Living Life According to the Dhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Retreat Talks · 34 min read

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa
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Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

This evening I wanted to pre-empt a lot of questions over the weekend concerning daily life. Not all of them, but some of them. To look at the way the Buddha advises us to live and then to try to explain what it means to take refuge and precepts, because that's the little ceremony that I offer on Sunday morning. And why we should do it, or why you might want to do it. The ceremony is on the Sunday just after breakfast, 9:30, and I'll talk about that tomorrow in more detail.

When the Buddha started to teach, the first people who were attracted to him were people who wanted to live a similar sort of ascetic life. And many of them had already been living the ascetic life, out in the jungle or the forests, going on alms round rather. That's the preferred expression, on alms round, not begging for food.

And when they were attracted to him, he said, well, come and try. *Ehi passiko*. There is of course the story about the women who turned up from his court later on in his dispensation. I'm sure many of you know the story that when they turned up he didn't want to ordain them. He didn't think that they could take the life and he refused them three times, which is basically no. But Ananda said, can women become fully liberated? And he said, yes. So he said, well, why not give them a chance? So he did. Ever since then, he's been blamed by the men.

Now, although that story exists, it would seem now actually that that's not quite right. Research has shown something else, that these people who turned up from court were in fact his own relatives. They were his stepmother, his wife and a few other court ladies. So they were obviously people who'd been living the good life. It would be difficult to wear rag robes. They would have been probably still wearing rag robes then, collect robes from the bodies of the dead, sew them up and boil them, and that was it. Later on he made people cut them into squares so that when you look at a robe it looks like paddy fields with passages, and then he made them dye it in arakanut, which turned into a sort of colour of, as one monk said, baby shit. So it's not particularly fashionable.

But there does seem to be, especially a nun there, just the name escapes me as usual, who seems to have asked him, it's in her verse, if you look at the verses left by the *Theris*, by the enlightened women. There's

one verse there where she states that when she asked the Buddha if she could join him, she'd already had *j hana* known, he said the same thing, *Ehi*, come, *Ehi Passiko*, come and try.

So that was one part of it, and slowly but surely an institution developed, and an institution basically is determined by its rules and regulations. So there were general rules and regulations of the time, but as monks and nuns misbehaved and people complained about certain behaviour, he would make a rule. One of the ones that you're all suffering from is not to eat after lunch. So that came about because lay people complained that the monks and nuns were turning up at all times and more than once with their bowls for food. They got fed up and they said no, this is not right, what are they doing all day, just sat there eating? So he made the rule that you can only go out once, it had to be in the morning and it had to be eaten before noon. And the monks complained because all the best foods are cooked in the evening like in most cultures, but he was quite strict about that. He said no, if you want to join this dispensation, that's what you do.

So that was one side of his dispensation. The other side of course was that many lay people began to be attracted to his teachings, and so he began to develop a lay way of life because he had to answer their questions. And this comes out in the Eightfold Path, which we'll come to in a little bit.

But the one thing that I really like to stress is that the jewel of the collection, the *Satipatthana* discourse, in which the Buddha describes how to meditate, all the stuff you've been hearing from me is out of that discourse. Like feeling feelings in feelings and all that sort of stuff. That's all from this discourse. That is addressed to the Kurus of Kurusadhamma. That's how the discourse opens. It always opens with where he was and who he gave the talk to.

So he was in a place which was close to modern Delhi and he had been there before and he'd given teachings about mindfulness and meditation. And when he came back he was taken by how committed the village was, the little town was, to the practice. And that's where he delivered this discourse. So the discourse explaining the whole process of meditation. And it ends with, if you maintain your mindfulness for seven years, for sure you will be either a non-returner or fully liberated. Never mind seven years, seven months. Never mind seven months, seven weeks. Never mind seven weeks, seven days. That means you don't lose your attention for seven days, right? As we found out, that's a wee bit difficult. And it's good to remember that.

He didn't pull any punches. He didn't think, well, only monastics with their special form of institution and life can become liberated. Not at all. And there are examples in the scriptures of many people becoming fully liberated. One is a cobbler.

He had to, shall we say, wander through the countryside. That was his normal thing. He would go from one monastery to the next, spending so much time here, so much time there. And on the way, he would stay in little villages and towns. And in those days, the wandering ascetics seemed to be the entertainment. I mean, there was obviously folk entertainment, bands and jumping up and down, but they would have

these big gatherings on full moon. And the people would go to the parks and they'd have these talks given to them by these ascetics, these spiritual seekers, and they'd be questions and all that sort of stuff.

And in fact, we know that the lay people complained to the Buddha that when we go to these teachers, they always answer our questions and these teachers also give talks, but yours sit like dumb pigs. So he said right, and he made a rule. All these rules come about because of silly things like that. So he said if a monk or nun is asked a dharma question they have to respond. It's a rule.

So he has lots of advice concerning the lay life. And this comes out, as I say, in the Eightfold Path. So it's good to look at that. It's good to look at the Eightfold Path and see what he's actually saying.

So the first is right understanding, right attitude. So that's really what we've been developing over this week. We've been developing our understanding about the way things really are, and hopefully that will in time sink down into an attitudinal base, an attitude. And then from there there's an outflow. So that outflow is into right speech, right action and right livelihood.

So now right, there's always the negative and the positive. So wrong speech of course, telling whoppers and coarse language and useless language and slander, those are your four types of wrong speech. And all those bring us problems. Right speech is kindly. It's always from a position of kindness, which you can include any positive attitude of kindness, from compassion, kindness from joy, sympathetic joy, kindness from friendliness, from *metta*. Kindness, honest. That honesty even stretches to not to exaggerate. And then finally, which is the most difficult one, at a suitable time.

So if you want to say something to somebody which you know might upset them, then you have to choose your time, say it kindly, and be upfront about it. And that's what the Buddha is saying. If you choose the wrong time, then you can expect it to completely go wrong. So this idea of choosing the right time, a suitable time, I think is rather insightful.

And that brings us all to this business of aggression and what's that other word where you're being direct, aggressive, and what's the word they use for that? Assertive, that's right. People think when you're assertive you have to stamp your foot and put your fist on your hips and say quite straightforward, I will not have this. But to be assertive is coming from a place of no fear, no aversion. That's what assertiveness is. And when it comes from that place it can be terribly kind, but they know that you mean it.

A slight example which gives you some idea of that is I remember Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She went to Lebanon when that dreadful stuff was going on and some school had been stuck in the middle of two firing lines, it seems, and the school has lots of children in the school. They'd been caught in the school and it was a dilemma as to what to do. They were very afraid to bring the kids out. It's very strange because I saw it on television, some of you might have seen it, and she's brought to the school. So I was thinking why don't they shoot her in a crossfire? But anyway the officials and all that, they brought her to this place where she could see the school, they told her what the situation was and what to do. Well she

had no problem. She just walked to the school and brought them out. Everybody else is so afraid and full of fear and all that confusion, but that's what had to be done and she was prepared to perhaps sacrifice her life to at least make the attempt.

So when you find yourself in a position of being bullied or somebody saying something which is rather nasty and all that sort of stuff and you want to talk to them, it doesn't have to be upfront straight on the nose, I will not have this sort of behaviour. Coming from that position of no fear and no hatred, no aversion, to say it very kindly, look, I won't take that sort of language anymore. And it hits much more strongly. If there's any fear, any anger, then subconsciously they'll bounce back off it. So coming from equanimity is a much better place, whatever we do, always.

It's been a regular experience of mine. I wrote in one of my little blogs on my monthly email where I came, we had to get rid of this big tree, this oak tree, because of oil tank regulations. And I came out of the house, and my neighbour was in an absolute rage. I've never seen, I mean, it was real rage. He completely lost it. And he was saying things like, I'm from Liverpool, and I'll have you shot. Doesn't say much for Liverpool. And the lumberjack who was okay by the way and quite an expert, he was standoffish. He seemed to be very cool, but that's because he had these two great big strapping young lads next to him.

And I came out into this and I thought, so I thought it was nothing to do with me, so I was really calm, cool, collected, the peacemaker. And I said, what's going on? And he raged on about this tree should have never been cut, it's not our tree, we've had all this business before, somebody was fined so many thousand pounds, on and on and on. And then he turns on me and he says, I'm going to drive my tractor up and down the side of your fence all day to disturb me, all sorts of stuff. And finally I sort of cooled him down and said well, and then he realised that I'd employed this lumberjack. He wasn't part of Satipanya. That cooled him down a bit. And very slowly over a little bit of period of time he sort of began to cool down. And this guy then approached and said, reminded him that he just threatened him with his life. A simple apology would do. And finally he just made a very quick apology. That was good. And he went out with his tail between his legs. He'd got the whole situation completely wrong.

And it was, I mean I don't know whether I would have reacted like that if I'd have been there at the beginning of the argument. It was that I entered into it thinking it was nothing to do with me. I was absolutely stable. And when he turned on me I was able to maintain that sort of stability. And that immediately gave nothing for this rage to hang on to. So that's always a little example from my own life telling me that equanimity is always the best policy.

So that's this right speech business, approaching people in a way which is always kind. And kindness undermines any form of anger. It's got nothing to hold on to. As you know, if somebody approaches you in a sort of accusatory way, as soon as you say, I'm sorry, that undermines the whole thing. And then of course you prove it was their fault. But it's just always undermining their anger is part and parcel of the good life. Which as we can see doesn't stop you from getting your point across. It's just making that little

distinction there.

So it's a good thing to keep in mind the distinction between being aggressive and being assertive. And that when we're assertive it doesn't have to be done with a strict, loud voice coming from the position of righteousness. I mean, that's basically another form of aggression in a way.

So this right speech has always the negative side and the positive side with these instructions. When it comes to right action, that's normally described as these five precepts that we say in the morning. And it's the basically, that's what you don't do.

So we try not to harm any living being, not to kill any living being, not to harm any living being. Well, I mean, as soon as you take that position, then of course you move towards caring for all living beings. And of course, this takes us into that whole area of vegetarianism, which is a constant question within Buddhist circles. Should we be vegetarian?

In Buddhist culture, the only vegetarians that I know of are the Chinese monks. They can be very strict vegetarian. And I once did a wedding ceremony for a Chinese woman who was marrying an Englishman. And after the ceremony, she came up to me quite worried and said that at the banquet, at the banquet which they would have after this ceremony, they'd be eating meat. So I gave her the normal line that the Buddha didn't ban eating meat. That wasn't the problem. So it's up to a person's sensibility, really.

At the monastery I joined in Sri Lanka, one of the monks very proudly came up to me and said, we're vegetarians, because monks eat meat if they're offered meat. It's not a problem, but the message had gone out that monks at Khandaboda were vegetarians. So I'd not been there for two or three meals when fish turns up. And so I didn't say anything, of course. One has to be careful. And I heard later that a rather wry Westerner had said that, well, in Sri Lanka, fish are self-propelling, automated vegetables. So that's it. So it depends where you draw the line.

As you know, in Western culture, the Benedictines were vegetarian, but they did eat fish. They had pools in which they kept fish. So fish vegetarians. The problem is not the eating of meat, of course, it's the killing of the animal. And it's up to a person to decide where they are in that sort of loop.

So of course when you buy the meat you support the butcher and so on and so forth, and it depends on really what your body needs. So I know a woman who has only got half a kidney and basically she has to eat meat, it seems. There's also this argument of blood groups. Certain blood groups are meat eaters rather than vegetarian eaters, which mirror our ancestral history. But I think it's up to every individual to decide whether they want to be vegetarian or not, or even vegan or not. It's up to you.

As a monastic, of course, because you're receiving alms, that's what you eat, because you haven't been in that loop. This is the point. You might say, well, you hold your bowl out and you get a great big chunk of beef. But the thing is that monks don't invite people to give them food. They can say, I prefer to be vegetarian. In Burma, during the rainy season, when monks and nuns gather to do special practice, often

they'll take a vegetarian vow.

But if I know that you've killed an animal to feed me, I can't eat it. That's my rule. If it's a leftover or it's part of something and then I turn up at the door with my bowl and you put a leg of chicken in there, then that would be allowable. But if I'd known you'd ripped this leg off, especially for me, then the chicken was hopping around, I'd have to refuse it.

So there's this whole murky area around vegetarianism where the Buddha didn't basically make any strict laws. And you must remember that in those times there was famine. And you had to kill your livestock to keep alive. And how are you going to teach the Buddha Dhamma to Eskimos? Or Inuits rather, as they prefer these days. Or people who live in deserts. So it's like there's no, in this idea of a relative universe, everything dependent on something else, you can't make absolute laws. Even killing, you can't make an absolute law about killing.

When I was at the monastery in Burma it was regularly fumigated for mosquitoes, so nobody complained about that. So there are different degrees of moral law out there, and it's up to the individual to decide where they are, that's all. So it's very rare that something is absolutely black and white.

So the second one, of course, is not to take what is not freely given. So that's a pretty, when you think about things, you might even become sensitive to taking even a pen home from work, because it's not given for that reason. So it gets, the more you get into these rules and regulations, the more refined they become. It's not just thieving something.

In the Buddhist monk's rules, if I have a liking for that bowl, for instance, it's a singing bowl, and I think, hmm, and I'm looking around to see if I can just slip it in my bag and borrow it, then of course that's still at the thought level. So I haven't actually broken any rule. All rules to do with monks and nuns are to do with action. And then if I come in again and see that rule, and then I'm overtaken by my desire to slip it away, and my hand moves towards it, but I don't actually, to the point of touching it, that's called a *dukkata*, that's a bad thing to do. Moving towards it.

If I touch it, then that's called a heavy offence. Now if I move it a nanometre and then decide not to take it, I've still committed an act of theft and I'm no longer a monk. Yeah. So the Buddha is quite clear about what constitutes an act and what doesn't constitute an act.

So if you take that into all sorts of areas of your life, you can see so long as it's in the mind, it's not manifested outward, it's not done harm out there. It's done harm within here if you've indulged it, but it's not done harm out there. And so long as you're moving towards something, towards you're about to do something, of course, you're now into a dangerous area where you might actually find yourself doing something you didn't want to do. But once you've actually done it, even if you then decide not to do it, but once it's done, it's done. That's it. The act is complete.

Of course, the consequence is different. The consequence of, say, just moving that bowl a nanometre and

then saying, whoa, no, and then walking away, well, there's going to be no consequence to that. But to actually stick it in my coat and shoot off with it and be caught at the gates, that could be, my whole reputation as a completely enlightened being might just fall apart. You can't imagine the Buddha shoplifting, can you? It wouldn't sort of fit.

So that whole business about not taking. Now, the opposite of that, of course, is generosity. Move towards generosity. And generosity was the subject that the Buddha always began his talks with when he talked to lay people, because anybody can be generous, even a thief can be generous with the stuff they've just thieved. So generosity is not, it's a sort of, it comes prior in a sense to the rule about taking and not taking. Anybody can be generous with what they have, and remember generosity is to do with both time, both wealth and time. And that's what it leads to.

Once you stop thinking about what I want. So at the worst end, it's taking something which is not ours, right? But then in the middle, it's this sort of greed of always wanting something. It's always wanting what other people have and envy and jealousy and all that sort of stuff. And when all that passes, where does that energy go? All that wanting, it moves outwards into wanting others to have it. And that's this natural transformation of the negative side of our characters and personalities towards the positive. It just happens naturally.

And I think one way that we can see that we're progressing spiritually is that we're getting far more delight in giving than in receiving. That's always a good sign, that you delight in giving. That's one of the Buddha's phrases, to delight in giving.

The third one is normally translated as around sexual activity, not to abuse our sexual activity. And of course in those days, as in previous times in the West, that would have been confined to the married life, to that type of relationship. These days of course it sort of lengthens out to a loving relationship, doesn't it? Whenever I talk about this I always say this, of course, that sex is just by itself it becomes an empty experience. And then I always quote Woody Allen, but as empty experiences go... So it's just one of those things.

But really that precept I think you can lengthen it out to any lust for anything. Lust for food, lust for getting out into the open. It's just that part of us that is overreaching. Again it always comes back to this seeking happiness in the sensual world.

The fourth one is wrong speech. Oh, wait a minute. I said wrong speech first, did I? So it should have been not to harm any living beings, wrong speech. That should have come fourth, actually. Sorry. And then there was not to take what is not freely given. And then there's this business of not to abuse the senses. And then finally, always a tricky one for a Western culture, not to take drinks and drugs that cloud the mind.

So the normal question is well what's wrong with a glass of wine? Especially if you're French. What's

wrong with a glass of wine? If you're Italian I mean, how can you not have a glass of wine with your spaghetti? So really again this comes back to the individual. I mean generally speaking in our culture to have a glass of wine with food is neither here nor there. It's not. But in the scriptures, the reason for this is that under the influence of it, you do things which you would not normally do. That's the problem with specifically alcohol. And it's up to a person's refinement. I mean, some teachers would say that you mustn't ever go near alcohol, but it's up to the individual to decide what mental state arises when they take alcohol.

I remember when I first started meditating I'd come out of an evening session and I hadn't eaten and I went into a pub and I had half a bitter, just to test it actually, to test the effect of half a bitter on my mindfulness. That's true, I did. And I drank this half of bitter and I sat there and I swear I felt this curtain fall down on the brain. It just came right down. And I thought well this is it. This is what it does. It does have, even a small amount of alcohol does have an effect on your level of consciousness and what you're doing.

So considering that we're trying to develop our awareness, the last thing we want to do is do something which is undermining that development. So again it's left up to the individual. The Eastern culture is not so alcoholic based. I mean they have alcohol but as far as I know there's none of this, there's none of the culture of wine. Culture of tea, but not of wine.

And when it comes to recreational drugs, well, that's the same thing. Recreational drugs distort your consciousness, so you'd have to decide whether that's what you want to do or not. So that whole area, really, for somebody who is bent on purifying their minds and on consciousness, then of course they'd come off all that stuff.

So those are the five basic rules, you might say, of what not to do. But that doesn't cover, in a sense, all the goodnesses that we're asked to develop. So the four of them, the four illimitables, are love, compassion, joy, and peace. And I'll say more about that tomorrow when we do the loving-kindness meditation, the *met ta*. But these are your basic relationships to life and they're illimitable because the development of the mind is seemingly indefinite. It's a bit like number. No matter how great a number you can conceive, you can always add one. It's like an eternity of numbers.

So it's the same with the mind, the heart. You can continue to develop it. And there are meant to be innumerable number of beings. So you can be there forever offering *metta* and an occasional lunch break.

The others are the ten *parami. Parami* means the other shore. And it's normally translated as perfections, which is a bit, that gives you the idea that you've come to the end of this, a perfection. But basically they're virtues. I would much prefer the word virtues. And they include a host of things. I'll just read them out. *Pa rami*.

The first one is this generosity. The second one is the moral law which we've discussed. The third one is

renunciation. So here we have to make, I think I've said before, the distinction between self mortification and renunciation. Renunciation is giving up something to see what our attachment is to it, and in seeing our attachment we wait for that attachment to go.

So one of the things I've suggested is whatever your most enjoyable program is on the telly, to sit there with a cup of tea and a biscuit and don't turn it on. And just feel the pain. So you wait for it to pass, wait for it to pass, and keep doing that until it's all gone and you don't care about that program anymore. So then you can watch it.

Wisdom, of course. Energy, so that's this business of right energy, putting the right energy into something. Patience. The Buddha calls patience the highest form of ascetic practice, to be able to bear with, not to lose one's patience over things, to become irritable. So of course, to be patient, you have to sit in the other person's place, don't you? You have to be in the other person's side to understand why they're behaving like that. Why the train is late, all that sort of stuff.

Truthfulness, we've talked about. Resolution. You hear me go on and on about resolution. So there it is in one of the *parami*. It's a commitment. You keep making resolutions. Even if you fail, it doesn't matter. You just keep putting energy into a resolution. And eventually, it grows in energy. And it takes a hold on us.

Loving kindness, *metta*, which we'll do tomorrow. And of course equanimity.

And I'll just read out what this says in the commentary, which sort of puts them all together for us, so that you can understand that although there is this negative, what we shouldn't do, there's much more about what we should be doing to develop our hearts and develop our relationship to the world. So here's what the *Visuddhimagga* says. The *Visuddhimagga* is a later work which is considered the handbook, really, of Theravada Buddhism, and it's probably one of the greatest spiritual classics of the world, really. But this is what it says, anyway.

"As the great beings, meaning someone destined to become liberated or Buddhahood, are concerned with the welfare of living beings, not tolerating the suffering of beings, wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings, and being impartial and just to all beings, therefore they give alms to all beings so that they may be happy, without investigating whether they are worthy or not. By avoiding doing them harm, they observe morality. And in order to bring morality to perfection, they train themselves in renunciation. In order to understand clearly what is beneficial and injurious to beings, they purify their wisdom. For the sake of the welfare and happiness of others, they constantly exert their energy. Though having become heroes through utmost energy, they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings. And once they have promised to give or to do something, they do not break their promise. With unshakable resolution, they work for the welfare of beings. With unshakable kindness, they are helpful to all. And by reason of their equanimity, they do not expect anything in return."

That's nice, isn't it? Very good. So that's the positive side of what you might call right action.

Then we move on now to right livelihood. So there are those livelihoods we're not supposed to get involved in, like one of them is of course killing animals and arms trafficking, human beings. I mean, you can think of those. But the big thing about livelihood is not what you do but how you do it. This is I think the real core of the thing. Whether we're doing some of the unskilled jobs of society, like cleaning parks, cleaning, that sort of thing, or whether we're doing some of the most highly skilled work in society, in spiritual terms it's irrelevant. In spiritual terms it's the attitude with which you do it.

So if you see what you're doing as a service, then it becomes a spiritual practice. And once we've grasped that, then it makes work very worthwhile, because all the things that we might suffer at work, such as the boredom of it or the tedium of it or the fact that other people are nasty to us, all that whole area, when it becomes a service that you're giving, then it all becomes very worthwhile. And I think that's the, if we start from that, if in the morning having done your two hours meditation you sit quietly and offer *metta* to all beings and then you get round to work, where you're going to spend really the better part of our lives, eight hours a day or so, and so you sit there and you just consider what you do and you do it for the benefit of the people you're working with, for the benefit of the firm or the organisation, and through that for the benefit of all. And if we engender that within us of course then it becomes meaningful no matter what we're doing.

When I was a kid I got a job from school. I work in a cake factory. And they had this belt with the cakes coming off. And there was a group of women, and they put me on the end of the line. And the women, of course, were very used to this sort of work, and I'd just joined them. And they were very quick with their hands and could keep up quite complex conversations. My job was to stick this damn cherry on the top. And every time I missed, I had to shut the machine down. They got a bit upset with me. And I didn't quite get the hang of it. They didn't give me enough time. They'd have given me half a day to get into it. But they were very kind. He's only a lad, leave him alone.

Now you think, well, how could you do something like that and turn that into a spiritual practice? Especially on a sort of production line like that. How could you do that? Well, if you think about it, it's an enormously, if I'd have known, if I'd have been into this sort of practice, this was an enormous opportunity to develop moment-to-moment concentration. Right attitude, completely there with the cherry on the cake. Just like that, on the cake, on the cake. Instead I was, oh, bloody hell, I've been doing this all day. And of course, if you're on the line, you're on the line for hours. Two hours, ding, the bell goes off, a cup of tea, bang, off you go again. I once had a job just punching holes in this damn thing for shot after shot, in front of my eyes.

So any situation can be seen as having potential for some sort of spiritual practice. So, yes, that is service. Service is the important thing to remember when it comes to work.

So now, if we leave it all there in terms of general guidelines about our lives, I mean, there's books written

on it, lots of good books about daily life and all that. The idea of taking refuge and precepts for the people who do it is that, in a sense, you've got to have some sort of reference point in the spiritual life. It doesn't matter what it is so long as it's obviously worthwhile. But if you keep hopping from here to there, then it's like you're using different value systems which eventually can just confuse you.

So if we look at our lives and think well, is there an authority, a final authority I go to for moral problems, for actual guidance? Is there a moral authority, an ethical authority I go to whom I really trust? And from there I would be able to put into context any other information I get, any other spiritual instruction I get. If you take that position, it doesn't stop you from this authority taking in other teachings, other traditions, except that it has to make sense to this central authority. If it doesn't, you've got two authorities, and that's when your confusion starts. Like, who do I follow, what should I do?

And the idea of taking refuge and precepts is, at one level it can be a very general commitment to the spiritual life, and at others it can be quite specific.

Okay. So we take refuge in the Buddha. So the Buddha is a historical personage. We have lots of information about his life and how he lived. We have lots of information about the people around him at the time, with an enormous amount of information about his teachings and what he proposed. And to take refuge in that is to take refuge in not simply some personage but an exemplar. So this is your example. And in a sense the Buddha is mirroring some archetype within us. There's something in us that has to be liberated. And so that would, and the Buddha's path is, shall we say, specific to the Buddha.

If you were a Christian, then Jesus, Jesus Christ would be your central authority. So often I get, for instance, people who are Christians saying, can I meditate? So my answer is, I don't see a confusion, but you've got to make sense of this within the teachings of Jesus Christ. And if you can't, then it creates a contradiction. It just creates wasted energy.

So some people, of course, won't go near other practices who are more fundamentalist Christians. But there are many monks and nuns, actually, within Christianity, within the Catholic tradition, and also the Anglican tradition here in Britain, who practice some form of Buddhist meditation. And there's a nun who lives out in the Brecon Be

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