

Bonheur

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 47:50

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhudassa

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

This evening, I'm going to try and tackle the problem of happiness. Just out of interest, to look at three different models. In the simple Christian idea, God calls you one way, and the devil calls you another. And human beings have free will. Free will, unfortunately, is not a concept that you will find, I believe, either in ancient Greece or in the East. It's interesting to note that free will is not a concept found in ancient Greece and in the East. And perhaps that's where we need to look for the foundation of Western individualism. So we have to thank Saint Augustine.

In the Freudian model, we simply have a repetition of this idea, but placed in psychological language. We have the superego and the id, and the ego is supposed to negotiate a path between these two rocks. And we can also see it in the Buddhist model. That is to say, in the Buddhist model there are attitudes that are beneficial and skillful and those that are unskillful and not beneficial. Christians, according to Saint Augustine, would see it as a problem of free will. And I think Freud hoped for no more than an accommodation with life, an arrangement with life. He didn't see a possible end to suffering. The kingdom of heaven always faces Christians. And remember that Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was within us.

For the Buddha, what helped us was discrimination. What helped us decide which way to go was discrimination, the ability to distinguish. So the Buddha's path is more related to understanding. Because when we understand how we create these problems, obviously, we're going to try to avoid doing it.

So now, taking the word "happiness" to mean everything you want, what makes you happy. The Buddha spoke of the fact that people think that *Nibbāna* is a paradise of the senses. And then there were these magnificent mental states that you could develop through concentration practices. He seems to say that yes, they are all nirvana but they are not true nirvana. So true nirvana was something more than the sensual world. It was something transcendent.

There was a very good compilation of texts. It was compiled by Ajahn Amaro and Passano. Some of you know him. Amaro. Yes. And it's called *The Island*. You can download it as a text onto your e-reader. And with Google Translate, no problem. And I think it's a good book to read, especially given the despair that people entering Buddhism have. It's a good book, particularly regarding the theme of disbelief in

something transcendental. Yeah, of the disbelief in something transcendental that people have when approaching Buddhism. Yeah. Materialistic scientists.

How does the Buddha want us to be happy? He speaks of people who go from darkness to light. And a large part of his teachings concerns how to become happy, how to make ourselves happy.

The first is the *vipassanā* that we have done — it's the purification that happens which is part of the process of making us happy. This process of purification takes place, which is part of what can make us happy. So when we feel anxiety or loneliness or sadness, by observing them — when we feel sadness, anger or other negative states and we observe them, it's not just about making them exhaust themselves. It's a process of transformation.

This came home to me in a particular experience I had. I was very angry with my teacher. In fact, I could have strangled him. And I went for a personal retreat of two weeks. And I had a companion with me who very kindly cooked and took care of the property. And while I was suffering on the cushion, he was reading "Lord of the Rings." He is now a reader in philosophy.

I was meditating with all this anger, this disappointment, etc. And I was trying to... I proposed to bring him to mind voluntarily. I brought my teacher to mind and each time his face was in front of me I felt these feelings. So I went towards them, I observed these feelings and I stayed with them. And to my great amazement, before my eyes they began to transform into a warm feeling of compassion. It only happened once but it was enough to prove that there was more to do — it was enough for me to prove that it's not just about letting these emotions dissipate. There is also a natural transformation that takes place inside the heart when you let the heart act. It's an amazing thing — the heart knows how to heal itself.

Like the body. If you cut yourself, you don't arrange for the cells to heal themselves. What you do is arrange for the wound to be disinfected. It's the body that heals itself. So when we don't interfere with the heart, but we allow it to express itself to us, it is healing us.

If you take loneliness, for example — everyone feels loneliness at some point and what we tend to do, of course, is to get out of it, to find a distraction. But if we meditate quietly with loneliness, in the presence of loneliness, sometimes you can listen to the language of loneliness. "You're useless, you're worthless, nobody loves you." And it then transforms into a form of self-hatred. "How could anyone love you?" But if you stay with this feeling and let it come to its end, at the very end of this feeling, what do you think you would experience? The positive side — being with oneself.

So this is the difficult approach to joy. But unfortunately, it is necessary.

You can read in books on positive psychology that there are three types of happiness. The first is the happiness of the senses. In Buddhist understanding, this would include all types of pleasures that are transitory, that are temporary. And obviously, what's disappointing is that they are temporary. And so when we grasp something just for these things, they tend to have a certain emptiness in them. I always

like to quote Woody Allen — he said that sex just for itself is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go...

But if these are empty experiences, our effort is to find a way to be with these without asking them to make us happy — if we understand the word happy as meaning a constant, eternal, permanent state. If we accept them as they are, then no problem.

I'll come back to this at the end of my talk this evening, but to think, to bring these experiences back to mind at the end of the day. Yes. Because often, our memory will only retain the abominable things that happened to us during the day. If we only contemplate what made us feel bad, what else can happen to us but unpleasant states?

The second, you will see, is taken from Aristotle. His term was, I think, *eudaimonia*. It means being completely absorbed in what you are doing. Athletes speak of being in the zone. It's a bit like a film where you become completely absorbed. And the paradox is that when you are totally happy, you don't realize it. As soon as you realize it, you lose it.

If this happens to you during meditation, suddenly there are these moments of ecstasy. And you find yourself absorbed in these states. Obviously, the mistake we make is "Ah, great, next time I meditate, I'm going to seek these states again." Obviously, there's only unhappiness waiting for us, disappointment. Obviously, if we can accept these states simply as they come, they remain in our memory as possibilities for feeling joy.

What they have observed is that what really makes us happy is that our lives have meaning. In a passage I was reading, it said that soldiers who commit suicide had lost the meaning of their lives, they no longer saw the meaning of their lives. They no longer saw a reason to live. That's the reason why most people commit suicide.

Paradoxically, we find our greatest meaning when we do something that is bigger than ourselves. When you work for a charity, for an ideal, for a business. For an ideal. That's why jihadists are so happy — now their life has so much meaning and it's an immense joy to blow themselves up, and when they die there are all these virgins waiting for them.

So we can see here that perhaps meaning is not sufficient enough. And this really brings us back to the Buddha's position on ethics. I mean, it was his insight on his awakening — it was his realization at the moment of his enlightenment. It was the discovery that it was his ethical decisions that had ultimately led him to find the end, to discover the end of suffering.

Ethics in its broadest sense simply means relationships. Our relationships with human beings, with animals, with nature. There is obviously a way of acting that is both soothing... This is not always the case. If your house is infested with rats, you have an ethical problem. Yes.

So how does the Buddha teach us to use our ethical decisions to develop the beautiful heart? When he speaks to lay people, he always follows this same process. He begins with generosity, then he speaks of morality, then he speaks of the states, and when he feels that the people are ready — and when he feels that the audience is ready, he speaks of the four noble truths. There is suffering.

Generosity is a key to the teaching. Even a thief can be generous, according to him. He can be generous using the things he just stole from you. Each time we are generous, we let go, we give something that we could have used for ourselves. If I give money to an organization, it means I cannot use this fortune to download new songs on my iPad. So in the act of giving, there is an act of renunciation.

Obviously, I can also give my time. When people do something for a charitable work, like visiting the sick, for example, it's also a renunciation of time they could have spent just for themselves.

You may have had the experience when a friend has said to you something like "I'm going to decorate my house or my flat this weekend" and you have jumped in and said "oh I'll come and give you a hand." And just after, "Why did I say that?" And then you have to find an excuse. "My dog is sick, I have to go."

In the moment, there is this spontaneous generosity. And then, there is this return. "I would have preferred to spend my Saturday going to see football." There is a natural tendency to generosity, but when this generosity involves a sacrifice, that's where it's important to develop the quality of renunciation.

When we do something for someone else and we observe that it makes them happy, there is also joy that arises in us at that moment. So the process of generosity is the process of growing *muditā*, sympathetic joy.

And if we find that we have difficulty being generous, one way to be generous is through gratitude. When we feel grateful towards someone, we naturally want to give back the gift. When we feel gratitude towards someone, we naturally want to give them a gift.

In our society, where so many things are taken for granted, we have lost this magnificent capacity to really feel great gratitude. Or I should say that I have lost the capacity. People complain about education. They complain about the health service. People complain about the education they receive, medical services, etc. Completely forgetting that education was free. And that for most medical services, if you have a serious illness, you could not pay. And yet, these services are often given by society to individuals.

And when you consider the problem that President Obama had in passing a welfare law just to help people have basic medical care — if you take into consideration the difficulties that President Obama encountered to pass a law that simply aimed to give everyone basic medical insurance, you realize how selfish one can become. Often formulated in language that says you should be able to take care of yourself. But this neglects to take into consideration that we are not these lone individuals who can govern our own life. But we are all connected to each other. And this capacity to see this interconnection allows compassion to arise naturally.

So already, in this process of generosity, renunciation and gratitude, hearts are growing all the time.

You have to engage in certain exercises if you want to develop these qualities. For example, we were talking yesterday about not leaving the computer to throw yourself on the bed to sleep after having played these games or after having watched television. Simply to sit quietly and reflect on your day. And just consider — become aware of the small kindnesses that you have given and that you have received. Someone perhaps made you a cup of tea at work. You perhaps gave up your place to someone else in a queue because that person was in a hurry. You perhaps forgave someone who had stepped on your foot in the tram.

When you follow the course of the day like this and you catch, you take note of these little moments, you become aware that the heart begins to sing. And then, reflect on the whole day and become aware of all these little joys. During the lunch break, you walked and you were enchanted, charmed by the song of a bird. And all these things, we tend to prevent them and remember all these miserable things. All these irritations that people have caused us. And these politicians. And we allow the mind to stay on that, so of course, these are the states that grow.

And of course, there is also the practice of *mettā*. You see, just sending messages of happiness from the heart. Simply sending messages of benevolence from the heart. As I told you, at the beginning, you may have the impression that the heart does not react, that it is indifferent and anesthetized.

For example, when you enter a room with people, normally, we come with a fixed view. Usually, we come with a fixed view, a predetermined view. We enter looking for someone or expecting something. But if you come to enter a room and let the room come to you...

Mais si vous entrez dans une pièce et que vous donnez la permission à ce que la pièce vienne vers vous, vienne au-devant de vous, c'est cette histoire de conscience, de conscience ouverte. Et avant d'entrer dans la pièce, vous mettez votre cœur dans une position de bienveillance. Et en entrant dans la pièce, c'est la pièce qui vient au-devant de vous, au lieu qu'il y ait une réaction, il y a une réponse du cœur basée sur ce cœur de bienveillance, à ce que la pièce amène.

Il y a beaucoup de choses que nous pouvons faire pour générer ce bonheur dans notre propre cœur. Si nous mettons ceci dans un conteneur éthique et le Bouddha a dit nous faisons ce qui est bon pour nous, ce qui est bon pour les autres, ce qui est bon pour nous et pour les autres. Parfois c'est très spécifique, vous parlez simplement de quelqu'un d'autre. Parfois c'est un large groupe de personnes. Et parfois vous allez inclure tous les êtres.

Si nous partons de cette base-là, ça devient très difficile de soutenir, que nous soutenions l'assassinat de quelqu'un d'autre. Peut-être uniquement dans les cas d'auto-défense.

Donc, pour récapituler, le but de la *vipassanā* sur le plan psychologique c'est la purification du cœur mais il faut nous rappeler qu'en même temps que la purification il y a un processus de transformation et puis il

y a aussi ces exercices positifs dans lesquels nous pouvons nous engager.

Et le discours sur l'établissement de la bienveillance dit qu'il nous faut donner cette bienveillance à tous les êtres dans toutes les directions. Le chant que nous faisons vient de ce sutta et cette qualité de générosité.

C'est quelque chose que vous pouvez vraiment regarder et voir. Si vous n'avez pas observé ce processus de gratitude, de renoncement, de générosité et de joie, faites un exercice. Tout ce qu'il vous faut faire, c'est prendre en considération quelque chose pour quoi vous vous sentez reconnaissant, et ensuite vous dire à vous-même je vais donner un peu de ma fortune ou un peu de mon temps pour que d'autres puissent ressentir ce même bénéfice. Et si vous le faites personnellement, envers quelqu'un d'autre, vous voyez qu'il y a de la joie qui émerge, qui apparaît. Je ne crois pas qu'il vous sera possible d'empêcher la résonance de cette joie dans votre propre cœur.

Mais il y a un avertissement. Et c'est le problème du do-gooder. Les do-gooders, quand ils vous font du bien, ils veulent que vous leur fassiez se sentir bien, eux. Le do-gooder veut vous faire le bien qu'il veut vous faire, que vous le vouliez ou non, pour le rendre heureux lui. Et c'est là que les gens disent, mais je ne comprends pas, je les ai tellement aidés, pourtant ils ne veulent plus me voir. Faites attention à ça. La corruption, c'est que nous commençons à faire ces choses dans le but d'être heureux. Évidemment, dans ce cas, ça devient égoïste.

Je ne peux qu'espérer que mes mots vous aident. Que dans votre pratique du Dhamma, vous puissiez faire croître un bonheur infini. Et finalement atteindre ce bonheur infini lui-même qu'est le Nibbāna. Au plus tôt.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

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