

Bodhisatta's Training to the Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Dharma Talks · 59:49

*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 for those of you who have just joined us, I've been using the story of the Buddha as a platform to talk about the Dhamma. The first talk was about him before he was born, in his previous lives, and we talked about it all the way up to the point where he was leaving home.

There's one thing I wanted to revise from the part of the great renunciation. Remember what threw him out of the good life was getting fed up with pleasure, and there was a thought that occurred to me that we often get confused between boredom and dispassion or disenchantment—a spiritual state. It occurs to me that the real difference is this: when we get bored with something and then go on a diet or a fast, after not too long a time, we get the craving come back up again for the same old thing. So that's not the feeling of disinterest that comes when a part of us has truly had enough of something. So even though it's placed before us and time has passed, there's nothing drawing us to that old pleasure, and that would definitely suggest that it's a movement in the heart moving away from the sensual life.

When we refer back to the disgust he felt after the party when they're all hanging about looking terrible, if we stress the disgust I think we're slightly off the point. It was the fact that there was no drawing towards it again. There was no pleasure to be had there, no happiness to be had there. And on top of that, remember there were the four signs, the messengers of the gods: the sick, the very aged person, the corpse, and the person sitting under a tree in some of the stories.

And then he makes the great renunciation. He leaves. I don't know whether I said this last time, but there's that lovely little bit where he peeps in and sees his newly born son with his wife. And he doesn't go towards them because that would again bring up all his doubts. And that gives a human touch to what seems to be like desertion. But he was just empowered to go. There are many times when people are called away from the family life in war and such. In fact, when I was thinking about this, I remembered somewhere in the 80s, the British government decided to position American missiles in Greenham Common, and there was a huge uproar about that from a certain section of the population. It was taken over by women. It became an encampment for women, and I remember for two years some of them were there. I remember this one woman being interviewed, and she'd left a family, a young family. Not very young—they were 10, 12, 13. So there are times when things are even more important than our families.

So for the Buddha, or the Bodhisattva as he was then, there's that drawing. And there may be times in our

lives when we get that feeling of wanting to go deeper into the practice. So we have to honor that as best we can.

When I was in Sri Lanka there was a young girl who would tell her father that in the evening whenever he went to bed, she would go up to the *dāgaba*. And in the *dāgaba* there were shrines where the Buddha and other hats would appear and get teaching, and she got that and wrote the story. The Buddha, she actually was collecting notes for a book on the Buddha. And the father would humor her, and she was eight, nine, ten—I think it was ten when she came to our monastery.

She got fed up with her parents not believing her. So one night she said to them, "I'm off now." And right there before their very eyes, she rose up and disappeared. The father and mother then thought, "This is very strange." So when she reappeared, they went visiting monasteries with her and ended up at Kanduboda. I wasn't there for the interview, but I heard the little cassette that they made of the interview. She said exactly what I said to you. She wouldn't bow to monks because she was an Arahant. When they asked her about what meditation was, she seemed to know what it was. There was no problem there. She said she'd come down really to look after her grandfather—that's why she'd taken rebirth.

But the reason I mention it is that in this book she was writing, the Buddha turned back six times before he finally made the decision to cross the Rubicon and make the big detachment. So this is where, when you read the scriptures, you always get this coming in of what we might call the supernatural, that which is above what we would consider to be nature. These days we tend to poo-poo all that, but unfortunately it is right there within the scriptures. So that's just to contemplate that the spiritual life does ask us to renounce things that we truly love. It can be very difficult, but once that seed is within you, once you know you've got to go, then you've got to go.

So now he's left and he's cut his hair off and his horse has died from sheer grief. Poor old Kantaka. He's put on the rag robes and he goes off to his first two teachers, two yoga teachers: Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. Remember that his big quest is: is there an end to suffering? Is there an end to unsatisfactoriness? Is there an answer to the reason why we're conscious and why we should be suffering because we're conscious?

Both of these trained him in what we now call the *jhānas*. The first person, Ālāra Kālāma, took him up to the third *arūpajhāna*, and Uddaka Rāmaputta took him to the end. So he did the four *rūpajhānas* and the four *arūpajhānas*. On both occasions, they were so taken by his adeptness at entering and re-entering these *jhānas* that they both said that he was their equal and would he come and teach with them. On both occasions, he says no. It doesn't really answer his problem.

So what is it about the *jhānas* that doesn't answer the problem of suffering? Remember that when we practice *jhāna*—and it's becoming more fashionable. When I came into Buddhism, it was no-no. You didn't do things like that. The Zen school that I was in called it "ghetto Zen," bad Zen. And everybody else from Ajahn Sumedho right through to the Mahasi tradition put you off it. But these days it's coming in with, I

think, the work of Leigh Brasington and especially perhaps Pa Auk.

So what is it about the *jhānas* which make some schools avoid it? It's because, remember, that the *jhānas* are about creating a state of mind, just as we do when we see a good film or have a good meal. You're trying to create a beautiful environment within ourselves. That's what it's about, because that's where the pain is. That's where the suffering is. It's inside us. So we seek pleasure often. We seek distraction often in order just to get away from the pain inside us. Even here in our meditation we might find ourselves walking just because we don't want to sit anymore—it's too painful. So even little small things can be little distractions for us.

The *jhānas* are just developing a state of mind and there are many ways that you can do it. Why is it that it can be such a path which can take you away from the practice? That's because when a person is truly adept at the *jhānas*, when they can just turn it on, it stays with them all day. It's not that they go into that deep absorption, but the mental state stays with them all day. So the teacher of *jhāna* knows when the student is becoming adept, when even if you were to pull their ears and box them around the nose, they're still very happy. They're not touched by it because their heart's gleaming with happiness and joy. It's that telltale sign that the mind, now the *citta*, or perhaps just the heart and mind, are being lifted up to that level.

People in ordinary daily life might do that on a slightly different level. For instance, somebody who is tremendously interested in what they're doing. So their lives are empowered by that interest or empowered by being in power. Or business people who have this goal and are driving themselves towards it can usually often just lift themselves to that level of energy and commitment whereby they never drop until, of course, the business fails. And then they drop. That really is the point of the *jhānas*.

So when the *jhānas* go down, then what comes up is the same old Siddhartha Gautama. That's what he discovered: that while he was in this state and could maintain it, actually he hadn't rooted out some of his emotional problems. Deeply he could see that when you come out of that, then you're back to where you were.

So with that disappointment—I mean it must have been disappointing for him, we can presume that as a layperson in the palace that he had explored all these things both theoretically with the Brahmins and people like that, and that now he was into the practice and that this was the practice that everybody was saying, "This is where it's at." And the idea, remember, of the *jhāna* wasn't simply to feel happy now; it was that when you're reborn you get reborn in the *jhāna* realms, and they last for eons upon eons, endless times.

So the idea is that as you go up the *jhāna* scale, you enter into the lower heavenly realms, then into the *arūpa* realms, and finally into the great big brahma realms, where you can hang about for a heck of a long time. But then it drops, but because of your good *kamma*, you probably only drop to being a human being, where you do the *jhānas* again, rev them up, and you go back up again. So in terms of, if you remember

the way that people would think in those days of this constant round of birth and rebirth, at least that seemed to be a viable answer. It was much happier up there in those realms than it is in this one.

Anyway, he's disappointed with that and the next thing he does is he goes off to practice these mortifications. Now, I've never been able to really find what was the understanding behind the mortifications. I've tried to look at it, but the only reason I can think of, which is really taken also from the Christian tradition, is that the reason why we're unhappy is because of the body. It's the body that lets in images. It's the body that has greed. It's the body that has lust. We feel it in the body. So if we can somehow control the body, then this would liberate the mind.

So all these things that the Buddha did—he said he starved himself. He was down to a grain of oats or something every day. He got to the point where he could hold his spine through his stomach. That very fierce asceticism, really I think was based on that understanding that if you reduce the appetite to the body, then somehow the mind is liberated, the *citta* is liberated.

Now for those of you—I'm sure all of you—have done a 10-day fast or longer, a month fast, you'll know that the first three days are absolutely horrible while the body's clearing out its rubbish. But then after that, you do enter into this very clear, very easy state. And no feelings of hunger because the body's eating itself. So, in that clarity, it's much easier to do certain practices. I've always presumed that that's what self-mortification is about.

Interestingly enough, the whole practice, if you look at the words, is actually about self-mortification, about the destruction of self. But here we're using it in that old form of controlling the body. But for whatever reasons there were—and remember that some of them came from the other leader who was a contemporary elder of the Buddha, the Jain leader, who was definitely into these sorts of things. His idea rested on *kamma*. His idea was that as soon as you do an action, you're creating more *saṅkhāras*. So you've got to stop doing. You've got to stop doing. So eventually the Jain saint starves themselves to death. That's the Jain way of doing things. There's a presumption that the Buddha followed that a little bit just to find out what all that was about.

But eventually, as you know, he ends up being very disconsolate and he just says it was just painful, that's all. He didn't seem to achieve anything at all.

So now we can imagine him coming to a point of despair. He's taken everything that the society has given him in his search and it just seems to have come to a dead end. In the story, he's sitting on the roadside when a woman, Sujātā, comes along with a bowl of offering for the gods. She's going towards the shrine, and she sees him. The scriptures are, you know, these apocryphal tales will be what they are. She sees a *deva* sitting by the road, and she honors him. But, frankly, he must have looked pretty ragged and pretty awful. As she's walking by, she must have thought, "Oh, this poor ascetic probably needs my rice pudding."

So she offers this rice pudding and somebody actually corrected me and said that that was a British Raj

invention. That is, there was no rice pudding. What there was, was a rice cake, which they have in Sri Lanka called *kiribat*. It's basically rice boiled in coconut milk, which is then boiled out and it's patted out and it's made a little block. Now if I had a choice, if I was in the Buddha's position there and had a choice, I'd definitely go for the British variety. The reason for that isn't just facetious.

It's because as he's eating this, or at some point close to that time, he remembers this point in childhood. What he remembers is watching his father opening up the plowing season by doing some sort of plowing ceremony. There's something about that watching, there's something about the way he's looking which gives him an inspiration. Somehow he remembers being in a state, to use that word, which is different in quality to all the *jhānas* he's done and all the states that might have come up when he was doing the self-mortification.

I was walking through Birmingham Station in Britain and as I was going up the escalator to the shopping mall, there was a great big poster up there with different pictures on it. There was one picture which, as soon as I saw it, I almost shouted with glee. And before they took me away, I was able to take a picture. This little picture is what I call Satipanya. I think it's the closest thing I've seen as an image to that state of mind which arises, shall we say, either just before or just upon the seeing.

This little baby—you see, all those eyes are completely open, completely absorbed in what... Well, you can't tell it's a she or he. That's the other thing about Satipanya—it's not been diversified. And the mouth has dropped. Now, that relaxed jaw is a great sign to us that the thinking mind has stopped, because the connection between the tongue and the jaw is intimate. You may have seen that when you're thinking, there are these little vibrations on the tongue. It's already ready to move.

As children, we have that very simple capacity, especially until around about the age of six or seven, of just being able to look. I'm sure you had the bad experiences I had of having looked like that and your parents tell you to shut your mouth because you look gormless. And after that, you never look the same, which is very unfortunate.

So if you ever see a child looking like that, you have to stop very still while the child's absorbed it. And if you see a child doing that, there's a moment of complete silence, you see, and then suddenly the question, "What is it?" But it has to be absorbed first.

So, this quality of *satipaññā*. Now, in the *jhānas*, there's *sati*, awareness. In fact, I mean, right awareness. Well, it's awareness, shall we say. Awareness never leaves us. It's there when we're asleep. I mean, something turns us over. Something pulls the blanket over us when we're cold. So, it's not as though awareness goes or disappears completely. It's always there in some way.

And when somebody practises *jhāna*, awareness is there, that's not the problem, you see. But it's this other quality that was missing, this *paññā*, this *jñāna*, this intuitive intelligence, that question mark. And that question mark is talked about in Zen as the great doubt. Not meaning that you're doubting the practice,

but that wanting to know. Hmm?

So that's what he remembers. That's what he remembers. So now, this brings also to mind the importance of food. So keep that in mind.

So now, having made a discovery and really sort of enlivened by that, now he's got a new tack, a new something to follow. He goes to find this place near the river Nerañjana where he's going to find a place to sit. And again, one of these lovely little apocryphal stories, he puts his bowl into the river and it goes upwards. And it goes against the flow.

And for those of you who come to my little morning tip, I pointed out that I once got a card which had a dead fish flowing in the river and the title was "Only dead fish go with the flow." So if you think of this magical moment which is representative of the fact that the Dhamma will always go against our conditioning, the self-conditioning. So it's always an uphill struggle, right? Much less, you don't want to fight it. But you've got to go up, you've got to go against the conditioning all the time. And I'll try and spend a bit of time on one of these talks, just revising some of the hindrances.

So now he's found himself a seat and he makes this wonderful great determination. And in the scriptures it's "Let my skin, bones and sinews remain and only and let the flesh and blood in my body dry up but not until I attain the supreme enlightenment will I give up this seat of meditation." Have you tried that? You can give it a go. It's sort of humiliating, but it's worth doing it. Because then you see that to be able to make that sort of determination, he's really built up that determination and power. I mean, resolution, forbearance, and all that sort of stuff. And in fact, you might say that he's come to a point where either he finds the answer to this, or he may as well not hang about. He may as well die. What's the point?

So at this point, of course, he gets the attack of Māra. And this book is "The Story of Gautama Buddha." It's from the Nidāna, the Jātakas. And I thought I'd read out this lovely battle so that you get the way that these stories build up in that sort of metaphysical, that supernatural way. So we've lost a lot of this in our over-rational culture, but it's a lovely scene.

So Māra has come. He's a *devaputra*. He's the son of the gods. He's not a devil from the hellish realm. He's somebody who entices people. It's like the Satan in Islam. When Ayatollah Khomeini called America Satan, he wasn't thinking of it as an evil, as a Christian devil. He was thinking of it as that which entices you away from the way of Allah.

So now he's come with all his armies, you see. And he's about now, he's really wound up and he's going to attack the Buddha and get him off the seat because he shouldn't be there. Māra should be there. The world is about the sensual world. It's not about getting enlightened. He's in the wrong seat.

"So then the devaputra Māra raised a tornado wishing to drive away Siddhartha with it. Instantaneously such gales rose from the east and other directions as would have shattered to bits mountain peaks of the height of half a yojana, two yojana or three yojana and could have uprooted shrubs and trees of the forest

and could have reduced to fragments the villages and townships of the neighbourhood, but by the virtue and majesty of the great being they lost their force and on reaching the Bodhisattva they were not able to shake even the hem of his robe.

"Wishing to engulf him in water and slay him, he next caused a heavy downpour of rain. By his great miraculous power, clouds gathered in hundreds of thousands, layer upon layer, and poured forth rain. The earth was hollowed out by the violence of the torrential downpour. A great flood came, submerging the treetops of the forest, but it could not moisten his robe, even to the extent of the little space on which a dewdrop could fall.

"Next he raised a great shower of rocks. Large mountain peaks came swirling through the air, issuing smoke and flames. But on reaching the Bodhisattva, they turned into wreaths of heavenly garlands.

"Next he raised a storm of missiles. Swords, daggers, darts and other weapons, single-edged and double-edged, came hurtling through the sky, smoking and flaming. But on reaching the Bodhisattva, they turned into heavenly flowers.

"Next he raised a shower of burning coals, embers of the hue of kimsuka flowers came flying through the sky and were scattered at the feet of the Bodhisattva, turning into heavenly flowers.

"Next he raised a storm of ashes, red-hot ashes, glowing like fire, came flying through the air, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into sandalwood powder.

"Next he raised a sandstorm. Fine particles of sand came smoking and flaming through the sky, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into heavenly flowers.

"Next he raised a storm of mud. The mud came smoking and flaming through the air, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into heavenly ointments.

"He next created a gloom which was as thick as when four conditions are found in combination. And on reaching the Bodhisattva, it disappeared as darkness that vanishes with the oncoming radiance of the sun."

It's lovely stuff, huh? And it's sort of literature, I suppose. You can call it literature. And eventually, of course, he won't budge. And so Māra then approaches him, you see, and he asks him this question.

Well let me just read it. "So now remember all this is being watched by the deities on the ridge of the universe. This is a square universe. Continually raised their heads and craning their necks looked out saying, 'Alas ruined indeed is the handsome physical frame of Prince Siddhartha, what will he do?'

"Then the great being told Māra as he stood there claiming the throne accruing on the day of their enlightenment to Bodhisattvas who fulfilled their perfections: 'Māra, who will testify to your having given away in charity?'

"Māra stretched forth his hand in the direction of his army, saying, 'All these are my witnesses.'

"Instantaneously, the cry of one accord, 'I am witness, I am his witness,' coming from the followers of Māra, resounding like an earthquake.

"Then said Māra to the great being, 'Siddhartha, who will testify to your having given in charity?'

"And the great being answered, 'You have sentient beings as witnesses to your having given away in charity, but in this place I have no living being whatever to be my witness. Let alone the generosity I have practised in all other existences, let this great and solid earth, non-sentient as it is, be my witness to the seven hundredfold great alms I gave when I was born as Vessantara.'

"And extricating his right arm from underneath the folds of his robe, he stretched it out towards the earth, saying, 'Are you or are you not witness of my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vessantara?'

"And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand echoes, as though to overwhelm the forces of Māra, and saying as it were, 'I was your witness to it then.'

"Then as the great being continued to reflect on the alms he had given to Vessantara, saying to himself, 'Oh Siddhartha, you have given away vast charities and made the highest sacrifice,' the elephant Girimekhalā, which is Māra's elephant, which was 150 yojanas in height, went down on its knees. And the followers of Māra fled in every direction. No two fled the same path, and they ran in whichever direction that lay before them, discarding their head ornaments and the clothes they were wearing."

So that's the great attack of Māra, put in a metaphorical way. And of course, those are the hindrances coming. Those are the final shaking of the self, which doesn't want to come off. And at root, it's fear, isn't it? When you get right down to the root emotion of delusion, it's fear. The fear of the loss of this idea of who I am. And that's what it's really portraying. Trying to get across that. If you just hold your ground, it disappears. It turns. It changes. It just turns into its opposite.

And what keeps him there, what keeps him able to resist the attack is, of course, his perfections. Here, of course, it's the charity. But in our meditation, it's that ability to stand and to observe those reactions that we get when fear arises and to be with it and to allow it to just be there and to get accustomed to fear. And if we can begin to lose our fear of fear, well, nothing can frighten us. But it's that ability to stand still you see. So even though this is a mythological way, it's a lovely sort of way of portraying what must be the sort of final death throes of the self, that moment when it just disappears.

So I'll try and do a bit more of that, go a bit more deeply into the hindrances another time. But I want to just move on to what happens then. He, of course, is moving towards the Enlightenment now. And one of the things that I suppose has always been a little disappointing for me...

Because having been brought up in something like Catholicism, which in my experience was a happy

religion. It doesn't go for everybody who is a Catholic. But also Christians and in the Judaic tradition too, there is this sense of jubilation, this sense of rejoicing and blowing horns and music. And when you remember this lovely music, say, of Bach's Hallelujah Chorus or Handel's Messiah, you see, and it sort of lifts you, you see.

Well, I always remember Buddha Day. Now, Buddha Day is, you know, the big, it's the big one. It's celebrating the founder, you know. Everything that, even this place is all, this place here now is totally a root dependent on this being that existed 2,500 years ago. And so one wants to blow horns and whoop a bit, you know.

So on these lovely Buddha days, especially, you know, I'm thinking more, well, it's the same everywhere, but I remember at Kanduboda where I was at most of the time, the only difference between Buddha day and everything else was you lined up a bit earlier for food because there was more stuff around. And that was it. And then there were these terrible talks and then you went away. And that was it.

And I want to read out just one more last piece, which at least shows you that in the literature there is this *mudita*, there is this wonderful sense of rejoicing at this great act.

And I remember I was visiting a very famous monk, he's died now, Ajahn Tate, who used to live on the Thai, right up on the Mekong River there, right up at the top of North Thailand. And they were building this meditation hall. I slept in it, actually. And on the wall, this artist was drawing a depiction of the Enlightenment and a more glorious picture you couldn't have come across. I mean, it was just full of action. It was like an exploding star with these beautiful colours. In a sense, sometimes we forget that. We forget that actually there's a point where you can actually rejoice and be happy and sort of have a feast.

So here, just before he becomes enlightened, you see, so now the gods know that Māra has been completely routed and the path is completely open for the Bodhisattva. So the signs go up from one realm to another realm and the whole of the thousand world system is now a gleam, you see.

"So the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the eastern ridge of the world sphere spread as far as the western ridge. Similarly, the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the western ridge, the northern ridge and the southern ridge spread as far as the eastern, southern and northern ridges respectively. And the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the surface of the earth remained in constant contact with the world of Brahmā and that those held aloft in the world of Brahmā penetrated to the very surface of the earth.

"Flowering trees in ten thousand world spheres blossomed forth. Fruit bearing trees were weighed down with clusters of fruit. Flowers that bloom on tree trunks, branches and creepers blossomed in their respective places. Lotus on stalks sprang in clusters of seven breaking through rocky surfaces and were heaped layer upon layer. The ten thousand world systems revolved and remained like a wreath of garlands tossed about or like a well-arranged spread of flowers.

"The intervening regions of 8,000 yojana between the world's spheres, which had not been lit before even by the radiance of seven suns shining together, became one mass of light. The great ocean, 84,000 yojanas deep, turned into sweet water. Rivers ceased to flow. Those blind from birth were able to see objects. Those deaf from birth were able to hear sounds. And those crippled from birth walked on their feet. Bonds and fetters broke loose and fell apart."

So this rejoicing, he now, of course, makes the big breakthrough. And that's the point of his, what we now call his enlightenment.

And there's just a little thing here I'd like to say before I leave is religious emotions. You know, what part do they play in our spiritual life? Because especially in something like Theravāda, you get pretty dry. Just doing your vipassanā. But that sense of awe that we get, for instance, in the carol Silent Night. Just to let the story of the Buddha come and just get that sense of awe, the brilliance, the amazing thing. And then to shift it over to consider the Dhamma as an actual living force that runs through the universe. Praise, adoration. It's actually one of the objects of jhāna meditation is contemplating the Buddha. You can get, it seems, to first or second jhāna with that. And the sense of rejoicing that we just heard. To bring that up, a sense of rejoicing.

Then, of course, there's that gratitude. Just a feeling of that lovely feeling of gratitude. The more poignant because, you know, this stuff cannot be repaid. You can't pay the Buddha back for what he did. In fact, you can't pay anybody back. That's an idea of paying somebody back. But just being able to receive the gifts. And that's why we have this flow of what I call a gift economy. I read that somewhere. Where people give each other gifts. The Dhamma and sustenance.

And devotion. In the morning when I ask people to devote themselves. Not so much a hard sort of... a hard sort of giving yourself. It's more like the heart wants to do it. You have to cajole yourself. You have to sort of massage the heart to feel that way.

And one thing that I think especially we in the West have to begin to look at is this whole thing of bowing and what bowing actually means. Now as you know there are many ways to bow. The Tibetans do a full prostration. The Theravādans do this bowing like I do when I come in here. And then there's the Zen which is just bow from the waist. And then there's just that some people sort of come in and just bow their head. And then again there's just that blink. It's just a suggestion of bowing.

So bowing, at first, it always seems a bit strange. And I remember when I first had to do it in Zen. I did it because everybody else did it.

But I didn't really get into it for a long time. And if you think of bowing as a body language, as a way of expressing these types of emotions, then it's a way of reinforcing the action of the heart. It's a way of actually giving it a vehicle in which to express these sorts of religious emotions. And these religious emotions are all bound up and around the faith and the trust and the act of giving oneself to the practice.

There's a sort of underbelly of it.

Now, of course, to think that they themselves alone get us to be liberated would be a silliness, but they're there as a sort of support. And some people feel a need for that more than others. The more intellectual you are, the less you feel you need it, but probably the more you do need it. And to find a way of expressing that devotion in some sort of body language, I think you'll find very helpful.

The first time I went to Burma to work with Bhūjanaka was the only time. After doing the old hard Mahāsi thing in a hall, I got the opportunity to visit Rangoon. And it was difficult to get let out. You had to have a good reason. So I gave him the reason that I wanted to buy religious books. At that time, to get religious books out of the country, you had to go from one government department to the next to get these bits of paper. The religious department, the censoring department, the export department, and of course I would take a whole day going to see these departments, and therefore spent the last week wandering around Rangoon.

And walking into the beautiful big pagoda, it's supposed to be one of the seven wonders of the world, the Shwedagon Pagoda, I walked in and I saw these people pouring water over Buddha *rupas* and bowing and mumbling. And I remember distinctly the sentence that came into my head. It said, well, I'm not a Buddhist. And that immediate rejection of any form of ritual was almost automatic. It was cool and cold and like that.

As this whole idea of religious emotions came to me and slowly began to develop, the last time I was in Burma, which was in the year 2000, and I was at Paṇḍita's place, I had again the opportunity to go to Shwedagon Pagoda. And it's quite remarkable to find myself not quite pouring water over Buddhas, but hanging around this lovely, limpid atmosphere. And there's a beautiful temple in Sri Lanka called Kelaniya, which is just outside Colombo, if you ever go. And if you go there on a full moon day, you can actually, it's like slicing through butter, the feeling of devotion in the air. And it's enormously beautiful.

With people just wandering around the Bodhi tree and making their blessings and making their offerings. And you might say that what it does is it gives a glow to the practice. It gives a certain glow to it underneath. And it's something that you may consider most people try to do a bit of *mettā* to soften the practice, but even these things are very softening and give the practice just that little bit of juice sometimes, especially when it gets miserable like the weather we've been having.

So these things that I've read out are really just examples of how the heart moves sometimes. Buddhism, generally speaking, will always veer towards that more wisdom base because it's centered on knowing. It's centered on this idea of perception, of discernment. But these little practices that we can do just put the heart in the right sort of position for it so it moves with that desire to investigate.

So I thought that I would then just read out for you the three sermons which he gave. Just read them out because they're pretty straightforward. So remember that when he was enlightened, he left searching for

his people. And I'll come back to that as another lecture. But on this one here, I'd just like to read the discourse on the turning of the wheel of law. And I've been a little bit, I've done my own little bit with it so that it reads more smoothly, because sometimes it feels stilted.

So this is what I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Benares in the deer park at Isipatana. And the Blessed One addressed the group of five ascetics, "Venerable friends." "Yes, venerable friend," those ascetics replied. "Venerable friends, these two extremes should not be practiced by anyone who has entered the spiritual path. Firstly, the pursuit of happiness in sensual pleasure. This is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. And secondly, the practice of self-mortification, which is ignoble, unbeneficial and painful. Avoiding these two extremes, the *Tathāgata* has discovered the middle way. This gives rise to insight, to knowledge, leads to peace, experiential understanding, to enlightenment and *Nibbāna*."

"And what is this middle way, awakened to by the *Tathāgata*? It is this noble eightfold path: right view, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness and right concentration. Now this, venerable friends, is the first noble truth of unsatisfactoriness. Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Sickness is suffering. Death is suffering. And being with what we dislike is suffering. And not being with what we like is suffering. In fact, not to get what we want is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of grasping — form, feeling, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and consciousness — are all unsatisfying."

"The second noble truth of the cause of unsatisfactoriness is the craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and indulgence, seeking happiness here and there. That is the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving to become, and the craving to annihilate. And the third noble truth of the cessation of suffering is the fading away without remainder, the cessation of that craving, the giving up and relinquishing of that craving and the freedom from it, non-attachment."

"The fourth noble truth is the path that leads out of this unsatisfactoriness. Now, venerable friends, in regard to these understandings that have never been known before, there arose in me the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the penetration, and the light, namely, that this is the noble truth of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be fully understood, and this noble truth has been fully understood. This is the noble truth of the cause of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be abandoned. This noble truth has been abandoned. This is the noble truth of the end of unsatisfactoriness. And this noble truth is to be realized. And this noble truth has been realized. This is the noble truth of the path leading to the end of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be developed. This noble truth has been developed."

"So long, venerable friends, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths, as they really are in their 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 *devas*, *māras* and *brahmās*, in

this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its *devas* and humans. But now that these noble truths have been fully realized by me, it is so proclaimed. This is the knowledge and vision arose in me. Unshakable is the liberation of my *citta*. This is my last birth. There is no more renewed becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said. And those venerable friends delighted in what he had spoken. And while the discourse was being delivered, there arose in the venerable Koṇḍañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dharma: "Whatever is subject to arising is all subject to passing away." And the Blessed One proclaimed, "Koṇḍañña knows, Koṇḍañña knows." And that is how Koṇḍañña earned his name, Aññāta Koṇḍañña, the Koṇḍañña who knows.

So that's when he went up and he met with them. And remember that they first rejected him because they had this feeling that he'd been soft and gone off and eaten rice pudding. And that was the limit. So when he went back, they didn't particularly like him coming. They thought, well, he's coming to tempt us. But in fact, it seems as though they were so taken by the way he looked that they were prepared to sit down and discuss these things with him. These things, of course, these scriptures were written after the event.

So then they all went off to get their alms round. On the way back, having eaten their alms round, they all sat down and he gave them another talk. And this one is the characteristic of not-self.

This is what I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Benares in the deer park at Isipatana. And there the Blessed One addressed a group of five ascetics, "Venerable friends." "Yes, venerable friend," the ascetics replied.

"Form is not self. If form were self, then it would not lead to affliction. And it would be possible to determine form: 'Let my form be like this. Let my form not be like this.' It would be the same with feelings, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, and even consciousness itself. If consciousness were self, we would be able to say, 'Let my consciousness be like this, let it not be like this.'"

"Now I ask you, is form permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, venerable friend." "And whatever is impermanent, is that satisfying or unsatisfying?" "It does not satisfy, venerable sir." "And is that which is impermanent, does not satisfy, and is subject to change, to be regarded as, 'this is me, this is mine, this is myself?'" "Not at all, venerable friend." "Can we not say the same of feelings, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, and even consciousness itself?" "Indeed, venerable friend," replied the five ascetics.

"So it follows that any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all form is to be correctly regarded as, 'this is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself.' And the same goes for feelings, perceptions, emotions, thoughts and even consciousness itself."

"Now, venerable friends, when someone who has heard this understands in this way, they become disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feelings and perceptions, disenchanted with emotions and thoughts, disenchanted even with consciousness itself. And once disenchanted, they become

dispassionate. And through this detachment, the *citta* is liberated. And when liberated, it realizes this is liberation. And they come to know: birth is no more, the spiritual life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been done, there is no more returning to any state of becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said, and those venerable friends delighted in what he had spoken. And while this discourse was being delivered, the *citta* of those group of five ascetics were liberated from the floods through non-clinging.

So now we've got five *Arahats* in the world.

And I'd like to read this one too. It's also a little short one. Well, I've made it short. I'm taking out all the repetitions. This is the one that T.S. Eliot writes about. And it's in his poem somewhere. And it's the one where he's describing burning. And here he's talking to a thousand monks. This is not so, you know, I mean, in the story this happens very shortly after his enlightenment.

This is what I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Gayā, at Gayā's head, together with a thousand monks. And there the Blessed One gave this discourse to them.

"All is burning. And what is this all that is burning? It is the eye that is burning, forms are burning, eye consciousness is burning, eye contact is burning, and whatever feeling is conditioned by that eye contact, whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fires of craving, the fires of aversion, the fires of delusion, burning with birth, aging, sickness and death, burning with sorrow, pain, desolation and despair."

"And so it is with all the senses, with hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. And the mind itself is also burning, burning with the fires of craving, the fires of aversion, the fires of delusion, burning with birth, aging, sickness and death, burning with sorrow, pain, desolation and despair."

"Now when a meditator, properly instructed, grasps this by direct experience, they become disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with eye consciousness, disenchanted with eye contact, and disenchanted with whatever feeling is conditioned by that eye contact, whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. And so it is with all the senses and the very mind itself. Once disenchanted with the sensual world as a source of happiness, the meditator loses interest. And through this dispassion, they become liberated. And with that liberation there comes this knowledge: There will be no more birth. The spiritual life has been fulfilled. What had to be done has been done. There will be no more returning into states of becoming."

That is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's teachings. And while this discourse was being delivered, the hearts of those thousand monks were liberated from the *āsavas* through the way of non-clinging.

So, just to... Sometimes I think we don't read the scriptures enough, you know. So, I just want to bring this

to an end by just going back to his victory verse, and then I shall chant it in Pali, and we'll sit for a while, a bit of silence, and then we'll do the *mettā*.

So now he's fully enlightened, he's broken through, he's awakened, and this is the victory verse that he told Ānanda that sprung spontaneously to him upon that awakening.

"Seeking but not finding the house-builder, I have travelled from birth to birth countless times. Painful indeed is birth over and over again. But now, O house-builder, you have been seen. You shall not build another house again. Your rafters have been broken, your ridgepole demolished. My *citta* has attained the unconditioned and gone beyond any kind of craving."

*Aneka jāti saṃsāraṃ, sandhāvissaṃ anibbisaṃ, gahakāraṃ gavesanto dukkhā jāti punappunaṃ.
Gahakāraka diṭṭho'si, puna gehaṃ na kāhasi, sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā gahakūṭaṃ visaṅkhataṃ.
Visaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ, taṇhānaṃ khayam ajjhagā.*

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