha, even though obviously it doesn't exist. It becomes like an image in your heart, it becomes like an image in your mind, you see. And the more you contemplate on what these qualities mean, it corrects your own image, your own ideal towards which you're working. It becomes quite a lovely contemplation to do in the same way you can contemplate the Dhamma and the Sangha. But the Buddha for in terms of developing the juice of the spiritual path, the actual devotional path which brings a real joy to the heart, so that's one of the exercises.

So we do *mettā*, which is another one of those similar exercises that brings a bit of juice to the practice. *Vipassanā* can be, well, heavy. So you've got to juice it up a bit, you see. So a day like on Sunday is a time when you just recollect on the teacher and the qualities of that, you know. And for most of us that's where we're heading. We're definitely heading towards the end of defilement. What does that mean? So it's a lovely exercise to do.

Then the other two are this *Pacceka Buddha*. So here there's a private Buddha, that's how it's translated, solitary Buddha. And the idea is that somebody can become fully self-enlightened, so *Pacceka Buddha* is self-enlightened, but can't teach. They just can't do it, can't get it across. Because the two things that the Buddha did was not only to teach the Dhamma, but to set up an order, an institution, which could carry the message, the Sangha, the order of monks and nuns. So it would seem that there are people who become fully enlightened, they just don't have those sort of qualities. They're not complete *Sammāsambuddhas*.

And then finally there's the *Sāvaka Buddhas*. So they're the ones who become Buddha by following a Buddha. So once you've devoted yourself to the Buddha's path and you become an *arahat*, that's the usual word they use for such a person, an *arahat*, then you're a *Sāvaka Buddha*. And you've made it. Then you can relax. Then you can really have a cup of tea. That's the only time you can really have a cup of tea and a cake. Before that, it's just indulgence. You're just kidding yourself.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, inspiring, shall we say.
May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

Dukkha — A Hard Place

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this teaching from the DhammaBytes series, Bhante Bodhidhamma unpacks the Pali term dukkha, literally meaning 'a hard place,' which forms the cornerstone of the Buddha's teaching. He explains how the historical Buddha's own existential crisis led to the discovery of three distinct types of dukkha that characterize human existence.

The talk explores dukkha-dukkha (ordinary suffering), viparināma-dukkha (suffering from impermanence), and saṅkhāra-dukkha (suffering from the delusion of selfhood). Bhante shows how these three forms of unsatisfactoriness correspond to the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self (anattā). Drawing from the Four Noble Truths, he demonstrates how recognizing our self-created suffering becomes the very path to freedom.

With practical wisdom, Bhante encourages taking responsibility for our mental states rather than blaming external circumstances. He offers guidance for applying this understanding in daily life, from small attachments to cups of tea to deeper patterns of clinging and aversion. This teaching provides essential groundwork for understanding why the Buddha declared that all his teaching could be summarized as 'dukkha and the cessation of dukkha.'

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

Just looking at this word *dukkha*, it's not new to the Buddha. It was fairly common coinage really, goes back a long way in the spiritual-religious history of India. The word is actually made up of two parts, *dukkha*, which just means a hard place. I don't think anybody would dispute that being a human being on this earth is a hard place. Even in our own mythology, Adam and Eve get chucked out of the garden, have to start working and come across sickness, old age and death.

So he starts off with that. That's what really drives him to seek spiritual, or to join the spiritual life of his time, because this *dukkha*, and it's in the air, it's in the air of his society. It's a society which is dislocated because there's a lot of political change going

on, moving from the old pastoral more democratic societies to monarchical and big cities were arriving and wars were getting worse. So in that sort of dislocation of time people tend to seek some sort of spiritual relief.

We can say that around about the age of middle 20, which I think is fairly common, there's a sort of awakening up to the fact that youth has come to an end or is coming to an end and one looks forward to sickness, old age and death. So with that there comes a sort of crisis in him. These days I suppose we call it an existential crisis. And off he goes on his search.

Eventually through his awakening he discerns three types of *dukkha*. The first one is called *dukkha-dukkha*, which translates to just ordinary miserable suffering. So if you say to somebody, do you suffer? They say, they don't suffer. Well, there's something wrong with them. Because everybody has some form of suffering.

But even though physical pain is included in that, it's not really included in the end of suffering because physical pain is part of our nature. It's not something that the liberation gets rid of. The Buddha himself, as you know, died of some form of gastroenteritis which was rather unpleasant. So it's not as though he got rid of physical pain. So this *dukkha-dukkha* really refers to the emotional stuff that we go through. But it also includes the pain that comes from indulgence, from getting attached to things.

And the second one is *vipariṇāma-dukkha*, which is the *dukkha*, the suffering we feel when we come across transience, when we come across impermanence. Whenever we get to a place where we feel comfortable, the right job, right relationship and all that sort of stuff, there's always this sort of clinging to it, sort of holding it, and it makes us blind to the fact that it's changing, it's in a process of flux.

And so not being aware of that we tend not to want to change things that are pleasant for us. On the other hand we crave for things to change when they're not right, when we're in a rotten situation, when the job goes wrong, when the relationship goes awry and when the body starts messing us about. Then we get this desire to escape from it.

So we're always working against the present moment, the self, this position we take towards life. It's always about trying to find happiness within this situation, within the sensual world, within the thought world, within the heart world. And therefore in doing that we find ourselves always in conflict. There's always a subtle conflict going on. Either we want to get rid of something or we want to hold on to it.

And then there's a more subtle suffering that comes that's known as *sāṅkhāra-dukkha*, and that's a suffering that comes from the delusion of being a self. And what we mean by that is that we experience ourselves as an integer, as something fairly solid, as the agent, as the person in control. I do my own thing in my own way, my own time, a self-made person. And this idea of a self obviously comes across certain problems.

So, like the body, we know intellectually that the body isn't me and not mine because it dies. We've got plenty of proof of that. Even so, when something goes wrong with the body, then we get really upset, and if something really terrible goes wrong with the body, it's a real shock, it's a problem for us, and death itself is still a horrible thing, even though intellectually we know these things are going to happen.

So that peculiar way that we relate to the body, of identifying with it, even though we say we don't, and of somehow possessing it, you know, we have a language such as, I have a big nose, see? I have big ears, I have got big ears, but I am sick, the body is sick, but I am sick, but I have a headache. It's a dualistic relationship that we have to this body.

And of course the sudden realisation that we don't control the body in any real sense. We can't stop it growing old, we can't stop it falling sick and so on. This brings a lot of fear and that fear is the undermining of the idea that the body is me and mine.

And it's the same with emotions. You don't go to bed making a determination to wake up depressed. You just wake up depressed. And it's these sorts of recognitions that there are things going on inside us, both at the physical and mental level, over which we don't have this control. And it's these sorts of little insights that begin to undermine this idea of, well, who am I? Who am I?

So these three qualities that the Buddha called *dukkha* turn out to be really the three characteristics of existence, which is the sense of impermanence, the unsatisfactory nature that we can never really find real deep contentment by seeking happiness in the world, if only because it arises and passes away. And this deeper delusion about who we are, or what we are.

So that's really a definition of *dukkha* according to the Buddha. And this term is at the root of his teaching. He actually says that all he teaches is *dukkha*, *dukkha-nirodha*, suffering and the end of it. It's in three words in the Pali. So it's something that he builds the whole of his teaching on. And the Four Noble Truths are centered on that *dukkha*. It's the fact of suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the path leading to the end of suffering. So it's something to just contemplate.

Now, when we're in our meditation, you see, we can normally see these things to a point. We can see it fairly clearly. But it's really taking that out into our daily practice where it has good effect. Simple things like recognising little attachments to cups of tea and TV programmes and just seeing how actually that can cause a lot of suffering. You know, a TV breaking down when you want to watch a football match, things like that, horrible things.

So it's recognising that when somebody comes to you and they say something and you feel irritation or disappointment, where's that coming from? And it's awakening to the fact that the suffering that we're actually experiencing is all self-created. And that puts you in charge. That makes you responsible for your own mental states. And what the Buddha is saying is that once you take full responsibility for your mental states, for your unsatisfactoriness, for your suffering, then that's the path out of it because then you'll try and do something about it rather than blame the world, blame society, blame this and blame that.

So it's really contemplating this whole area of *dukkha* and how we create suffering for ourselves and taking it into our daily lives which is the practice.

So my usual hope is that my words are of some assistance and that you are fully liberated from all suffering sooner.

Hetu — The Unwholesome Roots

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

In this DhammaBytes talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Pali term 'hetu' (root) and the three unwholesome roots that drive our suffering: lobha (greed/acquisitiveness), dosa (aversion), and moha (delusion). He reveals how these roots function as Buddhism's depth psychology, showing how our fundamental delusion of selfhood creates the basic relationship of 'this is me and mine' that separates us from the world.

Bhante explains how this mistaken identity generates constant anxiety about control, leading to the twin impulses of grasping what we want and pushing away what threatens us. He distinguishes between avijjā (not-knowing) and moha (delusion), showing how our innocent not-knowing becomes the active delusion that we are separate psychophysical beings. Through practical examples like struggling with a stubborn gate, he demonstrates how these roots manifest in everyday moments.

The talk emphasizes how vipassanā practice helps us recognize these deeply conditioned patterns, creating space between awareness and reactive impulses. Bhante addresses the fear that arises when we challenge our fundamental assumptions about selfhood, explaining how becoming comfortable with 'don't know' mind is essential for liberation. This foundational teaching connects to the broader framework of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), offering practitioners insight into the psychological mechanisms that perpetuate dukkha and the path to freedom.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The word I'd like to tackle this evening is *hetu*. It means root—the roots of our suffering. It's really what you would call these days our depth psychology. And it splits into three roots, which won't come as a surprise to you: greed, hatred and delusion.

The word for greed is *lobha*. Most of you would know perhaps the word *taṇhā*, which means desire. But *lobha* is that attitude that's translated as greed, though I think it's much better to understand it as acquisitiveness. The second one is *dosa*, which means aversion, not wanting. And the third one, *moha*, is delusion.

Now we've come across the word *avijjā*, which means ignorance. It's translated as ignorance, but actually it's far better translated in a very neutral sense of just not knowing. And then we make this mistake, and that mistake we call our delusions.

So the mistake, of course, is to believe ourselves to be phenomenal psychophysical organisms, human beings—which is understandable. I mean, our consciousness moves into the cellular life of the fetus, and when it's born, what does it know, apart from what it's experiencing? You can't expect anything else except for that consciousness to say, well, this is what I am. Not actually saying it intellectually, but just a direct relationship with what it experiences as being me. And this is what we call the self.

So the self isn't a thing, it's not an object, it's a relationship. It's a relationship we have to what we experience: this is me or mine. So there's your basic position in the world which we call delusive, a delusion, *moha*. This is me and these things are mine. So identity and possessions.

Now you can see that once you've established that relationship with the world, there's a whole load of things which aren't me, aren't mine. And that's where the barrier comes. Underlying, remember, the sense of self—and this is really quite an important understanding—is that the self actually in itself, or we in ourselves, never truly believe in the self itself. And the way that expresses itself is through a constant anxiety of being in control of our lives, of our things and so on.

If the self were actually rock hard, if it were a real rock hard self, which was immutable and eternal, then obviously that wouldn't happen. It's just that there's somewhere inside us that knows that this relationship doesn't quite fit, isn't quite right. And so we're constantly trying to acquire the future. And that's what *lobha* means in its deepest sense. We're trying to control the future.

And to do that, you've got to, of course, get rid of anything that upsets your presumed future. So your attitude, our attitude to life, is always this trying to make sure that things are going to go the way I want them to. And if anything gets in the way then I want to get rid of it. Simple as that. And it comes down into the moment as holding on to what we have and defending it from the enemy. And the enemy is simply all those who want what we have. Very simple.

So once we recognize that mechanism, and we know it's coming from this deeper delusion, this deeper mistake we've made of presuming that this is what we are, then our challenge is to be aware of that. I mean, that's what the *vipassanā* is about. It's leading us to the awareness of every time the mind is holding on to something or pushing

something away. And what we find is that just to be aware of it allows us just a small space of freedom. And the freedom is not to act according to those impulses. That's where the liberation is.

But these roots—they're roots, they're deep within our psychology—are so deeply rooted that we're not aware of how afraid we are of letting go, so afraid of just living in the moment and making the decisions in the moment with the faith that things evolve. And if things happen that we don't want to happen, then that's also part of our evolution. We can't stop things happening which are against us, because we live in a world that we can't control.

So the trick is to be aware of how the mind is constantly wanting to control. Therefore it doesn't listen, it doesn't really see the way things are, the way things really are, and it constantly finds itself in this little conflict, this conflict with the world as it is.

Even a simple thing like opening the gate. I was out there the other day, and for some reason it wouldn't open. So I found myself getting irritated with it. The gate should open when I want it to open, in the way that I want it to open. It just refused to do so. Even the slightest things, you'll catch the irritation, you'll catch the grabbing, you'll catch the desire.

And the more we don't act on those impulses, the more we're challenging that deep delusion that we have of who we are. And the more we do that, the more we come across this anxiety, this deep-seated fear. And it's not a place we like to be. It's not a place we like to be at all. We don't like to be in a state of don't know. And it's getting used to that. It's getting used to the fear that surrounds that, the anxiety that surrounds that.

And once we're used to those feelings and how it feels to be like that, then we've already distanced from it. And what we realize has been a great prevention for us to actually dig deep is the fear of that fear, the fear of that anxiety. We just bounce off it, pull off it quick. And by making fear itself an object and getting used to the feelings of fear, used to the feelings of anxiety, this fear of it disappears, or begins to disappear, or at least diminishes.

And of course, once we lose the fear of fear, what is there to frighten us? So this is the Buddha's deep psychology, really. From then on, it moves into how it manifests through daily life through the dependent wheel of origination.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated in this very lifetime, sooner rather than later.

Paññā - Wisdom and Intuitive Intelligence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Pali term paññā - often translated as wisdom or insight - revealing it as our fundamental intuitive intelligence. He explores the etymology of paññā, showing how its root connects to the Greek 'gnosis' and our English 'know,' with 'pa' serving as an intensifier meaning 'really knowing.'

Bhante explains how this primordial intelligence expresses itself through three main channels: physical (as seen in athletic performance), aesthetic (through artistic expression), and intellectual (through conceptual understanding). In vipassanā meditation, we work to disembed this pure intelligence from its confusion with body, heart, and mind by making these phenomena objects of awareness.

The talk reveals how this intelligence operates beyond our conscious control - often providing insights when least expected, such as during eating or upon waking. Bhante emphasizes that paññā cannot know itself as an object, yet it is the very faculty that knows all objects. This understanding points to the not-self (anattā) characteristic and our lack of ultimate control over even this wonderful capacity.

Drawing on the Mahasi tradition's understanding that deep insights often arise unexpectedly, this teaching offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners valuable perspective on the nature of wisdom and the goal of liberation from suffering.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I want to look at this word *paññā*, which often comes up alongside, in some form or other, the word *sati*, which means awareness, but I'll deal with that another time.

So this word *paññā*, it has two parts to it. The *ñā* comes right through the Greek with *gnosis* and the Latin and ends up with us as "no." It's the same root word which is a sentimental link with the Buddha. And the *pa* is just a reinforcing of a really, a really "no."

We tend to translate it as insight, but in its passive form we refer to it as wisdom. And wisdom here isn't to be confused with knowledge in the sense of cleverness. It's the way we relate to life either wisely or unwisely. It's a position. And this wisdom, when it's active, becomes an insightful process.

Sometimes it's translated as a knowing, which is a lovely word for it because knowing tells you what it does and it doesn't concretise it into an object.

When we are meditating, what we're trying to pull out or make obvious to ourselves is this faculty of *paññā*, this pure intelligence, this intuitive intelligence that we have. The reason why we get confused is because it's always expressing itself through something phenomenal, something that is within the world.

So physical intelligence, you see that in sports people. A tennis player might practice a great deal, but on the court there's no thought. There's just that immediate response. It's a sort of physical wisdom, you can say. Even just ordinary people - if something comes flying at you, you don't think about it, you just move. So that's an intelligence expressing itself through our physical nature.

The other main one would be an aesthetic intelligence through art, and we can see that in people especially who perform. They're not thinking, they just do. They've practiced the piece, and then it's just that complete absorption in the expression, whatever they're doing - singing, playing piano, whatever.

And in the intellect, of course, that's the final one. This intelligence has to express itself, its knowledge, through words as well, through concepts.

Through this process of *vipassanā*, specifically this process of *vipassanā*, we're trying to disembed this intelligence from its confusion with the body, heart and mind. And that's what we're doing when we make these things an object. So when we see feelings and sensations, when we're moving around and we're aware of the body moving, when we are aware of our emotional states, and when we're aware of our images and thoughts, we're aware of something. So the awareness there, even in the language, tells us that the awareness is something separate from what it's aware of.

It's making everything very clearly an object to ourselves so that this intelligence begins to recognise its own specific quality. And it cannot know itself in the same way that it can know an object. So in the Mahāyāna they'll say, the eye cannot see itself. The tongue doesn't taste itself. It's totally something which is beyond the phenomenal world. Can you imagine if your tongue had its root taste, had a regular root taste? The actual taste of the tongue was curry - it'd ruin the porridge, wouldn't it?

So it's a case of recognising that our senses are totally receptive. They don't actually come coloured, you might say. They come with an ability. So for instance, sight comes with an ability to see, but a person may be colour-blind, but it's still a receptive faculty.

So this intelligence, this primordial intelligence that we have, isn't something which can eventually be described, and yet it knows. This is the peculiar thing. And it doesn't know what it knows until it expresses what it knows. So that's why an artist, something like a painter, keeps working with the piece. And in so doing, this intelligence finds a way of expressing what it knows.

When we're describing something, even now as I'm talking, some of it I might know in the sense of something I've already learnt from the past, but often I find even when I'm talking, I say something in a slightly different way or I say something differently, which has not been thought out. It just comes. And I'm sure you've all had the experience of saying something amazingly wise and wondering where it came from. So it's that intelligence within us.

The last thing to really understand is that this intelligence sparks any time. The *vipassanā*, the practice of *vipassanā* is just a training. It's just helping us to discover this original intelligence. But it sparks off at any time. It's well known, for instance, in the Mahāsi tradition that often insights, deep insights come exactly when you don't expect them, like when you're eating and stuff like that, because often our *vipassanā* is distorted by wrong effort - trying to see something, trying to understand something.

So this intelligence we have is the active side of our awareness, which is often translated as consciousness, awareness, attention - all that. All these words in English are all pointing to this faculty, this *satipaṇṇā*, this awareness intelligence. And the awareness is more that receptive nature, the receiving. When it becomes active, it becomes a sort of passive action of wisdom, seeing things in a particular way. And then when an occasion arises, you get this insight, this darting forth, this grasp of something.

And it's not limited to the spiritual life. We're talking here about the spiritual life where that darting forth is really to do with understanding these three characteristics, because the purpose of our practice is simply to bring an end to suffering. But it's there in everything we do - this intelligence. Whether it's opening the bonnet of your car and looking to see what's wrong, or whether it's something you're struggling with and you sleep on it and then you wake up next morning and you've got an idea, whether it's a personal problem or a problem in life. Often these answers come really by just, as they say, sleeping on the problem - just allowing this intelligence, giving it time to work out, work itself out.

And that frankly is a mystery, at least it's a mystery to me, how it does that. And that's another little insight into this idea of not me, not mine, not in control. We're not in control, not even in control of this wonderful intelligence we have. It has its own way of working things out.

And so finally, the Buddha himself, having gone through his own training and coming to that point of liberation, which is the liberation of this intelligence, then he begins to teach. And all those things - his body, his aesthetic sense, because he likes to use imagery and stuff, and his intellect - are put to the service of expressing his understandings.

So that in summary is this word *paññā*, which is this fundamental basic Buddha nature we have, this intuitive intelligence.

So I can only hope my words have been of some use. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

Pūjā - Devotional Attention

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Pali word pūjā, translating it beautifully as 'devotional attention' - an attention flavoured with devotion, just as mettā is attention flavoured with loving-kindness. He explains how pūjā represents the heart's involvement in spiritual practice, encompassing emotions of wonder; awe, praise, and joy in receiving the Dharma.

Bhante explores the various expressions of devotional attention: the peaceful quality of spiritual chanting that creates deep equanimity, the symbolism found in shrine rooms with Buddha statues displaying different mudrās (hand gestures), and the meaning behind traditional offerings. He explains how candles represent the light of understanding and heat of love, incense symbolizes the perfume of good actions, and flowers remind us of impermanence.

The talk covers devotional practices like bowing as body language for surrender and gratitude, and circumambulation around stūpas as remembrance exercises. Bhante emphasizes that taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha creates a central reference point for life, giving deeper meaning and interconnection to all our activities. However, he warns that pūjā must support vipassanā practice, not replace it, lest spiritual life corrupt into mere sentimentality.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So the next word I wanted to tackle was *puja*. So it translates as honour, worship, but perhaps the nicest is devotional attention. Rather like that. Devotional attention. So it's an attention which is flavoured with devotion. Like *metta* is an attention flavoured with loving kindness or goodwill.

And really, the *puja* is the other side of the practice. You have the actual teachings themselves, and then we put that into this practice of *vipassanā*, which is an investigation. But without *metta*, without devotion, the practice can lack a bit of juice. It gets a bit dry. So this really is the language of the heart. It's the heart's involvement in the spiritual process.

And it's words such as wonder and awe, praise, worship, which is a little bit out of use these days, but it's a very strong praise, isn't it, and joy, the joy of receiving the Dharma, the joy, even the sympathetic joy in the Buddha himself having attained this enlightenment. So those are the sorts of devotional emotions you might say.

And you can see that this expresses itself through art, through buildings, temples, all spiritual art in that sense, and in pictures, sculptures, the great art of religious spiritual sculptures, and there's music, chanting. In our school, it would be this sort of chanting, which is not only memorizing the Buddha's words, it's about creating the peacefulness that goes with it.

And that's why, even if you listen to Gregorian chant, it's always on a level of peaceful. The emotions come, the joy and the awe and all that, but they're stabilized or rooted in this peace or equanimity. So if you listen to plain chant, just keep listening to it, it actually creates within you this very deep ongoing peace.

Then of course it got corrupted into polyphonic music and all that stuff. And the emotion started growing until you get to the romantics and it becomes silly. But if you stay with this original spiritual music, it's always this one line, you see. And if they are happy, it just rises gently above the medium of equanimity. That's my own take on music.

So all those things that we see are all part of the devotional aspect of our practice. So that when we come into a shrine room, you've got a statue. These statues have a *mudrā*, which means their particular attitude in which the Buddha is in. So this one is the concentration *mudrā*, the *jhāna* *mudrā*, which is the *mudrā* really of enlightenment. You get others with the hand up, which is the *mudrā* of fearlessness. You get the *varada*, the *mudrā* of offering, with the left hand offering things. You get the *mudrā* where he seems to be holding a lotus, which is the *mudrā* of teaching.

And perhaps the most famous one, or the most regular one, is where he's touching the earth, which is just before his enlightenment, when he, as it were, overcomes the attack of Māra, which was basically doubt. Like, who was he? And what was he playing at? Why don't you just enjoy life? Who are you to try and work out this great mystery? And he grounded himself, you see. Interestingly enough, it was the perfection of generosity which gave him the strength to carry on. When you give, you see, it's the renunciation. So, in a sense, he's reminding himself that he's not only doing it for himself. So, those are your *mudrās*.

And, you know, the candles. So, there's always candles. The light, you see. So, remember that the light of a candle is symbolic of the understanding, the path of wisdom. It's heat, the path of love. So, you start with love as your basis. And the action of the flame, good works. So that's in your eightfold path, right understanding, right attitude, that's the lover, right speech, right action, right livelihood. So the flame is really one of the better and the best symbols.

Incense usually refers to the perfume of good actions in your life. That's where it's symbolical. And the flowers always have an essence, impermanence. They rise and pass away.

When it comes to bowing, remember, that's a very strong body language for surrender. That's one thing, but I mean it can be done out of gratitude, you see, or out of praise. Depends on what you want to put into the action. Even if you find it difficult to do it physically, you can do it at least within yourself, the yielding.

And then you get the practice of walking around, circumambulation, you see, always keeping the object of veneration to your right. So even the Buddha said, before he died, is to create these *stupas* out of his ashes. And they were separated into eight, eight people wanted these ashes, eight different groups, and it was divided into these different groups. And what is a stupa? It's a burial mound. So if you think about when you visit the graves of your parents or your grandparents or whatever, that's what you're doing. You're just going there perhaps to remember your relationship with them, to thank them for it. So when you're walking around a stupa, that's basically a devotional exercise, you see, just to remember the memory of the Buddha in remembrance of me.

And they also did it with Bodhi trees. So remember, in the beginning, for about 500 years, there was no statue or picture of the Buddha. He was always represented either by a tree or a footprint or a seat, anything but the actual physical representations. This came about 500 years later with the Greeks. They started one line of sculpture, very beautiful Greek Adonises, and down in south of India the Mathura, which were begun then. And then since then, of course, there's always been statues about.

And so, finally, the expression of this puja, of this honour, devotion, etc., leads, you see, it's a response, it's the heart's response to the practice. So that when we have faith, it's not just an intellectual assent. I mean, that's how it's often described, especially through the Christian tradition, partly a sort of an intellectual acceptance. There has to be the heart with it. There has to be a certain feeling that this is where one wants to be, because that's where you're rooted within the heart base.

And so taking the refuges and precepts is a way of re-establishing your heart commitment to the practice you're doing. And what is it that you're actually doing when you take refuges and precepts? So the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. You're basically slowly making that the reference point of your life. That's what it is.

So it's like these merry-go-rounds with these horses going up and down. So most people are jumping on these horses, going round and round and round. And you find that, and even now you may find, that there are certain things that you're doing in your life which, as it were, are disconnected. A lot of people do all sorts of things, but they're all disconnected. They don't have a central reference point to which it all makes sense.

So by taking refuge in a particular spiritual path, what that becomes is your reference point. So now everything in your life has to make sense to this reference point. And that's how it becomes integral, interconnected. And from that you get your deeper meaning as to why the hell we're living here in the first place. And that's what taking refuge actually means. So it's not just an intellectual thing or even something that comes through vipassanā practice. Actually, something which moves at a deeper level within the heart.

And then, of course, one finds these practices, such as chanting and doing these circumambulations and all that. I mean, that's why we're having a stupa put in. You find them really uplifting. They're the juice of the practice, you might say.

But, of course, none of it actually, I mean, and this is the other thing, then, of course, if your practice just becomes that, just becomes puja, then really there's no hope, because that's when the spiritual life corrupts into schmaltz. So it's got to be this balance, and it's got to be seen that the puja is there to support the practice of insight, not the other way around.

I can only hope my few words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your suffering sooner rather than later.

Samyojana — The First Three Fetters

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this DhammaBytes talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the profound teaching of samyojana — the ten fetters or chains that bind beings to the cycle of suffering. Focusing specifically on the first three fetters, he explains how they are directly connected to the first stage of Awakening: sotāpanna or stream-entry.

The three lower fetters are: sakkāya-diṭṭhi (personality-belief or identification with body-mind as self), vicikicchā (skeptical doubt about the Buddha's teachings), and sīlabbata-parāmāsa (clinging to mere rites and rituals as sufficient for liberation). Bhante explains how these deeply rooted delusions are permanently destroyed when one first touches nibbāna consciousness — that transcendent state beyond ordinary worldly awareness.

With characteristic clarity, he addresses common misconceptions about spiritual practice, explaining why techniques are supports for Right Awareness rather than mystical rituals, and how the experience of stream-entry varies among practitioners. This teaching offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for serious meditators seeking to understand what liberation actually means — what we are liberated from and how the process unfolds through direct insight into the true nature of reality.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa (x3)

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The word this evening is *samyojana*. It translates as the fetters, chains, something which binds us. And there are ten of them. Personality belief, skeptical doubt, clinging to mere rules and rituals, sensuous craving, ill will, craving for fine material existence, craving for immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance.

What's particularly interesting about the ten fetters is that they are joined with the four paths and fruits of the four sainthoods which are stream entrance, once returner, non-returner and *arahat*, the free, self-enlightened one. So what the Buddha is saying here is that every time you make one of these paths and fruits, one of these fetters begin to drop away so the insight which we get every time we enter one of these fruits destroys the ability to go back on it. This will become pretty obvious to you as we go along.

So, if we just take the first three, because the first three are connected with the first path and fruit of *Sotāpanna*. *Sotāpanna* means stream entry. So, at this point, the person becomes a noble person. When we talk about an *Ariya*, a noble person is somebody who has gone beyond the ordinary, worldly consciousness and has touched upon the *Nibbāna* consciousness. That's what they've done.

The Buddha talks about it as a flash of lightning. So in a flash of lightning you see everything but it's only for that moment. It's not particularly deep but one thing that person knows which a person who has not had that does not know is that there is *Nibbāna*. There is a different transcendent state to ordinary consciousness. And it's upon that that these first three fetters go.

So the first one is personality belief, *sakāya-diṭṭhi*. It translates as believing this body personality, this human form, is Self. So some deep delusional misunderstanding has been snapped. It's not as though that's the end of self. In fact, some people who have this experience don't believe they've had it. Even though the teacher tells them they've had it, they don't believe they've had it because their sense of self is still so great. Some people have it and they don't know they've had it. It's just come to them. Like, for instance, somebody at the age of seven doesn't know that they've shifted the way they look at the world.

And for others it's a wow experience and they can't believe what's happened. And there's no explanation for this in the scriptures, but my own understanding is that if a person has already reached this state in a previous life, then in this life they're just making their way back up to where they left off in the last life. So in a sense it's just as natural for them as somebody of the age of seven. But if it's for the first time then it's such a veil that falls off the world that it seems just enormous to them. Such people tend to be happy to stay at that place not to move on so much but to just enjoy and absorb that level of consciousness.

And one of the insights of having that is, of course, that because there is this higher consciousness, we can say we're not this body and mind. So something has snapped there.

The second one is skeptical doubt. So until we've personally experienced or personally had a *nibbānic* experience, we don't know. We don't know if the Buddha's teaching is actually true. Whether it is an experience, we don't know by personal experience. And therefore, there's always a possibility of skeptical doubt.

And remember, skeptical doubt has the power to stop us practising, because we won't commit. That's when skeptical doubt becomes a real spiritual disease. When doubts just pass through our minds of, well, I can't do it, everybody else can, and I'm special that way. If you have that sort of doubt, then it sometimes arises and passes away. But when it becomes a frame of mind, this doubt, then of course it becomes a barrier. You won't commit, you won't do, and therefore you don't move. That skeptical doubt is cut asunder, because now you know. That's it.

And the third one is clinging to mere rites and rituals. So that's the understanding that rites and rituals in themselves are material to the path of liberation. So if you go back to the Buddha's time, and even today you'll find people thinking that their karma is washed away by standing in the Ganges or doing something like that. And that's a wrong understanding of rites and rituals.

People go overboard with that sometimes. They think that all rites and rituals are a complete waste of time. But the Buddha didn't think that. I mean, we have quite a rite to go through when you want to join the order, for a start. There's a whole series of things, taking refuges and precepts, for instance. It's something that he instigated. In fact, it was the second way into ordaining to the order. Well, the first way was when somebody would say to him, I'd like to be a disciple, I'd like to follow you. And his response was, *Ehi, Ehi Passiko*, come and try. That was it, that was the ordination. Just come and try, stay with me.

As the order grew a bit, then it became just slightly more formal. So they had to take the refuge and precepts, which we do in the evening. And then finally it turned into this slightly elaborate ceremony which had a question-and-answer format to make sure that you were ready for going into the order.

So it's not as though rites and rituals in themselves have no purpose. I personally think that they're very good for setting a mood, so I always start a retreat taking refuge precepts. People take them at their own level, but it's like a gateway and helps you move into it. So even in the morning, when you do your refuge, when you're doing your two-hour morning practice, to begin with a little bowing or something, which is an entrance into it.

But that itself, of course, is not specifically material to the process of liberation. What's material to the process of liberation is seeing things as they really are. It's the insight which liberates. But so long as there's some sort of belief, then it becomes a little barrier, because some of your energy goes into believing it.

And interestingly enough, it also manifests in the way that a person's relationship to the technique they're using in meditation. The technique becomes a mystique. It becomes a sort of, if you haven't got the technique right, you can't make it. So people like that are very worried about whether they've really got the technique right and how they're doing it properly. And of course they miss the point. They're turning the technique itself into a ritual whereby they can attain liberation. Whereas the technique is only there to support mindfulness. Full stop. You're supposed to let go of it after a while.

So, these first three fetters, the one where this deep identity we have with this human form, that's cut asunder. The skeptical doubt completely disappears in the sense that one now knows what the Buddha was talking about. And rites and rituals are put into the right perspective. We're not clinging to them for wrong reasons. And these are the three fetters that go when a person has what we call this *sotāpanna*, this stream-entrant experience. And that's how they're connected. These fetters are connected to the process of liberation.

So here you see what it is you're liberated from. When we talk about liberated, what are you liberated from? This is what you're liberated from. The *Sotāpanna* is liberated from these three fetters. And remember they can't go back on it, you can't go back on the level of consciousness that's it wherever they're born in whatever state they're born they'll always rise to that point you can't lose that knowledge.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance may you be liberated from these three lower fetters sooner rather than later.

Samyojana — The Last Seven Fetters

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the ten samyojana—the mental fetters that bind beings to the cycle of existence. After reviewing all ten fetters, he focuses particularly on the final seven that must be overcome by advanced practitioners: sensual craving, ill will, attachment to rūpa-jhānas (fine-material absorptions), restlessness, conceit, and ignorance.

Using the Buddha's vivid imagery, Bhante explains the four stages of awakening: the sotāpanna (stream-enterer) who glimpses Nibbāna like a flash of lightning, the sakadāgāmī (once-returner) like a starlit night, the anāgāmī (non-returner) like a full moon, and the arahant who sees clearly as the sun at midday. He also employs the metaphor of swimmers, showing how ordinary people swim underwater while stream-enterers keep their heads bobbing above water.

The talk emphasizes that these spiritual attainments cannot be forced through willful effort, as they transcend the self. True progress comes through continuous purification of the heart and vipassanā practice, cultivating insight into the three characteristics: impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). This wisdom (paññā) naturally liberates practitioners from the fetters when conditions are right.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and the Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So these *samyojana*, these fetters, remember there were ten of them. I'll just run through them quickly again. The idea of self, the personality belief, this personality being me. Skeptical doubt, doubt in the Buddha's teaching. This is specific to doubt in the Buddha's teaching. Clinging to mere rules and rituals, that means thinking that rules and rituals are material, directly material to the process of liberation, as some practice in the East, believing, for instance, that standing in the Ganges gets rid of your karma, stuff like that. The fourth and fifth are sensual craving and ill will. And then the sixth and seventh are these *rūpa jhānas*, the absorptions, based on *samatha* meditation. Then there's restlessness and finally ignorance.

So the *sotāpanna*, the stream entrant, someone who's glimpsed *Nibbāna*, the Buddha talks about it like a flash of lightning, has got rid of the first three.

Now there's another lovely image that the Buddha gives us. So we had the image of the *sotāpanna*, like a flash of lightning sees everything, but it is only a flash. And the once-returner, the *sakadāgāmi*, is like a full starlit night. The non-returner, the *anāgāmi*, is like a full moon night and the *arahat* sees things clearly as the sun at midday. That's the image he gives.

But there's another rather interesting image which tells us about the effort. Ordinary people are swimming under the water, he says, and the stream entrant is one whose head keeps bobbing up out of the water. The once-returner is the person who can tread water. So the head's always above water. And the person who is swimming towards once-returner is actually making the effort to get to the island. It's a swim. And the *arahat* is somebody who's landed on the island.

So it gives you two points of real effort. The first one is coming out of that fundamental delusion into the first glimpse of *Nibbāna*. And the second one, the difficult one, is getting to a non-returner. And the reason for that is that you're leaving the sensual world.

So the once-returner is somebody who has attenuated their sensual desire and ill will. But it doesn't go at all, their aversion doesn't go at all until they get to the state of non-returner. And what that means is that that being no longer desires to come back to this realm of existence. There's nothing attracting them here. That's basically it. And that's why they're called non-returners.

Now, there's still an attachment, and the attachment is to what the mind itself can produce, which are these beautiful states that we call the *jhānas*, the absorptions. And they have to get over that attachment to going up there. People who practice that, of course, the more you practice that, the more you tend to want to be there because, in a sense, you're in control of that. Once you become an adept at *jhāna* practice, you can enter it almost at will. So obviously, it's like having ice cream whenever you want it. There's no reason to come down for real ice cream when you can get it as a mental state. So that's one of the big problems of somebody who's an *anāgāmi*. They're already very easily accessible, blissful states.

And the last three things. I must have missed out conceit. Conceit, restlessness and ignorance. They're the last three. Now, conceit, of course, is the self. And remember, conceit is always that comparison. The self is always comparing itself to somebody else or to another way of living. So it's always, I'm better than, or I'm worse than, I'm not as good as, or the more subtle one, I'm equal to. And when you say I'm equal to somebody you're basically creating a group and the group is not as good as or worse than some-

thing else so even though it might come out as humility well I'm equal to you actually it's just another form of conceit. I can't remember who said it but all comparison is odious and in a sense that's what the self does it's always comparing itself to others.

And that conceit only goes with the ending of self. So that's basically someone who has achieved the full enlightenment, the full awakening. Restlessness, I think here, the way I see it anyway, is that it's basically a lot of the old habits that a person has, but they're now so attenuated, they're now so small, that they're only felt as a restlessness. So there's nothing particularly grave about such a person. By the time they get to an *an-āgāmī*, really they're very, very refined. The heart has been cleared of all its major obstacles because that's what keeps us here.

So this sense of restlessness, I would presume, is very fine. And I'm thinking of people like the Mahāsi Sayadaw whom I met. Some say that he was fully awakened and others say that he only attained this non-returner. At least that's what I got from the monks, so I don't know which is true. But the thing about such a person is that you do feel that they have some extra virtue about them. In the case of the Mahāsi, the feeling of silence. And it affects you as soon as you walk into the present. Your own head goes, your thoughts actually begin to stop. It has that effect on you. So we're talking about somebody who has really refined their heart and clarified their understanding. And that's basically somebody who's moving towards being fully awakened.

So really that takes us to the end of these *saṃyojana*, these fetters. And I suppose the thing to say about them is that these are not under our control at all. They arise when the time is right. All we can do is practice to continuously purify the heart, to try and get rid of as many of these defilements as we can, or to work on them constantly, and through the *vipassanā* to create that situation where insight can arise.

But we don't have any direct control. We can't make this thing happen because this whole process is beyond the self. And that's one of these conundrums, one of these paradoxes, that you have to try, but you can't try and get something. So Zen puts it in that paradoxical way of the effortless effort. So as soon as your effort in meditation is to try and attain one of these fruits, you're just creating an effort which is just knocking on the wrong door. It just ain't going to open because these things cannot be attained by an act of will coming from the self. And it's only when you drop that completely that insights arise, these *vipassanā* insights arise.

So that's why the Buddha's always insistent that we place the attention on the qualities of impermanence, of seeing how we're creating suffering for ourselves, and of seeing how we don't have control. That's the *anattā* doctrine, the not-self doctrine. And it's looking at, as things arise in this present moment, from one of those three vantage

points, that begins to liberate this *paññā*, this wisdom that we have within us, this active, intuitive intelligence, intuitive awareness. And that's what does the job. That's what does the job. That's where the insights come.

So, what the Buddha here has done by giving us these fetters, is he shows us how our delusion about the self, about how our defilements are all linked into the path, so that you can't have a growth of wisdom without the growth of virtue. They run parallel to each other. And that's basically what the *saṃyojana* are pointing to.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all the fetters sooner rather than later.

Sati — Knowing

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents sati as the single most important word encapsulating the Buddha's practical teaching. Moving beyond conventional translations of 'mindfulness' or 'awareness,' he reveals sati as 'knowing' — a dynamic, intelligent awareness that operates beyond the thinking mind.

Drawing from the Buddha's own awakening story, Bhante explains how the Buddha discovered vipassanā absorptions that contained this special quality of intelligence. This knowing is not our personal knowing, but rather a bare, open receptivity that allows insights to arise naturally. When we establish this 'noble awareness' (sammā sati), we step out of conditioned existence and discover the unconditioned space within us — our Buddha nature.

The talk explores how our fundamental delusion lies in believing we are merely this psycho-physical organism, driving us to seek the deathless (amatadhammaṃ) in transient pleasures. Through vipassanā practice, every time we make an object of our experience — thoughts, emotions, sensations — we discover the unconditioned awareness that observes them. This 'default position' of pure knowing becomes our refuge and the foundation for liberation from suffering.

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato
Sammā-Sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa*

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I think if you were to choose one word which encapsulates the teaching of the Buddha when it comes to the practice as opposed to the theory, it would have to be this word *sati*. Its root in the Sanskrit means actual remembrance and it's used in that way with certain exercises, so we talk about *buddhānusati*, recollection of the Buddha, recollection of the qualities of the Buddha, qualities of the Dhamma, and even *maranasati*. But when it comes to the word *sati*, the Buddha is using it in a specific way.

With it he always puts the word *ariya*, which we translate as noble. It's probably more accurate to say correct, or that awareness that leads to liberation. And that's what he's really saying.

From his life story he happens upon it. The teaching of the time tended to be about developing mental states that we now call the absorptions or *jhānas*. Although they're very blissful states, and you find them in all religions because they're brought about by contemplations — this *mettā* practice that we're doing, if you do it very strongly, will create bliss within you — they also suffer from impermanence, so they didn't actually produce the answer he was looking for about human suffering. They still presented him with his existential angst.

Then he tried the self-mortification, if you remember, which is really the understanding that the body's at fault. Our appetites and greeds come from the body, and therefore you have to renounce the body to an extent that you almost kill it. He became very thin. And that didn't take him anywhere.

It was only when he had been revived by that rice pudding that he has this memory of childhood. He's watching his father doing the ploughing ceremony. In the scriptures it talks about the first absorption. But there's something else in that absorption which wasn't there before, and we call them *vipassanā* absorptions. That quality that was there, that wasn't in the practice that he'd been doing with these other teachers, was the intelligence.

So he's watching his father, absorbed in watching his father, but with that question mark in the mind. That's why I have that picture at the back given to me by an Irish student. The little girl is reaching out and pulling away a leaf to discover this beautiful butterfly, but you can see that she's coming from the position of don't know and it's quite frightening for her. When we open up to ourselves like this it can be a bit frightening, but the power behind it is this intelligence.

This intelligence, this knowing, is that within us which is to be liberated. Because the problem lies within the knowing itself. The knowing doesn't know where it's at and it makes a wrong decision, it makes a wrong association. If I were to choose one word for this *sati*, which is often translated as awareness, mindfulness and all that, for me the word that really encapsulates it is knowing.

We're rather lucky in English that we have this gerund, which is a verbal noun. In so doing, it doesn't coagulate into a thing. It's not the known. It's not our knowing. You take away its personality, its solidity. It's just knowing, just like being, becoming. That quality of just knowing what is happening liberates the knowing from delusion.

That intelligence, that internal intelligence we have, which is part of *sati*, the awareness — the awareness really is pointing to just that openness, the receptivity that you need. And that knowing is beyond our control. When insights come, even in ordinary

daily life, it's not as though we've thought them through. Sometimes you go to bed with a problem and you wake up and it's as clear as day. And you haven't thought about it. So there's something about this intelligence within us which doesn't belong to the thinking mind.

That's why in the meditation we make such an effort to close the thinking mind. In so doing we liberate this intelligence. The awareness is the passive side of this intelligence — it's the openness, it's the receptivity. As we receive information there sparks forward out of it this grasping, this sudden understanding, and that's really the *paññā* part, this wisdom part within us. So *sati* is your default position.

In our standing meditation, just to come back to that bare awareness. Lovely word is stop. Just to catch the moment after you say stop. Before the mind rushes in for the next thing to do. It's just catching that moment and recognising that in that moment there's this tremendous potential because you're open to what there is.

Developing that awareness in his sitting, he was then able to let the heart and mind, all the conditioning that he had, just express itself. It was in that that he became aware of how we manufacture the world, where the actual original delusion lies. And it lies in the belief that we're human beings. Very simple. That we are this psychophysical organism.

Once we've made that delusive step, we're driven to make the best we can of this world, to seek happiness in sensual pleasure, in what the world can give us. It's not as though the world doesn't give us happiness or joy, but it can never totally satisfy this search, because the search is for something eternal, not dying, the immortal, the deathless, as he would put it.

Trying to find that deathless Dhamma, the *amatadhamma*. We say it when we repeat these phrases: the unborn, the undying, the uncreated, the unconditioned. What is that? Where do we find that position within the world of creation, within the world of transient things?

That's the process of *vipassanā*. Every time we make something an object within us — be it a thought, an emotion, a feeling, a sensation — in order to do that we've stepped out of creation, we've stepped out of the conditioned and we're discovering this place within us which is the unconditioned. In so doing, we're discovering the real, true, deeper meaning of *sammāsati*, this noble awareness. That's our Buddha nature.

Once we become certain about that, once we begin to understand that, then the training begins. Because we're constantly drawn back into the old conditioning. And that's the problem. The old conditioning is heavy. It'll keep sucking us back in. But every time we come back to that position of just awareness, bare attentiveness, pure knowing, we keep reinforcing within ourselves where the object of our quest lies.

That's why this practice of *vipassanā* is fundamental to the spiritual life really, because it's so easy to get lost in daily life. But just to settle in the morning, a little bit in the evening, and as many small times as we can during the day, to re-establish just that position of pure knowing. Just coming back down into that default position.

We did it in the standing meditation. Just to stop. And then you act from that position of awareness to the next thing to be done. It's that practice of constantly stopping and coming back down to that pure awareness which is the practice.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Sati in Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a common challenge for meditation practitioners: how to integrate the awareness (sati) developed in vipassanā practice into daily life without creating an artificial split between observer and actor. He explains that the goal is not constant self-awareness, but rather full engagement in each moment through right attention and care.

Drawing on the Noble Eightfold Path, Bhante emphasizes the importance of establishing right understanding and right intention before entering into action. He explores how stopping for moments of reflection allows us to act from wholesome motivations rather than the habitual patterns of greed, aversion, and delusion. The talk addresses practical challenges like boredom at work, explaining how repetition with awareness can transform mundane tasks.

Central to the teaching is cultivating equanimity (upekkhā) as our default state—a receptive calmness that allows us to meet each moment freshly without preconceptions. Bhante offers practical guidance for establishing moments of stillness throughout the day, creating space for skillful responses rather than reactive habits. This approach transforms daily activities into opportunities for awakening, where complete absorption in wholesome action leads naturally to the selfless happiness of the enlightened mind.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

The meditation that we do, this *vipassanā*, puts us into a peculiar position with ourselves. Having found this position within ourselves, we abstract from everything that we would normally call ourselves. Everything becomes an object, something to observe. Somehow we have to re-enter that psycho-physical organism and wander about the world.

Sometimes we mistake that meditation in daily life, thinking that we have to be self-aware, to try and keep this distance within ourselves. Well, that of course creates quite a split. Although self-awareness does arise at times, even if it arises in not such a skillful way—such as when we're embarrassed, you become very self-aware—the fact that it arises sometimes is not a problem. But if we think that that's the way we ought to be,

then it does become a problem because there's a split. There's me trying to watch myself trying to do something. You can't do it. Try reading while watching yourself read. You can't do it. So we have to re-engage.

Now what we come to recognise within ourselves is that a lot of the things that we do are coming from wrong attitudes. In the classic teaching it's all to do with greed, with acquisitiveness, all to do with aversion and fear, anxiety—both the aversion of pushing away and the aversion of running away. So knowing that, it's important before we begin an action to actually be quite clear about our attitude.

In the Eightfold Path, remember, right understanding is first. This is what we get through the meditation, and it drops into a right attitude, into a heart state. That attitude, remember, is not an emotional state—it's where you put your will. Why are you doing what you're doing? Being very clear about that, when you enter into the action, then we're producing good conditionings within ourselves.

Just on a very simple level, if you say that you'll help somebody, you might be in a habit of just saying yes. Will you do this? Yes. And then after you've said it, you say to yourself, what did I say that for? I don't want to do that. You get quite negative about it, and you do it, but there's a grudge there. So what was meant to be a very beautiful thing, a very happy thing to do, turns into something quite painful.

Now if you have stopped and then actually made that a point of reflection and then said yes, I'll help, then that comes from a right attitude and then you get the gift of happiness from it. So that ability to make the right intention—in order to do that, we've got to get in the habit of stopping, of actually just a moment of reflection. That's one of the very skillful habits that we can get into.

When you've finished an action, no matter what it is, there's a stop, and the next intention comes. You can see that intention if you don't stop, then you're in that rush mode. If you look at the Eightfold Path, you see it begins with right understanding. We form an intention from it, which is the right attitude, and then that affects the way we speak, what we do, and our livelihood—how we're actually making a living.

Now the two main attitudes or the two main positions that we have to take is this sense of attention—putting our attention where we want to put it—and the other one is care. That's where we put the heart. So these two things, attention and care, are the guiding modes that we need for everything we do.

To get that attention right, it's a case of putting ourselves into the action, a full engagement in what we're doing. It's at those points that we see that sense of self-awareness disappears. If it comes with care as well, then the heart's behind it, and you find that that movement into a loss of self-awareness, into what you're doing, comes with ease.

Now it happens to us naturally when we're doing something we love to do. If you're a gardener, for instance, you might finish something, and when you look back at the action, you can see that it's done beautifully, it's done well. But there's been no sense of time, and during that no sense of time, there's been no sense of self. So there's an absorption into the action.

Sometimes you do it when you're reading. You do it easily when you're watching a film. No sense of time. You just wake up and it's two hours long. Those moments when they actually happen from the right understanding, with the right attitude—when we go into that experience, that's the enlightened mind.

We're in that peculiar paradox that when we're completely happy like that, we don't know it. As soon as you know you're happy, you lost it, because then there's "I am happy." There's a split, there's a break between the happiness and you knowing that you're happy. And then, of course, you know it's going to end anyway, because everything arrives and passes away.

Now, on the other side of the equation, there is the negativity that we have which is stored up from past behaviour, from past wrong thinking. What we learn from our meditation is that you don't fight it, you don't try and get rid of it—you have to, as it were, accompany it.

Take our work. I would say it's impossible to do a job without sometimes feeling bored about it. Where does that boredom come from? Why does boredom arise? It's one of our big problems in this society because of the access to easy pleasure, easy entertainment, easy distraction. When the mind is always seeking some sort of excitement, and you have to go back and do the same work and say the same things day after day, and there isn't the excitement there, then what you get is this aversion, which is boredom.

So then the boredom says to you, look, what you need is variety. Variety is the spice of life. So then you go seeking this variety, but it becomes an obsession, an addiction to try and constantly find the next buzz. And the more you work at that, the more you find that you're more quickly bored by what you're doing, because you can't keep that high level of excitement all the time.

When we find ourselves being bored about something, the answer to that is repetition. You keep doing it. You keep doing it knowing that the boredom is there and that it's coming from wrong understanding, and you keep placing your attention on what you're doing. And then we find, magically, that the interest rises again. The commitment rises again.

Now to undermine all this business around seeking excitement in life is the quality of equanimity, calmness. You'll notice that we always begin the meditation with that calmness. It's really beginning to develop a taste for calmness, for the neutral, for a state of equanimity that begins to balance our lives, so that we're not always seeking this excitement, this distraction.

In a sense, that's our default position. If during daily life we can, every so often, even if it's only for a few seconds, just fall back into that state of stopping, re-establish the calmness of the body, calmness of the mind, the stillness, silence of the mind, calmness of the heart, and then in that position, we want to retain that. So as it were, open outwards. So it's a receptive mode. We're not going out, we're receiving. That's your equanimity.

If that's your default position, you can see that anything which touches that equanimity is going to be interesting, because you're not walking into the next moment with some preconception, some expectations, some idea of attaining or getting or achieving.

So in that default mode where we're just very calm, very still, very equanimous, we can repeat to ourselves that at this moment we're being, not trying to become something. We're not achieving anything, going anywhere, not trying to be anybody. That's a relief. That's a real holiday.

And then, when the next thing to be done arises in the mind—the next thing to be done, wash the pots—make the intention: wash the pots. And when you wash the pots, your attention is on what you're doing.

If you're speaking to somebody, your attention is on receiving what they're saying without trying to respond at the same time, which is what we normally do. We get into a sort of fencing. It's more important for them to understand what I mean rather than for me to understand what they mean. So that receptive mode, and then there's a sort of change, there's a click to respond.

So all these little things, everything that we're doing in the sitting meditation, has some relevance into daily life. It's the basic attitude in which we approach every moment in our lives. And the effect is just a greater calmness, a bit more happiness around. Not so many enemies.

Just to recap: we're not trying to be self-aware. In fact, we're trying to go to a point where we're not self-aware. The guiding principles are paying attention and doing it with care, putting the heart into it, making sure the intention that we are empowering is skillful, wholesome, and that we create during the day these moments of stillness. The more you create moments of stillness to establish that equanimity and move into the next moment, you'll see it has the effect of calming our lives. Just that moment allows us to make the right decision. Don't get caught up in the old habits of greed, hatred, fear and delusion.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated in this very lifetime, sooner rather than later.

Sīla - Good Conduct

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 9 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines sīla, the Pali term for ethical conduct that forms the first pillar of the Buddha's threefold training (sīla-samādhi-paññā). He traces how unethical behavior arises from our fundamental delusion about who we are and our attachment-driven attempts to find happiness in the world through manipulation and control.

Rather than mere rules or commandments, the Five Precepts (sikkhāpada) are presented as a path of training that begins with obvious ethical guidelines—like not harming living beings—and refines into subtle aspects of compassionate living. Bhante explains how ethical behavior naturally develops alongside wisdom, creating a systemic transformation where harmful tendencies like cruelty, theft, and dishonesty evolve into their positive counterparts: compassion, generosity, and truthfulness.

The talk emphasizes how vipassanā practice supports this transformation by helping us recognize conditioning without judgment, allowing unethical patterns to naturally atrophy when we stop empowering them. This process of refinement extends to the smallest details of daily conduct, cultivating a gentle, courteous way of being that reflects our growing wisdom and compassion. Essential listening for understanding how ethical conduct forms the foundation of Buddhist practice and awakening.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The word I'd like to look at this evening is the word *sīla*. It translates as morality, ethical behaviour. And it always comes first in the teachings. It's always *sīla-samādhi-paññā*. It's always ethical behaviour, concentration, and then wisdom.

To understand that, I have to go back to the beginnings as to why unethical behaviour happens. And it goes back to that point where we make a mistake. And this mistake of who we are, or what we are, manifests in a relationship of attachment to the world, or better, seeking happiness in the world. That's how the Buddha would put it, seeking happiness here and there. And that sort of relationship creates conflict. So we're always trying to manipulate the world and other people to make ourselves happy. And if they don't, we tend to want to just get rid of them. So you can see how from that

basic mechanism, it's very easy to begin to behave in a way which is harmful. And that would be the definition of something which is not ethical. If it does harm to others or to ourselves, then it's unethical.

The five precepts — that's how we translate it, but the actual word *sikkhāpada* is a path of training. They're not actually commandments as such. Ethical behaviour is a measure of our delusion or wisdom. When you realize that you start at the basis of your behaviour, then that's actually where your training is.

Take something, the first one that we take, which is pretty straightforward, not to harm or kill any living being. So we start there. I think most of us have probably given that up. But then there's a more subtle way of harming living beings in perhaps ways that we weren't particularly aware of, like not putting food out for the birds in the mid-winter. There's all sorts of little ways where our lack of interconnectedness manifests in ourselves as callousness.

So it becomes very fine, and then once we begin to see where that is, then the thing begins to flip. And just as we might have been cruel towards animals, that moves over towards compassion. Just as we were perhaps once thieving from banks and not sharing things with people, it moves towards generosity. All these things, like not being truthful, even to the slight point of exaggeration, it moves towards truthfulness. So it's not as though you move towards a place which is not ethical, you move towards the more positive places.

Now that movement doesn't come without wisdom, and that's the important thing to realize. So the approach to our happiness, to our ultimate happiness, has to have this sort of two-pronged approach. It's not only the growth of wisdom, it's not only the growth of understanding, but the change in behaviour. So the whole thing has to be systemic. And that's what *sīla* is pointing to.

And it's there, of course, within the Eightfold Path. So, with the right understanding, there's a change in the heart. And that's the second of the path, the right attitude. From that is right speech, right action, and eventually right livelihood. So it's a systemic process.

Now, some would say it happens naturally with the meditation, and I think that's true. But it's also good just to egg it along a bit, just to keep pushing it a wee bit and just to notice how sometimes our behaviour upsets people. Of course, it might be their problem, not yours, but even so, it's that ability to be sensitive to our relationships to people, which actually makes us more aware of intentions that we weren't perhaps particularly aware of.

One obvious thing is when we want to help somebody. Whether we like it or not, there's always that sort of self-regard within it, a certain conceit that needs to be thanked, that needs to be acknowledged, that needs to be appreciated. And if the person whom you've just given all your money to doesn't say thank you, you feel very upset. It's a case of being aware of those things.

And what our *vipassanā* practice is telling us is not to get judgmental about it, it's just a conditioning. It's no good then berating ourselves and judging ourselves as evil. It's a recognition of, that's a conditioning, and all I have to do is be aware of it and not empower it. It's as simple as that. And as we stop empowering those behaviours that we see are not ethical, not *sīla*, they atrophy, they just die away. You don't have to do anything. That's the simplicity of the path.

And then, of course, there's a refinement of that until you're really talking about even small movements like making a noise when you're eating. It can get extremely fine about your behaviour and about a certain delicacy, a certain courtesy. It moves towards a real gentle way of being in the world. Stabbing the plate with our knives and forks. Have compassion on the plate. Never meant any harm. Just the way we brush our teeth, gently. Just getting it over with. Things like that. So it moves us towards a real refinement of behaviour. And that's really that process of *sīla* as a show of how wise and gentle, compassionate we can become. So *sīla* is really quite a basic teaching.

When Buddhism first began as a practice in the 60s and 70s and 80s, people were very afraid to talk about *sīla*, talk about behaviour, especially sexual behaviour because it was meant to be free and easy. But eventually it affects the whole way that you treat human beings. And you go back to that golden rule, which began in that axial age with the Buddha, Lao Tzu, Socrates, Jeremiah, all these people, and it was just that one, you can reduce it all to that one phrase, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Not do unto others before they do unto you. We have to abandon that.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

01. Dāna - Generosity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this opening talk on the ten pāramī (perfections), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores dāna (generosity) as the foundational virtue in the Buddha's gradual teaching method. He explains why the Buddha always began teaching laypeople with generosity before moving to morality, rebirth, and the Four Noble Truths.

The talk examines three essential conditions for wholesome giving: the wealth or gift must be earned virtuously, the amount must be appropriate and wise, and the receiver must be worthy of the gift. Bhante addresses the subtle psychological dynamics of giving, including how unconscious expectations and the desire to 'feel good' can undermine pure generosity.

Drawing on practical examples from daily life, he explores how mindfulness can reveal our hidden motivations and how awareness of unwholesome intentions actually disempowers them. The discussion includes guidance on developing spontaneous generosity through practice, distinguishing this from impulsive giving that often leads to regret. This foundational teaching provides essential understanding for both meditation practice and ethical conduct in daily life.

*Namo tassa bhagavato harahato samma sambudassam Namō tassa bhagavato harahato
samma sambudassam Namō tassa bhagavato harahato samma sambudassam*

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I'm going to start on the ten perfections. I'll just run through them quickly: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness and equanimity. We won't do them all tonight. We'll just do the *dāna*, which is generosity.

Dāna is the core virtue for the Buddha because whenever he's teaching laypeople he always starts with *dāna*, generosity. The reason is that you can be completely immoral and yet be generous. So a thief can be very generous even if it's with your money. It's like a quality that can exist prior to a good morality. Then he always talks about morality, then he goes on to rebirth, and then finally when he feels that the audience is open enough, he hits them with the Four Noble Truths. So he has his way of gradual teaching.

By the way, when you hear *dāna* within Buddhist company, they're normally referring to giving food to monks, because when they say they're giving dana, that's what they're normally referring to.

The whole point about generosity, of course, is that it undermines selfishness. Our society is particularly selfish, I think, compared to others. That's the enemy of generosity: selfishness. The more subtle enemy, of course, is the feeling of doing it for feeling good, and we'll come to that in a minute.

Now, the scriptures talk about three conditions for a wholesome giving. If you're offering wealth, if you're offering money as a donation, it has to be earned virtuously. It's interesting, isn't it? If you just thieved it from the bank... It's like if people win on the lottery. Now, it's no big evil thing to win some money in the lottery, but it's still based on taking money from other people. Even though the other people have gladly put their money in, it's still a slightly off way of earning money. Gambling is a form of gambling. Even if you were to give that money, there would be just that little bit of unwholesomeness about it. In fact, I know of one person who won a lot of money. He was a Muslim and he offered it to his mosque. They wouldn't receive it. They wouldn't take it.

The gift itself, like the amount you give, has to be appropriate, has to be wise. Somebody was telling me just now that somebody's bought their daughter, I think she's 12 years old, a 500-pound watch. It's pretty much, isn't it? What does it do to a kid of that age? So you've got to be wise about the amount you give.

And the receiver themselves has to be worthy of your gift. They have to be worthy of it. So I mean, it's no good giving month tickets to Las Vegas. It wouldn't be right. And when people ask you for money on the streets, you have to be careful. I always... you know that they're either going to use it for drugs or for drink, so it's one of those little dodgy things. I mean, if you say well look I'll buy you a hamburger and they say well I don't want to eat and they just want your money for a bit more drink... In fact there was once in London and this young guy came up to me and said, can you give me some, can you help me? I said why do you want it? He said well I want to buy some hash. I said I don't want to do that. He said oh come on, I'm being truthful. I thought, well... he thought because he was being truthful therefore he was worthy of a gift. It's funny.

It's the same when you offer to do something for somebody. So you're offering time in that case, in which case you have to be careful of your motives. Often we think we're doing something out of a pure heart but there are subliminal unconscious conditions that we put on things. You have to be quite open to any negative feelings. Now, remember that if you're offering to do something for somebody and you're aware of these little things like, well, they might give me some money when I'm finished... remember that to

be aware of it is not to be dominated by it. So you can still be aware of that unwholesome thought and then determine that you're going to do it for wholesome reasons. Because there's an intention there, it's not activated. When it's subliminal, when it's unconscious, it can have an effect on what we're doing. And then you know that afterwards when they don't give you anything and you're upset. So then you know that there's been some sort of subliminal reason for doing something. Our awareness, our mindfulness puts us in contact with these little subterranean desires.

And of course what you're doing is worthy. It's no good saying to the judge, I was only helping him rob the bank. I didn't want any money. The act itself has to be virtuous, has to be wholesome. And again, the person has to be worthy of the gift. You have to feel they're worthy of it. Often when you have a next-door neighbor who's elderly, and they want a bit of help, so obviously that's... But I remember I used to visit a friend of mine. Every time you turned up, they'd say, oh, I'm glad you've come. Can you help me do this? And after a while you think, well, I've got to stop going, frankly. I'm being a bit abused now.

So those qualities about the virtue of your giving, the purpose of your giving, what it is you're actually giving and the virtue of the person who is receiving your gift, that makes the perfect gift.

When you make an offering often we do it quite impulsively and then often we regret what we've given or what we've done. If we can get into the habit of just stopping for a moment and just saying, well, I'll think about it or I'll just consider that for a minute and just get the right attitude going... When you actually give something or decide to do something for somebody, just make sure that you've actually phrased it within yourself to make that offering pure. You say something like, well, I'm giving this without any hope of return, or I'm doing this... That doesn't stop you doing things, offering things which aren't, shall we say, pure generosity. I mean, at Christmas you give presents and you get one back. That's all right. It's a social interaction. It's not evil to do that. It's just that it's not coming from the pure heart.

And remember that if you do give something, or you do something for somebody, and then you get this little voice come back saying, truly you are a most generous person, you're quite extraordinary, your virtue is above everybody else... So when you hear that little voice, you point to it and say, ah, I see you, Mara, the evil one, but it didn't actually affect my action, so therefore it didn't have the effect it would normally have of making what we do a little selfish. So it's seeing our unwholesome intentions which disempowers them. It's when we don't see them that they creep up behind us and then we realize afterwards that there have been unwholesome intentions.

And I suppose it's a paradox when you think that the more you give with that way, the more joyful you feel. But it's because we can rejoice in another person's joy. That's why we feel joyful when we help somebody. And then, of course, the mistake arises. You start doing it in order to feel good. See? And the whole thing... So let's be careful. Mara's tricky.

And the last thing is about spontaneity. Spontaneity doesn't arrive spontaneously. You've got to work at it. So if you think of sports people... I mean, like a tennis player, they're just acting, you can't even call it a reaction really. I mean, they're totally in the game, with the game, acting spontaneously. But they've done hours of practice. So at first it might seem that this is forced, contrived. And you're sort of playing this game of saying, well, why am I doing that? Okay, here I give with the fullness of my heart. But it's through the practice of that, that eventually you find yourself doing things spontaneously. Which is slightly different from doing something impulsively from old conditionings, which you normally tend to regret.

So if you're like me, you tend to say yes too quickly. You do the yes, and then you think, I don't want to do that. What did I say that for? So it's getting out of that habit. And it's not insulting to somebody to say, well, hold on, I'll have to think about that. It just gives you a bit of a space to make the right intention, and then there's no regrets.

So, just remember those three factors, just to end off with that. What is your intention? Is the gift worthy? Is it coming from a worthy place? And is the person you're helping, in some way or other, worthy of the gift? So, that's why they say the most perfect of all gifts is to give it to somebody who's fully enlightened. If you put an advert in the paper and say, is anybody fully enlightened because I want to make this perfect gift? Because in doing it with a perfect heart and giving exactly what the person wants, and this person is very worthy of your gift, because they've perfected the path, and through that example they spread merit into the world.

Merit is a funny way of translating *puñña*. I found a very good translation for it. It's goodness power. Goodness power. I thought it was a really good translation.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all insidious intentions sooner rather than later.

02. Sīla: Virtuous Conduct

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this second talk on the pāramīs (perfections), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines sīla—virtuous conduct that helps us reach 'the other shore' of Nibbāna. He explains how sīla encompasses wholesome bodily actions, speech, and livelihood, beginning with the foundational Pañcasīla (Five Precepts) that form the basic ethical platform for all practitioners.

The talk traces the progressive refinement of ethical conduct from negative prohibitions to positive transformations: from not killing to actively protecting life, from not stealing to generous giving, from sexual restraint to the skillful sublimation of energy. Bhante explores the eight precepts (Aṭṭhasīla) taken by laypeople on observance days, the ten precepts of novice monastics (sāmaṇera), and the 227 rules of fully ordained monks.

Rather than rigid commandments, these training rules (sikkhāpada) are presented as practical tools for investigating our attachments and developing wisdom. Sīla reflects our understanding—it's not abstract knowledge but a wise way of relating to the world through right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The talk concludes with practical advice for daily ethical reflection, reviewing our kusala (wholesome) and akusala (unwholesome) actions as part of spiritual development.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened.

So continuing with these perfections, and remember that's an odd sort of translation—it's those virtues, actions that we need to arrive at the other shore. That's what *pāramī* means, the other shore. It's just the Buddha's way of talking about Nibbāna, it's that other place, transcendent place.

And what he says is, when he's asked the question, or when he asks the question, what is karmically wholesome morality? It is wholesome bodily actions, wholesome verbal actions and purity of livelihood. So when we talk about *sīla*, morality, it really is confined to outward actions, to the way we affect the world through our actions, our speech, and through our livelihood.

It starts with the negative propositions. So there are various levels. The first one is this five, the *Pañcasīla*, the five *sikkhāpada*, which means root training rules. And that's what we chant in the evening. So they're pretty basic to any society. We're not going to kill each other, kill beings in that sense, but to kill other human beings. And we're not going to steal, take what is not freely given. Not misuse our sexual powers. Not to use wrong speech. That's divided into both telling lies and lying, slanderous speech, doing people down, gossip, and coarse speech—there's one other. It'll come to me. So, and then finally, of course, intoxicants. Nothing that's going to affect our consciousness.

So those are your five basic not-to-dos. And obviously, once we stop behaving like that, then it becomes more and more refined. So whereas it's not killing human beings, we don't want to harm any living beings. So there's a refinement of that. And then of course it transforms. So from not wanting to harm any living beings, we want to protect them. So that's the process, starting with that very negative formulation, and we end up with a very positive one.

So it's the same with taking what is not freely given. So from gross thieving from the banks and that, to being careful even with simple things like not taking pens from work. One gets very sensitive about that. But of course what one moves towards is generosity, giving away.

Sexual energy and that is refined in the sense that it moves from only using that energy within a skillful relationship, a loving relationship. And of course if you're not in relationship then it moves you towards celibacy. And celibacy is not simply—it's not a denial of sexual energy, it's a transformation of it, it's a sublimation of it. Sublimation is not a word we come across these days, because I think we get confused about suppressing. But suppressing something is a negative thing. It's about pushing something away out of negativity or fear.

But sublimating is seeing that actually what there is is just energy and through our conditioning we've channelled it in certain areas. And if we've channelled it into our sexual appetite, then it's a case of, as it were, letting that energy move over towards something more skillful, if we can't use our energy as a sexual energy. It's not stuck there. So that's a refinement of that energy.

When it comes to speech, the speech moves from coarse speech—that was the one I missed out—coarse speech, we move towards truthfulness, kindly speech, and speech at an appropriate time. So often we're being truthful, we're being kind, but we're not quite choosing the right situation to say what we want to say, and it causes upset, when if we had just waited for the opportunity, then we would have been able to have said something to help a situation.

So you've got these refinements. And the last one is intoxication. So basically in the spiritual life, you want to keep your consciousness clear. You want to keep it awake. So putting anything into consciousness is going to distort it. It's exactly what you don't want to do. And the refinement of it is this moment-to-moment awareness. That's what we're moving towards.

So those, you might say, are your basic platform of practice. And then the Buddha gives an opportunity to lay people to, as we say, turn the screw a bit on the full moon days. That's when, in Theravada Buddhist countries, the person might practice the eight *sīla*, the eight *sikkhāpada*, the eight rules of training.

So on a full moon day or a new moon day, you might find that people go to the local monastery and there they take slightly monastic vows in the sense that they don't eat after lunch, they don't worry about entertainment, they let go of radio, TV, iPods, all that sort of stuff. They don't worry about self-beautification, cosmetics, jewellery, all that sort of stuff. And if they're staying overnight they're just happy with just a straightforward bed, abandoning luxurious beds.

So those training rules are, as it were, finding out where your attachments are. That's what they're about. And by doing that, of course, you've got something to work with because it's attachments that we have to undermine.

Then there's the entrance into the order, what we call the *sāmaṇera*. So that moves into ten precepts. And it's the same as the eight, except the bit about entertainment and beautification are made into two. But added to that is this business of not touching money, not using money. So you're retreating from the world, from the world of enticement, once you've got no money, that's it.

And then finally when you join the order, there's a 227—it leaps, it's a quantum leap into 227. And again the whole idea of the rules is that part of it is based on that moral rule of not to harm living beings and so on, but the other side of it are just institutional rules which are meant to help the monastic remain more and more mindful.

So clothes for instance—it never occurs to me to get up in the morning and think I shall wear blue today. It's just this is it, I've just got these robes and that's the end of it. And it stops any worry or concern about how you look or how you should look, because you all look the same. The whole idea is to draw a line as to what it is you want to get involved with when it comes to the world.

Food—we only eat what we are given, so we don't choose what to eat. So those are refinements in terms of letting go of wants, the ordinary wants of life.

And a lot of this the layperson can also practice, just reducing the amount of—I mean, looking at your wardrobe and just asking, do I need all this stuff, how many pairs of shoes do you need. So that's how the morality in Buddha's understanding works because morality is the measure of wisdom or lack of it. So wisdom isn't something abstract. Wisdom is a way of relating to the world. It's not a knowledge, it's a relationship, a wise relationship. And this mirrors itself in our attitudes and this goes outwards into the world in right speech, right action and then right livelihood.

So this right livelihood, for instance—the worst of course is you don't want to get involved in the traffic of arms and human beings, flesh, intoxicants and arms. So once you're not involved in that, really any other form of livelihood can be taken as being something wholesome and to be used as a spiritual practice. That's what you do with your energy into society. And it's finding ways of making our livelihood and our ordinary daily lives work for us towards the spiritual end. So we have to have the principles right. So basically we're developing the good heart. Anything that we do with a good heart, from putting our attention and care into things, becomes a spiritual path, just naturally.

So that's what *sīla* means in the Buddha's practice, in the Buddha's understanding. Morality, we translate it as morality or ethics, behaviour, moral behaviour. And he just laid out a very simple platform that we can use to investigate our actions. And it's good practice, sometime in the day, sometime in the evening, just to review the day and just see whether we've been skillful or unskillful. So that's the words. That's how we translate this, *kusala-akusala*. Wholesome, unwholesome, skillful, unskillful.

They're not to be looked at as commandments, putting down upon us. They're just basic rules and regulations that come out of our human existence. Just being humans, this is the situation we're in, and because of our relationship to the world, we do things which are unwholesome, and they can be, in some way, fitted into these five basic laws about harm, about truthfulness, about our relationship to things, objects, taking what's not freely given, about our sexual energy—that can be widened out to just all appetites. Whether we're eating or enjoying this or enjoying that, it all comes under, in a sense, that business of greed. And intoxicants, just being careful not to put into the body what's going to upset our consciousness.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Nekkhamma — Renunciation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this third talk on the pāramī (perfections), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines nekkhamma — renunciation — beginning with the Buddha's Great Renunciation when he left his palace life to seek awakening. He distinguishes between harmful self-mortification practices (which the Buddha rejected as 'dukkha, anadyo, anatasamito' — ignoble, useless suffering) and true renunciation, which involves temporarily letting go of attachments to understand our relationship to them.

The talk offers practical guidance: choose something you're attached to — a favorite TV program, evening activities, even your cup of tea — and deliberately abstain while sitting in silence to feel the fire of craving. This reveals how attachment to pleasures creates frustration when denied, grief when lost, and the constant anxiety of potential loss. Bhante explains that renunciation isn't mere psychological therapy for addiction, but spiritual insight leading to discovery of 'the other shore' — nibbāna, the unconditioned.

True renunciation naturally transforms selfishness into generosity, aversion into love. Like the Zen ox-herding pictures, after reaching the empty circle of completion, we return to the world with wisdom. As we age, life itself becomes a natural renunciation — learning to let go with dignity rather than clinging brings peace and prevents unnecessary suffering.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're on to the fifth of these *pāramī*, of these perfections. And this one is renunciation. *Nekkhamma*. N-E-K-K-H-A-M-M-A. Just in case you want to remember it.

It translates very well as renunciation. Now it's a key thing in Buddhist understanding, renunciation, and it's symbolised in our practice through the Buddha's own Great Renunciation—that's what it's called. It's that point where the vanity of life and the necessity of sickness, old age and death finally get through to him and he leaves. He leaves his home, he leaves his wife, his child is just born. He's a young man, he's only twenty-nine when he goes.

So we have this image of him getting on his horse, Kanthaka I think his name was, with his servant Channa and riding off to the river across the Rubicon. So it has this mythical image of crossing into another country, a river. And of course he would talk about Nibbāna eventually as being the other shore. Anyway, he gets to the river, cuts off his hair, dons the rag robes of a mendicant and off he goes. His poor horse, Kanthaka, stricken by grief, dies. Little myths around that. But it's known as the Great Renunciation. He leaves everything.

And one of the practices that he does before he becomes liberated is, of course, he tries self-mortification, the mortification practices. And these were really based on the idea that desire arose mainly from the body, so if you didn't eat then your desire for food went and so did your greed. So they were pretty tough practices to overcome the body, thinking the body as being the problem. And he practised these in his usual way to the final degree.

And if you remember, he left his companions, his five companions, and they thought he'd gone soft. But his eventual description of these mortification exercises was *dukkha anañño anattasamhito*, which means ignoble, which means it's not on the path, it doesn't lead to liberation, useless, and suffering. So there he is, trying to get rid of suffering, and he's just piling it on with these very heavy exercises of mortification.

But renunciation is something different. Renunciation is stop doing something in order to discover your attachment. That's the purpose of renunciation. And one of the distinctions we can make these days is between fasting, which is a word people don't generally use these days apart from fasting for health, and dieting. So the idea of fasting for health and dieting is you get your weight down so you can eat again, more. It's just a trick we play on ourselves. But that's not the spiritual point of fasting. Fasting was always to let go in order to see what your relationship was to what it was you were letting go of.

So if we take renunciation in that very broad sense of the term, I mean, just look at your life and just catch what you're attached to. And then just say, no, I'm not going to do it for a while, just to feel the amount of energy I'm putting into that particular object, that particular pleasure that I have.

I mean, one of the things I have said to people is, choose your favourite program on TV. So some of you will be watching the World Cup. Just sit in front of the TV, get yourself a cup of tea and a biscuit and don't turn it on. And just feel what happens when your program is on that you're normally wrapped up in.

And you can take anything that you're attached to, it doesn't matter. It could be going out of an evening, it could be DVDs, it could be a cup of tea. I dread doing renunciation of a cup of tea! But if you just think of your—just as the desire comes up for something and then you say no. But now it doesn't work unless you sit in silence, unless you actually turn into yourself and just feel the fire of that craving. You've got to feel it. And as the craving comes up, then that's telling you how attached you are to the object.

Now, why would you want to get rid of an attachment to something which is giving you pleasure? It's because that attachment is coming from an essential delusion of seeking happiness in pleasure, seeking happiness in the world. And we don't really want to stop that unless we see the aftermath. So the aftermath of attachment to pleasurable things is frustration when you can't get it, grief if you lose it, boredom. People these days, the general ordinary person doesn't connect boredom with pleasure.

And it's a big problem because the more bored you are, it means the more you'll be seeking pleasure. And boredom is the measure of the way that something that you've enjoyed has lost its oomph, has lost its buzz. So that's why you can't keep eating the same piece of chocolate. You've got to have it flavoured with orange or lemon. There's always going to be variety. So variety is the spice of life, but it's also a real disease. It brings about diseases, and those diseases are this continual lack of satisfaction, of gratification rather. So you're always seeking for something stronger.

There's that grief if you lose it, frustration if you don't get it, and this constant underlying anxiety that you may lose it. Hence you get this massive insurance industry. So unless we make that connection with the happiness that we get from pleasure with the aftermath of it, then of course renunciation doesn't make any sense.

Now, there's a deeper reason for that renunciation, because as you pull away from the world, you're also discovering what is beyond the world. You're also discovering what is on that other shore. And that cannot be discovered so long as we're attached to this world. So the process of renunciation is also not simply a psychological therapy for addiction, for compulsive behaviour. It's actually a spiritual insight because it's leading you to see that there is something other. This other shore, *Nibbāna*, what is it?

So the practice of purification is absolutely essential. You can't progress without understanding the role of renunciation in the spiritual path. And if you look at any tradition, any spiritual tradition, you'll find that it's always leaving the world. You're leaving the world. Think of anything you know—Sufis, Christian monks, Christian ascetics—they're always leaving the world.

Now we then think, well, if we left the world we just become a blob or something or a useless person. But of course this is a spiritual progress in which you are leaving the world but also developing a new relationship to the world. And that relationship no longer has this false idea that it's going to bring you happiness because you've found your happiness in something which is beyond the world, the unconditioned.

When we come back into the world having made that discovery, then of course we act in the world with that wisdom. And that's exactly what the Buddha did. And it's exactly what anybody who's enlightened does. They always come back into the world. In the oxherding pictures of Zen, remember, you get to number nine and it's the circle. So that's the completion. But then in the tenth picture, the monk is coming back into the world.

Now, although that's in the grand scheme of full liberation, we do it all the time. As you let go of something, you've also let go of some small compulsive behaviour. That compulsive behaviour is now put to better use. It turns into its opposite. So where there was compulsive behaviour—it's all about me, me, me, servicing me, me, me—it now moves outwards, it becomes you, you, you, them, them, them. So it moves from selfishness to generosity, aversion to love, cruelty to compassion. So there's always that coming back into the world. It's just a natural transformation.

But renunciation is difficult. It's not easy. It's not something that anybody would do unless they saw some benefits. I mean, if you're an addict, you see the benefit. If you're an alcoholic, obviously you want to try and let go of that. But we don't see how addiction in our lives, with a small 'a', is actually the source of a lot of restlessness and suffering and the usual stuff that I've mentioned—frustration, grief, the whole lot.

So renunciation is an absolute key virtue to develop in our lives. And you don't have to push it, just very slowly. And of course life itself, as we move towards sickness, old age and death, is a natural renunciation. And if you can't let go of life as you get older—as we get older, as we move towards the grave—then of course it becomes a real pain, a real suffering, isn't it? We have to grow old with dignity.

And that dignity becomes natural if we can just find that easiness of releasing, of just letting go. This is the way it is. I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance. Now through your constant effort at renunciation, you will liberate yourselves from all suffering and achieve the great peace sooner rather than later.

04. Paññā: Intuitive Intelligence and Wisdom

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 9 min

In this fourth talk on the pāramī (perfections), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines paññā - the perfection of wisdom and intuitive intelligence. He distinguishes wisdom from mere knowledge, explaining that wisdom concerns how we relate to the world rather than simply accumulating information.

Bhante outlines the Buddha's teaching on three progressive stages of wisdom: sutamaya paññā (wisdom from listening), cintāmaya paññā (wisdom from reflection), and vipassanāmaya paññā (wisdom from direct insight). He explores how receiving teachings can be transformative, how contemplative reflection makes knowledge truly our own, and how vipassanā meditation develops our intuitive intelligence beyond conceptual thought.

Using the famous example of Archimedes' eureka moment, Bhante illustrates how genuine insights arise when our intuitive faculty operates independently of discursive thinking. In the Mahāsī tradition, noting practice helps separate this intelligent awareness from thought processes, allowing direct perception of phenomena's characteristics like impermanence. This direct seeing into the three marks of existence - impermanence, dukkha, and anattā (not-self) - becomes the liberating wisdom that frees us from delusion and leads to perfect peace.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So the next perfection—it began, remember, with *dāna*, giving, morality, *sīla*, and then renunciation, *nekkamma*. Wisdom, *paññā*, is the next one.

So now, *paññā*, spelled P-A-N-N with that Spanish symbol on top. I forget the name of it. Does anybody know it? Spanish symbol. And the A. And this *paññā*, it's got that root sound, ñ, which comes right through the Greek, gn, and comes to us as knowledge. And the *pā* is giving it a real power. So there's two words: *vijñāna* it comes to the same word which means to discern or discriminate, and *paññā* means to really see deeply. So we translate that as insight.

Now it has both the active form as an insightful moment, but it also has a passive form as wisdom, your collected wisdom. And remember, wisdom is not to be confused with knowledge. Wisdom is to do with how we relate to the world. It's a much bigger word than just knowledge.

And the Buddha talks about three stages. The first one is *sutamaya paññā*, which is the understanding or the insights you get from listening to somebody, as you are now. And if you think about it, that's how you enter into anything, whether it's a secular subject like science or history, and it's a spiritual path. First of all, you listen. You receive something. So it's the wisdom you get from receiving something. And this can be just an intellectual understanding—oh yes, it's very interesting—but it can also strike quite deeply.

And there are occasions in the scripture where people just on hearing a scripture seem to have had a quite deep insight just on the hearing of it. So listening to something can be quite life-changing. Maybe there is something that you have experienced. In my own life, I would say the experience of actually not so much reading, but seeing *Waiting for Godot*. I can always consider that the beginning of my spiritual path. It had such a profound effect on me. And I couldn't stop talking about it for days, to the annoyance of everybody who knew me. And that wasn't as though I thought about it or anything. I was just receiving the basic message that that play had to give. Just hitting it at the right time in the right place.

The next one is *cintāmaya paññā*. *Cinta* is just the word for the mind. So that's basically when we receive something, we begin to mull it over in our minds. And in so doing, as it were, it becomes our own knowledge. So that's why you get what we call inspirational reading. In inspirational reading, and this is something that the Benedictines in the Christian tradition developed, it's called *Lectio Divina*, divine reading. You read something—that's your receiving. And then, as it were, when something strikes you, a bit like music, a bit like a poem, you keep repeating it. You keep just reading it over and over until you get this sense of absorbing it, a digestion. And at that point, maybe not immediately afterwards, but at some time you find yourself thinking about it. And this thinking about it actually makes it your own knowledge.

Now, if you can't think about it, it never actually gets to be your own knowledge, and you normally can't explain it. I have a very good personal example of that. I've read relativity theory in very simple layman's terms many a time, but I still can't explain it to somebody. I seem to lose the thread of the logic of it at some point. But I understand it when I read it. This is the funny thing. But when I try and think about it, I tend to lose it.

And then finally, of course, there's this *vipassanāmayā paññā*. So seeing things at that direct grasp of things. And that, of course, is really beginning to employ a faculty within us which is not thought.

So this faculty within us, *paññā*, this intuitive wisdom, this intuitive intelligence—intuitive awareness is sometimes called—but if we just separate it from awareness, which is more the receiving part, the actual bit that's intelligent, the intuitive intelligence, normally speaking, does not distinguish itself from thought. And the whole process of *vipassanā* is to begin to separate that intelligence from thought. And that in the Mahāsi tradition is done by noting. So the thought is contained in a word, but as it were, the intelligence is pointing at something else: the direct feeling of a thing or the direct characteristic of a thing such as its arising and passing nature.

And in so doing, in freeing itself from thought, it now has a direct grasp of the way things really are. And the paradox is that it couldn't have got to that point without going through that process of receiving knowledge and thinking about it. And it's through that very medium of thought that once it's had an insight, it can then tell itself what it's just seen. Otherwise, it wouldn't be able to reflect upon the insights that it has.

And I think the greatest example of that in scientific history, or the most common one, or the most famous one, is Archimedes. So Archimedes is trying to figure out whether this crown is real gold or not, and he needs the weight and the volume, and he divides one into the other, or he gets confused, and eventually comes up with a specific weight, and then he knows it's pure gold. When it comes to weight of an irregular object, there's no problem. He just puts it on weights and he knows how many grams it is. But how do you get the volume of an irregular shape? Now, to us, of course, it seems very obvious. But in those days, somebody's got to crack that. Somebody's got to actually break through that conundrum. How do you get the volume of an irregular shape?

So he's thinking about it and he's probably racking his brains about it. The king would probably chop his head off. And finally, he gives up and he takes a bath. And as he's relaxing—I can only presume he's relaxing, not thinking about it—getting into a bath, and as he gets into the bath, he suddenly sees that the water is rising, and it must be rising by the displacement caused through his own body. And there he is, he's got it, and he shouts, "Eureka! I've got it, I've found it." If he'd never have had a bath at that moment, we probably would still not know how to get the volume of an irregular shape.

So that ability that we have within us, this intuitive intelligence, is what *vipassanā* meditation is specifically trying to develop. And that's how we get these insights. And the insight, remember, into impermanence, into the psychology of suffering, and into

this quality of not-me-not-mine is liberational. That's what actually liberates us from a delusive idea of what the world is. And it's that liberation which brings us to perfect peace and happiness.

So this *paññā*, of course, is absolutely central to the Buddha's teaching and how to develop it and where to look in order to liberate ourselves. And therefore that also is a perfection that also has to be brought to a point of keen exercise.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you develop your *paññā* and be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

Vīriya: Effort

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this talk on vīriya (effort), one of the ten pāramī or perfections, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's teaching on right effort as found in the Noble Eightfold Path and the Satipaṭṭhāna discourse. Drawing on the Pali terms vīriya, vāyāma, and ātāpī, he explains the paradox of 'effortless effort' - establishing a position of objective observation rather than straining to achieve specific results.

The talk illuminates how genuine effort in meditation involves finding the balanced attention described in the Buddha's teaching to the monk Soṇa about tuning a vīṇā - neither too tight nor too slack. Bhante emphasizes that our effort should focus on becoming the 'objective observer' who watches body, heart, and mind with curiosity, allowing wisdom to naturally arise through sustained awareness.

For daily life application, he discusses how right effort manifests through proper intention (cetanā) and mindful engagement with work and relationships. Drawing connections to right livelihood within the Eightfold Path, he shows how intention determines whether our actions create stress or serve as spiritual practice. The talk concludes with practical advice on overcoming laziness through contemplation of urgency and the benefits of mindfulness, making this teaching accessible for both meditation practitioners and those seeking to integrate Dhamma into everyday activities.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Now, for fear of boring one or two of you, I did this talk at Chrissie's and I forgot how to operate my little recorder, so I just wanted to repeat this talk around effort. It's one of what we call the perfections, which I think you can translate as the seven virtues, but the word *pāramī* just means those things that take you to the other shore, and it's the Buddha's image for Nibbāna to be over on the other side.

The word there is *vīriya*, and you'll get it also in the Eightfold Noble Path where they use the word *vāyāma*. And in the scriptures, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse on how to establish this mindfulness we've just been practising, the Buddha uses the word *ātāpī*. So the first two words, this *vīriya* and *vāyāma*, just refer to effort, but this *ātāpī* is really saying a real consistent effort in the practice.

This effort in the practice is really what Zen calls the effortless effort. And what's meant by that is you're not trying to achieve anything. That is really important. What you're trying to do is establish a way of looking at something, and then you have to have trust that this intelligence we have will actually see. It might not work immediately, so you've got to have a certain confidence. So that's the effort.

The Buddha is quite clear about that. These three words come together: this effort, mindfully and with intuitive intelligence. And this intuitive intelligence manifests as curiosity, as a curiosity of a child. It's coming from a place where you don't know. If you're curious about something and you've got some ideas, you tend to see what you're looking for. But whatever we're looking for is something which is not directly obvious to us, or else we'd have seen it.

So, for instance, in our meditation we've just been trying to look at impermanence. Well, if you said to anybody in the street, "Everything changes," they'd say, "So what? Everything, quite obviously everything changes." But in the Buddha's understanding, this change is quite radical. Everything actually disappears and reappears. It moves into potential and then into actual. And it's that, it's recognising that there's death with every moment, every single moment just drops away and then it arises. And this obviously can be experienced, but what it shows us is a discontinuity. That's the point, the discontinuity.

So, for instance, when you see yourself in the mirror, you recognise that this is the same person that you've always known for all your life. And you presume that it's the same person, it's the same body. But we know that the body completely changed every seven years, all the atoms are completely transferred, but we don't see that at all. And therefore we live in that comfortable delusion that this is the body that I've had, and that there's somehow some stability to it. So it's really when we get down to understanding these things, then it brings us up against these real understandings of life as to how it rises and passes away.

Now, the point about this right effort in meditation is that we have to be clear that our effort is not to see this. Our effort is to get into a position where this is seen. In other words, we're trying to get into that position of the objective observer, of that place within us like an observation post, and we're just watching.

One of the examples that I tend to use is the twitcher. So they hide, they're in a hide and they look out through this little window with their binoculars, and they just watch the bird. They don't do anything to the bird, this is the point. They don't do anything, they just watch. And then they go away and write their bestseller. Now that's what we're doing. We're trying to find this little hide within ourselves and we're just watch-

ing. And what are we watching? We're watching our physicality, the body, and how it manifests. We're watching the heart and how it manifests. And we're watching the mind and thoughts. And it's just in the watching that we come to know ourselves. You don't have to try. It's just the watching.

Now, if you try too hard, if something comes in which makes you strain, then there's something else coming into the equation. You're either trying to achieve something or trying to concentrate. That's a bad one. Concentration comes with relaxation.

So there's a story of Sona, who was one of the monks during the Buddha's time. And he'd given up, and he decided that he was going to leave the monastic life and go back to the ordinary lay life. And when the Buddha heard this, he went to see him. And this was the big problem: he was straining and straining. So he talked about tuning a string on a *vīṇā*. So that's a bit like a guitar. It mustn't be too tight, or else you miss the note, and it can't be too slack. And it's just getting that ability to just get the right effort so that your attention is steady. If you find yourself getting tense, then immediately you pull back and relax. If you find you're falling asleep, you wake up and make an effort. And that moment of being relaxed and yet firm is very difficult for us, because we're always on one side or the other.

Now, when it comes to right effort in daily life, that right effort is, I mean, there's obviously some form of achieving there. Like if you're at work, you've got to do a job. If you're at home, you've got to do this and that. So the achieving isn't the problem. The problem is, or if there is a problem, the problem is your intention. What is your intention? So this is where we begin to develop our personalities and our characters.

It's interesting that right there within the Buddha's eightfold path you have right livelihood. So he's saying that what you do in society is of central importance to your spiritual life. Now if you're doing a job simply to get on, simply for status, simply for money and all that, then obviously those intentions are going to drive you in a way which create what we know these days as stress. But if your intention is service, if you take your attention to service, then there's a very different feel to what you do. That doesn't mean to say that you can't ask for proper wages and that you can't go for a job which has high status but which you feel you can do. But it's the intention which is going to create either an internal state of stress or not.

Now, when you put right effort into your work, this is obviously to do with mindfulness. Which is one of these buzzwords that you see these days, mindfulness and stress, we've got mindfulness. Mindfulness is all over the place. So this mindfulness is just doing what you're doing. In Zen, they say when you wash the pots, just wash the pots. It's one of these little famous phrases.

And there was a case of a Zen master who would say this. And he was having breakfast and he was eating his breakfast and reading a newspaper. So one of his students said to him, "Roshi, I just noticed that you are eating your breakfast and reading a newspaper." He says, "When I'm eating breakfast, I'm eating breakfast. When I'm reading the newspaper, I'm reading the newspaper." It depends where you put your attention.

So when you're at work or when you're doing something, make sure you have the right intention for doing this particular piece of work. And you have to keep stopping to reaffirm it because the old intentions keep creeping in. And then you put your attention into what you're doing.

Now, in our meditation, we've found this place of an objective observer. So there's this feeling of a self looking at, this feeling of an observer looking at things. Now that's actually a false place. It's not the final end that we want to get to. But then we think that's what we've got to do in daily life. So you watch yourself doing something and you think that's mindfulness. Well, you can get away with that if you're doing something physical, but you can't have a conversation and observe yourself speaking. You lose the train of thought. You definitely can't add up your bills either.

So it's a case of when that self-awareness comes, it's there, but you keep putting your attention on what you're doing. As you put your attention on what you're doing, the self disappears because you are absorbed into the task. That's your meditation in action. And you know that you've been there because when you come out of it, into that self-awareness, a certain time has passed where there's been no time and there's been no sense of self. Now what makes that an enlightening experience is the purpose with which you went into it, the intention. So this is all included in this idea of right effort.

And that right effort begins with what the Buddha called *cetanā*. It translates as will. And in the standing meditation we came to that point where we could see intentions arise. So just before we sat we noted intending to rise, intending to sit. Now we could have stayed there, we could have kept standing. You don't have to obey an intention. But as soon as you moved, you empowered that intention. And as soon as you do that, you create a conditioning. You've created what in the language is called a *kamma*. You hear this word *kamma*, which normally means your comeuppance, but actually in the original literature it's what you do, it's your action. There's another word for your comeuppance.

So as soon as you've put your will into something, that's it. You can't stop it. That's it. It'll have an effect. It'll have an effect internally, and it'll have an effect externally. And you don't know what's going to happen either way, because it moves into conditions

over which you don't have control. So it's good to know what your intention is, because even if it turns out wrong, at least you feel good in yourself. So you might do something for the benefit of somebody else and they hate you for it. Occasionally happens. But you feel good within yourself because you did it with the right intention. There's that feeling of goodness in you. You can't stop people reacting from their position. So that's the important thing about effort.

Wherever you put your effort, you're going to create the conditioning. So once you begin to know that, then you do bring this mindfulness into your life, because putting in right effort is going to create happiness. Putting in wrong effort creates unhappiness. Simple as that.

And finally, there's this whole business of getting lazy, which is the opposite of effort. And when we do things and we're lazy and you feel guilty, that's good. You should feel guilty. You should be guilty and shameful that you've been lazy. And then you should give yourself a little exercise or something to increase your effort. And one of the things that the Buddha advises to create this sense of urgency, sense of urgency that's not stress, it's a sense of getting on with the job, is to contemplate on the negative side: sickness, old age and death. If you haven't got that long to live, it doesn't matter where you are, you don't know when you're going to go, so better make best of the circumstance you're within.

And the other one is to contemplate the benefit of mindfulness and how it can actually radically change your life, radically change your relationships. And it doesn't mean to say that life gets that much easier, but at least we're here, at least we're aware.

So right effort is really central to the Buddhist teachings. It's right there, right within virtually everything he says, right effort. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated because of your unending efforts towards your liberation, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

06. Khantī — Patience

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this exploration of khantī pāramī (the perfection of patience), Bhante Bodhidhamma reveals why the Buddha declared "there is nothing greater than patience." Drawing from key teachings, he shows how impatience is fundamentally rooted in dukkha — our suffering arises when we cannot accept conditions as they are, constantly wanting situations to be different.

Bhante explains how patience connects directly to the Buddha's core teaching of dukkha and dukkha-nirodha (suffering and its cessation). Every moment of impatience represents suffering — the irritation, anger, and frustration that arise when we don't get what we want or encounter what we don't want. The practice involves cultivating awareness of these arising reactions and learning to bear with them rather than being overwhelmed.

Using practical examples from daily life irritations to challenging monastery situations, Bhante demonstrates how patience requires moving beyond the self's perspective. The antidotes he offers include mettā (loving-kindness), compassion, and contemplation of anicca (impermanence). By putting ourselves in others' shoes and accepting the natural rhythm of change, we dissolve the barriers the ego creates and find peace with what is.

This teaching offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners essential guidance for transforming reactivity into the spiritual strength that comes from patient forbearance.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So the next on the list is *khanti*, which translates as patience, and I've just got three quotes here from the Buddha. "O monks, even if bandits should come and brutally saw you limb from limb with a double-handed saw, should you indulge your hatred towards them, you would not be followers of mine." I once said that to a group, and somebody said the Buddha had a great sense of humour.

"Patience, in force, in strong array, in someone that is, that person I call a Brahmin." A Brahmin was his way of saying somebody who was truly a spiritual, a developed person. Remember in his day there was a little fight going on between the Kshatriyas, the warrior caste, and the Brahmins as to who were the top notch of society. Eastward of

him in Bengal the Brahmins had won really. They were the top of the society. But where the Buddha was there was still that fight going on. It took a few more years before they finally became top dogs.

And the other one is "There's no greater thing exists than patience." I think "There's nothing greater than patience" is probably a better translation. So we have to ask why the Buddha made it so important.

Well, if you go back to his basic teaching which he reduced to a simple three words in the Pali: *dukkha dukkha nirodha*, which just means suffering and the end of suffering. So he's talking about suffering and the end of suffering. When you think, every time you're impatient, you're suffering. So patience is not being impatient. And what is it that makes us impatient? It's not getting what we want and getting what we don't want. And every time that happens, you get irritated, you get angry, you get frustrated. So all that's to do with developing patience.

Once we go back to that essential teaching of the Buddha around *dukkha*, about suffering, about unsatisfactoriness, then you see a lot of our impatience, a lot of our suffering, arises with not being able to accept conditions as they are. It's very simple. We always want them to be some other way. If only. This isn't the way it should be.

Remember, did you ever see Clint Eastwood in *Unforgiven*? Right at the end there's this usual big shootout and he's shot everybody. And the leader of the gang, as he's dying, he said, "This shouldn't have happened." That's what we say: this shouldn't happen, this shouldn't be like this. So we're constantly unable to accept the situation as it is. And that manifests in this impatience, frustration, anything which is that anger and whatnot is a lack of patience.

If you go back to the root meaning in English, which is really good, go back to your Latin school. *Patio, passi, patio, pati, passo* - to suffer. I suffer, *patio*. So we get words like patient, to be patient, passion. So our own word patience tells us that it's about being able to bear, forbearance, patient forbearance, being able to bear something.

If you just consider little times in your life where you find yourself getting just irritable about something, even if a door won't open or a door makes a noise when you close it, you get irritable. And if you look at all these little irritations that come up during the day, it's always because we want it to be something other than it is. This isn't the way it should be. So it's catching that, catching that moment and noting, being able to be aware of the arising of irritation, impatience. And as that arises just to bear with it, bear with it, allow it to pass, and then remind ourselves: this is the way it is, this is the way it is.

And the big antidotes, of course, as usual, is just loving-kindness, compassion. So when somebody irritates you, it's because they're doing something you don't want them to do. You have to wait for that irritation to arise, wait for it to pass. You can do it even while you're talking kindly. You can feel it there in the background. And making that effort to put yourself in their shoes. Put yourself in their shoes.

Even if somebody is purposefully getting up your nose, purposefully trying to get you irritated, even then that reaction of wanting to respond with irritation, with impatience, one tries to just let it arise and always approaching the person with at least a sense of non-violence, of putting yourself in the other person's shoes.

So the antidote is always to accept things as they are and to see it from the other person's position. To do that is to undermine this sense of self. Now one of the ways the self manifests is that it sees the world only from its perspective: this is me, this is my opinion, this is the way it should be for me. And as soon as you deposit your attention outward into somebody else's situation, you necessarily have to lose the barrier which the self always puts up. You can't go beyond the barrier. It's not as though there aren't marking off points, but there's between a barrier and a mark which separates one thing from another. What's the word I'm looking for there? What do you have around a property? A boundary, thanks.

There's usually a boundary and a barrier. Boundaries are passable. You can move in and out of them. But a barrier just puts up a wall. The self always likes to have walls. It likes to be firm. It gives it a sense of strength. And contemplating *anicca*, impermanence. Wanting things to be the way things are. You want it to change before it will change. You want the weather to be better. You want the job to move on. So this impatience, and that impatience is not accepting. In fact, that change also has its own rhythm, its own momentum.

One of the blessings of living in Sri Lanka, at Kanduboda, but just living with the Sri Lankan order, was their attitude to very annoying people who turned up at the monastery. I only remember one person ever being asked to leave - one monk this is - ever being asked to leave. And that's because he had a very peculiar idea of what the Vinaya was. But generally speaking, there was just this patience.

So we had one Westerner turn up who was - he actually told us he was schizophrenic. He probably hadn't taken his tablets. But he was doing the most strange things. I mean, talking to everybody, walking around nude, taking his bath at the wrong time. Everything that you could possibly expect a person to do in a monastery, he did the op-

posite. And everybody complained to the abbot. He would just say, "Oh well, patience and all that," and he just wouldn't ask him to leave. And then of course the time came when he just left anyway.

Now if you consider most times when somebody aggressive, somebody something evil comes into a situation, generally speaking you find the good people fly away. They leave. They won't hang on in there and wait until that negativity has passed. And that's why you get this takeover of evil, because they don't want to bear the suffering of that evil. Because they fight it, of course, they become part of that bad energy. But they won't hang on in there. Always escaping. And that escaping, that wanting to get away from what is irritating and not pleasant and all that, that's the impatience. That's the lack of patience, lack of patience for bad.

So this is one good reason why we should develop patience. It makes you feel much more at ease with the situation, just opening up to it: this is the way it is. Even in our bodies, when the body gets sick, when it gets ill, people don't like that. They're always fighting it. They don't want to have the flu. So they're actually putting this negative thing into their body of not wanting it to be like that. But if you were to put yourself in the position of your body instead of this person who wants to be somewhere else, then you naturally take care of it and it heals the better for it.

So you can understand why this patience becomes a really important virtue in the Buddhist teaching. It's all rooted in unsatisfactoriness, suffering, and the cause of unsatisfactoriness and suffering.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, and I must thank you for your patience in bearing with my little homily. May you be liberated from all suffering through your exercise of patience, sooner rather than later.

Sacca: Honesty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

In this DhammaBytes episode on the pāramīs (perfections), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores sacca - the perfection of honesty and truthfulness. Moving beyond obvious dishonesty, he examines the subtle ways we deviate from truth: exaggeration to impress others (rooted in the three conceits of superiority, inferiority, and equality), 'being economical with the truth,' and pretending knowledge we don't possess.

The teaching addresses the challenge of honest reporting in meditation practice, drawing from his experience with Eastern teachers who emphasized authenticity in describing spiritual experiences. He explores the complex territory of 'white lies' - examining intentions behind withholding or modifying truth, illustrated through stories from Sri Lanka about cultural differences in saying 'no' and keeping commitments.

Bhante emphasizes that the most difficult aspect of sacca is radical self-honesty - seeing ourselves as we truly are, which he defines as genuine humility. He presents the Buddhist teaching that when two people meet, six people are present: how each sees themselves, how each is seen by the other, and who each truly is. This perfection of honesty cuts through self-deception and supports clear communication, making it essential for both meditation practice and daily life interactions.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsbuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsbuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsbuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, just to carry on with these *pāramī*, the next one is *sacca*. The 'c' in Pali is always 'ch' and it translates as honesty, truthfulness.

I think we can pass over telling the great whoppers. I think we've gone beyond that. But Churchill talked about it. Churchill put it as being economical with the truth. But the other dishonesty is to do with exaggeration. And we tend to exaggerate in order to impress people. It's to do with the three conceits. We're either trying to impress somebody that we're better than we are, or worse than we are, or we're equal to them, even though we know we're not.

So that exaggeration that we put about ourselves, there's also exaggeration about the weather, the climate change, the financial crisis, just the way we talk about it, exaggerating it to create some impression. And so long as, I think it's a case of just being aware of what we're saying and what we're doing. It's always to do with right speech.

But there's a point where I think exaggeration leaves the humorous and moves into just that little area of slight untruth. You just have to be careful. I mean, I've occasionally found myself, when somebody's come up with a Pali word, pretending that I know it. It embarrasses me. And then I've got to go and look it up. And it's just because I've got in my head that I know Pali words, and I don't. I've got to get over the fact that I'm not a Pali scholar. And it's happened to me about, well, once I remember distinctly being corrected, and so I'm humbled and made some excuse about it.

So these things slip in and they're coming from that sense of self, basically. So just being aware of where we exaggerate is just slipping into untruth.

In terms of meditation, it can be a real problem because it was funny, when I used to work with my Eastern teachers, they were often all about honesty. It was because Westerners would talk about their experience. And I never really found out whether it was the fact that Westerners were exaggerating or whether it was the teachers who didn't believe that Westerners could attain these experiences. And I remember once saying to Ajahn Sumedho, I said, they think we're spiritual nerds, like we would think of Easterners at one time as being technological twits. And so there was that confusion, but they were always on about honesty, being honest in your reporting.

The next one that is of interest is white lies. These are all to do with intentions. What's your intention in not saying something that you ought to say, or in saying something that is not right, but for some good reason? I think in former times it was very difficult to tell somebody they were dying. You always had to pretend that they weren't actually dying, even though the person probably felt that they were dying. These days people are a bit more open about that, but it's a case of having a good reason for not saying the truth and being clear about it.

But I remember once there was an old teacher of mine from primary school whom I met and he became headmaster of a local place. And the catering service decided to serve TVP, textured vegetable protein, instead of meat. And he didn't tell the staff. And then he asked the staff what it was like, and of course they said it was all right, good mince, very nice meat, and all that. And then he told them. And they were very upset, because they felt they'd been used as guinea pigs. It was all right doing it to the kids.

And it was funny, because he told me with this sense of astonishment as to why they were so upset about it. And it was like he was, in other words, what he didn't realise was that in not telling them, he presumed that they would be prejudiced. So if he'd told them that it was TVP, they'd have eaten it with that critical mind and said, well, this isn't like meat, it doesn't have the same crunch, it doesn't have this, it doesn't have that. And he was tricking them in a way. So he got a bit of flack for that. But it just shows you, it was a good intention in a sense. But from his point of view, there was this lack of trust in the teachers that they wouldn't accept this TVP business.

Now, the one that's usually talked about in the commentaries is keeping your word, actually. That's the one they usually go on about, keeping your word. And I think we often find when somebody asks us to do something, we can be a bit too quick with the "yes, I'll do it." Instead of just holding a minute and saying, well, I'll have to think about it, I'll have to look at my diary or something. And you find yourself saying yes and then kicking yourself for doing it.

And then when it comes to the time to actually help them out, moving house or painting and decorating or something, suddenly you're feeling ill. You phone up and say, "Can't come, there's an elephant's just entered the house and I've got to deal with it," things like that, to get out of this hole you've got yourself in. And then you do it and you're feeling rotten all the time for doing it. And all it took was this moment of just saying, well, I'm not sure I can help or what.

There's a lovely incident of that in Sri Lanka. Easterners, because of loss of face, have it very difficult to say no. I came across this when I was in the *kutī*. I was trying to keep the rule very strictly. It was very difficult to do that. And so I would ask the office to buy me something. I can't remember what the object was now, but let's say it was apples. So I would say to them, can you get me so many apples? They were in trust with my money that I had. They were my *kappiya*, the ones who make it allowable.

Well, if they couldn't get apples, they came with a whole load of oranges. They couldn't come to me and say, there aren't any apples. They had to come with something else. But eventually I got fed up because I was wasting all my money. So I had to give up on asking them to do something.

And there was this Australian monk, now this is really going to make you laugh. So he had turned up in Sri Lanka and he had invited this senior monk to come to Thailand with him. And the senior monk couldn't say no. He can't say no. So he does this shake of the head business. And he bought a ticket, bought a ticket. And it was all arranged to meet at the airport, and he never turned up. And it was just too much for this Australian guy. This was the absolute pits, a senior monk. And I found that constantly in the

East, the inability to say no and giving you the impression they're coming. And then they don't. Or they say they'll do something and then they don't. And I think it's to do with that Eastern thing about losing face and not being shamed, a shamed culture rather than ours, which is more guilt-ridden.

So I think that's an area where you see in the commentaries, it's only discussed, as far as I remember, to do with this keeping your word.

So that gives you some ideas about this quality of *sacca* of truthfulness, being absolutely honest. And I think the most difficult thing is to be honest with oneself, frankly, to be brutally honest with oneself, to see oneself as one really is. And in a sense, that's the definition of humility. In its proper sense, to see oneself as one really is.

And you come across this way of talking about it in Buddhism. I don't know where this has come from, but when two people meet, there are six people there. There's me as I think I am, there's me as you think I am, and there's me as I really am. And the same applies to you. So how we communicate is a problem and it just shows how we have these self images which don't live up to the way other people see us and they see us from their vantage point they put a twist on us and seeing ourselves as we really are would cut through a lot of this stuff that comes up through honesty.

So it's quite a virtue really. Quite a virtue to develop that.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

08. Adhiṭṭhāna — Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this eighth episode on the pāramīs (perfections), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores adhiṭṭhāna — resolution or resolute determination. Drawing from the Buddha's own great resolve under the Bodhi tree to either achieve Awakening or die, this talk examines how conscious commitment transforms ordinary intentions into powerful spiritual tools.

Bhante explains the crucial distinction between mere desire and empowered intention, showing how our unconscious habits of breaking resolutions gradually undermine our capacity for commitment. Through practical examples from meditation practice, daily life, and relationships, he demonstrates how keeping wise and realistic resolutions strengthens our spiritual development.

The teaching emphasizes making resolutions that are within our actual capacity while maintaining the flexibility to adapt when circumstances genuinely require it. Special attention is given to how this perfection applies to meditation practice, daily mindfulness, and maintaining wholesome commitments over time. This wisdom becomes essential for anyone seeking to develop consistency in their spiritual practice and overcome the patterns of self-defeating behavior that obstruct the path to liberation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're on number eight now of our perfections, our *pāramī*, those that take us to the other shore. It's resolution, *adhiṭṭhāna* — A-D-H-I-T-T-H-A-N-A, just in case you want to know. *Ṭhāna* means position or place, your standing ground, and *adhi* just reinforces it — resolute resolution, enormous resolve.

This is mirrored in the Buddha's life just before he became fully liberated. You remember the story: he left home, finding the household life had become empty because of this problem of meaninglessness. It would have been expressed in those days as constant rebirth — constantly having to come back and do the same thing all over again. The same thing, slightly different story, but always being born, growing up, going old and dying, and that constant thing is reincarnation.

He then went out to try and find an answer to this end of suffering, as he would call it — something hard to bear, unsatisfactoriness, a fundamental unsatisfactoriness. And he tried all that business of developing absorption states, for they would disappear inside. And he tried self-mortification, and it just got very thin. And eventually he had that inspiration coming from childhood, the way that child gets wrapped into something and yet has that curiosity. So that was his inspiration, and he went to sit under this tree, what we now call the Bodhi tree, the fig tree, the religious fig tree. And he made a determination: either to crack this problem or to die.

That was the great determination, and it took him six hours. So it's mirrored in his life as that moment when he'd come to an end and he thought, well, either this is it or what's the point. He was going to sit there until he dropped dead.

This comes as one of the great virtues, and you have to make a distinction between an intention and the intentioned. The English word "intention" has this double meaning of meaning a wish — I have an intention to go — and I intended to do it, meaning that you actually made an act of will. That's why we always make a distinction between the desire that arises and the empowerment of that desire. These are two moments — two moments.

So even in simple things like a cup of tea, it comes up as a desire and nothing happens until you empower it. Normally speaking, it's habitual — we just go and do it. But what meditation, what our mindfulness should do, daily mindfulness, is to make us more and more aware of these little intentions that come. And then there's this power that goes into an intention. That's your will. And it's the will that takes something out of potential into actual.

So long as it remains a desire in the mind, nothing's happened. But as soon as you empower it, something happens: either a train of thoughts or an action or speech. One of those things happens. And that's what we understand as a *kamma*. And the important thing is to know that this is how we condition ourselves, through these intentions.

Now, when an intention becomes, instead of habitual, something that you consciously make a decision about, then you have to be resolute about that. You have to really contemplate why you want to do something and then you do it. And of course there's always a little clause that stops you from going and taking it overboard, except in exceptional circumstance or emergency.

So you might determine to climb a mountain — see that corner there, where's the hill. And as you get up and up and up, you might find that you're getting colder and colder and colder, you haven't put the right clothes on. In which case you have to come down because there's good reason. But if you got up and up and you felt, well, I can't be bothered getting to the top, then that wouldn't be a wholesome reason.

And slowly but surely, by not completing your resolutions for good reasons, you undermine your resolve. You undermine your ability to commit yourself. You never finish anything — these people who say they can't finish anything. So you have to be quite clear when you make a resolution that's what you're going to do.

This comes about also when even inadvertently you say you're going to help somebody and then you decide you don't want to do it. So you're undermining constantly your commitment. In this case, you're undermining your goodwill. And the spiritual life — to do that in the spiritual life is really undermining, because if you say to yourself, "I'm going to sit here for six hours, I'm going to sit here until I become fully enlightened or I'll drop dead or I die," and you give up after half an hour, that's bad news, isn't it?

Having made a rational decision that you are going to sit here for 40 minutes, try to keep it. Even if you're shifting and moving and doing all sorts of silly things, you keep to that resolve. And then there's that lovely feeling of having completed your commitment.

I remember when I first started meditating in the Zen — we were facing the wall, sitting on a bench. I wasn't sitting cross-legged. So it must have been, it wasn't very long I'd started, but the pain was excruciating in the knees and whatnot, really quite painful. But I was determined not to move. I was absolutely, you know, Zen. You bang your head against the wall — that's what it's for. That's why you sit next to the wall.

But I couldn't take it. And just as I gave up, the bell went. Oh, I felt terrible. Oh, never again, I said. Never again will I give up on a resolve. So, be careful.

When you hear of people trying to overcome certain habits, certain addictions around smoking, eating, drinking and whatnot, it's very difficult. And the more you don't keep your resolve, the more you undermine your ability to keep resolve. So you have to really keep to your resolve.

Now, you won't keep to resolve if it's not a wise undertaking. And what we mean by that is that it's something that you actually feel you can do. There's no point in determining to climb Everest. I mean, you've not done any training for it. It's an absolute waste of time. You just keep — like it's a Walter Mitty, isn't it?

So it has to be something that is rational, something that you know you can do, even if it takes just that little bit more effort. But you keep the resolve. And that's, of course, the same with things that are wholesome, too.

After morning chanting here, before we make the final bows, I always ask people to make a resolution for the day. This is more like a general resolve just to live mindfully with a good heart, something very general.

Now the problem with these resolves, of course, we keep forgetting. So, as often as you can during the day, to keep reinforcing that resolve by just saying it, eventually becomes habitual.

When we take vows, such as marriage vows, I think people think that once you've had this big ceremony, you've made a vow, that's it, you don't have to worry about it anymore. But the vow only lasts as long as the ceremony. It might last a couple of days after that. Then you get fed up with each other. So it's a constant. That's why, when I've done these little things for people, I always say on your anniversary, don't just go out and get drunk or something. Actually use it to re-establish the vow. And in that way, you keep reinforcing your commitment to the relationship.

So it's the same with a job. Once you've undertaken a job, ordinary work — if you keep reinforcing your commitment to it, you won't give in to silly things like boredom. There'll be that constant empowering of your effort towards what you're doing.

I had somebody email me just recently, and they had found a way of being alive by doing something new. But having done something new for so long, it became habitual again and they went back into these old patterns of a lack of spontaneity in their lives. What I pointed out to them was that it's your intention and your constant empowering of your intention to be with what you're doing in a completely whole-minded, whole-hearted way that turns it into a spontaneous action again.

So then he wrote back and he said, when I'm playing with my children — and he's got young kids — and he's actually in that communication of being creative with them and all that, then these ideas of being habitual and lack of spontaneity disappear. He said, is that what you mean? I said, yes.

So this comes about by recognising what your intentions are, make sure they're wholesome, and then you just do it. You put yourself into it. And that's one of this business of *adhiṭṭhāna*.

So this *adhiṭṭhāna*, Resolute Resolution, is a real virtue to develop. And it's a case of keeping to your resolve as best you can, making sure it's within your power — don't be ridiculous about results — and to make a determination to do it. Then you always say, save an extraordinary circumstance or emergency. Else you become foolhardy. You push yourself even when the whole situation is telling you that actually this resolve is not working. It's not working anymore. Stop it.

So I can only hope my words of being of some assistance and that by your resolute resolutions you will indeed come to the end of suffering sooner rather than later.

Mettā - Love

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7 min

Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces mettā (loving-kindness) as the foundation of the brahmavihāra practices, emphasizing its crucial role in balancing vipassanā meditation. He clarifies that mettā is not about generating warm emotions but rather cultivating an attitude of goodwill - training the will to think lovingly toward all beings.

The talk addresses common misconceptions, explaining that mettā practice focuses on intention rather than feeling, with attention directed outward toward others rather than seeking personal emotional satisfaction. Bhante describes the progressive stages of mettā meditation, beginning with those who have helped us and gradually extending to all beings universally, establishing a basic friendship that serves as the foundation for the other brahmavihāras.

He explains how genuine mettā naturally gives rise to karuṇā (compassion) when beings suffer, muditā (appreciative joy) when they experience good fortune, and upekkhā (equanimity) when appropriate. The four traditional blessings offered in mettā practice are explored: safety, health, happiness, and contentment. Using the Buddha's analogy of a mother's varied responses to her four children, Bhante illustrates how mettā provides the stable foundation from which all skillful relationships naturally arise, creating a universal attitude of goodwill independent of personal preferences.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I was going to talk about *mettā* tonight, which is just what we've done, this practice of goodwill. It's something which balances the practice of *vipassanā*. In *vipassanā*, we're trying to find a very objective position to ourselves. We're trying to experience what we normally call ourselves as objective experiences. So when we say the body and we're looking inward, what is it that we're actually experiencing? When we say an emotion, what do we actually mean by that?

So we take this position of the objective observer, one removed. That isn't the final position. The final position is even to get rid of the observer so that we're into a pure state of observing. But the downside of that is the equanimity that we get can so easily turn to indifference. And somehow we have to re-engage with the psycho-physical organism so that the wisdom that we have can actually be expressed. And to do that you

have to drop the wisdom into the heart, the right attitude, and then the attitude will express itself through the rest of the Eightfold Path in right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

So whenever you do *vipassanā*, it really is important to finish with *mettā*, even if it's only a minute, just to bring yourself back into a relationship with the world. And what we're trying to do is to establish an attitude.

So the mistake that is often made is that we're trying to get an emotion going, a loving, sweet, touchy-feely emotion. And that's a disaster. You have to pretend that you're feeling loving. So abandon that. It's useless. The idea is that you're training your will, your will to think lovingly, loving relationship, a loving thought. You've got to be careful with thought, but it's an attitude. It's a position you're taking of goodwill. And eventually the heart will respond. You do feel lovely when you're offering your goodwill to somebody. But then the danger is that you start doing this loving business in order to feel good.

And that's when it becomes corrupted. So your attention is always on the other. Your goodwill is going outwards towards the other as an intention. You'll notice that we turn it also towards ourselves, so that's also another mistake that you're very loving to everybody else but you beat yourself up. That's not a good thing to do either. So you have to offer yourself your goodwill. And in so doing, what you're creating is a basic relationship to all beings. That's what you end up with.

So you start with the particular, which is easy — somebody who's helped you. That's easy because of the gratitude that comes up. And you go through these stages where you're basically opening out, but you're offering the same offerings, so you're not distinguishing. And you're trying to get a universal attitude. Sometimes the word detached is used, but that makes it rather cold.

But it's a universal attitude that no matter who or what — it could be an animal, whatever is standing in front of you, whatever is there before you — whether you like them or dislike them is irrelevant. You still have the same goodwill towards them. And that's *mettā*. It's also a platform from which all the other relationships towards people arise too.

Because when you have that basic friendship towards somebody, you can see that if they fall into misfortune or they fall ill, compassion arises naturally. You don't have to work at it. You just feel compassionate. You have an attitude of compassion. And in the

same way, if a person has good fortune, wins the lottery and all that, you naturally feel joyful for them. And once that basic goodwill is established, these others arise naturally. You don't have to work at it.

And you'll notice that we have these four basic blessings. The one, to be safe. I mean, that's really fundamental to our human life, to actually feel safe. That's what you want from the government. You want safety from outer attack and safety from economic collapse. That's your basic ground. You want to feel safe. So you're offering people safety, but also safety from dangers that arise within ourselves, from our own angers and so on.

Everybody wants to be well, physically well. You want to be happy. And the last one, which I have used to be contented and in harmony with the world, is also translated as well-being, or to have an ease about your living, to be at ease with it. So those you offer. You offer through all these different stages. And in that way, you build up this universal love, which is not dependent on whether you like somebody or not. And that's really what *mettā* is.

And just to leave you with a final example of the Buddha's own way of expressing it, he talks about the mother. So a mother has four children and to one, occasionally, she's a friend, just a friend, talks. When the child gets sick or when one of the children becomes sick, she tends to that child, so that's the compassion. When one of the children has great success, she feels naturally joyful, her child. And when that child leaves home, there's no clinging on. There's an ability just to let the child go. And that's the other attitude of equanimity, which is another topic.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

Karuṇā - Compassion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 8 min

In this exploration of karuṇā (compassion), the second of the four brahmavihāra or sublime abodes, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a nuanced understanding of what true compassion means in Buddhist practice. He defines karuṇā simply as "the desire to alleviate suffering" while distinguishing it from its direct enemy of cruelty and its more subtle obstacles.

The talk examines two particularly insidious forms of false compassion: the "do-gooder" mentality that imposes help without truly understanding what others need, and pity that creates distance and superiority over those who suffer. Through practical examples, including the story of well-intentioned charity that collapsed a local economy, Bhante illustrates how compassion without wisdom can cause harm.

The teaching emphasizes the importance of "stepping into the other person's shoes" through imaginative empathy and asking what they actually need rather than presuming to know. Bhante addresses common obstacles practitioners face, including guilt over limitations and the tendency toward self-cruelty when recognizing our conditioning patterns. As one of the illimitables (appamañña), karuṇā can be developed boundlessly throughout life, requiring clear intention and mindful awareness of our motivations when offering help to others.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I thought I'd choose this word *karuna*, which translates pretty directly as compassion. Our word gives us some idea of how we should develop that virtue. Our word comes from the Latin, doesn't it? *Patire*, which means I suffer. The *com* is with, to suffer with somebody. You have to be slightly careful about that.

The first thing to say is that the direct enemy of compassion is cruelty. Cruelty is the desire to make somebody suffer. Compassion is defined as the desire to alleviate suffering. It's as simple as that. The desire to alleviate suffering - physical, mental, financial, existential. It's the desire to alleviate suffering.

And it's got a couple of very subtle enemies. That's how the commentaries would put it - near and far enemy. So the near one is cruelty. But the one that's more subtle, the one that we don't see, one of them is the do-gooder. So the do-gooder is somebody who's going to do you the good they want to do you, no matter what you want.

It may be that a friend has fallen ill or something, so you think to yourself, well, I'll go and visit. And I don't know whether people do it these days, but they've got some grapes and Lucozade or something. Some soup. And when you get there, of course, they say, "Oh, I've been really sick. I've just vomited all over the toilet. I can't possibly eat it." I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, it must be very bad." He said, "Could you do me a favour? Do you think you could clean the toilet?" And while you're cleaning it, he said, "I came here with soup and I'm cleaning a blooming toilet."

And what compassion is, is of course to stand in the other person's shoes and to ask them what they want. So you don't go there with some pre-set ideas, some set position of how you're going to help them.

There's a lovely case of that, of a charity in Totnes, that decided to collect clothes and send them to Africa, to this place in Africa. When they got there, the tailor trade collapsed. And with it, the local economy. So they had to pull all the clothes back. It was a case of compassion without wisdom.

So that do-gooding, you have to be careful of that. So it's the case of if you see somebody who needs help, your first question is, what do you want me to do? Then, of course, there can be some bargaining. "I want you to give me £100,000." There might be some bit of bargaining going on before. It's not because they ask something you have to do it. I mean, you've also got to take into consideration your own situation. But that's your starting position. You don't presume that you know what the other person wants. And that undermines this more subtle mistake that we make of being a do-gooder.

The other one is a bit more offensive in a way, and that's pity, isn't it? "Oh, poor thing, you must be suffering. I know how you feel." It's coming from this high position. I mean, consider yourself. If you've fallen over, for instance, and you're there with a broken leg, somebody comes, "Oh, poor thing, must be really hurting." All you want to do is call the ambulance. So this pity distances us from the suffering. It puts us, shall we say, slightly above it. It's a conceit.

So, to undermine that, again, one has to slip into the other person's shoes by way of just an imaginative force, like, if I was in that position, what would I want?

So these different positions, they're in us, all of us are a bit of a do-gooder, a bit of cruelty here and there. And it's a case of just recognising that these are conditionings within us. When they come up and if you find yourself blaming yourself, accusing yourself of cruelty and you could have been more sensitive and all that stuff, then you're being cruel to yourself, being compassionate to yourself. There's a case also of being able to forgive oneself and just to recognise these are all conditionings. And you learn

from those mistakes don't you? So the next time we find ourselves in a similar position one remembers that. So then you make the right intention and the intention is to be with the person who's suffering and ask what they want of you.

In that way you can develop this *karuna*. And *karuna*, this compassion, remember, is one of the illimitables. It's indefinite as to how much it can be developed within you. So long as we're alive and breathing, you can develop *karuna*.

So, I mean, this particular time, it's a time of goodwill, isn't it? Often you get charities come. So there's a stepping into the other person's shoes. And then one does what one can. You don't have to give to every charity that comes along. There's hundreds of millions of them. But it's a case of doing what you can for the other.

There's limitations, aren't there? Just limitations. If you feel guilty about not being able to help people, that's ridiculous. You can only do what you can do. You've only got so much power, so much wealth, so much influence. If somebody is dying of a heart attack and you're not a doctor and you don't know what to do, you can't blame yourself for it. All you can do is witness it, is to be a companion in that suffering, isn't it?

So we have to be, there's all sorts of little mistakes we can make around this area of compassion and it's just a case of making that aware of, making that something that we're aware of and making sure that whenever we want to do something for somebody or give some of our wealth towards somebody, that we have a very clear intention in mind. That's all.

Remember that all our conditionings start with intention. Once you have the right intention, at least that's your main karmic line. *Kamma* here means conditioning. So even though the old stuff may come up, you've not actually reinforced it. So that's the point. And just very slowly one shifts, one moves over.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

Muditā - Pure Joy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this third talk on the brahmavihāras (sublime abodes), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores muditā - sympathetic or reciprocal joy. This beautiful quality of the awakened heart allows us to genuinely celebrate others' happiness and good fortune without falling into envy or jealousy, muditā's obvious enemies.

Bhante explains how to cultivate this practice by first counting our own blessings - recognizing the joys, relationships, and fortunate circumstances that have shaped our lives. He guides us in extending wishes for simple but profound happiness: good sleep, health, safety, meaningful work, loving relationships, spiritual fulfillment, and peaceful death. The talk addresses muditā's subtle enemy - excitement and attachment to joyful states - emphasizing that true muditā remains a quiet, resonant joy rather than over-stimulated elation.

Drawing on modern research about neuroplasticity and the body-mind connection, Bhante reveals how cultivating joy literally rewires our cells to receive more pleasure and strengthens our immune system. He shares practical guidance for integrating muditā into daily life - not just formal meditation but spontaneous moments of wishing others well. This practice, when developed, naturally manifests as the subtle 'Buddha smile' of contentment that arises from complete facial relaxation, creating a continuous state of sympathetic joy that benefits both ourselves and all we encounter.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, this evening I want to do the third of the Brahma Viharas, which is *mudita*. Remember it's part of the Buddha heart, in other words how the enlightened person actually experiences the world, how they connect with the world rather, how they relate to the world.

So one of them is this *metta*, kindness, gentleness, friendliness, all that sort of stuff. Compassion, which is the desire to help. And there's equanimity which we'll come to next week or next time I come. And there's this joy, this *mudita* which is translated as sympathetic joy or reciprocal joy. It's a joy you feel when somebody else is happy.

And its obvious enemy is envy, envy and jealousy. That kills your own ability to enjoy other people's happiness, to share in their happiness. And, well, I'll come to how we can tackle that. But the near enemy, the one that we don't particularly recognize, is this excitement and that comes by — it's always this business of indulging in what — in a joyful state so you're always lifting the energy above what's necessary. One gets attached to it, you see, so that's always a danger with these things. So one has to remain at the level of just resonance, resonating people's joy and reflecting it back to them.

Looking all pretty good at the moment, I know. I was just wondering what you could do if they weren't joyful. That goes to compassion then, you see. At the moment we're presuming that the person is joyful. And so it's a sort of quiet joy. It's a happy, quiet joy. When you start jumping up and down and all that sort of stuff, then it's sort of a bit over the top.

And with this, when you actually develop it within yourself through the practice like *metta*, then you get the same lovely blissful states that you would with any other concentration meditation. And you'll see for yourself if you're just wishing somebody well within yourself, you'll see it just builds up a very pleasant resonance in the heart.

Now remember when you're doing this practice, and we'll come to the actual practice itself in a minute, you're not trying to feel happy. You're not trying to feel anything. It's always the intention — may you be happy, may your happiness increase, may your happiness not decrease. These sorts of well-wishings are given with the intention of helping the other person to be happy. The fact that we then begin to feel happy, we have to take as a happy consequence. That's the karmic result within our own minds of that sympathetic joy. Then if we start doing it in order to be happy, then we get into this subtle enemy, you see.

It's not something that we particularly practice. We're very good at do-gooding — the compassionate bit — but we don't — there's not that much practice. We're mainly miserable and whingeing. That's what we normally practice — bloody weather and it's always raining and the job and all that. We don't — we don't actually unless there's an occasion like a birthday or something, and then because we tend to go over the top.

So you can get right up to what's known as the third absorption, which is a pretty beautiful state. And remember that these things are known as *Brahmaviharas*, the dwelling place of Brahma. In other words, these are the most beautiful states of mind that we can develop. And they're illimitable, remember, which means that the mind, the heart is not like the physicality which is limited by space and by other contingent things. The mind seems to be able to develop these things indefinitely. It's a bit like number. Remember I always say about numbers — no matter how big the number you

imagine, you always add one. So it's like indefinite, there's no end to it. To say infinite is a little bit too definite. We can't say infinite — would be metaphysical — but indefinite gives it that understanding that there's no need ever to stop it. One can just continue to develop these beautiful states.

Now, how do you do it towards yourself? Well, you start — always start with yourself, you see. So, basically, you count your blessings. You count your blessings. And in counting your blessings and all the lovely things that have happened to us in our lives and the present things that now we enjoy, then we can feel glad for ourselves. We feel happy. We feel happy for ourselves. Even though we might be going through a miserable state, it's a case of looking at the glass as usual as half full. So it's actually just reminding ourselves of the joys that we have experienced in life and the pleasures that have come our way. And the fact that we're living now in not, shall we say, a too uncomfortable state. And it's just recognizing that and recognizing that as a blessing.

Remember, because of this self, because especially of Western ideas, we think that we've arrived at this place through my own efforts. A self-made person. I did my own thing in my own time. But actually, when you look, it's because of all the relationships that we've had, of the particular state the economy's in. Everything is contingent upon our particular happiness. So there's a part of us which is, shall we say, to do with fortune in the sense of being in this particular place at this particular time. It's nothing to do with our *kamma*. It's to do with the fact that we happen to be in a fairly fortunate situation.

So one begins to count one's blessings, and then to wish somebody just very banal things, like good sleep. There's a meditator at the moment with me, and because of not good sleep, you can't get the concentration, you can't really get the energy up — you need sleep. So even to wish somebody good sleep, to wake happily, health, safety, fruitful work, loving relationships, a meaningful spiritual life — what you mean by that is that life has some meaning to it beyond the obvious, beyond the job, beyond the relationship. There's some sort of purpose for life which is as it were beyond the normal things that we're doing.

And then don't forget peaceful death. You don't want to die in agony. Nice peaceful slipping away. And then to offer them either a rebirth in the heavenly realm or that they achieve some spiritual depth. So these are the sorts of things that you would be wishing for somebody else in order to increase their happiness. That's what you do. And you do it to yourself.

Remember, you're always to start — I mean, I know that in our *metta* practice, the way I do it is I put the self a bit further along. That's because really to overcome this, often what I find in people is a lot of negativity. They don't want to offer themselves any love. They feel horrible about themselves. So if you begin to feel nice about other people, then you get that nice feeling up and say, oh, me too. I wish I was like that too. So it's sort of turning the offering towards ourselves.

So this particular state, this *mudita*, sympathetic joy, is one of the illimitables. And we develop it by finding blessings that we know will make ourselves and others happy. And then just like we do the metta, you would do that as well. And remember that these things are not — you don't have to do it in a formal way. You don't have to be sitting in a meditation or you don't have to be sitting anywhere. You'd just be on a bus. You'd be driving along and stop at the lights and just wish somebody happiness. It's like it's just cultivating that constant — cultivating that constant relationship within ourselves with others. And of course it affects us and the way we are, and that affects how people see us, how people relate to us.

When your face is very relaxed, you should feel a natural smile appear on your face. Is that right? Would that be a common experience? No. If you relax your face completely, you'll see that there's just a smile. It comes with just that relaxation. You can almost call that the Buddha smile, that enigmatic smile. It's the smile of contentment. And to other people, it might still look grim because it's so subtle, but it's there within you. It's there within you and that's how you greet people, from that position of joyfulness.

So we'll come to that another time perhaps after this talk, but I do want to now talk about the smile. Just a bit of science really. Even a Richter smile, a smile that you don't mean but you just shape your mouth in a smile, even that affects the brain and begins to release this dopamine and the sort of pleasure system within the brain. And this is research that I read about, and as you know research changes, but what they discovered is that every cell in the body has receptors for these different chemicals. And if a person is constantly depressed and down, the cells actually begin to manufacture more receptors for this downer than it has for this joyful stuff. So that when somebody's depressed, even when joy comes up, the body can't feed that back to them because the body still feels depressed. You might say, you see what I mean? So when you understand that every time you make yourself happy, you're actually encouraging these cells to develop these receptors so you get that feedback from the body of pleasure which is resonating with the actual state of mind.

And with that, you see, the body and the mind always act together. I mean, we do that with the breath — just the gentle motion of the breath, beginning to see it as a pleasurable, neutral sensation, really calms the mind. You calm the mind, calms the body and the breath becomes finer, the breath becomes more subtle and more gentle. So the body and mind are very intimately connected and in this way they sort of tumble down into a deeper concentration, or in this sense they begin to resonate this joy, you see.

And the other effect of that is, remember that these things has an effect on our thymus, it seems. That's another thing, which is to do with our autoimmune system. So often when people are depressed, when they're stressed, etc., that's when you get ill. So somehow we can counteract that by just developing this constant state of kindness and joy, just reminding ourselves of our blessings and just letting that smile appear.

So that's this psychosomatic organism that we're living in, that we're actually inhabiting. And when you connect sympathetic joy, love, compassion, but especially I think this sympathetic joy with physical health, then you really want to start doing it. And as I say, it's more like a little practice every day. I'm always amazed at the power of just five minutes a day of joyful thinking and how it can affect your day. And in the end it becomes a sort of memory thing and you just remember to just make an offering of joy.

Like when you meet people, it's there naturally. When you meet a friend and all that, you're naturally joyful. So that comes naturally. But to actually have that sense of constantly developing it, it just becomes habitual. Just like this mindfulness becomes habitual. I mean, that's our problem. There's no problem in establishing mindfulness. The problem is remembering it, remembering to establish mindfulness. So it's a case of just encouraging ourselves to just do these little practices just often throughout the day. And it has this lovely continuous effect.

So that brings to the end my little homily on *mudita*. I can only hope that my words will increase your own sense of joy. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Upekkhā - Equanimity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this final talk on the four brahmavihāras (divine abodes), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores upekkhā - equanimity, which he describes as the highest of these sublime mental states. He provides practical guidance on establishing equanimous awareness by first contacting bodily sensations, then extending attention outward to create a unified field of present-moment receptivity.

The talk emphasizes how equanimity differs from mere indifference - it's an active state of open awareness that allows us to receive situations without emotional distortion or conceptual prejudice. Bhante demonstrates how this quality can be cultivated in daily life: entering rooms, meeting people, or facing difficult conversations with complete receptivity rather than reactive rushing.

A key teaching focuses on how equanimity helps us meet life's eight vicissitudes - gain and loss, honor and dishonor, happiness and misery, praise and blame - without being hijacked by emotional reactions. This balanced awareness also protects the other brahmavihāras from their subtle enemies: preventing loving-kindness from becoming attachment, compassion from becoming pity, and sympathetic joy from becoming over-excitement.

The practical instructions include techniques for developing this receptive awareness in meditation and daily activities, showing how equanimity creates the space to see our intentions clearly before acting, ultimately leading to greater wisdom and skillful response to life's challenges.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, I want to finish the four *Brahma-vihāras*, the dwelling place of the gods, the highest. They represent the highest mental states that we can develop, also known as the illimitables, in the sense that there's no definable end, there's no definable quantity with which you can develop these things. It's as great as the mind is.

So I want to finish with equanimity. We've done compassion, love, and sympathetic joy. Now equanimity is number four, and it's in a sense the most important. It's the highest quality of all really, the highest attitude that we can develop.

First of all, let's just say how you establish it. I always think it's best to establish it in a standing posture, but you can do it anywhere really. First of all, getting contact with the body, the sensations of the body. You can go up the body or down the body, it doesn't matter, but actually getting contact with the inner part of ourselves — the body, feelings.

And then to, as it were, launch your attention outwards, become aware of everything around you, what you can hear, what you can see. And then to bring them together and recognize that it's all just one mass of sensations. It's all one mass of perception, sensations, feelings. The dividing line doesn't have to be so sharp. And then you just sink into that. And that's your present moment. That's what you know. Just sink into it.

And in that state, by being completely present to the present moment, that in itself is the aim. So you're not trying to achieve anything beyond that. That's equanimity. You're just with the present moment. Completely receptive. The body's still. The heart calm. Just for a moment the mind's silent — to a point anyway. And this attitude of just receiving. That's your basis really. Openness.

To do that, often you have to be a little courageous. But I think we also have to understand that when we're like that, our contact with reality is not being distorted by emotional values or by concepts. So it's a really important practice to lay this ground of complete openness.

You can see how that then is quite easy — from that point of view, say in the sitting posture — to bring up the enquiry, to bring up that sense of curiosity. And because it's coming from the base of that equanimous openness, that receptivity, then the curiosity is not being distorted by some sort of preconceived ideas, prejudices, emotional states.

In daily life, just entering a room — just for a moment, receiving the room. When you enter a shop or a supermarket, just stand there for a moment and just receive it. Instead of always beelining in, just receive the fullness of it, the atmosphere, everything. When you enter into a house, just get a feel of it. Same with people. You meet somebody and there's always this rush towards them rather than just receiving them. It only takes a moment. It's just you receive the fullness of them. And not only how they actually look and that, but just catch what they're giving you.

I walked out of the gate and Jim, who sold the house to us, was at the road. He was with his daughter, Liz, whom I know, and their two children. And as I came out, I looked up the road, just stood there for a moment, before making up, and I could see there was a lot of negativity coming towards me. They were quite upset with me because I hadn't looked after the water, which they think has been our responsibility. And it's just receiv-

ing that, and then making sure it doesn't distort how you're going to receive them — otherwise it's just going to backfire. I approached them very slowly. I went towards them rather than expecting them to go towards me, and then just really had a conversation about the water. But if you don't — I find that if you don't do that, you very quickly get caught up in other people's states, and it begins to spiral.

It's the same with a meeting. You walk into a meeting — it's just for a moment. It only takes a moment. But it's to do with the attitude. So it's the same with the country. It's easy to do with the country, isn't it? You walk to the top of the hill and you just open up. You just receive the countryside. So we can do it in certain places. But you can do it on the bus, on the train. Driving a car and you stop at the lights — just receive the situation. So it's this constant effort just to drop into the present moment as it's being received rather than as you want to receive it.

I think once we get into the habit of it, you just get in the habit. It just naturally happens of just looking, just listening, just feeling.

Now the important thing from the conditioning point of view, spiritual point of view, is that of course we can see what mood we're in, because remember, it's not just receiving outside, it's receiving inside. So you can catch the mood you're in, you can catch the attitude that's coming up, the irritation — specifically the negative ones, because you don't want to get embroiled in them. And just that moment of equanimity where you're standing apart from allows you just to be able not to get involved in any negative state that is within us. And by doing that, you can always put it to the side. That's not suppressing it. Suppressing means that you don't want to see it. You do want to see it, but this isn't the time. It's a completely different attitude. You just put it to the side and then you raise the goodwill.

So that's important in terms of not getting caught up in old conditionings. And remember that the less we get caught up in old conditionings, the more they're dying out. If you don't use them, they just die out.

And the other part is intention, because if you are still, you can see your intention coming. And the great thing about seeing that is that you can see whether it's wholesome or not. You've got just that little bit of space so an intention doesn't come up and just hijack you — you find yourself murdering somebody. Heavens above! So by seeing an intention, you've just got that moment whether you want to empower it or not. It just gives you that little bit of control. And that's how you get this feeling of being in control of your life and not being taken by our emotional state and others, other people.

So it's developing a heart free of aversion and fear — not wanting to receive, afraid of receiving — and a mental state which is impartial. It's not caught up in partiality, in prejudice, in liking or not liking, and hopefully not in delusion because you're seeing your thoughts. You can see the thoughts and just not getting caught up in them. So you can see it's a sort of passive state of wisdom, a passive state. And out of that passive state then something active arises. From a point of view of our life, this allows us to meet the vicissitudes of life with a little bit of the old equanimity.

So the usual ones that's in the scriptures are gain and loss, honor and dishonor, happiness and misery, praise and blame. So if the good side comes — the gain, the honor, the happiness, the praise — you don't grab it, you don't seep into it. Everything that rises has to fade away, yeah? If it's on the dark side, you don't go so down with it. It doesn't depress you so much. You can keep aloof.

So these reactions that we have of being happy and sad, delighted, despair, disappointed, gratified, expecting, fear, expectation, fear — all that begins to, although it's there, you're not getting caught up in it. There's a sort of evenness. Because you're not getting caught up in it, it's not developing. So these things are always going to happen to us, but our position now is that we don't get conned by them, don't get hijacked.

And the other thing about equanimity is because of that ability to be open, to be aware of these little things that are going on in our minds, the subliminal things, it helps us not to fall into the subtle enemies of love, compassion and joy. So you can see attachment, you can see where the attachment is manifesting. But if you're caught up in it, you don't see it. You just find yourself behaving in a way which is using the other person. I mean, that's what attachment is.

And the same with compassion. So compassion's subtle enemy is grief. You feel pity for, you feel sorry for somebody. That's not necessary. It's coming from a rather conceited place, actually. Compassion is just the desire to help. But it doesn't mean to say that you can't feel the other person's pain. You can contact the other person's sorrow, but you don't have to feel sorry for them. You can actually be with somebody who's in a...

I remember at the funeral of my aunt, years and years and years ago, and I was with my cousin — we were about 18 or something — and we went off to another part of the seminary, sat on the bench together, and he just wept his eyes out, and I could feel his pain. I could feel it in my heart, I remember feeling it. But I never felt sorry for him. Funny enough, I don't know why. I just thought actually I was happy for him because it seemed to get it off his chest.

And the same with joy. Joy slips into this over-excitedness where you're really trying to just make yourself joyful, trying to get the best out of your ice cream. So what equanimity does, it just keeps that on an even keel. And one begins to appreciate these beautiful states of mind in their more pure states. They don't get frazzled by these other little parts.

So all in all, this equanimity is quite important. Important to develop. It's important in the sense that we begin from when we're equanimous, even-minded, when we're still like that, we can see very clearly, much more clearly what's going on — what's going on around us, what's going on inside us. And that allows us to be more in control of our lives. Hopefully leading to greater happiness.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your suffering, especially from any lack of equanimity, sooner rather than later.

Buddha as Refuge

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this illuminating DhammaByte, Bhante Bodhidhamma unpacks the profound meaning behind taking refuge in the Buddha by exploring the traditional nine epithets that describe the Awakened One. He examines each quality in detail: Arahat (one who has completed the path), Sammāsambuddha (fully self-awakened), Vijācaraṇasampanno (accomplished in wisdom and virtue), Sugato (faring well), Lokavidū (knower of worlds), and others.

The talk emphasizes why the Buddha is called 'self-enlightened' – having found awakening through his own insight after leaving his teachers and remembering that childhood moment of pure, curious awareness during his father's ploughing ceremony. Bhante explores the inseparable relationship between wisdom and virtue, explaining how ethical purification naturally accompanies deepening insight.

Particularly valuable is the discussion of the Buddha as 'knower of worlds,' relating the six realms not only to cosmological destinations but to our own mental states – how we can experience hell realms through panic or depression, animal realms through intoxication, and celestial realms through wholesome mental states. The talk concludes by clarifying that while we take refuge in the historical Buddha, this also points to our own potential for awakening, whether as Paccekabuddhas or Sāvakabuddhas following the Buddha's path.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So I thought actually this evening for my little Dharma bite, I'd actually do this word Buddha. And we chanted these nine attributes.

So the first one we say is *iti pi so bhagavā araham*. This word *araham* refers to having completed the path of training. It's the fourth level of sainthood. The first one being stream entrance, when a person intuitively attains Nibbāna. And then the next two are developments of that insight. See that it's always into the same thing: the three characteristics, impermanence, not-self, and how we create suffering. So this word *araham* simply means that he's completed the training to full awakening.

The next one is *sammāsambuddho*, so fully self-enlightened. So why do we say he was self-enlightened? Because he went to various teachers, and then he practised mortifications. And really the influence, we think, of the Nigaṇṭha, the leader of the Jains,

who would have been his elder contemporary. We say that because remember he comes to a crunch where he leaves his five companions and he sits by the roadside pretty dejected. And when I contemplate that moment, I would have thought it's a pretty heavy moment of anguish because he's left his family, he's left everything, he's gone out, he's done this training and it didn't work, and then he's done all this starving himself almost to death, and that didn't work, and there was nothing else on offer, nothing else in the spiritual field on offer. But he was still there with his original problem as to suffering—why was he suffering? And remember, in those days it would have been put in terms of continuous rebirth, *saṃsāra*. There would have been seemingly no end to being reborn in this realm, in that realm.

And it was in that desperation, remember, that he remembers this childhood occasion. And that's why we say he's self-enlightened, because it was the memory of how he was watching his father doing the ploughing ceremony that gave him the inspiration to sit again. And of course, what he remembered was that childlike mind, which we develop in our meditation, of just watching, just looking, with that curiosity, that enquiry. And that's the reason we say he's sambuddho, he's self-enlightened.

We also say he's *vijjācaraṇasampanno*, which means that he is fully developed in both his wisdom and his virtue. And that's something which is important to understand, that those two are concurrent. You can't grow in wisdom without the growth in virtue, because the defilements we suffer from, the unethical behaviour that we commit, is an expression of delusion. That's what it is. So as we grow in wisdom, there is a growth in virtue. You can't have the one without the other.

So I remember, it's not so bad these days, but there was a time you couldn't talk about morality. People didn't want to know about it. It was Victorian. So people would do... I mean, I know people who used to do six months head-banging meditation and then go out on sex, drugs and rock and roll, and it's like they won't get anywhere. You can't do that. At some point there has to be this purification of the heart, this purification of intention. And it can happen naturally just through the meditation. It becomes systemic as it drops into the attitude. Or you can develop it as an exercise in itself through right action.

So remember there's an eightfold path, it's not just the onefold path of right understanding. It runs systemically through our intentions, which is based in the heart, our attitudes, and then through the way we speak, the way we act, and into our livelihood. So that's why we say he's accomplished both in his wisdom and in his virtue. The one comes with the other.

Then we say he's sugato, which means he lives a happy life, he's at ease. He fares well through life. In other words, he's happy. He's found the end of suffering. So when you find the end of suffering, it seems, you're happy, which makes sense, doesn't it?

There was an occasion when somebody complains about the toughness of the training. And he says, you know, it's hard. And the Buddha replies, yes, it is, but people attain liberation. They attain Nibbāna. And the guy says, Nibbāna, so what? He says, well, when you get to Nibbāna, you are contented and really happy.

So the contentment is a mind, is a heart without unskilful desires. And the happiness is the basic flavour of the mind, which expresses itself in various forms of love, compassion, joy, and so on. That's where we're heading for. Have faith.

Then there's *lokavidū*. So he's the knower of the worlds, and this really points to, remember, the three insights that he had upon enlightenment. The first one was all his past lives and how he came to be the enlightenment. And then he saw that beings moved from one realm to the other according to their moral behaviour, which was new for the age. Most people thought it was just destination, but our destination is determined by our morality. And thirdly was that he was free of all defilement. So in that he's saying he saw how the law of kamma works. And in that case he saw the six worlds.

So there's the hell realms, there's the animal realm, there's the hungry ghost realm—that's a being driven by insatiable desires. There's the demon world, which are those people driven by hatred and anger and jealousy and all that stuff. There's the human world, here we are. And there's the celestial world, which is the happy realm.

And of course, these not only refer to specific realms, which is either provable or not provable, it doesn't matter, but they refer also to our own states of mind. So if we get drunk, for instance, we've entered into the animal world, the lack of intelligence. And if you fall into a deep depression or a psychotic episode and things like that, then you're in a hell realm. Even if it's for a moment where you find yourself in a place like a little panic. The whole point of those places is that you don't see the escape. That's hell. So he's *lokavidū*, he's the knower of the worlds.

He's also said to be the *anuttaro purisadammasārathi*. So *sārathi* is a charioteer, so he's a trainer, incomparable trainer of human beings. And this refers to the fact that he didn't just leave a teaching, he left a methodology which includes the rules of engagement. So we do the five precepts, you can take on the eight precepts, you can do ten precepts, and finally you get 227 if you become a monastic. So all the way he's creating institutions whereby people can actually see the training that they want to get themselves.

And we call them sikkhāpada. We don't call them commandments. Sometimes they're called precepts, but even that's not quite right. They're sikkhāpada. Pada means footsteps, sikkhā is training. So they are footsteps of training. They're the training rules. So that's why we say he is the incomparable trainer and leader of human beings.

Then we say he is sathhā devamanussānaṃ. So sathhā means a teacher, so he teaches in these two specific realms, the celestial realms, but also to human beings. So he's the actual teacher. And he takes that role seriously. There's a point where he may not have taught, but just out of compassion, the desire to pass the good news on to people arose in him. And the only doubt he had was whether people in fact could receive his message. And it's put in this mythological sense that the great Brahmā Sahampati came down and said, there are people with just a little dust in their eyes. And then he went out and began his teaching.

And one of the little phrases he comes up with, he always says that, whatever a teacher can do out of compassion for his students, I have done for you. So he's really committed to that whole process. And all his life, from 35 to 80, he spent just wandering around teaching. That's his life after that. So he's the teacher, he's the teacher of gods and men.

Buddho comes from the word budh which just means awakened. And I think that's the better word to enlightenment. Enlightenment gives the impression of something sudden, but it's a gradual awakening. And here it's almost like an adjective. He is the awakened one, the buddho.

And then finally Bhagavā. That's an honorific. It means anything from the sublime one to the reverend to the illustrious, the blessed, depends how you want to translate it. And that's how he's talked of in the scriptures. He's referred to as the Bhagavā, the blessed one.

And those epithets really, those descriptions of him, encapsulate this word Buddha. So when we actually take refuge, we are taking refuge in that historical figure, see? There's a trust, a confidence in that. But it also, remember, can refer to that within us, which is to be awakened.

Of course we don't have to be fully self-enlightened Buddhas. There are two other types. There's the Paccekabuddha who is fully self-enlightened but doesn't teach, either because he can't—it wouldn't be because he won't, maybe he just can't—and then there is the Sāvakabuddha which are those who become Buddhas simply by following a Buddha. So everybody can become the Buddha.

And that's about it, my little Dharma bite. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

Dhamma as Refuge

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this exploration of the second refuge, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Dhamma as that which sustains and upholds, going beyond mere belief to practical experience. He delves into the six traditional qualities of the Dhamma: svākāto (well-expounded), sandiṭṭhiko (immediate), akāliko (timeless), ehipassiko (to be experienced), opanayiko (leading onward), and paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī (knowable by the wise).

Drawing from the early scriptures, Bhante illustrates how the Buddha's teaching evolved from spontaneous responses to formalized doctrine, eventually crystallizing into the 37 factors leading to Awakening. He emphasizes the immediacy of the Dhamma - that its effects are not postponed to future lives but experienced here and now in meditation practice. The talk addresses the common misconception of practicing for future results, instead pointing to the present-moment awareness that characterizes true vipassanā.

Bhante explains how the Dhamma represents timeless spiritual laws that the Buddha discovered rather than invented - an ancient path leading to the complete end of suffering through Nibbāna. This refuge offers both psychological purification and the ultimate transcendent realization, making it accessible to those wise enough to seek liberation from dukkha.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So the next refuge that we take is the Dhamma. *Dhamma* itself is a word that has a root meaning in that which sustains or upholds. It's often translated, especially in the Far East, as the law, the true law. But it's also regularly translated as the teachings or the dispensation of the Buddha.

The first thing that we say about it is that it's *svākāto*, which means it's well expounded. When he begins his teaching, and he's teaching for 45 years, you can see from the early level of the scriptures that it's very spontaneous, in the sense that he knows what he's talking about, but it's not been fully formalised. It takes a few years for it to become formalised in terms of the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, Five Spiritual Faculties, and then he goes on and on. The purpose for that was that it was a way of remembering things, the mnemonics. In those days, they didn't have memory sticks, they

just had their heads. So they had to remember things just by these lists, and then very slowly towards the end of the scriptures, after many years, you can see the beginning of just lists, and they say that's the beginning of this later work called the Abhidhamma.

Because what you get from the scriptures are specific answers to certain questions given by individuals, it gives a feeling of immediacy about his teaching. He's not a philosopher writing in his room and publishing a book. It's like he's out on the streets and somebody comes and asks him a question. And then he gives that answer. So no particular scripture gives you the fullness of his teachings. You have to try and get it all together. That's why you get these books on what the Buddha taught. Because it's difficult. You have to read quite a few scriptures to congregate all his teachings.

But eventually you can actually reduce them to the 37 factors leading to awakening. There's a scholar, Warder, who studied the two main bodies of scriptures that still remain, ours and the other ones called the other sect, the other school, the Sarvāstivāda school, which is actually only in the Chinese. When he studied them both, he came up with this: The only thing you could say that the Buddha actually taught were these 37 factors that lead to enlightenment. The ones that you know, like the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Five Spiritual Faculties, and it just goes on. You get 37, and that's really the bedrock of his teaching. It's all fully explained. I mean, there are commentaries on it, of course, as usual. But eventually that's what comes through is the fullness of the teaching, both as theory and as practice. So that's why we say it's *svākāto*, it's well expounded.

The next thing is *sandiṭṭhiko*. This means it's immediate, and that's the thing about the *dhmma*. Although it suggests a future to us in terms of development and end-game and *Nibbāna* and all that, the effects are immediate. You don't have to wait tomorrow to see effects. As soon as you meditate, the effect is there. It's not something that you do now for some future result. And that's the immediacy of the *dhmma*.

So questions about future lives and all that stuff, they sometimes lead you off the actual point of the practice, which is that the enlightenment has to be here, the awakening has to be here, or it's not here, it's immediate. If we're not in a state of wisdom at this present moment, then there's no point in doing the practice. If you're trying to achieve something, if you're doing something now to achieve something in the future, then you're missing out on the present moment. It's like when you travel somewhere and your head's exactly where you're going to arrive, so you miss the whole train journey.

So it's this bringing ourselves back into the present moment and actually seeing that the *Dhamma* is right here and now, it's to be seen right here and now, felt here and now, experienced here and now. And that's the quality of the *Dhamma*, that it's immediate.

The next quality is *akāliko*, which means timeless. It's not something which belongs to the process of time. It stands outside time. It's an underlying law. Just like you might get these basic laws of our universe, they're not to do with time as such, they're to do with something which transcends time. It's right there within, you might say it subsists the process of time, so the *Dhamma* is already there. The Buddha didn't invent it, he discovered it. He said it was an ancient path he basically rediscovered or discovered what was already there.

What is already there is not, in this sense, the spiritual laws, such as the whole teaching around desire, which is a cause of suffering, is something that is just there as a substrate to the whole process of what we see around us, the creation of the world. So in that sense it's archaic, it's timeless.

The next one is *ehi-passiko*. This means to be experienced. It's actually got to be experienced. It's not something you just keep in your head. When the first monks and nuns asked to join him in the ascetic life, he simply said, "Ehi," come. *Ehipassiko*, come and try. That was the initial ordination. Come and try. I want to join you. Come and have a go. So this *ehi-passiko* refers to the actual practice that it has to be experienced. It has to be done. And it's in doing it that one actually sees this immediacy, this business of immediacy.

There's something else involved in that. In fact, it's not a belief system. It's no good believing what the Buddha says. It's not going to get you anywhere. It's something that has to be tested.

The next one is *opanayiko*, it means that it's leading somewhere, so it's not as though we're doing the practice which is not going somewhere. Now I've just said that we don't practice for the future, but in a sense there is a future, there is this eventuality of complete awakening, the complete end of suffering. I mean that's what's being offered. But the practice is in the immediate moment, but it is leading somewhere, and it's leading somewhere in two levels. It's leading somewhere psychologically, it's purifying the heart, so eventually we should feel better. And it's leading somewhere spiritually in the sense that it is going to an end point which we call *Nibbāna*.

Nibbāna can be described as a transcendent experience. That's what he called himself, he referred to himself as the *Tathāgata*, the transcendent one, the one who's gone beyond. So that's this *opanayiko*.

The final one is *paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*, and that simply means that it's to be, it's open to those who are wise, who are open to it. So it's something that a person is drawn to at a particular level of seeking within themselves. Whatever their quest is, then they will seek it out, and at some point they'll come across this ancient path.

Remember that the ancient path, although it's well expounded by the Buddha, is not peculiar to him. I mean, it's there within most religions that you find. Whether it's taught well enough, who knows, but the point is that it's there within us. We ourselves, having made a decision, can become self-enlightened if you want to become a bodhisattva. That's a person who makes the decision to become fully self-enlightened. So it's not as though the path exists somewhere outside us, it's right there within us. And if we're wise enough, if we're driven by a desire to be liberated from our suffering, then we'll naturally seek the end of suffering. That's one of the statements of the Buddha: it's suffering itself which makes us want to seek the end of suffering. Whether we like it or not, we will achieve it. It's just one of the, it's part of the evolution, you might say, of consciousness. That's getting a bit metaphysical.

So this is what we're taking refuge in when we say, when we're actually saying I take refuge in the *Dhamma*. And this word refuge, you go there to feel safe, don't you? You're taking refuge in something. Finding it as a medicine, something that's going to help you. So that's taking refuge in the *Dhamma*.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

Saṅgha as Refuge

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this DhammaBytes talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the third refuge of Saṅgha, examining both its traditional meaning as the ordained community and its deeper significance as the noble disciples who have attained the four paths and fruits. Drawing from the traditional refuge formula, he explains the four qualities of these followers: supatipanno (good conduct), ujupatipanno (upright conduct), ñāyapatipanno (wise conduct), and samīcipatipanno (dutiful conduct).

The talk provides a detailed exploration of the four pairs of noble disciples and eight individuals, covering the progressive stages of awakening from stream-entry (sotāpanna) through once-returner (sakadāgāmi), non-returner (anāgāmi), to the fully liberated arahant. Bhante explains how each stage involves the systematic undermining of the ten fetters (saṃyojana), beginning with personality view, wrong rites and rituals, and skeptical doubt at stream-entry.

Practical guidance is offered on understanding these attainments not as distant goals but as exemplars that inspire our own practice. The talk concludes by examining why the Saṅgha is worthy of offerings, hospitality, gifts, and reverence - serving as an incomparable field of merit that opens pathways for others on the spiritual journey, much like pioneering mountaineers who show others that the summit is achievable.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, Sangha is the third refuge and it starts off by saying *Supatipanno bhagavato savakasango* — that's of good conduct, the followers of the Blessed One. Then it says they are *uju-patipanno*, so of upright conduct, *nyaya-patipanno*, wise conduct, and *samīci-patipanno*, dutiful conduct. So those are the four descriptions. This *supati* means, translates as good or virtuous people who follow. They're a special group of people — I will come to that in a minute — but basically they are virtuous and good, that's the *supatipanno*. The *ujupatipanno*, upright, I think refers really to their following of the rule that they're upright in that sense. *Nyaya-patipanno*, they're wise. And *samīci* refers to the proper or true path that they're following. So that's the qualities of the Sangha that we respect.

Sangha means community. It normally refers to the ordained Sangha. If you go to Thailand or Sri Lanka or Burma, anywhere like that, and you say Sangha, they immediately think that you mean the ordained Sangha. But here it has a much wider meaning. Here it means anybody who has attained one of the four paths and fruits.

And that's what the next section goes on to say. It says, "So this is the order of disciples of the Blessed One, namely the four pairs of persons and the eight kinds of individuals." Now that refers to their attainment. Remember there are four paths and fruits. The normal explanation of that is that there's a moment in which one has the insight, so you've entered into a path, and then the fruit of it is the release from one of the fetters — from one or more of the fetters.

So when we talk about the four persons, the four types of these followers of the Buddha, *savakatta*, the first one is the stream entrant. So what we mean by that is that they've had the experience of Nibbāna. The Buddha talks about it like a flash of lightning, but it's strong enough for them to have a systemic change. And you can't go back on that. It's a level of consciousness. It's a way of being in the world. And what you've undermined are three of these *samyojana*, three of these fetters.

And the first one is the view of the personality of self — the view of your personhood. You begin to realize that a personality is just a collection of habits, and that when you're sitting in meditation you're actually watching these habits arise and pass away right there in front of you. So that distance, that objectification of your personality, is one of the realizations — that it's not you. It becomes you when you identify with it.

That identification, remember, is a loss of your awareness into the person, the personality, the five *khandhas*, the five aggregates. So that view has been sundered, but it's not completely gone. It's as though you've seen it but you're still held within its thrall. It's like you've seen where the delusion lies, but you still get deluded.

Also what goes is wrong rites and rituals — so the belief that just performing rites and rituals are going to actually get you on the path itself, that they are a liberation in themselves. Which doesn't mean to say that certain rites and rituals are not useful. For instance, in the West — I think they do it also in the East — the naming ceremonies. A little baby is brought. In Burma, they offer the baby, they bring the baby to a monk, and the monk gives them a name, and then gives the parents a little coin to buy the baby. It's like a spiritual transaction. From now on, this little baby has a connection with this particular monk, for good or for evil.

So there's that. Now that of course doesn't — you're not going to liberate the little child at all. I mean, there's just a little connection that's made. So it's the same when we bow to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. These things in themselves don't liberate, but they are supportive. And it's the same with chanting and all the various religious things that you see people do. They're just supports, often they're the juice of the practice, because vipassanā can be a bit tough. And it's just recognizing that that's all. So in other words they've come to know the path, and the path is the undermining of that delusion which is seeking happiness in the sensual world. That's the core of the problem.

And the third one is this skeptical doubt. So remember, skeptical doubt is not the same as the honest doubt of the philosopher, the wonder. We're not supposed to believe what the Buddha says; we're supposed to have that investigative faculty so that we can make it our own true, our own experience. But skeptical doubt, remember, is that doubt which stops you committing — your uncertainty, your fear of commitment. So that goes because now of course you've made it, you've had that insight. So that's the stream entrant.

The once returner, which means that a person is drawn back into this life form, undermines the next two, which is sensual pleasure as an attractive indulgence, and aversion, which remember has this twin business of hatred and fear. So those are only attenuated in the second level of attainment, the once returner. And those are completely done away with, with the non-returner.

And what that's basically saying is that that person is no longer drawn to this sensual life. There's no attraction there for it. It's much the same as, for instance, when we move out of teddy bears into toys. I mean, the teddy bear's still there, but you're not attracted to it anymore — or at least most people give up their teddy bears. It's that kind of thing. As you move into teenage and that relationship with the world, you give up your childish toys, but that's not a problem because one feels there's a natural growth of our awareness and consciousness and our knowledge of the world, so we're quite happy to leave those little toys behind.

But of course there comes a point where life doesn't seem to present anything else but sickness, old age and death, at which point you'd rather go back to your toys. So apart from that, this non-returner, the *anagami*, just doesn't have anything in this life form that attracts them. What they are attracted to are these inner states of ecstasy, the *rupa* and *arupa jhanas*.

And those don't go until you finally — that indulgence in mental states, blissful mental states, doesn't go until you finally crack it at the end of the path, which is the Arahant, the fully liberated one. And with that there goes the core ignorance as to who

we are — like who am I? Once that core ignorance goes, the self collapses. And so the other two fetters — conceit disappears, so there's no comparison anymore — and restlessness. Restlessness here I've always understood to mean all the hindrances that we suffer from, but as we grow in the spiritual life, they become less and less until they're just little disturbances in the mind. They lose their power over us. That's how I translate restlessness. But people will probably translate it more literally as restlessness.

So those are your four pairs, and every entrance into the path is the seeing of the path — that's the *magga* — and the fruit of it is the collapse of one of these fetters. That's why the word Nibbāna is often translated as unbinding, unshackling. So it's the unshackling of this knowing from its unshacklement with the fetters. And that's what you're doing every time you let go of something — you're unshackling, you're unbinding your consciousness, your knowing, from its delusion as to what it really is.

So now those four people can of course be both lay people and members of the monastic order, so it transcends that division. And in the tradition, people never actually say — if somebody thinks or believes or knows that they're one of these paths — they don't normally say it, because once you say "I am a Sotapanna" or worse "I am an Arahant," then everybody and his dog proves you're not. You just create enormous problems.

What people normally do is they express how they experience life, and then it's left up to the person to get. The Mahāsī said that these things are really just for one's own self-judgment about where one is. Of course the danger is that one either overestimates one's attainments and then there's usually a big disappointment coming up. But then that's humility, a humbling experience.

So now once we have those four types of persons, which in a sense become an ideal, we say that they're worthy of offerings and this is the requisites. And it's the requisites so that they can continue with their practice or continue to be here as fully enlightened beings because of the good they do — and we'll come to that as the last worthiness. They're worthy of hospitality, the four requisites. And this is also in a sense part of it, of course — food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Those are your four basic requisites of life, aren't they? Food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Everything else is not necessary.

And the third one is they're worthy of gifts, gift-making. And the reason for that is that it also creates merit for you. So when you give to people whom you see are spiritually training, spiritually advanced, and you want to help them, it's also a good merit to you. In the East, of course, this gets corrupted as merit-making, like a big bank account where you're storing up all these merits that when you die you enter into this beautiful heaven. I think it's wiser to think of it in terms of a growing of our own hearts in gener-

osity. And the merit is the beauty of one's own generous, kind heart. That's your immediate merit, you might say. Whether you get born into a heavenly realm or not is — well, it's to be hoped for.

And finally worthy of respect, worthy of reverence. And the reason for this is that they are an incomparable field of merit in the world — an incomparable field of merit. In other words they're great exemplars. And one good example of that is mountaineering. Once you get somebody climbing Everest — Hillary wasn't it? No, Edmund Hillary, that's it, and Sherpa Tenzing — yeah, though I believe Mallory did it because he was British. When they reached Everest, it opened the gates. Everybody who had a couple of legs could — well, even without a couple of legs could actually make it. It was there, open to be climbed. And of course there are lesser mountains, lesser peaks, and every time somebody makes it, it opens up that avenue for somebody else to do it. So they are exemplars.

And people who are well attained in the spiritual life are simply exemplars. They stand as an example for other people. And in that sense they are incomparable fields of merit, because in a sense there's no greater gift, is there, to humanity than somebody who's attained — especially attained the final path — because that is the goal, at least in Buddhist terms, of where we're all trying to make to. So in that sense they are the incomparable field of merit, and that's why we honour them and pay respect to them.

So that concludes my little homily on the Sangha. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

Khandha — The Aggregates

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the five khandhas (aggregates), the Buddha's profound method for understanding the psychophysical organism. Drawing on the metaphor of concrete made from separate ingredients, he explains how we experience ourselves as solid entities while the Buddha deconstructs this experience into five components: rūpa (corporeality/body), vedanā (feelings), saññā (perceptions), saṅkhāra (volitional formations), and viññāṇa (consciousness).

Using the simile of bubbles on the Ganges from the Pali Canon, Bhante demonstrates how careful examination reveals the insubstantial nature of all phenomena. He offers practical exercises, such as mindfully observing a daffodil while noting "looking, looking" to experience pure perception without conceptual overlay, and examining pain in meditation to distinguish between raw sensation and mental construction.

This teaching reveals how vipassanā practice breaks down the solidity of selfhood, allowing satipaṭṭhāna (Right Awareness) to recognize the process of experience itself. Essential listening for understanding how the Buddha's analytical framework supports the path to liberation through seeing the constructed nature of personal identity.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So the word is *khandha*. We'll do the *khandha*, which is the Buddha's way of understanding the psychosomatic, psychophysical organism. *Khandha*, K-H-A-N-D-H-A. It's translated as aggregate or heap.

So it's like concrete for instance. A bit of cement, a bit of sand, a bit of stone, a bit of water and it creates something solid. That's the point. We experience ourselves as solid entities, human beings. And what the Buddha was always doing is deconstructing our experience. So in dependent origination, he deconstructs it in a timeline as to how we create the world one moment after another. But in the aggregates, it's more like a slice, a slice of life. And if you look at the human being as a psychophysical organism, he divides it into these five parts. And over the next few weeks I'll go into the five parts in more detail.

So we do that with everything in the world. We create a concept, we have a designation, and we concretise things into things. So very simply, a tree. When you look at a tree, you see a tree. You call it a tree and you see it as a whole, as an entity, you might say. But we're well aware that the tree is made up of leaves, branches, and so on. And when you go into the leaves and branches and so on, you get molecules, and molecules you get subatomic particles, you just get energy. So it's that way of deconstructing things. But all that still remains is a concept. I mean science tells us that everything is just pure energy, but we don't experience it like that. We experience things as things, quite solid.

When you fall over and bang your head on a rock like I did, you don't think this is subatomic particles meeting subatomic particles. It's doing that. And the image that the Buddha uses as a way of, he's always using metaphors, is a cart. So in his day, a cart, it looks like a cart, but of course it's made up of wheels, axles, the main body of it, and so on. And it's the same with things that we own, like a car or a television. The mind is able to create solidity, substance. That's the point.

And of course this comes very close to us when it comes to our own bodies. So this designation that we give to ourselves, this concept where we draw all our experience together as it were and create me, a me, the solid that's what he is trying to deconstruct, the self, a person. And he does it in five modes.

So the first part of it is corporeality, the body. Then there's all the business of perceptions which go really from just the original percepts that come into the senses to conceptual thinking. It's that whole business of how the mind creates, how the mental part of our experience is created. Then there's all the feelings which are both physical feelings coming from the body but also feelings coming from the mind that we normally call emotions or moods, but they're actual feelings in the body.

Then there's this whole business of, translated as volitional conditioning. So that, you might say, is our thought and emotional life. But it's where the will comes in, it's where we create things. Our conditionings which we then split into those things where we feel unhappy and those things where we feel happy. That's basically how we experience life.

And finally there's the act of cognition. I'll go into it in a bit more detail. It's the point where all this information is gathered on a screen. It's a primary knowing. If you think of a television and all the things that actually move within the television coming from outside, all the radio waves, television waves and all that, and it's all hitting the TV and inside the TV there's all this mentation going on, and what you've got is a screen in front which collects it all into an image that you then know. So it's the same with the

mind. There's something that gathers it all together and presents it as an image, as an act of cognition. And all this, of course, you can actually experience. I mean it's not as though these things are in themselves some sort of idealism or something.

But let me just quote from the scriptures where he points something out to us there insubstantiality. He says: "Suppose that a man who's not blind were to behold the many bubbles in the Ganges as they are driving along and he should watch them and carefully examine them. After carefully examining them, however, they will appear to him empty, unreal and insubstantial. In exactly the same way does the meditator behold all the corporeal phenomena, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness, whether they be of the past, present or future, far or near, and he watches them and examines them carefully. And after carefully examining them, they appear to him empty, unreal, and insubstantial."

You can do an exercise where you can make at least some of these different *khandhas* clear to yourself. So now it's spring. There's the daffodils out. So when you see a daffodil, it's immediately put into the context of all the daffodils and all the flowers you've experienced. So you don't actually see that daffodil. It's always that daffodil in comparison with all of the daffodils. So to actually see that daffodil, you have to put your attention right on it.

Now as you put your attention right on it to as it were close down the mentation around it and all the comparisons and all that past experience, you can repeat a simple word like "looking" – not "daffodil" because that brings all the other stuff in – but the action of looking. So just by saying "looking, looking" it as it were collapses the thinking mind. So the thinking mind can only think in words, remember, words and images. So as you say "looking, looking" and that begins to close down, your attention just goes on to the flower itself, on to the actual what it is you're actually perceiving.

And the more and more you do that, you'll see that, you may experience, hopefully, that the door of perception is being cleansed and the yellowness of the flower begins to appear more yellow. The shape of the flower, the little filigrees and all the little shapes that go into the flower become more obvious as you begin to just focus in, just on the flower as flower.

Now as you do that and you become aware just of its yellowness or of its shape, that's you're experiencing perception. That's the perceiving mind. And then as it were you've come from that and you stay perceiving, you may also feel that with the perception a feeling arises. In other words, your relationship to that flower. So there may, hopefully, there'll be a sense of joy, right? A sense of feeling towards it. So there's that, and even colours have a feeling, don't they? Often I, maybe it's a regression, but often I

find if I see a real beautiful green or a blue, somehow it takes me back to being around about three, four or five when you play with these blocks that are blue and green. It's a funny sort of thing. And people get that with music as well, don't they? Sounds.

So you may actually feel a feeling come up as you experience just the perception of yellowness. Then as it were as you come out of that mode of just pure perception and you come away from it and you stop saying "knowing," then suddenly you get that sort of different level of perception where memory comes in in a sense of its comparison with all the other daffodils and flowers you've seen, and then you see the judging coming in that it's not such a good daffodil, it's a bit corrupt, or the yellow, or you prefer this yellow to that yellow. Now presupposed on all that process is the act of cognition, the act of just that primary knowing.

So these are little exercises where you can actually see how the mind is building up the world. And in your meditation you may even perceive that in terms of a pain. So while you're sitting, you get pain in the knee. So that's your conceptual idea: pain in the knee. As you go into the pain and really experience the pain as pain, not just pain in the knee – knee is a concept – as you go into it you might just experience tightness, heat, little stabby pains and whatnot. And at that point you lose the perception of pain. It's just pure feeling. And as you back off that, suddenly you get the concept come in: pain. And with pain you get the reaction.

So, these things, these little exercises and the process of *vipassanā* are just ways of breaking down the solidity of how we experience ourselves. And remember that whenever we're doing that, something is, as it were, emerging out of it, is the point. The whole point of breaking down the idea of the self is to discover who we really are. And that which is emerging out of it and getting to know all this as objects and getting to know it as process, that's this *satipaññā*. And it's beginning to recognise what this *satipaññā* is as opposed to all the mentation that we experience, which is the process of liberation, detachment.

So that's the *khandha*, the five *khandhas*: the body, corporeality, I'll go into that in more detail next week; all our perceptions, memory included in that; all our feeling, the feeling base of our experience which is both mental and physical coming from the body, coming from the mind; all the things that we create through an act of will – and those are our emotional thought life; and then finally this, the act of cognition, the sort of primary knowing of things.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later. God bless you.

Rūpa: Corporeality

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this talk on the first of the five khandhas (aggregates), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines rūpa - corporeality or the body - from the Buddha's profound perspective. Rather than discussing the physical body as solid matter, he reveals how the Buddha understood rūpa as our direct experience of embodiment through the four great elements (mahābhūta): earth (pressure, heaviness), fire (temperature), water (cohesion, elasticity), and air (movement).

Using practical examples from toenails to wine tasting, Bhante demonstrates how our 'solid' sense of body dissolves when examined closely into component sensations. He guides us through exercises to deconstruct pain, touch, and even the subtle processes of seeing and hearing down to their elemental basis. This analysis serves the Buddha's strategy of undermining the delusion 'I am the body' by showing what we are not.

The talk also touches on rūpa's broader meanings - the subtle mental images (nimitta) used in concentration practice, the formless (arūpa) absorptions, and even Buddha statues (Buddha-rūpa). Essential listening for understanding how vipassanā practice reveals the constructed nature of our embodied experience.

Namo tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa Namō tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa Namō tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So we were going through the *khandha*, which is these five heaps that the Buddha talks about, these five aggregates in which he deconstructs the psychophysical organism. And today we'll do the word *rūpa*.

So *rūpa* translates as corporeality, or your body, basically. And the first question that you have to ask yourself is, what do we actually know? What do we actually know in terms of direct experience of the body itself, save through the senses?

So if you take just a simple example like your toenails, because every so often you cut them off. What do you know about your toenails? You know how they look, you know how they feel, hard and all that. But you don't know what it is to be a toenail. If there were nerves within your toenail, can you imagine the agony of having to cut them off every so often? The same with your hair.

So our direct experience of the body is still dependent on these outer senses. If there are no nerve senses, if there are no nerves there, we don't know what it is. And we don't even know the inside of things. We don't know what makes a nail or what makes your hair. I mean, we know scientifically, but we don't know by direct experience.

So we know, for instance, science tells us that every time we breathe there's this exchange of carbon dioxide for oxygen, but you don't know it. At least I don't know anyway—I should talk for myself. I've never, I don't know oxygen. I mean I'm told it's there and I'd die without it, but I haven't a clue. I've never experienced it as a direct experience.

So when it comes to understanding what the Buddha means by the body, he's not talking about the physicality of the body. This is the point—he's talking about how we experience the body, the direct experience of the body. And what it comes down to is the four basic elements, the *mahābhūta*, the four basic elements. And they're described in a metaphorical way: the earth, fire, water and air.

Now earth are those feelings that we experience as pressure, heaviness, lightness, that sort of sensation. The fire is heat—it also includes cold of course, the whole gamut of temperature. Water is cohesive, elasticity, what joins things. And air is movement.

And what the Buddha is saying—and this is fairly straightforward in the ancient world, it would seem—if you go into a sensation deep enough, you'll be able to describe it in those sorts of ways. Now don't confuse this with the four great forces in science: electromagnetism, gravity, strong and weak force. Those are completely different. What science is describing is matter, as it were, the laws of matter in itself. I mean, we experience gravity in terms of weight, but the others don't seem to fit.

So what the Buddha's talking about when he talks about the four great elements is how we experience matter; not that matter is like that in itself. It's just the way the mind experiences matter. So there's two things, isn't there? There's matter in itself, and there's matter how mind experiences matter. So that's what he's talking about.

And then from there—I'll just mention them quickly because there's no real time to go into it—there arises the derivatives. So from that you get your seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. And then there are further ones that are put as femininity or virility, physical base of mind, which is the brain. Actually, I won't go into that just yet. Then there's bodily, verbal expression—so that's the body. These are all secondary to this original contact that the mind has with the body.

The physical life itself—so we know that the body has its own energy, its own force. Each cell has its own little life, you might say. And there's a space element, that's part of it—there's holes in the body. And then there's physical agility, elasticity, adaptability, growth, continuity. There's decay, there's impermanence, and finally there's those things that are nutrients to the body. All that is secondary.

What we're interested in, in terms of the process of awakening, is the fact that although we experience the body as a whole, as an entirety, as an experience, when you go into it, it's made up of all these little bits and pieces, and therefore it loses that substantiality. It feels substantial if you fall over on a mountain and bang your head on the floor. But in fact, it's just feeling, different types of feelings that arise. At a physical level, it's just a bunch of subatomic particles touching another bunch of stuff. But in terms of our normal reality, it's a person who's hit his head on the floor and is hurt.

So this is part of the Buddhist strategy of undermining this mistake, this delusion, this belief that I am the body, by knowing what you're not. It's by realising what you're not that you begin to realise what you are. So that's his methodology. He's not turning us around to look at something which is the unconditioned or *nirvāṇa*. He says that will arise naturally when you realise what you're not.

So let me leave you with one or two exercises that you can do sometimes. So we did the standing. So even there, just that very simple thing. Normally speaking, there's just the feeling of standing. But when we go into those feelings in the feet, we find actually, we can distinguish this heat from the pressure. At one level it's just feeling of standing, and at a different level we see it's made up of all these bits and pieces.

When you get pain, you might have pain, you might have a sharp pain from, say, the sitting, or a headache. When you go into it, when you stop using the word headache or pain and you go in to describe the sensations that are there, you are using different words. You might use heat or pressure, tightness or something else. The word pain disappears.

Also, how do we know the difference between the touch of metal and the touch of wood? If you go into that touch, you'll be able to discern what it is that's actually different at that feeling level. People, of course, these wine tasters and tea tasters, they do that, don't they? They get very into the distinctly different little bits that go into making this fullness of taste.

At a more subtle level, it's the eyes. The eyes are the heat element, fire. And in a moment of sharp meditation, you might actually experience what is happening in the mind when it takes in the stuff from the eyes. And it's actually imaging it as little flames.

It's the same with hearing, when you actually put your attention on the ear drum, on the actual process of hearing. And you can get right down to that basis of that first impact. All that is, is the touch of the air wave on the ear drum, which is then taken inward, as it were, to the next perception. You see it drawn into the mind until it actually takes on the sound of a bell. But that's not what's actually at that base. It's just contact. It's just pressure.

So that's what the Buddha means when he's talking about *rūpa*, about corporeality. You may also, just as an aside, come across another meaning when you're reading, and that is the subtle material that's within the mind itself that creates images. And through meditation, through concentration meditation, these become very bright, very obvious images in the mind, like a light. And these *nimitta*, as they're called, are then used for these absorption meditations to create an inner sense of bliss. So those also are known as *rūpa*.

And so taking that as a basis for those types of mental states that we call the absorptions, there's a further stage when even that image disappears. And they're known as the *arūpa*, the no-image state. So there's the fullness, really, of this word *rūpa*. And often you'll hear a Buddha *rūpa*, so it's the Buddha statue. So it's used in that sense too. With Easterners, that's a normal way of referring to a statue, a *rūpa*.

But the main thing is to, in your meditation, occasionally when you feel nicely concentrated, nicely investigative, curious, is to go into a sensation and begin to deconstruct it. And that's one of the purposes why the Buddha points out these different elements, these different four elements.

I can only hope my words are clarified not modified. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

Vedanā — Feeling

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7 min

In this exploration of the five khandhas (aggregates), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines vedanā — the aggregate of feeling or sensation. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), he explains how the Buddha distinguished five types of vedanā: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations, each divided into physical and mental categories.

Bhante clarifies the important distinction between bodily sensations and mental feelings, explaining how these represent two different energy systems that influence each other. He explores how vedanā extends to all six sense doors — including sight and hearing as physical sensations — creating approximately thirty different types of feelings and sensations.

A key teaching is that vedanā is present in every conscious moment, making it essential for vipassanā practice. The talk addresses the Satipaṭṭhāna method of vedanānupassanā — observing feelings within feelings — as a way to deconstruct our ordinary experience and see through the illusion of a solid, permanent self. This analytical approach helps practitioners understand how the psycho-physical organism operates without constituting a permanent entity or soul.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're still investigating these *khandhā*, the five aggregates into which the Buddha dissected our experience. It's the body with its sensations, *saññā*, which were the perceptual faculties which grow into concepts, our intellect. Today I want to talk about *vedanā*, which is feeling. The fourth was *saṅkhāra*, which just loosely we can sometimes translate as volitional conditioning. So it's where the will comes in. And then finally our act of cognition or consciousness.

Just looking at *vedanā*, there are five types and it's a slightly different way of looking at things. Two of them are physical, that's pretty straightforward for us. We have pleasant and unpleasant sensations, that's pretty easy for us to distinguish. But there are also distinguished pleasant and unpleasant mental sensations, and that's where the confusion comes in. Normally speaking we talk about feelings and emotions, and I think they shade into each other. Emotions are very complex things, but when you just go into the body they manifest as some sort of feeling. Depression is heavy, anger is hot and all

that, and that's what we're looking at when we are just feeling a sensation in the body which we recognize is caused by a mental state rather than the body itself. It's distinguishing those two. And the fifth one is of course the neutral states of both the body sensations and the mental sensations.

The reason we distinguish those two is because the Buddha taught that the physical part of our nature and the mental part were two actually distinct forms of energy. They both suffered from impermanence, they don't constitute a self or a soul or a person, but they are two different energy systems, the one affecting the other. When you're sitting and you get a sore knee, the mind becomes agitated. If you feel depressed, then the mind becomes heavy. Or if you feel tired, the body becomes heavy.

So that distinguishing, that deconstructing of our experience is part and parcel of understanding that this psycho-physical organism that we experience ourselves to be does not actually constitute an entity as such, something which is whole, entire, self-subsistent, can exist outside this universe. It just isn't that.

He also splits it up again, dissects it again into the various feelings that arise from the six senses. So sight, what we see is also a sensation, it also comes under the physical feelings. Hearing, what we hear comes under physical feelings, bodily feelings. So by dividing that, then of course we can see that there are something like thirty different types of sensations and feelings. These are only types, as you know. Within each type there are myriad types of feelings and sensations. I dare say it's never the case that one is exactly the same as the other, like leaves on the tree, they're not the same.

The other thing to say about *vedanā* is that they're always in any level of consciousness. So whenever you're conscious, there has to be the factor of *vedanā*. So if you're seeing, there's the feeling or sensation of light. If you're hearing, there's the sensation of sound and so on. So it's not possible for there to be a conscious moment without there being some sort of feeling.

Now the importance of the way he separates this out, feeling, comes up in the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, which is about seeking liberation, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse. And there's a second section there, after physical feelings, bodily feelings, there comes *vedanānupassanā*, which means to see feelings in feelings. It's a funny construction, it's what's known as a locative case where you're in something. So it's to feel, to see, to experience feelings in feelings. Now that seems like a double take.

But all he's saying is to try and separate out feelings completely from perceptual things, from emotional fantasies and stuff, and to just center completely on feeling. What is a feeling? To ask yourself the question, what is a feeling? What is a sensation? Because normally speaking we don't experience life in this way. We just experience it in the fullness of our personality and physical contact with the world. But by doing so it's all part and parcel of seeing how this life works for us.

This confusion between emotion and feeling, when I say confusion, it's the English and it's the way that we experience things, is something that we deal with when we come to the *saṅkhāra*, which is the next section to do with the will. So then it becomes quite complicated because everything then begins to motor up into what we would consider an experience.

So that, short and sweet, is the description of *vedanā*. I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your painful *vedanā*, sooner rather than later.

Saññā Perception & Vedanā Feeling

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this teaching on the five khandhas (aggregates), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines saññā (perception) and vedanā (feeling) as fundamental components of our experience. He explains how saññā functions as our basic perceptual memory, recording characteristics like shape and color; eventually developing into conceptual thinking and intellectual understanding. The talk explores how perception and feeling always arise together in every moment of attention, along with five other mental factors.

The discussion of vedanā reveals the Buddha's precise analysis of feeling into five types: pleasant and unpleasant physical sensations, pleasant and unpleasant mental sensations, and neutral states. Bhante emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between physical and mental feelings, showing how this discrimination helps us understand that our psycho-physical organism doesn't constitute a permanent self or entity.

Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, he explains vedanānupassanā—observing feelings within feelings—as a practice of isolating pure sensation from perceptual interpretations and emotional elaborations. This teaching offers practical guidance for meditators learning to deconstruct their experience and understand the workings of consciousness according to Buddhist psychology.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're carrying on with the *khandhas*, these five heaps. Now, when you look into the body when you're meditating, you can see it's made up first of all of the sensations coming from the body. So we did that last time, the *rūpa*, the body, and we can break down most of these sensations into these four categories of pressure, some sort of weight, some sort of temperature, movement, and some form of cohesiveness, elasticity.

Then there are all these other things that we can feel in the body, feelings that come from the mind that we can describe as emotions. And thoughts, images. So that's the Buddha's first three: the *rūpa*, the body; *saññā*, the perception; and then *vedanā*, feelings. And tonight we'll do this *saññā*.

So, in Buddhist psychology, when you attend to something, it will always have a feeling content, and it will have a perceptive content. They arise together. You can't have one without the other. They're said to be in every moment of attention. And what the *saññā* does is it records the basic characteristics of something.

So the zabutons, these mats you're sitting on, the basic thing would be the shape of it, its rectangular shape, and the colour. And it would record that, and these things slowly become your memory. And by seeing many colours, many shapes, then it begins to discriminate between all the different colours and shapes that you can experience, or that you do experience. So it's that perceptual memory. And as it grows to a higher level, then it puts labels on it. So there's the growth of the intellect coming from the perceptual level, these basic percepts. And therefore it has the job of recognising things. It's your basic memory.

The other factors of a moment of attention you might be interested to know is these two that I've mentioned, the feeling and the perception. There's also the moment of contact, which I'll come to at another time, which is part of the dependent origination, where you must have an object. You must have a sense organ and you must have the awareness of it, consciousness. And remember that there are six sense organs in the Buddha's teaching, the sixth one being the mind itself. The base of that presumably is the brain, the brain itself.

Then there is will. There must be some power there within that moment keeping things together and pointing them. And then there's that one-pointedness of attention. It's a quality. Then there's that quality of attending which is best expressed in that sentence "to pay attention." It's actually a quality, and it's called mental life faculty. That's the basic energy, the basic mental energy. And it is said that all these seven factors, mental factors, are within any given moment of attention.

Now, what happens is that the quality of these perceptions join with the emotional base, and then through the act of will, through that act of attending, you get this creativity. At worst it's known as *papañca*, which is a lovely word which means proliferation, and your mind's going all over the place. But at its more important level, it's the growth of the conceptual mind, the growth of thinking, and eventually of philosophy and the arts. So that all begins from that particular perceptual base of *saññā*.

So we're still really investigating these *khandha*, the five aggregates into which the Buddha dissected our experience. So it's the body with its sensations, *saññā* which were the perceptual faculties which grow into concepts, our intellect. Today I want to talk

about *vedanā*, which is feeling. The fourth was *saṅkhāra*, which loosely we can sometimes translate as volitional conditioning, so it's where the will comes in. And then finally our act of cognition or consciousness.

So looking at *vedanā*, there are five types and it's a slightly different way of looking at things. Two of them are physical. That's pretty straightforward for us. We have pleasant and unpleasant sensations. That's pretty easy for us to distinguish. But there's also distinguished as pleasant and unpleasant mental sensations, and that's where the confusion comes in because normally speaking we talk about feelings and emotions. And I think they shade into each other. Emotions are very complex things, but when you go into the body they manifest as some sort of feeling. Depression is heavy, anger is hot and all that, and that's what we're looking at when we are feeling a sensation in the body which we recognise is caused by a mental state rather than the body itself, and it's distinguishing those two. And the fifth one is of course the neutral states of both the body sensations and the mental sensations.

And the reason we distinguish those two is because the Buddha taught that the physical part of our nature and the mental part were two actually distinct forms of energy. They both suffered from impermanence, they don't constitute a self or a soul or a person, but they are two different energy systems, the one affecting the other. And you're sitting when you get a sore knee, the mind becomes agitated. If you feel depressed, then the mind becomes heavy. Or if you feel tired, the body becomes heavy. So that distinguishing, that deconstructing of our experience is part and parcel of understanding that this psycho-physical organism that we experience ourselves to be does not actually constitute an entity as such, something which is whole, entire, self-subsistent, can exist outside this universe, all that sort of stuff. It just isn't that.

And you can also—he also splits it up again, dissects it again into the various feelings that arise from the six, well seven senses. So sight, what we see is also a sensation, it also comes under the physical feelings. Hearing, what we hear comes under physical feelings, bodily feelings. So by dividing that, then of course we can see that there are something like thirty different types of sensations and feelings. These are only types, as you know. Within each type there are myriad types of feelings and sensations. And I dare say, it's never the case that one is exactly the same as the other, like leaves on a tree—they're not the same.

The other thing to say about *vedanā* is that they're always in any level of consciousness. So whenever you're conscious, there has to be the factor of *vedanā*. So if you're seeing, there's the feeling or sensation of light. If you're hearing, there's the sensation of sound and so on. So it's not possible for there to be a conscious moment without there being some sort of feeling.

Now the importance of *vedanā*—the way he separates this out, feeling, comes up in the discourse on how to establish this right mindfulness, which is about seeking liberation, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse. And there's a second section there, after physical feelings, bodily feelings, there comes *vedanānupassanā*, which means to see feelings in feelings. It's a funny construction. It's what's known as a locative case where you're in something, so it's to feel, to see, to experience feelings in feelings. Now that seems like a double take.

But all he's saying is to try and separate out feelings completely from perceptual things, from emotional fantasies and stuff, and to centre completely on feeling. What is a feeling? To ask yourself the question, what is a feeling? What is a sensation? Because normally speaking we don't experience life in this way. We experience it in the fullness of our personality and physical contact with the world. But by doing so it's all part and parcel of seeing how this life works for us.

And this confusion between emotion and feeling—when I say confusion it's the English and it's the way that we experience things—is something that we deal with when we come to the *saṅkhāra*, which is the next section to do with the will. So then it becomes quite complicated because everything then begins to motor up into what we would consider an experience.

So that, short and sweet, is the description of *vedanā*. I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your painful *vedanā*, sooner rather than later.

Saṅkhāra: Volitional Conditioning

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7 min

In this fourth talk on the khandhas (aggregates), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines saṅkhāra - the aggregate of volitional formations or mental conditionings. Unlike the other aggregates which are largely given to us, saṅkhāra represents the active realm of will where we directly engage with life through our thoughts, emotions, and intentional actions.

Bhante explains how saṅkhāra operates on two levels: passively as our established habits and dispositions that form the platform for behavior, and actively as volitional formations that govern our thinking, speech, and actions in each moment. He clarifies how this specialized meaning within the khandhas differs from the broader usage where 'sabbe saṅkhāra' refers to all conditioned phenomena in the universe.

The talk emphasizes the crucial importance of saṅkhāra for liberation, as this is where the will operates and where vipassanā meditation works to transform unwholesome mental patterns. Bhante explains how even the Buddha has habits (saṅkhāra), but they are all beautiful and no longer govern him. The goal of practice is to purify these volitional formations, removing what is unwholesome while cultivating what supports awakening and ethical living.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're still going through these *khandha*. Just to remind you that *khandha* means heap or aggregate — bits and pieces all stuck together. We started off with *rūpa*, which was the body itself, and really what we were looking at was how the mind experiences the body. That's where we came across these four great elements: fire, earth, water and air. Then we looked at *saññā*, which was basically the perceptual base — how it's turned into little percepts, how labels are put on things, and how later these are the basis for our intellect. Then we looked at *vedanā*, which was the feeling content. There were two types of feelings: those created by the body and those created by the mind. In the body, these will congregate to form our emotions.

So the fourth element is this *sankhāra*. Now *sankhāra* is used in a very wide sense by the Buddha. We chant "*sabbe sankhārā aniccātī*" in the morning chant, "*sabbe sankhārā dukkhātī*", "*sabbe sankhārā anattātī*". All compounded things are impermanent, unsatis-

factory and not-self. So this *sankhāra* means all compounded things — it's the phenomenal universe. There's nothing substantial there; it's all made up of bits and pieces which through the magic of the mind take on a certain substantiality.

We know that from our science. You walk into a door, it hurts, but we know it's made up of subatomic particles. In fact, it was the meeting of one set of subatomic particles with another set — as simple as that. But in the *khandhas*, it has a more specialized meaning. It has those *sankhāras* which are within the mind itself. When I say mind here, remember it's the heart and mind, so when I write about this I usually use the word psyche to draw them both together. In our older medieval language, it would have been the soul.

So *sankhāra* there is the passive side, which we can talk about as our habits or dispositions. They are the platform upon which we then behave into the world. When they become activated, they're normally translated as volitional formations. So what we're talking about is our thinking and emotional life. The reason why the Buddha separates this out from all the rest of this psychophysical organism is because here is where the will is active. The rest are given.

Your body gives you the sensations and you can't do much about it. The mind has its own way of perceiving things and you can't do much about it — it's often dependent on our culture, frankly. And feelings just arise because of the makeup of the psychophysical organism. But here with *sankhāra*, this is the world we're living in in a much more direct way, and it's governed by the will, governed by what we intend to do, through our thoughts, our actions, our speech. That's where we get these volitional conditionings.

Sometimes you get writers trying to find suitable words. Sometimes in its passive sense, I've heard it being translated as preparation, which doesn't quite work for me. And in its active sense, I've heard it translated as concoctions. So it's a difficult word to translate because it has both its passive meaning and active meaning. But from the point of view of our liberation, from the point of view of creating a beautiful world for ourselves, it's the place where the will is active.

In our meditation — just before I say that, remember that the *khandhas* are a snapshot of the psychophysical organism. If you take a moment, this is what you'll find. It doesn't tell us much about the process. The process of the psychophysical organism is expressed in the Wheel of Dependent Origination, and the *sankhāra* are really that middle bit which includes the reaction to things, the *tanhā*, and the grasping of it as "I want," and then the empowerment of it, which there is known as becoming. But here it's included in the understanding of *sankhāra*.

So these *sankhāras* are really where it all happens for us, where we actually experience life. The point of *vipassanā* is to take the unpleasantness out of those *sankhāras*. It's not as though the Buddha doesn't have habits, but he's not governed by them anymore, and they're all beautiful. That's the difference. We also have beautiful *sankhāras*, but there's a lot which aren't so beautiful.

In the Buddha's way of looking at things, a lot of them have to do with our ethical behaviour, so that brings a certain quality of morality to our behaviour too. The whole point of our *vipassanā* is to eradicate everything that's unwholesome within us which is established in these *sankhāras*.

So that brings to the end my little homily on *sankhāra*. I hope it has been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your negative *sankhāra* sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

Summing up the Khandhas

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this concluding talk on the khandhas (five aggregates), Bhante Bodhidhamma brings together the Buddha's systematic deconstruction of human experience. He explores how the Buddha analyzes the present moment through the aggregates - rūpa (form/body), vedanā (feeling), saññā (perception), saṅkhāra (mental formations), and viññāṇa (consciousness) - and as process through paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination).

The talk reveals how each aggregate functions: the body experienced through the four great elements, perceptions growing from basic sense contact to complex concepts, feelings as pleasant/unpleasant/neutral qualities, saṅkhāras encompassing all reactions and proliferations (papañca), and consciousness as the knowing quality. Bhante explains how insight meditation works by making these aggregates objects of observation rather than sources of identification.

Drawing connections to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, he shows how the four foundations of Right Awareness correspond to investigating these experiential components. The ultimate purpose is discovering the 'unbounded, unshackled consciousness' - awareness freed from identification with the aggregates. This systematic approach to seeing experience as the Buddha taught it provides the framework for genuine liberation from dukkha.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this is the final talk in our sequence about the *khandhas*, these aggregates. I want to try and bring everything together and see the reason why the Buddha taught in this way. Remember that his main technique was to deconstruct what we experience. He's always pulling it apart, either as a slice of the present moment or as a process. In terms of the present moment he uses the *khandhas* and also the six consciousnesses. Every consciousness we have must have a base, so it's one of the five senses and the mind itself which is the sixth base. As a process he uses dependent origination.

If we were to follow the *khandhas*, we have the first split away from the body itself. Remember when we talk about the body in terms of insight, we're talking about how the mind experiences the body. So that's when we come across these four great ele-

ments. It's not just moving the body, feeling it moving and things like that. The actual makeup of the body itself is how the body is experienced by the mind, and we come down to these really basic percepts which are these four great elements of fire, earth, water and air, which is temperature, pressure, cohesiveness, elasticity and movement.

So that's one type of experience sectioned off from the next thing, which is the intellect about perception. These perceptions begin at a very basic thing, so what we can say is that at all times there's the actual experience of a sensation coming in at one of the sense doors and a representation of it in the mind. That's your percept, and it's from these percepts which are memories, basically your memory, so you don't have to keep seeing blue and remembering blue. It has this memory perception, and these perceptions grow until they become concepts, at which point they're really beginning to move into the fourth category which is the *saṅkhāra*.

But there's an intermediate stage of these immediate percepts. When the mind begins to perceive them as either pleasant or unpleasant, that's where you've got feeling. These feelings are the quality of the actual original stimulus that's coming into the body, so you're perceiving it as pleasant and unpleasant.

Now when you watch the breath, you see you can just feel it as a gentle sensation, but you can also perceive it as something which has a certain pleasantness to it. At that point it's shifting from just being a neutral feeling, a neutral sensation you might say, to something which is taking on a certain value in terms of pleasantness. At this point you're moving into the area of feeling.

So that's another perception going on. There's the perception of the actual sensation that's coming in and an added perception of how the heart's experiencing it, the heart part of us, the emotional part. The other bit that comes into the body, which the body also feels as a perception, is the mind in the body. The mind in the body has this emotional content, and that's where you get your mental feelings from.

So there are those two types of feelings: physical feelings such as when you stub your foot, and emotional feelings such as when you're feeling happy and excited. These are all, in terms of the Buddha, to be classed as feelings whether they originate from the body or the mind. They're just feelings. The important thing is that they're perceived as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. So there's no way we cannot live in a non-dualistic world at that level. All our experience is divided into some degree of pleasantness and some degree of unpleasantness.

The next bit is the *saṅkhāras*, and this is where we have included all our reactions to things, all our conceptualizations, all our emotional life, the higher emotional life. The way it's put is *saññā-saṅkhā-papañca*. So the *saññā* is all the perceptual memories you've got at the intellectual level. The *saṅkhā* refers to all the emotional stuff, and the *papañca* is proliferation. So that's how we proliferate through these basic sensations and perceptions. As you know, it gets extremely complicated – concepts like freedom and democracy and things like that. It begins to move into really very complicated areas. But from the Buddha's point of view, you can always draw it down into one of these categories.

The fifth category is cognition. Now cognition, the way I personally experience it, is that the first level of knowing – it's as though, my own way of explaining it is, it's as though all the information is hitting the screen of the television. And that screen is a position of knowing. It's a point where there's an immediate cognition of what there is. Now the reason that this is made a distinction of is because it's to be separated out from the knowing.

Now the whole process of insight meditation is to make these *khandhas* objects. Normally we're in the *khandha*. The *khandha* is our personhood, our personality, our character – it's all included within that, the *khandhas*. In our meditation, we're pushing them away from us to look at them. In that process of making them objects within ourselves, through our meditation, we're actually beginning to discover this other quality which is the knowing. This knowing has certain qualities about it which is the quality of awareness, which is a type of knowing, and this intelligence.

It's slowly, as it were, shifting our location out of the *khandhas* into this knowing, which is the process of awakening. So long as we're in the *khandhas*, so long as we are identifying with an emotion, identifying with a concept, with an idea, identifying with a person – by which I mean these *khandhas*, identifying with a personality – so long as there's that identity, we're in a different location. When we're meditating and we pull back from that and they become objects to observe, we've found a different location. We've moved house.

Remember the image that the Buddha uses about the house builder: constantly building this house, but I found your ridge pole, I've broken you up and smashed you and all that. It's very violent. He's discovered the unconditional *citta*, the unconditional consciousness. That's all we're doing. We're just slowly beginning to reposition ourselves in this other place.

So that's the reason why the Buddha teaches the *khandhas*, because in your meditation you can actually, as you experience things, you can reflect on that. You don't have to go into a blank when you meditate. You can look and then every so often you can reflect upon what you're experiencing and say, well that's the *khandha*, you see, and this is the way that this knowing knows what it knows.

It's one of these paradoxes that the knowing has to pull itself out of the intellect in order to gain its own independence and its own self-knowledge of itself. It doesn't know itself. It simply thinks that it is thought, it thinks that it is emotion, it thinks that it is the body. By making these things objects, it's discovering a different identity. It's that process which we have to keep reinforcing all the time, which is the process of awakening – awakening to a different level of consciousness.

When it comes to the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the four places where the Buddha says we have to establish this consciousness, this way of looking, there's four of them. The first one is the body, the second one is feeling, so that's your *vedanā*. The third one is your *citta*, that's the word used here, which is your *saṅkhāra*. And the fourth one is looking at the dhamma, looking at what you experience from the point of view of the dhamma. So that's where you get these five different hindrances, the seven factors of enlightenment, and included in that are these five *khandhas*. Perception is presumed all the way through, and the act of cognition is presumed all the way through. You wouldn't know anything without that primary reflection.

These things can be experienced. It's not as though they are abstract ideas. Meditators can actually experience these different things just pulling themselves apart. You can experience an emotion, for instance, against the body and it separates out from the body itself, so you can see this is an emotion, a mental state which is finer, and the body is resonating. The body is actually mirroring it, but normally we experience it as one thing.

You can actually – there are experiences where you can see the original perception, the original feeling, the perception of the feeling and the cognition as a process, as an immediate constant process. So all these things that the Buddha's talking about are not intellectualizations. They're not something that he's arrived at by just thinking about something because it makes sense to us from a thought point of view. If you haven't experienced these, it's absolutely separate, but they can actually be directly experienced.

So it's the same with dependent origination. It's not something that he's intellectualized or conceptualized out of human experience as such. It's something that you can actually see in your meditation.

So remember that the Buddha has two purposes in his teaching, one of which he really stresses. It's the negative side, the bit about suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and how we achieve our misery. And the other part is the end of suffering, just the end of suffering. This end of suffering is called *Nibbāna*, it's called the unconditioned, the unborn. He's got various ways of pointing to it, and he talks about it also, remember, as the unbounded, unshackled consciousness.

Unshackled consciousness. What's it unshackled from? It's unshackled from various things, but it's mainly unshackled from its identity with these five *khandhas*. So that's your purpose in your meditation and the purpose of knowing these various ways, because it's as though in the Buddha's deconstruction of human experience, by looking at it that way, you're closer to seeing what he's actually asking you to see.

Whereas if you were to use, shall we say, a Freudian model, so you'd be looking for your superego, your ego and your id, which is fine – you find things, it makes sense – but would it lead you to liberation? This is the point. So what I would say is if you want to be sure that you're on the path to liberation, the path to awakening, then you've got to start seeing the world the way the Buddha sees it, which doesn't particularly negate other ways of seeing it. They may be complementary, who knows. But we definitely have to begin to see the way the Buddha saw things, and then we begin through our meditation to experience that.

I think that brings my little homily for the evening to an end. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering by observing the *khandhas* sooner rather than later.

1. Avijjā - Not-Knowing

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 8 min

In this opening talk on paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines avijjā - often translated as ignorance but better understood as simple 'not-knowing.' Through a vivid monastery story about flies and spiders, he illustrates how our innocent lack of understanding leads to presumptions that create unnecessary suffering.

Bhante explains that avijjā isn't a moral failing but an innocent mistake we all begin with as children, absorbing cultural conditioning without true understanding. This not-knowing creates the fundamental error of identifying with what we experience, leading to the full spectrum of human suffering including depression, anxiety, guilt and shame.

The talk explores how vipassanā meditation works through two parallel processes: developing wisdom that undermines our original mistake of identity, and purification that allows emotional states to exhaust themselves naturally. This dual path leads from ignorant innocence through suffering to wisdom within a purified heart - an immaculate state that reconnects with the world through love, compassion and joy. A hopeful foundation for understanding how awakening unfolds through dependent origination.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The word I'd like to tackle tonight is this word *avijjā*. It's one of these core words. *Ā* means not and *vijjā* means knowledge, and it's translated unfortunately as ignorance. But the word ignorance has a sort of pejorative feel about it, like you're stupid or you're culpable. But this is just basically not-knowing. I did come across a word in the dictionary and I thought I might use that, but I don't think everybody knows it. So it's this quality of not-knowing right at the beginning.

I mean, what do we know as children? As a baby, what do we know? We don't know anything. And then it all piles in: the culture, the language, the habits of our parents, then the school, and everything just piles in. And is it any wonder that we presume that this is what we are? This is definitely, phenomenally what we are.

But let me give you an example of what this ignorance is, because what it does is it presumes. We've got to be careful here—it's not an evil thing. It's just a simple matter of, well, this must be right.

I had a hut in the monastery I was at. I call it a *kuti*. A hut, unfortunately, doesn't give you the right impression—it was a proper brick-built little building with its own toilet. And one year, somehow these little flies came in called *hopatua*. Tiny little flies. And the disturbing thing about them was that they got through the mosquito net. And when they bit, they left this little pimple that itched for about three days, or it did for me. And it slowly drives you mad, even though you're meditating—it slowly drives you mad.

And I used to regularly evict all the spiders from my room. But then it occurred to me that, no, I need these spiders. They, in fact, would eat these flies. So I allowed the spiders to come in. And I ended up with lots of these spider webs, and some of them were big spiders. And to my horror, the place got more and more filled with these little flies. And it came to a point when I was actually considering leaving and going to another monastery. It was just becoming unbearable.

And there was another monk in the western room, a Canadian, staying at the monastery, been there for longer than me. And he came along one day and I told him, I said, I'm on the point of leaving. I can't handle these flies. And he looked around and he said, "It's these cobwebs. They breed on cobwebs." So I of course immediately evicted all the spiders and burnt joss sticks, and the whole situation became bearable again.

But that for me was a prime example of what happens when you don't know and you presume, and you end up with more suffering than you expected.

So this *avijjā*, this *avijjā* that we suffer from is just a very simple state of not-knowing. And then we move into this position of given knowledge and there's a presumption that this is what we are, what I believe, this is me, this is mine. And it's a mistake—it's just a mistake. And because we begin from that position of not-knowing, from an intellectual or from an understanding point of view, from the heart's point of view we begin from a position of innocence. So it's just a mistake, an innocent mistake.

But unfortunately, it does end up with depression, anxiety, guilt, shame, and all the rest of the whole gamut of human suffering. And at some point, one says, "I've got to meditate." So you end up in a meditation hall trying to get rid of this stuff.

And then the process comes back on itself. The process comes back on itself, where you realize—as you go deeper and deeper into yourself, you're getting close to the original mistake, which is to do with an identity, an identity of being a human being. That's what we think we are. As we undo that, there are two processes going on.

The process of *vipassanā* is a process of understanding where the mistake lies. So that's why we're looking at this business of impermanence, the business of how we relate to things by way of grasping or owning, wanting and identifying, and how we have

a deeper identity with what we're experiencing. And by undoing that, we're beginning to understand what we really are. But the other process that's going on is that we're having to deal with all these emotional states that come up. And we begin to realize that by just allowing them to express themselves as mental states, as emotional states, they're actually exhausting themselves. That's why we come off the dream, because it's through dreams that they develop.

And so these two processes—of the understanding is undermining this original mistake, and the process of purification is undermining and going back upon the product of that mistake, even though it was done innocently. So the end process that we're moving towards is a point of understanding, which we call wisdom. And from the heart's point of view, the purification takes us back to the beginning of that innocence. But it's now not an ignorant and not-knowing innocence. It's now a wisdom within a purified heart, an immaculate heart. And that's the end of the process when we reach death.

So the process that we're going through, or have been through, is from a point of ignorance into a mistake which has caused us problems. And we undo those problems and come to a point of wisdom. From the heart's point of view, we've innocently made a mistake, and we have all the problems that come from that mistake, including guilt and shame and all that. And then as we undermine that, we return to a purified heart. This purified heart is then an energy, a form of energy, which then reconnects with the world. And that reconnection we call love. And that love has its various forms of compassion and joy.

So we should be hopeful. We should practice with joy, knowing that there is an end to this process. So I hope my words have been of some use to you. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

2. Nāma-Rūpa: Body-Mind

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7 min

In this teaching on paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines nāma-rūpa, the body-mind complex that marks our entry into existence. He explains how nāma (mind/name) and rūpa (form/body) represent two distinct yet interdependent energies, with the mind arising multiple times within each material moment.

Using practical meditation examples like watching the breath and experiencing pain, Bhante demonstrates how vipassanā practice involves deconstructing our experience to distinguish between bodily sensations and mental interpretations. He illustrates this with the example of eating pizza—how the tongue provides mere sensations while the mind creates concepts, memories, and emotional reactions.

This separation reveals a crucial insight: we cannot find a substantial 'self' in either component, yet body and mind remain intimately connected—physical sensations trigger mental reactions, and mental states produce bodily responses. Understanding this interdependence forms the first two insights in vipassanā meditation and establishes the foundation for investigating the insubstantial nature of human experience. This teaching provides essential groundwork for deeper exploration of the Buddha's analytical approach to awakening.

So carrying on with these words, look at these two words called *nāma* and *rūpa*. *Nāma* refers to mind and it comes right through to our language through Latin, *nomen*, *nat*—the word *name* actually comes from the word *nāma*. So it's basically referring to the mind. And *rūpa*, actually its definition is really more to do with form, appearance, but basically it's the body. And it's understood that these are two different energies, two different forms of energy we can say. So that in later works it was said that in one material moment the mind arose 17 times. So there were 17 consciousnesses within the arising of one particular material moment. But we needn't worry too much about that.

It begins in the dependent origination as you know. As we go through it, the first of coming into this life is this *nāma-rūpa*—there's a split there, it's the body and mind. And in terms of the process of insight, in terms of the process of awakening, remember that the Buddha's main technique is this process of deconstructing what we are. It's looking at our experience and trying to find out its components to see whether any of these components or parts actually constitute anything real, anything substantial, something that doesn't arise and pass away basically.

So the first thing in our meditation is to make this distinction between this is the body, this is the mind, and to see them as two very separate perceptions. So when you're watching the breath there's the rising and falling of the body—the abdomen is rising and falling, that's physicality—and the actual naming of it rising and falling or the seeing of it is to do with the mind.

When you actually look at the breath a bit more closely, you may find that the mind is also constructing the whole process. So there's an image of the stomach in the mind for a start. If you're watching it there, if you're watching it at the nostrils, it's the nostrils. And there's also this whole idea that something's rising and falling. So where does that come from? It comes from the mind actually contacting the body and through its own processes, feeling that rising and falling process. But actually what's coming from the body is just sensations, just sensations.

So it's when you look at pain, so you might feel discomfort in your sitting. What part of it is the mind and what part is the body? So as you contact it and you're saying, pain, pain, the very word pain is coming from the mind. So as you go into the pain, you begin to discover its various constituents. It might just be heat, it might be pressure, it might be some other things. So you recognise that the pain is a mental construct. What the body is giving is just sensations. And when you react to pain, you're not reacting to the body, you're reacting to your concept about what the sensations are. So it's that breaking up of our experience to trying to find out whether there's anything substantial. Where's the self? When I talk about me, where is it?

When we're eating, you see. So to make a distinction between the actual taste coming from the tongue and the delight that arises in the heart. Most times when we eat, it's just all one experience. So as you put the food on your tongue, there's sensations arising. But then somehow when these sensations come into the mind, the mind immediately distinguishes it as pizza or something. But actually the taste has nothing to do with pizza. The taste is either salty or tomatoey or whatever it is. But it's not pizza. The mind says it's pizza. I mean, it's seen it, of course, but I'm just saying if you hadn't seen it and just put it in your tongue, then the mind would recognise these things as pizza. It's coming from its own memory bank.

But more than that, it's reacting. So I don't know about you, but if I eat pizza, I feel delightful. It's just a natural occurrence. Because in the past, I've always had this pizza and it's always made me delighted. It's very simple. But the delight is nothing to do with the pizza. It's to do with my relationship with the pizza. If I didn't like pizza, I wouldn't feel happy.

So it's making that distinction, it's actually pulling things apart that we begin to realise that this whole experience that we're having is not a me, it's a construct, it's a compendium of things that we put together into a concept, an actual experiential concept, and then we make the mistake of taking it as me.

Now there are two distinctions to be made. Once we've separated out this body and mind, once we've become clear that there is the body which is offering sensations, full stop, that's all it can do, and this is the mind which is interpreting it and reacting to it and has a relationship with it, it's then recognising that there's some relationship going on, that the one arises dependent on the other.

So when you put food on the tongue, the mind reacts. If you don't put food on the tongue, the mind doesn't react. It just doesn't happen. When the mind moves, the body moves. So as soon as you get an angry thought, there's something happens in the body. It reacts with heat. As soon as you have a fearful thought, it reacts with certain sensations, a wobbliness or a weak at the knees or nausea or whatever.

So it's also catching that relationship between the body and mind that they are two separate things and yet you cannot actually separate them because they're both firing off the other at the same time. And this insight is the beginning of the process of investigating this human phenomena to see whether there's anything actually substantial within it. So in terms of the process of insight through the vipassanā these are your first two insights and it's this what raises the curiosity to go into it more deeply.

So nāma-rūpa, this body and mind, are really the beginning of your practice. That's what you're asked to do. The beginning of your practice is to make this very clear distinction in ourselves.

I can only hope that this little homily has brought amazing insight. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Salāyatana, Vedanā, Phassa: Six Senses, Contact, Feeling

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this third installment on paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the next three links that operate automatically once we have a body-mind complex (nāma-rūpa): the six sense spheres (salāyatana), contact (phassa), and feeling (vedanā). He explains how the six senses—including the mind (mano) as the sixth sense—create distinct spheres of experience (āyatana) that cannot interfere with each other. The teaching explores how contact arises when object, sense base, and consciousness come together, leading to the crucial formation of vedanā—our automatic categorization of experience as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Drawing from the Majjhima Nikāya, Bhante illustrates how we can only know attributes of things, not things in themselves, through our physical and psychological processes. Using practical meditation examples like working with pain and itching, he demonstrates how mindful attention can deconstruct our usual perceptions, revealing the impermanent, process-based nature of experience. This understanding helps practitioners recognize the three characteristics of existence and see through the illusion of a controlling self, as these automatic processes arise from past karma rather than present volition.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Last time we tackled this *nāma-rūpa*, the body-mind complex. And we said something about *āyatana*, I think. So I just want to do the next three links, because that completes the part of the dependent origination that we don't actually have control of. It's automatic.

Once you've got a body and mind, you have these senses, and there are six senses. So there's the five that we know of and the mind itself. When Buddhism talks about the mind itself, it uses a special word, *mana*. And it's really talking about that bit where whatever stimuli are coming in through the senses, somehow it's being put on a screen and it's being collected. But it also refers to the stuff that comes up in the mind itself as memory and emotion.

So the idea is that the senses themselves have not only a base on the retina, and we know also in the brain, but also in the mind itself, which is separate from the brain. And this word *āyatana* is a sphere, so you can't have one sphere interrupting with another. So you can't hear through your eyes. Now I know there's such a thing as synesthesia where people smell numbers and stuff like that. But that's happening elsewhere. Actually on the sense base you can only see through the eye, full stop. And this word *āyatana* is a sphere of experience. So people who are blind simply don't have the sphere of experience of colours and sights. And it's an important word because when he's describing Nibbāna, just as an aside, he uses the word *āyatana*. It's a sphere, a sphere of experience.

And they talk about the inner and outer. So the outer part is the actual object. And the inner part is the sense base. So there's an object and a sense base which, as you know, arise on the retina or at the eardrum. But it's still based upon the object from outside. So, in this sense, Theravada is a sort of qualified realism. It doesn't deny that things outside us exist. But what it says is we can only know what we know through our physical and psychological processes. So it's a sort of, you could almost call it a qualified idealism as well, that all you can know is what your consciousness knows, and it can only know what it receives through the senses. So you can't know things in themselves, you can only know the attributes of something. And that's quoted straight from the Majjhima Nikāya: Each of the five faculties owns a different sphere and none of them partake of the spheres of another. And they have mind as their support. Without the mind, the ideal is easy. Simple as that.

So then we have this next step on dependent origination which is the contact. So this is the point, the Buddha here is describing the point where we come to know something. So the body and mind and the five senses are the instruments with which the contact is made. And for this contact to happen there has to be an object. It has to be a sense base and there has to be consciousness. Now this consciousness, this *viññāna*, remember is the same consciousness that we get in the five *khandhas*, the five heaps, which is that basic act of cognition.

And it's obviously a very complex thing because it not only picks up say of this chair — it not only picks up the colors and the shape of the chair but it also understands what it is the chair so there's other things going on in the mind which eventually lets you know that a chair is there and it's to be sat upon. And that's all part of that process. But it begins at a very simple base of the photons hitting the eye.

And when they talk about that, when the scriptures talk about that at the actual five sense basis, that's where the mind contacts matter and it only knows it, it would seem, in these four ways: earth, water, fire and wind. I always get the sequence wrong. So earth is the sense of pressure, of weight, things like that. Water is congealing magnetism — it's what draws together, it's what keeps, it's what turns wheat into dough. Sometimes in the breath you can feel it — you feel like an elasticity and that's the water element. Fire is heat, of course, and here remember that photons would be considered a fire element. And wind is movement.

So picking up on those qualities, the mind then forms a concrete picture in the mind of what it is. So we know that, don't we? It's amazing how all that's happening at the eardrum is this tapping. It really is, it's just a tapping and yet it's taken in and it turns into a sound. It's quite remarkable.

And then when we get that, I should have also mentioned that of course when it comes to emotions, that's a physical contact. Emotions manifest in the body as feelings, as this contact. And at some point there's a definition of what we're experiencing as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. At that point it becomes *vedanā* — feeling.

So what *vedanā* is, is a perception of the hedonistic value of what you're experiencing, whether it's pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. So it doesn't change what you're actually experiencing, it's just your perception of it, an internal decision as to whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. And you can't stop living in that dualistic world. So the world is always going to be experienced either as pleasant or unpleasant. And even when we say neutral, when you really go into the neutral, the neutral feelings, you find it splits one way or the other into pleasant and unpleasant. So you can't go beyond that. That is given. That's a given. And it gives it a feeling coloration to what we're actually experiencing.

So let's take for instance in the sitting you might get pain in the knee. As that sensation comes into consciousness we begin to realise it's pain. So pain is a feeling that we are now experiencing as unpleasant. It's an unpleasant feeling. Now forgetting the next stage, which is usually a reaction or resistance to it, let's just go straight into it, supposing it's not a pain that you have any problem with.

So now as you bury your attention into the pain, it's as though you flip, it's as though you go from a barrier of whether it's likeable or unlikable into just pure feeling, pure sensation. And at this point, you begin to experience pain as sensation and you can deconstruct it. You can say, oh, there's a bit of pressure there, there's a bit of heat there. And at that point, your attention, your consciousness has come right slap bang up against matter.

And in your meditation, you can play around with that. You can, at one minute, perceive it as pressure, as pressure and heat. And next minute, by just pulling back off, you can see this clicking in as pain. And just to be able to play around with that sometimes.

Like an itch. An itch is a sort of funny thing because it's neither pleasant nor unpleasant unless you scratch it. But as you go into it, it's quite, you go beyond the idea of an itch into these very sharp little pointy sensations.

So, remember that the whole idea of splitting up our, or of experiencing our, what we experience in this way, in this sort of deconstructed way, is to undermine the idea that this is a self, that this is some body. And what we begin to realize is it's just this process that happens in time. And once it's perceived and gone, that's it. It's finished. The process begins again. And there's nobody there. You don't need somebody to create pain in the knee. You can just bang it on a chair and the pain will arise. And pleasant feelings arise, unpleasant feelings arise, in meditation especially, and you haven't called for them, they just arise themselves.

And it's that sense of not being in control of these things that mirror back to us that maybe this isn't me, not me, not mine. So that brings us really to the point of dependent origination, which is a given. And that's also, remember, when we say it's a given, it's also something which is the product of the past. It's a product of what's happened in the past. So there's your *kamma* coming in in this present moment.

Now, not entirely dependent, because as you know, your eye base, the retina, is dependent on your genetics. You can't say that's my personal *kamma*, because that's been brought up through generations. If you haven't got good eyesight like me, you're just stuck with it. That's not because in the past life I was poking somebody's eyes out. So this whole thing becomes quite complicated. But in a sense, to complicate it is sometimes to miss the point. Because what liberates us is seeing these three characteristics. So when we see the impermanence of it, we see it as a process. And when we see it as not me, not mine, because we're distanced from it, because it's become an object of attention, that's what liberates us. That's what liberates us.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

4. Taṇhā Upādāna Bhava — Craving, Grasping, Becoming

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

In this fourth talk on paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines three pivotal links that explain how we create and perpetuate suffering. After contact (phassa) and feeling (vedanā), we encounter taṇhā — craving or thirst that manifests as both wanting and not-wanting. This is followed by upādāna (grasping), where the sense of 'I' emerges and suffering truly begins, and bhava (becoming), where the will (cetanā) creates kamma through the act of becoming a self.

Bhante explains that while taṇhā remains merely potential — a movement of resistance or indulgence in the mind — it becomes suffering only when the self-identity enters through upādāna. He emphasizes the crucial gap between vedanā and upādāna, where taṇhā offers practitioners the opportunity to recognize unwholesome desires and let them pass away rather than falling into identification.

This teaching provides essential insights for both formal meditation practice and daily life awareness. By understanding this sequence — 'wanting, I, get' rather than 'I want, I get' — practitioners can develop the mindfulness needed to interrupt the cycle of saṅkhāra (volitional conditioning) formation. Bhante emphasizes that recognizing this process allows us to gradually transform our personality by choosing wholesome responses over habitual reactive patterns.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

So just to continue the words that the Buddha used in dependent origination. We went through the first parts which are basically to do with how we enter into every moment with this ignorance, this not knowing, and it creates these saṅkhāras which are the conditions that we end up manufacturing through this misunderstanding. And there's the given—there's consciousness which is that point of cognition and the body-mind complex and those two, remember, work on each other. The Buddha said they're like two sheaves of hay leaning against each other; the one can't arise without the other.

And then we have what the body and mind, what the constituents are, the nāma, the saḷāyatana, the six senses, and with that we make contact. This contact has an object, it has a sense base, and it has that consciousness we're talking about. And then we give it

a tone colour, a feeling colour, whether it's pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. So that's what you enter each moment with, as it were. That's your given, that's your *vipāka*, that's the product of past action.

Now, this is where the ignorance now strikes again, as it were, underneath the whole problem and produces a certain relationship to what we find as pleasant and unpleasant, and that's your *taṇhā*. So this *taṇhā* is translated as craving, which is sometimes a little bit too strong for these little desires we have. But we include things like addictions and compulsive behaviours in this *taṇhā*. And some people translate it as lack, a sense of lack, like you've got a big hole, you've got to fill it up. A thirst, another translation you'll come across. But the usual one you get is craving.

And what that is telling us again is just what our relationship to something is. And the relationship, remember, is always based on this wrong understanding of seeking happiness in the wrong place, perfect happiness. So that's your *taṇhā*. And that should become pretty straightforward when you meditate, because when something comes up, you'll see your reaction. And remember, it's not always craving in a sense of wanting something—it's not wanting something, too. So you get resistance and indulgence, resistance and indulgence. So that's your hate-love dichotomy of life.

And it's at this point that the duality begins to hurt. We live in a dual world in the sense that it's a multi-complex world, but as soon as we enter into it with this duality of wanting-not-wanting, then it becomes a very unpleasant place for us. In meditation we're able to see that quite clearly.

But the next step, *upādāna*, is the point where we lose it, where we actually drop into that desire. That's the becoming of a self, that's the self, the I. And the Buddha actually calls the *khandhas*—remember, the five *khandhas* that we talked about, which are the body, perceptions, feelings, these conditional volitions and consciousness—he called them the *upādāna khandhas*, the grasping *khandhas*.

And the thing about this *upādāna* is that once you enter into it, the I, the self becomes, and that's the point of suffering actually. The *taṇhā* in meditation we can see is just a desire in the heart, wanting and not wanting, but so long as it's an object, so long as we're quite distinct from it, it's not actually *dukkha*, it's not suffering. The suffering comes with the self, with the identity with that wanting. It's a very lovely little subtle point to grasp. And once the I has gone in there—I have actually seen it, this sucking into an object—but it's very difficult to stop. Then the impulsion, the pushing into that wanting, a power.

While it's *taṇhā*, while it's just desire, it only remains potential. Nothing's happened. It's just a movement in the mind of resisting or indulging. But nothing's actually happened. But as soon as the I gets in there, then as I say it's very difficult to stop the next one, which is *bhava*, the becoming. It's at this point that the will comes in and that's your *cetanā*. And the Buddha says your *cetanā*, your will which is a power, is your *kamma*, meaning your action—not your *kamma* in the common ordinary sense of that word that's used in English meaning your comeuppance. *Kamma* here is an act. And the act is the becoming of a self again. So *bhava*.

So every time we fall into the I and do something out of the position of an I, we're becoming. And that of course is the world of *saṃsāra*. So these three words the Buddha tries to capture that whole business of how we create suffering and how we continue to create suffering and the process that we go through.

And you'll see that it's the opposite of language. Language normally say, "I want, I scream." But actually, I scream, want, I. And as soon as you get I, get. And that's it. That sequence—to see that sequence is to see more and more clearly where the escape is. If there was no desire before the I, then the escape would be really exceedingly difficult because you'd have to catch this identity extraordinarily quickly. But because between the *vedanā*, what we like and dislike, and the I, there lies this potential that we call *taṇhā*, the craving, the wanting, the not wanting, it gives us that—if we can see that—it gives us that gap in our experience.

And that's really where we can begin to change ourselves, because when we see that *taṇhā*, this craving, call it that, is unwholesome, we can let it pass away, we can let it drop away. And in so doing, remember, it's undermining a habit of craving. And that is what our *saṅkhāras* are, our conditional, volitional conditioning. It's like these huge circles, they're little circles within this greater circle of dependent origination, all bits feeding off each other.

And there are times when we can see that the desires that come up are actually wholesome. They might have a touch of I in it, but the point is that they're wholesome. And by actually putting our will into that, then obviously that's changing our personality.

So those three little links are where the Buddha explains how we carry on creating these *saṅkhāras*, these volitional conditionings based on this ground of not knowing, of ignorance, of delusion. So not only in meditation but in daily life, as soon as you see that "I want" come up, that wanting come up, if we can just stop at that moment and

just catch the craving before we do something, that's where we've got the power to change ourselves. Every time we miss it, we're either reinforcing an old conditioning which may be unwholesome, or starting a new one, which may also be unwholesome.

So it's a case of bringing this type of mindfulness into virtually everything we do. And in this way, we slowly change ourselves. And I think one of the things we come across is the power of these old desires. They're very, very strong, much stronger than we think they are.

So, that's it. I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your *taṇhā*, *upādāna*, and *bhava*, sooner rather than later.

Paṭicca Samuppāda: Dependent Origination to Saṃsāra

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 9 min

In this concluding talk on paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the final links of the twelve-fold chain: bhava (becoming), jāti (birth), jarā-maraṇa (aging and death), and the resulting suffering of soka, parideva, dukkha, domanassa, and upāyāsa (sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair).

Bhante presents two complementary interpretations of this foundational teaching. The traditional three-life view, found in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, sees avijjā (ignorance) and saṅkhāra (volitional formations) as karmic inheritance from past lives, with viññāṇa as the relinking consciousness that carries conditioning between lifetimes. The present-moment interpretation understands each link as occurring within immediate experience, where every moment contains its own arising, duration, and passing away.

The talk emphasizes that both understandings point toward the same goal: liberation from saṃsāra through the development of wisdom (vipassanā) and virtue (sīla). Bhante explains how mindful awareness of our intentions allows us to abandon unwholesome actions while cultivating wholesome ones, while insight practice cuts through the fundamental delusion that perpetuates the wheel of dependent origination. This integration of ethical conduct and wisdom forms the heart of the Buddha's path to ending suffering.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

We were doing all the words to do with the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, dependent origination. Some people translate that, remember, as interdependent origination. And we've been through the *avijjā*, the words we did was *avijjā*, *saṅkhāra*, *viññāṇa*, *nāmarūpa*, *saḷāyatana*, *phassa*, *vedanā*, *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* and they translate or are translated as ignorance, intentional activities or volitional conditionings, consciousness, mind and matter, sixfold sense base, contact, feeling, craving, grasping and becoming.

And then we're going through just the last bit which is *bhavapaccayā jāti*. So there, in a sense, it's a bit of a repetition because the *bhava*, the becoming, is then described as the *jāti*, *jarā* and *marāṇa*, so birth, ageing and death. *Jāti*, birth, *jarā*, ageing, *marāṇa* and death. And the rest of it, *soka*, *parideva*, *dukkha*, *domanassa*, really all the Buddha

is saying that this leads to the whole gamut of human suffering. It translates as sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. So people have tried to make some sense out of the order of that, but it's not. I think he's just saying, look, when you behave like this, basically you're creating misery, and that's about it.

Now, what we have to do this evening is just recognise that there are two interpretations to this particular teaching, dependent origination. The traditional one is to do with three lives. So when we are born, we come into this life with the first two parts, the *avijjā*, which is your basic ignorance, your basic delusion, and all the conditioning that you've gained from your previous lives. And remember that, really, that's your *kamma*. So the mental states, the potential mental states that you're born with, the seeds that are already there within consciousness, within the mind, are your *kamma*. That's what you're born with into this present life. This is the three life theory.

And then you pass through this life, turning this wheel. And remember, we're not always turning the wheel. When we're asleep, there's no *paṭiccasamuppāda*. And so it's not as though it's always there. But every time there's an act of volition, which is based on greed, hatred, or this essential delusion, then the wheel turns. And what it's doing is, it's reinforcing conditioning. And you may even be starting some new stuff. Why not? Well, we're at it. If we're going to create misery, we may as well get in there and have a good go.

And this leads us to this *bhava*, which just means this continuous becoming, translated also as *saṃsāra*, the world of ever going on, no end to it. And then when we die, then that process of being born, growing old and dying starts again. So the last bit in a future life is really saying that this wheel of dependent origination is just going to keep going, just going to keep going. So those are your three life theory, which is your traditional one. That's the one you'll get from Buddhaghosa in his book, *The Path of Purification*. And in that particular teaching, the *viññāṇa* that they're talking about right at the beginning there, that consciousness that we were relating to, is the relinking consciousness which moves from one life to the next. So it's an actually specific definition of that *viññāṇa*.

But as we mentioned before, there's also a present moment understanding of this teaching in which the *avijjā-saṅkhāra* is the platform upon which every moment is sitting. It's sitting on the delusion, this misunderstanding, and all the *saṅkhāras*, all these volitional conditionings, as conditionings ready to be activated given the right stimulus. So they're often referred to as those conditionings, the set conditionings they lie there as potential. Then with every moment there arises the potential again of some action.

And if it's arising out of this base, if it's arising out of that base, then you get this turning of dependent origination. In which case, the *jāti jarāmaṇaṃ* is referring back onto this present moment, that each moment has a beginning to it, it has a process to it, and it has an end to it. So the wheel as it were, these three wheels are turning within themselves. So there's this basic wheel of delusion feeding into the conditioning as a potential, then there's this active feed down into this already present potential conditioning of the actions we are doing, and this produces, in every moment, a beginning, a middle and an end. And that's, in short, the understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as a present moment experience.

So it's up to you, really, which one you put the accent on. In terms of traditional teachings, they would emphasise the three lives. But in terms of our practice, our daily practice, and what we're trying to do is escape this wheel, then I think it makes more sense to see it as a moment-to-moment experience. But that's not to deny the three-life theory, because, of course, when we do die, all those conditionings are carried over onto the next life. And that's really where our *kamma* is.

Often we think of *kamma* as something coming at us from the outside, but actually it's the inner part of ourselves because that's where we experience suffering. Just because somebody shouts at you, you stupid bald-headed monk, heaven forbid, then heaven forgive them. Just because somebody shouts at you doesn't mean that it hurts you, you know, sticks and stones hurt my bones and all that. But how we react to that is our suffering, our *kamma*.

And the whole of the Buddhist teaching, as far as I can see, is about putting an end to this dependent origination. That's your *samsāra*. All the teachings are about trying to bring that to an end, undercutting it and remember that the undercutting has these two sides. First of all through action so by constantly noting our intentions, letting go of those that are undermining us, unwholesome, leading to more suffering and reinforcing those that are not, that are actually leading to virtue, there is that active change.

But underneath that there has to be this *vipassanā* which is cutting into the basic delusion which is creating the whole problem. So remember the growth of wisdom and the growth of virtue must run concurrent in the spiritual life. You can't have the one without the other.

And that, I think, brings to an end my small dhamma bites, my little discussions on the dependent origination, *paṭiccasamuppāda*. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

Another Model of Paṭicca Samuppāda

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma presents a transformative perspective on paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination) that reveals the path from suffering to liberation. Beginning with the traditional twelve-link chain—from avijjā (ignorance) through saṅkhāra (volitional formations) to jarāmaraṇa (aging and death)—he demonstrates how this process operates moment by moment through our sensory contact and reactive patterns.

The Buddha's profound insight that 'suffering itself is the cause for the end of suffering' forms the heart of this teaching. Through yoniso manasikāra (wise reflection), we develop saddhā (confidence) that naturally leads to kusala kamma (skillful actions). This creates a positive spiral: gladness arises, deepening into pīti (rapture), passaddhi (tranquillity), and sukha (happiness), providing the foundation for samādhi (concentration) and vipassanā (insight).

Bhante explains how investigation into the three characteristics—anicca (impermanence), dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), and anattā (not-self)—leads to gradual disenchantment with seeking happiness in conditioned phenomena. This process culminates in moments of liberation that mirror the ultimate freedom of Nibbāna, slowly undermining the āsavas (mental outflows) that bind us to suffering.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa (x3)

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I want to make one more talk devoted to Dependent Origination, really looking at another model. If I go through the model, then you'll see that it offers a slightly different perspective.

Remember that we begin with this *avijjā*, ignorance. We start from the platform of not knowing, but this not knowing produces a certain delusion. A delusion is the wrong way of looking at something. Because of that, we've created in the past these *saṅkhāras*. *Saṅkhāras* are basically all our habits. The important thing is that they've been produced by an act of will. In other words, we produce them. We don't particularly produce what we see - it's just natural to the body, natural to the sense base. But what you do with what you see is within your power.

These two things - the fundamental not knowing, the delusion, and the habits - are running concurrently beneath every moment. Then within every moment you've got to have this basic trilogy. The first one is the potential of cognition, which is the primary act of knowing, and this doesn't happen unless you've got a body and mind. The two lean against each other. Because there's a body and mind, you've got your six sense bases. There's your basic human being, and it's through that that you make contact with the world.

That's your first active moment - contact. There has to be an object, there has to be a sense base, and there has to be that act of cognition. From there you've got your basic sensations, and then we divide the world into what we like, what we don't like, and there's an area of neutrality. But if you look at that more closely, it always shades off into liking and not liking. That's what we might call the basic duality of the world, but that's not suffering.

It's at the next point that these *saṅkhāras*, these volitional conditionings, begin to rise in the form of desires, and that's your *taṇhā*. There's another word in Pali, *chanda*, which means a good desire, such as desire to meditate. But *taṇhā* is a word specific to those desires which arise out of delusion.

Out of that, the next moment is that moment of identity, self. That's the point actually where you start suffering - the point where you identify with what it is you want. As soon as you've done that, it's almost impossible to stop the energy going into that process which is going to make it come out of a potential desire into some form of action, and that's your becoming, that's your *kamma*. As soon as you act, there has to be a beginning of the action, the middle section, and the end of it. That's your birth, aging and death.

That's your fundamental dependent origination rolling on every so often. Not all the time. It's only when it's activated through this desire. It obviously doesn't happen when you're asleep. It doesn't happen in neutral actions either. But that doesn't mean to say that the fundamental delusion isn't there. That's running constantly underneath every moment of our lives.

All this produces suffering. The Buddha says, *dukkha* - that's the *dukkha*. The Buddha says that it's because of suffering that we seek the end of suffering. That might be pretty obvious, but it's because we don't want to suffer that we begin to seek the end of suffering. So suffering itself is the cause for the end of suffering.

The way this comes about is through three things. First of all, wise reflection. The Buddha is very keen on this *yoniso-manasikāra* - that every so often you actually look back upon your actions and work out what we've done which is harmful to ourselves. In a sense, that's the action of conscience. Interestingly enough, there's no word in Pali for our word conscience, but that's another talk.

This wise reflection brings about a certain confidence. That's what we mean by this faith, this confidence. It's through the confidence that we begin to act in skillful ways. As soon as we do that, it takes away all the guilt, all the shame, all the remorse from our lives, and there's a natural gladness that arises. There's a natural peacefulness in the mind. With this peacefulness there comes a deeper peacefulness of a rapture. It has also a certain calmness to it, and you'll see that some of these qualities are part of the seven factors of enlightenment. This produces a certain contentment, a certain happiness.

When you've got that emotional base within the mind, concentration arises naturally. It's easy. What empowers this is the desire to want to know. Even when something horrible is happening within us, even when we've got a depression, as soon as you turn towards an investigation towards that mode, that interest, immediately you can feel that at another level, or a part of it, or beneath it, there is this very subtle joy. That joy is actually mirroring the liberation, the detachment from the mental state that we're experiencing.

With that concentration and with that investigation, there arises the knowledge and the insight - the one moves into the other. This knowledge and insight is always into these three characteristics - *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* - because these are manifestations of our delusion. With those little insights, there are classic insights which lead to these paths and fruits. They're cut-off points because you can't fall down from that. It's like when we reach the age of six or seven, and Father Christmas can't exist anymore. You can't go back to believing it. It's not possible. You've got to kid yourself. You can't go back to that open belief that Father Christmas is going to appear from Lapland with Rudolph.

What happens is, just like with Father Christmas, you become disenchanted with that. You don't believe in it anymore. That's your disenchantment. That's a really beautiful word for it because we tend to be enchanted by the world, bewitched by the world. It's this knowledge, this understanding which undermines that bewitchment, that enchantment.

These moments of bewitchment and enchantment don't have to be huge, fantastic insights. They're just little understandings that keep coming to us all the time. What's happening is there's a slow movement in consciousness, a slow movement in the way we're

seeing the world. This begins to accumulate, this begins to grow. It manifests in the way we feel about things, the way we respond to things rather than react. It manifests in the heart as compassion, love, sympathetic joy. These are all qualities that arise because we're undermining that fundamental delusion which is causing this root selfishness where we can only see the world from the way that we see it and for our own benefit.

As soon as that disenchantment comes, all the emotions around bewitchment disappear. That's your dispassion. That's where the heart's beginning to really cleanse itself. It's at these little moments that we experience these liberations. That liberation is the quality of freedom that the Buddha talks about, which is the essential feel of *Nibbāna*.

We get little insights like that. *Nibbāna* itself is a technical word. It refers to the final end. It's phrased as path, fruits and *Nibbāna*, but that doesn't mean to say that we can't get a little inkling as to what it is to be liberated from these desires. All that takes us to what's known as the destruction of the outflows, the *āsavas*, which will be my talk next week.

You've got this wheel of dependent origination constantly turning, and then slowly there's an awakening of "Hey, I'm suffering." As soon as that recognition comes up, then there's the desire to escape it. It's through this reflection, it's through faith, it's through good action that the faith begins to arise that the path that we're on is actually leading out of it. This leads to a natural gladness which leads to a deeper state of rapture, which is that interest, which is wanting to know how to get out of this. But that must be matched with calmness.

Then there comes this general happiness with things, and it's within that atmosphere that the concentration easily grows and with it this investigation. It's in the investigation that these knowledges and insights arise.

As soon as we see something, we become disenchanted. For instance, it's like when you overeat, and then afterwards you feel bloated, you feel heavy with it, and you have a little reflection. You say, "Well, this is caused by overeating. So the next time I see food, I'll go a bit more gently on it." There's all these little gross examples, but as you become disenchanted, more and more subtly within the way you observe your own psychology, you see every time there's an indulgence there's always an aftermath of dissatisfaction. It's really beginning to feel the dissatisfaction which leads you to the end of it.

So long as when the dissatisfaction comes up you keep going back to another pleasurable state to hide it from ourselves, then we're not actually seeing the suffering. Unwittingly we keep pounding this, we keep pounding the beat round and round - it's de-

pendent origination. It's really catching the aftermath, the effects of indulgence, which makes us want to stop indulging. That's part of your knowledge and insight that brings about the disenchantment with the world as a place we can seek happiness.

Which, remember, is not a denial of the pleasures and joys of life. It's that wrong relationship of thinking that this is true happiness. That's what leads us to this lovely place where we're enjoying things, but there's that dispassion. Remember, the English word "passion" is quite lovely because it comes from the Latin meaning "I suffer." That's the liberation. That's the feeling of liberation. Slowly through this, we're undermining these *āsavas*, which I'll talk about next week - these outflows.

That's looking at dependent origination as a joyful process, or at least the process out of which we can find our liberation. I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance and that you will struggle against the old habits and release yourself from the pain of suffering sooner rather than later.

1. Indulgence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

In this opening episode of a series on the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the Buddha's first discourse after his Awakening. He reads the sutta's opening sections, explaining how it was preserved by Ānanda and the circumstances of its delivery to the five ascetics at Isipatana Deer Park in Vārāṇasī.

The talk focuses on the first extreme the Buddha warned against: the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures. Bhante clarifies that the Buddha wasn't condemning pleasures themselves, but rather our psychological pursuit of happiness through them. He outlines five consequences of this attachment: psychological dependency and addiction, frustration when denied, grief when lost, underlying anxiety about loss, and boredom due to pleasure's inbuilt obsolescence.

This teaching offers practical insight into our relationship with sensual experiences—from simple pleasures like food and nature to complex attachments to people and possessions. Bhante shows how these attachments create the very suffering (dukkha) the Buddha identified, making this ancient wisdom directly relevant to modern life and our consumer culture.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

To begin these little homilies on the scriptures, I suppose the obvious one to start with is what's known as the first discourse, the one in which the Buddha begins the turning of the wheel of the law. I'm going to read it out, just the main bit. It's not that long a discourse. I'm going to read out just to the point where it gives us the full layout of his teachings.

"Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Baranasi and the Deer Park at Isipatana. There the Blessed One addressed the monks of the group of five thus: 'Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial, and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the *Tathāgata* has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to

enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*. And what, monks, is that middle way awakened to by the *Tathāgata*? It is this Noble Eightfold Path, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness. This, monks, is that middle way, awakened to by the *Tathāgata*, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*.

'Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering. Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. Union with what is displeasing is suffering, and separation from what is pleasing is suffering. Not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering. It is this craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence and craving for extermination. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-attachment. This, monks, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. It is the noble Eightfold Path.'

So that's the opening of the discourse. He goes on for a couple of more pages where he goes into it just a little bit more. He extends it, basically. What I mean to do is just go through it over a period of time and hopefully just say a few words as to how this understands the meaning of these different phrases.

The first thing to begin with is that the one that it begins with, "thus have I heard." I'm presuming that you don't know anything about the scriptures, so I'll start with the very basics. After the Buddha's death, the enlightened monastics got together and convened a first council, which is up in Vulture's Peak, which you can still visit, right there near the ancient city of Rajagaha, the king's city, which is now called Rajgir.

The one person they were depending upon was Ananda because Ananda had spent the last 20 years of the Buddha's life with him as his attendant. He was a cousin, but the thing about Ananda was he had this phenomenal audio memory and basically they were depending on him to remember what the Buddha had said, what the talks the Buddha had given. The story is that when the Buddha died he'd only attained the first level of attainment, one called the *Sotāpanna*, the stream entrance, and there are four to go—another three to go rather. He put in a lot of effort trying to become fully liberated because the *Arahants* had made this rule that nobody would come to the meeting unless they were fully liberated. So he struggled and struggled and struggled,

and the night before this whole meeting was going to take place, he worked all the night and could see that he wasn't going to make it. He could see that. It was getting a bit desperate towards the end of the night, at least it was my interpretation.

Anyway, he lay down to have a rest. And it was on the point of the standing position to the lying position that he went through the rest of the processes of enlightenment. And when he hit the pillow, that was when he'd attained the full liberation. That's the story that surrounds Ananda. So they let him in, and what happened was they would ask him to relate a discourse, they would question that discourse, and slowly but surely this whole set of talks were laid out. All these things, remember, in those times were learnt off by heart, so they were pretty set pieces. You can see from this it's formalised.

All the scriptures begin with "thus have I heard" because it refers back to Ananda's memory of what the Buddha taught. Not to say the other people there didn't make suggestions and whatnot, but basically that's how the scriptures came about. He says that in a sense he couldn't have heard this because he wasn't there at the time because the Buddha was only talking to his five companions, but "thus I heard" must also mean that which came to him and which the Buddha had approved of in some way or other. Because by the time the Buddha died, all these scriptures were being learnt off by heart. They were all set pieces really.

So this talk is given after he became fully awakened and wondered who he could pass this on to, if you remember the story. He remembers his first two teachers and then he learns or begins to realise they both died, either through his superpowers or he learns that they both died. So the next group of people that he thinks about passing this on to were the five companions whom he'd abandoned, whom he left out of despair when he came to the end of those self-mortification exercises.

And so he goes to find them. The distance from where he was liberated, Bodh Gaya, all the way up to Sarnath, which is on the Ganges right up there on the Ganges just outside Varanasi, present-day Varanasi, that's a heck of a long way. So it must have taken him quite a while to get up there. When he finally finds them, he approaches them and they're a bit disappointed in him. They basically try to ignore him. But as he comes close, they see that something's changed about him. So they offer him a seat. During this whole talk, in another discourse, which relates it in a slightly different way, he's constantly saying to them, "Have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say something like this before?" And by the end of this first talk, they're pretty convinced that he's had some sort of major breakthrough. In fact, by the end of this talk one of them enters into the level of a stream entrance.

So that's the opening part here. "Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Varanasi, which is present day Varanasi, in the deer park at Isipatana, and there the Blessed One addressed the monks of the group of five thus."

Now he goes on to, there are these two extremes that should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. Now, in the commentaries, it says that when all these scriptures are addressed to monks, you can take it—I forget the term for that in English, where you use one part to refer to the whole, like "all hands on deck." Anyway, here, what he means is anybody who follows the Dharma. So it should be said, for us it's all meditators. These two extremes should not be followed by one who's gone forth into homelessness. That can be taken also to mean anybody who's entered into the spiritual life, into a spiritual way of thinking about things. These two extremes should be avoided.

So the first one is the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. I just want to go into that for this particular session.

Remember that he's not talking about pleasures itself. It's always about the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures. The pursuit of sensual happiness. So, first of all, there are sensual happinesses, such as eating and whatnot. In fact, this can extend to anything which comes in through the six senses, whether you're listening to the radio, anything from sex, drugs, rock and roll. It doesn't really matter what it is, it's the whole gamut of human pleasure in the sensual world. He's not saying there's anything wrong with that. He's saying it's seeking happiness there that's the problem. Seeking happiness in sensual pleasures.

And there are consequences to that seeking happiness in sensual pleasures, and if we keep those things in mind then whenever you are enjoying a sensual pleasure one has to be careful of that overlay of seeking happiness in it which is forming the attachment to it, which is trying to make a sensual pleasure something which we are becoming psychologically dependent on. So in other words, to go, for instance, in nature, just to go walking in the country and to enjoy the country is one thing, but then when you find that during a whole set of bad weather you can't get out to the country and you're feeling depressed, then that's telling you something about your relationship to the country. See what I mean? So it's that relationship that he's saying is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial.

There are five consequences that arise from that attachment. The first one is the whole psychological dependency which at worst is addiction. So anytime you have that psychological need for something, then that is pointing out to us where our dependency lies. And that's the suffering. It's got to be fulfilled. There's a lack. There's a thirst there for it.

The second one is frustration when you don't get it. That's another sign. You're getting angry because you can't have what you want.

The third one is grief that you've lost it. If you have something and then you lose it and you can't go, then you feel sad about it and grieve. If it's somebody close to you, it also refers to the attachment we have to human beings. They're also part of the sensual world. So when they die, when they fall ill, misfortune hits them, the grief we feel is something else. That's not to be confused with sorrow and compassion. That's another thing, though. But that sense of personal loss, the hole that's left in our hearts, for instance when somebody dies, that is the measure of attachment.

And this underlying constant fear of loss—that's the anxiety. So once you're dependent on something, whether you like it or not there's always going to be that underlying sense of anxiety because we know it arises and passes away. Sometimes it's not going to be there. So our society, which has become so sophisticated, and we have this awful weather like this, there's an underlying anxiety that, you know, the electricity is going to go or the heating is going to stop or people aren't going to get their food because it's not being distributed. These things that we take so much for granted under extreme conditions point to our anxiety about these things, about loss.

And the fifth thing, which is really I think the true psychological motivation for our consumerism, is boredom. So boredom comes about because of the inbuilt obsolescence of pleasure. In other words, you can't keep getting the same buzz from the same thing. So even if you put the sweetest most beautiful chocolate in your mouth, the next one is not going to make it. You've got to have a different type of chocolate. Or you've got to leave it for a long while and then go at it again. So that inbuilt inability for the same sensual pleasure to keep giving you the same buzz comes back to us as a feeling of boredom with it. And that boredom can of course get really very strong, can move to a real aversion with something which was once giving you pleasure.

And the whole of consumerism is not simply giving you pleasure because pleasure is pleasant. It's also because people are constantly running away from boredom. So they're always looking for something new. What's the next thing on the menu? What's the next thing that's new? It's the real underlying power because we are much more motivated to move away from pain than we are to move towards pleasure.

So these five things, when you contemplate it, they bring home why the Buddha thought that the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasure which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. He hasn't got a good word for it at all.

So hopefully that will give you something to reflect upon, especially as we approach Christmas with the food and all that. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all desire for seeking happiness in sensual pleasure, and achieve that enlightenment, that pure happiness of *Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

Self-Mortification

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this second episode exploring the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's teaching on self-mortification as one of the two extremes to avoid on the spiritual path. Drawing from the Buddha's own six-year experience with severe fasting and other ascetic practices, he explains how these physical austerities were believed to reduce bodily desires and lead to liberation.

Bhante extends this teaching beyond its historical context of physical mortification to encompass psychological patterns of self-hatred, repression, and constant self-judgment that plague modern practitioners. He explores how this inner self-mortification manifests as depression, despair, and neurotic behaviors, and how it can be mistaken for humility. The talk examines how different personality types—those prone to indulgence versus those prone to aversion—relate differently to rules and moral guidelines.

The discussion culminates in understanding true renunciation as the Middle Way alternative to both indulgence and mortification. Rather than punishing ourselves, we learn to recognize attachment and gently let go, feeling the healing pain of release rather than the destructive pain of self-hatred. This approach transforms our relationship with desire from one of battle to one of wise understanding.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So we're going through the first discourse. It's known as the first discourse that the Buddha gave. It obviously wasn't done in this way. He was probably just in conversation with the five companions. But later on it got systematized into this, formalized into this discourse. And it's the basic platform of all the Buddha's teachings, the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path.

Last week we just introduced it and we talked really about the whole problems of this sensual pleasure business. Remember he says, "Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one who's gone forth into homelessness." Remember what we mean by that is somebody who's gone into the spiritual life. What to? The pursuit of happi-

ness, sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. So he hasn't got a good word for it, for indulgence of any sort, especially around Christmas.

And then there's now the second one, the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and unbeneficial. Now in those days there were those teachers who taught these blissful states what we now call the *jhānas*, which the Buddha felt were very worthwhile because they develop beautiful mental states. The one about, for instance, *mettā* — if you keep developing that then your whole mind is suffused, your whole heart is suffused with this good will. So you didn't see any problem with that apart from the usual attachment that one gets with beautiful states of mind. It's like when you walk in the country, you get attached to it and you want to go out there again.

But the other thing was this self-mortification and the understanding — even which predates the Buddha — was this whole business of desire. This wasn't something specific to the Buddha, the fact that desire was the cause of suffering. It was there in some understanding or other. Even Socrates said it. Socrates said desire is the cause of suffering. So the whole idea was that this sensual pleasure, which was the world — the world — somehow if you want to be liberated from the world, one other way to do it would be to reduce the appetites of the body. So one obvious way is to fast.

So this is what the Buddha did. One of his main exercises was to fast. In fact, it seems to be the main one that he did. He said he got so thin he could hold his spine through his stomach. He tried that. And the whole idea was that by reducing the appetites of the body, you necessarily reduced your desire for them.

Now, have you ever done a fast, a 10-day fast? Well, what happens is the first three days are pretty awful as the body detoxes itself. But then suddenly, you get into a very nice place and you don't feel hungry. And the reason is the body starts eating itself. You're actually dying. But you never feel hungry. You feel very light. Very light, it's fantastic really. And you can understand why people make a habit of it, and why it became such a thing in yoga to do long fasts, because it is very purifying. And your appetite is simply reduced. Somehow it's just not there. You just don't feel hungry after a while, and the body feels very light.

Other mortification exercises were to sit next to a fire and suffer the heat. You'll see them even today in yoga, in India, with their arms withered still held up in the air, never pulled down. And it's all to do with trying to get rid of the body almost. It's seeing the body as something which is hateful, to be despised, to be got rid of, to be conquered.

There's some negative feeling towards the body, and of course we get it through Christianity as well, and especially through its judgments around sexual activity. There's something impure about it.

So this was the practice of the time, and again it was all to do with rebirth. It was all to do with liberating the *atta*, the self, from the body. This is the way you did it — you stopped it from seeking happiness in the body. And one way to do it, of course, is to make the body painful.

But I think we can stretch this a bit more, like last time I was talking about the psychological consequences of indulgence — the boredom, the grief at loss, etc., etc. Here, what we find is all the stuff that Freud really understood about repression and about self-hatred and about self-judgment. Because to me, all that comes into that negative part, which actually is making us suffer. And it's ignoble, meaning that it's not on the path and it's completely useless. So that's his phrase — remember, it's painful, ignoble and unbeneficial. There's absolutely no reason to do it.

So I think we can stretch this, or at least I prefer to do this, to stretch it to all this business around self-hatred, around repression, around that area where we're constantly judging ourselves, putting ourselves down. So it's not just a physical thing, it's a mental thing. And when we do that, of course, when we really suppress stuff that we don't want to go near, we know it leaks out in other ways in other sorts of neurotic patterns of behavior and stuff like that. And if it's more of a conscious thing, this constant self-judgment and doing ourselves down — "you're no good, you're useless, nobody loves you" and all that sort of stuff — it leads to depression, doesn't it, leads to despair.

So it's absolutely a waste of time to do that. And when we see the danger of that sort of self-hatred, that's when the meditation works for us, because we turn around upon it, we name it, we actually acknowledge what we're actually doing to ourselves. That's the point. And in so doing we're pulling ourselves out of it, we're finding another position.

And remember that it's never getting into the head of it, never getting into the talk of it, or the speech of it, or trying to argue with it, or trying to make it see another point. It's always about sinking into the heart and feeling the self-hatred that we have towards ourselves, the self-judgment, and just being there with it, the unforgiving nature that we have sometimes towards ourselves, our unkindness towards ourselves, and just to stay with that and wait for it to pass, and to recognize it as just another mental state. Not me, not mine.

That's the important thing. See, every time, remember, we identify with this stuff, it's actually harming us. We're actually telling this very state of mind to do us harm. Every time we have these thoughts like, "you're useless and no good," "I am useless" — see, the I, how do you get out of that? There's no escape from that. You are the one who is useless, who is horrible, whom nobody can possibly love and all that sort of stuff.

So remember that that's also mortifying ourselves. And that's often can be confused with humility in its more subtle sense. We think that we're being humble by doing ourselves down, by always undermining our self-esteem. Sometimes we can mistake that for a sense of humility — "this is the way I really am" — but in fact it's just another form of self-hatred.

Now one of the interesting things about these two types — the type that is self-indulgent and the type that is very self-hating — is that it comes out in the way that we look at rules and regulations. So those people who tend to be self-indulgent are very easy with rules. And if anything, they become lax. It moves that way. Whereas people who are very self-hating, who have this problem with an aversion, an aversive type personality, get very tight around rules. It's like a prison. And they can't distinguish, for instance, the moral law from rules and regulations of society. It's very difficult for them to make that distinction. It's all to do with rules and regulations.

I remember Douglas Bader, the war hero, the guy who flew all the planes and then crashed and smashed his legs up. So I remember him saying something along the lines that, because he constantly broke rules, he said something along the lines that rules are like chains to idiots or fools, but to the wise they're guidelines. And when we are, if we tend to be the sort of person who is very tight around themselves, always self-criticizing, always criticizing themselves, they use rules in order to protect themselves from their own criticism, because every time they break a rule they get the guilt. They get the guilt about having done something, and then again it reinforces the feeling of "I'm horrible, I'm terrible."

So there's a lot of ramifications around this whole business of self-mortification. Now I've really stretched this because I don't think the Buddha himself was thinking about that when he wrote this. I think he's in his own time, in his own place, he's really talked about these practices that were going on at his time.

Now then he goes on to say that without veering towards either of these extremes, the *Tathāgata* has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*.

So, one of the virtues that we have is renunciation. Now, renunciation isn't self-mortification. We're not trying to punish ourselves. What we're trying to do is trying to find out where the attachment is. So when you walk into the kitchen and you think, "I'll have a biscuit," see? So if you just bring out the biscuit and hold it in front of you, and just feel the attachment, and then say, "Well, I won't have it now," and put it back in the tin — now that sort of renunciation would be the middle way. You're not doing it out of self-hatred. You're doing it to let go of attachment to biscuits.

I mean, one of the things I put to people is just choose your best TV program and get your biscuit and your cup of tea and just sit there and just don't turn it on. And just be there knowing that the football match is on, knowing that the next episode, which is the crucial episode, is next. And it's just feeling that desire and letting it go, which is the whole thing about desire is the problem, attachment is the problem, and it's just letting go. So that would be the middle way.

When it comes to this business of mortification, you are in a sense not feeding into the appetite to the body. You're doing outwardly what self-mortificators would seem to be doing, but for a completely different reason. You're not punishing the body. You're not thinking that this is going to somehow get you a better rebirth or whatever — or it might, because you're letting go of attachment. It's more in the sense of seeing that attachment is actually suffering, and every time you feed into it, it creates more suffering. So by renouncing it and by feeling the pain of letting go — the pain of letting go, that's a healing pain — that finally undermines this whole business of attachment.

So then he goes on after this to go on to the middle path. So that's another little homily. So that's his opening statement. That's the platform of his whole teaching. It begins by this statement: "Monks, there are these two extremes which should not be followed by one who's gone forth into homelessness. What to? The pursuit of happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldliness, ignoble and unbeneficial, and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the *Tathāgata* has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*."

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.

The First Noble Truth of Dukkha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this exploration of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the First Noble Truth of dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness). Drawing from the Buddha's first teaching after his Awakening, he explains how birth, aging, illness, and death are inherent aspects of existence, while emphasizing that our suffering comes not from these facts of life themselves, but from our relationship to them.

The talk addresses the daily experiences of dukkha: union with what is displeasing, separation from what is pleasing, and not getting what we want. Bhante Bodhidhamma offers practical guidance on moving from discontent to contentment by distinguishing between genuine needs and sufficiency versus greed. He concludes with an examination of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandhā) - form, feeling, perception, mental formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness - explaining how clinging to these ever-changing aspects of experience creates suffering.

This teaching provides essential foundation for understanding the Buddha's core insight into the nature of existence and offers practical approaches for developing contentment and letting go of attachment to impermanent phenomena.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, we've got this Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, turning of the wheel of the law, and having told us that the way to happiness was not through seeking happiness in sensual pleasures — remember it's not a denial of sensual pleasures — nor is it the pursuit of self-mortification, or punishing the body.

And he says he's awakened to the middle way that gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. And then he says, what, monks, is the middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata? So it is this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention or right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. And this is what leads to peace and so on and so forth.

Now he repeats that, so I'll come back to that. But then he tells us about the noble truths. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering. This is the first noble truth. There's four of them. So there's the noble truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the fact that there is an end to suffering, and the path leading to that end of suffering.

So here he's telling us what the noble truth of suffering is. The first noble truth: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering. Union with what is displeasing is suffering, and separation from what is pleasing is suffering. Not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

Now books are written on this, but I'll do a little five-minute commentary. So the first four — birth, aging, illness and death — this of course refers to, goes back to the mythology around his awakening, where as a young man in his middle twenties, he comes across the person who's very sick, a very aged person, and a corpse. I mean, that's how it's put. But basically, somewhere in his mid-twenties, he woke up to the fact that what was waiting for him was sickness, old age, and death, having been born.

But he puts in here birth, so birth of course is suffering. I know that maybe with some caesarean sections the baby doesn't suffer that much, but even so there is suffering. So it's just part of the fabric of life, this suffering.

So here, remember, there's not only just the basic suffering, the *dukkha*, there's the *dukkha dukkhata*, which means the suffering of sufferings. So he's always making a distinction between the facts of life, which are the sickness, old age and death, which is painful, but the suffering is our relationship to it. So always remember that it's not as though he's denying that there is pain in life. He himself of course never overcame physical pain. He died in pain from some sort of gastroenteritis.

So that's the main thing. And these things are really something to contemplate. It's good to do it once a day. Just remind ourselves there is sickness, old age and death. You don't have to get morbid about it. It's just there is sickness, old age and death.

So every morning after puja, at the end of the puja, before we do the Karaniya Sutta, the Metta Sutta, the sutta on loving-kindness, people send me names of people who are either extremely sick or they're dying. So every morning I read out this list and the list changes and it's just a nice reminder, a grounding.

Then it's more to do with our daily life, so there's the union with what is displeasing is suffering. In other words, being with what you don't like is a pain. That's all he's saying. It's very simple, very straightforward, and it's to do again with our attitude to

those situations, those people, those places where we find ourselves, where we don't want to be. So remember, it's not the people, it's not the places that are causing the suffering, it's our relationship to them.

And then there's the opposite, separation from what is pleasing. So not being able to get your coffee when you want it, your tea, not being able to find your friend or somebody you're close to. So separation from what you love, from what you're attached to, is suffering. So again, it's not the coffee that's causing the suffering or the friend who's not there or the fact that you can't get out to the countryside at this particular time. That's not the suffering. The suffering is to do with our relationship to it.

So those two are the opposites: union with what is displeasing and separation from what is pleasing.

And then finally, in a sentence, not to get what you want. So I'm sure you've come across this phrase: to want what you get more than you're always getting what you want. So wanting what you get moves us towards contentment. This is the way it is. And the more we're content with the way things are, the less there is this desire to want to seek happiness in the pleasurable things of life, just to be contented.

So the positive side of "not to get what one wants" is discontent. The negative side is discontent. And if we turn that sentence around itself and just begin to appreciate what we have, to develop a certain gratitude for it, then this contentment rises.

And my last little reminder with the tip of the day, which of course you all read, went on about this business of need and sufficiency and greed. So how do you know what's sufficient? That leads to contentment. What is sufficient?

And I suggest in this that don't come back on it from greed. Don't look at all the things you greed for and then come back to what you think is sufficiency. Start from the point of view of what you really, really, really need in order to exist. Considering, for instance, the disasters we've had last year like the flooding in Pakistan and the flooding in Australia. So what would you grab and take with you which you think you need? Now that's your basis. Once that's clear, then you can begin to move up into this area of sufficiency.

So what we need is clothes. It doesn't matter whether it's rag clothes or just a cloth. But then, of course, we live in a society and you need certain clothings for certain jobs and relaxation, and so on. If you start from that base of what you need, then it's easier to get to a more realistic sufficiency, that's all.

And then finally, this statement: the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering. Books are written on the five aggregates. The five aggregates is the way the Buddha splits our human experience in the moment for the purpose of showing us where suffering lies.

So obviously there's the body. There are feelings both caused by the body and the mind. In the body, there's perceptions, and feeling and perception always rise together. Then there are these *saṅkhāras*, so these are your conditionings, and this is where you'll find will. It's here in the *saṅkhāra* that there's suffering created or undone. And then there's cognition, that which knows. So you're aware of what it is you're aware of. It's an act of cognition.

So these five *khandhas*, remember, are there with the Buddha. The Buddha after enlightenment still had his five *khandhas*. So it's this business of the process of desire, the process of attachment to them, using them, using these five *khandhas*, which is the body and mind, in order to seek some sort of permanent happiness.

And when we look at what we mean by happiness, I think you'll normally come down to a pleasant, beautiful state of mind. And of course, if you associate real happiness with beautiful states of mind, then it's a no-go, isn't it? Because it keeps changing. And if you could stop the world and say, "This is it, I don't want to move on," then you could use the body and mind to reach this wonderful state. But you can't.

So as soon as you recognize this process of impermanence, then you stop seeking this permanent happiness in the world. And that's what makes you let go of things easier. So when you're in a state of happiness, you're happy. And then after you finish, you remind yourself that's it. It's never going to rise again. You're never going to get the same party. It just doesn't happen.

So that's your first noble truth. This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering. Union or association with what is displeasing is suffering. Separation from what is pleasing is suffering. And not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, these five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated, having perceived most deeply the problem of suffering, from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

Second Noble Truth: The Cause of Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this exploration of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the second of the Four Noble Truths: the arising of suffering through taṇhā (craving). He clarifies that not all desires are unwholesome—the desire to meditate or help others leads to liberation—but specifically addresses wrong desire based on misunderstanding.

The talk explores three types of craving: kāma-taṇhā (craving for sensual pleasures), bhava-taṇhā (craving for becoming), and vibhava-taṇhā (craving for annihilation). Bhante explains how our constant 'selfing' process creates renewed becoming (bhava) and how this psychological mechanism drives saṃsāra. He distinguishes between natural appetite and indulgence, showing how awareness of desire—rather than identification with it—prevents suffering.

Drawing on meditation experience, he illustrates how the objective observer position in vipassanā practice reveals our true nature beyond the physical, emotional, and thinking selves. This insight practice, he explains, places us 'in the presence of Nibbāna,' offering a direct path to understanding the cessation of this constant becoming process.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So we're struggling our way through the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, which is the turning of the wheel of the law. We call it the first discourse—not that it was actually what he said first, but it contains the platform of all his teachings. It's basically telling us that the middle path is not one of indulging in the world nor of exercising severe mortifications.

He then goes on to explain these four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the end of suffering. We're up to the second part there, and this is how it reads from Bhikkhu Bodhi: "Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering. It is this craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination."

Now, I'll go through that again. Some of Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations are a bit heavy. I'll give you alternative translations which I think make a little bit more sense. "Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the arising of suffering"—in other words, how does suffering arise? Origin for me is a little bit too strong, because the original cause is ignorance. But how do we experience the arising of suffering? Where does it begin? And it is this craving. On dependent origination, it's the word *tanhā*, which translates as thirst, craving, sense of lack.

So this craving that leads to renewed existence—we'll come to that in a minute—accompanied by delight and lust. You have to take that as meaning both the emotional pleasures we get out of life and the physical pleasures. Lust is a bit too confined a word really. It's delighting in sensual pleasures, seeking delight here and there.

What the Buddha is suggesting is that our lives are constantly a movement towards what is pleasant, trying to escape what is unpleasant. In finding something pleasant, we form an attachment to it, we indulge it. Remember, there is an inbuilt obsolescence with pleasure. What made you excited yesterday is now boring. Your boiled sweet has to have a different flavour—you just get bored. So this business of seeking pleasure here and there, you see, and it's desire which is the mechanism, the first mechanism that comes.

I think the best place you can see this is when you eat. Having prepared yourself a meal, just sit there for a moment and catch your relationship to that meal. A part of it will be ordinary appetite—that's a desire, but that's a good desire because it wants to nourish the body. But the other desire is seeking happiness in sensual pleasure, seeking delight in sensual pleasure. And that's indulgence.

You have to be careful with this English word "desire." Not all desires are bad. The desire to meditate is hardly something which is unwholesome—it leads to liberation. The Buddha himself desired to go on alms round to get some food. When people asked him a question, he desired to answer it. So you've got to be careful with desire. It's a specific desire—it's a wrong desire, it's a desire based on wrong understanding, which is seeking happiness in the sensual world.

So he says this is the reason for the arising of suffering—this desire. You can call it the psychological reason. Actually speaking, if we're aware of desire, you see, we're not actually suffering. It's when we identify with the desire that the suffering is felt. That's on dependent origination—that's the grasping of it. Anyway, that's perhaps a little too detailed for such a short talk.

But he points out that we've got to observe desires as they come. It's in knowing a desire to be unwholesome and in waiting for it to pass away that we decondition that desire within the heart. When we see a desire which is wholesome, if we empower it, then that's the conditioning which will grow in the heart. So in the Eightfold Path you'll see we move from selfishness to generosity, hatred to love, cruelty to compassion. It's done by recognizing a desire as unwholesome, not reinforcing it, not acting on it. When you see one that's good, then you act upon it. In this way you change yourself. Very simple—the mechanism is very simple, but it's not easy, of course.

Now he says "renewed existence." Existence is every time a self arises—it's a becoming, a constant state of becoming, of a making of an I. When you're asleep this isn't happening, see. As soon as you wake up, you say, "Oh, here I am." The I has arisen. And it says, "Got to get up and got to get some breakfast." This I is constantly recreating itself through its actions.

Now he's translated it as existence, but actually the Pali word *bhava* is better translated by "becoming"—constant state of becoming. If that state of becoming is driven by wrong understanding, that's what we mean by *saṃsāra*. *Saṃsāra*, the world of constantly onward going, the rotation, the day in and the day out, the moment in, the moment out—that's what we mean by *saṃsāra*. So I think it's better translated by "renewed becoming."

So then he posits what these cravings are. The first one is the one we've discussed, which is the craving for sensual pleasure. Sensual pleasure—he's including here everything, all the joys and happinesses that the world has to offer us. He's talking about sensual pleasure meaning all the joys and pleasures of life. It's the desire—it's the wrong desire for them which is the problem. The wrong desire manifests as an indulgence, it manifests as compulsive behaviour, addiction, it manifests as frustration when you don't get it, and so on. So then you know that's a wrong desire.

But then he says craving for—he translates "existence"—craving for becoming. So we're constantly trying to create the future. Constantly—that's the whole business of planning: what I'm going to do tomorrow, what I'm going to do next year, what I'm going to do when I'm retired, what I'm going to do when I'm dead. He's constantly trying to work out the future, you see. So this desire to constantly become, become, become. Most of us do that because if we're not becoming, we must be dying.

Now, then he also says, of course, craving for—here he translates it as "extermination," but I slightly prefer the usual word, which is annihilation. So that's, at worst, suicide. Life gets so horrible, so unbearable, for one reason or another, that one wants to get rid of the self, and that's suicide. But we also do it in little bits and bobs, you see.

When we're a bit bored, a bit depressed, you think, "Oh, to hell with it," and you launch yourself onto the sofa or couch and fall asleep. So you block out for a while. Every time you do that, you're self-annihilating.

That's one of the causes why we feel in meditation, but also in daily life, the dullness and the lethargy sometimes comes up. That's because we've pushed all this stuff down through sleep. Sleep's a great suppressant. Often you wake up and you are feeling better. But actually you've pushed stuff away, you see. So that's this idea of seeking, craving for non-existence, you see. Craving—that's better actually—craving for not becoming.

Although you have to be careful here because the enlightened person is no longer in that state of creating this self. Remember, when the Buddha was enlightened, he didn't disappear. He kept being a human being. But he didn't suffer from this, you see.

So this creating of a becoming is to do with a self. The self isn't an object, it's not a thing—it's a process. So the self is always changing depending on what it happens to be doing at the time. If you were to define yourself, you might define yourself variously as a friend, by your profession, as a mother, a father—the definition of self keeps changing, see. A sociological self, an existential self. I've got a list of selves somewhere that somebody wrote—there's about thirty of them. But I mean, that can't be exhaustive, because every time there's a self, there's a type. So it's "selfing"—that would be a better word. It's constant selfing, and that arises out of a wrong relationship with the world, with the body, with the heart and mind, where you're saying, "This is me."

So the liberation is when that sense of "this is me" disappears, but there is still that awareness. The Buddha is awareness within the world, but not of it. That relationship has been broken. Therefore, it's impossible for that person to suffer.

Now, in your meditation, when you become the objective observer within yourself, and you're observing maybe some physical pain or something, or you're observing an emotion—you're feeling it, feeling an emotion, you see an image—all these things have been objectified. They're an object to you. So whatever knows has extracted itself out of this body, heart and mind, see? And when you're in that position and you come out of it, just reflect a bit. What was it like being there?

It's very different from being a physical self like when you trap your finger in a door. See, for that one moment you are the finger as a physical self. It's very different from being an emotional self when you lose it and you find yourself swallowing about or getting angry. They're different from a thinking self when you're lost in thought. It's another position, isn't it? Something else. There's no thought, there's no emotions, and there's no body when you're the observer, when you're the feeler, is there?

Now, if you haven't experienced that, then you have to come here and do a week's retreat. Because that's what the Buddha says: when you are mindful, and he's talking about this level of mindfulness, you are in the presence of *Nibbāna*. You're in the vicinity of *Nibbāna*. So we're very close to it.

So that's basically how he phrases the noble truth of the arising of suffering. It is this craving that we have that leads to renewed becoming, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, and craving for annihilation.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your clear understanding of desire, liberate yourself from all suffering sooner rather than later.

The Third Noble Truth: The End of Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min

In this exploration of the Third Noble Truth from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's revolutionary declaration that suffering can completely end in this very life. Unlike Western psychology or Abrahamic religions that view suffering as inevitable or only resolved in an afterlife, the Buddha proclaimed that through the 'remainderless fading away' of taṇhā (craving), complete liberation is achievable here and now.

The talk carefully unpacks how the cessation of dukkha occurs through the complete ending of the three forms of craving: sensual pleasure, existence, and extermination. Bhante explains how this cessation relates to upādāna (clinging) to the five khandhas and our mistaken sense of identity with the psycho-physical organism. He addresses common misunderstandings about Buddhist 'annihilationism,' clarifying that while greed, hatred, and delusion are destroyed, what remains is the unconditioned awareness that constitutes Nibbāna.

Using the Buddha's preferred via negativa approach, Bhante illustrates how liberation is described through what it isn't—unborn, undying, unconditioned—while pointing to the positive reality of the 'island,' 'refuge,' and 'sphere' that transcends the six sense-bases. This teaching offers hope that complete freedom from suffering, though requiring dedication, is the birthright of every human being.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble, and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So we've been through the first two Noble Truths. The first one, of course, was telling us what suffering is—what the Buddha means by suffering. The second one, as it's translated, is the origin of suffering, the arising of suffering, or the cause of suffering. That's the better translation: the cause of suffering, what is the original beginning of how suffering arises.

So he goes on—perhaps I could read that, it's very short: "Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of suffering. Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, separation from what is pleasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering. It

is this craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. That is, craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence, craving for extermination."

So this is the third one: "Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-attachment."

First of all, there's this amazing statement that there is an end to suffering. I don't think any modern psychologist in the West would ever think of that. They think of an accommodation, being able to be generally at ease with the way things are, but the end of fear? I have a book which is a companion to the book *Emotional Intelligence—Intelligent Emotion*, it's called—and in the preface she says there will always be fear, there will always be anxiety.

So there's no conception in Western psychology, in Western psychotherapy, that there's an actual place where suffering actually comes to an end. Even in our religions, the Abrahamic religions, the end of suffering is in heaven. That's where you go. There's no way you can end suffering in this life, as far as I understand. Perhaps the saints do, but it's generally understood it comes afterwards. It comes when you get to heaven.

Now, of course, in Buddhist understanding, it takes quite a while to get to this point where there's an end of suffering. But the statement is you can do it right here and now as a human being. So this is quite—to me, it's always amazingly radical—that there can be right here and now this end of suffering.

And he says it's the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-attachment. So he centres the whole of his teaching concerning the end of suffering on this point of craving.

Now you've got to remember that he's pointing to the word *taṇhā*. *Upādāna*, *taṇhā upādāna*. These two words are telling us about our psychology when it comes to seeking happiness. There's a seeking happiness in the world, and of course the world can't deliver. That's the point. The world cannot deliver perfect peace and happiness, even if it's on the simple grounds that things arise and pass away. So as soon as you've got something, you'd like to say stop the world, but it doesn't happen.

And this craving, this craving and this grasping of the five aggregates—this body-mind complex and the grasping of it—remember, is that suggestion of identity. So in this he's basically saying not until the identity passes, this same craving. Remember in the Second Noble Truth he says it's the craving for existence, craving for extermination, but the suffering itself is the five aggregates subject to clinging. So that clinging, remember,

is *upādāna*—this business of identifying with the body and heart and mind. And because we identify with that, we seek happiness as a product of that body, of that psycho-physical organism. And that's why it'll always fail.

So he says when that completely passes away, when that desire to seek permanent happiness—this happiness in the world—passes away, there's a complete non-attachment to it. And so here his formulation is very much in that *via negativa*—the way in which you say what something is by saying what it isn't.

So in the state of enlightenment, state of liberation, and here the big word is non-attachment—in that state of liberation from craving, liberation from wrong identity, there is this end of suffering. So you have to be careful that therefore there's not an interpretation of that in a very negative sense, that there's nothing there anyway—that's the end of it, you enter into this blank, this cessation. You'll come across these words like *nirodha*.

The end of suffering meaning some complete cessation—remember when Christian missionaries first came across Buddhism, they interpreted that just as a clever way of annihilation. Since there was no self, there was no self to be saved, and therefore when you were liberated you were basically—it was a subtle form of annihilation.

So you've always got to counterbalance that with these very clear statements the Buddha makes about *Nibbāna*. He doesn't say *Nibbāna* here. He's keeping clear of that word for the moment. He's just telling us what's not there. Of course, later, when he talks about end of suffering later, he says it's *Nibbāna*. And that *Nibbāna* translates as no desire, but it also translates as not shackled, not binding.

And this refers to something within us which no longer attaches to the world. And that's referring back to this awareness, this *satipaṇṇā*, this awareness, this intuitive awareness. And again he has various ways of pointing to that in that negative way: there is an unborn, undying—this should be not born, not dying, not compounded, not conditioned.

And remember that—I think I've said this before—the word he uses when he talks about that is a specific word in Pali which really translates best as "there exists." So there's two words for "is": *hoti* and *atthi*. *Hoti* is what we would normally use for something like "this is a book" or "there is a book in the other room." But *atthi* translates much stronger—it's actually an existence. "There exists, not born, not that."

Then he talks about it as an *āyatana*, which is a sphere. And remember in his language there are six spheres of experience which relate to the five basic senses and the mind as a sense base. So these create spheres which don't interfere with each other—you can't see through your ears. Then he talks about there is a sphere where none of that exists, where there's no moon, no sun, et cetera, et cetera.

And then he has lovely words like "the island," "the refuge," "home"—things like that, all suggesting something very positive about that particular experience. So whenever you read the scriptures, you always have to remember that his approach to what is, for want of a better word, transcendent—but remember it's right here and now, so it's also immanent. It's right here and now, this possibility.

His preferred way of expressing it is by telling us what it isn't. You have to be careful that in so doing you don't translate it as something which just doesn't exist—some form of a clever way of telling us that we're going to be annihilated because there's no self. Therefore when you get rid of the self there's nobody there—but that wouldn't be correct.

So keeping that in mind, in this particular first discourse where he's first of all expounding for the first time his understanding, he keeps it very simple. He states that the cause of suffering is this desire, this attachment, this identity, and it's when this completely fades away that there is this non-attachment. So that non-attachment equals the end of suffering equals *Nibbāna*.

And when he's questioned—because of this way of expressing *Nibbāna* always in the negative sense—even in his time he is accused of being an annihilationist. And he constantly says the only things to be annihilated are greed, hatred, and delusion. Greed, hatred, and delusion—and the delusion, remember, refers to this identity we have with this psychophysical organism, human being.

So when you're reading the scriptures like this, we always have to remember that his preferred way of talking about that which is transcendent of this world is always in this negative sense.

So this, monks, is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering, the end of suffering, the complete end of suffering. It is the remainderless—there's nothing left—fading away and cessation, complete ending of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-attachment.

I can only hope my words have convinced you that there is an end to suffering and that you will attain that sooner or later.

The Fourth Noble Truth: The Eightfold Path

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

*In this talk from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11) series, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Fourth Noble Truth: the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering. He explains how the path traditionally organized into *sīla* (ethics), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) actually begins with Right View—understanding the Four Noble Truths and the three characteristics of existence.*

Bhante emphasizes the Buddha's ethical perspective: all suffering stems from the fundamental mistake of identifying ourselves as human beings seeking happiness in the sensual world. This wrong view leads to greed, aversion, and delusion. Right View must penetrate from intellectual understanding into the heart as compassion, then manifest through Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.

The final three factors—Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Concentration—operate both in formal meditation practice and daily life mindfulness. Rather than watching ourselves objectively during activities, we practice absorption into wholesome action with attention and care. This integrated approach shows how the Eightfold Path can lead to liberation through multiple entry points, whether through wisdom or through the heart of loving-kindness.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa —
Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully Self-Enlightened One.

So we've been through the opening of this *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, which if you remember rightly means turning the wheel of the law. It's the first discourse that the Buddha gave, or at least it states the basic platform of his teaching which were the Four Noble Truths. And we went through the first noble truth which explains the truth of suffering, the second one is the cause of suffering, and the third one is the cessation of suffering, the end of suffering. So the fourth one is the noble path leading to the end of suffering.

And that noble path is right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The normal way that this is expressed is through these three divisions: *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, which means the ethical life, ethics, the meditation — meditation as a practice but also as something

that subsists through our lives — and wisdom. It turns it around really, because the path comes wisdom first, then right effort, and then the meditation. So we'll do it the way it comes here anyway.

This right view, this right understanding, refers specifically to these Four Noble Truths and especially to the three characteristics. So it's actually seeing impermanence, becoming more and more aware of the impermanent nature of our existence, seeing the role of desire. Remember, this is the wrong desire. We're not talking about the desire to meditate, anything like that. We're talking about desire which is seeking happiness in the sensual world — seeking happiness in the sensual world.

You have to remember that the Buddha ethicized everything. From the Buddha's point of view, everything was an ethical problem. These days we don't see it like that. We see from psychotherapy, we see it as a medical problem, a mental problem. From the Buddha's point of view, everything is an ethical problem. And the reason is that right at the beginning, somewhere, we made this mistake. And the mistake is one of identity. This identity means that we consider ourselves to be human beings. This is a really very deep and profound mistake.

Thinking ourselves to be human beings, we're now trying to seek happiness in the human world, which is the sensual world. Now, as soon as we seek happiness in the sensual world, we begin to accumulate, become acquisitive, and that turns to greed. When you gain something and hold something, somebody else wants it, so you've got to protect it. So you're into aversion, you're into hatred, you're into conflict. And if the other person's too big, you run for it, you interfere. So you've got these three fundamental positions. You've got one of acquisitiveness, collecting, greed, because that makes you feel safe. The more money in the bank you've got, the more safe you feel. And aversion and fear.

So there's your basic stance in life from the point of view of this wrong understanding. And therefore all our problems arise from that. On the positive side, of course, we have compassion, love, sympathetic joy and peace. And, of course, that takes us away from our problems. Then we form a very different relationship to life.

So, from the Buddha's point of view, all our suffering is based on this wrong understanding which produces an ethical situation. And that's why what we do is what determines our future. So this right view — that's what it means. It's beginning to understand that. And the other part of right view is to understand that the world we live in is the world that we create. There's no objective world — that's a myth that came up with our 18th century enlightenment and science. But the world that we experience doesn't

have any objectivity. It's completely created by us. And we create an illusion that we can see the world as it is. But these days neurobiology is proving without any shadow of a doubt that we can only see the world the way we see it, within our own heads.

So once you realize that, then you realize that whatever information is coming in through the senses, what we do with it is completely up to us. So if we're living in an awful world, that's our problem. It's not anybody else's problem. And then we have to find a way out. So that's what we generally mean by this right view.

Now this right view, when it becomes a right view, not a wrong view, it's no good having it up there in the sky as an understanding. It has to penetrate, and the first penetration is into the heart, and that manifests as an attitude. And that's the second part. So it's no good saying, "Oh yes, everything's interconnected and interdependence" and then go around shooting people. It's got to descend into the heart as some form of interconnectedness, which means compassion. So that from the heart's point of view, interconnectedness is love, interconnectedness is compassion, sympathetic joy. If it doesn't, it just remains this cold philosophical idea that everybody's connected.

Now once it's moved into the heart, again it's a waste of time — it has to move out into the body. Once it moves into the body it begins to express itself. So that's where you get right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Now this right livelihood isn't strictly necessary because in a sense it's included in action, but the Buddha puts it there. And you've only got to consider what qualities your livelihood develops — what qualities livelihood develops in a person. So I mean just think of the qualities of a policeman: suspicious. And a teacher — a teacher always asks questions they can answer. They never ask one they can't answer. There's all sorts. So your profession, what you actually do, has a direct effect upon your character, your personality. Especially when you think that you spend probably the best energy of your life in it — eight hours a day, whatever it is. So you can see it has a direct effect. So he puts it as quite separate.

And perhaps another reason is that it's through livelihood that we act in the world. And that's our *kamma*. So that's how we go from right understanding into a right attitude and out through the world into right speech, right action, right livelihood.

Now the last three are to do with our mental state, state of awareness, and that's right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This right effort of course is this right mindfulness you've got to catch. In our meditation we have this objective position within us where we're trying to investigate the psychophysical organism and try to find out what we're doing wrong, why we're so miserable. Now that's not what you take into daily life. Into daily life, you're not trying to watch yourself. When you're doing a job,

when you're washing the pot, you're not trying to watch yourself wash the pots. If you do that, you just break a few and get very angry with yourself. You can't watch yourself adding up bills. You get them all wrong.

So you're not trying to take that objective position. You're trying to absorb into your action. And to absorb into your action in a way that isn't going to cause you suffering. So there are two qualities that you have to develop. This sense of attention. So that's your *samādhi*. That's your concentration. It's got to have the right attitude. So it's coming from care. The job itself you're doing has to be wholesome in itself, and you put yourself into it.

Now as you're doing something — say gardening, even a hobby like gardening — you might become aware of yourself as of a general self-awareness. So that arises naturally. We're not trying to develop that. Then you put your attention into the work. Now if you've gone into that work with attention and care and you absorb into that work, you lose a sense of self — there's nobody there doing it — and you lose a sense of time. So self and time are the same thing. Time, existence, self, they're all there as an objectivity which takes us out of the moment.

Now you can't help coming out of the moment and becoming self-aware, but you're not developing that. You're trying to develop this absorption, putting yourself right into what you're doing. Now, when you absorb into what you're doing, you are developing the qualities that that job is demanding. So, if you go into it with greed, if you go into it with indulgence, you come out with a dependency. And if you go into it with a pure heart, you come out with a pure heart.

So that's why it's so important that when you start a job, you just stop for a moment, get your attitude right — right attitude. Your understanding right. And then you give yourself to the job. And that's mindfulness in ordinary daily life.

And the purpose of the sitting meditation is to establish that sense of awareness, a sense of mindfulness within ourselves, so that in a sense, throughout daily life, there's also a connection with ourselves. So that we see, for instance, if you're talking to somebody, you're there with the first rising of irritation, just before you hit them. You can feel the little movement in the heart, because you're there. It doesn't move, it just stays there. But often, because we're not aware of it, it's growing up here around the back, and then suddenly you find yourself shouting your head off.

So, to be like that, you've also got to be very relaxed. There's lots of — it's dreadful trying to develop this stuff. So you can see this Eightfold Path is actually to be taken both — the last bit, the right concentration, right effort, right mindfulness, goes to one

side in terms of a process of self-investigation, which we call *vipassanā*, insight and all that, and the other side is this mindfulness that we take into right speech, right action, right livelihood. Now it all turns on itself.

Now you can see that from the Buddha's point of view, being a Buddha, one who knows, his own liberation came through an investigation. So that's why right view is at the top, the right investigation. But there are definite signs in the scriptures — I'm just now trying to gather all the information for this — that the same path of liberation can come through love, can come through the heart. And when it comes through the heart, it comes also through action. So this Eightfold Path revolves on itself. There's an entry point to enlightenment from any of these eight points.

In the discourse on how to develop *mettā*, this mindfulness, he ends off by saying, "By living with the heart of goodwill and mindfulness, you won't have to come back for another rebirth." In other words, that's the path to liberation also. And it's something that, I have to say, in Theravāda has been subdued a lot.

That ends this little section on the fourth one, the path leading to liberation, the path leading to enlightenment. And the next talk, the last one, I'll just read through because it ends up with a wonderful crescendo at the end, which we shall leave till next week.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your deep understanding of the Eightfold Path, liberate yourselves from all suffering sooner rather than later.

The Buddha's Awakening Becomes Universal

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this concluding episode of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta series, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's threefold instruction for each Noble Truth: understanding suffering, abandoning its cause, realizing cessation (Nibbāna), and developing the path. The talk examines the Buddha's systematic approach through three phases of knowledge—intellectual, reflective, and direct insight through vipassanā.

The episode highlights the profound moment when Venerable Koṇḍañña attains the 'dust-free, stainless vision of Dhamma,' realizing that 'whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.' This marks the first person to understand the Buddha's teaching, transforming his personal awakening into a universal possibility. Bhante explains how Nibbāna represents the 'unbinding of consciousness' from attachment and desire, using the ancient understanding of fire returning to its potential state.

The talk concludes with the cosmic celebration as devas throughout all realms proclaim that the unsurpassable wheel of Dhamma has been set in motion, emphasizing how one person's insight opens the path of liberation for all beings. A inspiring conclusion to this foundational discourse series.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we've now got to the end of this discourse, the Turning of the Wheel of the Law, and we've been through the opening where he's pointing out what the Middle Path is. It's not to do with indulging in the wonders of life, nor is it to do with some form of self-mortification. We went through the Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the reason for suffering, the cause of suffering, the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering which is *Nibbāna*, and the path.

So now he tells us what to do with each of these Noble Truths. The first one is, of course, just a basic statement. He then tells us what we have to do, and then he tells us that he's done it. So he says, this is the Noble Truth of suffering. The Noble Truth of suffering is to be fully understood.

Remember that the understanding is in three phases. It's both in the phase of something that you hear and understand. And then it's the phase of understanding it because you yourself have reflected on it, so it's become your own intellectual knowledge. And then it's understood at a deeper level by direct experience through *vipassanā*, through insight. So that's what he means when he says the Noble Truth of suffering is to be fully understood.

Then he says, the Noble Truth of suffering has been fully understood by him. Thus, monks, in regard to things unheard of before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration and light.

Then he again states it: this is the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering. You can translate it also as the cause of suffering. So this Noble Truth of the origin of suffering has to be abandoned. The cause of suffering is desire. Now remember, it's a desire which is based on seeking happiness in the wrong place, seeking happiness in the sensual world.

When the Buddha says the sensual world, he means anything to do with what we experience, because the senses, remember, are basically your five normal senses. It's also the mind. So when he talks about the sensual world, he's also talking about these absorptions. So it's anything in the phenomenal world that has to be abandoned. Remember, it's not that they're destroyed; it's just that it's the desire that has to be abandoned for them, arising from this wrong relationship.

And then he states quite clearly: the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned. He's done it.

Then he says: this is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering. Now the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized. In other words, this one is the realization of *Nirvāna*. It's an experience. It's an actual experience of something which just simply doesn't belong to this phenomenal world. It's something beyond it, and that's what *Nibbāna* is.

Nibbāna itself, remember, is a word which was used with fire, with heat. So he's talking about consciousness. He's talking about the way consciousness wraps itself around something, gets stuck on something. And when he talks about the light going out, the fire going out, the flame going out—*Nibbāna*—he's always talking about the release of consciousness.

Remember that in those days, the physics wasn't the same as ours. The idea was that you had a fuel and that when you did certain things to this fuel, it drew the fire element from the universe. So if you rub two sticks together, you're actually beckoning this fire

element to congeal around the wood. And when of course the wood finished, what happened to the fire element? It didn't die out; it just went back into that state of potential.

So *Nibbāna* is that unbinding of consciousness. It's the unbinding of it, the release of it. And how does that tightness manifest? Desire, attachment. Simple, isn't it?

And then he says, of course, that this Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized. Thus, monks, in regard to things unheard of before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration and light.

And then the fourth Noble Truth is a simple statement: this Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed. The Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed. So in other words, the process of moving from a state of unenlightenment, a state of unhappiness, to a state of happiness is to be developed. In other words, it's gradual, and he's very insistent that the process is gradual.

It's very rare for somebody just to make it just like that. Remember the story of Bāhiya of the bark cloth. Now Bāhiya, of course, was enlightened just upon hearing this immediate teaching that in the hearing there's only the hearing, in the seeing there's only the seeing, in the cognizing there's only the cognizing. But then you have to remember he'd been living with this bark cloth for years and being separated from the world, not indulging in Costa Coffee or anything like that.

And so then he says: this Noble Truth leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed. Thus, monks, in regard to things unheard of before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration and light.

And then there's this lovely section: So long, monks, as my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths, as they really are, in the three phases and twelve aspects, was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world, with its *deva*, *mara* and *brahma*, in this population, with its ascetics and brahmins, its *devas* and humans. But when my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths, as they really are, in their three phases and twelve aspects, was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its *devas*, *mara* and *brahma*, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its *devas* and humans.

The knowledge and vision arose in me: unshakable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed becoming. Unshakable is the liberation of my mind.

This is what the Blessed One said. Elated, the monks of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the *Dhamma*: whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.

So here while he's speaking, one of his old companions has an insight into this impermanence. And he sees that whatever arises passes away. And it's deep enough for him to have a change in the way that he relates to the world.

Now when the Wheel of the *Dhamma* had been set in motion by the Blessed One—this is the crescendo bit, you're waiting—and when the Wheel of the *Dhamma* had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth-dwelling *devas* raised a cry: At Baranasi, in the deer park of Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the *Dhamma* has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic, or brahmin, or *deva*, or *mara*, or *brahma*, or by anyone in this world.

And having heard the cry of the earth-dwelling *devas*, the *devas* of the realm of the four great kings raised the cry. And having raised the cry, the *devas* of the realm of the four great kings, the Tavatimsa *devas*, the Yama *devas*, the Tusita *devas*, the *devas* who delight in creating, the *devas* who wield power over others' creations, the *devas* of Brahma's company raised a cry: At Baranasi in the deer park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the *Dhamma* had been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or brahmin or *deva* or *mara* or *brahma* or by anyone in this world.

Moving, isn't it?

Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the Brahma world, and this ten-thousand-world system shook, quaked and trembled, and an immeasurable great radiance, surpassing the divine majesty of the *devas*, appeared in the world.

Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: Kondañña has indeed understood, Kondañña knows. In this way, the Venerable Kondañña acquired the name Añña Kondañña—Kondañña, the one who knows.

Good stuff, eh?

Now, I think it's just good to reflect on that moment there when the Buddha realizes that Kondañña actually understands. So remember, not so long before this, he's had this experience of liberation, complete liberation, and he wants to teach it and he has a doubt as to whether anybody can grasp the subtlety of this. So now here he is, he's met

his companions and he's given them this teaching, and one person actually—he recognizes one person has actually had this insight into impermanence which he sees as liberating. He sees that actually Kondañña has made a glimpse into *Nibbāna*.

Now anybody who's done any teaching, even if it's just to your children or to somebody at work and you've been explaining something and they've had a bit of difficulty understanding and then suddenly they grasp it—doesn't joy arise in your heart? So one can only imagine the immeasurable reciprocal joy, the *mudita* that the Buddha must have felt when he realized that one of his old companions had actually made this insight. Because what had been a personal experience now becomes universal. If Kondañña can do it, so can everybody else.

So it's just that little bit of the ending contemplation of the great joy within the Buddha when he realizes that in fact other people can grasp it, other people can be liberated. So I can only hope that this has also been an inspiration for you and that our little exegesis concerning the first discourse of the Buddha will inspire you to further effort and that you will be liberated from all your suffering sooner rather than later.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.

Not-Self - Control

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this opening talk on the Second Discourse on Not-Self, Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the Anattalakkhana Sutta, delivered by the Buddha to his five companions after the first turning of the Dhamma wheel. This profound discourse systematically deconstructs the notion of self through examining the five khandhas (aggregates).

Bhante begins by contextualizing the historical understanding of 'self' (attā) in the Brahminical tradition - as the center of power with complete control, permanence, and perpetual happiness. The Buddha's revolutionary approach was not to make metaphysical statements about the existence or non-existence of self, but to use it as a teaching tool, asking: if the self has ultimate power, where is the evidence?

Focusing on rūpa (form/body), Bhante explores how our physical experience demonstrates anattā (not-self). Despite superficial control, we cannot command our body to remain at peak condition, prevent illness, or direct the countless unconscious processes occurring within us. Through examining our relationship with the body and the four mahābhūta (great elements), practitioners learn to investigate the quality of control - or lack thereof - as a gateway to understanding the fundamental characteristic of not-self.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So now the Buddha had made this amazing breakthrough and he'd wondered whether people would be able to understand what he'd discovered. Overcoming his doubt, he sought his five companions. These are the ascetics that he'd been with for a few years practicing austerity. Remember when he approached them, they didn't really want to see him. He'd gone soft, so they said. When he started talking to them, it doesn't come up actually in the discourse on the turning of the wheel of the law – that's more formalised – but in the *Vinaya*, which is the rule of the monks where it describes things a bit more, he says that as he's giving that talk he's constantly asking them: Have you ever heard me speak like this before? Have you ever heard me say these things before?

By the end of that first discussion that he'd had, in which he laid down the platform of his understanding – the Four Noble Truths – that there is suffering, *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness, which is pretty straightforward, pretty obvious. The cause of it is this desire, which translates as seeking happiness in the sensual world, seeking happiness in this phenomenal world – that's a big problem. The third noble truth says that there is an end to suffering, and it is when this particular desire is completely eradicated. Then, of course, he goes on to the path: right understanding, right attitude, right intention. There's right speech, right action, right livelihood. So you've got to bring it right into daily life. And then there's the meditation: right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Now after he'd spoken, presumably in the morning, it was said that they all went off to get some food. They all went off on alms rounds. Having come back and had a little lunch to revive their spirits and had a little kip, as you do, they got together again and the Buddha is said to have delivered this particular sermon on the characteristic of non-self, the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*.

What I'll do first is just read it straight through so that you get the gist of it. It's not very long, of course. Then we'll go back and have a look at what he's saying.

Before I start, Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation – this is the book "In the Buddha's Words" – is literal and sometimes a little difficult in style, but he's trying to be as close to the text as possible. As we go through the text, then you'll see there are other ways of expressing things.

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Bārānasi, which is Benares, present day Benares, in the deer park at Isipatana. Now there the Blessed One addressed the monks of the group of five. "Thus, monks." "Venerable sir," those monks replied, and the Blessed One said this:

"Monks, form is non-self. For if, monks, form were self, this form would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to determine of form: 'Let my form be thus, let my form not be thus.' But because form is not self, form leads to affliction and it is not possible to determine of form: 'Let my form be thus, let my form not be thus.'

"Feeling is not self. Perception is not self. Volitional formations are non-self. And consciousness is non-self."

Now for those of you who know the five *khandhas* and who have been diligently attending these talks will remember that this is the way the Buddha looks at our experience through these five heaps.

For each of them, and we'll just repeat the one about consciousness, he says the same thing: "For if, monks, consciousness were self, this consciousness would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to determine of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus.' But because consciousness is non-self, consciousness leads to affliction and it is not possible to determine of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus.'"

"Now what do you think, monks: is form permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, venerable sir." "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" "Suffering, venerable sir." "Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is myself?'" "No, venerable sir."

"Is feeling permanent or impermanent? Is perception permanent or impermanent? Are volitional formations permanent or impermanent? Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, venerable sir." "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" "Suffering, venerable sir." "Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is myself?'" "No, venerable sir."

"Therefore, monks, any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all form should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.'

"Any kind of feeling whatsoever, any kind of perception whatsoever, any kind of volitional formations, any kind of consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all consciousness should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.'

"Seeing thus, monks, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with volitional formations, disenchanted with consciousness. And becoming disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, his mind is liberated. And when it is liberated, there comes the knowledge it's liberated. He understands: 'Destroyed is birth. The spiritual life has been lived. What had to be done has been done, and there is no more coming back to any state of being.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of those monks of the group of five were liberated from the taints by non-clinging.

There we are, you see. Anybody liberated? You see, it's the way you say it, it's the way he said it, I reckon. I don't have it, you see. Now liberated from the taint by non-clinging.

As I say, some of the words he uses are debatable, but we can first of all begin by taking from this discourse what exactly was understood at the time by a self.

We're going back now to the Brahminical tradition, which predates what we call Hinduism. Remember at that time there was also a great change in their way of thinking. The Vedanta was being completed. The Upanishads were just being written, well, made up, created. They were coming out of the ritualistic way of living through the Rig Veda, coming to understand that ritual didn't actually bring results. This great movement at that time of people going into the forests and living the ascetic life was all part of this loss of confidence, existential problem. Remember you've got to put that in context of the whole axial age because the same thing, similar things happening in China with Lao Tzu, in Greece with Socrates, and Moses. Probably all over another part of the world that we don't know of. The whole of human consciousness was moving, you see. Really the big message of the age was do unto others as you would have them do unto you, not do unto others before they do unto you.

Now what was understood by a self at that time? The self was the centre of power of itself. The whole idea of a self was that you were in complete control – that's the first thing, we'll come back to it. The second thing was that it was permanent, it wasn't changing, it was always the same. The third one was that it was happy, it was always happy.

If you think about it, if you have complete power over your being, then you could say to yourself: "From now on I'm going to be happy," and that'd be it, that'd be the end of it, wouldn't it? You would be happy all the time. That would presume a state of continuity, a state of absolute continuity. So this was the idea of a soul, an *attā* as understood at that time. We have to remember that, yeah?

I presume that you get a similar explanation of spirit or soul in other religious traditions. What he's doing now – he is not saying, and this is a really important point – nowhere in the scriptures do you see him saying there is no self. There's never a metaphysical statement. He never goes that far. It's a teaching tool. He's asking: If the self is the centre of power and has complete power over what it thinks it is, and if it is permanent, and if it is always happy, then where is it?

Now he's asking us: The first thing is form is non-self. This word form, remember, is referring to the body. In a more subtle sense, it's more to do with the experience of the body at its sense base. There we go into those four great elements, the *mahābhūta*,

which we've also done, and which of course you'll all remember: fire, earth, water and air, which refer to the properties of temperature, the property of pressure or lack of it, the property of movement and the property of cohesion or elasticity. It is understood that you can reduce all sensations down to some combination of these – even sight, which would be more the fire element. We know that the ear for instance is basically a pressure point. There's no sound as such. There's no sound in the universe. There are simply waves, waves of pressure. In your meditation you can get down to that.

When it comes to the more difficult senses like tasting and smelling, even so, these are said to be combinations of these four.

Now, we'll just do this one, and we'll sort of draw it to the end there. What he's saying is: Is this body a self? If it were a self, then it wouldn't lead to affliction. It wouldn't lead to suffering or unsatisfactoriness. So the question is: Are you in a state of continual satisfaction with your body? No.

He says, "Right, well it can't be that." He says, "Is it possible to say then to this body: From now on, you will remain at the age of 30, and you will not move?" Or whatever age you felt to be at your most greatest physical prowess. Then he's saying, if not, if you can't say that, and you can't say "Let it be this, let it not be that," then it must be – it can't be a self. It must be, it cannot be something over which you can say you have power.

So that's what he's saying. He's asking us to always recognise that the body, although we have superficial control over it, fundamentally we have very little control over it. If it falls seriously ill, when it falls ill, it just falls ill. We don't even know what's happening in the body. I mean, have you any idea now what your liver is doing? You might know intellectually, you might have read about it, but actually, can you now know what your liver is doing? Are you aware that red blood corpuscles are moving out of the marrow of your bone and into your bloodstream?

See, it's a completely weird state we're in. This is the first argument that he puts to us. That if we think, if we ask ourselves, "Who am I?" or "What am I?" one way to look at it is: Am I in control of it? Is it completely within my power? That's all.

Next week we'll revise that by going through the others. A bit more to be said about that too.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May, through your careful investigation of the quality of power over your body, lead you to liberation from suffering sooner rather than later.

Not-self — Impermanence and Suffering

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this second talk on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59), Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the Buddha systematically deconstructed the notion of self through examining impermanence and unsatisfactoriness in the five khandhas (aggregates). The teaching reveals how our ordinary perception of continuity masks the radical impermanence that characterizes all experience — where each moment arises completely anew rather than flowing from the previous one.

The Buddha's method is presented as a logical progression: first establishing that we cannot control the khandhas (body, feelings, perceptions, saṅkhāras, and consciousness), then showing their impermanent nature, and finally demonstrating how this impermanence leads to dukkha when we cling to what cannot be grasped. Bhante explains how our expectation of continuity creates the conditions for suffering, and how recognizing the momentary nature of experience begins to undermine our solid sense of self.

This talk offers practical insight into the three characteristics (tilakkhana) — impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā) — showing how they work together in the Buddha's graduated teaching method. Essential listening for understanding the fundamental structure of Buddhist insight meditation and the path to liberation from the delusion of selfhood.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, the discourse on not-self that the Buddha gave at the old deer park in Isipatana, which is near modern Benares, to the five companions — if you remember, he makes the point concerning the self that it has to be in control, because it's not me, not mine. Remember in those days the Brahminical tradition or the general understanding was that the soul was in control and it could do what it wanted with itself. So the question was then: well, what was it? That was one of the definitions.

And he goes through the five *khandhas*. So remember the five khandhas, the five aggregates, are the way he splits up, deconstructs the human being into five parts. The body with its sensations, perceptions — that's the basic mental process of perceiving through the senses. Feelings in the body which are coming both from the body itself

and from our emotional life, whereby we discern the world as either pleasant or unpleasant, some shade of unpleasantness or pleasantness. These *sankhāra* — now these *sankhāra*, remember, are what we construct or what we create with our will. So that's our emotional thought life. And finally, consciousness.

And it's the consciousness which is — sometimes it's a little bit confusing in the descriptions. It's either the consciousness which is a basic act of cognition. It's like the screen of a TV, where the input is put into a picture. Sometimes it's understood as that. Other times it's understood as discriminative consciousness. So what can tell between blue and red and things like that, so it can discriminate. In higher faculties of course it's philosophy and art, but it's the same consciousness that discriminates, compares, et cetera. So he's asking: are we in control of these things? Do we have that total control which would be a definition of a self?

And just very simply: if we were in control of the body, then you'd be able to stop it growing old for a start. At least that's the first thing I'd do.

So having made that point now, he now goes on to the next thing, and the discussion carries on like this. It's more like a catechism: "What do you think, monks? Is form — so that's the body — permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, Venerable Sir." "And is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" "Suffering, Venerable Sir." "Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: this is mine, this I am, this is myself?" "No, Venerable Sir."

So here's the points he makes. So just thinking about the body — and remember the body also here refers to the sense bases and that basic act of contact with the world at the physical level. In other words, at the physical bodily level rather than smelling or tasting and all that, the contact is — remember — split into four different types: the feeling of hardness or softness, pressure; feeling of some sort of warmth, heat, fire, cold; feeling of movement, some sort of movement; and a more subtle feeling of cohesion, elasticity, which you might sometimes get in the breath when you're breathing, feeling of expansion, like a concertina. So that's what he's referring to.

And his first question is: is it permanent? So that was another definition of the self, the *attā* — it was permanent. So is it permanent? So you can't be the body. Then he asks, then he links — if it's impermanent, is it suffering or not suffering? Is it suffering or happiness?

Now in the three characteristics which we investigate in order to become fully liberated — because these three characteristics are the way in which we are deluded by the world, or we delude ourselves — the first one is this impermanence. So we tend to see,

at least if not permanency, we see continuity. So thinking about the body, we tend to feel it as some sort of continuous body. So the body I've got now is the same as I had this morning. But we know that every seven years there's a complete change of atoms. So what we tend to do is form this continuity.

It's the same with time. Remember there are acts of cognition — momentary acts of cognition. They're like a blinking. So one picture is put into the mind as to what we're looking at, and then before the next picture can arise, that picture has to go away. So actually, when you get down to how consciousness works, it's stroboscopic. But we don't experience that. What we experience is flow. So that's exactly the same as the old films — we experience it as flow, but actually there's twenty-five or something per second of these frames.

And so this impermanence he's talking about isn't the sense of something in a constant state of change, as you might, for instance, get a piece of clay, mold it into a cup, then fiddle around with it, then mold it into a saucer. So it's the same piece of clay. No, every moment is absolutely created from the beginning. That's what the Buddha's meaning of impermanence is. So it's not change in the way that we would think of change. It's not some sort of continuity. A moment arises, a moment arises, a moment disappears. That's it. There's obviously a connection with the past, but the past has been completely ended for this new moment to begin.

Now, when we say moments, remember, we're never really talking about the world out there. We're talking about how we experience the world. We are completely and entirely dependent upon our senses and brain as to how we experience the world. And what he's saying is that this is how it works. So when he's saying "is it impermanent," he means "is it radically impermanent?" Yes, it is.

Now, where does the suffering come from? So we first of all perceive things as continuous. When you realize it's not continuous, then you realize that you've been holding on to something. It brings out a certain expectation. So that's why when somebody dies suddenly, it comes as a shock. You don't expect it. Continuity gives you expectation. So wherever we believe something to be in any way permanent, even if it's only in a short time, there's always the possibility of suffering.

So those three characteristics, when they're taught, they're always taught with impermanence first, suffering second, and then not-self. And that's exactly how he puts it here. So "is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" "Suffering, Venerable Sir." "Is what is impermanent and suffering and subject to change" — that's another way of saying impermanent — "can we say this is mine? Can I say that I possess something which

doesn't exist only for a moment and then that's gone? Can I say this is me, I am this? Can I say this is myself?" — in other words, my soul, my eternal soul. "No, Venerable Sir."

So the key is impermanence. The key is to see impermanence, and through impermanence you begin to connect with the suffering that arises because we expect things to continue. And we see that through impermanence there's nothing solid there, there's nothing substantial. And that begins to undermine our ideas of who we are.

Then, of course, he goes through the next four khandhas, the next four aggregates, as they're called. So there's feeling, the same thing. Which feeling are you? If you say, "I am my emotions, I am my emotional life, that's what I really am. I am what I feel," so which one are you going to be? You can't expect an emotion, can you? You don't go to bed and think, "Well, tomorrow I shall determine to wake up depressed." You wake up depressed. You wake up happy. There's absolutely no control after you've been to sleep as to how you wake up. If you're the type that wakes up very beautifully — so I had this elderly lady come to see me today, and she says she always wakes up bright. She's very lucky because she knows all these people wake up depressed, but she says all her life, apart from the occasional hard time, she said, "I always wake up full of life, full of wanting to go." I said to her, "You are blessed."

So there's feeling, and we ask ourselves: well, why do I say "I am sad"? What is this "I"? What is it? Why do I so associate with, identify with my emotions when they're impermanent, and that identity causes me suffering?

Then of course there's perception. So all the things that we perceive, they're also to be understood as impermanent. And if we believe our perceptions — if you take perceptions up the ladder, what *saññā* is, perception, it's the holding of first of all a percept, but as your thought gets more and more complicated, it becomes conceptual. And that becomes the percept, the perception with which you see the world through. So if you say to yourself, "I am a socialist" or something, that's it, you're blocked, you can't move. You're frozen into a definition. Now that's not true if you say you're a Buddhist. I'll come to that after the talk.

And then there's the volitional formations. It's just a way of trying to translate this word *sankhāra* — it's difficult. All it means is our emotional thought life which we create through our acts of will. Every time you remember you pay attention to something, there's an act of intention involved, and an intention is the beginning of an act of will. So you might hear something as you walk into your house — somebody's there, something — and you hear something, you hear the TV, and you put your attention there. And with that attention, which is an intention, you intend to listen. There arises a desire

to watch the TV, and you go and watch TV. It's like — so every time, remember, every time you attend to something, there's also an act of intention. That's why it's conditioning. So these are all the sankhāras, and he asks exactly the same question: are they permanent, and so on.

And then finally, consciousness itself. Consciousness here itself is not a sort of suffering in the sense that one is aware of it. One is aware of suffering. Consciousness itself isn't suffering — it's just the awareness of suffering. And therefore we can say that there is suffering; we know there is suffering.

So then he goes on. He says, "Therefore, monks" — by the way, this translation of *bhikkhu* translates as monks, but the commentaries tell us that this means all people who are listening to the Dharma. What do you call that figure of speech when you say "all hands on deck"? I can't remember what it is — "any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all form should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom, thus: this is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself." And he says the same with feeling, with perception, volitional formations, and consciousness.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all suffering, even impermanent suffering, sooner rather than later.

Not-self - Recap and Metaphors

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19 min

In this dharma talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma continues his exploration of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59), the Buddha's second discourse on the characteristic of not-self (anattā). He begins by recapping the Buddha's logical argument that nothing in our experience can be considered a 'self' because we lack complete control over body and mind, and because all phenomena are impermanent and therefore unsatisfactory.

The heart of this teaching features the Buddha's famous metaphors from the Pheṇapīṇḍūpama Sutta, where he compares the five khandhas to: foam on the Ganges (form/body), water bubbles (feeling), desert mirages (perception), banana tree trunks with no heartwood (saṅkhāras), and magical illusions (consciousness). These powerful images reveal how our experience, while appearing substantial, is actually 'void, hollow, and insubstantial' when carefully investigated.

Bhante explains how insight into these three characteristics of existence—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self—leads to disenchantment, then dispassion, and ultimately liberation. He emphasizes that this doesn't lead to emotional numbness but to contentment and joy—qualities of the awakened mind. Practical guidance is offered for daily life, encouraging moments of non-clinging when compulsions arise. This teaching skillfully weaves together intellectual understanding with vivid imagery, making the profound truth of anattā accessible to modern practitioners.

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namō tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namō tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we've been going through this *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, the discourse on the characteristic of not-self. And if you remember, the first teaching is concerning control. If this is me, then I should be able to do what I want with it. This is a key understanding at that time as to what a soul or a self was. A soul or a self was completely in control of itself.

So if you look at any part of our experience as a human being, whether it's the body or thoughts or emotions, you can see from this sitting that we've just done that they arise of themselves. Even though we have a certain control, we discover that actually we don't have total control. And the argument would be if you can't control it, it's not

you. It's got another centre. It's got its own centre of control. But he also points out that even that is not a self, as if it were something substantial. It's also something ephemeral, changing.

And that's the next point. The next point about the soul or the self is that it's permanent. So if we look at any of our experience, whether it's physical, mental, emotional, it arises and passes away. So it can't be a soul or a self or anything permanent. And that would be one of the definitions of a soul or a self. That's the point. It's how you define a soul or a self.

And then, of course, he asks the question, well, if it's impermanent, does that bring a sense of dissatisfaction or satisfaction? Well, it's unsatisfactory, isn't it? It might be satisfactory if something is painful and then it passes away. But when it's happy, we can't hold on to it. That's also unsatisfactory.

So in the discourse here, he's actually explaining these three characteristics of existence. They're the fundamental characteristics of existence that he's pointing to, to discover our true nature. When we perceive things as they really are, we also begin to see what there really is.

Now what I want to do is to read another discourse which gives another side of the Buddhist teachings, because this is an intellectual exposition but he also has a way of expressing things through imagery. We'll come to that, but in this particular discourse he gave it to his five companions. So this was after he'd become fully awakened. He searched for them, found them in Benares, present day Varanasi, and at Isipatana, Sarnath, excuse me, Sarnath, is the Deer Park.

And so the story goes, when he gave them a talk, then they went on alms round, and after they'd eaten and had a rest, he gave this talk, and all of them became fully liberated. And I just want to read the end of it, which gives you the formula in which this is said.

So, seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with form, that's the body as well, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perceptions, disenchanted with volitional formations, so those are your thoughts and emotions, and disenchanted with consciousness. See, that word disenchanted, no longer caught up in the enchantment of the world, you're not bewitched by it.

Now, when we become disenchanted, the next step is to become dispassionate. It doesn't mean to say that you end up being emotionally void, a numb blob. It just means that you don't get passionate about things in the wrong way. Being angry, holding on to things, attachment, you become dispassionate. And it's through this process of dispassion that we're liberated. Dispassion.

So the insight creates a different relationship of disenchantment. This disenchantment affects our relationship with the world, which is the way we experience the world ourselves, which leads to a sense of equanimity, a sense of ease with the world. That's the dispassionate part. And that's, when it's taken to the limit, that's the liberation of the mind. That's the liberation of consciousness. Probably a better word. Although, as you know, the word I prefer is the knowing, that which knows, the Buddha within, the Buddha within.

And once that's done, he understands, it is lovely, destroyed his birth, this rebirth, the spiritual life has been lived, what has been done has been done. Can you feel the relief in that? It's like when you have to redecorate a house and you finish it and it's all very nice and beautiful. And you say what has been done has been done. A sense of relief and satisfaction. There is no more coming back to any state of becoming. This constant rebirthing business.

Now you have to be careful here because at the spiritual level the rebirthing means the recreation of this self which is recreating the wrong relationship to the world. You have to remember that when the Buddha was liberated, he didn't disappear. He was still there. He acted as he was there, fully liberated, walking around as even being. So whenever we read this end of becoming or end of being, as some people translate it, we think of annihilation. It's obviously not.

What's annihilated, the Buddha's clear about this, what is annihilated is that wrong view, the delusion, and with it, all sense of attachment to the world, and all sense of aversion or fear of the world. That's what disappears completely.

And then finally, that is what the Blessed One said, elated, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's statement, and while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of those monks of the group of five were liberated from the taints by non-clinging. Now the taint is just another word of saying all those things in us which are produced by this wrong thinking. And that non-clinging is just another way of saying dispassion.

So you can bring this into your daily life. Every time you have a compulsion to do something, to have that biscuit and a cup of tea, just hang on there. Just wait till it passes away. What's the mind when there's no desire in it? And the more that we move towards that state, the more we're developing the state of contentment. Contentment is a quality of the Buddha mind. Contentment and joy.

So, let's see how he expresses this in imagery. Because he often says there are people for whom imagery works better than an intellectual dry approach. So this is on one occasion, he was dwelling at Ayojjha on the bank of the river Ganges. And there the Blessed One addressed the monks thus. In the scriptures where you come across *bhikkhu*, I can't remember what that figure of speech is called. You know when you say things like all hands on deck, meaning all people. So this is when the commentaries tell us that when the Buddha uses the word monks, he's referring to anybody who's listening.

So suppose that this river Ganges was carrying along a great lump of foam and a man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it and carefully investigate it and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a lump of foam? So too monks, whatever kind of form there is, remember that's the body, whether past or future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near. And the meditator inspects it, ponders it and carefully investigates it and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial for what substance could there be in form?

Now you see we know from our subatomic physics that this body is just a mass of energy. There's nothing substantial in it at all. But that's not how we experience it. You trap your finger in the door, it's definitely got substance. But in reality it's nothing. It's just frazzled energy walking around. Wonderful stuff.

Now suppose that in the autumn when it is raining and the big raindrops are falling, and a water bubble arises and bursts on the surface of the water. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a water bubble? So too, whatever kind of feeling there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, a monk inspects it, ponders it, carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in feeling?

Now, when we have a feeling, it presents itself as something hard. Feeling, say, if you have a pain in the knee or some pain in the body caused by an emotional state. At first, it feels hard because of that identity with it. That's what hardens it. This, you know, I

am suffering. But actually, when you go into this meditation, as we've just done, and you can feel it, you can see there's nothing there. Once you get into the texture of it, it's got no substance. There's nothing in it at all. It's just a passing state of different sensations.

Suppose that in the last month of the hot season, at high noon, a shimmering mirage appears. Now a man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a mirage? So too, monks, whatever kind of perception there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, a monk inspects it, ponders it, carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in perception?

Now when we perceive something, that is a correlative something which is an image in the mind which relates to what you're looking at. So we know that the eye when it's looking at a picture is just moving around at enormous speeds, picking up little pixels. And it's coming back into the brain, into the mind-brain complex, and it's creating a constant picture. And then, in that amazing way, it then projects it back onto the picture. So what we're actually seeing is the picture in the mind being projected onto the picture that we're supposedly looking at. And therefore, it's a mirage. It doesn't actually exist. We're not actually seeing that picture. What we're seeing is what the mind's creating. That's a lovely image of a mirage.

Suppose a man needing heartwood, that's the very middle of the wood of a tree, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, would take a sharp axe and enter a forest. There he would see the trunk of a large banana tree, straight, fresh, without a fruit bud core. He would cut it down at the root, cut off the crown, and unroll the coil. As he unrolled the coil, he would not find even softwood, let alone heartwood. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in the trunk of a banana tree?

So too monks, whatever kind of volitional formations there are, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, a monk inspects them, ponders them, carefully investigates them. And as he investigates them, they appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in volitional formations?

Now, if you think of our emotional thought life, it's layer upon layer isn't it? It's just coming up. You're sitting here and suddenly off on a dream. So if you think of something that makes a little bit more immediate is an onion. As you keep peeling the levels

of an onion, when you get to the middle of it there's nothing there. So all these emotional states we get, all these thought patterns, they're all coming up and they're all just going away and there's nothing in them, there's nothing substantial. Good image.

Now suppose that a magician or a magician's apprentice would display a magical illusion at a crossroads and a man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it and carefully investigate it and it would appear to him to be void, hollow and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a magical illusion? So too monks, whatever kind of consciousness there is, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near. A monk inspects it, ponders it, carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in consciousness?

Now, the English translation here is a bit strange and is not quite right because consciousness has so many meanings these days. Even in the Buddha's discourses the word consciousness is used variously depending on the context and that's the same with other words because he's having to use the concepts of his time to get across his new understanding and there's always that difficulty of trying to say something and being misunderstood because people hear the word and hear it from another position and hear it from another meaning.

So what's understood here is that a perception is some sort of word, a label that we put on things, and it's also some sort of image. So when you see an apple, you have an image of it, and you also have a word for it. And those all congregate to, shall we say, a perceptual process. This perceptual process grows with the subtlety of your thinking. Large concepts like democracy and freedom and all that which remain in the mind as perceptions, conceptions, all this has to, as it were, come forward onto something that we can see. So that would be like a television screen and at that point there's a cognition and that's what he's talking about.

So just as on the screen of your computer, what is it? Is there any substance there? It's just a picture, isn't it? Or when you're watching a film in a cinema. It looks real, but what it is, it's just a screen, as we know with photons and all that, but there's no substance to it. Even a 3D film, there's no substance to it. And that's a lovely, a magical illusion. It's a magical illusion.

Now, it wouldn't be a problem, but we identify with it. We say, I am my consciousness. I think, therefore I am, and all that. That's the problem. But when we discover we're not that, then we become dispassionate about it. We don't get so involved, we don't get so attached to the world, and the suffering disappears.

So now, as usual, he says, when the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted, see this word disenchanted, not being caught up with, form disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with volitional formations, and disenchanted with consciousness. And becoming disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, his mind is liberated. And when it is liberated, there comes the knowledge it is liberated. He understands. Destroyed his birth, the spiritual life has been lived. What had to be done has been done. Oh, what a relief. And there is no more coming back to any state of becoming.

Here ends the discourse on the quality of not-self by the Buddha. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that they will lead you to your liberation sooner rather than later.

01. Sickness, Ageing and Death

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min

In this opening talk from the series on the human condition, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how the Buddha could speak directly about life's harsh realities—sickness, ageing, and death—because he had discovered a way beyond suffering. Through the Buddha's dialogue with King Pasenadi of Kosala, we see how even the most powerful rulers cannot escape mortality through wealth, armies, or political cunning.

The Buddha's teaching reveals that not even arahats—fully awakened beings—are exempt from bodily decay and death, yet they face these realities without being overwhelmed. This discourse emphasizes that when 'ageing and death are rolling in on you,' the only meaningful response is to 'live by the Dharma, live righteously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds.'

Bhante reflects on the Buddha's own experience of loss, including the deaths of his chief disciples Sāriputta and Moggallāna, demonstrating that sadness exists even for the awakened, though without the crushing grip of grief. The episode concludes with the Buddha's memorable verse: 'The beautiful chariots of kings wear out. This body too undergoes decay. But the Dharma of the good does not decay.' This teaching serves as essential groundwork for understanding why we need the Buddhist path.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm continuing these little evening talks using Bhikkhu Bodhi's book, *In the Buddha's Words*, an anthology. I thought to begin at the beginning, instead of going all over the place. It starts off with what he calls the human condition. When the Buddha came to his realisation, he saw an end to this suffering business.

If you can imagine a doctor, the awkwardness of having to tell somebody they have a terminal illness and that there's no chance of it being healed. They might say, "Well, you might last nine months, one year, two years," but the news is really bad. It must be difficult, even if they've done it many times, to actually have to say that to somebody, knowing the shock and the horror that it causes in people. It must be similar if somebody has

a chronic illness, something like rheumatoid arthritis. They have to say to them, "We can't do anything about it, we can give you drugs, but you're stuck with it." Again, there's a despairing note about it and no help.

Very different, of course, if the illness is something they can cure. Then they're very happy to tell you that you'll be suffering miserably and terribly for a month, but at the end, you'll be all right. So when it comes to the harsh conditions of our life, the Buddha can be right in our face with it because he's got an answer. He says, "Well, there is an end to this suffering." So he can be fairly straight on the nose business. These passages just tell you how he doesn't pull his punches.

He's talking here to King Pasenadi. There were two areas where he wandered. He never really went over towards Bengal, towards Calcutta. He stayed within that area, Varanasi, Benares, present-day Benares, all the way up to where his people lived, the Sakyas. He seems to have moved right over towards modern Delhi. He wandered for quite a while. It was all over the place, really. He just kept walking.

There were two kings. One was Pasenadi, who was the ruler of the northern part of that area, the Gangetic plain. There was Bimbisara in the south, who ruled the kingdom of Magadha. Pasenadi, he must have known even as a child, because his people, the Sakyas, would have been under that kingship.

You often hear the tales of the Buddha being the prince of a great king and all that. But actually, it was a small tribe, the Sakyas, who lived on the borders of what is present-day Nepal. His father was the head man. He was the chief and elective. It would have been a more democratic thing – democratic only within that caste, the Kshatriyas, the warrior caste, the rulers. They came under the king of Kosala. The king of Kosala was their lord, you might say. Very feudal. There's no record as to whether they paid duty or anything like that. But anyway, he obviously knows him, and King Pasenadi became a great supporter of his.

He's at the capital, Savatthi, and King Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One: "Venerable Sir, is anyone who is born free from ageing and death?"

"Great King, no one who is born is free from ageing and death. Even those affluent Kshatriyas" – that's the ruling caste – "rich with great wealth and property, with abundant gold and silver, abundant treasures and commodities, abundant wealth and grain, because they've been born, are not free from ageing and death. Even those affluent brahmins and those affluent householders with abundant wealth and grain, because they've been born, they're not free from ageing and death. Even those monks who are arahats, fully liberated, whose taints are destroyed, who've lived the holy life, done

what has to be done, laid down the burdens, reached their own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence and are completely liberated through final knowledge – even for them this body is subject to breaking up, subject to being laid down."

There's no escape. Even somebody who's fully liberated has to go through the horror. Now we know that, for instance, Moggallāna, who was one of his two main disciples and he was known for his powers, was seemingly murdered by bandits. His other great disciple, Sāriputta, seems to have died at home in peace, but it would have been a sad thing for him that both of them died before he went.

When I was in Burma, I saw a beautiful statue with the Buddha sitting and he had his hand pointing towards his heart like that. I'd never seen this mudra – what's the word for mudra? The position, like you get them, well, like this one here, that's the samadhi posture. They said to me it was a sadness he felt when he heard that the two teachers who had brought him so far were dead and he had wanted to pass on his message to them. So this tells us that sadness isn't beyond the Buddha. He's sad, but he's not overwhelmed by it. He's not grieving for it.

There's a little phrase, there's a little verse that he creates: "The beautiful chariots of kings wear out. This body too undergoes decay. But the *Dhamma* of the good does not decay. So the good proclaim along with the good." A little verse just to remind us that the Dhamma is beyond time. It's *akālika*. One of the qualities of the Dhamma is that it exists as a law no matter what time or space you happen to be in.

Then he goes on, and this is quite a long little passage but we'll get through it. At Sāvattḥī in the middle of the day, King Pasenadi of Kosala approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then asked him: "Now where have you come from, great king, in the middle of the day?"

"Just now, Venerable Sir, I've been engaged in those affairs of kingship typical for kings who are intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, who are obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures and who've attained stable control of their country and who rule, having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth."

Intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty. "What do you think, great king? Suppose a man would come to you from the east, one who is trustworthy and reliable, and would tell you: 'For sure, great king, you should know this. I'm coming from the east and there I saw a great mountain high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done, great king.' Then a second man would come to you from the west, and a third from the north, and a fourth from the south, one who is trustworthy and reliable, and would tell you: 'For sure, great king,

you should know this. I'm coming from the south and there I saw a great mountain high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done, great king.' If, great king, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain, what should be done?"

"Oh, if, Venerable Sir, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain, what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma, to live righteously and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

"I inform you, great king, I announce to you, great king: ageing and death are rolling in on you. When ageing and death are rolling in on you, great king, what should be done?"

"As ageing and death are rolling in on me, Venerable Sir, what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma, to live righteously and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds? Venerable Sir, kings intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who've attained stable control of their country and rule over a great sphere of territory, conquer by means of elephant battles, cavalry battles, chariot battles and infantry battles. But there is no hope of victory by such battles, no chance of success when ageing and death are rolling in.

"In this royal court, Venerable Sir, there are counsellors who, when the enemies arrive, are capable of dividing them by subterfuge. There is no hope of victory by subterfuge, no chance of success when ageing and death are rolling in. In this royal court, Venerable Sir, there exists abundant bullion and gold stored in vaults and lofts. With such wealth we are capable of mollifying the enemies when they come. But there is no hope of victory by wealth, no chance of success when ageing and death are rolling in. As ageing and death are rolling in on me, Venerable Sir, what else should I do but live by Dhamma, live righteously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

"So it is, great king, so it is, great king. As ageing and death are rolling in on you, what else should you do but live by Dhamma, live righteously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

This is what the Blessed One said. We can only hope that his words have some effect upon us and that we will live righteously and according to the Dhamma. May you be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

02. Divine Messengers

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this teaching from the Devadūta Sutta (MN 130), Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's discourse on the three divine messengers: old age, sickness, and death. Drawing parallels to the Buddha's own awakening story, he explores how these universal experiences serve as profound reminders of our shared human condition.

The talk delves into the deeper workings of kamma, emphasizing how our actions create ripples both externally in our relationships and internally in our mental states. Bhante particularly highlights how seemingly small acts - respect for parents, elders, and spiritual teachers - carry significant karmic weight, shaping the world we create around ourselves.

Rather than viewing these divine messengers as causes for despair, Bhante shows how mindful awareness of impermanence can awaken us to life's preciousness. By contemplating aging, illness, and death not morbidly but wisely, we learn to treasure each moment and relationship more deeply. This teaching offers practical guidance for incorporating this contemplation into daily practice, transforming our relationship with mortality from fear to appreciation.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa (three times)

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm just giving these little evening talks around passages from *In the Buddha's Words* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. It's just a collection of the Buddha's main points from the scriptures. One thing that you come across when you read the scriptures is this repetitive nature. Remember, it was an oral tradition kept over 500 years before it was written down. The way you remembered things is by just repeating them in a sequence, in a formula. So it's very repetitious. But it drives the point home if you keep saying it often enough. It has a purpose to it.

What we've been doing is the human condition. We're starting rather gloomily that it is in fact misery. This one here is concerning the divine messengers. Those of you who know the Buddha's story, in the mythology that surrounds his awakening, there are these four messengers. This one's only about the three. What it's saying is that somewhere in his youth, late youth, he became aware of these three things: sickness, old age and death, sickness, ageing and death.

There was this other thing that he noticed was that an ascetic sitting under a tree which suggested that there was an escape. On these four journeys while he was out hunting he comes across a very sick person, a very old person, a corpse and this monk sitting under a tree. Each of these he asks himself what is it, because he's not supposed to know what it is. He's been brought up in a life of luxury. When he finds out he says well this will happen to me – will I get sick, will I age, will I die? That's a bit of a shock. You could look upon this as an existential crisis in his life which eventually drives him from home to seek an answer.

This uses the same imagery of these three divine messengers. There's only three here but it has a slightly different purpose. I'll read it and you'll get the flavour of the scriptures too.

"There are, monks, these three divine messengers." He translated as monks but really it's a word that I suppose better translated as listeners or those who are listening to what he's saying. "What three? There is a person of bad conduct in body, speech and mind, and on the dissolution of the body after death he's reborn in a plane of misery, in a bad destination, in a lower world, in hell.

"There the warders of hell seize him by both arms and take him before Yama, the lord of death, saying, 'This man, your majesty, had no respect for father and mother, nor for ascetics and Brahmins, nor did he honour the elders of the family. May your majesty inflict due punishment on him.'

"Then, monks, King Yama questions that man, examines him and addresses him concerning the first divine messenger. 'Didn't you ever see, my good man, the first divine messenger appearing among humankind?' And he replies, 'No, Lord, I didn't see him.'

"Then King Yama says to him, 'But my good man, didn't you ever see a woman or a man, 80, 90 or 100 years old, frail, bent like a roof bracket, crooked, leaning on a stick, shakily going along, ailing, youth bigger gone, with broken teeth, with grey and scanty hair, or bald, wrinkled, with blotched limbs?'"

That's a great old description, isn't it?

"And the man replies, 'Yes, Lord, I have seen him.' Then King Yama says to him, 'But my good man, didn't it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, I too am subject to old age and cannot escape it. Let me now do noble deeds of body, speech and mind.' 'No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.'

"King Yama says, 'Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds by body, speech and mind. Well, you'll be treated as befit your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, *devas*, ascetics or Brahmins. But you alone have done that evil deed and you will have to experience the fruit.'

"Now, when, monks, King Yama has questioned, examined and addressed him thus concerning the first divine messenger, he again questions, examines and addresses the man about the second one, saying to him, 'Didn't you ever see, my good man, the second divine messenger appearing among mankind?' 'No, Lord, I didn't see him.'

"But my good man, didn't you ever see a woman or a man who was sick and in pain, seriously ill, lying in his own filth, having to be lifted up by some and put to bed by others?' 'Yes, Lord, I have seen this.'

"My good man, didn't it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, I too am subject to illness and cannot escape it? Let me now do noble deeds by body, speech and mind.' 'No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.'

"Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds by body, speech and mind. Well, you'll be treated as befit your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, *devas*, ascetics or Brahmins, but you alone have done that evil deed, and you will experience the fruit.'

"Now, when, monks, King Yama has questioned, examined and addressed him thus concerning the second divine messenger, he again questions and examines and addresses the man about the third one, saying, 'Didn't you ever see, my good man, the third divine messenger appearing among mankind?' 'No, Lord, I did not see him.'

"But, my good man, didn't you ever see a woman or a man one or three days dead, the corpse swollen, discoloured and festering?' 'Yes, Lord, I have seen this.'

"Then, my good man, didn't it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, I am also subject to death and cannot escape it? Let me now do noble deeds by body, speech and mind.' 'No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.'

"Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds of body, speech and mind. Well, you'll be treated as befit your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, *devas*, ascetics or Brahmins. You alone have done the evil deed, and you have to experience the fruit."

I have to take this apart a bit. We've discussed what these four messengers are. Obviously this is told in a mythological way, and the basic law of *kamma* is very simple: when you do something which is wholesome, wholesomeness arises from it. If you do something unwholesome, unskillful, unskillfulness arises from it. Remember that there are two waves of that action.

When you say something which is warm and kind and supportive, or when you say something which is cutting and horrible, it goes out into the world and it affects somebody. They will react to you in their own particular way. But that, in a sense, is not your *kamma*. Most people think of *kamma* as something that happens to them. The real *kamma* is internally, because the more you find yourself speaking kindly and gently the more good you feel inside, and the more you're being angry and making cutting remarks the more you feel unhappy inside.

Of course as we do this we build up a world around us. People begin to know us: well this person speaks kindly and is nice and gentle, and this person is horrible. You eventually find yourself being liked or disliked, and so the world out there begins to mirror what is in your own heart. Even if you don't know it – and here's a really subtle point – even if you think that you're being kind but actually there's something in your voice which is unkind or insincere, if you don't know that in yourself the other person does. Then although you're being kind you keep wondering, "I wonder why nobody likes me?"

When you're not aware of subtle movements in your own heart it acts out to the person as if it's fate, as if it's meant to happen to them from who knows where. But actually we're constantly creating this little world around us.

Here you see what he's saying is the deeper teaching about *kamma*. You notice that he's not talking about evil deeds. He's not talking about murdering and thieving and all that stuff. He's talking about ordinary social things, relationships. He's talking about no respect for mother or father, for ascetics or Brahmins, didn't honour the elders of the family. He's talking about things which normally we wouldn't consider to be so important from the point of view of the karmic doctrine about evil, but actually it's all important. If you take care of your relationships, if you take care of the small things in life, then the big things tend to take care of themselves. It's interesting that he should make such a big point of just this relationship in society.

For those of you who are new to Buddhism, the law of *kamma* – the Buddha did teach rebirth. There was a process whereby after death one carried on, driven by your ethical actions, different by your ethics. That was the important point. In the scriptures often he's using imagery and tales and the ways that it would be told in those days. In a

sense it's a bit difficult for us to enter into that mythology, but there's a connection because as you know in Christianity one is judged at the pearly gates whether you get in or not, the day of judgment.

This day of judgment, really, spiritually speaking, is happening internally. We ourselves end up being our own judges. When you reflect upon your life, the Dalai Lama says that you live your life twice, if you live long enough: once as you live towards old age, and then in old age you live it again as memory. Hopefully when we get to advanced old age, our memories of our lives are full of beautiful memories because they're caused by past actions which have been beautiful.

You have to take certain scriptures within the mythology of the time, but the teaching is there really about making ourselves more and more aware of these three divine messengers, these three signs: sickness, old age and death. It's not something that we particularly like to think about. You don't have to get morose about it. You don't have to be on it all day and all night. But you might find it very useful just to bring those three to mind every morning, just as a reminder, so that when the body does get sick and as you do advance in age, and as death does come upon us, it doesn't come as this huge, enormous shock that I never thought it would happen to me.

There was this lovely cartoon I saw with a woman, she's dying in bed, and she has all her friends around her. She says, "Why me? Why not one of you?" We don't want to get into that position of terminal shock.

Just now a friend has phoned up and one of his close friends has been told he has a terminal illness. Well he's only 61, which is young these days, younger than me. It's a case of always just having that mindfulness. Of course the effect isn't to make us depressed – that's the point. The effect is to begin to see how precious life is. We begin to treasure it more. That's the joy of it. You begin to really open up to the joys of life. Taking nothing for granted. Because you might not be here tomorrow.

I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your careful discernment between wholesome and unwholesome action, lead yourself to complete liberation of suffering.

The Two Darts

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's famous parable of the two darts, which illustrates how we compound our suffering through unskillful reactions to life's inevitable difficulties. The first dart represents the unavoidable painful experiences of life - illness, aging, loss, and death. The second dart is our mental reaction: the resistance, aversion, and seeking of escape through sensual pleasures that we add to these natural experiences.

Drawing from the Buddha's discourse to the monks, Bhante explains how an "uninstructed worldling" experiences both physical and mental suffering, while the "instructed noble disciple" learns to feel only the bodily sensation without the additional mental torment. The teaching explores the three underlying tendencies (anusaya) that keep us trapped: aversion to painful feelings, attachment to pleasant feelings, and ignorance regarding neutral feelings.

This talk offers practical insight into developing a healthy relationship with both pleasure and pain, learning to enjoy life's gifts without attachment while accepting difficulties without resistance. Bhante emphasizes that this is not about becoming cold or detached, but about cultivating wise non-attachment that allows us to be fully present to life without the psychological dependency that creates suffering. Essential listening for understanding the psychological foundations of Buddhist practice and the path to freedom through Vipassanā meditation.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa, Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa, Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa — homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're following this compilation by Bhikkhu Bodhi and we've been through the heavy bit — sickness, aging and death. We're still unfortunately on the heaviness of life. The joys come at the end. Here the Buddha is now going into what you might call the basic psychology of how we create suffering for ourselves, and he uses the word "worldling" — an uninstructed worldling — as though looking at the world as if we were aliens. But he's just trying to translate a word which just means an ordinary person who doesn't know why they cause themselves suffering and doesn't come across the Buddha's teaching. That's the only word. I think you might wonder what he means by it.

So, monks — and remember that these discourses always begin with "monks," but it stands for anybody who's listening, really — when the uninstructed worldling experiences a painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves and laments. He weeps, beating his breast and becomes distraught. He feels two feelings, a bodily one and a mental one.

Now suppose they were to strike a man with a dart and then strike him immediately afterwards with a second dart, so that the man would feel a feeling caused by two darts. So too, when the uninstructed worldling experiences a painful feeling, he feels two feelings, a bodily one and a mental one. While experiencing that same painful feeling, she harbors aversion towards it. When she harbors aversion towards painful feeling, the underlying tendency to aversion towards painful feeling lies behind this.

And while experiencing painful feeling, she seeks delight in sensual pleasure. For what reason? Because the uninstructed worldling does not know of any escape from painful feeling other than sensual pleasure. And when she seeks delight in sensual pleasure, the underlying tendency of lust for pleasant feeling lies behind this.

She does not understand as it really is the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger and the escape in case of these feelings. When she does not understand these feelings, the underlying tendency to ignorance in regard to neither painful nor pleasant feeling lies behind this. If they feel a pleasant feeling, they feel it attached. And if they feel a painful feeling, they feel it attached. And if they feel a neither painful nor pleasant feeling, they feel it attached.

This is called an uninstructed worldling who is attached to birth, aging, and death, who is attached to sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair, who is attached to suffering, I say.

There's a lot of meat in this. Books are written on this. I myself have a wonderful talk, which you can download from the website, on the gratification, the danger and the escape.

So what's the Buddha saying? He's saying, first of all, when we feel something harmful, when we feel something painful in the body — now remember there's two types of feelings in the body: those feelings that come from the body itself, such as painful knees when you're sitting, and those painful feelings that are in the body coming from the heart, our emotional states. That's bad enough to be able to sit with that. But then we have this second dart, as he calls it, which is the resistance, not wanting to go there. So we have both the painful feeling and now we've created an aversion to it. So now we're in turmoil.

Because we're in turmoil, we're now seeking an escape. And the escape is tea and biscuits — basically turn on the TV, phone up a friend, do anything apart from feel these feelings. That's the gratification. But unfortunately, if we go on, we don't see the danger of that. Because when we're gratified, when we're enjoying ourselves, it's okay. I mean, we're in heaven. What's the problem? We don't see the problems that arise after that, which is that we've suppressed these feelings and they're there within the system. We haven't actually dealt with them. And secondly, when that pleasant feeling disappears, we find that we become attached to it. Attached here means psychologically dependent on something for our happiness.

There's a lot of psychology here. If we go through it just bit by bit, then we'll see. So when an uninstructed worldlyling experiences a painful feeling, they immediately react to it. They sorrow about it, they grieve about it, they lament, they weep beating their breast, becoming distraught. Just think of the time when you've been even a little bit ill and it stops you going to work or it stops you doing something — a bad cold, a flu. There's that negativity. Now that's the second dart. What the Buddha is saying is that's not necessary. That's the second dart. And what he points out is that therefore, unless we are aware of that, then we'll keep making things worse for ourselves by this reaction.

So he harbors aversion towards the painful feeling. He harbors it. We develop that aversion towards painful feeling. That means there's a lot of fear there too. So whatever we feel, whatever we think there's going to be a bit of difficulty for us, a bit of painfulness for us, we tend to run from it. And the aversion that is manifesting is an underlying tendency to aversion, which means that we already have a conditioning within us to either resist or run from what we find unpleasant. Every time we react like that, we reinforce this tendency, this conditioning, this habit within us. So we're actually making things worse all the time for ourselves.

And because it gets so bad, while experiencing a painful feeling, they seek sensual pleasure. So that's what we do, isn't it? Things get a bit tough, so you get drunk. Anything not to feel those feelings, not to endure them. And because of that, we have this underlying tendency of seeking happiness in pleasure is reinforced. We keep thinking that the way to happiness is to keep reinforcing this pleasure that we get from worldly things. But there's the danger. The danger is that worldly things — they do not understand, as it really is, the origin and passing away. In other words, anything you get attached to is going to let you down because it's going to change. It's going to pass away. Just when you thought you've got the right person, the right job, the right house, the right car, you drop dead. Or worse, it passes away.

So it's a case of recognizing that as soon as we hold on to something, it has a great potential of creating suffering for us. And that's the problem with gratifying ourselves in the world of pleasure. We don't see the danger. And when the danger comes, we're stuck with the suffering. They don't see the escape.

And then he says, when a pleasant feeling arises, they feel attached. This "attached" means attached to something — like for instance, I'm attached to my car. It's that use of the word. When you're attached to somebody, you are in some way psychologically connected with them, but often in a way which if they disappear or if the car breaks down, there's sorrow, lamentation, grief and despair.

So what the Buddha is saying is, it's not necessary for us to get rid of the joys of life, and it's not necessary for us to reject what is painful in life. Life is full of joy and woe. All we have to know is how to relate to this stuff. So when unpleasant things come, to actually just accept it, to bear with it, to endure it. And when pleasant stuff comes, to be careful that we don't form an attachment to it.

Now that's really difficult. It's one of my regular teachings here around food. The distinction between enjoying the food and indulging in it is a very fine one. But you've got to work at it, because when we indulge, the suffering comes. So you have to be very careful that we don't interpret the Buddha's teaching as life-negative. Far from it. Once he was fully liberated, he became one of the most sensual beings that there can be. Why? Because now he's completely open to the sensual world. He's not afraid of it and he's not indulging in it.

So now we have the other side of the equation. Monks, when the instructed noble disciple experiences a painful feeling, they do not sorrow, grieve or lament. They do not weep beating their breast and become distraught. They feel one feeling, a bodily one, not the mental one. Suppose they were to strike a man with a dart, but they would not strike him immediately afterwards with a second dart, so that man would feel a feeling caused by one dart only. So too, when the instructed disciple experiences a painful feeling, they feel one feeling, a bodily feeling, and not the mental one.

While experiencing the same feeling, they harbor no aversion towards it. And since they harbor no aversion towards painful feeling, the underlying tendency to aversion towards painful feeling does not lie behind this. So in other words, even the very conditioning within us that causes this resistance and this indulgence is beginning to fade away. And of course, the liberated person is one that simply can't react like that anymore because that habit has been completely wiped out.

While experiencing painful feeling, they do not seek delight in sensual pleasure. For what reason? Because the instructed noble disciple knows of an escape from painful feeling other than sensual pleasure. And that's what the purpose of *vipassanā* is — it's to discover that escape. Since they do not seek delight in sensual pleasure, the underlying tendency of lust for pleasant feelings does not lie behind this. So that indulgence is not there.

And they understand it as it really is: the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger and the escape in the case of these feelings. And since they understand these things, the underlying tendency of ignorance towards neither painful nor pleasant feeling does not lie behind this. So remember, we tend to ignore those sensations that we do not see as either painful or pleasant. So when we come to the breath, generally speaking, we find it boring. And that shows us that we're constantly trying to seek excitement, whereas the spiritual life is drawing us towards silence, towards stillness.

If they feel a pleasant feeling, they feel it detached — they're not becoming psychologically dependent on it. And if they feel a painful feeling, they feel it detached. And if they feel a neither painful nor pleasant feeling, they feel it detached. This is called a noble disciple who is detached — who is not actually, the better phrase is non-attached. Because the word detached tends to give you the feeling of callousness almost, to be detached from people's suffering and all that. So it's non-attached from birth, aging and death, who is non-attached from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair, who is non-attached from suffering, I say.

This, monks, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling, which we are no longer.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that the Buddha's *Dhamma* is coming through loud and clear. May you, by your great efforts, overcome suffering and do not seek escape through indulgence in pleasure, sooner rather than later.

The Eight Worldly Conditions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

In this DhammaBytes teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines one of the Buddha's most practical teachings about navigating life's inevitable ups and downs. The eight worldly conditions (aṭṭha lokadhamma) - gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain - constantly affect our lives, but the Buddha shows us how our relationship to these experiences determines whether they lead to suffering or freedom.

The key difference between the 'uninstructed worldling' and the 'instructed noble disciple' lies not in what happens to them, but in their understanding. When we recognize that all conditions are impermanent, bound up with suffering, and subject to change, we can experience life's pleasures without attachment and face life's difficulties without despair.

Bhante Bodhidhamma offers practical guidance on applying this wisdom - from enjoying a meal without greed to losing wealth without devastation. He emphasizes that this teaching doesn't ask us to become emotionless, but rather to develop the right relationship to our experiences. Through gentle reminders of impermanence and the cultivation of non-attachment, we can find the middle way between indulgence and suppression, leading to genuine freedom from the endless cycle of elation and dejection that characterizes unreflected living.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're now moving on to the next piece of scripture where we're in the section on the tribulations of an unreflected living. If you remember last week we talked about these two darts, how we make suffering for ourselves by our reactions to things. So this particular part of the scripture is really talking about the vicissitudes of life, the eight worldly conditions.

I shall read it and then we'll see what we can make of it.

These eight worldly conditions keep the world turning round and the world turns round these eight worldly conditions. What eight? Gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. These eight worldly conditions are encountered by an uninstructed worldling and they are also encountered by an instructed noble disciple.

What now is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling?

Venerable Sir, our knowledge of these things has its roots in the Blessed One. It has the Blessed One as guide and resort. It would be good, Venerable Sir, if the Blessed One would clarify the meaning of that statement. Having heard it from him, we will bear it in mind.

That means us.

Listen then, and attend carefully, I shall speak.

Yes, Venerable Sir, they replied, and the Blessed One spoke thus.

When an uninstructed worldly monk comes upon gain, they do not reflect on it thus: This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. They do not know it as it really is. And when they come upon loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, they do not reflect on them thus: All these are impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. They do not see them as they really are. With such a person, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, keep their minds engrossed. And when gain comes, they are elated. And when they meet with loss, they are dejected. When fame comes, they are elated. And when they meet with disrepute, they are dejected. When praise comes, they are elated. And when they meet with blame, they are dejected. And when they experience pleasure, they are elated. But when they experience pain, they're dejected. Being thus involved in likes and dislikes, they will not be free from birth, aging and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair. They will not be free from suffering, I say.

But when an instructed noble disciple comes upon gain, they reflect it thus: This gain has come to me. This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. And so they will reflect when loss or so forth comes upon them. They understand all things as they really are and they do not engross their minds. Thus, they will not be elated by gain and dejected by loss, elated by fame and dejected by disrepute, elated by praise and dejected by blame, elated by pleasure and dejected by pain, and having thus given up likes and dislikes, they will be freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair. They will be free from suffering, I say.

This is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling.

Clear?

So what's the Buddha saying here? These things are pretty obvious, some of them are pretty obvious to us. So there are these eight worldly conditions: gain and loss. Well I mean we've just been through this growth in the economy for eight years and then suddenly it collapses. And while it grows nobody thinks this is going to end. It's like this is going to go on forever. And then suddenly it all collapsed. Everybody's in a tizzy. Poor old Prime Minister Brown's chewing his fingernails. It's like a catastrophe. Nobody thought it would come to an end.

Fame and disrepute. Well it might not be disrepute. Just a loss of fame can be a disaster. A couple of weeks back, there was a program on Tony Hancock, the 1960s comedian. And he was famous, and he loved his fame, and he loved being famous. And the new comedy was coming in, all that satirical stuff. This was the week that was, and then Monty Python. And so he became the old hat. And so he began to lose fame, and he became despairing about it. He tried to make it in Australia, failed, committed suicide. Desperate. It gets worse if you disrepute, of course. If you're one of these MPs who got caught up in all that, and they thought they were getting away with it, some of them thought they were actually obeying the rules and regulations, and then suddenly a couple of them find themselves in jail. What a way to go. See, so at one point they're elated, life's wonderful, the next minute they're despairing.

Praise and blame. We all like to be praised for what we do and when we don't get it we don't feel good. It's worse of course if they blame. We had a meditator here just recently who seems to be in a real toxic atmosphere at work in IT. Everybody's blaming everybody. He just finds it so difficult in a blame culture. Instead of saying something's gone wrong, how did it go wrong? How can we stop it going wrong in the future? It's much easier to say, he did it.

When I was in Sri Lanka, there used to be this bird. I think it was a sea bird. I never actually saw it, mainly because there were so many trees around. But as it flew over, it used to say, "he did it, he did it." And I'd be sitting there saying, "no, I didn't, honestly, I didn't. It wasn't me." Nobody wants to be blamed. "He did it."

And then, of course, there's pleasure and pain. Well, we all know about that. When we're enjoying life, when we're enjoying food, all that sort of stuff, and we're elated by it. And then of course when we're sick, when we're ill, when we don't feel well, when we can't eat and we want to eat and all that, you just get dejected. You're miserable. So you can see how it works.

Now what does he mean? You have to be careful here. What does he mean by elated and dejected? And then he goes on to say of course that the instructed person does not become elated. So you have to be very careful here because if you say to yourself, well

this is a great meal, and then you say to yourself, it is subject to change, it's going to finish, I'm not going to enjoy this at all. Then the whole of life becomes miserable. At one time you were enjoying things and then it did get miserable, but now it's all miserable. So you have to be very careful what the Buddha is saying here.

What he means by elated of course is that sense of indulgence, that sense of whoopee, that sense of over excitement in things, and of course this underlying presumption that it's always going to be like this. That's the problem. So it's not a case of not enjoying things. The Buddha experiences and enjoys the taste of food but he does not greed for it.

Now that distinction as we've said before is very difficult for us, but at least we can stop this big depression at the end of things when things go wrong by just this gentle reminder to ourselves that everything changes. What's his little phrase here? That is impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. The suffering comes because of our relationship to what we're enjoying.

So he's saying that when an instructed noble disciple, they remind themselves about this. They understand things as they really are. It does not engross the mind. So in other words, you're not caught up in it. You're not deluded by it. So you have to be slightly careful about that, or else life becomes miserable.

And the other thing is not to be afraid of pleasure just in case you indulge and then you get all the misery, because that fear then stops you really enjoying things. So when it comes to something that you say in advance that you know you're going to enjoy then it's just putting in that right intention, just getting that right relationship.

So if for instance great wealth comes to you because you played the lottery or something, heaven forbid you play that, and you've got all these millions of pounds come your way. So that's great wealth. Now what would you do with it? What they say is that people who get this enormous amount of money, they are elated for one year and that's it. Then they get really depressed and it goes back to ordinary horrible life. So it's a case of if wealth comes to us by whatever means, it's having the right relationship to it. It's using it for our benefit and the benefit of others. And that's where you get your joy.

Do you remember that win from the lottery? It was quite a while ago now, but it was an ordinary fellow. And when he got his win, he divided it all between his family and friends. Do you remember that? I think everybody went, "you know, I must be a fool, I must be an idiot." And he said, I think it's something about, "there's no point in me

being happy if others around me aren't." It's something of that nature. And that was a lovely interconnectedness. So he was happy in the right way. He didn't fall. His mind did not become engrossed.

So what he's saying is that this is actually seeing impermanence. So to see impermanence is to change our relationship to things. There's a lovely phrase that I continuously repeat to myself: there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. It's not only worth holding on to because if you do, like he says, it causes suffering, because it disappears, but because you're not holding on to actually anything. You think you're holding on to something but it's actually in a continual state of change while you're trying to hold on to it. And grasping that fact is a liberation. You can release the grip.

And he's given up likes and dislikes. Now it's not as though when you put food on your tongue you can't say I like this. That's not the problem. It's preferences. So if somebody says, how do you like your tea? Are you one of these people that says, "well, I just leave the bag in for two seconds, shake it about a bit, only a drop of milk, and only one, two or three grains of sugar, no more?" And if it doesn't come up as you have it, it's no good.

Now I had an old friend of mine who died recently, about a year or so ago, and I went to visit and he's got a very elderly mother, about 90. And she says to me, "will you make me a cup of tea?" Oh no, I said, would you like a cup of tea? She says, "yes I would. Make it very weak." I said, okay. So I went out and I made this tea and I brought it back in. And she said, "oh this is ridiculous, it's too weak." I said, how do I know how weak you want it? And she was really upset, so I took it out and made another one. "It's too strong, oh my goodness." She had this sort of, whatever she meant by weak, I never really figured out.

So there's somebody who's suffering because of preference. So if you're the sort of person who says, "well, as it comes," ah, you've liberated yourself from a lot of suffering around tea. Just as it comes. And that's all the Buddha's saying.

Now, how do we do it? Well, he gives us here the technique to do it. He says, any time gain or fame or praise or pleasure comes your way, you just gently repeat to yourself, "this is impermanent, if I don't get it right, it's going to be bound up with suffering and it is itself subject to change." That's it.

So if somebody gives you a gift of a crystal glass, say thank you very much and very quietly say to yourself, "any moment this could be broken, this could break," and when it breaks you just say, "oh look it's broken." What's the problem? It's the same way. You buy something like one of these iPhones. They cost a bit. You buy one and then you say,

"this could disappear, this could be stolen." So you leave it by mischance somewhere, and it's stolen. It's gone, that's it. What's the problem? And then out of the goodness of your heart, you say, "may the person who has it be to their benefit. I give it to them freely." But I'll still call the police.

So you're just having to let go of things. Yes, that's right. If you've stolen this, please keep it out of a gift. Receive it as a gift.

So this little bit here, the Buddha is just looking at our experience of life from these eight worldly conditions. So there they are: gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. I can only hope this little reading and my amazing commentary has been of some use and that you will drive yourself hastily to liberation sooner rather than later.

Thank you very much.

Clinging Causes Anxiety

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this teaching on the human condition, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how clinging (upādāna) to false notions of self creates anxiety and mental agitation. Drawing from the Buddha's analysis of the five khandhas (aggregates), he explores the four ways we mistakenly identify with form: seeing form as self, self as possessing form, form as in self, or self as in form.

The teaching reveals how our attachment to the body as 'I am the body' or 'I have a body' inevitably leads to suffering when the body changes through aging, illness, or injury. This process of identification creates what the Buddha describes as 'agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with change.' Bhante explains how this same pattern applies to all five aggregates - form, sensation, perception, saṅkhāra (mental formations), and consciousness.

The discourse then presents the liberating alternative: how the noble disciple who practices non-clinging experiences non-agitation even as the body and mind naturally change. This teaching offers essential insight into paṭiccasamuppāda (dependent origination) and provides practical understanding for meditation practitioners working with the reality of impermanence and the illusion of self.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

So we're carrying on with the Buddha's words by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Now this bit here takes us into a slightly difficult realm. Remember that we are reflecting on the human condition, the tribulations of living. And this one is termed here as the anxiety due to change, but we'll see how we go anyway. Remember that when it says monks, it's standing for all listeners.

So, listeners: "I will teach you agitation through clinging and non-agitation through non-clinging. Listen and attend carefully and I shall speak." So first of all we have to understand what he means by clinging. So those of you who remember dependent origination, it's the point of identity. Very simply, you see ice cream, the desire arises, want, then the I comes in, and then get. So that's your process, mental process. The perception and the feeling arising when you see ice cream, the desire, then the identity, I want, and then I get. Now what the Buddha's talking about is the point of identity.

So we're talking about what is this I? What do we mean when I say I? That's what he means by clinging, and he's saying it causes agitation as we shall see. "Yes venerable sir," they replied. And the Blessed One said this: "How is there agitation through clinging? Here the uninstructed worldling who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their dharma, who is not a seer of superior persons, and is unskilled and undisciplined in their dharma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in-self, or self as in-form." Clear? It does get a bit... you have to understand the language, you see.

So by form he's translating here what we mean by the body. It's not just the body, it's how we experience the body. So it's feelings and sensations in the body. Actually at a more basic level it's these—if you remember those four great elements described in a descriptive way as earth, water, fire and wind. What we talk about is sense of pressure, sense of gravity and all that, all the stuff around heat and lack of it, sense of fluidity, elasticity, that which conjoins like elasticity and movement. So in Buddhist psychology, in fact in ancient psychology, all our perceptions arise from that basic percept of the way we experience things. So for instance seeing would be a fire element. So anyway, he's talking about the body.

And now he says, you see, now these people who don't know, who don't know the truth from untruth, and they're undisciplined, they don't practise *dharma*—dharma means here a righteous way—they say that form as self. So in other words, I am the body. I am the body comes out most clearly to us when the doctor says you've got six weeks to live. Then you know I am the body. Why? Because the agitation arises, the fear, the despair, etc. If you didn't think you were the body, what's the problem? But it's the identity, I am the body, which is the problem.

Now I remember I was with a friend once and we were... he said something which was about Buddhism and whatnot. And I said to him, "Well, you know, we aren't the body." And his father blurted out, "Oh yes we are!" That was it. End of conversation. He was dead in a year. So this I is a very... it's a very impermanent thing.

So that's what he means when he says form as self: I am the body. Self as possessing form: so I have a body. So we'll often say things like "I have one leg shorter than the other," as you say. So you have parts. Like "I have a big nose"—I'm not talking personally here. So I have a big nose, you have parts of your body. So we have a dual relationship to the body. We sometimes think I am the body, sometimes think well I have it.

Then there's form in self, so the self is something slightly separate and the form is within it. The body is within it. So the self is much bigger than the body but somehow the body is in it, it's part of its definition. So for instance, I am the body, I am the mind, I am feelings, etc. So there's a big self and the body is just part of it, but it's still I. So that's the point.

And then there is the self as in forms. So it's as though we think of ourselves, this little feeling of a self, which happens just an inch or so behind your forehead, doesn't it? You don't feel the self in your knee, do you? Or in your big toe? When you're looking at me now, where's the sense of self coming from? I'm looking at you. It appears, doesn't it, just behind your forehead? So the self is in form: me, I as I experience myself, I'm up here in my head inside the body. So we have all these different ways of feeling myself, of experiencing this so-called self.

Now when we identify with something—I am—there's a presumption that this is what I always am. I am the body. Now if we say I am the body, the Buddha goes on: "That body of his, that body of theirs, changes and alters. With the change and alteration of the body, their consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of the body. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of the body remain obsessing the mind. And because their mind is obsessed, they are frightened, distressed and anxious. And through clinging, they become agitated."

Correct? He's not telling us anything that we don't experience. I mean, you look in the mirror and there's a few more wrinkles there and you get very agitated. A few more white hairs and you get very agitated. No hair is even more terrible, it's awful. So you can imagine the terror when I was 21 and I was looking in the mirror and I saw this gleam through my hair, you see, and I thought, what the hell is that? And as I did that, I said, there's a hole! There's a hole! And my father thought it was a hoot. But it never occurred to me that I would... I'm supposed to miss a generation. I forgot my mother was bald. No, that's not true. But somehow, I always remember that moment, you see. Terrible agitation. Terrible.

So there we have this sequence. We've got the sequence of I am the body, and at various points in our lives, we realise that this body is not what we thought it was. It's moved on. And that's what brings us this preoccupation with the body. So if you wake up in the morning and you always wake up with a bad back, that's fine. If you wake up in the morning and you've got a pain in the stomach, you get very worried, you've got to go to the doctor because you haven't had that one before. And because of this agitation, a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation...

I mean, just think of how upset you can get if your body's ill when just you wanted to go on holiday. How angry you are that you can't run as fast and you missed that bus because you stubbed your toe the other day. There's all these agitation comes up when we realise that the body has changed. It can be a change which is continual, a continual aging process, or it can be something which only lasts for so long, as when we're ill.

And so this agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing the mind. And because the mind is obsessed, they are frightened, distressed and anxious. Through clinging, they become agitated. So in other words, he's saying it's the way we define ourselves that's the problem. The body isn't the problem. It's the relationship that we've developed to the body as it being me, or I am in the body, and therefore I'm supposed to control the body, or the body's in me. It doesn't matter what relationship you have to the body. I possess the body. It won't follow your command. And that's your problem. That's our problem.

So that's the body. Then he goes through the five *khandhas*. So if you remember the five aggregates, there are all those acts of perception, basic perception, all the sensations and feelings, then there's all what we call the *saṅkhāra*, which are—I'll come back to in a minute for those of you who've forgotten—volitional conditionings, and acts of cognition where we know what it is that we are experiencing.

Now the Buddha divides the human experience into these five because he wants to point us to where the suffering arises. The suffering doesn't arise in the body. Pain arises in the body, pleasure arrives in the body, not suffering. Perceptions may be unpleasant or pleasant, but it's not suffering. Feelings can be pleasant and unpleasant, but they're not actual suffering. The suffering comes about because of our relationship, and this is in our *saṅkhāra*. That's where we have developed our habits of wanting and not wanting. And cognition is neither here nor there. Cognition is just that point of knowing. Like you know you're sitting on a mat.

He says that all of these suffer from the same thing because of this clinging. So just the final one, I'll read the final one: "With the change and alteration of consciousness, their consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of consciousness. Agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of consciousness remain obsessing their minds. And because their mind is obsessed, they become frightened, distressed and anxious. And through clinging, through identity of one sort or another, they become agitated."

So agitation there refers to all the negative mental states that arise because of this delusion about who we are.

Then of course as usual we always get the opposite. So it is in such a way that there is agitation through clinging. Now, "And how is there non-agitation through non-clinging?" So here the instructed noble disciple who is a seer of the noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their dharma, who is a seer of superior persons and is skilled and disciplined in their dharma, does not regard form as self—he doesn't think the body is me—or self as possessing form, I have a body, or form as in self, or as the self is in the body, in the form.

"That form, that body of theirs, changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of that body or form, their consciousness does not become preoccupied with the change of form. There is no agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form, and it does not remain obsessing their minds. And because their mind is not obsessed, they're not frightened, distressed or anxious. And through non-clinging, not false identity, they do not become agitated."

And then he goes through all the *khandhas* again, you see. And then finally he says, "It is in such a way that there is non-agitation through non-clinging."

I can only hope that the words of the Buddha have been of some assistance and that my commentary has helped a little bit, and that you will use it to deepen your understanding about the human condition and wend your way gently to full liberation sooner rather than later.

Mahākassapa Explains the Cause of Conflict

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores a profound discourse where Venerable Mahākassapa explains the fundamental causes of human conflict to the Brahmin Āramadaṇḍa. The teaching reveals that kṣatriyas fight with kṣatriyas, brahmins with brahmins, and householders with householders due to attachment, adherence, fixation, addiction, and obsession with sensual pleasures.

Mahākassapa, renowned for his ability to elaborate the Buddha's cryptic teachings, demonstrates that ascetics fight with ascetics for the same reasons - but with views and opinions rather than sensual objects. Bhante explains how this ancient wisdom applies directly to modern conflicts, from parliamentary debates to personal disagreements.

The talk offers practical guidance on transforming our relationship with both material desires and ideological positions. Rather than complete renunciation, the teaching points toward holding perspectives lightly - understanding the difference between having views and being enslaved by them. This shift from rigid 'rightness' to flexible perspective can dissolve the righteousness that fuels interpersonal conflict.

Drawing on the social context of the Buddha's time - the emerging caste system, merchant class, and ascetic movement - Bhante shows how these timeless insights about attachment and the roots of dukkha remain profoundly relevant for finding peace in our contemporary world.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Carrying on from where we were, the next section Bhikkhu Bodhi calls "the world in turmoil." It's really about conflict, as to why we create conflict.

Before I read this, there's a character here called Venerable Mahākaccāna. There were certain disciples of the Buddha and he would give them a title because of their special qualities. For instance, Sāriputta, who was probably his closest disciple with Moggallāna, he called him the general of the Dhamma, such was his understanding of the teaching. Now Mahākaccāna had the title which ran something like "one who is

greatest at saying in detail what I have said cryptically." It's just a couple of words in Pali but in English you have to explain it. This takes us to how the Buddha actually used the methodologies for teaching.

His usual thing would be just to explain something and then add a metaphor or simile. He would normally follow the usual thing of saying what you're going to say, explaining it in detail, and then telling people what you just said. That's the normal approach — if you give a speech, that's what you normally do. He would always add a simile, not always, but generally speaking, he would add a simile or some metaphor at the end of his explanation because some people understand better with imagery rather than an intellectual approach.

But often he would be asked a question and he would just give a cryptic statement and disappear. You get the idea that maybe he's got a lot of people and they're all asking questions. He just says a sentence or two and leaves it at that. The people who were baffled would go and ask the elders. Mahākaccāna was one of the more usual ones if he was around because he had this ability to really pull things to pieces for them.

Mahākaccāna didn't seem to be part of the inner set of the group of monks that generally were around the Buddha and it seems that he would live — he would go back to where he came from, which was at that time a place called Avanti. Avanti was south of the Ganges.

The Buddha, if you know your map of India, he would hang around Varanasi — modern day Varanasi, which in those days was called Benares — and he would wander up north to where his people lived, the Śākya, and then he'd wander over towards Delhi, across the kingdom of Kosala, and he'd even go almost as far as Delhi to people like the Kulus. He's got a big area, if you can imagine. He's walking all the time. He's not taking a bus or something. He's walking all the time. He covers this quite large area.

But he never seems to go towards Bengal, towards Calcutta way. He seems to be always on that side. It's mainly to do with the people who supported him and probably his family connections because his people, the Śākya, came under the king of Kosala. They were vassals in medieval feudal terms. They were vassals of the king of Kosala. So this ruling caste would have known each other.

The other thing to remember is that the caste system that's there today was being strengthened around the Buddha's time. We're talking 2,500 years ago. It's becoming much more defined. For instance, towards Bengal, present day Calcutta, the Brahmins

had ascended to the chief caste, but this still hadn't happened where the Buddha was. Often the Buddha makes little side remarks about these Brahmins: "a true Brahmin is this and this and this."

There was still the Kṣatriyas or the Khatiyas as they're called in Pali were still the ruling caste — it was the old warrior caste. So there's the Brahmins who were the priestly caste, but they would hold jobs, they were courtiers, they owned farms. The Khatiyas were the soldiers and the rulers. Then there was the agricultural people, the people who owned land, the Vaiśyas. Well, here they're called householders, because at that time I don't think they'd actually gone into Vaiśyas and then Śūdra. I don't think that comes up in the scriptures. You've got basically the Brahmins and the ruling caste and then what's known as the householders. They would have covered quite a large group of people.

At this time, the people who were coming forward who weren't a particular caste were the merchants because of the change, because of the growth of kingship, which was fairly new, and the huge merchandise that was beginning to cross northern India all the way up to Afghanistan and even the Silk Road I think was operating by then over to China. All that was beginning at that time and there were these very nouveau riche, the new rich people who were the merchants.

Just keeping that in mind, then we have these questions. And there were these ascetics, the *samaṇas*. This was basically a movement which must have begun not much earlier than the Buddha's time and then of course carried on — of men mainly and women who would leave society completely and just live out in the forests and would come in for alms round, for food.

It would seem that one of the big entertainments of the day was to go to the local shrine, a park which would also be a shrine, on a full moon where they would listen to these debates between these ascetics arguing against each other. This is the discourse that he's called "the origin of conflicts."

So the Brahmin Ārāmaṇḍa approached the Venerable Mahākaccāna, exchanged friendly greetings with him and asked him, "Why is it, Master Kaccāna, that Khatiyas fight with Khatiyas, Brahmins with Brahmins and householders with householders?"

"It is, Brahmin, because of attachment to sensual pleasures, adherence to sensual pleasures, fixation on sensual pleasures, addiction to sensual pleasures, obsession with sensual pleasures, holding firmly to sensual pleasures that Khatiyas fight with Khatiyas, Brahmins with Brahmins, and householders with householders."

"And why is it, Master Kaccāna, that ascetics fight with ascetics?"

"It is, Brahmin, because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession to views, holding firmly to views that ascetics fight with ascetics."

Now, obviously he's given us all these words which are different ways of looking at our relationship to the sensual world. Sensual world means anything that you experience. It's not just eating, sex, drugs and rock and roll — it's the whole thing. He talks about attachment. Attachment, remember, is a psychological dependency on something which we presume we will be unhappy without. That's what we've done. If you say for instance, "I need a car, I need a cup of tea at 11 o'clock" and if the cup of tea isn't there, well, it's misery, isn't it? That misery is caused because we form some sort of psychological dependency on an object. "I can't live without you" — that's what you say when you're in love, isn't it? "I couldn't live without you." You obviously don't want the other person to die. So that's that sort of attachment.

He talks about adherence — to adhere. It's a stickiness, isn't it? Adhesive. It's a sticky object. You get stuck on things. You can't get it off. It's like this flypaper. Once you've got it in your finger, you just can't get rid of it. So that's the feel of attachment. You're stuck to it and it's stuck to you.

Fixation. Something that's a fixation is stuck in the mind, isn't it? It's a fixer; you can't get rid of it out of your mind. Sometimes you find yourself constantly thinking about something. Remember, these adherences and fixations and everything he's talking about has a positive side of wanting, but remember it also has the negative side of bringing up anger, frustration whenever somebody is taking what you want. And there's always that underlying fear of losing.

Sometimes, if somebody loses their job and they've got a mortgage, then it becomes this constant thing in their mind about how are they going to pay the next mortgage.

Addiction gives us an idea of being enslaved, isn't it? It's an enslavement to something, an addiction. You really can't stop doing it if it gets that bad. And then there's an obsession with it. That again is a mental, emotional thing. These words just give us a different angle on what it is that we suffer from when we form a wrong relationship with the sensual world. And of course holding firmly — he won't let go.

By using all these words, Mahākaccāna is actually showing us that he's thought about the Buddha's words, the Buddha's teaching, and he's seen it from all these little different angles.

When we find ourselves — maybe you found yourself having to see some of the Olympics — and if you haven't got to work or if your iPlayer isn't working, then you get this fixation about it, making sure that you can find a clip somewhere on YouTube.

When it comes to ascetics fighting ascetics, he says that this is the same thing, but it's with attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation, addiction, obsession, and holding firmly onto views. So views and opinions. You've only got to listen to these parliamentary debates if you really want to waste your time. You can see that they have all these things — they're attached to them, they're adherents, they're fixated on views, they can't see another person's point of view, they're addicted to always talking about it, obsessed by them, holding on.

How can you live, especially in a modern democratic society, without having a view or an opinion? That's a problem, isn't it? We have to understand that it's not the view or opinion which is the problem, but how you relate to it. "I'm right, everybody else is wrong" — so you're in conflict immediately.

One word that I personally like is perspective. If you have a perspective on, say, the economic situation, so you have a perspective, then that does allow you to see another person's point of view, another person's perspective. In so doing, of course, you're able to at least embrace that understanding, bring it close to you, so that there isn't always this negativity, this conflict that you may find between yourself and somebody having another point of view.

If you can, every time you hear yourself saying, "Well, I think" and "I feel," and you hear somebody else say that, then you have to say, "Well, that's an interesting perspective. Would you like to hear mine?" And then try to open them out of it. It sometimes sucks the anger out of the righteousness — oh boy, righteousness — out of the situation.

So that's the origin. This Brahmin is asking, why is it that these people fight against each other? Why is it that these ascetics in those days, but these days everybody, fight each other in terms of views and opinions? It always comes down to this business of this relationship we have with what we have.

What we have to ask ourselves is, is that really necessary? Can I enjoy life without this grasping, without this hand-aching hold onto things? Of course you have to practice that. Once you, or once we've understood that, there's a case of practicing it. Every time you find yourself holding it, just talk to yourself: let go. Let go. And see if anything happens. When they kick you out of your house, then you might... There's only certain things you can let go of. It's the relationship. It's this wrong relationship we have with it.

It's worthy of contemplating that and worthy of making it a daily intention in the morning just to catch oneself getting caught up in things — even the simple things. Somebody offers you a cup of tea — how would you like it? Are you one of these people that says, "Two sugars, a little smidgen of milk, stir to the left," or are you "as it comes"? What liberation that is — completely open to any cup of tea which approaches you.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that I've been able to explain this reason as to why we're getting conflict and that this will surely lead you very quickly to your complete liberation sooner rather than later.

Thank you very much.

Envy and Niggardliness: The Cause of Conflict

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a profound dialogue between Sakka, ruler of the devas, and the Buddha about why beings wish to live in peace yet end up in conflict. The Buddha traces the root of hatred and enmity back to envy (issā) and niggardliness (macchariya), which arise from our fundamental tendency toward liking and disliking.

Following the chain of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), Bhante explains how liking-disliking leads to desire, which arises from thinking, which itself springs from papañca—elaborate perceptions and notions. This psychological process reveals how our misunderstanding about where true happiness lies drives us into acquisitiveness and the inevitable conflicts that follow.

The teaching offers practical guidance for meditation and daily life: catching the mind at the moment of liking-disliking before it proliferates into craving and conflict. Through Right Awareness of these mental movements, we can remain equanimous with discomfort and avoid the internal resistance that creates suffering. This fundamental shift in understanding allows us to find genuine peace rather than seeking happiness through accumulation in the sensual world.

Namo tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa Namō tassa bhagavato hara-hatto samma-sambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Harahato Samma Sambuddhasa
Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we are continuing with the human condition and there are two pieces here that Bhikkhu Bodhi has chosen for us. This is Saka the ruler of the devas. In the scriptures the devas, these gods coming from different realms, would often approach the Buddha. Saka is the ruler of a particular heaven, a happy one, and he asked the Buddha: "Beings wish to live without hate, harming, hostility or enmity. They wish to live in peace. Yet they live in hate, harming each other, hostile and as enemies. By what fetters are they bound, sir, that they live in such a way?"

And the Blessed One replied: "Ruler of the Devas, it is the bonds of envy and niggardliness that bind beings, so that although they wish to live without hate, hostility and enmity, and to live in peace, yet they live in hate, harming one another, hostile, and as enemies."

This was the Blessed One's reply, and Saka, delighted, exclaimed: "So it is, Blessed One, so it is, fortunate one. Through the Blessed One's answer, I have overcome my doubt and got rid of uncertainty."

Then Saka, having expressed his appreciation, asked another question: "But sir, what gives rise to envy and niggardliness? What is their origin? How are they born? How do they arise? When what is present, do they arise? And when what is absent, do they not arise?"

"Envy and niggardliness, ruler of the Devas, arise from liking and disliking. This is their origin. This is how they're born, how they arise. When they're present, they arise. And when these are absent, they do not arise."

"But, sir, what gives rise to liking and disliking?"

"They arise, O ruler of the Devas, from desire."

"And what gives rise to desire?"

"It arises, ruler of the Devas, from thinking. When the mind thinks about something, desire arises. When the mind thinks of nothing, desire does not arise."

"But what gives rise to thinking?"

"Thinking arises from elaborate perceptions and notions. When elaborate perceptions and notions are present, thinking arises. When elaborate perceptions and notions are absent, thinking does not arise."

This evening you experienced all that in your sitting.

So if we take this apart, you'll see. Saka, he's come with this problem. He's asking, well, why is it that everybody does want to live in peace and we all end up killing each other? So he says, through envy and niggardliness.

So it goes back to this original problem of greed. And greed, remember, acquisitiveness is a better word. Now remember that the fundamental problem is that believing ourselves to be human beings full stop, our desire for happiness drives us to seek happiness in the phenomenal world, in other words in what we experience. So once you're into that search you begin to accumulate. So the more money you've got in the bank the safer you feel. Now if somebody's got more, see, then you're envious.

And just to make a small distinction between envy and jealousy. So you can say to somebody, "Oh, I envy you," and they're rather proud of that. They're very happy that you should envy them. But if you say to somebody, "I'm jealous of you," that stings a bit,

doesn't it? So there's something added to envy that turns it into jealousy. And it's a hatred, isn't it? You not only envy yourself, you're hating them for having what they've got.

And that niggardliness means that even when somebody wants a bit of what you have, you're not going to give it under no circumstance. So as soon as you're into acquisitiveness, as soon as you're into holding something, you're into a conflict. You can't not be in conflict once you're grasping something, once you're holding something tight. You've got to obviously defend it from enemies, because remember, just as we're envious of others, they happen also to be envious of us, which means they want what we've got.

So therefore you can see as soon as we have this wrong understanding as to where happiness is to be found, we think that it's to do with accumulation of some sort: accumulation of money, of objects, of friends. "These are my friends, my family." Then you're always immediately into some sort of conflict. Hence they live in hatred, harming one another, hostile and as enemies.

Now, when he asks, what's the cause of this? The Buddha goes right back to the fundamental position of liking and disliking. What's the cause of envy? Liking and disliking. Now liking and disliking refers to that point on the Buddhist psychology called *dependent origination* when we experience something as pleasant or unpleasant.

So we're always, as soon as we experience something, we're always shifting it to one side or the other. We always find it nice, pleasant, or we find it not nice, not pleasant. So we live in a world of that fundamental duality. There's an area in the middle that we call neutral, but if you look at that closely enough, it just shades into what's likeable or shades into what's not likeable. So that's our fundamental experience of life.

All beings have that. Even the mole, who is now again attacking our lawn, knows what is likeable and what is unlikable. And I definitely don't like the mole. But my heart goes out to it, feeling it from its position.

So this liking and disliking, now there's nothing wrong with that, because then he asks, well, what is the cause of that? So what happens after this liking and disliking? So it's desire. So that's the next thing, desire.

Now what we mean by desire, you've got to be careful here. It's a desire based on wrong understanding. It's a desire which is coming from the misunderstanding as to where happiness is to be found. So what we get from that desire, often it's translated as craving, which is a bit strong really. But it's basically wanting what's likeable and not wanting what's unlikable. So immediately you're into an internal conflict. You're either

holding on to something and pushing whatever is away that's a danger to you, or you're resisting something which you don't like. So already we're beginning the process of suffering, we're beginning the process of hatred.

Once we got that he asks what gives rise to desire. So now here he talks about thinking. When the mind thinks about something. So, there you are in your posture, and suddenly you're in Acapulco. It's just arisen, the desire to get away, the desire to be on holiday. Off you go. Or you remember something, something somebody said to you today which has irritated you. So off you go. "How could you? Who do you think you were?" It's come from a thought.

Now, it says what gives rise to thinking. So now we come to a word which is difficult to translate in the Pali. It's *papañca*. *Papañca* just means proliferation. So it's a proliferation arising from a particular conditioning, and it's because of these elaborated perceptions and notions that all these things come.

So if we were to go back on that instead of starting with the hatred and stuff that Saka is asking about, here we have these conditionings within us and they're dormant. They're like programs in a computer, and then a button is pressed and a thought comes up. Some idea comes up. This idea is grasped by the mind and it's worked on. But what's driving it is either this desire, the desire either to get rid of what's unpleasant or to indulge what is pleasant.

So it's just another way of talking about the dependent origination, the psychology of the Buddha. So obviously the way out of that is to catch it at the moment of liking-disliking. So if we can be aware, if we can be awake and see the mind changing, determining something as likeable or dislikeable, there's not a problem because we can stay aloof from that and that's your position in meditation.

So when you're sitting here like this and say a pain comes or discomfort comes, to catch it at the point of discomfort, there's not a problem. But as soon as you relate to it as not wanting it, then you're in conflict with it.

Now I'm not saying, we're not saying that if something really hurts that you can't move, but generally speaking, as soon as we get a little discomfort, off you go. Just watch yourself watching TV. Just catch yourself constantly shifting and moving as the body just feels slight discomfort, off you go. And it's this inability to be at peace with, equanimous with what is discomfort that is creating all this resistance in the psyche. And so whenever something taps into that off you go, hatred and all that stuff.

So this is why we live in hate, harming one another, hostile and as enemies. So it's a case of catching it right at the beginning where the liking and disliking arises and then just catching that wanting, not wanting, and then just allowing that to pass away. And that's how you remain at an even keel.

When something is wholesome, of course, that's not a problem. When something is to our benefit, coming from the heart of goodwill and all that, then we should empower it. That's not a problem. It's those things which are based on not liking, those things based on a wrong desire, seeking happiness in the sensual world. Real happiness, that is.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your careful discrimination, exit from all suffering sooner rather than later. Thank you very much.

Detailed Sequence Leading to Conflict

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's profound teaching on dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda) through what he calls 'the dark chain of causation.' Using the relatable example of ice cream on a hot day, he traces the psychological steps from initial pleasant feeling through craving (taṇhā), pursuit, gain, possessiveness, and niggardliness, ultimately leading to defensiveness and conflict.

Drawing from the Buddha's detailed analysis of how we create our own suffering, Bhante explains how each link in this chain reinforces the next, creating a vicious cycle that can escalate from simple desire to 'clubs, weapons, conflicts, quarrels and disputes.' The key insight is recognizing where to break this cycle - right at the beginning with craving itself.

The talk offers practical guidance on how to interrupt this process through Right Awareness, noting thoughts without suppression, and redirecting attention back to the heart. Bhante emphasizes the importance of diligence (appamāda) in this practice, sharing humorous personal anecdotes about the challenges of maintaining awareness in daily situations. This teaching provides essential understanding for anyone seeking to comprehend how our mental formations create dukkha and how mindful awareness can lead to freedom.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa (three times). Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened.

So Bhikkhu Bodhi keeps choosing some nice juicy passages for us. This one here is taken from actually one of the main discourses on dependency, the wheel of dependent origination, which is the Buddhist psychology as to how we cause problems in ourselves. So I'll read it through first and then we'll take it from there. It's called "The Dark Chain of Causation."

Thus Ānanda, in dependence upon feeling there is craving. In dependence upon craving there is pursuit. In dependence upon pursuit there is gain. In dependence upon gain there is decision making. And in dependence upon decision making there is desire and lust. In dependence on desire and lust there is attachment. In dependence upon attachment there is possessiveness. In dependence upon possessiveness there is niggardliness. And in dependence upon niggardliness there is defensiveness. And because of

defensiveness various evil, unwholesome things originate: the taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels and disputes, insults, slander and falsehood. What a miserable outcome!

So if we go through this, you see, what he's doing is he's showing us the round of how things create this cycle, this vicious circle, and just things get worse unless we see where we have to pop it, where we have to actually break that cycle.

So feeling—feeling here always arises with perception. So feelings are either pleasant or unpleasant and we tend to rate our happiness according to our feeling. I mean we say "I feel happy," so that's one of the big mistakes, but I won't go into that. So we have a feeling of happiness and because of this, craving arises. Craving here means—it's a strong word really, for a specific word *taṇhā*, which means desiring something which is not wholesome for us, which is not skilful for us. We don't really have that word in English. The word "desire" doesn't give us that meaning, so they tend to translate it with this "craving," but of course that's a bit strong. Although it can be a craving, obviously—it can be an addiction.

So, dependent upon this craving, there's pursuit, which means we go and get it. So let's take a very simple thing: ice cream. So, as you're walking down the street on a hot day, which happens occasionally in this country once a year, you might see a sign for an ice cream. So the seeing of it, the perception of it brings a memory and it brings a feeling tone to that memory. And you say to yourself, "Oh, I'd like an ice cream." So that business of "I'd like an ice cream" is the craving, is wanting it.

Now once you've done that, of course, you go and buy it. You're on the path into the shop to get yourself an ice cream. That's the pursuit. In dependence upon the pursuit, there's gain. So you get in the shop, you buy it, and there you've got it. You've got your ice cream.

In dependence upon gain, there is decision making. So now you happen to be with a friend. You want the ice cream, right? And you've bought—you're about to buy the ice cream, and you're going to decide whether you should offer your friend, whether you should offer to buy an ice cream for your friend or not. This is a big problem. Whether it's their turn to offer you the ice cream. So there's all these little machinations going on in the mind. So then there's decision making.

And upon this decision making, there is desire and lust. Now what does he mean by that? It means that when we're going into a shop to buy this ice cream with a friend, we're buying it for ourselves. And we may feel reluctant to have to buy one for our friend. So it creates a disturbance within us.

In dependence upon that desire, dependence upon that becomes an attachment. So now the attachment is basically saying that it's pointing out this psychological dependency on ice cream. So because ice cream brings us this happy feeling and that's how we define our happiness—"I feel happy"—then we become dependent on it and that's what attachment means.

In dependence upon attachment, there's possessiveness. That's pretty straightforward. It's mine, right? You hold on to it, you get fist cramp. And then in dependence upon possessiveness, there is niggardliness. You're not going to give somebody else a lick of your ice cream. It's for me.

And then in dependence upon niggardliness, there's defensiveness. So now your friend says, "Go on, give us a lick." "No, get off!" See? And then they say, "Well, I gave you one when I had an ice cream." And then there's a big fight. And before you know it: clubs, weapons, conflicts, insults, slander and falsehoods. Good God, there's no end to misery.

So now, then you have to take this back again because this whole process has reinforced the original feeling. See? So now the next time you see ice cream, there's an even greater desire for it because there's an even greater psychological dependency on it for happiness. See? So there you've got your rounds, and this is the vicious circle.

So all he's saying is if you look at, if you are aware of this process within ourselves and actually that is causing us problems, then you have to go to where you're going to cut the circle. And you cut the circle right at the beginning with the craving. So when you see ice cream and you get this addiction for it, this almost overwhelming desire to get it, you see, then you have to just stay still. See? And just allow it to pass. Keep walking, keep walking past the shop. See? Just keep going, just keep going.

And when the craving goes, some of that attachment's gone. When some of that attachment's gone, some of the possessiveness has gone. When some of the possessiveness has gone, some of the niggardliness has gone. When some of the niggardliness has gone, then the defensiveness has gone. When the defensiveness has gone, there is no more taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels and disputes, insults, slander and falsehoods. Get it?

So this is the Buddha trying to explain in detail how we create problems within ourselves. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May, through your lack of niggardliness, come to achieve the great end of niggling—no, come to complete end of niggardliness, which is of course nibbanic bliss, sooner rather than later. Any questions around niggardliness?

The main thing is to see that the processes in the mind that we call thinking and imagining are actually what's causing the problems, and as soon as you can stop that—you have to be careful, remember that's not suppressing anything. When you see some thought going on and on, you see, and you stop it, you see.

If it's stopped with aversion—"I don't want it"—or if it's stopped with fear, then that's suppressing. In other words, you've got this underlying, unexpressed attitude, and it keeps coming up into the mind as a constant thought, thought pattern, obsessive thought pattern, and you push it down. You push it down with aversion or fear. So that's suppression. And that, of course, is negative mental energy on top of mental negativity.

But if you note the thought, you see, and you accept the thought for what it is—so that's the noting—so "this is niggardliness," and you just turn away back into the heart, you see, you've not suppressed anything because the problem is here in the feeling. And if you open up to that and let it express itself as pure feeling, then that is the process of therapy. That's the heart healing itself. It's just letting go of this turbulence. See?

Once you've understood that, you see, then you get in the habit of doing it. And of course, everything cools down. See? But it's the habit, you see. So, for instance, you might have, I don't know, this business of when somebody says something that's upset you. And you've just battered it—"That's the way they are." And then tea break. And then lunchtime. See? And then by evening you're stabbing them and clubs and all that. And it's just built up through the mind. So even though they've only insulted you once, you've had them insult you a hundred thousand times. No wonder you want to kill them.

So it's actually getting right there with the thought, knowing the thought for what it is, staying with the heart for a little while, and then putting the attention elsewhere. And that's the process. Unfortunately, if we're not diligent—so that's the Buddha's favourite, one of his favourite words, *appamādo*, right?—we're not diligent, and before you know it, it starts off again. You've worked hard to get rid of all this anguish and hatred and fear and then one moment it's all fired up again through the mind. So it's just that constant effort, constant effort.

"It's not easy to always nip it in the bud when the craving starts. Perhaps it would be anywhere in the cycle."

Well, once it's gone off—well, I think once it's shot off and you're right there holding your club, then you've got to stop. Well, then you've got to stop, you see, and catch the heaviness of the mood in the heart, you see. So if you're driving, you see, and you're getting cheesed off with this guy going so slow in front of you. See, so if you don't watch it, you're trying to overtake them all the time. You're shooting ahead.

It was funny, a few weeks ago, I went to see the treasurer, Rob, who lives in Shrewsbury, and for some reason, he plied me with two very strong coffees. Okay, so I've got this energy. And I end up at Morrison's for a cup of tea. And I walk in, and I'm stuck in this queue, and they are all old—well, they're all octogenarians. They're all these old people. And they're in front of me, and there's these two women, and they're taking hours over deciding what to have, you see. So I can feel this energy. And I try to go past them. "Do you mind? Moving the queue." And I start off—I know, I know, this is it! You see, one has to always be alert to one's...

I blame the coffee, of course. It was amusing. Well, this is why—yes, I stay here. I surround myself with people who don't push me. Exactly, yeah. Yeah, I get first in the queue here. It was amusing, actually. Yeah, it was funny. Very good.

So should we have some tea?

09. Power

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's teaching on power and its potential for both liberation and destruction. He contrasts the unwholesome power driven by greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha) with the wholesome spiritual power of the Iddhipāda — the four bases of psychic power including desire (chanda), energy (vīriya), heart (citta), and investigation (vimamsa).

Drawing fascinating parallels between the Buddha's temptations and those of other spiritual figures, Bhante explores how our fundamental delusion of selfhood creates the drive to control others and our environment. He addresses the psychological roots of political oppression, examining how dictators maintain power and why non-violent resistance ultimately succeeds where violence perpetuates suffering.

The talk illuminates how we unconsciously wield power in relationships through emotional manipulation and control, often disguised as love or care. Through practical examples, including the difference between being 'in authority' versus being 'an authority,' Bhante shows how to recognize and transform our own power dynamics. He concludes by exploring the Buddhist understanding of identity ('I am' versus 'there is') and how releasing false identifications liberates us from the compulsive need to control, opening the heart to genuine compassion and interconnectedness.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa, namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we are carrying on with the human condition. This is the last one of this particular section, which is called "A World in Turmoil":

"Greed, hatred and delusion of every kind are unwholesome. Whatever action a greedy, hating and deluded person keeps up by deeds, words and thoughts, that too is unwholesome. Whatever suffering such a person, overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them, inflicts under false pretexts upon another by killing, imprisonment, confiscation of property, false accusations or expulsion, being prompted in this by the thought, 'I have power and I want power,' all this is unwholesome too."

So this is one of those really pointed things as the Buddha talks about his power.

Have to be careful here about power as such. If we look at our own history, our own psychoanalytic history, you find Freud thought that our main problem was pleasure, the pleasure principle. And then one of his students, Adler, thought it was power. And another one, Frankl — I just looked these up on Wikipedia — thought it was meaning, which is rather interesting actually. Our search for meaning was the driving force in our lives.

So here you have three driving forces: pleasure principle, wanting to be happy for heaven's sake; power, power gives us control; and then meaning — why are we alive? Where are we going? Why were we born? All that.

It's interesting to note that in the Buddha's history, in the Buddha's process, his main problem seemed to be around pleasure. *Māra*, the evil one, sent his three daughters. One was sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure, and boredom. That was his problem, you see. If you compare that to Christ, Jesus Christ, remember he was taken to the top of the mountain by Satan and given power over all. His was a power complex. Very interesting, huh? The contrast between those two great spiritual leaders.

Then you get all sorts of ideas about power. Even, say, Nietzsche, who had such an influence on the Nazis and people like that, that drive of will to power, the will to be the best you could be, that's another one, isn't it? Driven by the idea of being the best. And then you get people like Schopenhauer, I think, the will to live, just to be alive. I mean, we come across that when our lives are in danger — you just want to be alive for God's sake.

So there are all these types of power. When it comes to the Buddha's teachings, we have a positive power. They're called the *iddhipāda*, the paths of power, accompanied by the effect of will. One of them is desire, intention. So remember, you can have a desire to become liberated from suffering. Unless your will is behind it, unless there's a real power, nothing's going to happen. You're going to sit there dreaming.

And there's energy. So it's a real — what the Buddha's saying is, to progress spiritually, you've got to have a real energy, a real power behind that energy. And then there's the heart. Your heart's got to be empowered. There's got to be a real inner desire to become liberated. And then finally there has to be this quality of investigation. Because our problem fundamentally is delusion and misunderstanding somewhere. So we have to search within our lives with the way we think, what we do — where are we going wrong, how are we creating problems for ourselves. So that has to be really empowered.

So these are all the positive sides of power. But I think here of course the Buddha is saying that there is such a power which is driven by greed, hatred and delusion. That's obviously we talk about something else.

And then he says it is "whatever suffering such a person overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them, inflicts under false pretext upon another by killing, imprisonment, confiscation of property, false accusation and expulsion. Being prompted in this by the thought, 'I have power and I want power.'" So obviously that's a completely different form of power. That's a power which is coming from control, isn't it? Of getting what you want at the expense of anybody or anything, even the earth.

To understand that we have to go back to this basic idea of the self itself and who we think we are. So remember that our essential delusion is a problem of identity, of who we are. And having defined ourselves as human beings, you see, this is a big problem because now we're searching absolute or real happiness as a human being. In so doing, we have a relationship to the world of making sure the world, through the body, through the world that we can find happiness and that we want to control the world, you see.

So you either control it by getting rich. That's one way of trying to control it. Fame. Being famous is a lovely feeling. Being loved, even though it's not a real love. People drop you as soon as you're not making up the right songs. So fame is very flimsy, but it gives you a feeling of being wanted. And you have a control over your fans. And then, of course, there's just naked power. Just power. And we have lots of examples in our own history of that.

Machiavelli was the one, wasn't he? Machiavelli was the Renaissance thinker who said, if you want to be a good ruler, forget love — fear. Fear was the way to keep control. And of course, if you look at just around the world, the dictators we have still, this terrible thing going on in Syria. So all these are people who've gained power and who gather support for their power by making sure that everybody has a little share of the goods. That's how you get your support, isn't it? So if you're a dictator, you want to make sure that your army gets exactly what it needs and what it wants and your soldiers have a good night out. And then they've got something to lose, in which case, of course, they'll be right behind you. And they definitely don't want the opposition to win, because they will take power. See, that's the awful thing.

If you compare, for instance, what's happened in Burma, or, well, take Burma just for an instance, where the opposition has been non-violent. See, because it's been non-violent, eventually, even though it's caused sacrifice — that's the problem with non-viol-

ence, it demands sacrifice. After all the killing, eventually the military, the dictator, begins to give way. It's the same with India, with Gandhi and the British. It's a non-violence and eventually it just gives way, even though there's sacrifice. But when you're into some violent revolution, such as what's happening in Syria, then of course you have many more deaths actually because of that. Because it's two people facing each other with the desire for absolute power. Both sides want to destroy the other. There's not going to be much chance for peace if you're going to do that. If you look at South Africa and the whole way that Nelson Mandela was seen, towards reconciliation. But there has to be, this is the problem, there has to be that sacrifice. Most people don't want to do that — they'd rather just go for the enemy and that's the end of that.

So power in terms of our lives — so really we have to see where is it that we're exercising power in this bad sense, trying to control people. We can do it very cleverly, by hints and by emotional blackmail, you know. "I will not love you unless you give me everything I need." And there's just naked power, money power, you know.

Just to investigate our relationships and the way that because we depend on these relationships for happiness, see — not to say that there isn't a true love there. It doesn't negate the fact that there is a true love there. It's just that there's another bit which is about this relationship is for me. Am I you? And that's where you get the power. That's where you want the control.

So parents definitely love their children but they also want to be able to tell their children what to do. Not so much for the benefit of the child but for their benefit. So the worst case is, you know, when somebody — I remember seeing a program where a parent, she'd failed to become the violinist that she wanted to be. And so by every means she could, her daughter was going to be this great violinist. And of course it was just messing the daughter up. So it's an imposition, you see, an imposition of her desire on the other.

So this is where power causes us problems in our lives. And eventually, of course, we might end up doing exactly what the Buddha says here, "inflicts under false pretext upon another, killing, imprisonment, confiscation of property, false accusation and expulsion." Terrible.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance and that overcoming all temptation to control, to control, to have power in a bad sense, you will achieve full liberation from suffering sooner rather than later. Thank you very much.

Any comments on that? Any ideas?

"Some sort of clarification about the difference between *tanha* and *chanda*. Is it the delusion and the ego identification which is the problem which turns something neutral into something bad?"

Yeah, yeah. The word *tanha* that you've used is a specific meaning. It has a specific meaning of a desire which is unwholesome, unskillful. The word for a desire, generally speaking, is *chanda*. So that's the word they use in those paths to power that I was talking about. So the desire to become liberated, that would be considered wholesome, I think. And one has to empower that desire — you want to really, you want to really need that, you're seeking for liberation from suffering. So that's *chanda*. *Chanda* is something else — *chanda* is the will. So that's the power, that's power, you see.

So for instance you can intend, but nothing may happen. So you can intend, for instance, "well now we'll intend to have a cup of tea." But if it's not empowered, you'll just be sitting here still intending till tomorrow morning. So the power is what takes something out of potential into an actual. And that's an actual, that's a force. I mean, I can intend to move the chair, but unless I actually put energy into it, it's not going to happen. So that's the power there.

Now, power itself is completely neutral. What makes it wholesome and unwholesome is the attitude driving it. So if you want to make somebody suffer, you'll use your power to do that. If you want to make somebody happy, you'll use your power to do that.

And then there's also just generally speaking two types of power that we can wield. We have the word "authority." So you can be "in authority over," so to be in authority over somebody you inspire fear. But you can also be "an authority" whereby you inspire respect. If you're somebody who people think is an authority, like when you go to the doctor, hopefully, you think it's an authority. They've got to be right. So there's that. There's a completely different sort of relationship there, you see.

Most positions have a bit of both. To have a bit of power with being an authority is often necessary to get done what you need to be done, what needs to be done, you see. But you can see there's a distinction there between two types of power that's often invested in us. And remember that dictators only arise because people invest them with power. And it wouldn't happen if people didn't give them the power that they had. Take Cameron, for instance. We've given him power for five years. So that's that.

And going back to your original point about the self — well the self remember is in the Buddhist terms, it's a relationship. When we say "I am," when you finish off that sentence, that's telling you something about yourself. So it could be something like, "I

am depressed." So now this is me, I am depressed. See, once you identify with something, there's no escape, is there? What are you going to do? I am depressed. See, I mean, what we're learning here is that we see depression as something outside the I, outside this observer. So it's more accurate to say, "there is depression."

Now that liberates, that liberates me from suffering the depression. It doesn't take away the depression — the depression still remains a depression — but now I can find another identity which is no matter what, no matter that there's a feeling of depression, I'll carry on doing what I need to do, see. It won't hijack my life.

So and then there are definitions like "I am an electrician, I'm a teacher, I'm a doctor." So when these are taken away from us then of course you get depression. I mean once you lose your job and you say "I am," but if you take the I away and say that there is an action of being an electrician or whatever it is, then there's not that identity, you see. So if it goes away, you still don't lose that sense of self-esteem. That's the point. If your self-esteem is based on your job and your job goes, then you lose your self-esteem. You feel diminished by it.

It's the same with watching these Paralympics. These people, some of them have had really bad accidents, suffered greatly, but you can see they've all regained a lot of their self-esteem, which they might have lost through becoming disabled. Because before you said, "I am a fully able person," and now you've got to go around saying, "I am disabled." That's a loss of something, isn't it?

So that's what the self is — the self is when you complete the sentence "I am," right? Hey, there's a problem. If you check — if you take that "I am" away and say "there is," there's a completely different relationship.

It's the same with a lesser sense of identity which is "I have," see. "I own." Owning objects, if you think about it actually, you can only use an object — you can't in any absolute sense own it. I mean legally you might say "this is my car," but when the thief takes it it's his — it's not yours anymore. You still go around saying "somebody's stolen my car." But that's just a legal fiction.

It's like something that you might, I don't know, you might get some precious glassware or something like that, you see. And it's "my glassware," you see. It's something that you possess. If it breaks, of course, a lot of suffering. But if you already see it broken — when it breaks, well, it's going to break anyway. I saw it broken. It's like getting a different relationship with things so that when they disappear, it doesn't hurt. Or it doesn't hurt so much.

"Self-remembering is then something which is opposite to self-identifying."

Well, self-remembering is, yes, I mean, self-remembering — dissociating ourselves from — yes, but you have to be careful with that word. Primarily it's a dissociation to get away from the wrong relationship. But then you have to re-engage with the right relationship. See? So you might say, for instance, you might dissociate yourself from somebody's suffering. And you might say, "well, that's their *kamma*. What's it got to do with me? It's their *kamma*." But then you've got to re-engage and recognize that we're all in this together. And there comes that compassion and a desire to alleviate suffering.

I always like to tell the story of when I was in Thailand and I went to visit this monk and there was a cat and it was playing around with a mouse which was already dead. And I just said to him, I said, "didn't you stop that? It's a fat cat. You know, it's a monastery cat. It's a fat cat. I said, didn't you stop that?" He said, "no." He said, "it's cat *kamma*, mouse *kamma*." See? So I said, that is...

And funnily enough, very shortly after that, I was sitting on a bench with a few monks, and this cat jumped out and caught a bird. Well, this monk, as quick as lightning, got up, gave this cat one hell of a smack, picked up the bird — it was already dead, the lungs had been punctured — and held it up beautifully by the wings and chanted, "all compounded things arise and pass away," you see.

So obviously this monk didn't think that it was cat *kamma* and bird *kamma* entirely. The fact that he was aware of it was part of their *kamma*. There's the engagement, there's the connection. Whereas this monk had completely dissociated — it was all there like it's not my problem. Whereas this other monk was completely engaged, you see. And that's this right attitude.

So that's why at the end of every sitting that we do with *vipassanā*, we do the *mettā*, because that re-engages us properly.

"But how do we know which one we have to dissociate?"

Well, the compassion is the right one. Because that's, in a sense, to create a dissociation without the connection is creating another barrier.

And a barrier is a sign of the self.

Now a barrier is not the same as a boundary. So if you take the seashore, one minute it's the sea and the next minute it's the land. It's a boundary, you see, but it's fluid, it's easy. But if you take a cliff, that's a barrier. Now as soon as you create barriers, you're isolating yourself. If you say this is not my business, all the problems of the world are not my business, then remember the world has no business taking any of your prob-

lems as their business. So if you go along and say to a doctor, "Well I'm really ill, I've got this pain," the doctor says, "It's not my business." Do you know what I mean? It works both ways, you see. And that produces a sort of callousness.

So there has to be that recognition, and when you realize—when you go deeper and realize our interconnectedness—then you realize that everything we do has an effect on everything else in some way. The ripples of every action we do just goes completely out and then completely back, you see. So this is reinforced even with physics, ordinary science, the theory of chaos, where small conditions, given supporting conditions, will grow. So the usual example to give is a butterfly flap in South America, given supporting conditions, becomes a storm in North America.

So if you take that on the positive side, even to make a small gift towards, shall we say, some problem in the Middle East, may eventually be just that condition that brings about peace. You don't know, you see. When you begin to see the world as this interconnectedness, this interdependency, then of course the barriers break down.

See, the Buddha, when he was fully liberated, he could have just sat there, couldn't he? I'm happy. But it's funny because the first thought that comes into his head is "Who can I teach this to?" So there's a natural outflow from wisdom. Wisdom in action is compassion. You simply—it doesn't work the other way.

Saṃsāra: Onward Going

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21 min

In this exploration of saṃsāra, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's teaching that the cycle of existence has no discoverable beginning. Drawing from suttas that use striking similes—comparing the length of time beings have wandered through countless rebirths to all the grass and trees in Jambudīpa, or grains of sand in the Ganges—he illuminates how beings remain 'hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.' The talk contrasts Eastern cyclical concepts of time with Western linear progress, exploring how the mind constantly projects futures and clings to the past. Bhante discusses the Buddha's radical solution: becoming disenchanted with saṅkhāras (formations), developing dispassion, and ultimately finding liberation. He draws fascinating parallels between Buddhist consciousness teachings and modern physics, suggesting that manifest reality emerges from what he calls 'Nibbānic consciousness'—the pure awareness we touch in mindfulness practice. This teaching offers both philosophical insight into the nature of existence and practical guidance for meditation, showing how observing thoughts and sensations connects us to primordial awareness.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're coming to the end now of this section on the human condition. And it's not been a happy time. Remember I did happy times last year on the blessings that come to us in the lay life. So they're up on the website if you want to make yourself happy. If you want to lift your heart.

So now we're actually going to a bit of... He's ended this chapter with part of it which is called Without Discoverable Beginnings. So some of it's interesting to us from a philosophical or theological point of view. But there's other stuff in it. And I'm hoping that over the next two weeks we'll actually finish this chapter. So I'll read it as usual and then we'll see how we go.

So the Blessed One said this. Listeners, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginnings. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Supposing a man would cut up whatever grass, sticks, branches and foliage there was in this Jambudīpa and collect them together into

a single heap. And having done so, he would put them down, saying for each one, this is my mother, this is my mother's mother. The sequence of that man's mothers and grandmothers would not come to an end. Yet the grass, sticks, branches and foliage in this Jambudipa would be used up and exhausted. For what reason? Because, listeners, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings wandering and roaming on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by cravings. For such a long time you have experienced suffering, anguish and disaster and swell the cemeteries. It is enough to become disenchanted with formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to become liberated from them.

So *saṃsāra* is just the world of onward going. It's just a way of saying that. The world just keeps turning and turning. Jambudipa is the apple rose country, and that's what India was called at that time, Jambudipa, the apple rose country.

Now, I'll just read the next one because the next one just balances this. Monks, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. The first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Suppose a man would reduce this great earth to balls of clay the size of jujube kernels—that's very small—and put them down saying for each one, this is my father, this is my father's father. The sequence of that man's fathers and grandfathers would not come to an end, yet this great earth would be used up and exhausted. And for what reason? Because this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginnings. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, listeners, you have experienced suffering, anguish and disaster and swell the cemeteries. It is enough to become disenchanted with all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.

So the first thing is, that this idea of no beginning, this is very strange for us because in the West we see time as progress. God began something here and off it went and it's going to end up over there. And our idea of progress is that it's going somewhere. Actually, the whole point of the universe, the whole point of creation by God is that it comes to an end, and then there'll be the big judgment, and some go to heaven, but the point is, we have this idea of progress, right?

So even in our society now, on a materialistic level, we presume that technology will progress, we presume that science, everything is going to progress better and better and better and better and better, and at some point the universe is going to come to an end, right? The Big Bang is going to be exhausted, and that's the end of that. But just as an aside, you'll notice that even though our technology and our science is quite unbelievable, our moral behavior remains much the same as caveman. I mean, there's not

much difference between what happened at the beginning of the dawn of human consciousness and what's happening now. And this is because of greed, hatred and delusion.

Now in the East and in fact before Christianity—Judeo-Christian civilization—it would have been the same for the Greeks and the Romans. The idea was much more cyclical so time revolves. And of course you can see that in a sense that every day the sun rises and the sun sets and there's this cyclic. And when you get the idea of a cycle there's no beginning, there's no end, it just keeps going on and on and on. So it's a very different idea about what time is, you see.

Now, what was horrific to the people in the Buddha's time was that there didn't seem to be an end to it. That this was what was in store. Every life, every time you ended a lifetime, depending on your beliefs, some people believed your next life would be determined by your good actions, by what you did or what you didn't do. Some people believed it was just fate. So next lifetime, you ended up as a pig. And that was it. And then the next lifetime, I'd be human again. And for some people, it made no sense at all. For others, there was some idea of progression. That one went on and then went into higher realms. There was, of course, people who were annihilationists—when your life was finished that was it, it was complete. Others thought you went up to this very high realm and then that was it, cut off. So there's masses of ideas but the general thing was, was there a way out of this, you see. So that's the Buddha's—that's what he means by at its basic thing about *dukkha*, about suffering—was there a way out of this onward going, and that's what the word *saṃsāra* means.

So, he says, there's no discoverable beginning, you see. But then he points, of course, to an end, you see. I mean, the reason is, of course, because of this hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. So, the ignorance, remember, is not knowing who or what we really are. In so doing, we make the mistake, we think we are what we appear to be. And being humans we seek happiness in the human form. And that's where the attachment comes. And that's where the suffering comes.

Then he says of course that it's enough to become disenchanted. And what does disenchantment mean, you see? When you're disenchanted. So when you fall in love with somebody, there is that complete enchantment with the other. Their voice, the way they walk, the way their hair is. That's why nobody fell in love with me, you see. So, there they see that, and then suddenly, of course, about three months on, or six months on, something goes off and there's a disenchantment and suddenly they just—yes, to be enchanted is actually a word coming from witchcraft. You're drawn into, you're enchanted, you're drawn into, you're being mesmerized, enchanted, you see.

So to become disenchanted with something, to become dispassionate, in other words, not to have these feelings about craving and all that around things. And then finally, it's enough to be liberated from them. And of course, that liberation really means this complete disidentification and dispossession, mental dispossession of everything that's in this world. And that's what we mean by renunciation.

Now remember we're talking about a relationship, we're not talking about the actual things. We're not talking about not eating pleasant food anymore, we're talking about not having this wrong relationship with pleasant food. You've got to be careful or else you end up just dying of starvation because you think you've got to give up food. No, you don't have to give up any food.

And then, of course, he says the same thing for fathers, so both mothers and fathers. But that's an interesting thing for us, isn't it? The idea of time, how we perceive time. If it's progress, if we're always looking for progress, and you see that in our economic system, we're always looking for growth. They can't, these people in power, they can't think of an economic system which isn't growing. They can't get their heads around the idea that perhaps it's just sustainability we want. Just something that sustains and gives everybody enough food, enough clothing, etc. It's always really growth. And it's just very much a western thing. Very much a western thing.

Let me carry on because there's another two here which is worth doing. So a certain monk approached the Blessed One and paid homage to him and sat down at one side and said to him, Venerable Sir, how long is an eon? We'll talk about time again. An eon is long, monk. It is not easy to count it and say it is so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years. Then is it possible to give a simile, Venerable Sir? It is possible, monk, said the Blessed One. Supposing, monk, there was a great stone mountain, a yojana long, and a yojana wide, and a yojana high, without holes or crevices, one solid mass of rock—a yojana is seven miles approximately—at the end of every hundred years a man would stroke it once with a piece of cloth. That great stone mountain might by this effort be worn away and eliminated before the eon would still not have come to an end. So long is an eon. And of eons of such length we have wandered through so many eons, so many hundreds of eons, so many thousands of eons, so many hundreds of thousands of eons. For what reason? Because, monks, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. And then you get that repetition: A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time you have experienced suffering, anguish and disaster and swell the cemetery. It is enough to become disenchanted with all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.

And I'm beginning to wonder why Bhikkhu Bodhi had so many of these collected. He only needed one or two.

So here again this idea of time, you see, this idea of time. Of course there's what you might call scientific time or physical time, like the time it takes for the earth to go around the sun, something objective of that nature. So we've got hours and years and all that. There's also psychological time, you see.

Remember that sometimes time seems to drag when we don't particularly enjoy it. And sometimes we wonder where the time went. Sometimes we don't get enough time. So there's also this business of time as a mental thing.

Now, just as an aside, remember the mind is always projecting a future for us. So when we're happy, the mind presumes, that's how it's going to be forever. So when the stock markets rose, and they rose, and they rose, everybody thought, well, it's going to be forever. When you're in the other side, when you're in depression, the mind says, well, this is how it's always going to be. When you've got pain, this is how the mind's going to always be. So, really be careful of that because the mind is always fooling us. It's always creating a future. And it's always regretting or nostalgic for the past. The mind won't stay in the present. It doesn't like the present. Because it experiences the present as a sort of deadness. Like nothing happens in the now. If you're right in the now, nothing much happens. And if you're in the now, you don't know what's going to happen next. And that's too fearful. So the mind is always creating the next moment for us.

Now that's what you're doing in meditation. You're watching how the mind is always creating the next eon. What are you going to do when you retire? I don't have to think about that anymore.

Just do take a next one just to finish off. Then there's just one more for next week and we'll bring it to an end. Again, something very similar.

At Rajagaha in the bamboo grove, the squirrel sanctuary, a certain Brahmin approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. Now Rajagaha was the capital city of Magadha which is present day all around Varanasi—it's all that area—and Bimbisara was the king who was a great supporter of the Buddha. And it was around there that there would have been this shrine area where ascetics would collect and sit and then people would come ask them questions, bring food, etc.

If you go to Rajgir now, and it's a circle of mountains which would have been great for fortification. Now it's just a village on one end of it. And on the other side there's a hill called Vulture's Peak where the Buddha gave many a talk, especially in the Mahayana tradition. And if you go there now, there's still the hot baths. So that's probably why the king and his people chose it to be their capital city.

So when they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and asked, Master Gautama, how many eons have elapsed and gone by? The Brahmin, many eons have elapsed and gone by. It is not easy to count them and say there are so many eons, so many hundreds of eons, so many thousands of eons, so many hundreds of thousands of eons. But is it possible to give a simile, Master Gautama? It is possible, Brahmin. Imagine, Brahmin, the grains of sand between the point where the river Ganges originates and the point where it enters the great ocean. It is not easy to count these and say there are so many grains of sand, so many hundreds of grains, so many thousands of grains, so many hundreds of thousands of grains. Brahmin, the eons that have elapsed and gone by are even more numerous than that. It is not easy to count them and say there are so many eons and so many hundreds of eons and so many thousands of eons and so many hundreds of thousands of eons. For what reason? Because, Brahmin, the point is not discerned. This *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, monks, you have experienced suffering, anguish and disaster and swell the cemeteries. It is enough to become disenchanted with formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.

And just as a final thing, modern science, which equates very much with the Buddhist understanding of the mind, this idea of the vacuum which contains this unknowable energy, out of which the manifest universe seems to arise, the manifest and the unmanifest. And in Buddhist understanding there is this what you might call ground consciousness, the Nibbanic consciousness. And this Nibbanic consciousness finds itself in what you might call what we experience as the mind. And what we mean by mind is thoughts, images, emotions, and how the mind actually contacts the world physically—light, etc. And that, actually speaking, everything is coming out of that base nine. It's not the other way around.

So, you could say that a materialist, looking only at matter, has to then find a way of explaining how consciousness arises from subatomic particles. And they can't. It's called a hard problem. But from a spiritual point of view, it's actually coming the other

way. It's as though they're looking at the world at the wrong end of the telescope. It's actually coming out of this emptiness, this vacuum, which, within us, is this Nibbanic consciousness, the knowing, you see.

Every time we're in that position within ourselves, observing, observing thoughts, observing images, feeling and observing sensations and feelings within our bodies, we're actually moving back into that primordial state of pure intuitive awareness. That's why the Buddha says those who are mindful are in the presence of *Nibbāna*. But the Buddha told us not to identify with that. Well we won't go into that not tonight anyway—actually that isn't quite correct but I'll bring this to an end so that we can move on to a discussion.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you become disenchanted with life and move towards your own divine bliss sooner rather than later.

11. Rounds of Becoming

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15 min

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's stark description of saṃsāra as having no discoverable beginning - beings endlessly roaming and wandering, hindered by ignorance (avijjā) and fettered by craving (taṇhā). Drawing from the scriptures, he explores how even when oceans dry up, mountains burn, and the earth perishes, suffering continues for those caught in these rounds of becoming.

The teaching centers on the powerful simile of a dog tied to a post, running in circles without understanding what binds it. This represents how beings revolve around the false pillar of self-identification with the five khandhas (aggregates): form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā), volitional formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa). Bhante explains four different ways people conceptualize the self in relation to form, showing how each becomes a binding post around which we endlessly circle.

The discourse illuminates how this self-identification traps us in cycles of birth, aging, and death - not referring to physical death, but the constant arising and passing of the sense of 'me' through dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda). Only through Right Awareness and understanding the true nature of these aggregates can we cut the leash that binds us to this pillar of selfhood, finding freedom from the rounds of becoming.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-enlightened.

So we're actually coming to the end of our chapter on the human condition. And this is actually the last bit of quotation from the scriptures. So I shall read it as usual. Listeners, when you see this word "monks" in the scriptures, it stands for everybody who's listening.

"This saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. The first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Now there comes a time, monks, when the great ocean dries up and evaporates and no longer exists. But still I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. There comes a time, monks, when Sinaru, the king of mountains, burns up and perishes and no longer exists. But still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings

roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. And there comes a time, monks, when the great earth burns up and perishes and no longer exists. And still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

"Suppose, monks, a dog tied up on a leash was bound to a strong post or pillar. It would just keep on running and revolving around that same post or pillar. So too, the uninstructed worldling regards form as self, feeling as self, perception as self, volitional formations as self, and consciousness as self. And he just keeps running and revolving around form, and around feeling, and around perception, around volitional formations, and around consciousness. And as he keeps on running and revolving around them, he's not freed from form. Not freed from feeling. Not freed from perception. Not freed from volitional formations. Not freed from consciousness. He's not freed from birth, aging and death. Not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair. Not freed from suffering, I say."

It's a bit heavy, isn't it?

So here we have some old themes. This business of *samsāra* has no discoverable beginning. Really, that's just looking at cause and effect. If you go back on cause and effect, you don't seem to get to a beginning of it. In other religious forms, they try to form a beginning by saying a god started it at some point, but from the Buddha's point of view, there's no discoverable beginning for this. Which is awful, isn't it? It presumes that we've been going round and round like this dog for yonks. Roaming and wandering around, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

So remember, these are the two points on dependent origination. It begins by this fundamental not understanding, not knowing, which produces for us a misunderstanding. And that's the delusion. What is the delusion? The delusion is thinking that we are human beings in an absolute sense. Conventionally, obviously, we're not apes, or at least most of us aren't. You see some people walking along dragging their knuckles on the floor, but apart from those... So we have this mistake, and what the mistake does is it makes us seek real happiness in the sensual world. There's the desire.

And as you know, this desire leads to acquisition. We have to defend it, and therefore you get the opposite, the aversion, the hatred, and if the enemy is too big, fear. So remember, those are your three fundamental dispositions: acquisition, acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear. And from then, all human misery stems.

And then he gives us three images. There's the ocean, there's the mountains, and the earth. And he just says, well, when all this disappears... we know from science that this earth will disappear. At some point, the sun will... what do they call those big red blowout stars? Supernovae. That's it, we've had it then. We have to make sure that we're already inhabiting another planet. So once we know that the Earth is going to die at some point, and it'll probably die quicker than we think because of our own actions, and the ocean comes and then etc. But still, this doesn't mean that beings don't go on.

So this presumes, remember, there's always a presumption that there isn't just this physical body, there's also the mental body, the *mano-maya-kāya*, the body made by the mind, which is within this body and leaves the body when we die. But remember that that's not to be confused with the *nibbāna-dhātu*, as they like to say in Theravada, the element of *Nibbāna*, or that which is the Buddha within.

We begin to understand what that might be the more we meditate and the more we recognize what the qualities are of the one who's observing, that which is observing.

And then we get this image of the dog on a leash tied round and round, just running and running around a pillar. There's no end to it. The dog doesn't know what's tying him to the pillar. He just keeps running. He thinks that the faster he runs, the more chance there is of escaping. But he doesn't realize that he's tied to this pillar.

So what is this pillar that we're tied to? It's the self. That's the pillar, that's the false pillar that we've driven into our existence, thinking that, well, this is what I am. And therefore, we're always going to run around the demands of the self. And the self is what? Seeking happiness. Seeking happiness in this sensual world.

And this takes us to this whole business of what we think the self is. So remember there are four positions. And he has it nicely written here at the back. So, people regard the self as form. So, I am my body. That's the materialist position, isn't it? I am my body. And it gives an example of a flame of an oil lamp and its colour are indistinguishable. So, the flame and the colour are the same. So, a materialist will say, well, I am my genes. Full stop.

And then somebody says, well, the self as possessing form. So it's more the image of a tree possesses a shadow. So the real me is my mind, my heart and mind. But the body is not my real me. It's something I possess, but it's not me. And then there's the form which is in self. So it takes the formless mind as a self within which form is situated. So I am this mind of mine, this heart-mind of mine, and within that you find this body. Again the image is of a scent in a flower. The scent is in the flower, but then we think well, the flower is not the scent.

And then the self is in form in the sense of a jewel in a casket. So it's situated within the body, but it's not the body.

So we've got all these different ideas of a self, as to who we are, as to what we identify with. And that becomes the pillar. And then we keep running around the demands of this self.

And he goes through his usual way of describing the human being, which are these five *khandhās*. So the *khandhās* are these five aggregates, these heaps. It's just a way of looking at a human being to see where the problem is. There are many ways that you can split up the human form, but the way the Buddha does it is to show us where the problem is.

So the first one is the body itself. There's a whole thing that we call the body, both the physical part of our body and the way the mind experiences the body, through feeling, sensation. So for instance, the nail on my finger here... I don't know it, do I? I don't even feel it grow, I don't know anything about it. But I do know it by the sense of touch, and the fact that I can see it. But I don't actually know the nail in itself, do I? Strange. Do you think? I keep going on about, this is my body.

And then there's feeling. All these feelings, they're me. They tend to be easier to identify with. So when I've got a pain, that's me.

Then there's the perceptions. So perceptions lead to a lot of thoughts. So what I perceive, I believe, is actually true. And through our science, we might even come to the conclusion that what I see is actually the way it is. So when I see a tree, I believe that that's the way it is. But in fact, if I take another position, I see the tree differently. And other people see the tree differently. But I'm of the opinion in myself that when I look at a tree, that's the way it really is.

And then there's volitional formation. So these are what we would normally call our emotional thought life. And we identify with that strongly. I'm not feeling well. This is my opinion.

And there's consciousness. So the consciousness there is that I am that which cognizes and which can grasp things. It's a discriminative consciousness. So I am that.

So all these identities are part of this idea of who I am, which is this pillar. And I'm just running and running around this pillar, this self. And just like the dog, I don't see it. I don't see the problem.

Not until you become instructed. So we've all been instructed that there's absolutely no excuse for keep running around this pillar for heaven's sake. But until we do, then at least, as soon as we do realize where the problem lies, then at least we don't run around so manically. We still try and make a break for it and just find ourselves running around when we get lost in our indulgences and get caught up in hatred and all that. But at least when we wake up we think, hold on, I'm just running around this pillar again.

And he says there won't be... you're just not freed. Won't be freed from birth, aging and death. Now remember this birth, aging and death is the birth, aging and death of the self. The Buddha does not suffer from the birth, aging and death of self. He's liberated from that. His body dies and the Buddha within remains, goes who knows where. It doesn't have a lodging. It doesn't have a state. But it's understood in Mahāyāna Buddhism that there is also the *sambhoga-kāya*, the body of delight, which is the angelic body. It's still there. But it's not fooled by it.

So remember, whenever you hear in the scriptures this business of birth, aging, and death, it's always about the self, the idea of a self. And it's happening all the time. It doesn't happen when you're asleep. When you're asleep, there's no birth, aging, and death of a self. And when you wake up, you say, oh, here I am again. You say that every morning, don't you? Ding-a-ling-a-ling, oh, I'm here. Here I am again. And every time we go through the dependent origination, there's a self. So we're not always doing it. But every time we do it, there's a process of being born as me, and whatever me is doing comes to an end, and then there's a death.

And because of that, there will continue to be sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair. That's terrible, isn't it? There will be no freedom from suffering, I say.

So that brings us to the end of this section. And next week, which is my last Tuesday before Noreen comes, I'll just pull it all together, just this whole business on this section, which tends to be, shall we say, meditating on the dark side of life.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that you will, by your constant endeavour, cut the leash around that post sooner rather than later.

12. Short Review of the Human Condition

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20 min

In this concluding talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma provides a comprehensive review of his eleven-week exploration of the human condition through the lens of the Buddha's first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11). He revisits the four key areas examined: first, the inevitable suffering we cannot escape—sickness, aging, and death—illustrated through the divine messengers and the mountains crushing King Pasenadi. The teaching emphasizes developing patience (khanti) and right relationship with unavoidable dukkha.

The second area covers unnecessary suffering we create through mental proliferation, referencing the two arrows teaching where physical pain need not become mental anguish. Bhante explores the eight vicissitudes of life (gain/loss, fame/disgrace, praise/blame, pleasure/pain) and our anxiety about impermanence, rooted in wrong views of self (attā).

The third section examines how we cause suffering for others through attachment to views, envy, and selfishness, tracing the chain from elaborate perceptions (papañca) through thinking to desire and conflict. Finally, he reflects on saṃsāra's beginningless nature through powerful images of mountains, rivers, and the dog tied to a post—representing our bondage to self-view. The path to liberation (nibbāna) lies in investigating and transforming our fundamental relationship to existence, moving beyond the three roots of greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha).

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato
Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa*

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Today I wanted to take the opportunity to go over what we did, so that you get the overall picture of what we've been doing these past ten or eleven weeks, because it comes to the end of my session. Next week it's snoring with a bit of luck.

We were really looking at the human condition, and the thing we have to remember is that the Buddha doesn't pull any punches. He wants us really to face reality directly, and he does this in the first discourse, what we call the first Turning of the Wheel of the Law. Now that isn't exactly what he said obviously, but it's the platform of his whole teaching.

It begins with this word *dukkha*. There is *dukkha*. *Dukkha* means hard to bear. We translate it as suffering, but it's also translated as unsatisfactoriness. So it's the whole gamut really of the whole problem of human living. He begins to centre us specifically on the suffering that we can't do anything about. And that's where we started. We started with sickness, old age or aging, and death.

If you remember, he first points out to King Pasenadi of Kosala that it doesn't matter what station of life you are, rich or famous, whatever, sickness, old age and death is going to come. He has the image of the three great mountains stalking on poor King Bimbisāra. So he's full of good cheer.

Then there's the divine messengers. This goes back to the myth that surrounds his own awakening, where sometime in his early twenties, probably, the idea of sickness, old age and death comes to him very much as an existential problem. It drives him to seek an answer. It's put in that mythological sense of, he's out hunting and he sees a very sick person, a very old person, and a corpse, and a *samaṇa* sitting under a tree. So they're known as the divine messengers. But basically they are little awakenings.

If you remember, there's this lovely little parable about this man who's born in hell with Yama. Yama keeps asking him, "Didn't you ever see, my good man, the first divine messenger appearing among humankind?" "I did not see him." "My good man, did you never see a woman or a man, eighty, ninety or a hundred years old, frail, bent like a roof bracket, crooked, leaning on a stick, shakily going along, ailing, youth and vigour gone, with broken teeth, with grey and scanty hair or bald, wrinkled with blotched limbs?" He saw her and he says, "No, I haven't seen her." He says, "Well, it didn't ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, that I too am subject to old age, cannot escape it?"

So there's a lovely parable about Yama, King Yama, who's in charge of hell, the hell realms. Remember that hell in Buddhism is not permanent. It's still horrible, but it's not permanent.

He's pointing to the fact that there are things in our lives which are just part and parcel of the human condition, and that we can't do anything about that except form a right relationship with it. That's when he talks about patience and forbearance. Remember, the king says to him, "I've been engaged in these affairs of kingship, typical for kings, who are intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, who are obsessed by greed of sensual pleasures, and who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth."

Then he says, "But this great peril, this terrible thing, the destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain," and so on. Then he advises him to get his act straight. "As aging and death are rolling in on you, what else should you do but to live by the Dhamma, live righteously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

So it's a case of acceptance that there's no escape from these things in life. What's really going to undermine our suffering around that area is getting the right relationship to it. So the acceptance, the patience, the forbearance.

Then the next section was the suffering that we don't have to suffer. This is, in a sense, more important. If you remember, we had the image of the two darts. It's bad enough being ill, but getting depressed about being ill is unnecessary. Full stop. It's an option. We have an option not to feel depressed when we get ill.

Then he goes on about uninstructed worldlings. Those who are uninstructed experience a painful feeling, so then they sorrow, grieve, lament, weep beating their breast, become distraught. They have two feelings: a bodily one and a mental one. He's pointing to the fact that that isn't necessary.

It's the same with the eight vicissitudes of life. There's gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. How to be above that? Sometimes life works for us and we're doing okay, sometimes we lose it. Sometimes people love us and sometimes people don't. Sometimes people think we're absolutely fantastic, sometimes people think we're horrible. That's praise and blame. And then there's pleasure and pain.

Again, it's this business of being able to deal with these vicissitudes of life so that they don't actually get into us. As today, people are losing work and whatnot, so that's bad enough. But to actually find ourselves getting depressed about it, anxious about it — unnecessary. If you remember, when fame comes, he feels elated. When he meets with disrepute, he feels dejected.

Then we had this whole thing about anxiety and this anxiety about change. Remember the self? We went into all the business of the self and how we regard ourselves, how we perceive ourselves as being some individual, complete individual in a sense, kidding ourselves that we're in charge, that we have this control that we don't have. There were different ways in which we see ourselves: either as the body and mind, or inside it, or that we're possessed within the body and mind, and so on and so forth.

But it's this business of we always want to stop the world as soon as we've got something good. We just want to hold it there. Don't move, just keep it going. And the fact that everything is impermanent. Therefore we can't control it. Therefore nothing is reliable. So this is the cause of our anxiety.

Remember that for the most part, what we're anxious about never actually happens, because it's the mind's business to try and visualise the future. The mind's always throwing it forward, even when we're ill. If we have a painful illness, actually what's happening in the present for most people, for most illnesses, is some discomfort at some level and some inability — you can't go out or you can't do this or you can't do that. But then the mind launches it into days and months and years of the same problem, and then of course you feel horrible or depressed and terrible.

Then, once we discussed how we cause suffering for ourselves, which is unnecessary, we then talked about the world. What happens in the world? Why is it, the question is, that people end up fighting? I mean, in those days, the warrior caste fought the warrior caste, and the priestly caste, the Brahmins, fought the priestly caste, and householders, householders.

The first thing we discussed was this attachment to views and opinions. Obsessed with views and opinions. You've only got to think of the Houses of Parliament. I mean, ours has become a civilised fisticuff. But if you look at Syria, for instance, what's happening there, it's absolutely awful.

Then there's this lovely question: beings like all of us want to live without hate, want to live without harming and hostility and enmity. We want to live in peace, yet we live in hate, harming each other, hostile and as enemies. So what's the cause of that? In this particular passage, the Buddha points to envy and niggardliness. I love that word, niggardly. I think selfishness would have been probably — it's just envy and selfishness. Wanting what others have.

Then we have this process. What gives rise to liking and disliking? They arise from desire. What gives rise to desire? They arise from thinking. When the mind thinks about something, desire arises. When the mind thinks of nothing, desire does not arise. What gives rise to thinking? Thinking arises from elaborate perceptions and notions.

Remember, this was our habits. It's a difficult word to translate, but it means everything that we can create through an act of will. And that translates into all our habits, emotional and thought habits. So you're sitting comfortably in a chair and suddenly out of the blue this desire arises to rob somebody from the local post office. Be-

fore you know it, you're planning it, you've got your mates and off you go. Of course it can happen on the positive side too. You can imagine yourself saving the world and who knows what could happen then.

So it's a case of recognising the importance of catching our thoughts, catch it right at the inception, to actually know what's driving that thought and then to just let it pass and to stay with whatever negative state there is in the heart, wait for it to pass.

Then we have this whole business about causation, about everything being dependent on something else. So we can talk about causality. Some of it is dependent on things that have happened in the past, and then they keep producing things. Remember that dependent upon feeling, we had this craving, this desire. Like ice cream — it brings up a nice feeling when you think of ice cream, at least for most people. So then you get a craving for it, a desire for it. Then there's that pursuit for it, wanting to get it. And with that pursuit there comes the decision making. What to do about it, what to do about how you're going to get it.

Dependent on that, the desire grows. And dependent on that there comes the attachment: I really want it. And the possessiveness, keeping it, holding it. And dependent upon this possessiveness, this whole niggardliness comes up again. And depending upon niggardliness, there's defensiveness. You've got to protect what you have. And because of defensiveness, various evil, unwholesome things originate: the taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels and disputes, insults, slander and falsehood.

So it's really also being aware of how things progress through certain stages and being able to stop the process right at the point where you can. Which is the point of the arising of desire. That's where we have control. Once it grabs us, it's very difficult. Once it's really got some power behind it.

Then we go back now to the roots of violence and oppression. This comes down to these three roots of greed, hatred and delusion. Remember the delusion as we experience it is that we want to seek some sort of permanent happiness in the world. Even if it's not permanent happiness, we want to be constantly happy. And we tend to associate happiness with mental state of happiness. So we're always driving towards that end. And because of that, there's a sense of holding on to it. You get your acquisitiveness. And then you've got to protect it and you get your aversion, your hatred. And if it's too big, you run from it.

So it's really understanding that this goes very deep, it goes deep into our relationship to our lives. Whereas in the second section we were talking about how we cause suffering for ourselves, in the third one we talk about how we cause it for everybody else as well. Or at least how we're catalysts for other people's suffering.

Then finally we had these wonderful images of a beginning that is undiscoverable. We had the image of grass and sticks. If you were to cut up whatever grass, sticks and branches and foliage there are in this rose apple land, Jambudīpa — that's India — and collect them all together in a single heap, and having done so, you'd have separated them saying, "This is my mother, this is my mother's mother," the sequence of mothers and grandmothers would now come to an end. You'd be going back into endless time.

Then there was the image of the balls of clay. If they reduced this great earth to balls of clay the size of jujube kernels — I presume they're very small — you say, "This is my father, this is my father's father." And you'd never get to the end. Even though you got rid of all your jujube seed clay balls, you still wouldn't have come to the end of your search for your father's father's father's father.

Then there was the image of the mountain made of solid rock, a massive solid rock, seven miles long, seven miles wide and seven miles high. And every hundred years a man would stroke it once with a piece of fine cloth. How long it would take to wear the mountain down. What a horrible image is that?

Then he gave us the image of the river Ganges. The grains of sand between the point where the river Ganges originates and the point where it enters the great ocean. It's not easy to count these, hundreds and hundreds of thousands. He says it's not easy to count the eons, the hundreds of eons, the hundreds of thousands of eons that we've been roaming around in *saṃsāra*, this onward going.

And then finally, there was the dog on a leash tied to this pole, running round and round and round, helpless, unable to liberate himself. And that post, remember, going back to an early thing, is the sense of self.

So here we've been looking at the darker side of life. The fact of how we cause suffering for ourselves and what the root of that suffering is. And it always goes back to this essential problem about relationship, asking ourselves who we are or what we are, and what is our relationship to the life that we live.

Remember that it's recognising that as something to really investigate that liberates us from that wrong relationship. And the liberation of that wrong relationship is what the Buddha means by *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* has various meanings to it. One of them is no more desire. Now that's not wholesome desire. I mean the Buddha upon enlightenment

had the desire to teach others what he'd come to understand. It's this desire which gets us into trouble. That's one of the core meanings that the commentaries give to this word *Nibbāna*: no desire.

So that's it. We have to go away glum. Think about our lives, is it? Try to get us out of our glumminess. I can only hope that all these lectures have been of some assistance.

May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later. *Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.*

Righteous Government and Righteous Ruler

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min

In this opening talk from the series on 'The Happiness Visible in the Present Life,' Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's profound teaching on righteous governance and leadership. Drawing from the canonical image of the wheel-turning monarch (cakkavatti rāja), he examines how both worldly rulers and spiritual leaders must rely on the Dhamma as their foundation for providing lawful protection, shelter, and safety to those under their care.

The talk illuminates how the Buddha presents the Dhamma as the ultimate co-regent of any just ruler, emphasizing that true governance comes through adherence to ethical principles, particularly the Five Precepts. Bhante connects this ancient wisdom to our individual spiritual practice, showing how the Tathāgata as the 'righteous king of the Dhamma' provides protection through right action of body, speech, and mind.

This teaching reveals the transformative power of ethical living - both for society and for individual practitioners. When we align our actions with the Dhamma, we create an 'incomparable wheel' that cannot be turned back by any force in the world. Essential listening for understanding how Buddhist ethics apply to both governance and personal spiritual development.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

So I want to do this chapter from Bhikkhu Bodhi's *In the Buddha's Words*. It's a good compilation and I'm just going to make my way through the section which is called "The Happiness Visible in the Present Life." So that's hopeful, isn't it?

The first part really is about a king. So it's about the ruler, righteous rule. And just before we start, if you remember the stories that accumulated around the Buddha's birth and his life, there's that cute little story where Asita, who's a sage, has a premonition that some great being has been born. And when he finally goes to the Sakyas and he holds the baby in his arms, he says that either this child will be a universal monarch

or a fully self-enlightened being. And then he starts crying. And they say, "Why are you crying?" He says, "Because I'll soon be dead and I won't get the benefit of this person's enlightenment."

So, a touching little story. But it reminds you, of course, of Jesus and the temple of Simeon. So, there's always a point when we're recognised. I mean, if a few of you go for a job, one of you is recognised. You're always recognised for your talent, no matter where you are.

So the universal monarch keeps coming up through the scriptures and you could say that he's really the alter ego of the Buddha. It's what the Buddha would have been if he hadn't become fully liberated, if he'd stayed at home and carried on being a warrior of the warrior caste, the Kshatriya.

Anyway, so this is the Buddha talking about this. He says: "Monks, even a wheel-turning monarch, a just and righteous king, does not govern his realm without a co-regent." So the wheel-turning monarch, wheel-turning, refers again to the *dhamma*, turning the wheel of the *dhamma*.

"And when he had spoken this, a certain monk addressed the Blessed One thus: 'But who, Venerable Sir, is the co-regent of the wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king?' 'It is the *Dhamma*, the law of righteousness, O monk,' replied the Blessed One."

"In this case, the wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king, relying on the *Dhamma*, honouring the *Dhamma*, esteeming and respecting it, with the *Dhamma* as his standard, banner and sovereign, provides lawful protection, shelter and safety for his dependents. He provides lawful protection, shelter and safety for the Kshatriyas attending on him—that's the warrior caste—for his army, for the Brahmins and householders, for the inhabitants of towns and countrysides, for ascetics and Brahmins, for the beasts and birds. A wheel-turning monarch, a just and righteous king who thus provides lawful protection, shelter and safety for all beings, is the one who rules by *dhamma* only, and that rule cannot be overthrown by any hostile human being."

That's a pretty interesting statement, isn't it? So there's these three things: the lawful rule—that means our government should be giving us lawful protection, presumably that's from attack from the outside; shelter—and I presume that we can include in shelter clothing and all the rest of that that we might need; and safety—safety presumably from financial collapse. And he does this by following the *Dhamma*.

And what we mean by the *Dhamma* here, of course, for the just and righteous king is the five precepts. Now if you think of the five precepts, the first one is not to kill—not to kill any being, but I mean not to kill any human being. So you can imagine if in this world right now every human being were to take that precept, there would in fact be a little bit of a change in the world, to some great degree. So if somebody were to keep the precepts, if this king or if our rulers were to keep the precepts, then it would have an effect upon the whole society.

Now this goes back to the Buddha's position that our basic problem is to get the right relationship to the world. So from his point of view, it's all about ethics. It's all about how we treat people, how we treat the world, how we treat animals and so on. And this always comes from this basic understanding of no harm. That's your platform, no harm. And then from that platform, the positives arise: compassion, love, friendship and so on and so forth. And that's what is meant here by the *Dhamma*, by this wheel-turning monarch and the righteous ruler.

Now, as opposed to that, he says: "Even so, the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the perfectly enlightened one, the just and the righteous king of the *Dhamma*, relying on the *Dhamma*, honouring the *Dhamma*, esteeming and respecting it, with the *Dhamma* as his standard, banner and sovereign, provides lawful protection, shelter and safety in regard to action by body, speech and mind."

So now he's talking individually, now talking about each individual, although himself of course specifically as the fully self-enlightened one, also taking the *dhamma*. So the Buddha has a great respect for what he's discovered, for the understandings that he's come to, which are nothing to do with him personally. It's not as though he's invented them—they're there as basic laws and he respects that and he follows it. And then by that, he actually brings to himself lawful protection and safety and shelter.

So it has both this—you could interpret this as saying that when we live according to the *dhamma*, when we live according to righteousness or however you want to express it, it has both an inward effect and an outward effect. So in that sense, this universal monarch and the fully self-enlightened being refer to us.

"And such bodily action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken. Such verbal action should be undertaken, such should not be undertaken. Such mental action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken."

In other words, when it comes to actions, there are three actions. There's the thoughts that we have, there's the words that we speak and there's the actions that we do. And when we're clear about what we ought to be doing and what we ought not to be doing, then we change our lives. And because we're in relationship, we change the life of others.

So the final passage: "The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the fully enlightened one, the just and righteous king of the *Dhamma*, who thus provides lawful protection, shelter and safety in regard to action by body, speech and mind, is the one who turns the incomparable wheel of the *dhamma* in accordance with the *dhamma* only, and that wheel of the *dhamma* cannot be turned back by any ascetic or Brahmin or by any deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world."

So that's the power of goodness. I mean it's not always obvious in the world as we see it, but eventually, if you keep working at it, keep moving towards goodness, then it has this inner power. It has this inner power. And so that's why he says that it cannot be overcome once it's set in motion. The devas are, of course, the gods, and Māra is the evil one. Even Brahmā, the great powerful god and all that. But from our point of view, it's nobody in the world.

And it's because we generally do not act from the point of view of the *Dhamma* that we fall into all these horrible states.

So next week we'll do more of the specific teachings about how to live the good life. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

2. The Ruler

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this compelling DhammaBytes episode, Bhante Bodhidhamma completes his exploration of the cakkavatti (wheel-turning monarch) from the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta (DN 26), examining the Buddha's profound vision of righteous governance. The teaching reveals how this mythical ruler represents not only the Buddha's alter ego as a worldly leader, but also the potential for awakened leadership within each of us.

The episode details the seven treasures of the wheel-turning monarch - the divine wheel, elephant, horse, water-purifying gem, ideal woman, treasurer, and wise counsellor - and explores their symbolic significance. When a Brahmin asks the Buddha about conducting elaborate Vedic sacrifices, the Buddha responds with the story of King Mahāvijita, whose chaplain recommends addressing social problems through economic justice rather than punishment.

This teaching presents the Buddha's revolutionary approach to governance: rather than executing criminals or conducting costly sacrifices, a wise ruler should provide grain to farmers, capital to traders, and proper wages to government workers. This creates prosperity, peace, and security where people can 'dwell in open houses with joy in their hearts, playing with their children.' The episode demonstrates how Dhamma principles can guide not only individual conduct but social and political behavior, offering timeless wisdom for contemporary issues of justice and governance.

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato
Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa*

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I want to carry on this week with the world-conquering monarch, to finish it off, because we're starting at the top with government. If you remember from the last talk, we said that this monarch, the wheel-turning monarch, was in a sense the alter ego of the Buddha—how he would have been if he'd been a righteous king. I also tried to put it in terms of ourselves: there's the Buddha within us and there's us as actors in the world, and each of us have our own domains in the sense of what we can do, our power.

I wanted to go on to this wheel-turning monarch. He says, after hundreds of thousands of years, the king, Daḷanemi, said to a certain man: "My good man, whenever you see the sacred wheel treasure—that's the wheel-turning treasure—has slipped from its position, report it to me." Well, he does. And the king says, "Well, it's time for me to retire now."

So he tells his son that the sacred wheel treasure has slipped from its position. "And I've heard when this happens to a wheel-turning monarch, he has not much longer to live." So he does the right thing. He said he's fed up with human pleasures; it's time to get into heavenly pleasures. And so off he goes: shaves his head and beard, puts on the ochre robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

Then his son takes over, and seven days after the royal sage had gone forth, the sacred wheel treasure vanished. Bad news! So he's a bit worried about this. He calls upon the sage, and the sage said: "You should know that the wheel treasure has disappeared, but do not grieve or feel sad at the disappearance. The wheel treasure is not an heirloom from your fathers. But now, my son, you must turn yourself into a noble wheel-turner."

He gives him certain things that he has to do for this wheel to turn up. He asks him: "What is the duty?" So he says: "Right, so yourself, depending on the Dhamma, honoring it, revering it, cherishing it, doing homage to it and venerating it, having the Dhamma as your badge and banner, acknowledging the Dhamma as your master, you should establish righteous guard, ward and protection for your own household, your troops, your khattiyas—that's his caste—and vassals, for Brahmins and householders, town and country folk, ascetics and Brahmins, for beasts and birds. Let no crime prevail in your kingdom, and to those who are in need, give wealth.

"And whatever ascetics and Brahmins in your kingdom have renounced the life of sensual infatuation and are devoted to forbearance and gentleness, each one taming himself, each one calming himself, and each one striving for the end of craving, from time to time you should approach them and ask: 'What, venerable sir, is wholesome and what is unwholesome? What is blameable and what is blameless? What action will in the long run lead to harm and sorrow, and what to welfare and happiness?'"

So he does all this, of course, and blow me down, the wheel appears! Now, having the wheel, having now appeared, he also has, of course, the seven treasures of the wheel-turning monarch. They are: this divine wheel, which has all its spokes. And then the sacred wheel treasure appeared to him: thousand spokes, complete with rim, hub and all accessories. So this is this mythical wheel, the Dhamma wheel.

Now he does have other treasures. His other seven treasures are: the elephant—you have a good elephant; a horse, and this horse is special because it can fly through the air; he has a water-purifying gem—that tells you the importance of water in that society; a good woman—that's very important; a treasurer who can see hidden treasure, in other words, where you've hidden your money; and finally, a very wise counsellor. So with these seven treasures, he ends up being this world-turning monarch.

Now, here comes the meat of it, because this Brahmin addresses the Blessed One and asks him: "I've heard that you understand how to conduct successfully the triple sacrifice with its sixteen requisites. Now I do not understand all this, but I want to make a big sacrifice. It would be good if Master Gotama would explain it to me."

These sacrifices were based on the idea of appeasing gods. If you wanted a god to do something, you had to give him something. Even in the Bible, God wants Abraham to kill his son. It's this idea of giving something up to get something, and you have power over the person or over the god. By this time, these sacrifices weren't a case of "let's try and appease the gods." It was more: if the sacrifice was done perfectly, God had to answer. And the thing was that it really wasn't happening very much, and people were losing faith in that sort of big sacrifice.

These sacrifices—like the king's sacrifice—hundreds of horses were slaughtered, and cows. I mean, it was a big thing. It wasn't just get the old sheep dog or something and hang it from a tree. It was all done with precision. In other scriptures it goes into what was necessary for these sacrifices to be perfected. But here this Brahmin has come to him, and the Buddha tells him a story about this king called Mahāvijita.

"So he was rich and of great wealth and resources, abundance of gold and silver, of possessions and requisites, of money and money's worth, and with a full treasury and granary. And when the king was reflecting in private, this thought came to him: 'I have acquired extensive wealth in human terms and I occupy a wide, extensive land which I have conquered. Let me now make a great sacrifice that would be to my benefit and happiness for a long time.' And calling his chaplain—that would have been a Brahmin—he told him his thought. 'I want to make a big sacrifice. Instruct me, venerable sir, how this may be to my lasting benefit and happiness.'"

So his listener, this fellow who's asked him about the sacrifice, would have expected him to go into some detail on how to make these big sacrifices. But the Buddha says to him: "But this chaplain replied: 'Your Majesty's country is beset by thieves. It is ravaged. Villages and towns are being destroyed. The countryside is infested with brigands.'" In other words, he's telling us what the country was like—the country he's actually in now, where the Buddha is living. There were brigands and thieves and everything else.

"And if Your Majesty were to tax this region, that would be a wrong thing to do. Suppose Your Majesty were to think: "I will get rid of this plague of robbers by execution and imprisonment, or by confiscation, threats and banishment." The plague would not be properly ended." Ah, it's interesting, isn't it? To all these politicians that want to punish these people, put them in jail for hundreds of thousands of years: "Those who survived would later harm Your Majesty's realm. However, with this plan, you can completely eliminate the plague. To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let Your Majesty distribute grain and fodder. To those in trade, give capital. To those in government service, assign proper wages. Then those people, being intent on their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty's revenues will be great. The land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves. And the people will join their hearts; playing with their children, they will dwell in open houses."

Idyllic, isn't it? "And saying "So be it," the king accepted the chaplain's advice. He gave grain and so on. And those people, intent on their own occupations, did not harm the kingdom. The king's revenue became great. The land was tranquil and not beset by thieves. And the people, with joy in their hearts, playing with their children, dwelt in open houses."

So this is the Buddha's form of government. And just something to reflect upon: he's often—you get Buddhism criticized for not being active, not being proactive, and not being engaged. I think that's beginning to fade now because there's a lot of engaged Buddhism. But the Buddha had his own ideas of how people ought to be ruled, and his two very good friends were the local kings: Bimbisāra down in Benares—modern day Benares—and Pasenadi up in the north. He would have known these people, I think, from childhood. They were his age group, and during his time there was no war between them. It was a very peaceful period. It all began to break up as he was dying. The sons began to—well, Bimbisāra's son went and murdered his father, starved him to death, kicked him off the throne.

But the other form of government, which we'll come to later on, was this more tribal-based custom where it was more like an aristocracy, a bit like the Greeks. So the Buddha's father would have been the head man of that group of people, of that tribe called the Sākyans, who would be elected. Now in this book, Bhikkhu Bodhi says that the Buddha doesn't—he seems to be even-handed with both types of government. But the government he left for the order was of the community type. He didn't leave a Pope; he didn't leave somebody in charge at all. And he said you've got to take the Dhamma as your refuge and yourself as your refuge. So the government that he wanted for the order was the government of elders. I think that's where his heart was, and probably because that's the way he was brought up.

But at least here we see in these discourses that the Buddha was trying, in many ways when he was talking to people in power—Brahmins and such—to express the Dhamma as something which was guiding the society, guiding not only individual behavior but social behavior, monarchical behavior, the behavior of governments.

And you've only got to consider: if everybody in the world just now said they wouldn't kill any other human being, even that would be a tremendous change, wouldn't it? Or stop thieving from people. Especially copper. I saw the headlines about copper. Brilliant, isn't it?

So these are just things to ponder. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

The Six Directions Ritual as Useless or Meaningful

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this DhammaBytes episode, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a fascinating encounter from the Sigālovāda Sutta (DN 31) where the Buddha meets a young householder performing ritual worship to the six directions. When Sigālaka explains he's following his dying father's instructions to pay homage to east, south, west, north, nadir, and zenith with wet clothes and hair, the Buddha redirects this empty ritual into meaningful spiritual practice.

The Buddha reframes the six directions as key relationships: parents (east), teachers (south), spouse and children (west), friends (north), workers and helpers (nadir), and spiritual teachers (zenith). Instead of physical worship, he teaches protection through mettā (loving-kindness) directed toward these relationships. Bhante explores how this teaching addresses wrong rites and rituals (one of the ten fetters), distinguishing between harmful superstition and meaningful practice that supports the spiritual path.

The talk offers practical guidance on transforming daily routines into mindful spiritual practices, emphasizing that rituals become worthwhile only when connected to genuine development of wisdom and compassion. This teaching provides valuable insight into Right Livelihood and how Buddhist practice integrates with lay life responsibilities and relationships.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So now I want to move on to more familiar stuff about how we treat each other. There's a discourse here which looks at worshipping in the six directions. I shall read it and then we'll see what we can make of it.

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha at the Bamboo Grove in the Squirrel Sanctuary. So Rājagaha was the main dwelling place of Bimbisāra and his kingdom would have been along just north of the Ganges, that area. Then Sigālaka the householder's son, having got up early and gone out of Rājagaha, was paying homage with wet clothes and hair and with joined palms to the different directions: to the east, the south, the west, the north, the nadir and the zenith.

His father has died and it would seem that one way of paying respects was to wet your hair, wet your clothes. I've not been able to find out why that is. Presumably some sort of tears, maybe some sort of expression of sorrow, I don't know. And the Blessed One having risen early and dressed, took his robe and bowl and went to Rājagaha for alms. And seeing Sigālaka paying homage to the different directions he said, "How so? Why have you got up early to pay homage to the different directions?"

"Venerable sir, my father, when he was dying, told me to do so. And so out of respect for my father's words, which I revere, honour and hold sacred, I have got up early to pay homage in this way to the six directions."

"But householder's son, that is not the right way to pay homage to the six directions according to the noble one's discipline."

So Sigālaka is obviously one of his students.

"Well, venerable sir, how should one pay homage to the six directions according to the noble one's discipline? It would be good if the Blessed One would teach me the proper way to pay homage to the six directions according to the noble one's discipline."

"Then listen and attend carefully, householder's son, and I will speak."

That's good stuff, isn't it?

"Yes, venerable sir," Sigālaka said. And the Blessed One said this: "And how, householder's son, does the noble disciple protect the six directions?"

So here you see, not pay homage but protect. These six things are to be regarded as the six directions. Now before I tell you what they are, you have to guess. Each direction is to do with a relationship that we have, and he's basically saying that there are these six directions which he gives a certain relationship that we have, for instance with parents, workplace and so on.

So if you think of six people, how would you put them in order? Who would be your first? You don't have to shout it now, just in your mind. Who would be the first people you would pay homage to or pay respect to, or as he says, to protect? In other words, to send out loving-kindness. It's a protection, a protection, a blessing. It's a blessing. After the first, who would you then send out your loving-kindness to? Number two, number three, who would you send out your loving-kindness to? Number four, number five and number six.

So the six directions are east, so you start facing the east where the sun rises. East and then you go round: east, south, west, north, below the nadir, and the zenith. So you're moving round. You can imagine him doing so. He's facing the sun, the rising sun in the morning, turns to the south, turns to the west, turns to the north, all below him, all above him.

"These six things are to be regarded as the six directions. The east denotes mother and father. The south denotes teachers. The west denotes wife and children. The north denotes friends and companions. The nadir denotes servants, workers and helpers. And the zenith denotes ascetics and brahmins."

So we can, as it were, compare our value systems with those of his times, because this would have been quite general, the way that he's split society up like this. So he puts enormous stress on mother and father, and we'll come to that another time. And then his wife and children. Then his friends and companions. So presumably with wife and children it's also relatives. Then his friends and companions.

Now the nadir, he's obviously a rich person because here it talks about servants, workers and helpers. But it would mean your working companions, your livelihood. So remember that's important in the Buddhist teaching. He actually puts it as one of the Eightfold Path: Right Livelihood. So all those people involved in your livelihood.

And then finally up above, ascetics and brahmins. So the ascetics were the type of people that he would have been classed with, the *samana*. And the brahmins were the priestly caste.

Now the other thing to notice about this is the way that he changes ritual. In the ten fetters, one of the fetters is wrong rites and rituals. And this is what we get rid of when we enter into stream entry, like the first level of sanctity, the first noble level. And what is meant there, not that rituals themselves need be useless, but exactly why you do them.

So bowing to the Buddha and repeating the verses, the *vipassanā* verses, is all well and good. But in terms of the process of awakening it really doesn't have much weight. It's a reminder and if we make it as part of that practice to, as it were, get us into the *vipassanā* practice then all well and good. But in itself doesn't really take us very far. So all these things like lighting candles, refuges and precepts, they all have their place but in a sense they're worthless unless we do the real practice.

So here's Sigālaka and what exactly he was doing we don't know, but basically he was paying respects to the east, south and west. He was going around paying respects, exactly what that entails he doesn't say, but he was doing something which the Buddha

thought, well, that's absolutely useless. So he told him instead, using the same ritual, to actually apply loving-kindness in all these directions, and therefore he makes the ritual something worthwhile on the spiritual path.

So in our lives everything we do has to have that connection with the spiritual path. And although you wouldn't call them a ritual, they are in fact in some ways little rituals. For instance, just the whole process of the rising in the morning, from the moment you get up until you're ready to face the world, all that business of getting out of bed and washing, all that stuff, that can become a ritual, in that broad sense of the word, of making it meaningful to spiritual life.

So a ritual can be something that you're doing on a regular basis, something that you do all the time, round and round and round, like brushing your teeth. You can take it down to that level, in my understanding. And a ritual, of course, on its far end can be rather superstitious. You know, like every time you say something like, "I'm healthy," touch wood. That's a complete waste of time. But you feel good when you do it, because something in you says it's okay.

Just to reinforce that, there's a lovely little story where the Buddha sneezes. And the monks and all the lay people, especially the monks and nuns, they all offer blessings, like we would say, "God bless you," or something like that. And he says, "Does that help?" And they say, "No." He says, "Well, don't do it. Don't do it, because it's useless."

So, not before too long, the lay people start complaining, because when they sneeze, the monks aren't blessing them. So the monks came back to the Buddha and said, "Look, we've stopped doing these blessings for people with colds and sneezes." And he says, "Oh well, bless them. Because they're complaining," he says, "oh well, bless them."

So it's like if you're ready at that level of spiritual development to realise that some things are absolutely useless, then you'll stop doing it. But on the other hand, there's no harm in it. That's what he says, there's no harm in it. It's the same when somebody says to him that his students are going to these other shrines to pay respects to these gods and other people and he says it's no harm. It's just in a sense it's on the level of being useless but it's not particularly harmful.

So that's how we have this practice, that's how the practice came about of loving-kindness in the six directions. Now you can take it further than that because you can go in all sorts of directions and you can go east, east-south, southeast, and you go to all the points on the compass. And we had, I'll just finish off with this little thing, we had this rather lovely monk come from Burma to join us once at the Vihāra, and he wanted to do this practice with us, so he started off by, "All beings in the east, may they be happy

and peaceful. All beings in the southeast." And he got completely confused. And we all burst out laughing. And that was the end of that practice. He completely lost his compass points. He wasn't used to it.

But in fact, that is the classic way of developing *jhāna*, in developing absorptions in loving-kindness. So you repeat things, it's like a mantra and you keep repeating and eventually the heart moves, the heart rises and you start getting these lovely feelings. And it's done through this process because it demands concentration. You've got to know where you're going. Get the direction wrong and that's it, you've had it.

So that's the beginning of these scriptures in this particular book, telling us how to behave, giving us some sort of guidance in daily life. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated knowing which way you're facing, sooner rather than later. Thank you very much.

4. Parents and Children

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min

In this DhammaBytes episode, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's guidance on family relationships from the Sigāḷaka Sutta (DN 31), focusing on the mutual responsibilities between parents and children. He explores the five ways children should honor their parents: supporting them in old age, performing duties for them, maintaining family traditions, being worthy of their heritage, and making merit on their behalf after death. The talk addresses how parents should reciprocate by restraining children from evil, supporting them in good, teaching skills, helping them find suitable partners, and providing inheritance.

Bhante distinguishes between external duty imposed as 'must' versus personal responsibility willingly undertaken, emphasizing how gratitude naturally leads to fulfilling our commitments. He discusses how modern society's focus on individual rights contrasts with traditional emphasis on duties and responsibilities. The episode includes the Buddha's teaching that parents can never be fully repaid for their care, except by establishing them in the Dhamma - in faith, moral conduct, generosity, and wisdom.

Drawing from both ancient wisdom and contemporary challenges, this talk offers practical guidance for navigating family relationships with wisdom and compassion, while honoring the profound debt of gratitude we owe our parents.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, we're looking this evening at the business of family. And we'll start with parents. Whenever you offer loving kindness in the practice, you always start with your parents.

This is what he says about them. There are five ways in which a son should minister to his mother and father as the eastern direction. Now, we have to take for granted that this is a patriarchal society and sons are the only ones that matter. That's a bit cheeky. For son, read son and daughter.

He should think, having been supported by them, I will support them. I will perform their duties for them. I will keep up the family tradition. I will be worthy of my heritage. And after my parents' death, I will distribute gifts on their behalf.

And there are five directions in which parents, so ministered to by their sons in the eastern direction will reciprocate. They will restrain him from evil, support him in doing good, teach him some skill, find him a suitable wife, and in due time hand over his inheritance to him. And in this way the eastern direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear. Remember all these little things are always ending up with making it at peace and free from fear.

So we have to accept that the Buddha lived at a particular time, but most of what he says still pertains today. Having been supported by them, I will support them. These days more and more people are going to have to look after their elderly parents, especially baby boomers like my generation. And for some, it's very little. But for others, it's going to be a full-time job.

And this whole business of duty, if you feel that something is imposed upon you as a must, as an ought to, as an outside duty, then obviously it becomes a burden. But when you take it on as your personal responsibility, then it becomes something that you are very happy to take on. That's the distinction. So often when you get in popular psychology, this business of must and ought to are terrible things, it's good to make that distinction.

And of course, just by contemplating what our parents did for us, that one raises a certain sense of gratitude. And with that gratitude, there comes a desire to fulfill our commitments, our duties. I suppose the other thing is, ever since Freud, we've blamed our parents for everything that's wrong with us. So it became fashionable to hate your mother especially.

So there's a case of also recognizing that our parents were probably more enlightened than we are, but definitely unenlightened. And therefore, just did their best. Most of them did their best. And some of them would have been through rough times for various reasons. And that's the way it is. That's the way it probably was in the Buddha's time.

These days, of course, society is a bit more fraught. In his day, it was a much more agrarian society, much more gentle, easy-moving. There were hard times. There were famines. There was one definitely during the Buddha's time. It wasn't all easy. And there were local skirmishes, local wars. So it wasn't... Well, we know that his family, or his people, the Sakyas, were attacked by the local king, the Dudduba. And they had to shift capital. So there would have been lots of suffering there.

But it is this business of just looking at what we mean when we say must and ought to, our duty, duty and responsibility. It tends to be against the modern grain because we tend to prefer to talk about rights. My right. So if we say it's my right to look after my parents, then it's all right. I have a right to look after my parents.

And I will perform their duties for them. I keep up the family tradition. That's an interesting one, which might not pertain very much these days. But when I began to practice Buddhism, this was against the tradition of the family. The family were, by generations upon generations, Catholics on both sides. And I remember when I ordained as a monk, my parents, my brothers and sisters came. I wrote to my uncle, my one and only uncle. That's my English uncle. My mother's Italian, so I had uncles over there. But my only English uncle, I said, I invited him to come. And he said he couldn't, he said, because I'd abandoned the faith of my father.

So there are certain unspoken traditions in the family. One of them might be that nobody's ever been to prison and you've ended up in prison. Or in the older days, again, a lot of these things are much looser now, but divorce. I just can't remember. Oh, yes, that's right. In Sri Lanka, the man who looked after our monastery is an elderly fellow. He was talking to me about his personal life one day and he was saying to me, it was a terrible marriage and I wanted to divorce. So I went to my parents and said, I want a divorce. And they said, well, we don't do that, so I never divorced. So in certain families you do get this very strong tradition.

I'll be worthy of their heritage. And then after my parents' death I'll distribute gifts on their behalf. So this is to do with helping people through good works, passing on your merit to other people. And also in most religions you do things for your parents. In Buddhism, whenever you offer something to the monastery, whenever you give something to the monastery, you always do a *pirit*, and it's always for your relatives who've died. It's always for their benefit. Always bring that to mind.

On the other hand, of course, parents have a duty to their children, and they reciprocate. And they restrain them from evil. So we hear a lot of these days of blaming parents for the way some of the children behave. It's very difficult, isn't it? Because these days a lot of teenagers have their own minds and some of these families are under a lot of social strain. But they try and do their best. But they blame parents, the newspapers blame parents for all these kids that were out rioting and what not. But some of them are untrainable, aren't they?

You might be interested to know that there was a book published just after those riots in London called the Gangs of Manchester, believe it or not, which went back to the late 1900s, exactly the same problem with riots by the youth and all that. And the same

thing, papers going on about parents' duties and all that. And what they did was set up working men's clubs which taught them, which educated the poor people and gave them skills, and eventually found them work. And it took a generation. So that's what we're in for now. All those working men's clubs have disappeared, haven't they? It's been years since I've seen those.

And to find him, to teach him a skill. Educational. To find him a suitable wife. So that's gone out of fashion, hasn't it? And in due time to hand over their inheritance. So these are to be taken as things just to contemplate about our own relationship to our parents and our children.

But here he talks about how much we owe them. So this is how important he understood parents to be. He said, monks, I declare that there are two people one can never repay. What two? One's mother and father. Even if one should carry about one's mother on one shoulder and one's father on the other, and while doing so should live a hundred years, reach the age of a hundred years, and if one should attend to them by anointing them with balms, by massaging, bathing, and rubbing their limbs, and they should even void their excrements there, even by that would one not do enough for one's parents, nor would one repay them. That's good, isn't it?

Even if one were to establish one's parents as the supreme lords and rulers over the earth, so rich in the seven treasures, one would not do enough for them, nor would one repay them. For what reasons? Parents are of great help to their children. They bring them up, feed them, and show them the world. So that's his way of expressing our gratitude to our parents.

However, monks, one who encourages his unbelieving parents, settles them and establishes them in the faith, who encourages his immoral parents, settles and establishes them in moral discipline, who encourages his stingy parents, settles and establishes them in generosity, who encourages his ignorant parents, settles and establishes them in wisdom, such a one does enough for his parents. He repays them and more than repays them for what they have done.

So there is a way of repaying your parents, and that is basically to establish them in the Buddha's dispensation, which is a bit much these days, isn't it? But that gives you an idea of his way that parents were treated in his day. And you still get that in the East. You still get a special honouring of parents. I'm not so sure we do that these days so much.

So that gives you an idea of his advice or his guidance when it comes to dealing with our parents and how parents should deal with their children. So I think that brings us to the end of this evening's little homily. It'll take me a while to get through his whole thing, but this time next year I should have just about made it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

5. Husbands and Wives

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this DhammaByte, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's practical advice for married couples, drawing from discourses where the Awakened One addresses householders about relationships. The teaching presents four kinds of marriages - from 'wretch living with wretch' to 'god living with goddess' - all based on ethical conduct rather than material circumstances.

The episode examines a discourse given to the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika about his troublesome daughter-in-law Sujātā, where the Buddha describes seven types of wives: slayer, thief, tyrant, mother, sister, friend, and handmaiden. While these teachings reflect the social context of ancient India, Bhante Bodhidhamma highlights their universal relevance when applied equally to both partners.

Central to these teachings is the Buddha's emphasis that true happiness in relationships stems from ethical conduct - how we relate to others with wholesomeness rather than material compatibility. The Buddha's advice consistently returns to the foundation of the Dhammapada: 'cease from evil, do good, purify the heart.' This practical guidance demonstrates how the path to liberation encompasses all aspects of daily life, including the intimate bonds of marriage.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we've now come to his advice to husbands and wives. I've chosen, there's a couple of discourses here, but I've chosen two of them. So the first one, he says, different kinds of marriages.

On one occasion the Blessed One was travelling along the highway between Madura and Veranja, and a number of householders and their wives were travelling along the same road. Then the Blessed One left the road and sat down on a seat at the foot of a tree, and the householders and their wives saw the Blessed One sitting there, and approached him. And having paid homage to him, they sat down to one side, and the

Blessed One said to them, "Householders, there are four kinds of marriages. What four? A wretch lives with another wretch. A wretch lives together with a goddess. A god lives together with a wretch. And a god lives together with a goddess."

"And how does a wretch live together with a wretch? Here, householders, the husband is one who destroys life, takes what is not given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsely, and indulges in wines, liquors, and intoxicants, the basis for negligence. He is immoral, of bad character. He dwells at home with a heart obsessed by the stain of stinginess. He abuses and reviles ascetics and Brahmins, and his wife is exactly the same in all respects. And in such a way, a wretch lives together with a wretch."

It's pretty clear, isn't it? The thing about this is, just a little aside, is just to notice that he talks always about wines, liquor and intoxicants as the basis for negligence.

So how does a wretch live together with a goddess? So a husband is one who destroys life, etc., etc., abuses and reviles ascetics and Brahmins, but his wife is one who abstains from the destruction of life. She does all the opposite, so abstains from taking what is not freely given, abstains from sexual misconduct, abstains from speaking falsely, does not indulge in wines, liquor and intoxicants, the basis of negligence. She is not immoral or of bad character. She dwells at home with a heart not obsessed by the stain of stinginess. She does not abuse and revile ascetics and Brahmins.

The other little aside there is their relationship to ascetics and Brahmins. Obviously, there were people in those times who didn't like these loafers. The Buddha, in fact, there's one point where a Brahmin abrades him as being absolutely useless. He's walking around. The Buddha defended himself. We'll come to that maybe another time.

So then, of course, the other combination is a god who lives with a wretch. And finally, a god who lives with a goddess.

Now, when you read this, you realize that the Buddha, when he's talking about happiness, when he's talking about harmony, he's always on this level of morality, or ethics rather. So, he's never talking about somebody who's rich living with somebody who's poor, or somebody who's healthy living with somebody who's sick. It's always about how you relate to people.

So, ethics is basically around our relationships, whatever our relationships are, whether in this case it's between a husband and wife, or between yourself and nature, or even a stone. So that's what ethics is about. And as far as the Buddha is concerned, happiness is based upon the way we relate to things, either wholesomely or unwholesomely, or skillfully or unskillfully.

And his whole teaching is about that. In fact, the path to liberation is about purifying the heart. It's very simple, isn't it? In the Dhammapada he makes it very clear. He says, "Cease from evil, do good, purify the heart. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas." He drives it down to that simplicity. How do we relate to the world around us? And if we get that right, then we'll be happy. We'll be gods and goddesses. So that's the first little thing.

And I've got a little note here from Uncle Eddie. Uncle Eddie is an archaeologist, and he was taking people around Anuradhapura, which is the main ancient city in Sri Lanka. And he had these little jokes, and one of them was, in marriage there are three kinds of rings: there's the engagement ring, the marriage ring, and suffering. He's a killer. He was very funny.

Now this is where we sometimes are disappointed in the Buddha because we forget that his personality and his character is a product of his time and place. So we can't expect them to be postmodern. So there's a lovely discourse here on the seven kinds of wives. And after you've read it, of course, you can displace wife with husband and you get much the same thing.

So on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And Anāthapiṇḍika, remember, was the very rich merchant who bought him his first monastery. In the morning the Blessed One dressed, took his bowl and robe, and went to Anāthapiṇḍika's house, where he sat down in a seat prepared for him. On that occasion people in the house were making uproar and a racket, and the householder, Anāthapiṇḍika, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. And the Blessed One then said to him, "Who are people in your house making this uproar and racket, householder? One should think they were fishermen making a haul of fish."

"Then Venerable Sir, that venerable sir is our daughter-in-law Sujātā. She is rich and has been brought here from a rich family. She does not obey her father-in-law or mother-in-law nor her husband. She does not even honour, respect, esteem and venerate the Blessed One."

Then the Blessed One called the daughter-in-law Sujātā saying, "Come Sujātā."

"Yes, venerable sir," she replied. She went to the Blessed One, paid homage to him and sat to one side.

And the Blessed One said to her, "There are seven kinds of wives, Sujātā. What seven? One is a slayer, one is a thief, one is a tyrant, one is a mother, one is a sister, one like a friend, and one like a handmaiden. These are the seven kinds of wives. Now which of these seven are you?"

"I do not understand in detail the meaning of the Blessed One's brief statement. It would be good, Venerable Sir, if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I might understand the meaning in detail."

"Listen, Sujātā, and attend carefully, and I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," Sujātā replied, and the Blessed One said this: "With hateful mind, cold and heartless, lusting for others, despising her husband, who seeks to kill the one who bought her, such a wife is called a slayer."

Here's an interesting thing, that obviously in those days, the husband bought the wife from the family that she came from.

"When a husband acquires wealth by his craft or trade or farm work she tries to filch a little for herself, such a wife is called a thief. The slothful glutton bent on idling, harsh, fierce, rough in speech, a woman who bullies her own supporter, such a wife is called a tyrant."

"One who is always helpful and kind, who guards a husband as a mother her son, who carefully protects the wealth he earns, such a wife is called a mother. She who holds her husband in high regard as a younger sister holds the elder born, who humbly submits to her husband's will, such a wife is called a sister."

Stinger, isn't it, that one? It's not quite feminist, that one. I'll come back to that in a minute.

"One who rejoices at her husband's sight as a good friend might welcome another, well-raised, virtuous and devoted, such a wife is called a friend. One without anger, afraid of punishment, who bears with her husband free of hate, who humbly submits to her husband's will, such a wife is called a handmaid."

"These types of wives are called a slayer, a thief, the wife like a tyrant. These kinds of wives, with the body's breakup, will be reborn deep in hell. But wives like mother, like a sister, friend, and a wife called a handmaid, steady in virtue, long restrained, with the body breakup, goes to heaven. These, Sujātā, are the seven kinds of wives. Now, which of these are you?"

"Beginning today, venerable sir, you should consider me as a wife like a handmaid."

So obviously we can change wife to husband and go through it all. Yes, I mean, there are things which don't ring so happily for us about obedience and all that. These days we presume equality and all that, a sense of negotiation. But all these qualities that he talks about are on either side, aren't they? He holds his wife in high esteem as a younger brother holds his elder brother, rejoices at her sight, as one might welcome another. One without anger, afraid of punishment. That's a difficult one for us to get to. Afraid of being barked at, I suppose. Who bears his wife free of hate. So once you turn these things around, they have a more general meaning for it.

One little thing that comes out here is this whole business of authority. There's two things isn't there? There's being in authority over and an authority in. So if you're in authority over then what you inspire is fear. But if you're an authority in, then you inspire respect. So when you go to the doctor, generally speaking, we respect the person because we see them as an authority in their doctrine. But they don't have an authority over us.

I remember once when I had a bad cold, and it went on and on and on. And I went to see my doctor, and he obviously knew that there were certain types of people that when you made a prescription, they didn't take it anyway. So it was funny, because he said to me, after he'd given me this prescription, he said, "And make sure you take them."

I said, "What?" How did he do it? Which of course I didn't, because it was only a cold for heaven's sake. He gave me antibacterial stuff.

So the purpose of reading these things that the Buddha gives advice to lay people is that he is engaged in all the daily life and people went to him for what we would call just ordinary problems. And when you read the stuff, it's always around ethics and how we relate. Always around ethics and how we relate to people, to nature, to things. And that's what brings about, in his terms, a real sense of happiness, connectedness and all that.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later, even if you're married.

What Makes for a Good Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 16 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a discourse where the Buddha responds to a lay follower's request for teachings that lead to happiness both in this life and future lives. The teaching presents eight key factors: four for present welfare (persistent effort in one's work, protection of rightfully earned wealth, cultivating good friendship with those accomplished in faith and virtue, and balanced living within one's means) and four for future welfare (accomplishment in faith, moral discipline, generosity, and wisdom).

Bhante explains how the Buddha's practical advice remains remarkably relevant today, addressing contemporary issues like debt and consumer culture through the lens of balanced living. He explores the connection between ethical conduct and wisdom, showing how our unethical behavior stems from fundamental delusion about where true happiness lies. The talk emphasizes the transformative shift from seeking happiness through acquisition to finding joy in generosity and relinquishment.

Drawing on timeless principles, this teaching offers both newcomers and experienced practitioners a clear framework for living skillfully while progressing on the spiritual path toward the complete destruction of suffering.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So now we've come to a particular discourse which is really asking the question: what makes a good life? And again you have to translate a lot of what the Buddha said into the modern idiom. So I shall read it and then we'll see what we can say about it.

"Now on one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Kaliyans where there was a market town of the Kaliyans called Kakarapata. Then the Kalyan family man Dīgha Janu approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and so seated he said to the Blessed One: 'Venerable Sir, we are lay people. We enjoy sensual pleasure, dwelling at home in a bed crowded with children, enjoying fine sandalwood, wearing garlands, scents and unguents, accepting gold and silver. Let the Blessed One teach the Dharma to us in a way that will lead to our welfare and happiness, both in the present life and in the future life as well.'"

So that sentence, "crowded with children, a bed crowded with children" — like Eskimos, the Tibetans also, the whole family sleeps in the same bed. They don't have mummy and daddy over there and the rest of them in the back room. There they are, just like these days, sensual pleasures, enjoying fine sandalwood and all that, and accepting gold and silver. So remember, in those days, that was fairly new. You had to be rich. There was still mainly society with barter. So this was the beginning of the merchant class.

"There are, Bhiyagapaja, four things that lead to the welfare and happiness of a family man in this very life." So you have to translate this family man to a couple or whatever. "What four? Accomplishment of persistent effort, the accomplishment of protection, good friendship and balanced living."

"And what is the accomplishment of persistent effort? Here, Bhiyagapaja, whatever may be the means by which a family man earns his living, whether by farming, trade, cattle raising, archery, or civil service, or by any other craft, he is skillful and diligent. He investigates the appropriate means and is able to act and arrange everything properly. This is called accomplishment of persistent effort."

In other words, you do a good job. That's pretty straightforward.

"And what is the accomplishment of protection? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man sets up a protection and guard over the wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained, thinking: how can I prevent kings and bandits from taking this away? Fire from burning it, floods from sweeping it, and unloved heirs from taking it. This is called accomplishment of protection."

Well, there's not so much that. It's just, yes, exactly. I was going to say kings and governments taking away our money and bandits. And, of course, now we have insurance, so we're not too worried about these things. But I love that "unloved heirs from taking it away."

"And what is good friendship? Here, Bhiyagapaja, in whatever village or town a family man dwells, he associates with householders or their sons, whether young or old, who are of a mature virtue, accomplished in faith, moral discipline, generosity and wisdom. He converses with them and engages in discussions with them. He emulates them in regard to their accomplishment in faith, moral discipline, generosity and wisdom. This is called good friendship."

So that's the definition of good friendship. Faith — he goes on actually to describe faith as having faith in the Buddha *Dhammasangha*. But it's also trust, isn't it? Trust in each other. Moral discipline. He also explains that afterwards. Generosity and wisdom. As I say, he comes to that, so we'll read that for the time being.

"And what is a balanced life? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man knows his income and expenditures and leads the balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, so that his income exceeds his expenditures rather than the reverse. Just as a goldsmith or his apprentice, holding up a scale, knows by so much it has dipped down, by so much it has tilted up, so a family man leads a balanced life."

That's interesting because these days everybody seems — everybody's in debt. The average debt is eight thousand pounds, as what is on the news. Our society has not been living the balanced life. And so we've ended up in this dreadful place.

"The wealth thus amassed has four sources of dissipation: womanizing, drunkenness, gambling and evil friendship. Just as in the case of a tank with four inlets and outlets, if one should close the inlets and open the outlets, and there would be not enough adequate rainfall, a decrease rather than increase of the water could be expected in the tank. So these four things bring about dissipation of amassed wealth.

'Similarly, there are four sources for the increase of amassed wealth: abstinence from womanizing, from drunkenness, from gambling, and from evil friendship. And just as in the case of a tank with four inlets and outlets, if one should open the inlets and close the outlets, and there would be adequate rainfall, an increase, rather than a decrease, of the water could be expected in the tank. These four things bring about the increase of amassed wealth.'

So this tells you what people got up to. All sorts of clubbing. Drunkenness. This is not new, is it?

"These four things, Bhiyagapaja, lead a family man's welfare and happiness in the present life. Four other things lead to a family man's welfare and happiness in the future life. What four? Accomplishment in faith, moral discipline, generosity and wisdom.

'And how is a family man accomplished in faith? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man has faith. He places faith in the enlightenment of the *Tathāgata*: the Blessed One is an *Arahat*, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of *devas* and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One. In this way, a family man is accomplished in faith.'

So this basically is pointing to the fact that we need a spiritual hero, really, to emulate. Somebody who guides us, a teacher. They're lucky to have the Buddha. So it puts them in a slightly better position.

"And how is a family man accomplished in moral discipline? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man abstains from the destruction of life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from wines, liquors, and intoxicants, the basis of negligence. And this way a family man is accomplished in moral discipline."

You'll notice that wines, liquors, and intoxicants, he didn't consider them to be evil in themselves. It was more that it led to this basis for negligence. You do things under the influence that you wouldn't normally do.

"And how is a family man accomplished in generosity? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man dwells at home with a mind devoid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed, delighted in relinquishment, one devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. And in this way, a family man is accomplished in generosity.

'And how is a man accomplished in wisdom? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man possesses the wisdom that sees into the arising and passing away of phenomena, that is noble and penetrative and leads to the complete destruction of suffering. In this way, a family man is accomplished in wisdom.

'These four things, Bhiyagapaja, lead to a family man's welfare and happiness in a future life.'

So, having made clear what he feels makes us happy in this life — persistent effort, doing a good job, protecting what one has, good friendship and a balanced life — and that is it. Now when he talks about future life, future birth, which we can either take to mean after death, or just this life, the future of this life. The first thing he points to is that we need to have some sort of guide, a spiritual guide.

And then he says to accomplish in moral discipline. Remember that in the Buddha's teaching, our unethical behavior is the measure of our delusion. That's why morality, ethics and wisdom go hand in hand. You can't have the one without the other because the impurity in our hearts is caused by this deep wrong understanding which always begins with seeking happiness in the wrong place. Because we seek happiness in the wrong place, we become attached to it, we hold on to things. And that develops into greed, and at worst into stealing, things like that.

And when we do that, anybody who threatens what we have becomes our enemy. Find ourselves in conflict. So aversion arises. And if that person's too big, fear. You run for it. So there's your three basic dispositions from the position of delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear. And from there, all the miseries arise.

And what he's saying is that we abstain from the obvious expressions of that, which is the destruction of life, the wanton destruction of life, from stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and from these wines and from intoxicants, anything that takes away our sense of moral responsibility. And then of course there's the opposite to that which is complementary and that's generosity.

The last two you see — accomplishments in generosity and the accomplishment of wisdom is seen as the arising and passing away phenomena. In other words, seeing that things are transient. When we really see that things are transient then of course you don't hold on to them. Your grip loosens.

And one of the measures of the spiritual life — our own personal development — is that you find much more joy in giving than in receiving. That's one little test you can set yourself: are you still expecting people to give you things to make you happy? But actually you get much more happiness by giving, by giving away.

Now when you give away you have to give something up, and there's your relinquishment. That's the undoing of that tightness that we have around things — "my, this is mine." And that's how wisdom grows, you see, through realizing, through the deep realizing with the impermanence of things.

So if anything is impermanent it's obviously not reliable, and therefore why should we be upset when things that we love and hold on to and say are mine disappear or broken? So if somebody gives you a very precious thing like a Ming vase, you have to imagine it already broken. So when it does break you're not upset. That's the idea anyway.

Remember that when it comes to things, actually you can only use them. The idea of possession is a legal fiction, isn't it? I mean, you might say, "this is my car, see?" And then a thief takes it. You still go around saying, "this is my car." No, it's a thief's car. They've got it. But you still hold on to it as "my car." I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't try and get it back, you understand. It's just the pain, the pain of somebody stealing your car, "my car."

So when you switch your thing from "my car" to "a car I use," then the pain isn't so much, you see.

So on this particular discourse, you see, he's sort of broadened it out a bit from the other stuff that we were doing the other weeks.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Well, that was very weak. It obviously wasn't a good talk. I mean, it just didn't get the response. Oh, that's terrible.

Use of Wealth for Happiness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min

In this talk, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's practical advice on wealth and happiness given to the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika. Drawing from discourses in the Pāli Canon, he reveals how the Buddha encouraged laypeople to first make themselves happy with righteously earned wealth, then extend that happiness to family, friends, and the community.

The teaching outlines four worthy uses of wealth: creating happiness for oneself and others, securing against future losses, making offerings to relatives and spiritual beings, and supporting renunciants dedicated to Awakening. Bhante explores the four types of happiness available to laypeople: possession, enjoyment, freedom from debt, and blamelessness, showing how the Buddha valued both spiritual development and worldly wellbeing.

This practical Dhamma addresses common misconceptions about Buddhism being overly austere, demonstrating instead how the Buddha supported a balanced approach to material life. The talk includes valuable guidance on distinguishing between healthy enjoyment and harmful indulgence, offering wisdom for navigating wealth and pleasure in accordance with the Dhamma while maintaining ethical conduct and supporting spiritual growth.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassam Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassam Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassam

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

The advice the Buddha gives to lay people is interesting to see how he often phrases it, much the same as we did last week, but with a slightly different nuance to it. So first, I want to read out his advice on the proper use of wealth. Here he's talking to a householder called Anathapindika.

Anathapindika was one of the new classes of people, the merchants, and he was very rich. When he heard about the Buddha at one of his relation's houses, he had this sudden desire to see him, and when he did see him he really took him as a teacher and immediately offered to buy him his first monastery. As the story goes, he wanted to buy him a park owned by a particular prince, and the prince obviously didn't want to let go of this park. He said even if he covered it with gold, you know. So he offered to cover it with gold, and he did cover it with gold, and it became the Buddha's first monastery. That's how committed Anathapindika was.

He says, "With the wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained, the noble disciple undertakes four worthy deeds." So this is what you do with your wealth.

"With the wealth thus gained, he makes himself happy and pleased and properly maintains himself in happiness." Often when you read the Buddha's teachings, it's all about suffering and misery. It goes on and on about suffering and misery. But he's quite clear here that if you're earning good money, then your first duty is to make yourself happy, pleased, and maintain yourself in happiness.

But then he says you also make your parents happy and pleased and properly maintain them in happiness. He makes his wife and children, his slaves, workers and servants happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness. He makes friends and colleagues happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness. This is the first case of wealth gone to good use, fruitfully applied and used for a worthy cause.

The idea of money being something in our society has a certain dirtiness about it. Filthy lucre and all that. But the Buddha's quite clear, there's nothing wrong with money, if it is righteously gained. And the first duty, according to him anyway, is to make yourself happy. And in making yourself happy, you then obviously have the opportunity to make others happy. So it spreads outwards, your happiness becomes infectious.

Then he says, "Further, a householder with wealth thus gained, the noble disciple makes provision against the losses that might arise on account of fire and floods, kings and bandits and unloved heirs." Remember that one from last time, unloved heirs. "And he makes himself secure against them. This is the second case of wealth gone to good use."

That's something that we in our recent history have failed to understand. We're all, so many people have landed themselves in huge debt and have been happy to do so, living on the old never never. But he's quite clear that you have to hold something back just in case of fire and floods, kings, government always robbing us, and bandits, thieves.

Just on that case, a person who comes to meditate here had left the window open. She lived in a first-floor flat, left the window open, and some neighbor was able to sneak in and steal her laptop, her Mac laptop. And of course, being an honest person, following the teachings of the Buddha, she was quite truthful and said the window was open so she never got compensation, she never got her insurance. So luckily she had some money back and was able to get another one.

"Further, the householder with wealth thus gained, the noble disciple makes the five kind of offerings to relatives, guests, ancestors, the king and the devas." So on top of that you're making gifts. You actually do something more than just make people happy, you actually offer them things. So it's to relatives and guests, ancestors, so that's making some sort of, remember in those days you made sacrifice for the benefit of others. Often it was animal sacrifice. The great king's sacrifice was, I believe, hundreds of horses and cows. They were all slaughtered to create good karma for the person who died. I'm not so sure he'd actually want that.

Later on in another discourse, when this is put to him, whether they should kill animals for the benefit of other beings, he obviously was against it, and he suggested that they did good deeds for their ancestors and the king and devas. So that's a bit difficult for us these days to think of protecting deities. Well that's up to your personal beliefs really, whether you believe there are other beings, strong beings around who protect your property.

In ancient times you even had every house had its own little deity to which you offered your prayers. And if you go to Thailand, they've all got their little places in the garden, little houses for the devas. So that's completely up to you whether you want to do that or not. I mean, I do it. Every time I leave the place empty like this, I always ask the devas to protect it. You never know.

"Further, the householder with the wealth thus gained, the noble disciple establishes a lofty offering of alms for those ascetics and Brahmins who refrain from vanity and negligence, who are settled in patience and gentleness, who are devoted to taming themselves, to calming themselves, and to attaining *Nibbāna*, an offering that is heavenly, resulting in happiness, conducive to heaven." So it's making offerings to ascetics. This is a bit strange for our society, a sort of northern European Protestant who got rid of all the priestly caste and especially monks absolutely. So it'd be difficult for people in these particular countries to explain why they should be supported.

As you know, if you've received my latest little e-reminder, I'm off on this pilgrimage following some of the places that St. Francis followed. So St. Francis took to its absolute degree this idea of poverty, of letting go of everything and living off the alms that people would offer him. So why would he do that? I mean, why would people offer to feed him and look after him? I mean, not that he needed very much. His clothes were just sackcloth stitched together. It was obviously because they thought that it would be a benefit to them to support somebody who was developing themselves spiritually.

So in the Buddhist tradition, the idea is that of course somebody who joins a monastery, who becomes an ascetic in that sense, really is trying to overcome that deeper sense of suffering that comes from seeking *Nirvāna*. So properly speaking, a good monastery is really a spiritual hospital, and so lay people offer gifts so that people can become healthy.

In return, of course, the monastic is supposed to be advanced enough in their meditation and understanding of the Dharma that they can guide lay people. So that's the benefit for both sides. But the lay person is supposed to be driven by making offerings out of compassion for this person who's trying to get out of suffering.

Not that it's always like that. It always becomes slightly corrupted because the person's making offerings for their own benefit. There was a case that I heard of, a person who came up from Bangkok with this delicious food in order to offer it to Ajahn Chah and his monastery. And if you offer it to somebody who is highly attained, you obviously get far more grace than somebody who has very little attainment. So when he got to Ajahn Chah's monastery he found that Ajahn Chah wasn't there, so he put all the food back in the van and went somewhere else. That's not quite the way it's supposed to work.

So anyway, "The householder, these are the four worthy deeds that a noble disciple undertakes with the wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously earned. And for anyone whose wealth is expended on other things apart from these four worthy deeds, that wealth is said to have gone to waste, to have been squandered and used frivolously. But for anyone whose wealth is expended on these four worthy deeds, that wealth is said to have gone to good use, to have been fruitfully employed and used for a worthy cause."

For me what stands out is this idea that one has to make oneself happy and then others. Whenever we begin the *metta* practice I usually put to ourselves further along the line, but traditionally you start off with yourself because when you're happy you can make others happy. And we sometimes get confused with that, with being selfish. But it's not, it's self-care. So you have to make sure that just because you've treated yourself, that therefore you're being selfish. No, you might need to lift your heart a bit so you buy an ice cream or something.

Just to reinforce that, I'll just read this, it's a small discourse. So here, the Buddha is actually talking about what happiness is. So the Blessed One said to the householder Anathapindika, so it's the same person, "There are, householder, these four kinds of happiness, which may be achieved by a layperson who enjoys sensual pleasures de-

pending on time and occasion. What four? The happiness of possession, the happiness of enjoyment, the happiness of freedom from debt and the happiness of blamelessness." So these are the happinesses. But the first one you notice is to do with sensual pleasure.

"So what is the happiness of possession? Here a family man possesses wealth acquired by energetic striving" and so on. "And when he thinks 'I possess wealth acquired in this way, righteously gained,' he experiences happiness and joy. This is the happiness of possession."

"And then what is the happiness of enjoyment? So with the wealth acquired by energetic striving" and so on, "a family man enjoys his wealth and does meritorious deeds." These two always come together, to enjoy your wealth and to do meritorious deeds. "And he thinks 'with the wealth acquired in this way, I enjoy my wealth and do meritorious deeds,' and he experiences happiness and joy. This is called the happiness of enjoyment."

"And what, householder, is the happiness of freedom from debt? Here a family man is not indebted to anyone to any degree, whether small or great. And when he thinks, 'I'm not indebted to anyone to any degree, whether small or great,' he experiences happiness and joy. This is called the happiness of freedom from debt."

"And what, householder, is the happiness of blamelessness? Here, householder, a noble disciple is endowed with blameless conduct of body, speech and mind. And when he thinks, 'I am endowed with blameless conduct of body, speech and mind,' he experiences happiness and joy. And this is the happiness of blamelessness."

"These, householder, are the four kinds of happiness that a lay person who enjoys sensual pleasures may enjoy depending on time and on occasions." I can only hope these words have been of some assistance and that you will continue to enjoy your life and do meritorious deeds and in such a way arrive at that lovely place sooner rather than later.

Does that come as a sort of surprise? That the Buddha is so clear about certain types of happiness and that he's not at all gloomy about people enjoying themselves? That's because the normal message is *dukkha*, *dukkha*, suffering, suffering, misery. Get the hair shirt out. Don't do this, don't do that. But he's quite happy with it. He's quite happy with people earning good money and enjoying life and making sure that they also do meritorious deeds.

In that, when we say this grace before meals, perhaps you can look at it when you go to the kitchen, it's distinguishing between indulgence and enjoyment, appreciative joy and indulgence. And these two are so close together, it's very difficult. The only, you

only know that you've slipped into indulgence after the event when you find craving arriving for biscuits again. Then you know, ah, you didn't just enjoy them, you were becoming psychologically dependent on them for happiness. That's a very fine distinction, a very fine distinction.

So how would you get over that? How would you find yourself, if you find yourself raiding the biscuit tin every ten minutes, how do you get over that? You get over that through renunciation. So that's when you place the biscuit tin in front of you and refuse to take one until all desires for biscuits have disappeared. When all desires for biscuits have disappeared, then you can start again and enjoy them. And you have to be very careful not to just go over that edge so you're indulging again. Difficult, isn't it?

8. Virtues of a Good Spouse

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min

In this DhammaBytes episode, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a lesser-known teaching where the Buddha advised Visakha on the qualities that lead to success in both this world and the next. The talk explores eight virtues divided into two categories: four for worldly success (capability at work, managing domestic affairs, harmonious relationships, and financial responsibility) and four for spiritual liberation (faith in the Buddha's awakening, moral discipline including the five precepts, generous giving, and penetrative wisdom into impermanence).

Bhante contextualizes this teaching within its historical period while drawing parallels to modern relationships and domestic life. He emphasizes how the Buddha's approach was revolutionary for its time, particularly in recognizing women's spiritual potential for full awakening. The discussion highlights the integration of practical life skills with spiritual development, showing how ethical conduct in relationships reflects our wisdom or delusion.

The teaching particularly focuses on generosity as "delighting in relinquishment" - the joy found in letting go rather than merely giving. Bhante connects this to the ultimate spiritual goal of recognizing that "there's nothing in the world worth holding on to," leading to liberation from suffering through understanding the impermanent nature of all phenomena, including our sense of self.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we continue with our exploration of the Buddha's teaching about lay life. I thought I would do this one which is rather quaint to our modern ears. But it tells us a little bit about that society. And I don't think it's that too distant from us. You might have said these things to a woman right up until the 1960s, really. Anyway, this is what Bhikkhu Bodhi has called "The Woman of the Home."

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattḥī in the Eastern Park in the mansion of Migāra's mother. Then Visākhā, Migāra's mother, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him and sat to one side. Visākhā was one of his main disciples, very rich. And as you can see, it was in her park, so pretty well off. And the Blessed One

then said to her: "Visākhā, when a woman possesses four qualities, she is heading for victory in the present world and is successful in this world. What four? Here, Visākhā, a woman is capable at her work, she manages her domestic help, she behaves in a way that is agreeable to her husband, and she safeguards his earnings."

These days you can put "partner" where it says "woman," but I'm keeping it to "woman" because it gives us a flavour of his time.

"And how is a woman capable at her work? Here, Visākhā, she is skilful and diligent in regard to her husband's household chores, whether with wool or cotton. She investigates the appropriate means and is able to act and arrange everything properly. And in this way, a woman is capable at her work."

So this tells you a little bit about what a woman at home might do. Knitting, very much like you would expect somebody right up until, say, the 60s.

"And how is a woman one who manages the domestic help?" So this is only for those rather rich people. "Here, Visākhā, in regard to her husband's domestic helpers, slaves, servants, and workers, she knows by direct inspection what they have done and failed to do. She knows when they are sick and healthy, and she distributes to each the appropriate share of food. And in this way, a woman manages domestic help."

Now this would take you to "Upstairs Downstairs," wouldn't it? Don't know about the slaves. That goes back a bit.

"And how does a woman behave in a way that is agreeable to her husband? Here, Visākhā, a woman would not commit any misdeed that her husband would consider disagreeable, even at the cost of her life. In this way, a woman behaves in a way that is agreeable to her husband."

Now those were the days. We have to remember that in the book of Manu, which is a Brahminical text, a woman is seen to be as a chattel of the husband, and a woman is not capable of liberating herself because she can't get *moksha* — she has to be reborn as a man. So you can see how when the Buddha came along and liberated women from that oppression, saying that they could be fully liberated in this very lifetime, it was like men. It was revolutionary, really.

"And how does a woman safeguard her husband's earnings? Here, Visākhā, whatever a husband brings home, whether money or grain, silver or gold, she succeeds in protecting it and guarding it, and she is not a spendthrift, thief, wastrel, or squanderer of his wealth. And in this way, a woman safeguards her husband's earnings."

I'm thinking of this Indian man who came to the vihāra once, years ago. He was in a state of — I think he was overcoming shock. What had happened was he had done the thing of handing over his wages to his wife. And she had taken care of all the expenses. And unknown to him, she'd been sending this huge amount of money home to her side of the family. And he'd found this out a bit late in life. He was about to retire. So they were obviously spendthrift, you see, wasteful, and a squanderer of his wealth.

"When, Visākhā, a woman possesses these four qualities, she is heading for victory in the present world and is successful in this world. And when she possesses four other qualities, she is heading for victory in the other world and is successful in regard to the other world. And what four? Here, Visākhā, a woman is accomplished in faith, moral discipline, generosity, and wisdom."

"And how is a woman accomplished in faith? Here, Visākhā, a woman has faith. She places faith in the enlightenment of the *Tathāgata*."

So notice that — not in the *Tathāgata*, in the enlightenment of the *Tathāgata*, in the enlightenment of the Buddha.

"And how is a woman accomplished in moral discipline?" So your basic moral law. She "abstains from destruction of life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from wines, liquors, intoxicants, the basis for negligence."

So that's the main reason for not taking intoxicants — it's the basis for negligence. You do things under the influence that you wouldn't normally do. "In this way a woman is accomplished in moral discipline."

"And how is a woman accomplished in generosity? Here, Visākhā, a woman dwells at home with a mind devoid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed, delighting in relinquishment, one devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. And in this way a woman is accomplished in generosity."

Generosity comes up very much in the Buddhist teaching. Whenever he gives a talk to lay people, he always starts with generosity. And here it's beautifully put why we should be generous: "devoid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed." So these are all adjectives for generosity, but "delighting in relinquishment" — delighting in relinquishment. That's tough, isn't it? Delighting in giving something away. I mean, giving something away is one thing, delighting in it is something else. And "devoted to charity." "Delighting in giving and sharing."

So that's one thing we parents teach children, isn't it? To share. And often in children, it comes very naturally to want to share, doesn't it? And they delight in it. Then, of course, we get stingy.

But that business of relinquishment — remember every time we give we have to let go of something. That's the process of relinquishment, of renunciation. And eventually everything has to be renounced — everything. When we say everything has to be renounced, we're talking about our relationship to something, which is about holding on.

I was at a vihāra, you see, and a monk asked me where did I get my hat? So I said, well, I don't know. He said, "I'm looking for one like that," you see. Now, if I'd have been delighted in relinquishment, I'd have immediately given him my hat. But I didn't. I did not delight in relinquishment. I thought, I'm not giving him my hat. However, I did make up for it, because later on I sent him my hat. But it took about three months for me to get around to delighting in relinquishment. Not until I'd got another hat either. So you can see I've got a long way to go.

"And how is a woman accomplished in wisdom? Here, Visākhā, a woman possesses the wisdom that sees into the arising and passing away phenomena. That is noble wisdom and penetrative, and leads to complete destruction of suffering."

So that's, again, the actual spiritual path, which is about undermining certain delusions. And it always starts with impermanence, because that's the most obvious one you can catch. Anybody can see impermanence. If you say to somebody, you know, everything changes, they say, "So what?" I mean, the seasons change, they know it changes. But it's the penetrative seeing of changing.

And remember that that penetration is not so much out in the world, it's within here. The sense of I is also arising and passing away and has no substance. When something arises and passes away, it has no real existence. It's not an entity, is it? And remember it's perceiving this constantly that allows us to come to this lovely phrase from the Buddha that there's nothing in the world worth holding on to. And then of course relinquishment becomes easy — you stop holding on to things. And that's a sign to us — the more that we can do that, the more we're releasing ourselves from suffering.

"So when a woman possesses these four qualities, she is heading for victory in the other world and is successful in regard to the other world."

Here the Buddha is mixing, you see, what you might call the virtues that we need for ordinary daily living and those virtues we need to liberate ourselves from suffering. It's quite realistic, isn't it? We've got to be able to handle life, we've got to be able to do

things which are to our personal betterment within society, like the job we do. And that runs hand in hand with the practice, with spiritual practice, which is about liberating ourselves from suffering.

So the four that are successful in this world are: capable at our work, managing our lives, our domestic lives, behaving in a way that's agreeable to those around us, specifically our spouses and partners, and safeguarding the earnings, the wealth of our family.

And what are those factors that bring about accomplishment, that bring success and victory in the other world? So that's faith, trust. I mean, these days, it's funny how it's translated — that is normally confidence, trust in the Buddha's teaching, to put trust in it. Moral discipline. So remember that the Buddha brought our whole problem down to our ethics. Ethics is about relationship. So our relationships manifest our delusion or our wisdom — the way we relate to things, the way we relate to ourselves. That's ethics. Generosity, which is the positive side of ethics. The virtue leads to everything else. And wisdom — wisdom in the sense of a direct, penetrative truth-seeing which liberates us from this fundamental delusion about identity, about who we are or what we are.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by developing domestic virtues as well as spiritual virtues, liberate yourselves from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

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