

The Sense Bases Continued: The Thirty-Six Positions of Beings

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 25:23

Good evening. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

So apologies for yesterday evening. The upload was down. That's what happened. But I'm sure now that your habit is well established and that you carried on and continued and did your own *mettā* and compassion, all those reflections at the end of the sitting. I'm sure of it.

Before I go back to that discourse, tomorrow I begin this course for people. It has a combination of *vipassānā* and *mettā* goodwill exercises on body care and Brian Lester will do the reiki. Now if you want to jot the times, I'll try and put them on the front page actually but the times for the YouTube: at eight o'clock in the morning, and I'll be doing my usual opening process of taking refuges and precepts, standing meditation, sitting meditation. At two o'clock in the afternoon I might give, depending on how I moved, I might give a small introductory talk and then we'll sit again. And then at six o'clock in the evening Brian will be on this same channel going through the reiki, and we're back here at eight o'clock as usual in the evening.

The talks will be based around what the retreat is. So the first one is about goodwill. The second, only short talks. The second one is around the body and the third one, bringing your practice into daily life because that's what we have to do. So that starts tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, same channel, and same face, me, and that'll be it. I think that's the announcement I have to make, yes.

Okay, so we're back on the old Saḷāyatana-vibhaṅga Sutta, which translates as the exposition of the sixfold sense base. Now, what the Buddha is trying to show us all the time is how we build up the world that we are experiencing. He starts off by pointing out that everything that we experience comes up upon a particular base, a particular consciousness, a moment of consciousness, which remember is a mirror. And it's always coming from the sense bases.

So you've got your five basic bases, the five sense bases that we normally associate with consciousness and the mind base which records what's coming in from the other five senses and from the mind-heart itself—emotions, moods, imaginings, thoughts. They all must appear on that screen of consciousness so that moment is called contact. And that's what we went through yesterday: the six internal bases.

So the eye base—that's the word for it—ear base, et cetera. And then there's something that has to appear. So that's your sound base and odor base, flavor base, tangible base, and mind object base, the emotions, thoughts, and all that. And then there are these six classes of consciousness. When these three come together—a sense base, an object and consciousness—then you have what the Buddha calls contact, *phassa*. So that's on your dependent origination. Remember dependent origination starts off with the body and mind as a separation between our physicality and our mentality, psycho-physical organism. And then in that organism there are these six sense bases.

And because of consciousness, we get this contact. Now, when it came to the contact, there's the next point where we define what we're actually experiencing as either pleasant, unpleasant or simply neutral. And here the words used have been translated as joy, grief and equanimity. This equanimity here just means neutral—it's not the virtue of equanimity. It's basically the same word *upekkhā*. And so he says that seeing a form with the eye, one explores the form productive of joy. One explores the form productive of grief. One explores the form productive of equanimity.

So now this exploration, remember, is *vipassanā*. In other words, seeing the process is the process of exploration. You're not trying to change anything at this stage because this is all given. As soon as you place your eye on something—such now I'm placing my eye on the table that this camera is set on—I can't stop my eye seeing that table in the way it sees it. So if I'm colorblind, I'll see perhaps a different table, a different color from other people. And I can't stop that. And as soon as I see a table, I've already had, through all the tables in my life, a relationship with the table. So normally speaking, it's fairly neutral. But if I see, for instance, a flower, a rose or something like that, then because of my past experience, I'll see it as pleasant. And the same with unpleasant objects. So that's a given.

So those are six. Now, having said that, so there are six kinds of, there are six sense bases, six consciousnesses. And when you multiply the six by whether they're pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, then you get the eighteen. Remember, we've got numbers to explain here. And the next one is the thirty-six positions of beings should be understood. Now with reference to what was this said: there are six kinds of joy based on the household life and six kinds of joy based on renunciation.

Now a household life—really a better translation would be the sensual life, a life based on seeking happiness in the sensual world. He tends to have a downer on the householder, which he says the household life is dusty. But basically what he's trying to make a distinction between are people who are devoted to trying to find happiness in the sensual world and those people who are beginning to renounce that. That doesn't mean, remember, that you don't keep on enjoying things. It just undermines the indulgence, the dependency on other things, on other people for our happiness. Now of course a householder could also be a renunciate, which I'm sure refers to all of you as spiritual athletes.

So there are six kinds of grief for the householder life, six kinds of joy and six kinds of equanimity. You've got in the householder life those people who have joy when they experience things, who have

unhappiness when they experience things and who experience a neutral mental state, which here is translated by equanimity. It's a bit confusing that. So you could say in other words that those who are devoted to the sensual life are just going to keep being reborn. And this is what we mean by *samsāra*—it is driven by the desire to seek happiness in whatever form in the human realm. And those who are renunciates are really trying to escape that to a different level of being.

So there are six kinds of joy based on the household life. The six kinds are, of course, based on the six senses. When one regards as an acquisition, the acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying, and associated with worldliness—now, that's the word I was looking for actually, worldly—and when one recalls what was formerly acquired, that has passed, ceased and changed, joy arises. Such joy is called the joy based on the sensual or as he would have it, the household life.

Now, one regards as an acquisition the acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye. That's a double take. In other words, one becomes attached to what one acquires or what one experiences through the eye, the nose, etc. And then, of course, we have happy memories too. So we not only enjoy, for instance, a good meal now for the purpose of just indulging it or just enjoying it. And when we think of all these wonderful meals we've had, holidays we've had, romantic affairs we've had, all that, when we think about them, they bring up a happy state of mind. Or as he would have it here, joy. And this is true for things that we've heard, things that we've smelled, things that we've tasted and so on and so forth. This is called the joy based on the sensual or the household life.

Now, what are the six kinds of joy based on renunciation? So this is the spiritual life. When by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms one sees that is actually is with proper wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering and subject to change, joy arises. Such joy is called the joy of renunciation.

Now that at first seems a little bit much. Renouncing something is supposed to bring us joy? But remember, we're not renouncing the normal joys, the normal enjoyments of life, we're renouncing this attachment. Now, for me, the great example is eating. When we eat, we not only eat to nourish the body, we eat in order to make ourselves happy often. Now that's something that we are, should we say, becoming dependent on food for. So that's often why we find ourselves taking biscuits and having a bit of cake and doing this and doing that. And it's simply there only to make us feel comforted or happy. But that creates a dependency.

So when the coffee's not there and the tea's not there and so forth, there's a feeling of panic. So that's caused through dependency. That's what we mean by attachment. Now, letting go of that can be a relief. And one thing I try to stress when I'm teaching is if you've got a real desire for something, which you know you shouldn't have—so too much food or something in this case—just stay with that feeling of desire and explore it, by which we mean experience it as a feeling. Desire arises from out of a state of

dissatisfaction and is itself a state of dissatisfaction. That's why we want it gratified.

So it's a case of staying with that feeling of the desire of wanting, wanting, wanting, and really staying with it till it actually completely ends. And when it completely ends, you'll get the present. I think I've said it before with the taints, the *āsavas*. You'll get the present for it. And what it'll be is that sense of release because these wrong desires are like chains around us. And once the chain drops off you just feel that sense of liberation. That's what we mean by liberation in terms of nirvana is liberating ourselves from wrong desires and then joy arises and that's the joy of renunciation. Try it.

So then he goes through the six bases again, the six senses, each of them by knowing impermanence, change, fading away, the cessation of forms, one sees that it actually is the proper wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering and subject to change.

So then he goes on to the six kinds of grief of the sensual or household life. And one regards as a non-acquisition the non-acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying and associated with worldliness. But when one recalls what was formerly not acquired, that has passed, ceased and changed, grief arises. Such grief as this is called the grief based on the household life.

Now, again, that double negative is very confusing. When one regards as a non-acquisition, the non-acquisition of forms. So in other words, when you don't get what you want. So the non-acquisition of forms, in other words, you wanted to see something like the latest movie or something, and you couldn't get to it. So it was denied you. So all the cinema didn't show it or it wasn't on the video, it wasn't on some platform or other. So this brings about a sense of grief, disappointment, a sense of loss—whatever you want, which you can't get, is going to make you frustrated and so on. And then he goes on, of course, then he takes that through the six senses.

Now, what are the six kinds of grief based on the renunciation? When by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms one sees that is actually is with proper wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering subject to change and one generates a longing for the supreme liberations thus. When shall I enter upon and abide in the base—the base, you might say the sphere—that the noble ones now enter upon and abiding in? One who generates thus a longing for the supreme liberation, grief arises with that longing as condition. Such grief is called grief based on renunciation.

So now having given something up one longs for something better and that longing is not quite the same as desire. It's very wholesome. It motivates you to move towards what you feel you really want. It gives us a sense of urgency, a sense of real commitment to what we want. And of course, because we're not satisfied yet, until we become fully liberated, that longing is never entirely fulfilled. So even though it's a great motivation in us to move towards what we really want, which is going to be wholesome and in this case completely liberating from suffering, it is itself a state of unsatisfactoriness. And that's one of the griefs—it's a big word, that is a bit too strong—for what happens when you start giving up all the

indulgences and bring yourself onto the path.

And we'll do that when we see that there is a real possibility of an end to all suffering. And when you're sitting and you sit with a desire, for instance, and it really does come to an end. And you sit with something which is horrible and terrible, and it does come to an end. You're actually experiencing the fact that things come to an end. And by doing that and doing it often and realizing that it has an effect on your habits, that your habits actually do have less and less power to overcome you, then you see the possibility that in fact there can be an end to suffering. That's not to be confused with the ordinary pains of the body—I mean that's once you've got a body you've got pain, that's just the way it is. So that's what happens when you give up. You get this sense of longing for something better, in this case longing for liberation. And then of course it goes through all the six senses here.

In what are the six kinds of equanimity—so again I think the word better thing is neutral or indifference—based on the household life. On seeing a form with the eye, equanimity arises or neutralness in a foolish, infatuated, ordinary person. He doesn't like ordinary people. Ordinary people infatuated. In an untaught, ordinary person who has not conquered his limitations or conquered the results of karma and who is blind to danger. Such equanimity as this does not transcend the form. That is why it is called equanimity based on the household life.

So seeing something with the eye, something which somebody who had a bit of wisdom would be disturbed by, and they're not fazed. So here we have an untaught ordinary person not conquered by his limitations. So according to the commentary, that means defilements. So he's just not fazed by somebody, for instance, who might be at ease with cruelty, soft cruelty like sarcasm and whatnot. He's not fazed when he sees somebody being humiliated. And therefore he's blind to the danger of the anger that such behavior can cause. Such equanimity as this does not transcend the form. So it keeps you locked into. And so it's true with other things that we hear or feel, etc.

And then of course there's the six senses, the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation. When by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms—that's your basic approach—knowing the impermanence, change, fading away and cessation of forms, one sees that it actually is with proper wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering and subject to change. Equanimity arises. Such equanimity as this transcends the form. That is why it's called equanimity of renunciation.

So that equanimity is one of acceptance, like this is the way it is. So you're not ruffled when things go wrong and we're not incredibly excited when things go right. And that's the equanimity that comes when we understand that things are in the process, that things always change. You can't rely on anything and nothing is reliable. And that brings about a certain attitude to life. Here, equanimity is, I think, the right word.

One that arises from just seeing things as they really are, that sort of acceptance — this is the way it is.

So it was with reference to this that it was said the thirty-six positions of beings should be understood. So those are your six senses, which have three affective values — joy, grief, or pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral — and that is again split into two: those that are associated with the life of the senses, seeking happiness in the sensual world, something that you've got to hold on to, creating attachment and dependency; and those that arise because we're letting go of the world as somewhere where we can find permanent happiness or even comfort and seeking it elsewhere.

So I think that brings us to the end for this evening. We'll stop there.

Now, tomorrow, because of this course, the short talk will be on goodwill. And then on the Saturday evening, it'll be about the body. And then on — hold on, Saturday evening, it'll be about goodwill. That's tomorrow. Sunday evening, about the body. And on Monday, practising in daily life.

So I hope you take advantage of a little bit of extra meditation over the weekend. If you're on your own, then turn it into a little mini retreat for yourself.

So it's time for us to do a little bit of meditation.

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