

# 26 More Reflections

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 32:56

---

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddhasa.* Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

So this evening we'll come to the end of these wonderful expressions of aspiration. The next one is, so I'm going to do the same so that we overcome our biases, just to listen, catch that reaction, let it go, and then open up to the statement. Luckily, none of these are controversial, which would cause us to shake our fists and other such demonstrations.

So I find it difficult to choose one above others. So ideally, I would go for one which involves keeping the precepts. If this is too wide, I will allow myself to be influenced by our post-truth world and identify the value of truth. Truth in personal relationships and interpersonal transactions, truth in the corporate world and the world of work, truth in politics, don't laugh, and the spiritual truths we seek, the truths of the Dharma. If this is too wide, I will allow myself to be influenced by our post-truth world and identify the value of truth in capitals. Truth in personal relationships and interpersonal transactions, truth in the corporate worlds and the world of work, truth in politics, don't laugh, and the spiritual truths we seek, the truths of the Dharma.

Yes, not to lie. It's in right speech, of course. Not to tell the truth also includes things like calumny, talking badly about people. It also includes abusive language and of course just talking for talking's sake, but the main thing of course is truthfulness.

Yes, we live in a post-truth world. It's been shocking, really, when you think about it, how politicians like Trump and our own blessed Boris get away with the most astounding lies. Nobody pulls them up. You can't take them to court. Politicians seem to be above the law. You can actually go on a website which is called Boris Johnson Lies. And the journalist has listed all the lies, and they're all supported by research, et cetera, et cetera. And it is extraordinary. It's not that we ever thought politicians told the truth. Well, we never thought they told the whole truth. As Winston Churchill said, a lie is to be economical with the truth, so you only tell half truth. But some of the stuff that we hear from Boris and from Trump and others is just completely untrue, and nobody pulls them up about it. It's just extraordinary.

But on a personal level, yes, being truthful in our relationships and interpersonal reactions. You could say, couldn't you, that our relationships are based on that honesty, on being honest, open, not hiding things from each other, not exaggerating things. That's another way you can be dishonest, by exaggerating, exaggeration. Corporate worlds, of course, we know we have astounding examples of the cigarette companies, the tobacco companies, and all that false research, and the same with these oil companies and

the research on climate change. And all that, it's awful really, absolutely awful. And we talk about transparency, you know, and governments are anything but transparent. So that's just the way it is.

And somehow, you know, we have to keep working to ask for the truth. And we're very fortunate in this country that we have a free press. As you know, what happened in China when somebody was being truthful about coronavirus, they were, I think they were definitely pulled up by the police for being subversive. So it's an awful state we're in.

Lying in the monastic rule is a very serious offence, and if it's like about your attainments, if you say that you know you're an Arahant or something or you've been through all the jhānas and it's a lie and you know it's a lie and perhaps you've done it in order to get supporters, that's a *pārājika*. Pārājika means end of life, that's how a defeat is often termed, as a defeat by which you have to leave the order. Interestingly enough, much in the same way as our politicians. You can't make a monk leave the order. I mean, if you're in certain organisations in certain countries, of course, the force of the country, of the order can make you leave, but they can't disrobe you. All they can do is not accept you in their monastery. So if somebody declares themselves to be an Arahant, for instance, and has enough lay people who believes them, then he can continue. There's not much can be done about it. It's an interesting little point about the order.

I mean, there were people who made that mistake in the Buddha's time. There's one occasion where there's a monk, and I'm not actually absolutely clear whether it was a pārājika in other words one of these defeats, but the Buddha wouldn't start the recitation of the *Patimokkha*, the rule, and Moggallāna asks him. You have to forgive me these little lapses, I've got the main story right. And finally, and they sit all night and finally the Buddha's asked, you know, why aren't you starting? He said, there's somebody impure, you see. And Moggallāna, that's right, Moggallāna with his special abilities could see who it was and actually got hold of him and threw him out of the meeting. It's about the only bit of violence that seems to occur in the scriptures.

So truth is of course an absolute necessity, absolute necessity. Yes, I've got here that wonderful moment when Trump's people came out with this wonderful phrase alternative facts. I thought that was absolutely brilliant, alternative facts. And of course, perhaps some of the hardest thing is to be truthful to ourselves. Sometimes we're not truthful to ourselves, not really open to our own defilements. I always remember being slightly shocked when I realised that I was jealous. I was jealous of somebody. And it took me by surprise because I would have gone around saying, well, I'm not jealous of anybody. But in fact, on this particular occasion, I was. And that pulled me up, you see. So I keep a lookout for that sort of unwholesome mental state.

Jealousy is one of those things that we don't obviously like to accept about ourselves because it diminishes us. I mean, as soon as you're jealous of somebody, you're saying that they're better than you. So yes, that truth is something that we could all ponder more on and demand it, demand it of our politicians, especially of our politicians. Very good.

So the next one is, my thoughts on society is that we need a greater awareness of our interdependence with all human beings, but also all organisms, animals, birds, insects, etc. Then it wouldn't occur to us that to cause any harm to anything would be peaceful and considerate. My thoughts on society is that we need a greater awareness of our interdependence with all human beings, but also with other organisms, such as animals, birds, insects. And it wouldn't occur to us to cause any harm to anything. It would be peaceful and considerate.

So we've had similar expressions of that, of course, interdependence. Thich Nhat Hanh's poem about I am this, I am that, some of you might know it, I am the flower on the something, you know, it's a bit romantic, but really it's trying to, a poetic way of saying that I am my relationships, I am that's what I am phenomenally. I'm my relationship. I'm a relationship to me. And as soon as I meet somebody, I become somebody else. As soon as I'm in nature, I become somebody else. We're always recreating ourselves within a given situation, within a given environment. If there's no environment there, then it becomes a real unpleasant place.

I remember in the earlier talks that I was giving, we talked about this confinement, solitary confinement of prisoners and how it can really mess them up psychologically because you need that feed. You need the feed from other people or else your mind just goes a bit bonkers. That is, unless you've not got so many defilements. In the monk's life, you're not supposed to go out on your own until you've reached the first path and fruit. Meaning, you know, going into the jungles and all that and the forest in those days because of the danger of losing your mind.

And of course, I'm especially aware of the lack of insects. I remember just driving from London to Manchester, my home, home of the brave, in the 60s and 70s, and your windscreen, you'd have to get out and wash your windscreen. The insects would be splattered all over it. These days you drive anywhere and there's hardly anything that hits the windscreen. I must say that this year I've noticed more bees and stuff. But last year I hardly saw any. So what to do?

And of course it is that interdependence where we begin to realise that when we harm anything out there, we're actually harming ourselves. That's the thing, isn't it? That's the interconnectedness, the interdependency. And it's really beginning to understand that and getting to a position where you try and do as little harm as possible. Definitely as little harm intentionally as possible.

Next one is my value statement would be, we need to recognise the real relationship of fundamental interdependence that exists between us individuals and social groups, between us as species and the planet, and to start behave accordingly. So my value statement would be, we need to recognise the real relationship of fundamental interdependence that exists between us as individuals and social groups and between us as species and the planet and to start to behave accordingly.

So as I said, I just laid them out as they came in rather than put them in sections, but these two came one after the other. So obviously, much the same sentiment here. Again this accent that I think we've become

more aware of these days of our dependence upon species, upon other beings, especially as I say these insects upon which we so depend for our food.

The next one is regarding your request for our thoughts. What I found most rewarding and liberating is rejoicing in other people's happiness and success. I find it trickier than feeling compassion for those struggling. It is somehow much easier to be a bigger person, to find love for someone in need, but the joy that comes from truly feeling happy for someone that is already in a good place and finding generosity to wish them even more happiness. This has been a lovely, uplifting revelation for me from our evening sittings. Not an easy one, though.

Regards your request for our thoughts, what I found most rewarding and liberating is rejoicing in other people's happiness and success. I find it trickier than feeling compassion for those struggling. It's so much easier to be a bigger person, to find love for someone in need. For the joy that comes from truly feeling happy for someone that is already in a good place and finding the generosity to wish them even more happiness, this has been a lovely, uplifting revelation for me from our evening sittings. Not an easy one, though.

It's not an easy one, though. It's something that we don't particularly practice, do we? Rejoicing in other people's success. I mean, we do it on birthdays, of course, and special days like marriages and births and all that. But we don't go around rejoicing in people so much. And it's another level of connection, isn't it? So you have love and care, you have compassion when people are not in a good place. And then this sense of rejoicing in people's success, in people's abilities.

Recognising people's abilities and rejoicing in it and of course that lifts the heart tremendously, and you have to do it to yourself too. You have to rejoice in our own qualities, in our own success, and this lifts us. If we don't do that, the tendency is always to think negatively. It's to think how I could have been. The glass is always half empty. It's not half full. And that's what joy does. It balances out the more negative feelings we have towards us because most of us never feel good enough. We're always lacking something. It could have been better. It's to do with comparison, and comparison is a form of conceit.

So there are three conceits, you know, I'm better than you, so that makes me feel much, that makes me feel good. I'm worse than you, that doesn't make me feel very good, but it's somehow, there's an inverted pride and I can take comfort in it, you know, I can excuse my failures because I'm not as good as you. And then there's a more subtle one of we are equal. Now, at first you might think, oh, well, that's egalitarian. That's perfectly all right. But of course, when you look into it, when you say that we're equal, what we're saying is that you and me are part of this group who are equal, but actually we're superior or inferior to others. So it's a communal conceit.

So rejoicing, and of course, it undermines that near enemy of envy and jealousy. So yes, it's a lovely thing to practice. And we also had, I think we had somewhere, if I remember rightly, we had generosity and a sense of, I mean, what actually goes to support that is gratitude, thankfulness. When we develop a certain

level of gratitude, then we're much more open to the qualities that people have and to the things they've achieved. So, yes. Sympathetic joy. It is one of the four *Brahmaviharas*. It's one of the four dwelling places of Brahma.

So what the Buddha is saying there is that this is one of the greatest mental states we can develop. And I have to say, it's not often taught. I don't remember doing any in all my training. I mean, it was there, of course. One is happy. But there's no specific training any time in any of my spiritual practice, you know, in Buddhism, to do with joy. I have put you on to that book, by the way, I mentioned it before, *Awakening Joy* by James Baraz, very good.

So now, today, I had an email which nicely sums up everything for me. So I've not had to think about how to draw these questions to a conclusion. I've been enjoying the exploration of values over the last few days. It is fascinating to see how the different perfections all link up so that each one of them can become an entry point to developing all of them. That works nicely with the diversity of humanity.

My initial response to your question, which value would be most fundamental, was humility. It's not one of the *pāramis*, that's one of the ten perfections. On reflection, I see it as related to generosity. Both imply that my own needs and opinions are not of more value than those of others around me or far away, and allow for the possibility that my own views may be limited, that another person may be as blind and that their view is as limited as mine, holding a different part of the same elephant and describing the whole beast from their own perspective.

If enough of us could come together to share our limited perspectives openly and without clinging, then between us a fuller picture of reality might emerge and hopefully lead to better collective and individual actions in the world. I can now see that it also all links up with renunciation, in particular of ego-driven views. The *pāramis* are an area that I have so far not greatly looked at, partly believing that it was necessary to get rid of the taints before they can develop. If I understood you rightly last night, both processes can actually happen in parallel. That's great and encouraging to hear. Of course, thinking about it, the two are like positive and negative images. By developing the perfections, I can start reducing the taints and vice versa.

So these are lovely ending paragraphs for us. And as I say, I've relieved me of any duty of drawing things up. So I shall read it again. I've been enjoying the exploration of values over the last few days and it's fascinating to see how the different perfections all link up so that each one of them can become an entry point to developing all of them. That works nicely with the diversity of humanity. My initial response to your question, which value would be most fundamental, was humility.

It's not one of the *parami*, the perfections. On reflection, I see it as related to generosity. Both imply my own needs and opinions are not of more value than those of others around me or far away, and allow for the possibility that my own views may be limited, that another person may be as blind and their view as limited as mine, holding a different part of the same elephant and describing the whole beast from their

own perspective.

If enough of us can come together to share our limited perspectives openly and without clinging, then between us a fuller picture of reality will emerge and hopefully lead to better collective and individual actions in the world. I can see now that it all links up with renunciation, in particular the ego-driven views. The *parami* is an area I've so far not greatly looked at, partly believing that it's necessary to get rid of the taints before they can develop. I understood you right last night. Both processes can actually happen in parallel. That's great and encouraging to hear. Of course, thinking about it, the two are like positive and negative images. By developing the perfections, I can start reducing the taints and vice versa.

That's a lovely conclusion for us. I think that's a really good point that manifests our diversity, all these different views, but also our fundamental unity, which he later points out. This image of the elephant—that's an old Indian simile about blind men feeling an elephant and then saying that it's a brush, the tail, or it's a stump of a tree, the leg, completely misunderstanding the elephant as a whole. And that's what happens when we cling to a view or an opinion and we think that we've got it all. It's a case of seeing our views and opinions, as he said, as a perspective.

This business of working with the taints when they come up, but also developing the power of me—yes, indeed, that's what we're instructed to do. And remember that the energy or the malevolent energy or the turbulences that come with the defilements, that energy is not lost. It is transformed. In fact, the word I prefer is sublimated. It moves directly from the unwholesome state directly into the wholesome, and sometimes you might actually experience that.

I remember I was having a hard time with my teacher once and I was doing a personal retreat. I was working with this real deep disappointment I had in him, and it came up with a lot of aversion. Being a very good meditator at that time, I just stayed with the feeling, stayed with the feeling. And to my honest surprise, it just turned in front of me into this really warm, compassionate feeling for him. And that manifested for me that these energies, they just turn—they evaporate and become something else. So you can work on both.

On that last line, the bit about hopefully lead to better collective and individual actions in the world—I was told a story by Nori. She was in Bulgaria, and somebody told her that he was in Sofia, the capital, and just noticed that lots of people were walking towards the centre. And so he joined in. A whole crowd began to develop in the central square.

And then one man got up and began to talk about all the people, all his relatives or friends who'd gone missing in the communist era. And more and more people got up to talk about their grievances. And the building, the government building behind them was full of lights, it seems. And eventually, when everything had been spoken, seemingly everybody turned and looked into the building, and all the lights started to go out. And there's a presumption that they were all escaping. And from that moment onwards, it seems the communist government began to give in.

Of course, that was all around '89 when the wall collapsed. And looking back at that time, generally speaking, what a peaceful revolution that was, you know, compared to the earlier times when there were uprisings in Hungary, '56, I think, which were brutally suppressed.

So the whole purpose of us really considering these different qualities is to begin to see how they can manifest through our economics and our social life, even personally individually. It might make us much more aware of what we're buying, what we're eating, and how we talk to others, how we actually begin to persuade others—especially those whom we meet who have opposite views and opinions—perhaps to get them to open up to our views and for us to understand theirs.

I mean, we've been through this whole Brexit thing where it was very difficult for some people who were for staying to understand that anybody could want to leave. And there's all this thing about them being a bit thick—they didn't understand. And of course, one of the fundamental reasons that people wanted to leave was that they just weren't benefiting. They saw nothing but their own poverty, and the immigration had made them feel a loss—this is the white English people and the Welsh—had made them feel their sense of community was being undermined.

Anyway, that's what we have to do. We have to keep these values, these virtues in our minds, and whenever the opportunity comes to say what's necessary, to be open about it, not to be afraid. And hopefully we shall move towards a very wonderful and enlightened society in no length of time. We can hope.

So with those wonderful words, let us now begin our practice.

---

*Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.*