

# Vita Quotidiana - Daily Practice and Spiritual Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 1:11:09

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*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.

I just wanted to say something extra about *kamma* because I realised that I hadn't really made clear what the real *kamma* is. So if we remember that when we do an action, it has an effect into society, into the world. But we don't know what's going to come back to us because of surrounding conditions, and we don't really know the effect inwardly on our psyche.

Now, then we have to remember what the Buddha's teaching is concerned with. So he's concerned with suffering and bringing suffering to an end. So where is this suffering? It's not out in the world, it's within our own minds.

So in terms of the process of liberation, the *kamma* that we have to deal with is the one that's inside us. And remember that within us there is a given pain, you might say, mental and physical pain. So some of it is natural to the body, illness and so on. And the other is, of course, coming from our habits, from our unwholesome habits.

Now, how we relate to that is also something we've taught ourselves. And this reaction is the direct cause of our suffering. And underneath that, there are these wrong views. So this is our *kamma*. And this is the *kamma* that we have to work with.

This evening I just want to talk about daily practice and some other things too, because usually, especially for beginners, there are lots of questions about that.

So remember that you've got to bring this practice into your daily life. And the morning sitting, the morning meditation is I think absolutely important, because you're setting yourself on the right path right there at the beginning of the day. At the end of the sitting, when we do a reflection on the sitting, after that, bring to mind what is going to happen, we hope, during the day. And where you see there's a possibility of anxiety, irritation, etc., really bring it to mind and make the decision that you're going to work with that as it comes up.

So, you know, especially at work, sometimes relationships can be pretty awful. Sometimes we can feel overloaded by the amount of work we have. So recognising that, knowing how you react to it, and saying

to yourself, right, well, when I get there I'll work with it in a *Dharma* way. In other words, skillfully. So that's important.

The next point of important practice, if you can make it into a habit, is after the day, after a day's work or when you've been out for the day, just to sit and allow whatever accumulations have happened during the day to rise. So there may be anxiety, irritations, excitements. So just let everything cool down. And then you have an evening ahead of you, see?

And this is something you can do in little bits all the way through the day. So this is something I brought into my own working life at the time and it reserved so much energy - which was to keep stopping throughout the day and just let whatever accumulation, let it exhaust itself a bit.

Even in the mid-day break, often I wouldn't go into the staff room. So I would go out and sit in the local church. I had to knock on the door for the... it was a Church of England church. I'd knock on the door and ask, can I have the keys? They give me the keys. I'd just sit there, you know. Of course, churches are always quiet, they're always lovely places to sit.

So, I think if you get into the habit of doing that, you'll see it really does save a lot of energy. Yes, because remember that if in the morning you become irritated with something, you know, somebody has said something to you that's irritating. So, you know, everybody has that experience that you're sitting there during the coffee break by yourself, and before you know it, the mind's off. It's going, it's going, it's going. By evening, you've got a headache.

So it's a case of just being with, after every action whatever, just to stop, feel something, just let it go. So that's important.

Now in the evening it's also really important to prepare to go to sleep. There was a survey done in England a while back and people just aren't sleeping well, and one of the reasons is that they're going to bed straight off Facebook or a horror movie. So you have to allow this organism to just begin to relax. You have to allow your body to start relaxing.

So half an hour before you intend to go to bed, just cool down. You can listen to some music, you can meditate, you can listen to some quiet music. Just whatever you feel is relaxing, just drawing the energy down.

So that would be a daily routine. And if you can, maybe join a group once a week, once every two weeks or something, because this does raise your commitment.

The Buddha says, there's a passage where Ananda, who was the Buddha's companion for the last twenty years, looking after him... So the Buddha tells about Ananda who was his companion for twenty years of his life. He told him that for him a good companion was half of the spiritual life. Half the spiritual life. And the Buddha said, oh no, Ananda, it's all the spiritual life. Yes, and he points out, if you have good

companions, you tend to do what is good for you.

And remember we live in a society which is not driven by spiritual values. So it's very difficult to maintain that sort of spiritual view of our lives. I mean, if you consider one of these Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia. Now, we might not like many things about Saudi Arabia, but it is a society which is geared towards the spiritual. So if somebody at the prayer time - noon, I can't remember the times - but if somebody at the prayer time just stops the car, gets out of the car, puts the carpet down and starts praying, everybody thinks, oh, that's wonderful. Here they put you in jail. Or they lock you away.

So, having to live in a society which doesn't have spiritual values makes things more difficult for us, that's all. And of course finally to try and get on to a retreat every year.

Now just on that, people are always slightly concerned about progress. Unfortunately, spiritual progress isn't like studying a subject. So you get a diploma and then you get a B.A. and an M.A. and a doctorate. Yes, you get a diploma, then a master's, a doctorate, no.

I mean, there are, of course, these attainments, what we call the spiritual attainments, which arise really when the time is ripe. There are spiritual achievements that come when the time is right. Yeah, you can't push them.

But through our practice what we can begin to experience is a change in the way we relate to the life we're leading. So you might find that you just become less angry, more generous.

So this practice has a systemic effect because in a sense you've got to take whatever understanding you have and it's got to be translated into an attitude. So this is the *Eightfold Path*, you see? It's the Eightfold Path.

For instance, beginning to really perceive impermanence and know that you don't have complete control over your life. So in the morning you remind yourself something might happen today, good and bad, and I have to be open to it. And to work with it. Not try to ignore it or to try to go against what the circumstance is actually coming at you with.

So, for instance, somebody might call you during the day and ask for some help, but because you've set yourself on this path, you're not listening to the call, you see. Recognising impermanence makes you much more malleable, able to move and change as the circumstance demands.

And then we have to bring it into this right speech, the way we speak. I mean, most of us have given up telling great big lies, whoppers, great big lies. But it's surprising how we exaggerate things. So this borders on a mild level of dishonesty. Yes, and just to be aware when we're talking for talking's sake, wasting time.

That doesn't mean that you don't go through the normal pleasantries of life, such as when you meet somebody. And yeah, that's it really.

And then there's right action. So this is to do with just remaining as close as we can to those five training rules. But it also has a positive side of really seeing our lives as an exercise in being virtuous.

Our delusion manifests in the way we relate. So the Buddha's teaching, remember, is all about ethics. You can always ask yourself, what is my relationship to this, to this object? What is my relationship to this person and so on? And if you perceive it to be wholesome for yourself, for somebody else, or for both of you, then that's what we should do.

And then there's right livelihood. It's interesting that he should include this. It's interesting he should include right livelihood. Because it would normally be included in right action. But if you consider the effect on your personality and character that the job you do has upon you.

So, for instance, the virtues that you would develop as a soldier, as opposed to, say, being a nurse. Or a policeman. So, one of the virtues of the policeman is that he's always suspicious. So it affects you, doesn't it? It affects the way you look at the world.

Oh, and then the last three are to do with our practice and meditation, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. And he often says, especially when you're doing something, an awareness imbued, saturated with loving kindness. Even as you close the fridge door. With great loving kindness.

So, if we can develop that sort of attitude in our lives, you see, your heart lifts. You feel more happy?

The next thing I want to point out is this virtuous circle: gratitude, generosity and renunciation.

So now if you consider just for a minute how much you've received from your parents, from friends, from society, education, medicine, from your practice. When you actually consider how much you received, you know, it's impossible to pay it back. When you realise how much you have received, you realise that it is impossible to give it back. The Buddha said that if you carried your parents on your shoulders the whole of your life, you would not have repaid them for the gift of life. This is presuming that you want to continue living.

So, when you think about that, then of course the heart wants to try and give something back, you see. And this is your generosity.

Now, you can be generous with your wealth and you can be generous with your time. Now, every time you give something away for the benefit of another, you could have used that for yourself. Every time you give away some of your wealth, well you could have used it for a day by the seaside. Ice cream. When you give your time to something, to somebody, or to any occasion, it was time that you could have used just for yourself.

So every time you're generous, you're also practising renunciation. Now, if it's to be a true act of generosity with a feeling of really giving something that you didn't really want to give, then there has to be that little bit of pain. And that's stretching your renunciation a bit, you see, your hold on things.

So now in the commentaries, it doesn't say this in the actual scriptures, but the commentaries say that this is a path to liberation. And you can understand that if you see that the process of liberation is the process of becoming more and more non-attached.

Just one little thing that I suffered from and I think a lot of people do - a little thing that I have suffered, and I think many people do, is that you say yes too quickly. For example, a friend has a lot of gardening. And they call you to ask you for a little help. And you say, oh yes, yes, yes. Saturday morning. And then afterwards you think, oh. And then come Saturday morning you ring them and say I have a cerebral headache.

So you know it's always good just to pause a moment before you say yes. It's very difficult if you're in the habit of saying yes too quickly, it's very difficult to say let me get back to you, let me think about it.

The other thing is about love and attachment. So long as there's a self there will be attachment. And remember attachment is a dependency on something or somebody for our personal well-being, happiness, joy, etc. So this process of generosity is helping us to let go of things. And this process of generosity helps us to let things go.

But when we bring that attachment into relationships then it always manifests in various ways. But the underlying attitude from attachment is one of control.

So if your partner or your spouse doesn't do what you expect them to do then that's when you get angry. Or if they do something that you don't expect them to do or something strange, then that's when, or they change, they change, then you get this feeling of anxiety that you're losing the person.

And I think I mentioned it before, when you stop laughing at your partner's jokes and you get bored with them, then you see you're expecting them to entertain you. So, if you catch your relationship, you'll see when this attitude of control is coming in and that's how this attachment manifests.

Now the opposite of that is to think that you should suffer everything because you love the person. Ah, and then you become the one who becomes controlled. So even there you've got to be clear as to what your relationship is and what you're prepared to work with. I mean, love doesn't mean that you allow yourself to be abused, full stop. It's a tricky area, you see.

And, you know, just the attachment of a parent to a child. You could say it's almost natural. It's impossible for a parent not to have some special feeling towards their child. But again, notice how sometimes it manifests - how your child is absolutely perfect, but next door he's an absolute... you want to strangle him. Your child is perfect, while the one next door you'd like to strangle.

And how, for instance, if you see your child hurt itself... for example, if you see that your child hurts himself... but you know, it's nothing, it's just a scratch or something, even though they're crying their eyes out. So then you very calmly, you know, you hug the child. But if you see the child may have done some

real damage, they've broken their arm or banged their head badly, then there's panic.

Then you have to ask yourself, is this panic necessary? And what's it doing for the child? Now, unfortunately, you can't stop the panic because panic panics. So... but as soon as somebody who meditates is aware of that, they don't allow it to completely control their actions.

So if you keep your sensitivity open to how you're relating to people, you'll see pretty clearly where love is and where control is.

There's one example in the scriptures where the Buddha asks these three *Arahats* how they live so peacefully together. There is a story in the scriptures that says that Buddha asked these three Arahants how they could live so peacefully. And he asks Anuruddha, how do you maintain this peacefulness between the three of you? When I wake up in the morning, I say to myself, I shall put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do.

So if you can see, if you're in a family or in a group of friends, if everybody were to say that, you can see that there's some diplomacy to go on, but eventually there wouldn't be any argument. There would be a discussion, but there wouldn't be any argument.

Now, this only works if everybody says that to themselves. This putting aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do, this only really works if everybody says the same thing. Otherwise you'll find yourself doing what everybody else wants to do. But at least it gives us an idea of how we might suggest to our partners and friends how they might approach a situation.

The other thing is to talk about these roads of success or roads of power. Some of you will know them, the *Iddhipāda*. When you practice in this way, with these absorptions, then you can get these powers. You can walk through a wall. Now, that at first might seem ridiculous. But it's the ability to separate the subtle body, the mental body, from the physical. And the mental body is not bound by the physicality of the world. So perhaps you can try that this evening, eh?

Then there's telepathy, which, believe it or not, has actually been proven as a power, as an ability. They've done experiments where certain people who do have this gift of telepathy and they've sent the other people in a submarine down in the ocean, so that it can never be explained as some sort of electromagnetic manifestation. And yes, they were able to communicate. Oh, I forgot his name. It'll come to me.

Clear audience, where you can hear things which a person would not normally hear. Hear people's thoughts, read their minds. You can bring up all your past lives. And you can also sometimes see the destination of people, where they're actually going to go. And the last one, interestingly enough, is of course the extinction of the mental intoxicants. The *āsavā*, that's what they're called. These three *āsavā*, sometimes four, are the basic delusions, the manifestations of that basic ignorance: sense desire, the desire to seek happiness through the senses; the desire to become; and wrong views, wrong

understandings. Ignorance is also one of them. But the others arise out of that ignorance.

But these qualities, the roads to success, can be used for anything in your life. And if you think about anything that you've really wanted to do, you'll see that these qualities were there. First of all there has to be that very strong desire, zeal. You've got to really want it. Secondly there has to be the effort to begin to manifest that desire. The Buddha, in the discourse on how to establish mindfulness, uses the word *ātāpī*. *Satipaṭṭhāna*, mindfulness. *Ātāpī*. And this *ātāpī* is the energy of self-mortification. If you, well, as an example, if you think of these Olympic sports people, how much they practice every day with the goal in mind of getting that medal.

So it also means that you've got to put your whole heart and mind into the project. That you can't be taken off on this little thing and that little thing. You're absolutely centered on what you want to achieve. And you've got to maintain a certain level of discrimination, of investigation. So if you think about that right: a real determined desire; a real effort to make that manifest; a complete commitment of your heart and mind to the project; and then just keeping alive that sort of, you might say, helpful doubt, just looking for the way things are, keeping in contact with the way things are moving. Making sure that that aim is not like blinkers on a horse, that you're aware of other things, you see.

So I'm sure you've all done that once in your life. I'm sure you've all done it at least once in your life. So these are called the roads to success or the roads to power. So when you want to do something, you can ask yourself, how much do I really want to do this? And if you feel that there's not enough desire, but you want to do it, then you have to sort of build up your desire. You have to cajole yourself.

For instance, just watching the breath. You want to do it, but you can't really do it. Then you ask yourself, do I want to do it? And like these athletes, you have to say, yes! And it's like lifting weights. Just one more. Just one more. So you get that sort of energy. So this is what we're looking at when we say zeal.

So that gives you, I hope, some ideas about daily life. In Zen they say if there's a separation between the meditation and daily life, by a hair's breadth you've lost the path.

So finally, I just want to talk about taking refuges and precepts. I know some of you have done it. But there comes a point, I think, in a spiritual life when, in a sense, you want to make a decision about your commitment. For instance, when I began practicing in Zen, after about a year, every year they do this particular ceremony. There was an occasion to take the refuges and precepts and I felt at the time that I had found my path. And so I went through that ceremony.

And just like any ceremony which punctuates our lives, it gives you a sort of starting point for a particular commitment. Like for instance a marriage. There's a social event in which that is proclaimed. And then that changes your life. So there comes a point in the spiritual practice where you may feel you just want to commit yourself to this path.

So what is it that you would commit yourself to? Well the first thing is the Buddha. Now the Buddha is an

exemplar and a teacher. Because he actually lived through this training process. And that's why he was able to teach it so intimately. So, it's a sort of understanding that the originator of this particular dispensation really was expressing what he had personally experienced.

But spiritually, it's the Buddha within that you're taking refuge in. That's your real refuge. So there is an act of confidence that there is something in us that is seeking liberation and will attain it. So that's taking refuge in the Buddha.

Taking refuge in the Dhamma. The Dhamma is both the understanding, the teachings, but also the practice. And I think you'll find across all Buddhisms the same basic teachings. There may be different interpretations, but the basic teaching remains the same. So the basic teachings are the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Dependent Origination. That's the psychology. And the three characteristics of existence. So that's your basis. I've never come across a Buddhism that doesn't teach that in some way or other.

When it comes to the practice, you don't have to stay with just one practice. I myself moved from Zen to this *vipassanā* and in the field of *vipassanā* I also practiced other forms. So I did some work with Goenkaji and also I went to certain different practices especially in Thailand. But eventually I centered on this practice because this is the one that had the greatest impact on me. And I practiced it enough to feel that I had really grasped the technique. So in the end I was able to just practice by myself. And that's of course why I teach it. I don't teach Zen.

So you're taking refuge in the teaching, which means that you ought to try and lift your understanding of the Dhamma. When I started in the late 70s, there was virtually, there weren't many books on Buddhism. And there were hardly any talks or anything. Now there's a whole website. It's ridiculous. There's a book every second. Everybody wants to write a book. Even me. So that's the Dhamma. And again, when I was starting, there were very few meditation centers. But now there's many. So the opportunity to practice is available.

And then finally there's the taking refuge in the Saṅgha. Saṅgha is a technical word that's used normally speaking to refer to monks and nuns. But these days you find it being used by the Buddhist community to refer to themselves. But this isn't what you're taking refuge in. No, neither the monks and nuns, nor... Yeah, no, don't put your refuge there. The refuge, your confidence is in those people who have attained some insight into *Nibbāna*.

So, we have these four levels of attainment: stream entry, once returner, non-returner, arahant. So there isn't time to go into much detail about that, but these such people stand as witnesses to the Buddha's own particular experience. So their confidence is unshakable.

It is understood that if the dispensation no longer produced these people even at that level of stream entrant, if these teachings didn't generate people at least at the first level of entering the stream, the

teaching would first of all corrupt into an intellectual scholastic exercise and eventually corrupt into just empty ritual, lighting candles, bowing, which, if the practice is full, has its role for those people who have more of a devotional feel towards their heart. More of a heart connection to the religion.

And then, of course, there are the five precepts. Remember, the real translation is training. Path of training. *Sikkhāpada*. *Pada* means footstep and *sikkhā* means training. So it's the path of training. So they're not commandments. It's not as though you should feel guilty too much if you don't follow them. You should feel perhaps a little disappointed that you cannot follow. You could feel a moment of disappointment that you didn't follow them. And this could lead you to encourage yourself.

So the first one is usually very easy for us. We're not going to kill any living beings. Even this can be attenuated, in my understanding. I mean you have a right to protect your own life. And then, but what that leads us to is, of course, protecting life. It always moves us towards the opposite.

And then there's not to take what is not freely given. So, when we begin to practice that, it leads towards generosity.

Now, this one is usually translated as sexual desire. Not to abuse sexual desire. But the word *kāma*, really in its fullness, is all sensual pleasure. And therefore also not to eat with avidity. So it's about indulgence. It's about, letting go of this indulgence.

And then there's right speech. This is of course the most difficult. Because we're always talking. If we're not talking to somebody, we're talking to ourselves. It just never stops. Even in dreams we're talking. So even though that's the most difficult, we have to make an effort. It should be as best as we can. It should be truthful. It should be kind, gentle. And we should speak at the right time. So if we keep that sort of ideas in our minds, then usually we're okay with right speech.

The last one is probably the most difficult for Western society anyway. Not to take, alcohol, drugs, whatever, that mess your level of consciousness. It also says in the scriptures that of course when we're under the influence of alcohol we tend to do things that we then regret.

And so it depends on you how much wine you want to drink. You can be very strict with it, no alcohol. Or you can be a little bit easy with it. It's just remembering that you want to maintain throughout our lives this bright awareness, that's all.

I remember once I hadn't eaten all afternoon and I went to the Zen practice and on the way home I went into the pub and had a half a beer, just a half. And it was quite remarkable, I just felt this weight coming down on my brain. Even so, it took a while before I was able to abandon alcohol.

And these are the refuges and precepts. A good practice is to start the morning by chanting or reading them. And then to remind yourself how you want to behave throughout the day. So over time you can see some progress. And you can rate progress by how your virtues are manifesting. Are you calmer? Are you

more generous? Are you more open to people? Are you, generally speaking, more happy with your life?

It doesn't mean to say that trouble won't come. It doesn't mean that sometimes you will become very anxious or angry and so on. But over a long length of time, five years, twenty, it depends on how much you put into the practice. You can see some change for the better. If the change is for the worse, stop.

So if over this evening and tomorrow morning you think you might want to take these Refuge and Precepts, then you have to fill out this little certificate for me. I need to know what name you want to put on my very lovely certificate. And you have to choose a virtue that you want to develop. But only one. And how long you want to take the refuges for. I would suggest a minimum of one year. One person said to me, until my birthday, I said, when's your birthday? In three weeks. I said, what's the point?

So, I'll leave it at that. The other thing is that on Saturday evening, we have an opportunity to answer any questions that come up. And so, there's a leaf here. You can just write your questions up.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, that by your devotion to your practice, you will be liberated from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

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