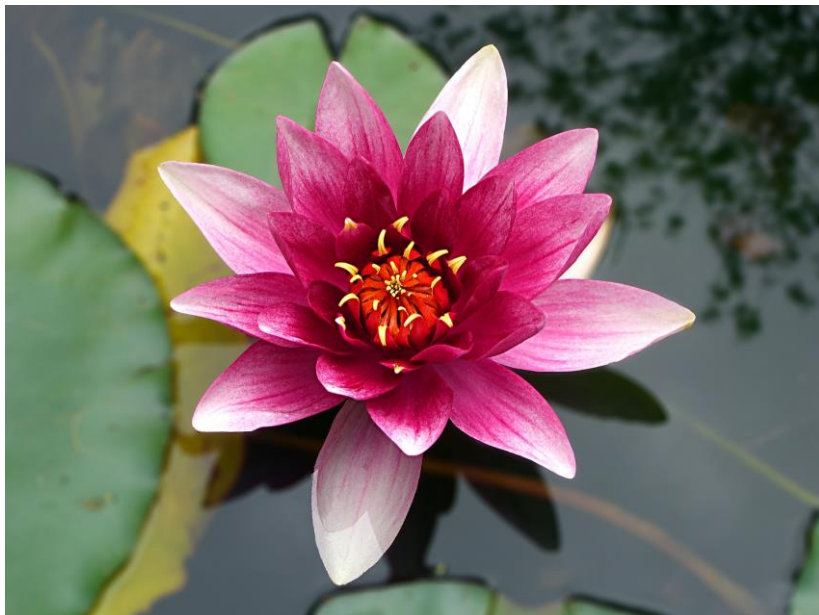


Knowing for Your Self



A Dhamma Talk by Ajahn Jitindriya

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*A Dhamma Talk by Venerable Ajahn Jitindriya
(June 20th, 2004, Taejong, South Korea)*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa
(Honor to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the fully Enlightened One.)*

Venerable Sangha and venerable lay practitioners. I thank you for inviting me here today and giving me the opportunity to speak on Dhamma. This is my first time in Korea, and I have been here just for three or four days now. I am learning a lot about the Korean culture and the Korean Buddhist tradition, and I'm finding it very interesting and very useful. So, you'll have to forgive me if, during my Dhamma talk, I say things that might sound different to the way you have understood the Buddha-dhamma in your tradition.

I took ordination in the Thai Forest Tradition, in England. Even though the essence of Buddha-dhamma is the same across all countries and cultures where Buddha-dhamma is taught, sometimes the ways of practice, with different emphases on certain teachings, can evolve quite differently, especially in cultures that have been separated from each other for many centuries. So we might say that there are many different kinds of Buddhism these days: Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism, Vietnamese Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, Sri Lankan Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, and even lay Western Vipassana movements. But really, you can't have many different kinds of Buddhism. The basis of the Buddhist teaching, if it is really the essence of Buddhism, always points to the Truth.

The essence of Buddhism rests on the very Truth the Buddha discovered himself, with his enlightenment. His teachings are enlightened teachings – he taught from that place of enlightenment. So even though different generations and different cultures may develop different forms and practices, the essence must truly be the same if we are to call it 'Buddha-dhamma'. So it is interesting today, as the world is becoming smaller, becoming more like a global village, that all these different traditions can come together and learn from each other, through meetings and conferences, to talk and discuss about our understanding of Buddha-dhamma.

We learn that there are many different ways of saying the same thing. Even within one's own tradition, there are different teachers' realisations – they may have realised the same Truth but they might use different words to talk about or point to that Truth. This is an important thing to remember, that the words we use, in fact even the words the Buddha used to teach about Truth, about Dhamma, are skilful means, employed to help people realise the Truth in their own hearts. Words and their meanings are so changeable – dependent on culture, on social circumstance. Even in my own generation, a word that meant one thing when I was younger might mean something rather different now, depending on changing contexts. So words and their meanings are changing all the time.

But one quality of the *ultimate* Truth which the Buddha pointed to is that it is unchanging. So when we are teaching Buddha-dhamma in different cultures and to different beings who are caught in different kinds of predicaments, we might use different words, different skilful means, but they should be pointing to the same Truth for individuals to realise, to taste in their own hearts. Then one will know directly the essence of Buddha-dhamma. This is important to recollect, just like the well-known simile of the finger pointing to the moon. When we want to see the moon, or know the moon, we rely on a finger to point to where it is and direct our attention to the moon.

But if we get stuck on the finger, then we are really stuck – we don't know the moon, we don't see the moon. Maybe we start bowing to the finger, thinking this is the most important thing – the signpost to the moon. That's not it at all. In this case, the Dhamma is the most important thing, so the words we hear and the practices we do, if they lead us to tasting the Truth for ourselves, then this is a good skilful means. But the skilful means is not the Truth itself.

The Buddha said, *'Just as the ocean has but one taste, that is, the taste of salt, so this Dhamma and discipline has but one taste, the taste of freedom'*. Perhaps this is a criterion we can use for ourselves along the path of practice. We can ask ourselves, "How am I practising, and what are the results of those practices?" Are they leading us to that taste of freedom – a truth that we can taste and know for ourselves? Is it freeing us from greed, hatred, and delusion – the suffering that comes from not being awake, from not knowing the truth? Is it freeing us truly? Because, there are many ways in which we search for freedom.

In fact, for my generation, 'freedom' was the ultimate goal. If you were born in the 50's and 60's, freedom was such an important concept, an inspirational ideal. And, as many of you know, we can search for that freedom in many ways: in the sensual realm; in the financial realm; in the material realm; in trying to break down the boundaries which have been set up by our culture and conditioned through our education and the ways of thinking that we've been taught. I was certainly a person who loved to break down boundaries, because I wanted to experience freedom. I didn't want to be told what I should do, and I wanted to know for myself. In one sense, I look back on those times in my own life, and actually, I can see that it was the 'noble search' within me trying to find freedom, but I didn't really know where to look, or how to find it. In such cases, we just break down all perceived boundaries without discernment.

In retrospect, I realised I didn't understand the law of kamma at that time. It is very helpful to comprehend this teaching on kamma, the law of cause and effect, because when we want to break down any

and all boundaries we come up against without really understanding those boundaries, then we can do ourselves some damage and we can do other people damage, unwillingly, unknowingly, and this is unfortunate. The freedom the heart is really longing for is the freedom of knowing and understanding the Truth, and the freedom from suffering that the Buddha promised.

Freedom from suffering, he articulated, is freedom from ‘birth, old-age, sickness, death; from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair’. This way of articulating the realm of suffering was very focused on the human predicament – how it feels to be caught in this cycle of birth and death, gain and loss. There is a lot of pain in this life, and most of us don’t have much understanding of it. Before this technological age actually, just to survive took a lot of work, a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, just to have enough food to feed the family, just to battle with the weather conditions. Just these things could make life quite difficult. These days we can get somewhat disconnected from the truth of that kind of suffering, with all our high-tech advancements, however useful and helpful they may be.

However, if we are not able to reflect on the truth of old-age, sickness, and death, then we are inhibiting ourselves from realising the freedom of the Buddha. When he was still unenlightened, these very same truths began to awaken the wisdom within the bodhisattva, the Buddha-to-be. As many of you know, he was a prince in a small kingdom in Northern India, and as such, led a very privileged life. When he talked of his own life, the Buddha, looking back said, “I tasted every pleasure of the sense of realm. I knew completely the gratification of the sensual of realm.” And yet, when he started waking up to the truth of old-age, sickness, and death, something in him could no longer just blindly enjoy the pleasure of the sense realm. The question arose: Is there anything more than this? ... Is this life just to eat, drink, and be merry, and then just die?

For the Bodhisattva, such questions became quite potent and he could no longer rest. These are the signs, or perceptions, that roused the Bodhisattva to search for freedom – old-age, sickness, death, and later, the sign of the *samana*, the religious wanderer or one in search of truth – these are called the four *Devaduttas*, literally meaning ‘*heavenly messengers*’. As the story goes, these heavenly messengers appeared to the Bodhisattva in order to facilitate his Awakening to Buddhahood. It takes that kind of disillusionment with the pleasure we can have on the sense level for us to begin to put in effort and enquire into where we can find a freedom that is more lasting, more true, more real, or more deep.

We have all tasted gratification on that level of sense pleasure, and it is lovely, intoxicating, and enjoyable; and we go there again and again. But the fact that we go there again and again becomes suffering for us because we develop a habit, an addiction, a need to get our pleasure from these short-lived experiences. The Buddha pointed to this experience as being ‘*dukkha*’, the pain of attachment to the sense realm. For even though it is pleasurable in one aspect, actually, it can create a much deeper underlying displeasure, and dis-ease. These pleasurable experiences end, they change, and that is beyond our control, and our needing them creates a painful dependency. If we have no other source for experiencing ease and pleasure, then these things outside ourselves become dependencies and we get hooked. Then we take birth in them again and again, we get caught in searching for them again and again, and this experience is suffering. This is one aspect of suffering the Buddha was pointing to, which we have to understand.

As these *devaduttas* appeared to the bodhisattva, legend has it that he ‘saw’ for the first time ‘an old person’, which seems rather strange to us because we see old people all the time. It is said that the bodhisattva’s father knew that his son was a special being – it was predicted that he would become either a fully enlightened Buddha, that is, would leave the home life, leave the palace, and become a great religious teacher, or if he didn’t do that, he would become a world ruling monarch. Of course, his father wanted him to inherit the

kingdom and continue ruling, so his father was desperate not to allow any religious inkling to arise in his son's life. So it is said that when the bodhisattva went out from the palace, his father would actually have all the old people, the sick people, and any corpses within the vicinity removed, so as his son would not come into contact with such displeasure that might lead him to consider the renunciate life. That is the legend anyway.

But actually, I see this in a slightly different light. It may be that the Bodhisattva's father could control the environment in that way, but perhaps the story is pointing to something else. Just as we see around us old people, sick people, and we know people who have died – perhaps we have seen their dead bodies – but, have the truths of old-age, sickness and death really woken us up yet? Have they really touched our hearts in a way that we recognize: 'Oh!... *this being, me... I too* am subject to old age, sickness, and death!' Even though we can think, 'Oh, yes, I know I'm aging, I know I will die someday, and I know I will get sick'... actually, when it really happens to you, then it hits you like a brick, like running into a brick wall, because you haven't really opened up to the truth yet. Or, when a loved one suddenly dies... perhaps you have experienced that. The kind of trauma and grief that can arise at that time shows us that we haven't yet really understood these things. We haven't really understood the truth of old-age, sickness, and death – which are unavoidable in this realm. Instead of seeing this truth as a disaster, however, the Buddha taught that it is actually in understanding these truths that we find a way out of this death-bound realm, and find our way to complete freedom from death and suffering.

First, we have to see the truth of this, and allow it to awaken within us a longing for freedom from that limitation – freedom from the suffering involved in this realm, and the consequences of that suffering – the psychological and emotional suffering, the confusion of not knowing who we are, why we were born, where we are going, and how to find peace and ease. These are all part of the truth of '*Dukkha*'. The

Buddha used these *devaduttas* as a teaching because in his own experience, the seeing of the old person, the sick person, the dead person, and the religious seeker opened his eyes. It is said that at first he felt something like humility, or in some translations, '*humiliation*', seeing that: 'I too will age; I too will become decrepit and decay; I too will die.' This seeing cuts against the conceit of youth, against the conceit of health, against the conceit of thinking of life as permanent and stable, against the conceit of having wealth and power. Maybe you think that when you get enough money you can do anything you want. But it doesn't buy you freedom from old age, sickness, and death. This seeing cuts against those conceits and it makes one humble, the important point. Then he was able to contemplate.... 'What am I going to do about it? Is there a way out? Is there something more than this?'

And then the fourth sign, the *samana*, a religious mendicant – when the Buddha saw this sign, something in him felt cooled and relieved. Seeing this *samana* with a peaceful countenance and a focused mind, it is said that he understood 'there is a way out'; there are beings who are searching, practicing to find the Deathless Truth, the *Amata Dhamma*. So that gave him inspiration for what he would do with his life. He could no longer enjoy the palace life, so he decided to renounce the home life and undertake the life of a wandering mendicant in search of the Truth, in search of the Deathless. This is how he phrased it in those days: 'In search of the unborn, unaging, undying, deathless, sorrowless freedom from suffering'. So here, he identifies, *there is this*: there *is* the Deathless, and it is possible to realise that, which allows us freedom from the death-bound, freedom from the limited, freedom from suffering – *Nibbana* (or *Nirvana*).

Later in his life, after awakening, he articulated it like this: "There is the unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed; if it weren't for this, there would be no escape from the born, the originated, the created, the formed. But since there is this unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed, there is an escape from the born, originated, created, and formed."

So this forms the basis of his teaching. For me, as a young person searching for freedom, wanting freedom, when I heard the word, 'Deathless', it resonated with my sense of what freedom was, at least that was the kind of freedom I was searching for: the freedom that transcends all boundaries, the freedom that undermines all movement of greed, hatred, and delusion in the mind. The freedom that, once tasted, cannot be destroyed, cannot be undone. The Buddha referred to this experience of Nibbana as 'the supreme security from bondage'.

I must say, that is something that I experienced as a young person, this sense of being bound. I grew up in a very good family and had a very good education, and felt as if I could do anything I wanted to do in terms of choosing a career or lifestyle. It was all open to me on that side of things. I had good job opportunities, good friends, and yet, there was a deep sense of 'bondage', of restriction somehow. I remember once as a young person, living the suburbs, a strong perception arose in me one weekend... I could hear all around me the sounds of lawn mowers, the neighbours out mowing the lawns of their quarter-acre blocks; and in the distance I could hear the whistles from the football field, and all these 'signs' of the middle-class suburban life were appearing to me. The weekend sports, the lawns, the nice house, the family, the car, the kids. Everything seemed quite nice, on one level, and yet internally I experienced a deep sense of urgency. It was like an inner voice said, 'Get out of here! It's a trap!' I knew I couldn't follow suit with this way of life. I definitely needed a broader scope to explore the world, more freedom.

I studied art, and wanted to explore the world; I had an emerging desire to know and express the 'ultimate truth'. But at that time I hadn't yet met the Buddha-dhamma. I was brought up as a Catholic. I resonated with some of the teachings of Jesus Christ – I had a very soft place in my heart for him. I think as a child I had felt him as a kind of a friend, someone wholly trustworthy. Even though he was not present as a human being, the qualities that were conveyed of him as a historical being were qualities I was drawn toward: love, humility,

compassion, non-harm, non-violence, and a deep sincere commitment to his spiritual path and his understanding of Truth. So, all of that resonated. But much else about the church and practices there, it seemed to me, were quite empty; I didn't find faith arising there. It spoke more to me about imposed boundaries and limitations at that time in my life rather than freedom, and could answer none of my questions – the arising existential and metaphysical questions. In fact, it seemed that I was not allowed to ask such questions in that kind of environment. When I finally met the Buddhist teachings some years later, it was a great relief. To find this teaching that allowed me to question, to enquire; in fact, actually encouraged me to enquire more and more deeply into my own experiences, into one's own experience of the world, because that would lead one to the Truth.

The little insights I had gathered along the way on my own search were verified when I heard the Buddha's teaching, particularly the teachings of *Anicca*: that '*All conditioned things are impermanent*'. All things that come into existence must change and pass away. All is in flux and flow – nothing stays the same. This is the truth I began to understand through my own investigations through art. As one observes the landscape, for example, and then observes one's internal experience – the mental processes, in order to know what to paint – it is experienced as a shifting landscape, both internally and externally. As one focuses more inwardly, one starts to see that shifting landscape of the mind more clearly, and it is reflected externally as well. For example, I would be looking externally and seeing that these colours aren't staying the same – they are shifting all the time; these trees aren't 'trees', they are shapes and shadows, they are dancing reflections of light, shining forth momentarily then disappearing. The inner movements of consciousness were the same in that respect – perceptions, feelings, memories all interplaying, coming and going, never static.

The more one looked and investigated, the world began to change shape, or rather, my perception of the world began to change, to open up. The world is as it is, but our perception of it, the way we learn to see it, is what ‘fixes’ it, what concretises it in our conceptual mind. This is a kind of mental prison we get caught in. This is a learned thinking. So, in a way, with Buddha-dhamma – the way of practicing meditation, cultivating wisdom and wholesome living – we have to undo, or see through, a lot of the blind conditioning of our minds which have been taught to see in certain ways. The mind labels things conceptually, in a way that tends to obstruct our direct experience – we just say, for example, “This is a tree.” Having labelled and identified like this then our minds and eyes shut down – we all know and agree it is ‘a tree’, and that’s it. But do we really know what a tree is? When you really move toward that thing, that experience, and begin to open your senses again, and ask, “What is this thing called or labelled, ‘tree’?” When we begin to come into direct contact and enquire into the experience of this phenomenon, then we start to understand something more about nature – the nature of the external world, which similarly reflects the nature of the internal world: all the processes of this mind and body. And we also learn about the nature of ignorance.

The nature of ignorance prevents us from seeing the Truth – the way things truly are. It prevents us from knowing what it is to not suffer, to not be caught in the realm of suffering. Often, as beings growing up in this world, we experience a lot of angst and emotional turmoil. We are brought into this world and are expected to find our orientation within it, expected to just accept the values around us, and expected to find a kind of gratification with the sense world and be content with that. That’s supposed to make us happy. Yet, many of us realise that it doesn’t make us happy at all. Mostly, it makes us more confused.

The world of advertising and the media are telling us one thing, and we are being affected by that, but actually, our hearts are telling us another thing. So, it is really important for us, as spiritual beings, to

learn to listen to the heart, in terms of what it is that really brings suffering, and what it is that really brings happiness – to know that truly, not just believe what's being conditioned by this culture and its worldly values. When I was a young person trying to come to terms with this world, my place in it and how I could live this life in the best way possible, there was a lot of emotional angst, a lot of confusion and a lot of pain which I didn't understand. I didn't know why it was there. I just knew it was painful and it wasn't something I could easily talk about with others either, because on the outside my life looked just fine really – so what was the problem?

This experience of suffering was important to me however, because it was the experience that was most affecting my life. I began to pay attention to it. What was it about? I made that enquiry the centre of my life, and it led me into the search, the search for the Truth. Because I wanted to know, I wanted to understand what this suffering was. I knew I could not live my life in peace unless I understood this suffering. Perhaps one could say it was created from seeing the pain around me in the world – the pain of beings caught in greed, hatred, and delusion, and what that does to us, how it causes us to behave – all the killings, the slayings, and abuses in the world. And living in the city, watching people run around – like ants busying themselves around the ant hills, not really going anywhere but busy, busy, busy; suffering from all sorts of stress, but do they know what they are doing? Do they know what they are caught in? And then I would reflect on myself, taking a look at my own cravings – my own addictions to sense pleasures, and many different kinds of things – and just recognised the pain in that, the pain of not getting what one wants. Even the pain of getting what one wants, when we discover it doesn't really satisfy our desire!

So this experience of suffering became a primary contemplation, and it fed into the process of my art. I wanted to know the ultimate truth (which I intuited was possible) and wanted to express that through art. But of course, I had to find it before I could express it! So, that set me out on a journey to see the world, to experience it and

take it all in; to see what was going on out there. In the mid-1980's I travelled for a year through Southeast Asia, India, and Europe, with the intention to stay in England for a time, to work a little and then carry on. But by the time I got to England, there had been a big shift. There had been a lot of contemplation throughout that period of travelling – moving on from day to day with just a pack on one's back. In brief, what I had come to realise was that suffering was the same everywhere – not only my own but everyone else's, no matter what culture I was in, no matter what side of the town I was on – the wealthy side or the poor side. Suffering was the same everywhere, and no culture seemed to have a better handle on it than any other.

So when I got to England, there was a big turning inwards. The answers were not 'out there', so the enquiry just naturally turned more inwards. A desire to learn more about meditation arose and various synchronistic events occurred, leading me to a Burmese monk who was teaching meditation nearby, and who subsequently advised me to go to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, north of London. After about a year of meditation and study, in Amaravati and other places, I eventually decided to take ordination. That year was a powerful year – I was able to stop working and spend the year doing meditation retreats, and seriously enquiring into the Buddha's teaching.

The first retreat I went on, which actually convinced me of this path, was the first time I went to Amaravati. It was a ten-day meditation retreat taught by an English monk. It was upon hearing the teaching of the Four Noble Truths that I felt deep relief in my heart. The Four Noble Truths, which some of you might know, are: *The Truth of suffering; the Truth of the cause of suffering; the Truth of the cessation of suffering; and the Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering*. This is the nutshell of Buddhism – the Four Noble Truths. And what brought me that great relief was the teaching about the truth of suffering. I realised: the suffering you've been experiencing, you've been churning with, that's been causing so much distress, it is just this truth of suffering. It's not yours. It's not even your fault. This is the

experience of beings caught in a realm bound by ignorance: where greed, hatred, and delusion take hold and cause suffering. Just to be able to hear and see that much, there was a turning around. Because that suffering I was experiencing, as many of you might also know, became so personalised. This is ‘my’ suffering, something ‘I’ have to do something about. I must be ‘getting it wrong’, and if I can just ‘get it right’, maybe I won’t have to suffer – if I find the right path, or the right partner, or get enough money to buy the new house, the new SUV, or get the right ‘whatever’! That view puts so much pressure on the personal level of things. On the personal level, there was a lot of confusion, because I didn’t know the right way.

To hear that ‘*There is Dukkha*’, there is this experience of suffering, or unsatisfactoriness, and that it is the experience of all beings – this was experienced as a great relief. It was a Truth that the Buddha said should be apprehended and fully understood. In conjunction with the fact of this suffering, there is also the fact that it has a cause, and once you understand that cause and undermine, or let go of that cause, we can experience the cessation of suffering. The Path, the fourth Truth, is the guidance, or instructions on how to cultivate one’s life in order to realise the cessation of suffering. So, not only did it relieve me of this very personalised focus on suffering as being ‘me’, and ‘my problem’, or ‘my fault’, it offered the experience of the cessation of suffering through the development of a way of practice, a way of enquiry, in which I would taste that experience of the ending of suffering for myself. I didn’t have to *believe* that it was going to happen one day in the future, or after I die. I didn’t have to have a blind faith in it. I just had to continue my enquiry, following up on my understanding of the practice; and as such, the truth of this teaching became more and more apparent.

The teaching of the Four Noble Truths is the first teaching the Buddha gave to the five disciples in Isipatana, modern day Sarnath, near Benares, just a couple of months after his full awakening. By that time, he had understood within himself how he should talk about what

he had realised. Under the Bodhi tree, he realised complete enlightenment, but then spent several weeks there afterwards, both enjoying the fruits of his awakening and contemplating different aspects of what he had understood, so as he could begin to teach it to beings in a skilful way, hoping they too would then be able to come to understand the way to the cessation of suffering.

There are many different ways we can talk about this teaching, and it depends somewhat on the time we have, but the Buddha, having such deep wisdom, was able to give just the right teaching to the different beings he met. He could see quite clearly where they were caught. Each of us are caught in our own little pockets of delusion. The Buddha was able to see the ripeness of beings for realising the Truth, and was often able to say something that was just right for undoing certain fixed perceptions, allowing a new understanding and clear seeing to arise in them – that would liberate them. So there are many different ways of teaching that we find in the teachings of the Buddha which have been passed down to us.

One of my favourite sayings is a pithy one, and carries a lot of meaning. The Buddha was asked: What is the briefest way in which you could sum up your teaching? And he replied, “*Nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to.*” This is an interesting teaching to begin to reflect upon, to let into your heart and consider what these words really mean. Because basically, what he is pointing to is the very cause of suffering – this clinging and craving. The cause of suffering is what he called, ‘*tanha*’, in Pali, that craving or thirst which manifests in many different ways: thirst for sensual experience, thirst for being, and thirst for not-being. Now, they can all sound rather abstract like that, a bit difficult to get a handle on, but for now, I just want to drop that in. The cause of suffering is this craving and clinging we experience internally.

According to the Buddha’s teaching, when the causes of something are removed, then their result, or the corresponding effect, can no longer appear. So, with the removal of this craving, suffering ceases, or suffering can no longer arise because its cause or basis is

removed. It's as simple as that. This is really talking about the Second Noble Truth – the cause of suffering, this craving, thirsting; and the Third Noble Truth – the cessation of suffering, when this craving is abandoned. We may experience the cessation of suffering momentarily when a particular craving or attachment is let-go of, and that is to be tasted and known and understood. And when that movement of craving in the heart is *thoroughly* understood and *completely* abandoned, then suffering can no longer arise at all.

The Buddha elucidated the whole causal chain of events which leads to suffering, and pointed out that with the undoing of those events, allowing them to disband, then suffering no longer has any basis to arise upon. This is a very profound insight. It was this insight that brought him to complete enlightenment on that night under the Bodhi tree. This law of Dependent Origination is really a detailed analysis of the Four Noble Truths, but for now, all I want to point out here is that even though this craving is the immediate cause of suffering in this chain of events, actually, the root cause of craving and suffering is ignorance, the first link in this whole causal chain. In Pali, it is called, '*Avijja*' – that means, 'not knowing'; in particular, not knowing the Four Noble Truths, not awakening to the Four Noble Truths. It's opposite then is *vijja*, knowing – the kind of knowing that undermines ignorance and thus causes the cessation of suffering, and is a cause for the non-arising of suffering in the future. Suffering can no longer arise because its causes have been removed, put out of play.

Now, this teaching, this truth, touches on many things. Basically, it is pointing to the fact that all the causes of suffering are within these conditioned minds, and are themselves merely conditions in the mind. We often think the causes of suffering are 'out there', the leaders of government, for example – we could make a long list of all the countries governed by leaders who cause suffering in the world, couldn't we? But in this moment, where is the suffering, and where does it arise? Or perhaps it is the person I am living with that is the cause of my suffering. Hmm? This is one way that monastic life in

community is very useful because we have to live with a lot of people, but we come to see them as our teachers rather than our ‘irritants’. We may think they are causing us suffering, but rather they are ‘bodhisattvas’ helping us to wake up to the truth of suffering, because the truth of suffering is within. But the truth of the cessation of suffering is also within us. So this is where we need to look. We have to start to look within ourselves, the workings of this body-mind.

The Buddha pointed this out. He said, *‘In this fathom long body together with mind and perception is the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world.’* He added that, ‘the world’, in the blessed one’s dispensation, is that by which one perceives and conceives of the world. That is: the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind – the mind as the sixth sense base. This is where we experience the world, and in our delusion, believe ourselves to be separate from everything ‘out there’. We very much experience ourselves as ‘I am here’, in this skin-bag, everyone else and the world is ‘out there’.

In the Buddha’s dispensation, in order to realize the Truth, we need a reorientation. We need to understand how ‘the world’ of our experience arises and ceases at these very sense doors, and how the sense of a ‘self’, a ‘me’ and a ‘mine’, arises with not fully understanding that process. This is to encourage you to open up to and enquire into your own direct experience: with seeing – where does seeing happen? With hearing – where does sound happen? With tasting – where is the taste happening? With smelling – where is the smelling? With sensing – where are the sensations happening? With thoughts, feelings, memories, etc... where are they felt, how are they known? They all depend on this body and mind, and this is where our experience of the world arises, is conditioned, and persists. And this is where we get trapped as ‘egoic’ beings, in this mentally constructed world – trying to avoid pain and hang on to pleasure in an endless cycle of stress. So, in order to begin to undo that, to see the Truth, we start to examine, we start to enquire into our own experiences of seeing,

hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, feeling, and knowing. This way works extremely well for realisation, because you are bringing your attention to one place, the place where our life is actually happening. And we are not trying to manipulate the reality of our experience, we are just wanting to see it clearly, just as it is, right where it arises and ceases. And when we do see it clearly, that truth will liberate us.

If we want realisation, we have to see the truth for ourselves. That's the point of the Buddha teaching the way he did – using words and teachings in a way that would guide people towards seeing for themselves, tasting for themselves, the truth of samsara and the truth of Nibbana, the truth of suffering and the truth of the end of suffering. Only your own seeing and understanding can liberate you. Even if you have great love for the Buddha, even if you have complete faith in him, bow down and say, 'Yes, that's it!', if you haven't yet seen it in your own heart, you are not free.

This is why every aspect of his teaching is pointing us to look within our own hearts, within our own experience of this body-mind and enquire: What is 'the world'? What is this experience I call 'myself'? This is a fascinating enquiry. We can use this way to begin to discern where suffering and its causes arise and where they cease, so as we can start to get a handle on this pattern of arising and ceasing, knowing it for ourselves until it becomes second nature – to know when grasping and craving are present, and to know how to let go skillfully; to taste the suffering when suffering is present, and to taste the cessation of suffering when there is letting go.

This is very, very important. In my experience in this practice and also with teaching others, it often happens that when people hear that craving is the cause of suffering and that we need to let go of craving, they find it incredibly difficult to take that on board. Basically, they start to think: 'But I am going to lose everything I've ever wanted!' Is that the feeling you get sometimes when you hear about this? 'I am going to lose everything, and what would be left? Surely there

won't be any happiness left if I can't hang on to this! And does it mean I have to let go of my loved ones? Does it mean I'll have to shave my head and put on robes?' It doesn't mean any of that, (though at some point one might indeed feel that monastic life is the way forward for them at that time). To enquire into your own experience of craving is to understand what it really is. It is a conditioned movement in the mind, it moves with wanting and not wanting, and arises upon the feeling of pleasure or pain. But it is a habitual movement of mind. It's not done with *vijja*, with knowing, with understanding. It's habitual and unconscious, for the most part. As long as it remains habitual and unconscious, we're not waking up to the truth of suffering. Thus, we are not in a position to understand the truth of the cessation of suffering either.

Now, in our own experience, when we can come to bare witness and experience the truth of suffering with the arising of craving and clinging, then we are in a position to understand how letting go happens too. Letting go doesn't happen by getting rid of the object of clinging or destroying the thing that's clinging. Letting go of clinging and craving happens by understanding that 'this is painful', 'this is *dukkha*'. It's as if you are holding a burning hot coal and you have been holding it for centuries, because you have never been shown anything different; you think it's what you are supposed to do, but you are experiencing pain all over. You know you are experiencing pain but you don't know how to get rid of this pain, because you haven't related it to the fact that you are holding this burning hot coal. So this inner enquiry brings us to the point where we can see, 'Oh! It's just that much.' There is this hot burning coal and my hand is wrapped around it!

That's the kind of comprehension that comes when you see directly for yourself. When that comprehension arises, there is a natural letting go. When you notice that holding on is painful, if you are seeing clearly, then what happens is that we drop it, because we've seen where the pain is coming from. It's very pragmatic in that sense. 'Ah! I have seen it. How stupid! Why didn't I see that before?' Because no one has ever shown us. We thought that it was normal. Through ignorance, this

truth had been hidden. This is the power of ignorance – it veils our seeing of so many processes. And we don't think we have any control over it. How often do we experience ourselves as victims in this world? You know, 'someone is causing me suffering', rather than seeing, 'perhaps it's the way I am relating to this experience that is causing me *dukkha*.' Now that doesn't mean we stay in outwardly abusive situations just to contemplate the inner relationship to suffering. We must always muster whatever wisdom we have to act and make the choices we must in this life. But to bring more awareness and knowledge to the forces that motivate us is the way to true freedom.

With the power of meditation, we are developing mindfulness, concentration, and discernment (wisdom), and with these mental tools, which gradually gather power, we start to gain facility in this kind of contemplation – throughout this body-mind we begin to see these truths of suffering and the cessation of suffering, and thus develop the path. We develop the skill of relinquishing suffering when it arises, developing the wholesome states of mind, the states which allow stillness, clarity, wisdom and compassion to arise, and thus we bring great benefit to ourselves and others. And when practitioners taste that freedom, through knowing the cessation of suffering, through touching the Deathless, that's the deepest sweetness, the deepest pleasure; the highest happiness, the Buddha called it. When you taste it, you realise that's what you have been looking for all your life.

With that experience, when it goes deep enough, then the experience of being dependant on the pleasure of material things no longer arises, because you've understood and seen the relative value of that. You don't have to throw all sense pleasure away however, and there's no need to declare it is 'evil'. You just know how to relate to it in a way which no longer causes suffering. If it is useful, then use it; if not, then, abandon it.

So, there is this great emphasis in the Buddha's teaching on direct and personal experience for wisdom to arise in the heart – intellectual knowledge can be corrupted. Even if we have perfect

intellectual knowledge of the teachings on suffering, the end of suffering, and the path to liberation, if we do not have wisdom from direct experience arising within our own heart, then that knowledge is corruptible. Our behaviour, our actions of body, speech and mind are still corruptible – likely to be corrupted by greed, hatred, and delusion.

So, this direct knowing and enquiry, in this moment, moment-by-moment – this develops the path factors: Right Understanding; Right Intention; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Livelihood; Right Effort; Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. In brief, it is *Sila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna* – *wholesome living, meditation and wise reflection, or wisdom*. These path factors work together all the time to develop the path; they aren't developed in isolation, one from the other. With this path cultivation insight arises and frees us by degrees from certain kinds of suffering. Then we gradually gain the strength and wisdom to develop the path to its fullest extent, which frees us completely from the power of ignorance.

This is the path that the Buddha taught as the way to true freedom. May we all gain liberating insight into these truths.

EVAM