Is Awareness Enough?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Dharma Talks · 54:01

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One. I thought I'd try and put things together to make it clear as to what the role of awareness is in the process of enlightenment and what else is necessary.

If we begin with the life of the Buddha himself, remember that he had practiced quite fiercely for six years. And before that he probably dabbled a bit. In the first year or so, he attains all these very profound absorptions to the point that both teachers ask him to join them as teachers. And these are what we now call the *jhānas*. Also during that time he's obviously keeping his mind very still because one of the factors of enlightenment, one of the factors of the *jhānas* is a still mind, a concentrated mind.

Then he does mortification exercises, mainly around not eating. And he comes to the end of this process after six years and he's got nowhere. Nowhere in terms of his koan, in terms of his real life question, which is, is there an end to suffering? All that time, he had awareness.

He comes to that point, and in desperation, he's sitting by the roadside looking pretty ragged. And a woman comes along with a bowl of rice, as you know, meaning to offer it to a god. In the scriptures, they say that she mistook him for a *deva*, for an angel, for a god. But I don't think he looked like that at all. So they took pity on him and said, you'd better take some of this rice. So he had this rice, and he felt fulfilled. And he thought about what was going on and all that. And he must have been pretty miserable. His mates had left him. They said he'd gone soft because he'd eaten his rice.

And then he remembered this little time in childhood, when he is observing his father, he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. Now there's something in that observation, there was something in that particular moment, which he remembered at that time, in a time of desperation, looking back over his life, wondering whether there was an end to suffering. And he remembers this particular state of mind. If you go back, can you remember a particular state of mind at the age of 8, 9, 10, 12? So it must have been something that he really remembered, something about the quality of that observation, which he then, of course, goes and sits and determines not to move until his eyes are enlightened or he drops dead. Have you tried that?

So he sat there, and luckily for him, and for us, he became enlightened. He had this insight which liberated him, liberated him from this confusion about suffering. So that's his story.

Then, of course, the whole of his life is actually talking about this moment, of how to get to this moment of liberation. And the core discourse is the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse here, the discourse on how to establish this *sati*, which we translate as mindfulness, awareness, attention, being present. All these are about being here in a particular way.

Now, if we look at this, you'll see it's the words he uses. He says that the meditator sits and he observes these four frames of reference: the body, feelings, the mind with its emotions, and *dhamma*, which he means to look at all this from the point of view of his teachings. The three characteristics, the four noble truths, eight of these, ten of those, and so on. And he says to do it with *ātāpī sampajāno satimā*.

Ātāpī comes from the word *tapos*, which means mortification exercise. So in other words, it's real energy. So those people who translate the Zen effortless effort, meaning that you can just lie down and it'll happen, haven't read this particular discourse. So there's some energy here. We need some energy. We need some commitment. We need some real putting of our effort behind something.

The word *satimā* is just an adjective from *sati*. So, with awareness, translated. Mindfully. And the middle word is *sampajāno*. *Sampajāno* meaning with intelligence. These core words are in constant recurrence throughout the discourse.

When we get into the discourse itself, which describes in more detail how we establish these four frames of reference—the body, feelings in the body, emotional states, mental states, and the *dhamma*—we get these recurring phrases. He says to establish mindfulness on one of these four and to do it inwardly just to the point of being able to stay with it. Then the next stage is to observe the rising and falling—that's the next stage. And then finally he says to dwell upon it, to dwell upon the object of meditation, just so much that *jñāna* and *paṭissati* can arise naturally. *Jñāna* is insight. *Sati* is awareness. So there's nowhere in the scripture that *sati* and *paññā* are separated. Wherever there's *sati* there's *paññā*.

So *sati* is that awareness, general awareness. *Paññā* is intelligence. It's an intuitive intelligence.

Now, if we go back to *sati*, go back to awareness, a robber, in the midst of robbing a bank, is ultra-aware, isn't he? I'd be. Very mindful. My head would be sparking. When you're crossing a road and it's busy and you've got to watch yourself, you're aware.

So there's something about the awareness which is going to become enlightened, which is leading us to enlightenment, which is not ordinary awareness. That's why the Buddha calls it *sammāsati*, right awareness. A baby is aware. In fact, if anything, a child is living almost in a very present moment, but it's not *sammāsati*. So there must be something else to the *sati*.

Now, if we go to the factors of enlightenment, then we come across those factors which are necessary to also be there against this background of *sati*. So *sati*, you can say, is like a field of awareness. It's just a being present. But there must come something into that presence which is going to spark, which is going to actually see something.

And what we find in the seven factors is this *dhammavicaya—dhammavicaya*, which means investigation of *dhamma*. So although we have this awareness, it has to be pointed at something. It has to be aware of something. There has to be an intentionality behind it. You can't just flop, go into this wondrous, spacious state of being all things, in a state of open awareness, because nothing's going to happen. It's very nice, it's very peaceful, it's very beautiful, but it's dull, it's daft. Nothing happens.

So there has to come in this *dhammavicaya*. This *dhammavicaya*, this investigation of *dhamma,* has to be balanced with *upekkhā*, with equanimity. This suggests that this investigation must not have a question there. That's the problem. As soon as we say, let's investigate something, a question arises. Somehow we have to develop that curiosity which is just a question mark. As soon as there's a word put to it, as soon as there's a looking for something, then it's going to be corrupted. It's going to be corrupted by that concept that you're looking for.

Balanced with that you have *pīti* and *passaddhi*. *Pīti* here translates as interest. Interest is an attitude, isn't it? It's a mental state to have interest in something. There's an eagerness included in there, a wanting to know. It's a heart state to be interested in something. Now that has to be balanced with *passaddhi*, which is tranquility. If interest is not balanced that way, then it becomes excited. And if there's no interest there, then you enter into this lovely meditative state of tranquility.

You can see meditators when they do that. They'll be like this. And if you wake them up, they say, "Oh, I'm here. What's wrong? I'm aware." Put them to sleep. It's lovely. Nothing's going to happen. They're going to end up after an hour just as daft as they were before they started.

So there has to be this intelligence, this interest, this wanting to know. And subsisting all that, subsisting and helping all that, is of course concentration, which is this one-pointedness of the mind, the ability of the mind to stay still. And the effort—and this is the *ātāpī*, this is the effort of mortification exercises—is just enough effort to maintain that. That's all.

So there's your seven factors of enlightenment. And you can see that in the scriptures. He never separates awareness from intelligence, awareness from intuition.

So when we meditate and we sit here, the first effort is to bring the mind to a stillness. But once you're in that stillness, once you've made the effort to, as it were, quiet down and to become aware of the object, there has to arise in us this wanting to know. Now, what is it we want to know? What is it that wanting has to be pointed to?

Here, the Buddha simply says to become aware of the three characteristics of existence. Because when we become aware of the three characteristics of existence, we're undermining this consciousness which believes itself to be a self. So as long as we are aware of transience, and that's his next step. So the first step was just to dwell upon the object. The second step is to become aware of its process.

But here, to my mind—I'm not so sure this is particularly commentarial, but to my mind—this watching of

anicca, watching of transiency, includes the other two. Which is to observe how suffering arises and to observe that quality of not me, not mine. So there are your three characteristics.

So now you can see that this intuitive intelligence which is natural to us and which is the same intelligence that works out how much we have to pay for the bills and what we have to do at work. It's all the same intelligence. There's no other intelligence than the intelligence we have. What we need to do is clarify the intelligence of thought and clarify the intelligence of any distorting emotion. And we do that by making states of mind objects. We do that by bringing the mind into the present moment so that thought can't get in because thought is always after thought. When you're involved in something, there's no room for thought.

So the whole process of the meditation is to bring this, is to, as it were, close down the awareness into the present moment to an object arising and passing away so that there's no time but to see what there is. But that seeing is guided, is actually being primed to see the three factors, to see the three characteristics of existence: the fact that it's arising and passing away; the fact that it's not me, not mine, the distance; and the fact that any time I form a relationship with it, of wanting or not wanting, possession or identity, some dissatisfaction arises.

It's just watching that that liberates this consciousness from wrong relationship to the body, mind and heart it's in. And that's all we're doing—we're just changing our relationship to the world. And remember, in Buddhist terms, the world is how we experience the world. In other words, it's within this, as he says, fathom-long body. It's not outside us. It's within this bubble of our consciousness. That's what we've got to change.

Considering his own discovery of the role of awareness—when you think about it, it can't only have been awareness, it must have also been the memory of this intuition that came with it, this way of looking—and the example that I always use is of a little child who's around about pre-language or around about the beginning of language, where there's no conceptual thinking as such. They might have a word "car" or whatever, but there's nothing built up around it conceptually.

And you'll often see them see something like a bug which they've never seen before. And you see them just lock onto it. They just lock onto it. There's no time as far as they're concerned. There's just this thing crawling away. And you'll see their mouths drop. Now when the mouth drops and the tongue relaxes, there's no thought. So there they are, just in that moment. And they're just stuck there. And then some well-meaning parent will tell them to shut their mouth and kill it.

But if you leave the kid alone, then of course it comes out of it and says, "What is it?" Now once the parent says, "Oh that's a beetle," that's it, it doesn't look anymore. It knows it. And we've lost that direct contact with beetles. When was the last time you really looked at a beetle?

So that's what conceptual, that's what the concepts do. They make us presume that in seeing a thing

through the vision or through the prism of a concept, we actually experience it. So somehow we've got to go beyond that, and we do that by constantly bringing this attention into the present moment. And as it locks into the present moment, there can't be room for thought. And we're right there with that childlike mind. Except this time, it actually has some intelligence, some stored wisdom behind it, which the child doesn't have. If the child had that, it'd become enlightened at the age of three. But we have to go through the horror of our lives in order to build up the wisdom of how to develop this way of looking. Remember, it's suffering which leads us to the enlightenment. So we've got to go through the pain, or else there's no gain. Everybody knows that.

In this scripture, he's very clear about that. So now we come to this confusion as to how we can be confused with the different traditions. As far as my understanding is—and you're welcome to correct me after the talk—there are two major traditions. There's the Vipassana tradition and there's the Dzogchen-Zazen tradition. And just on the outside of that, there's the Koan tradition.

What is the difference between those two approaches which can cause confusion to meditators? In the *vip assanā* process, we want to get to that *satipañña*, we want to get to that *sampajāno satimā*. And we do it by way of using an object within the body, the breath itself. By turning inward and going into the breath, we pull out that singular object and we begin to, as it were, bury our awareness and that intuitive intelligence just into a single sensation. All the world is in a grain of sand.

In that moment, when we, as it were, open up to the field of awareness, so that we're not just concentrated into the breath, but able to observe anything which draws our attention—we're not looking for anything, so I'm sitting watching the breath and there's a bird song, and it's the bird song which is drawing my attention. I'm not looking for bird songs. And as I go to the ear, as I go to the ear base, I'm interested in the process of hearing. I'm not interested in the bird. I'll see the image of the bird in my mind. I hear and I feel my response to it. So I can see this whole connection I have with the outside world. I can see that when the bird stops, there's a longing for it to go on a little bit more. So there's my attachment. So that's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in the way that this mind is constantly wandering between wanting and not wanting. How things arise and pass away. Creating that distance, recognizing it's not me, not mine. And it's all come from this center in the breath where I've honed the seven factors of enlightenment.

Now, if you go to the Dzogchen school, or the Zazen school—the Zazen school I know personally—as soon as you sit, you're supposed to be there. Like that. Boom, boom. You made it. That's it. You're right there. Just where you were, it took these poor Vipassana ninnies weeks to get there. These Dzogchen guys, boom, that's it, they're there.

Now it can't be so, can it? There must be something going on. So that somebody who throws themselves into a Zazen position, Shikantaza. Now when you look at their training, you can see how they get there and are able to hold it. Remember that in most, like, something like Sogyal Rinpoche, as far as I know, you sit in Dzogchen for ten minutes. That's all they can expect from somebody who's doing their practice at an

ordinary level. Now remember that insight in the Enlightenment doesn't take any time. You either see it or you don't. It's a flash, that's it, it's finished.

But if we look at the whole tradition, then we see how they can just sit there for ten minutes, or maybe an hour, or whatever. Hundred thousand bows. *Om mani padme hum*. Days on end. What are those practices? Visualizations, purifying the heart. It's only when you've been through all that can you throw yourself on the cushion and enter into Dzogchen.

There's the balance of the practice. Dzogchen masters and Zazen masters will tell you that the error of somebody in Dzogchen and Zazen is that they fall into the same error as Vipassanā people: to move into that state of clear awareness, absolutely still body, straight, perfect energy, no thinking, perfect peace and happiness until they wake up.

If you look at the Zazen school, you've only got to go up to Throssel Hole. It's been years since I went there. But when I used to go up there, you'd work three hours at a stretch. You'd never stop. And you worked fast. I remember once I was saying to the work chiefs, the abbot wanted soil moved from one end to the other end to build a little garden. So I was stood at one end with a spade, and there was another guy stood at the other end, and there was this Dominican priest with a wheelbarrow, belting up and down. He shoved it in and down, he chucked it out and back up. Three hours! Weeding for three hours.

The whole idea of that Zazen meditation is not something separate from what you do. It's a common mistake, especially in the Vipassanā, because we have these special practices, special occasions, but in Zen they always talk about ordinary daily life. So there you are weeding, and you're weeding. You're putting your mind in it. You know, when you wash, you've heard these Zen sayings, when you wash the pots, just wash the pots. So when you weed, you weed. And you're weeding, and you get into the rhythm of weeding, and you don't want to leave the weeding. And the bell goes, and you want to keep weeding. And then you go back, and you're full of this energy. And you go, boom, something's going to go, and you're there. It's not that the mind doesn't wander, but at least you've got some concentration because of the hard work, you've got the energy, and so you can sit in zazen, just sitting.

Now the koan is an interesting one, because the koan actually has its roots, all these things have their roots in the fundamental schools of Theravāda and for the Mahāyāna, what became known as the Sarvāstivādin school. If you have a look at this very dry tome called the Path of Purification by Buddhaghosa, a scholar of the medieval ages, the driest book in the world, bag of bones, but probably the most brilliant piece of, most brilliant compendium of spiritual exercises you'll come across. And one of them is how to become enlightened by repeating the word death. How to become enlightened by repeating the word death.

So how are we supposed to do that? Well, the idea is that you sit, you be silent, and you use the word death to contact your feelings about death. Every time you say death, images may come, feelings may come. It's an internalised practice of what's in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, known as looking at dead bodies in

cemeteries. It's the *asubha*, it's the horrible meditations. And you're supposed to go to a cemetery and a charnel ground where the bodies were just left and eaten by vultures and rotting and all that, rats around. And you're supposed to sit there and just watch bodies rotting. Come back, see them in different states and keep saying to yourself, just as this body is, so mine will be. The commentary warns you not to sit upwind. Very detailed.

So there you are sitting, repeating this word death, and it's bringing up all your emotions about it, all your feelings about death. And just like vipassanā you observe in part one. And who is it? What is it that's afraid of death? It's the self, isn't it? So once you've cut through the fear of death, what is it to be afraid of? Hence the enlightenment.

Now from that you can see how the koans came. The koans, now the regular koan in somewhere like Korea is who am I or what is it. Now, a person in the old days would have been given a koan, and they would have been caught up in this intellectual answer. The Rinzai school was meant for, was supposed to be for samurais and for the intellectuals. So, the yogi would come along, and the master would ask him the koan, and he'd wait for the answer, and the guy would give him some sort of explanation, well, I'm not this, I'm not, and he'd get a clout across the ear. And he'd keep coming, getting bonked on the head, until finally he stopped thinking. That's the point. That's the point of the koan, to stop thinking.

So the idea in the koan when we say something like, who am I? And remember, these koans come up naturally in your meditation. Just feeling a feeling and hearing a little question like, what is this? That's your koan. It is turning on that intelligence. That's what the koan is doing. It's turning on that intelligence, making that intelligence look in a certain way, but beyond thought. So the meditator, just like one would say, death, and just feel what comes up, you might say, who am I? And just rest in that moment and let the intelligence take over. Our problem is we keep getting in the way. We keep trying to manipulate that intelligence to see what we want it to see and become enlightened.

So you can see how the koan is just an extension, is just a more obvious way of exciting this *paññā*, this intuitive intelligence we have within us. So now you can see, if you come from the Zen tradition and you meet a Theravādin, and the Theravāda says, all you need is awareness, they'll say, oh, no, no, no, that won't do at all. But in the Theravāda understanding, whenever you say right awareness, the intelligence is included. It's not right awareness unless the intelligence is being activated, the intuitive intelligence. And that's where the confusion lies often when you meet these schools, because they're coming from slightly different traditions. But it's always the same. It's always the same.

And in his book, which is still considered to be a classic of meditation, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation by Nyanaponika Thera, a very famous German monk who died not so long ago, he said that there was a time when people thought that Theravāda meditation, vipassanā, and Zen were sort of two opposites, belonged to two different worlds. But in fact, when these teachers came together, and when people who had practiced both actually began to realize that in fact it's all one and the same thing. And when you

think about it, how else could it be? How else could it be?

So there we have it. The Buddha's own remembrance in childhood of a particular level of consciousness. It's not a state of mind. It's not an emotional state. It's not a thought state. It's a way of seeing things. Because of his own practice, he has that concentration of mind. He has the effort. And he has the rice pudding. And he sits under the tree and he becomes enlightened. And then he realizes what the factors are that made him get there. And the main factor is this *sati*. Behind it there are all the faculties. Why does he put *sati* first? Because that's your main disposition, awareness. To begin with the awareness of the object is your disposition. And then once the awareness is there, the concentration and effort will come to rise to support it. And once the awareness and concentration is there, and it's coming more and more into the present moment, the intuitive wisdom, supported by faith, if there's any scepticism you've had it, supported by faith, uses those qualities to see clearly what's going on. And just that seeing is its own liberation.

So the liberation is consciousness liberating itself from wrong view. And the whole process of the enlightenment is simply to get out of the way. The effortless effort. That's it.

Is there any questions? Observations? Criticism? Additions? Editorials? Yes?

"There are many stories about people who follow the teachers and then are severely treated in order to get rid of this ego which you mentioned in the classic. That is one of the biggest barriers to being able to have these states come together in the right portions and go forward. How does it work, doing that, going out and scourging yourself on weekends?"

I don't think Buddhist teachers were particularly cruel. I mean, the only real stories come from the Zen tradition where they chop your hand off or something, or chop your finger off if you happen to. Who? Oh, yes, yes, yes. Well, remember that the way teachers teach their students is very much dependent upon the culture. I mean, I can't imagine a Westerner taking that sort of business. I mean, they'd probably smack the guy, smack the person back. It's not within our culture to be battered towards the enlightenment. I mean, the Buddha himself wasn't. Nobody gave him a whack or two.

As Buddhism spreads, remember, it does pick up the culture. In the West, we're in very early days, very early days, and I can well imagine within two or three generations, four generations, that the Buddhism in the West is remarkably different from the Buddhism elsewhere. Because that's what's happened everywhere else. Chinese Buddhism is remarkably different from Japanese, from Thai, from Tibetan. So it changes, but your core question is in fact how to get rid of ego and the self.

One of the things that is very difficult for us is the word obedience, is the word submission. We can't handle that. It goes against the whole post-modern idea that I do my own thing in my own way in my own time. But before the Buddha became enlightened, so it is said, he put his bowl into the river and it flowed upwards against the stream. Only dead fish go with the flow. So this was symbolic of the fact that

whatever we do towards enlightenment is always going to go against the self. Always. Always.

So the self, remember, is caught up in a game. It's caught up in a game with the world of wanting and not wanting and it finds a certain pleasure there. It finds a certain comfort. It doesn't want to let go of it because it always thinks if it can get it right it will definitely be perfectly happy. So that's one of the things about bowing. People hate to bow, but in fact bowing is the physical, it's the bodily expression of that submission. That's one reason it's the physical expression of submitting yourself to the dictates of the Dharma. So if the Dharma says you shouldn't indulge in this then you have to bow to that. If you can't bow to it, if you can't take the teaching, if you can't do it, then you just end up with a very stiff back. An arthritic back.

And this is one of the fundamental attitudes of any spiritual life. It's not just Buddhism. Humility goes all the way through. This word humility, which has now been downgraded into slavery. But humility is that ability to be obedient. Who uses the word obedient these days? You don't hear parents use it with kids. Be obedient. It's all gone out of the language. It's too painful for the ego. The word discipline. The word discipline. I mean, it actually means, if I remember rightly, study, isn't it? Disciplina. Does anybody know? Disciplina. It means learning. Learning. So in a university you have a discipline. We talk about a discipline, because to study, to advance in knowledge, there has to be this commitment, this order, this discipline. But these days, education is much more concerned with entertainment.

So, in answer to your question about the way teachers teach, it's often to humble, to humble the student. I remember when I was in Burma, and I was, you know, being the westerner, and frankly, I just got fed up of bowing to this monk. I mean, he was my teacher, but I just got fed up with him. And he was so conceited, as far as I could see. Arrogant. I wasn't going to bow to him. And I remember approaching him and just sitting there. And he went... And if I hadn't have bowed, I'd have been out. That's it. Forget it. And what he's teaching me is, look, if you're going to take my message, then you'd better have the right attitude. One of the most painful times of my life.

"Is the awareness with interest and energy, what exactly do you mean by energy?"

Energy is just the effort to maintain it. I mean as a physical thing, the only energy you need to become enlightened, if we could hold it there, the Buddha says for seven years if you're unlucky, for seven days if you're really with it, it's just the energy to keep you upright. Just the energy in the spine. So all the energy you need is the resolution, the energy to just keep observing the object.

So that's why I mentioned to those of you here for the meditation that if we are serial meditators, then every time we come to sit, you really have to remind yourself what you're going to do. And so you make that resolution. This period of time, I'm going to commit myself to establishing mindfulness. Put it in your own way. Unless you forget, and you just sit there, it becomes habitual, and the mind wanders, and sure, you've planned your holiday down to America, but what's the point? But if you sit and you make this resolution right at the beginning of your sit, then I think you'll find that when you wander, you'll come

back to that same resolution. Because remember, that resolution is conditioning your mind, it's conditioning you to be present. It's an attitude, it's an attitudinal change to be present. And I would say that every time you lose it on a dream side, you come back, you stop for a moment, you recognize what's happened, and you recommit yourself with real resolution. Resolute resolution.

"But don't you need like a free flow of energy so no tension?"

Say that again?

"A free flow of energy so... In the whole body, not just a resolution."

I don't quite know... Well, should... Yeah, oh energy, yeah, say no more. The thing is once you're in this posture and you're lifting the energy up the spine just by sitting tall, then you're actually correcting all the energy in your body. You will feel, I'm sure many of you have felt, all the chakras fire. Pain in your stomach, pain in your chest, around your neck, it's all blocked. That's it. You don't have to do any yoga posture to become enlightened. You don't need astrology.

"You seem to be saying in the talk that... Is that what you were saying?"

That's right.

"It seems that people can have quite deep insights into those three experiences, but not have a final cessation in suffering. Maybe some change in ways that can happen, so they can bring wisdom and intelligence, but there's still a sufferer and still suffering can take place."

Yeah. So... Insight or... It's... Yeah, no, it's... The insights into these things are like little... Little corrections of view. Little corrections. Until the whole thing becomes properly corrected and then you're enlightened. They're just little adjustments. And they show up in little changes in the way you behave, in the way you react to similar situations, in the way you don't react to similar situations. Little changes within you. It's a very slow process. I mean, the Buddha often warns us this is a slow process.

And then there are kernel points when we can talk about a shift in perception. And these are what we call the stream entrant, the non-returner, and the arahat. I liken it to a stick. You see, you keep bending the stick. Now you'll notice that when you first start bending a stick, it's easy, isn't it? So when you first sit, it's easy. But as you keep going, you get the resistance. You get the resistance. And you get the resistance, and that's the ego, it's pulling away. And you've just got to keep working. And sometimes you relax, and you back up again. But remember that every time you flex it, you are getting stronger. You all do these exercises, I'm sure. And then one day, crack! Two sticks. Different state. Yeah. That's how it goes.

Yes?

"My question was going to be that once the stick is broken, is there no going back?"

Definitely not. And who'd want to go back? You see, if you think of the shift of consciousness, this very

great shift that we go through between six and eight, where we get real. When we're six, believing Father Christmas comes down the chimney is not a problem, because what I can imagine is true, it's fact. Eight is a bit difficult. And then this morality comes in.

It's not as though young children don't feel shame and guilt, but it becomes much more clear around the age of seven, right and wrong. The tree of the fruit of good and evil. Now you wouldn't want to go back to three years old. I don't think so. So once you've moved, once you've become a *sotāpanna*, once you've become a stream entrant or an *arahat*, you don't want to go down again.

Is enlightenment one thing from which there is no going back or is it also a temporary insight? Now actually, this is a good question because this is also very confusing from the different traditions. In Theravāda we have things like *jhānas*, these insights of *vipassanā*. In the Japanese tradition we hear about satori and kenshō and they're actually all the same thing. You'll find that when you read the literature and you go through all the traditions, you'll find they're always talking about the same thing. They're always talking about little insights concerning the three facts, concerning the three characteristics. Transience, how suffering arises, and not self. It's always that. And then you'll see that they often have a special word for what we would call stream entrance.

Now, up until that stick snaps, you can always go back. And it's very difficult. It really is. Oh, it's soul destroying to have got the stick there and to have given up. It's like climbing up the mountain and you're almost at the peak and you tumble all the way down. So it's very important not to push ourselves too much so that in a sense we exhaust ourselves. We have to take a pace which is our personal pace of enlightenment. Just our personal pace.

Some people walk round and round and round spiralling up the mountain and the occasional person can just go straight up. So we've all got our little way. And you have to be very careful that you don't push yourself too much because that would be the error of westerners. Even if you're only moving at one nanometer per ten years, that's okay, it's moving up. I'm very careful of that. Very careful.

And the other mistake, of course, is to overestimate. That's the other side, where you think you've made it. That can be very depressing when you find out that you haven't. I've had two experiences, just personal experiences, where it was just a pain, really. And I just came to a point where I thought, God, no, I can't handle this. And I was just going to cut out and get back to a bit of happiness, for God's sake. And it was one of these little moments in your spiritual life. And I actually made a decision to give up.

And all I can say was that the next moment I was filled with an intense horror as to what that meant. Absolutely, the horror was so awful within me as to what that actually meant that I just went and sat on the cushion and waited until the intention to meditate came again. And I've also had the experience of thinking you've achieved something and actually you haven't. That's a bit depressing. It takes a couple of beers to get over that. And then you gather energy and you start off again.

The ego gets more and more subtle the more you chase it. The more you overcome ego, the more subtle it becomes. Remember, conceit stays with you to the bitter end. It's the last fetter to go, one of the last fetters. Restlessness is one of the last fetters. And restlessness here suggests every neurosis you can think of, but extraordinarily refined. But it's still there.

So the fear's still there, the anger's still there. Everything's still there, but it's just like a... But it's still there, right to the bitter end. It's a little bit more fun taking things at your own pace.

How do you know if you're being lazy or not trying hard at all, or overdoing it? Well, I think it's a case of personal experiment. I think you just have to... In terms of laziness... I like to just make, it's my own definition really, laziness is when you decide you're not going to do it. When you decide that instead you can have a cup of tea. It's actually a conscious decision. I'm fed up.

Sloth and torpor are slightly more subtle because they're mental states that arise. And often, my teacher used to call them our two very good friends because they're always saying, "Ten minutes won't do you any harm. Just have a kip. You'll feel so good." But in fact, it's not tiredness at all. It's just sloth and torpor.

So in a sense you've got to experiment. You've got to experiment and just be very aware of your body, very aware of where the limits are. When it came to sloth and torpor, for instance, and just general laziness and not wanting to do things, this was the great problem of Moggallāna, who was the second great disciple of the Buddha. And the Buddha gave him, if I remember rightly, thirteen different ways to awaken, to stay above the sloth and torpor. And only at the end of that could he say he was really tired and have a sleep.

It's like you're trying to just push the boundary, but not so much that you crack it. And you have to be prepared to make mistakes unless you know the limit. And then you make a mistake. But if you go warily, the mistake isn't crushing you. I'm just going back now to the seventies, the middle seventies, where so many people I know really got into this business of these insights, which are all delineated, and just exhausted themselves with this very wrong effort of trying to achieve something.

And one very good friend of mine, he was in Burma actually, he dropped out. I could see it. I could see it happening. And he dropped out and I met him about seven years later and that year he'd spent ten thousand pounds on crack. So you can fall a long way. So that's not to frighten you. I'm not suggesting that you're going to rush out and get crack. But it's just a matter of experimentation. It's just a matter of working within your limits.

May I say something? Sure. I work as a therapist in Canada and what I've found is that there's a tendency in Canada at least, and perhaps over here as well, for people to flog themselves and to really push quite hard. It's even quite inherent in the media telling us that we're not good enough, that we need to be better, look better, that there's something that we're not quite right. And that this can carry over into meditation, for myself as well, that watching the pushing beyond and wanting to be the perfect meditator and to be compassionate.

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