

# Concerning Mettā and Other Questions (Geneva May 2006)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 1:01:20

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Does metta meditation have an effect on the body?

Have you seen a film called... What do you know? It's a film about science, about understanding the human body and the universe. What I learned from it was about the cells in our body. Our cells have different sensors that react according to the hormones that arrive. When someone is always depressed, the outer membrane of the cell develops more and more sensors that will receive the hormones produced by the state of depression.

The more sensors there are to receive the hormones of depression, the fewer sensors there are to receive the hormones of joy. So this means that for someone who is always depressed, when something joyful happens, they don't feel the joy at all, but only the depression. There will come a time when the person can no longer feel happy or will have difficulties feeling happy.

There is a feedback, an exchange between mind and body. When the mind doesn't feel happy, it will produce a sensation so that the body, in turn, doesn't feel happy either. When the mind is not happy, the body is not happy—it feels heavy and depressed. This means that when the mind senses that the body is heavy and depressed, the mind, in turn, feels much more depressed. So the mind and body mutually reinforce each other in their depression.

When you observe the reciprocation, it's the same thing. When you put your attention on the breath, the breath will calm down and will also lead the mind to calm down in turn. As the mind calms down, the body calms down in turn. As the body calms down, the body needs less oxygen, which means that at that moment the breathing becomes finer and finer.

At that moment, when the breathing becomes finer and finer, the attention sharpens to try to catch the breath that has become fine. So this means that mind and body train each other mutually in this increasingly deep calm.

When we practise loving-kindness meditation, we produce hormones—beautiful hormones that will produce beautiful sensations. Our cells will produce more and more sensors that will produce more and more beautiful sensations. As we offer *metta* anywhere we find ourselves during the day, we will notice that our body will become increasingly beautiful, having beautiful sensations. And this will produce what we call wholesome sensations.

Beautiful thoughts, beautiful feelings have a beautiful influence on the body.

Why does my history occupy me when joy is there? Why am I caught up by my past when I feel happiness? If happiness is there, why does my past come back when happiness is not there?

History here is our conditioning. Because this conditioning is very strong, very powerful. When our conditioning arises and pushes us to act in an ineffective or impure manner, we must be humble before this fact.

We cannot fight against our conditioning or destroy it. All we can do is be aware of our conditioning and let it go. Because of our weakness, our lack of will, most of the time we give up.

Take for example someone who smokes. The person knows very well that smoking can kill them. Because it's not so obvious, but because of weakness and lack of discipline, the person continues to smoke because it gives them pleasure.

The problem with addiction is that the addict only feels natural or normal when they are addicted. The problem with dependencies is that the person only feels normal when they are in states of dependency. When they stop their dependency, they feel abnormal. So fighting against this is very difficult. Going against the dependency is very difficult.

After they've stopped, the person will be in a withdrawal period. Afterwards, the person feels confident about not smoking anymore. And then, at a party, someone offers them a cigarette. And they say, "Oh well, I'll just have one." But then, the whole habit is kick-started. So the bad habits come back. It's like starting a motorcycle. So the person smokes again.

To fight against our conditioning, we must let our desire dissolve, because it's there like a little animal just waiting for the biscuit.

Can you explain the difference between the mental, the mind, and the intellect?

There is the whole process of perception. Then there is also the process of knowing, of apprehending perception, of knowing perception. In this process, there is the process of sensation, which is colours, sounds that we perceive. After that, there is the process of labelling, of putting a name, a word. This labelling process becomes the intellect.

So the process of perceptions combined with the intellect produces the fabrication of images. When this phenomenon is very developed, it produces the state of theatre. We can abuse it to produce pornography.

All this is included in the Buddhist term *nama*. This is the process that you must purify with your *vipassanā* practice. What you must do is dissociate this process—the process of attention, *sati*, attention and wisdom. That is, you try to dissociate this, to take out the quality of *satipaññā*—the quality that constitutes attention and wisdom. *Satipaññā*—attention and wisdom—intuitive intelligence.

All we must do is take all these phenomena as objects: sensations, feelings, emotions, images. This is the discovery of what *satipaññā* is, which is awakening. This is the discovery of what attention and intuitive wisdom constitute—the goal.

I would like to improve my understanding. In this magma, we must take all the elements and take them as objectives of our analysis. So in this process of disassembling all these elements as objects, we will become an observer. So this feeling of observer, which is a feeling of self, must also be an object of observation. Is this correct?

Yes. So this observer cannot be us. So this subtle sensation of having a self cannot be real. It cannot be you. It's an object. Because it's an object. If it's an object, it cannot be the subject. It's very simple. If it's an object, it cannot be self.

So at the end of the day, who observes? It's the knowing?

What we must reach is to ask the question: is everything we have observed in isolation, separately? Or are there other things in addition?

The Buddha's explanation reached a point where we can no longer explain with normal terms. "Such is the delusion of the mind that if it can put a label on it, it thinks it knows it." So as long as the mind can put a label on an object, the mind thinks that it knows it. This is how we say that the mind is a liar.

We said that our sensations, our feelings, our thoughts are not us, don't belong to us, so how can we undo them? How can we stop them?

We must not stop them. If you stop, you become a block. We must only purify them. The first thought that the Buddha had at his awakening was: who can I help, to whom can I teach?

The wisdom we have naturally wants to express itself. Otherwise, it wouldn't be wisdom. We cannot separate wisdom from ethical, moral behaviour. This is the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. Right understanding, right intention. If the intention is correct, then there will be right speech, right livelihood.

We don't want to stop anything; we only want to purify it.

My Western mind struggles with the concept of non-self. If thoughts and feelings are not me, then to whom do they belong? Then who loves, who gives birth, and who dies one day?

The Buddha didn't say there is no self. It's a technique. It's a technique to realise the notions "this is not me, this doesn't belong to me." When I sit in meditation and I have pain, the sensation is observed from outside—it's not me, nor does it belong to me. Everything I can feel, everything I can experience, I can see that it's not me, nor does it belong to me.

When we were little babies up to the age of four months, there was no objective world. A baby up to four months, for them, there is no subjective external world. For them, everything is theirs, everything is them.

There is no duality between them and the external world. There is nothing, there is no language.

Then after four months, something emerges that makes the difference between the child and the external world. And first the mother. At the age of three years, they are very conscious of their body.

We would need to take the process of taking out everything that is in us and externalising it, like the room that is outside of ourselves. The world we know is the world that the mind has fabricated.

No one can deny that when we leave this room, this room continues to exist. But your experience of the room, what you know of the room, the room you know is your room, it's not my room. So we all live in parallel universes.

I ask myself, how have we been able to communicate? For us, there is no world outside; there is only in our mind. It's awful, frightening. So this means I ask myself, do I see the world in a real way? This is why I buy a little support from all the people who have the same opinion as me to reassure myself.

This is what religions do. There is a God. Certain religions say there is a God. To prove this, they say that since there are millions who believe in God, this means God exists. Then there is a very strange religion that says there is no God. Then Buddhism gathers all the people who say, who believe there is no God.

Who knows?

Who is it then who dies, who gives birth and who dies one day?

In one sense, no one. Because this body, for example, this body is an assemblage of cells that live their own life. Do you know what happens in your spinal cord? Do you know the cells, the red and white blood cells? Have you met the white, red haemoglobin? We only know the taste of blood. But we don't know at all what blood is.

If you are the blood, if you dance to the blood and you cut your hand and the blood flows, this means that at that moment you lose your self, your you. When the body disappears, it's not you. If it's you, you can say "There, don't die now." If you investigate these things more deeply, you'll see that it will sabotage your idea of self. And it's frightening. But it's very interesting.

If you don't really have... How can you explain, if you don't have someone, if there is no one, how do you explain this state?

What we are are metaphors. They are metaphors for wisdom or a lack of wisdom. That is, the faculty of knowing—the Buddha nature. When we love someone, we love the Buddha nature that is in the person. We are nourishing the Buddha nature that is in the person, through the person's personality.

So who loves? Love is an attitude that comes from wisdom.

If there is no I, where is the source of love? The question must be: what is the purpose of my existence? The purpose of existence is to reach this happiness and liberation. And it's a quality of this process that the

more I have of it, the more I want to share it. It's the quality of this quest—the more I have this love, the more I want to share it with other people.

Does this help you?

When the Buddha reached awakening, he didn't become schizophrenic. All character traits and personality traits become the vehicle—that is, all his actions and all his words—so that his knowledge can express itself through this vehicle, this knowledge.

This wisdom is not attached to the metaphors. The metaphor means the body, speech, and actions. It's like a painting—the painter will say this is not my emotions, but it's a means for me to express these emotions, it's a media.

For someone who is awakened, their body, their words, and their actions are like a masterpiece. The attitude of love, compassion and all those with *Nibbāna*.

When Sāriputta was asked, "How can you speak of the joy of *Nibbāna* when there are no emotions there?" Someone had asked Sāriputta how we can reach the state of *Nibbāna* when there is no thought or emotion. He said that it is the total absence of emotions that is the ultimate blessing of *Nibbāna*.

Now, when you meditate and a beautiful feeling appears—when you have an agreeable sensation that arises and you observe it—you will ask yourself what is the sensation, the emotion in your act of observing, of seeing?

Love, compassion that are expressed are expressions of the Buddha nature that are in us.

Don't understand the artist and the adult work. So can the artist be what we call God in other religions?

When you speak of God, it's something else, isn't it? That is, the question is whether the artist can be considered as God from other religions. It's another question. That brings a lot of things about creation. That will lead us to debates about creation.

If you want to leave, go ahead. You can go eat a bit more; there are no set hours.

Could you make the distinction in Buddhism between love and compassion?

Love is described as friendship. The desire to be a friend of someone.

So everything that you would want from a good friend, this is *mettā*. Everything that you would want from a good friend, this is *mettā*. You want them to be free from anger. Compassion comes from the desire to eliminate someone's suffering. Compassion is the wish to diminish the suffering of others. This is different. The opposite of loving-kindness is hatred. The opposite of compassion is cruelty.

Can you illustrate with an example the relationship between a strong emotion and the sensations in the

body? And how can we use this relationship to develop our mindfulness? One of the first insights in *vipassanā* — there are sixteen levels of insight in *vipassanā*, the last of which leads to the *Nibbāna* state.

Someone who goes on this path is called *Sotāpanna*, one who has entered the stream. Those who have attained the four levels will be much more awakened: the once-returner, the non-returner, and the *Arahant*.

The first insight of *Vipassanā* is to separate body from mind. This is the first level of diminishing the notion of self. Because the self must be made of one block; it cannot be made in pieces, made of different elements, different parts. Seeing that the body and sensations are two different energies is the beginning of dissolving the notion of self. So this is how your knowledge — here the person speaks of awareness of consciousness — but the development of our knowledge begins in the *Vipassanā* process by separating the body from the mind.

Mindfulness will begin to develop from this separation between body and mind. There is the sensation of rising and falling. Then there is the consciousness of this rising and falling, which are two different processes.

There is a story of a young boy who was saved by the prayers of the Buddha's disciples from certain death. There is the question of individual *kamma* and the influence of prayers. How can this be reconciled with the idea that the Buddha is not an intercessor between us and a supreme being that doesn't exist in Buddhism, and individual responsibility?

When we speak of *kamma*, this has to do with the process of liberation. We speak only of what happens inside ourselves. What comes from the outside is not necessarily created by our own *kamma*. In Buddhism, as in the natural sciences, there are laws of nature. If you are killed by a tsunami, this doesn't mean that in your past life you drowned thousands of rats. If you catch a genetic disease through your genetic history, this doesn't mean you deserve this disease because in your past life you killed someone. If you are born into a family that is beneficial or unfavourable to you, this doesn't mean you deserve it.

What you deserve is the mental state you have in these precise situations. There are people who die with a calm mental state, and others who die frightened during tsunamis. That is their *kamma*. There are people who have serious illnesses and are content, and others who are bitter and frightened. That is their personal *kamma*. Those who are born into horrible families or united families — their reaction in these situations, that is their personal *kamma*.

So when we speak of this person who was going toward certain death, we are not speaking of his personal *kamma*, but of his environment, other causes. When the Buddha or his disciples prayed and sent their loving-kindness toward this person, they may very well have changed the circumstances that were going to cause him to die. They may very well change the circumstances in which the person was going toward certain death.

This brings us to ask the question: do our prayers or what we spread as loving-kindness have an effect? This is for each person to judge. If, for example, I send loving-kindness to someone who is ill and I hope they will heal, if they are healed, I cannot prove the effect of my actions. Whether the mind affects materiality is for each person to judge.

There is a healer who speaks of an accident in which a lady was killed in a car accident. When the lady was killed, her spirit left her body and observed the line of cars passing. Everyone was swearing and angry, and only one person prayed for her. She saw the energy go up and then come back down on her own head. She saw that the energy from the person who prayed went up and came back down on the same person. She was revived and then returned to her body. She remembered the licence plate of the other person, went to meet him, and offered him a gift. Whether you believe this or not is for you to judge.

When the Buddha and disciples prayed, so to speak, they did not intercede with someone else, but they did it directly. When the venerable sends mettā, he doesn't go ask someone else, but does it directly. I can only hope that this will do you good.

Kamma is a form of cause and effect. Kamma is what we spoke about yesterday — your *saṅkhāras*. Kamma is a force. Yes, of course. Sometimes you do things with a happy heart and you get a very bad response. We do a good deed and then we receive bad things in return.

There is a charitable organisation that sends clothes to Africa. When the clothes arrive in Africa, they destroy the local industry. The local industry collapses, so they had to stop sending the clothes. Compassion without wisdom is a problem. Even if you are the most compassionate person who loves everyone, there will always be someone who hates you.

Can we just do a little blessing, and then we'll finish for today?

May you enjoy great good fortune, may all the powers that be, the force be behind you, the Dhamma, and may you receive all the blessings of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

Time for tea — a British obsession!

Let me also take this opportunity to thank you, and to thank the venerable here for organising this, and of course our wonderful translator. And thanks to the Venerable Amica for organising the two days of meditation.

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