70th Birthday: Bhante Bodhidhamma's Life Story

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 1:23:33

Namo tassa

I just want to begin by thanking all those people who have organized this lovely little celebration for me. The organizing committee: Aya and Richard and Deya and Mark and Sarah. And all those people who've made lovely donations to buy this statue that will go at the back of the pond there, and to fund my little trip to Japan. I was relieved to see that I could get a return ticket.

Also, I thank Charles and Heather and Mark and Peter, who've done this very professional recording for us. And of course, everybody who's chipped in for today.

So we have other birthdays here. Sarah, her birthday. And also Andy, who's got the 5-0. We're all suffering. And I think we can bring to mind Stephen Hawking. We can feel a certain sorrow for David Bowie, didn't quite make his three score and ten. And I think we can all join in with a special regard and good wishes to Kim Jong-un in Korea.

I am delighted that you've taken such joy in my own little birthday. But of course I myself am depressed. This is the beginning of the steep, the downward trend to decrepitude and senility. Now there was a card which some thought was telling me that 70 was a new 30. It's not. 70's serious.

Something peculiar's happened to me this year, in the sense that, suddenly—I suppose it's reaching the end of all this building stuff here, and feeling very settled outside Sari Panya—memories of my past life came up. I mean, this one. Of my past living. And I just wondered how it is that I got to this place. So I thought it was an opportunity to answer the questions that I'm often asked, but I usually palm off with a sentence or two. How I became a Buddhist, how I became a monk, and why do I continue?

So to start at the beginning: my father was in the RAF. They were following the armies up the boot of Italy when he was billeted on my mother's house. And they fell in love. And it seems as though he took AWOL in order to marry her. And when he got back to Cyprus, they put him in jail for a while. It's all very romantic. Anyway, he brought her to Britain and that's when her real depression began. If you can imagine moving from a hillside village overlooking the Adriatic with the smell of pine in your nostrils and ending up in Manchester. Black Manchester. We forget how black the cities were. Saturated with soot everywhere and pea soup fog.

Anyway, she happily became pregnant with me, but decided to go home to have me. And when the time

came, they brought in the local midwife. She was 25, so presumably there was a little difficulty, but either they rushed it or it was her particular way of doing things, but they cut her. Such was the agony she bit into my uncle's thumb, and he showed me the scar. Even then I wouldn't come out. They had to prize me out with forceps. I mean, what a start. What a start.

She went on to give birth to two more sons and a daughter. So I've got two brothers and a lovely sister.

The effect of birth upon us. Consider the Buddha. So as soon as he was born, his mother died. So there must be a feeling there of loss, whether the baby's fully aware of it or not. There must be a feeling of loss. And according to certain disciplines like rebirthing, that breathing thing, and Stan Grof, holographic breathing. The birth trauma has a real effect upon us. It's there within our psyche. So I know this from the difference between my siblings because my mother said that my sister, who was last 11 years on, fell out. And she's utterly phlegmatic. Nothing like me. So that was my birth.

Now, I want you to imagine this little five-year-old boy being taken to church by his father. And he's walking into church. The church is quite big. It's St. Patrick's. It belongs to a third generation of Irish. And as you walk in, your nostrils are suffused with incense, frankincense. The atmosphere is very warm. And the people are very quiet. And then you're sitting there. And you're taken up into the gallery, into the choir loft. And your father is conducting. And at the point where the priest in these wonderful garments comes in with all the altar boys, because it was high mass, you're there as a little boy, a little child, and you're let loose. You can wander around and you're hanging on to the barrier of the choir overlooking down into the congregation and suddenly Bach or Handel or sweet music is coming in. So this was my introduction into devotion. I was in ecstasy.

And it's something that I think a lot of children these days don't get. Not that they don't get it with other things like pop stars and things like that. But it was my introduction into religion as a real heart-based experience. And this was to carry on. So that was, I call, if my first catastrophe was birth, this was my first blessing.

And my mother, being a southern Catholic—they were Roman Catholics, so I should mention that—my mother being a southern European Catholic, it was all about the love of Jesus. And my father was all hellfire and brimstone. I had a nice balance. I obviously warmed towards my mother. Northern Catholicism is very Protestant.

When you convert to a religion, when you actually move into a religion, you move in for various reasons. Most people who come to Buddhism come because they're suffering, because things have gone wrong and they've heard about meditation and stuff like that. But to actually begin to develop a heart attachment, a heart, a good attachment—not all attachments are evil—a relationship of the heart with your religion is very difficult, because this is done when you're a child. When you go to Thailand, you'll see little children are brought into the monastery, into the temples, and they bow, and they also have this sandalwood and incense, and they have the chanting. So that sense of devotion, which is a beautiful emotional state, it's a

mental state of praise, of being in a lovely spaced out place, it's absolutely glorious. And of course you can develop these things into absorptions.

That's very difficult for us because it's a different culture. We haven't got that background. So I always think the way into that, the way into a devotional, a heart connection with the Buddhist teaching is through gratitude. And the more that you consider what the teaching has done for you and for others, then you get this gratitude come up. And it's very simple to go from gratitude towards love, towards a relationship.

Now, of course, the Buddha is gone. It's not as though we're relating to the Buddha. What we're relating to is an image within us of the Buddha. And in growing that, in a sense, we're actually forming a devotional relationship to the Buddha within us that we want to become. So it's the Buddha as he appears in daily life. It's not the transcendent Buddha. It's the Buddha of compassion, of love, of joy. And that's why I've got all these statues. That's the idea of devotion. I'm trying to squeeze a bit of Dharma out of my autobiography.

So anyway, we moved then to North Manchester, which was all fields at that time, out of Dean G. Mostyn into the lovely fields. The fields didn't stay fields long. They were soon built on. And right at the back of us, they established a cemetery. We're at school. There were over 50 kids in the class. So 47 was the peak of the baby boom. It begins in 45 and ends in 65. And if you look at the graph, it goes up on 47 and then begins to slowly come down. So Theresa May is a boomer.

So then, while I was at primary school, a priest turned up. And he gave us this wonderful talk with pictures about the missions. He showed us pictures of Flores, which is a beautiful island in Indonesia. He showed us pictures about New Guinea. And he showed us pictures about South America. And he talked about the wonderful things that priests did out there, missionaries. And if anybody felt like they might be drawn to that thing, then they should get in contact. So anyway, I got the 11 plus and I went to Xaverian College, which was a grammar school. But two of my friends from that school went to St. Richard's College. And during that year, for some reason, it came to me that that's what I wanted to do.

My mother was fiercely against it, but my father was like that, but it was my Aunt Rose who really wanted a priest in the family. Come the age of 12, I'm off on the train down to St. Richard's College.

And for me, it was entering into two years of undiluted heaven, because it was all about doing exactly what you want to do. And that's when you're most happiest, isn't it? When you're doing exactly what you want to do in an unpressured situation, you're in perfect joy. For instance, a hobby, right?

So the routine there was up about half past six, seven o'clock. We went down for mass. After mass, we went out in most weathers, only in the most severe, to do the old army exercise. Back in, into breakfast, clean up. School starts nine o'clock, all the way through to five o'clock. And all that time, apart from a little break at lunch, I remember it was in silence. Can you imagine that for a 12-year-old these days? At 6

o'clock, we went in to study, and at 8 o'clock, we were finally let free and we could play games down in the big game room. Imagine a 12-year-old day like today.

So, and I really got into it. I mean it was, all I remember is just being blissed out and hating going home, and having to come back because it was just there that I found my joy.

Then, something began to happen which promised a different sort of joy. It promised gold, but it turned into glitter. And the joy it promised finally ended up with frustration. Puberty. Even Mick Jagger could get no satisfaction. And he tried.

Anyway, we were let out every so often to go for a walk on a Sunday. And there were about six of us, five of us on the trip. And as we got down, we suddenly had this idea that we'd smoke. Now, teenagers are by nature rebellious. The order didn't smoke. And it was a German order begun by a German priest. And it was mainly German and American. And the joke was, we don't smoke, so we drink. S-V-D. And so it was a little rebellion to go and get some cigarettes. And we decided to steal them. There was an old lady who ran a shop at this bridge on the Worcester Canal. And as we entered in, we'd had it all figured out, somebody distracted her and somebody took the cigarettes. And I can't remember what my job was. I'll leave that.

Well, we smoked, of course. And when we got back in the evening after lunch, we were all called to the prefect's office, the headmaster prefect. And he told us that, he asked us, had we taken cigarettes from this lady? And we all said yes. She was no fool. We were probably the only customers the whole day. There was nobody, that in the middle of nowhere. So we were dismissed, and we thought, well, that's it.

There was no corporal punishment in the seminary at all. If I was at Xaverian, you'd have been beaten. Anyway, about a day or so later, we were all called for a talk in the main, in this big classroom. And the rector, who was in charge of the whole place, announced that certain boys had stolen. And he called our names and he said, you are expelled. Can you imagine that? I was three months off my GCEs and they kicked me out.

Anyway, I got back and because of that, my GCEs went all over the place. I had about four GCEs. I had to take my English again. And unfortunately, because the education was mainly by Americans, who I don't think really understood the English GCE system at the time. So what happened was, I ended up with subjects that I had virtually no interest in. Latin, French, and history. I had a bit of interest in history.

So life went on. And I didn't do well at the GCEs. And I remember talking to my father about this. Now, when they expelled, when I was thrown out, that was a cut off of a vocation. This vocation to be a priest remained in me as a really strong, tremendous urge for three years till I was over 19. Why couldn't I go back? Why couldn't I go back? It's because they never forgave me.

I can't tell you how important it is to forgive your enemies. What happened was, come the GCE, I turned up and they gave me a room in an outer building. I had to go into the exam room at a different entrance from everybody else. I wasn't allowed to talk to anybody and they weren't allowed to talk to me. In other

words, I was excommunicated. And there was no way you can come back on that. If a priest or somebody come up and said, look, give it a couple of years and then, you know, you can join another order. I'd have had an in, but I had this block. I couldn't move.

So if you have any pity on your enemies, on all of them, do forgive them because it allows them to forgive themselves. And of course, in our offering forgiveness, we empty our own hearts of the revenge and the hurt and all that sort of stuff. Now, it doesn't mean to say that you've got to have somebody's forgiveness in order to forgive yourself, but it just makes it much easier.

So I went on then to about 19, and my father pointed out to me that since I was lost, I had no clue what to do with my life at this point. I'm completely lost. He said, why don't you teach? He said, you can travel with teaching. They must have known I was unsettled.

So I decided, I didn't go into university, so I went down to St. Mary's College, which was then a Catholic training college. It's now a university. And it was the year they were introducing the B.Ed. And instead of doing the B.Ed., I did the other offering, which was a degree course and a teacher training course.

And it was during this time that I completely forgot about being a priest. I finally began to enjoy a bit of life. But there's this underlying meaninglessness. There's this underlying boredom that comes because nothing you're doing is of any direct meaning to your own heart. And so what you overlay it with is distraction. You get drunk, you chase women, you do all sorts of daft things. And that went on for a little while until...

And it was during that time I fell in love. Oh my goodness. Well, you know what the first time is. So I'm completely sozzled, right? And on one steamy, love-drenched night, she fell pregnant. This was my third catastrophe.

So now in a Catholic community, for that to happen is a horror story. The abortion law had just been introduced, so it was legal. Let's not confuse legal with moral, just because in a liberal society, many of our personal decisions are left to us. But I just couldn't go there. It just wasn't on my to-do list, getting married and having children. So we struggled with it. We both struggled with it. She would have been, I think, happy going that way.

And eventually I had to be true to my own heart. And I went up to visit the parents and I said, look, I can't marry you. I'll support them. It was a way of getting myself into that position where eventually I'd marry. It was an in-between place, which I felt happy with, that I wasn't entrapped, and then finally I'd probably give in. But to the family, it just wasn't a no-go, and they just saw disaster for her daughter. They had connections with surgeons and stuff, and so she had an abortion.

I never felt really bad personally about that because I was never brought into that decision making. And of course I'm part of that whole process.

But if you go on the website and just type in something like reactions to abortion, you'll see pages after pages of men and women who really regret, no matter what good reason they had, actually regret that whole process. So it's there, shall we say, within my psyche, that at some part of my life there was an abuse of my sexual powers, even though it was a very wonderful moment.

Buddhism is no different from other religions. As soon as there's conception, there's consciousness. So there's a living being. There's no way out of that. That's what's understood, anyway. And this further alienated me. It further alienated me from my own heart. It further put me into a position of what you might call an underlying despair, which I never really looked at. It was just there underneath — the boredom, the meaninglessness, and then this tragedy — and all that just lay down upon me as a despair, which every occasion would actually lend me in an angry depression. But it never lasted long because I'm very sanguine.

And then one day... I was 21, 1968, 1968, very important date, 1968. That was the student revolutions, if you remember, in Paris and all that. And I lay in bed on a Sunday and I said to myself, I wonder what will happen if I don't go to church. Now in those days, if you didn't go to church, it was a mortal sin. And if you didn't get to confess to a priest and you died, you went to hell forever. I mean, that was the teaching. So it was a big decision. They changed all that in the mid-60s with Pope John XXIII. And I said to myself, if I don't go to church today, let's see what happens.

Nothing happened. So I never went again. I know, it's the most ridiculous thing to do. And what it manifests really was that the religion had now lost that connection of devotion. It had just become an empty ritual. I was just turning up for the mass, receiving communion, et cetera, et cetera. And it had lost its potency. And I think also there might have been guilt about the abortion and all that. And so there was a cutoff there.

Now, what this did, of course, was it deepened my alienation. It deepened my alienation to the whole thing. In other words, I found myself where Nietzsche found himself. I only discovered Nietzsche fairly recently because God is dead. We've killed him. Nietzsche struggled with that. I mean, he came up with the answer of the courage to face the sufferings and the death of life and to somehow rise above it. And that's what he meant by the superman or supraman, the übermensch.

The Buddha himself, if you remember, had that existential crisis. I mean, he puts it in the myth. There's a myth surrounding seeing a sick person, an aging person, and a corpse, and this person sitting under a tree. And the whole thing is about him in his young 20s coming to realize that actually what he's heading towards is sickness, aging, and death. And that this image of the *samana*, of the recluse sitting under a tree, suggested some sort of an escape. So we have to, I think, imagine the Buddha that he himself is going through an existential crisis. And it's so strong within him to find the answer to this that he leaves his family. In his case, his just-born child. So I think from our point of view, this is where the Buddha's at. The meaningfulness of life is gone. It's an existential angst. And that's where I was, really, with this existential

anxiety.

Now, I don't want to give you the impression that I was going around moping and all that. No, I was still getting drunk and having a good time. It's just that every so often in silent moments, just by yourself, you suddenly sink into this area of just sheer boredom, a despair about life. You're just living it.

And then came my third blessing. We went to see Waiting for Godot by Beckett. Now some of you probably don't know that play because it's years old now. But it's basically about two tramps who are having these gorgeous conversations waiting for Godot. Godot's going to come and sort it all out. And the same thing happens in the second act. And in the first act, two people come, walk across the stage. But in the second act, one's gone blind and the other one's gone dumb. And in the first act, there are leaves on the tree. In the second act, there's no leaves. So here are the two tramps waiting for Godot, and everything's just getting worse.

I came out of that play, even though it was just an amateur production by a college, absolutely enthused. I couldn't stop talking about it. They all thought I'd gone mad. But to me, it just caught this whole existential problem of what is the point if in the end you just die? And I thought at this point, just to get across this, I'd read out a poem by Beckett, which I came across much later. I spent a lot of time writing about nothingness, well, doggerel anyway, and what it meant to just come to the end, to just finish, to just, and that's it, you're gone, is it? So let me just read this little poem to you, see what you think.

Just think, if all this, one day,
all this one day, one fine day, just think,
if one day, one fine day, all this stopped.

Get it? So that was the underlying existential problem that I was battling with.

In terms of my emotional life, when I wasn't being extrovert and going out there, there was this, there's a lovely poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, that gets it across. And I carried this now for a long time. But it gives you an idea of, I think it's just a wonderful piece of poetry.

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, what black hours We have spent this night!
What sights, heart, you saw, Ways you went,
and more must In longer lights delay!

With witness I speak this,
But where I say hours, I mean years, I mean life.

My lament is cries countless, Cries like dead letters
Sent to dearest hymn,
that lives, alas, away.

I am gall, I am heartburn.
God's most deep decree.
Bitter would have me taste.
My taste was me.

Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.
Self-yeast of spirit, a dull dough sours.

I see the lost are like this, and they're scourged to be as I am mine.
They're sweating cells, but worse.

Ooh. Isn't that good, eh? They're sweating cells. I love it.

So then, actually, I've gone and forgotten my little centerpiece. I'm so sorry. I'll have to go back to my birth. Do you mind? I'm sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me. After that terrible birth, we seem to have both recovered.

I hadn't seen this picture for years. And when I saw it, I thought, well, blow me down. And two things came to mind when I saw it. I thought, first of all, we remember our mothers as old, in old age. We forget they were all lovely young women. And the other thing was that little child, if it was just shown to me, there's no way I'd make a connection with that child at all. I mean, this is the 10th body. Well, no, he's got hair. There's no way I'd make a connection. This is my 10th body, if we're to believe biology. Every 10 years, you completely change all the atoms in your body. Anyway, sorry about that. I'm going to leave you here.

So I leave, the relationship breaks up. I can't handle it anymore. So anyway, I'm in Spain and I'm looking for my friends and I've lost them. I've arrived there sometime later. And I pick up a telegram from the local post office. Do you remember telegrams? Yeah, fantastic. And it said, congratulations, son, BA and teaching certificate. And I went up onto a high rock and overlooked the sea. And I said to myself, there's no way in this world I want to teach.

So I went down and camped in this camp. And that night, there was a torrential rain. I woke up with the tent around me, completely sodden with sand and everything, staggered to the drink area, the, what do you call it? It's where people drink. And looking pretty miserable for myself. And I met this bloke called Dave. And we began talking. And by the end of the evening, we decided to travel together across the world. Simple as that.

So I came back, and I got a job through somebody I knew as a rep for selling audiovisuals to schools. And there was lots of money in education, so I made lots of money. And I was traveling all over Cornwall and all over Wales selling this stuff to schools. And I gathered something like a thousand pounds, which must be a lot of money these days, isn't it? A thousand pounds. And come the year, off we went.

And during that time, remember, all this time I've got this thing going on, this nothingness and this stuff in the heart. But because of the joy of travel, just the constant new information coming in and the liberation of it, it was all underneath. It would only come up in the gloomier moments.

So anyway, we went off and we started off towards North Africa. We went down to, saw all the stuff in Egypt, the usual stuff, ride a camel and all that. Went over to Khartoum, lay on the luggage rack to sleep and woke up with sand everywhere because of a sandstorm. Got onto a boat down to Juba, which is now the capital of South Sudan. And for 10 days, we were looking at the amazing sight of reeds. The reeds were so tall, they went up above the boat. And the boat just plowed through this canal, which was the Nile. And all you saw for 10 days was reeds. And because we didn't have much money, we were just eating bread. So this was a really gloomy time. And that's when I wrote most of my doggerel about nothingness.

Got down to Juba. We flew across to Entebbe. We made this amazing bus ride across Africa. I slept on the back seat. And every so often, I was in midair as he ran over an elephant. It was just unbelievable. Got to Mombasa, stayed with his brother, but we didn't get on so well. So we went up the beach and camped up there. And there we got stolen. All our traveling checks were stolen, which was fantastic because when you got to India, you got on the black market and made a lot of money. Terrible, isn't it? And they stole my father's watch. He'd given me this gold watch that he had been given after he'd finished his time as a headmaster at St. Patrick's. And it had inscribed on it at the back, and it was a precious thing.

So I wrote him a letter expressing my sense of sorrow and my love of him and all that. Well, when his reply came back, about three or four months later... He said, thank you, son. Bit sentimental.

So we get to India. So we get this cattle boat across the Indian Ocean from Mombasa to Bombay, playing chess all the time. Lots of travelers, by the way. There wasn't many going down Egypt. But by the time we got to Africa, the boat was full of Westerners. It was all hippies. I was dressed in purple. So we take this boat all the way across to Bombay, and we do the usual trip. And we finally end up in Nepal. And that's when we got really stoned. Up in Nepal, lots of these stones full of dope. And there were these lovely hippie gatherings where we'd all sit in a circle with a chillum. That's ridiculous, isn't it? And that lasted for a while.

And then we made our way down to Calcutta. And Calcutta was at war. That was the Indo-Pakistan war where Bangladesh split off. And so there was no planes going out. So we were stuck there for two weeks. And what I did every day, so this was one of my big awakenings. When you went to India, this time it wasn't so bad. But in those days, sickness, destitution was in your face. It was in your face. And in Calcutta, they have a huge park with this massive statue of Queen Victoria, which I presume they got rid of now. And there was a massive road, a circuit road going around. That road was packed tight with the sick. Elephantitis, everything, apart from lepers, all the way around. And they were lying on the pavement. And when you saw that, you understood Mother Teresa's compassion. Because many of them would have died just there.

So anyway, I saw that. That I'm not used to, I'm not ready to receive. I'm aware of the suffering, but I'm not ready to receive it. Every day I went to this Sikh restaurant to get curry, and I would always ask for a glass of water. And when they brought the glass of water, which was a pint glass, you'd always leave a nice oily thumbprint on the side. I don't know how it was that I was in India for so long and never caught anything. It's just weird.

Every day I passed this woman who had a huge goiter, and she sat there absolutely silent, holding a little thing for coins, and her eyes were always glazed with tears. She just sat there, never looked at me, just sat there. And as I passed on the other side of the road, I always saw her. Day after day I passed that poor woman, and I never gave her a penny.

So then I'm coming round the corner, I'm just wandering around Calcutta, and I come round the corner, and right before me, there's this little girl. She must be over seven, but she looks round about five. And she's sucking a dried black banana peel. And she sees me, and as she sees me, she has the dignity and that destitution to cover her sex. And that hit me so hard that I just bombed past her. I never went back to buy her a banana. It just hit me so hard. That was my little boy drowned on the beach moment, where you suddenly, the awareness of compassion is not enough. There has to be that contact. Anyway, that passed. And that stays with me. Every time I bring that image to mind, if I feel callous about anything, about refugees and all these people, I just bring that little child to mind. And that's my connection with all the suffering that's going on these days.

So we're in Calcutta, and we did a couple of naughty things. And we had opium. Opium's wonderful. And I was laid out there all night, and I remember waking up and just watching all these cockroaches going over Dave's body. I went into the toilet, and there was cockroaches everywhere. It sounded like cockroaches. I thought, fantastic. Anyway, I look, and all my troubles are gone. Like, what is all this business? Nothing. It's stupid. Get rid of it. I'm just absolutely blissed out. Then, of course, it wears off, and I'm depressed and anxious again.

So before long, we're off on a flight. We're going to Bangkok. And we do the usual tourist trip and wandering into all these beautiful Buddhist buildings. That's it. I have no connection at all with Buddhism. For me, they're just museums. And again, a bit of naughty stuff and cocaine and all that in Bangkok. And none of it really held. It was only years later when I read that book, Emotional Intelligence by Goldman, which brought this whole thing about emotional intelligence into consciousness, that he says in it, if you're a depressive, you tend to be drawn to those drugs that lift you out of your depression. These are not hallucinatory drugs. And if you are an anxious person, you're drawn to alcohol. Well, that's me, isn't it?

So we left Bangkok, we went down through Malaysia, and then we had to walk across the bridge to Singapore. As we got to the checkpoint, they sent us back to get a haircut. We had to cut my hair off, all of it, and then come back, and then we took this boat, which was a real proper lovely little boat, all the way to Port Moresby. It was on its way to Cairns and down to Australia. That was New Guinea. We flew then

from New Guinea to Medang, and I took up my post as a teacher in the Society of the Divine Word Missionary School.

I contacted them again and got this job, myself and Dave. He taught art and I was teaching English. That was a great year teaching those kids—they actually wanted to learn, you know what I mean? Great things like climbing Mount Harbour and going up this boat, which was run by a priest who was really a dislocated cowboy. He went up and down barking orders in that strident American way, giving sermons, selling things and shooting crocodiles. He had his huge rifle. He'd just go "Shoot!"

It was during that time that, because I was settled—and as soon as I was settled, you're kidding, blown me down after the rush—because I'm unsettled, I've got years to go yet. I'm only at the age of twenty-five, I'm not even twenty-five yet. But I get there. So anyway, I've got this dreadful thing going on, this nothingness. I go back from teaching, I don't know what it was, I lie on the bed and I'm suddenly suffused with this enormous fear. For some reason, I don't know, I must have got it from somewhere, I turn towards the fear, and I go into it, and next minute, I'm out of my body. I'm up there looking down, I turn round, I see that tunnel, swirling tunnel, and I'm back into the body. All fear of death disappeared. Not the fear of dying, all fear of death disappeared. And suddenly, out of the blue, I start writing plays. I start writing plays.

I go down to Australia because I'm interested in theatre and I go to a training school really to learn the art of theatre because I know virtually nothing about it. That's where I fall in love again. Hijacked. We have a lovely relationship. It's going fine. We're involved in theater. I get one or two plays going. Suddenly this idea of marriage comes up. My brother just got married. I was twenty-seven. That's what you do. But in my heart of hearts, I wasn't with it at all. But because of the relationship and because of the love, you get married. We went through a civil service. There was something in me that just couldn't handle this. I was getting overly happy. I remember my dear best man, as we got into the taxi, said to me, "You know, Pete"—that's what I was called—"Pete, you've got to take something seriously."

Well, it was a disaster because somebody who had been a friend, a companion, a lover, somebody whom I shared theatre with, suddenly became a burden. I'd fallen into the patriarchal trap. She became a burden. We went on a honeymoon and I drained it of joy. She said to me at one point, "You know, if you carry on like this, I'll leave you." That's not the sort of conversation you have on a honeymoon. It's absolutely awful.

We got to London, and my brother offered us lodgings. Hitting London in November from—it was the beginning of summer in Australia—the rain and the cold, and then we hit the theatre, and it was just overwhelming. Sydney was a small city with a major theatre and a couple of little outlets. You hit London, and it's just impossible. I sent my plays off, and I would follow them up, and I got one play back, and it had "600" written on it. It was just overwhelming. I was so depressed, and I was dragging her down too.

We were at SOAS, School of Oriental and Asian Studies. While we were there, this Nigerian approached us and said he was taking a troop out to Nigeria and would we be interested. Well, we were completely lost. We just said yes. He gave us lodgings. He said, "I'm going to get the group together in a house." I left my

brother, went to this house, and it was just an empty room with a mattress in it. We had to put a line up for the clothes. I'm standing there for about two, three weeks, and nothing's happening. We're saying, "Larry, what's, can you show us the play? Can you show us the play?" Finally he shows us this play, and it could have been written by a ten-year-old. It was an inverted racist play. It was all about this great black chief who was going to teach these stupid white people something. Myself and Chris—by the way, her mother was Aboriginal and her father was English—we just looked at each other: got to get out of this, got to get out of this.

Very fortunately, I'd lost contact with Dave, my travelling companion. As we got onto a tube, he was right there. I said, "Dave!" Just a wonderful thing. He was moving out of a flat in Highgate. We were down in Kentish Town. It just worked for us.

The night before, we'd planned the escape because there must have been something in us that told us something like this would happen. We told him that we weren't going to come. That evening he came round and went ballistic. I mean, it was racist. It was awful. My wife stepped forward and slapped his face. He made for her. I grabbed hold of him. I'm on the floor with him. I'm holding him down. I'm shouting, "Relax, Harry, let go." Finally when he gives up the struggle, we both get up and he's standing there and he goes off again. I'm very penitent and I'm saying, "Get back." Finally he left. That night, we slept with chairs up against the doors and a carving knife. I slept with a carving knife. Seven o'clock in the morning, we were in that taxi and off we went.

Anyway, it just got worse and worse and worse. Eventually, my wife got a job in a theatre company up in Birmingham. Really, that was the first leaving. We both knew something was wrong. We knew it wasn't working. Her leaving really was the beginning of her leaving me.

I went back home really depressed. I was back in teaching FE. It was awful. I was getting nowhere with my plays. There was a fantastic opportunity when the director of Earl's Court Theatre actually asked me to come along. I had an interview with him. We were discussing this play I'd read—I mean, you don't do that with a top director. I didn't have the energy to go back with another play. I didn't keep the contact. That's what you do. Once you've got your foot in, you keep pushing. So I'm getting slowly, slowly depressed. That's when Chris tells me that she's fallen in love with somebody else.

Apart from the ego thump, the affection had almost disappeared, really. So there wasn't that sense of loss that you might get from somebody whom you truly love. But it put a cap on my situation. I mean, I was getting nowhere, plays were no good, I was teaching, which I hated doing, I was going nowhere. So I was in a state of absolute despair and shock.

I thought, well, everything I've built up these last years has just collapsed. Then it came to me that it was the most rational thing to do, the most obvious thing to do. In fact, it was common sense. I had to go to Japan to meditate. I don't know how that came. I'd read a book on Zen Buddhism in Sydney, and I'd walked from where I lived to the shops, looking at myself, observing myself. By the time I got to the shops,

I thought, no, this is going to drive me crazy. So that was it. That was all I knew.

So I wrote to the Buddhist Society. How did we find places before Google? It's a mystery. Anyway, I wrote to them, and they wrote back and gave me twenty-one reasons as to why I shouldn't go to Japan. But they put me in touch with Throssel Hole Abbey that had only recently opened up in Hexham in Northumberland. From them, they put me in touch with Vajra Bailey, who was teaching in Birmingham, just a bus ride away from where I was living.

I remember going there on a cold February day, and she was very Zen, you know. The house was cold. We got up to the room, and there was a couple of Greek people there. Then she took us into the shrine room. We all bowed, and I thought, this is ridiculous. Then she sat me on a stool, and she pushed my back in and sat me upright. She said, "Just watch. Keep your eyes open like that." The instruction was: watch what comes up.

So I sat there for forty minutes in absolute agony, both emotionally and physically. But by the end of it, I was just convinced this was going to get me out of this hole. She had a room in the house which wasn't occupied, so I went to lodge with her. So that was February. By June, by July, I had a job, which was a really easy one, teaching English to foreigners, foreign students. I bought a house. Everything began to move in that way. That was my last catastrophe, my last big catastrophe. I've had catastrophes since, but they're only small Cs.

I carry on doing that. Being part of a Zen monastery was like being back in St. Richard's. It just came to me with such ease. I loved going up there, even during the summer holidays. I'd spend six weeks up at Throssel Abbey.

Then one day I came back, and I lay on the bed, and this tremendous fear just filled the whole of my body, every cell—I felt it everywhere. There came this picture of this little boy, two years old, going into the front room, shaking my grandfather and saying, "He's dead, they've killed him, now they're going to kill me." Two years old.

I said to my father, "I found grandfather dead in the front room." He said, "No, he died in bed, I was with him." This tells a lot about trauma, children's trauma. Obviously my parents weren't getting on. I'm thinking I'm the problem, they go in and they presume they've killed my dear old grandfather, and I presume they're going to kill me now. What happened when that trauma came up—you have to be very careful with childhood memories, right? Because you don't know what you're laying on them actually. In the memory I speak to myself in English, but I don't think I had English—in fact, I could speak at the age of two. But that was the thought.

What happened then was I got a series of images coming through my life to tell me how this trauma had cancered every one of my relationships. There's your karmic line. It was just so plain to face, it was unbelievable. That was such a wonderful relief.

Then shortly after that, a little bit longer after that, I'm walking along the road, and on the other side there's a copse of wood. As I turn into the copse of wood, I get this thump on the head. This energy comes down into the heart, it shoots out towards this tree, and what I'm looking at is a kaleidoscopic vortex of energy reaching up into the sky. Can you imagine that? If you can imagine it, I've just turned towards a copse of wood, there's this gentle thump on my head, energy comes down in the centre of my body, it bursts out of my heart centre, and what I'm looking at is one tree amongst them all, which is this multicoloured, kaleidoscopic vortex of energy reaching up into the sky.

For a while I was blissed out and I remember particularly looking at this crimson geometry of a rose. That lasted for an hour or two and then I got depressed and anxious again. Now if you were to ask me if I had a choice between those two—this vision or this purification of the heart—no choice. You go for the purification of the heart. Because that's something you can do. You can't make these other things happen. They seem to come to cap a certain level. They don't come to begin something. They seem to end a process. I don't think that would have been possible, that insight or vision or whatever it was, without the clearing of the heart.

If you look at the Dhammapada, the Buddha puts the practice as: "Stop doing evil, do good, purify the heart. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas." It's as simple as that. This purifying of the heart, what we go through when we're sitting there with all these things coming up, that is something that we can actually do something directly about.

Now when it comes to this other thing, this bump on the head, what do you think? God? Big being? Or just neurons firing through your head, just atomic, subatomic activity firing through the head. The thing is, I don't know. It didn't feel like a personal God. It just felt as though I was given this gift and I've remained at that level. If something happens like that to you, you don't have to expand it into some huge cosmology. It's just something that you receive. It's just an interesting thing. What I understood by that was that the whole of this phenomenal world is nothing but light. It's nothing but energy. Matter is just the coagulation of it. That's all it is. That's what it's made of. There's nothing real. There's nothing substantial in it.

Anyway, all that passed, and I carried on teaching. The story then is basically how I became a Buddhist. I went up to Throssel, I joined the Zen monastery. Through that, through Vajra Bailey, I met the *Theravāda* monk and I did a retreat with him. In that retreat I was drawn. Then the next year the Mahāsi teachers came and that gave me a real technique in which to really delve into myself in a way that Zen hadn't really done. It was from that that I decided to take a sabbatical from work and I went to Burma with my teacher for six months.

When I came back, during that time, this whole business of impermanence became even clearer because there I actually clearly saw that although this might be, what I'd seen about this tree might be true out there, what's actually true in here is the arising and passing away, minutely, of consciousnesses.

That's actually what we're experiencing all the time, just this screen which is flashing, flashing inside us.

And what is it that's aware of it? What is it that is looking at it? And that, of course, is our *satipaññā*, that's our intuitive awareness. And it's that separation which is the process of liberating ourselves from the delusion of thinking that we are this psychophysical organism.

So when I got back, I was really fired up. I was going to make a go of it. I got back to college, to the college I was teaching at, and they gave me a promotion. Can you believe that? So I thought, this is what I've got to do. I'll take it as a bad girl every so often. I'll come back and get a promotion. They gave me a promotion.

During that time, I was ready really to move into the whole thing of marriage. I bought a new house. It was a semi-detached house. And during that time, I began to fall in love again. Oh, my goodness. And so there was then this real potential. But something else started to creep in, which was, why don't I spend three years as a monk?

Now, the monastic order was established by the Buddha exactly for that reason. When you look at the rules of the monastic order, you end up simply learning the Dharma or meditating. There's nothing beyond that if you're keeping the rule as he would want it. And the whole infrastructure that comes with it in a society is that it holds you there, it holds you in that place.

So I struggled with that for about a year, making lists for and against, and for and against. And finally, when it really got on top of me, I went to see Revata Thera, my teacher, and I said, Bhante, I want to become a monk. And he said, you're too old. What a relief. Let's get back and live properly. So that was it. But it wouldn't leave me.

So come another six months, I'm back to him and I'm saying, listen, I've got to, I really have to ordain. Even if it's only for three years. That was my intention, a three-year ordination. So again, he said, well, no, he said, you're needed here. I'd become now so much part of that Vihara. And there were only a few of us. He wasn't the type of person who collected people. So there's only about three of us who held the whole Vihara up.

So again, I went away, but this time I wasn't so convinced. I spent two weeks in meditation with a good friend who read Lord of the Rings while I was suffering in the other room. If you're listening, Peter, you'll remember. And I came back absolutely determined. And when I went to see him again, he said, OK.

So I ordained for three years. And I remember telling my mother. And she burst into this enormous veil of tears. And I put my arm around her. I said, Mum, it's only for three years. And she stopped. In Catholicism, if you're a monk, you disappear. These days they're not so strict, but you disappear into the monastery, you don't see him again.

So there was a lovely feast for that ordination. And I went off to work with Goenkaji in his monastery, in his center in Igatpuri, India. And there, something came out of my neck, some snake or other, it was absolutely awful. And I came back feeling I'd got rid of some big thing. And who should be there at the Vihara but Upandita, Sayadaw Upandita, some of you might know. He's one of the prime teachers of the

Mahāsi tradition, who invited me to come and join him in Burma.

So before I did that, I thought, well, why don't I go and live at Amarawati, the big monastery there, and really get to know what it is to live in this community. So I turned up there, and it was during that year that there were those demonstrations in Burma and all the killing and everything that they did. It was the one before the one that finally made the military pull back. So I decided not to go.

And then at the turning of the year, I said to the sangha, I said to the monk, listen, I ought to go and tell Sayadaw Upandita why I've not turned up. So I went to his retreat in IMS. That's Barre, Massachusetts place. And as soon as I walked into the meditation hall, I just knew this was it. I didn't want to live in that forest community type of monasticism. I wanted this hard grind, full on, full metal jacket meditation.

So I decided to go to Burma. But I couldn't get in. I got to Bangkok. I couldn't get a visa. I ended up in a monastery in the north. I finally caught up with Upandita down in Penang. And I did a retreat with him in Penang there. And by this time, I'm despairing again. Because it's four years. I'm not getting anywhere. I'd determined three years. I thought, well, I'll give it another year. So I'm kneeling in front of the Buddha statue. And I'm saying, look, I've done what I can. I said, if nothing happens in another year, I'm going to go back and do something useful.

So there was a German monk there whom I was talking to and giving him all my sorrows and telling him where I was and all that. And he said to me, why don't you go to Sri Lanka? I said, Sri Lanka? I never even thought. The Mahāsis were out there. So I wrote to Venerable Pemasiri, who was the abbot. And he wrote back and said, come.

When I got there, I told him what I wanted to. I said, I just want to sit. I just want to find somewhere I can sit. So he gave me this bunch of keys and he directs me to this *kuti*, this hut at the back of the meditation room, of the monastery. And when I got there, there's this beautiful little ten foot by six foot hut with a little *cankamana*, a walking area with walls to keep the snakes out and all that. And a garden all to myself. And I walked in there and I thought, this is absolutely marvellous.

So I had a toilet built, that was important. And then there came that day, which was, it's very rare, even in a sense, even in the monastic life, where you didn't have to go into a retreat with the idea that you're going to finish in a month, three months, four months. I went in with no ending date. And so I sat there going through all this purification of the heart, doing the meditation, two o'clock till ten o'clock at night, really going for it. I was absolutely empowered for doing it.

And it was during that time my second trauma appeared out of the blue. I had this dream of looking across a pond and there was a ghost waving at me. Now this ghost was exactly what you expect a ghost, a big sheet with two eyes. And it was on the other side of the pond. And I was absolutely terrified. And I asked a Jungian psychologist about this. He said it was a birth trauma. I don't know.

And then one night, the dream came once, it came twice, this nightmare. And then one night I woke up

and there it was in the corner of the room. And I remember bouncing on the bed in absolute terror and my little voice saying, what do you want? What do you want? And the thing just disappeared. It just fizzled out. And that was it. Something just came out of the heart, this trauma. I still don't know what it means. And then after that, the clarity of impermanence became even more obvious to me.

And it was so fortunate. Death doesn't particularly regard you. Death happens when it wants to do it. It's usually most inconvenient. So at that point, just when everything was finished, my father died. So I remember receiving the news and I was walking back towards the kuti. I'm crying. But I didn't cry long because when I reflected on his life, you know, he had a good life. He was a happy man. He was very sanguine. And I loved him much.

And I went back for his funeral. And then I thought, well, somebody has to stay with my mother, comfort my mother. So I stayed with my mother for a year and I was a real Job's comforter. You know what I mean? I think I caused her more misery. Death stirs things up. I mean, if there's one woman I love to bits, it's my mother. And I could strangle her. So I stayed with her for one year and then I came back and I said to the family, I don't think she's going to live long because she doesn't have the moral support.

Anyway, what happened was I went back with the fierce intention again to start and off I went. And come about, it wasn't very long, something like that, she went seriously ill. And so I came back, and I felt really bad about that year of comforting. And so I really made an effort this time.

And you couldn't live with my mother. It was impossible. So we got her into a lovely nursing home. And at first, she hated it. She talked about le carrozze, these wheelchairs. She couldn't stand the wheelchairs. But when I went to see her after about a month, she was perfectly at home. She was back in boarding school. She was with all these friends, all these women. She was chatting away. She was the life of the party. It was absolutely wonderful to see her.

Anyway, again, most inconveniently, she decided to have a stroke just before I was off to Sri Lanka. And she died within three days. So having buried her, I then went back to Sri Lanka and started the process again. So the death of my mother was really weird. I felt like an orphan. I mean, I was, what, forty-five years old? And I felt as though, yeah, I felt like an orphan. I wrote this big, long letter to one of my cousins in Italy explaining how awful I felt. I don't know what he's done with it.

And that passed. And then I went back and really went for it again. And there came this point where, oh, it was just impossible. The restlessness, the pain that was coming out of me, it was just constant. It was day in. I woke up into it. I carried it through the day. I slept into it. I woke up and it just went on day after day. And it got to a point when I thought, no, I just can't go on. I can't go on, I'm going to stop.

Well, I can't tell you what happened then. When I gave up at that moment, there came into me this enormous terror, which picked me up and threw me back onto the meditation cushion. Because that's the last thing you do. You can stop for a while, you can leave it, you can get drunk, you can do anything, but

you never give up. Once you're on the path, you move on the path. If you give up, there's only one way to go. You're going to go down. And I was horrified. I can't tell you the horror that struck me when I realised that I'd actually given up on my spiritual journey. So I got over that pretty quickly. I just sat on the cushion and plowed my way through it.

So then I'm getting, my body is beginning to suffer, I think. I don't know, I'm beginning to feel weak. I'm not strong. I write to a monk I know in London, who's Dr. Vajiragnana. And I write with the intention of staying there just to get my body right.

So I turn up at the London Buddhist Vihara, and I've got this back room, and I'm basically meditating. And the monk who was teaching there decided to leave the order and get married. So who did they ask to sit on the podium? It's me. So I'm sitting there, and I'm slowly beginning to understand that whatever took me to Sri Lanka, that energy, that inspiration was dying away. I didn't want to go back there. How would I live in Britain? So the only way you can live in Britain, if you want to find somewhere spiritually supportive, was to begin to teach. I needed support. So that's where the teaching began.

But, of course, I had this horror of teaching. I really didn't want to do it. So I'm teaching weekend retreats, and come the year 2000, I decide, look, I've got to sort this out, and I go on a retreat with Upandita, outside Upandita's place, Panditarama, in the middle of Rangoon.

And when you go on retreat with a problem, you don't think about the problem. You just go on retreat. And whatever is causing the problem will, in fact, just sort itself out. In other words, what's causing the problem is confusion. That's what's normally the problem. And if you just sit with it, if you just stay with it, as confusion, as fear of making a decision, eventually it just sorts itself out.

So that was another rotten retreat. Six weeks of misery. And then when it passed, it was lovely and peaceful for a week. So I'm down at the end of the retreat and I'm in the hall there and I'm looking at the bookcase and my eye falls on this book. And it's all the stuff on teaching that's taken out of A Course of Miracles. Some of you might know that book, A Course of Miracles. It's a big book and it's got a teacher's book with it. And I pick it out and I'm reading it and by the end of that book I'm absolutely certain that what I've got to do is teach. How weird. It happens, doesn't it? You've got this problem and you call for help and the answer comes. It comes in its own time.

So I get back to Britain. And I go back to the Vihara. And I set up a little trust. And before we know it, we've collected twenty-five thousand pounds to open a center. And that's where the big mistake comes. I open up in the north of London. All my support is in the south. I completely forget that London is not a city. It's a collection of villages. And you don't go from the south to the north for an evening meeting. That's a two-hour journey.

So on the opening day, thirty-odd people came. And what happened was they never came again. And I had this, they never came again, that's it. And come September, Matthias, a Dutch student, he was a student at

one of the London universities doing a PhD. And he's very good. He supported me all the way. He's a lovely man. And I said to him, if we don't have somebody by the end of September, we're not going to have a group.

So we advertised all over the place, made these little stickers. And I had two young fellas, and they cycled everywhere. And they put these stickers everywhere, laundrettes, libraries, everywhere. And they had the wrong telephone number. Yeah, you learn, you learn. So the first night the neighbour came and he never came again. The second night nobody came. So by October I'm thinking this is a disaster.

By the end of that season the Sri Lankans had come to help us, especially Sita. She was always there helping me, Dr. Sita Siriwardhana. And then we had this six-week retreat over winter. We closed the place down. There were five of us. And I decided that it was not going to work. I've got to get out.

Luckily, there was a man who was on retreat with me, Peter, who knew the Batchelors. And he got in touch with the Batchelors. That's Stephen and Martine. Some of you might have read their books and might know them.

And he told them that the next cosmic Buddha was in the north of London. So there you go. So they came up to see me, and it was just one of these lovely moments.

Oh, my goodness. I'm really going over the top now. It's 3:15. I'm rushing now. I'm rushing through, right? Where do I need to get to? So anyway, this is it. This is the last bit. So it was just one of those times when Gaia House was stuck. The Bachelors had moved to France. They needed somebody there to look after the personals, about 12 personals. So I went to see Christina Feldman, and I thought it was a great place.

And when I was there, I became really my Dharma teacher's college. Because not only was I retreating with people who had come on personal retreat, some of them were ill with ME and things like that. Some were, you know, psychological problems, not mental illnesses, but, you know, passing depressions and lots of stuff. I had to deal with some of the managers who were running the place and I was given the chance to run these eight-week retreats in the Mahāsi system twice a year. And it was during that time that I realised that there was a little space to start something like this.

So after about a year or two, I decided to leave. I was never really fully into the teachers' organisation there because it's a very lay organisation. And so, again, I came to a choice as to whether to disrobe and become a lay teacher or to remain a monk. It was a bit like, for those of you who know the imagery, a bit like being a Catholic priest amongst Quakers.

So I gave up. I decided to leave. And then we just went through the whole business of a trust. I have a special thanks to Anne Ashton, who was the treasurer, who was the accounts person at Gaia House and she took us through this whole process of getting a lawyer. We've got a lawyer from down in London, you know, a simple letter to the charitable trust and we had it, and it only cost us two and a half thousand pounds. And then we set it up and, well, then it's just history, isn't it? You know, I found this place and

from then on I think you know, it's all about that.

So let me see now. Let me see. I've got to finish now. This is the coda. This is finally the coda. Nobody's really rushed me. I could have been here three hours. So first, here we go. All right. Okay.

So you might ask now, after all this, where am I? Everybody wants to know where you are. So the Buddha gives this image of an ocean in which beings are swimming underneath, completely lost. Others bob their head up and down, and some are stable, and they can see there's an island. An island which is both in, but not of, this world.

Now for me, it wasn't an ocean, it's been a swamp, okay? So I'm stuck in this swamp with crocodiles, and every so often there's a bit of a clearing, and that's it. And all I can say is that I know where the island is. That's the important thing. I know where the island is. Does that mean I'm making a beeline for it? Not at all. I slip over here, slip over there, I sometimes turn my back on it. But generally speaking, I'm on the way, right? So that's where you've got to get to.

So you can see how I just stumbled and bumbled and just blundered my way through life, but not without lots of summery somersaults and sticky toffee pudding with custard. And I've landed here in an area of outstanding natural beauty. It's not bad, is it?

Anyway, so now, there are two things. I wanted to talk about some of my spiritual experience, because I want to really release people from keeping it to themselves. Often, you know, I get meditators come to me and tell me similar things that I've told you, and I've said, have you told anybody? They say, no, it's only just for me. Because there isn't that framework within which they feel free to express themselves. And often, of course, if they can't, they get into what's known as a spiritual emergency where it just sends them offline and they end up with a doctor. And if the doctor's not sympathetic, of course, you're back on drugs. It's a psychotic interlude or something.

So be much more open about out-of-body experiences. I go to Gaia and occasionally I'll ask a group of 25 how many people have had out-of-body experiences. Five hands go up. Now, I wouldn't say that's the same percentage for the general population, but it's not an unknown experience, you know?

And so finally, what is it that I would really like to pass on to you? What is it I've come to know? I've come to realise that the difference between me and the Buddha is one of degree and not of kind. And that the difference between me and you is the same. And that the difference between us and all sentient beings, all these animals, if you look into their eyes, the mirrors, the windows to the soul, you'll see they have this intelligence. And that, because of that, the force that lies in us all is to seek happiness. And because we're deluded, we create all this suffering, but at some point there has to be a turning. You turn round upon it, and at some point in your life, you're pushed by your own suffering to move towards the end of it.

Now Kant has this little phrase called a categorical imperative. And he's talking about the moral law, whereby, if I can just quote him here, if I can just find it just a minute. I can find it somewhere. I thought

I'd written it down. Oh, what a shame. It's the definition of it, you see. A categorical imperative by which he means that if you make a moral law, like for instance not to steal, that is unconditionally and completely applicable to all human beings. In the category of stealing, it is an imperative, a command that all human beings obey that. You can't say one human being can steal and others can't.

So I would like to say that it is a categorical imperative that all beings, all sentient beings, will become fully liberated from all suffering forever. Absolutely.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion and befuddlement, and that you will, by your devotion to the practice, unrelenting, unremitting devotion to the practice, come to the end of suffering forever, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

I could have gone on. Sorry about that.

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