

Climate Emergency

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 14:25

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

A couple of moons ago, I was tackling the whole idea of social conditioning and how it becomes our *kamma*—how it becomes our *kamma* in the sense that we have to take full responsibility for the conditioning that we've been given and try and sort it out. Then I tackled the problem of neoliberalism and how mindfulness was being used to further their agenda. So the third thing to tackle, which everybody's probably very concerned about, is the environment and social collapse. I thought I'd give a résumé of where we are, and then say how we can approach it.

In 2015, the first nine months, global mean warming reached one degree Celsius above pre-industrial times. That was an important moment, and of course it's continuing to climb. In the UK here, on the 19th of July, we passed 40 degrees—first time ever. As you know, there's a huge drought at the moment all over Europe and massive floods in Australia. I was talking to a friend out there—it peaked at 14.4 metres high. That's unbelievable. That's about three or four double-decker buses, isn't it? The amount of water that must have been dropped.

Anyway, these are all little signs preparing us for what's to come, and we're not seeing very much action about it. It reminds you a little bit about Britain before the Second World War, where Chamberlain did his best to bring about "peace for our time." He'd lived through the First World War; he just didn't want to see the horror of war again. But of course, he was duped really by Hitler, and he died shortly after he declared war.

At the moment, we've got all these terrible things going on—apart from Ukraine, China, and then there's the terrible incident in America, Salman Rushdie being stabbed. He was quoted as saying that he was concerned about democracy in the US, and I think that's there as well. And I think perhaps most disturbing is the general mood of the age, the zeitgeist, slowly moving away from liberal democracy to illiberal democracy—in other words, fascism, some form of authoritarianism.

I think many people were shocked by Orbán saying things like, "We are not a mixed race and we do not want to become a mixed race." They are a mixed race—they're a combination of Huns, which were Mongoloid, and Turkic, the same people as Turkey. I don't know what he's going on about. Then, of course, he went on to say that countries where European and non-Europeans mingle are no longer nations, and then he went off to America to give a talk to his buddies. The fact that a head of state in the EU can

actually say that, and obviously there have been many people who will support him, really shows us where we're moving towards.

As these pressures grow, I'm reminded again of that poem by W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," which I think I read one evening. It's got this wonderful line: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

My reaction has been very gloomy. I had two or three conversations where on both occasions I had to get in touch with them again and apologise for being so gloomy about the situation. So it's a case, I think, of beginning to realise that we have to see the situation from a spiritual point of view.

To deny the situation, to devote ourselves to escapism—sex, drugs and rock and roll—or to become despondent and uncaring, disengaged, is just going to lead to some sort of despair eventually. There's of course the fear that grows in us and a sense of panic, and that can lead to even suicidal feelings. There was a case in 1938 where Orson Welles adapted H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds," and it began without telling anybody that it was a play. It was done as if it was a real broadcast that the Martians had landed. Of course, people fled their homes—lots of people fled their homes. Luckily, nobody committed suicide. But that just shows what happens when something grips a population. In a sense, we've got to tackle these things within us.

The other major feeling might be anger. I thought I would read out the discourse, the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, which translates as the Simile of the Saw. So the Buddha says: "Even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb from limb, with a two-handed saw, he among you who let his heart get angered, even that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic with a mind of goodwill and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with goodwill.' And beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill-will. That's how you should train yourselves.

"If you attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw, do you see any aspect of speech, slight or gross, that you could not endure?"

"No, Lord."

"Then attend constantly to this admonition of the simile of the saw. That will be for your long-term welfare and happiness."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

I once read that out in a talk to people, and somebody said, "The Buddha had a great sense of humour." So it's very difficult for us to follow that command.

But in fact, all these emotional states that we might suffer from—the sense of fear, of not wanting to face

reality, the realities as they come, and the anger—we really have to ask ourselves: in what way is it helping? How does it help me? How does it help anybody else? That immediately, hopefully, cuts through the catastrophising and allows us to stay with the present moment, with what's actually happening.

Even if millions of people start to die from lack of food, from thirst with this drought, from overheating—even though that looks from a total point of view really quite apocalyptic—we have to remind ourselves that we all die singly. We all die just ourselves. We're all alone when we die. Some will die in a very painful situation, others will die in beatitude. It's just recognising that these are all still individual deaths. We're stuck with what can we do. We have to accept the limits of our ability, of our power, and even of our influence.

Beginning to see this whole situation as an opportunity for spiritual growth, then at least we know we can benefit from it. We might have to come to that awful realisation that there's not going to be a cure for this situation, and that all we can do is care. It's a bit like when somebody has a progressive illness or a chronic or even a terminal illness. There's no cure for it, but you can develop care. That means friendship and at times even rejoicing. And of course, definitely compassion.

That's really where our spiritual practice is taking us. We have to look upon this growing situation as an opportunity for that. Otherwise, I can't see anything else but despair.

This talk is an introduction to the six forums that Noreen will be leading based on those maxims, the six maxims that were sent as a tip in the last month by Shantigarbha. We're also going to email you an essay that was written by Gwen Sanderson. She's actually one of our trustees and she's very much involved in this whole business of climate change and social breakdown. There's a whole study now, a university study on collapsology. She went to a meeting and was able to put that down for us in an essay.

Once that's circulated, we'll have a meeting on Zoom on the 12th of September. It will be an opportunity really for people to share their feelings, to explore their thoughts and feelings about this.

The situation will get worse, won't it? There's no way we're going to stop it. So it's a case of really looking into ourselves and making that special effort to see it from a spiritual angle, to see it from a place which is going to make us have that basic hope that there is an end to suffering and that we can actually achieve it.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not doomed you too much, and that you see the light at the end of the tunnel, and that by your practice you will liberate yourself from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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