

09. Power

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 25:33

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-violence, 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 problems 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.

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