

9 JHĀNA MEDITATION

Fremantle Zendo

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I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to come and speak to you all. This is actually the second time that I speak to the Zen group. I want to talk this evening about something that is of use and benefit to everyone who meditates. This evening's talk is on *jhāna* meditation of the Thai forest tradition, because I thought it would be very useful to everybody here.

The Heart of Buddhist Practice

Everyone would know that the Buddha became Enlightened by sitting under a tree and meditating. Meditation is the heart of Buddhist practice and that which has set it apart from other practices and religions. As far as my historical understanding is concerned, I cannot see that there was any practise of meditation, certainly not any quiet meditation, prior to the time of the Buddha. It's as if he rediscovered this path with meditation at its heart. Even though meditation is mentioned in the Upanishads, my understanding, and that of Indian academics, is that those texts date to after the time of the Buddha. The old Pāli word for meditation was *jhāna*. This is a very important word because as you know, when the Buddhist tradition went to China, *jhāna* became Chan and from Chan we get Zen. So this is the historical context for the roots of meditation.

The way of meditation in the Thai Forest tradition is the way of just 'letting go'. Many people in our world would like to understand how to let go because we have many problems and difficulties, and many attachments. The fundamental teaching of the Buddha is that an attachment to certain things leads to suffering. So we need to understand how to let go of those attachments. We do this through meditation; this is the process of letting go.

One of the first things that impressed me about meditation is that the more you let go, the more happiness comes into your mind. The path of meditation is the path of happiness. In fact the more you smile – I don't know if you are allowed to smile in

the Zendo – but the more you smile the more it's a sign that you understand about the letting go of suffering. Another thing that impressed me in Buddhism was the fact that the Buddhist monks I met were very happy, especially people like Ajahn Chah, my teacher in Thailand. Not only was the teacher happy but also, when I read the *suttas*, I found time and time again that the Buddha was a very happy monk. The people who went to see the Buddha when he was passing through the monasteries, such as the great Jeta Grove Monastery outside Sāvathī, would always comment on how happy the community, the Saṅgha, looked and how much they smiled.

I said in Singapore recently that the greatest marketing tool for Buddhism is the serene smile of a happy meditator. Because, when a person sees that the practice of meditation gives rise to happiness and the ending of suffering and distress, then they too will want to follow that path. They too will want to share that smile. That certainly is the story of my practise of Buddhism. I went to Thailand for one reason: of all the monks I'd seen in the city of London, where I was born, it was the happy smiling Thai monks who impressed me the most. I thought that if Buddhism was going to give anything, if it was going to work, then the happiness I saw in those monks is what I wanted to share.

Happiness is just the end of suffering and it is that which encourages people to follow the Buddhist path. That happiness is born of letting go and the process of meditation is what generates it. But the happiness and meditation have to be grounded on the ease of the body and a very virtuous lifestyle. I'm sure that everyone would agree with me that it's very difficult to sit meditation in the Zendo, or in a meditation hall of any tradition, if, beforehand, you've been acting unskillfully with your body and speech. What I mean by unskillful is doing something that hurts or harms oneself or another. If one cannot let go of such stupidity, then it's so hard to let go of more refined things, and to develop the peaceful state of meditation.

That's the reason in the Thai Forest tradition, why meditation is grounded on a very pure life style, a lifestyle of harmlessness, a lifestyle of compassion, a lifestyle of the purity of conduct of all the senses. Having achieved that degree of purity, there is a path of letting go in this meditation. You understand from your own experience what

letting go means because when you let go of any obstacle, of any attachment, you experience peace. The sign of letting go is the peace and happiness which arises in the mind. That's why I think many of you would understand that one of the objects of meditation is *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is the ability to sustain the attention on one thing with calmness and stillness.

The Path of 'Letting Go'

However, recently when I went to teach meditation and Buddhism in Malaysia and Singapore there was a syndrome which I had never met before in the Thai Forest tradition. It was what they called '*samādhi* headache'. I don't know if you get Zen headaches, but if you do you are going in the wrong direction. You can imagine yuppies in Malaysia and Singapore, always trying to control and manipulate their lives. When they sat meditation they were controlling and manipulating their meditation as well. That is going in the complete opposite direction to the Buddha's teaching. They were meditating to get somewhere. They were meditating to control their body, control their minds, and they were getting into the tension called '*samādhi* headache'. I told them that I had never heard of this before.

There is something that is important to overcome on the path of meditation. *Jhāna* is the path of letting go more and more. The core teachings of Theravāda are the Four Noble Truths. The second and third ones are what I am going to point to this evening. The second truth is craving, which is the cause of suffering. The third truth is letting go, letting go is the meaning of *Nibbāna*, ultimate happiness. One of the sayings of the Buddha in the *suttas* is, "*Nibbāna* is the highest happiness", and it's that point of happiness which becomes the carrot on this path of meditation. The more you let go the more happiness you have.

The first things that we teach in the Forest tradition are the stages of letting go. Just like any other process, there has to be a methodical stage by stage abandoning: first the coarse things, then the more refined, then the abandoning of the very refined, until you can let go of everything. It is just like a carpenter who is going to make a beautiful piece of furniture. He takes wood from the wood yard and first of all planes it down to get rid of the rough edges and the burrs which are caused by the saw.

Having planed off the rough parts, he uses the coarsest sandpaper, and then medium sandpaper. and then fine sandpaper. After using the finest sandpaper and smoothing the wood as much as possible, he'll finish off with a cloth and some oil or some wax to fine polish this beautiful piece of wood. If you start with the polishing cloth on the rough piece of wood you'll waste a lot of polishing cloths! This is a simile for the letting go procedure.

Abiding in the Present Moment

This was the way that we were taught by some of the great teachers of North East Thailand, and this was the way they practised. They would sit for hours in peace and happiness with a smile on their face, which in turn would give rise to the wisdom in their teachings. The way they did this was first of all to abandon the past and the future and to abide in the present moment. This is such a simple thing, but it is such a valuable thing to do on the path of meditation. No matter what you are focussing your attention on, whether it's on an object or on silence, it's so easy just to linger on the past and think of what happened earlier. The past is just a memory, the future is just a dream, and once you've completely abandoned them you are in the present moment.

During a recent retreat I was talking a lot and I made a slip of the tongue: instead of calling it the 'present moment' I called it the 'pleasant moment'. I didn't mind that slip of the tongue because it was very true. The present moment is very pleasant because you are letting go of so many burdens. As a monk with many duties and responsibilities I abide very often in the present moment. In other words, when I come here I've got no monastery and I've got no Buddhist Society in Nollamara. When I'm here I'm just a monk sitting here in the Zendo. All the past is abandoned, and I don't imagine the future. A good illustration of this comes from a very famous Thai monk who died recently in the South of Thailand. He was building a huge meditation hall in his monastery. When the rainy season came (which in our tradition means we go on retreat for three months and all work is stopped) and the retreat started the roof was only half completed. So when people came and visited that monastery they would ask this great monk, "When is your hall going to be completed?" He looked at them and said "It is finished". They looked back at him saying, "How can you say it's finished? The roof is not finished yet, there are no windows, there are no doors, and it hasn't been painted yet. What do you mean, 'it's

finished’?” He would reply, “What’s done is finished”. That was a beautiful teaching

This is what you should do just before you meditate: say, “What’s done is finished”, so you don’t take all your so-called unfinished business into your meditation. Please, do not be a person who has to get everything out of the way before you meditate. If you do that you’ll find you’ll never have the time to meditate. If you try and get everything perfect and tie up all your loose ends, you’ll find you’ll be dead before you can meditate. Loose ends are the normal state of life, and there is always more work to be done. There is always a mess in the kitchen to clean up. What are you living for – to help to clean the kitchen or to have a peaceful mind? So meditation becomes important or rather the ‘present moment’ becomes important. What you’re doing here is letting go of a lot of business; you’re focussing on the only truth you have which is ‘here and now’.

Sometimes monks tend to focus so much on the present moment that they sometimes forget what hour it is, what day it is. In my early years as a monk with no responsibilities – and this is no joke – I even forgot what year it was. One day was very much like the next in those monasteries in the jungles of North East Thailand. You had this beautiful feeling of being in the timeless present moment.

Letting go should be your first goal in the meditation. The sign of letting go is freedom. Sometimes people are afraid of freeing themselves. Fear is one of the hindrances to abandonment. We are so attached to our past because it defines us. It’s from the past that we have built up our feeling of self, of who we think we are. We are attached to the future because we think if we plan then we’ll find some security, some safety.

Some Thai monks tell fortunes and people would sometimes come up to my teacher, Ajahn Chah, this great meditator, and ask him to tell their fortunes. Ajahn Chah would always out of compassion and wisdom agree to do so. He would say to them, “Madam or sir, I’ll tell you your fortune. Your future is uncertain.” He was always right! So why worry about things that we do not know will happen? How many times have you worried about going to the dentist for example? You worry yourself sick about something you are afraid of and when you get to the dentist, you find he’s

got the flu and cancelled your appointment. What a waste of time that is. So it's just wise, it's common sense, especially in the time of meditation, to forget about all the past and the future and to be free in the present moment.

We have a skilful means in the Thai Forest tradition that comes from the time of the Buddha, of using what we call 'mindfulness'. To explain mindfulness, I use the simile of a gatekeeper, who can be like the guard at your house. Some rich people have these guards to make sure that burglars do not get in and steal their goods. And they know that mindfulness is much more than bare attention, because if you tell that gatekeeper to just be mindful, be aware, just watch what's going on, you can imagine what happens. When you go home from the temple, you find that people have burgled your house. You ask the guard, "Weren't you mindful? I told you to guard this house." And the guard says, "Yes, I was mindful. I saw the burglars going in and I saw them going out with your stereo. I watched them go in again and take all your jewels. I was very mindful. I was fully aware all the time." Would you be very happy with that guard? Of course you wouldn't. Remember that this guard 'mindfulness' has a job to do and that job is to abandon, to let go of certain things. You have to tell that guard very clearly that you want to let go of the past and the future, so that you can dwell in the present moment. When you tell your guard that, the mind can do it quite easily as you go deeper into the present moment and become accustomed to the happiness and freedom of just being in the now.

In the next stage of the meditation you will find that you can't even think. I'm not sure if any of you like music. But if you are listening to a beautiful piece of classical music, in a great theatre or concert hall, do you ever turn around to the person next to you and start talking, saying what a wonderful piece of music it is? If you did you'd get thrown out, and for good reason because as soon as you start talking it means you are no longer listening. It's the same with your mind, when you think of something, or label something, it means you're no longer listening. It's like being a host at a party, your job is just to greet the visitors when they come in, not to linger in conversation. Because if you have a conversation with one guest it means you are not paying attention to the guest who is coming right behind. The stream of the present moment, if it is attended to fully, gives no time for thought or for inner conversation. In that silence there is a deepening of what I call contentment. It's just like two old

people who have been living together for so many years; they know each other so well, they're so at ease in each other's company, that there's no need to talk. In the same way, when you are fully at ease with the present moment, there is no need to say anything.

All thinking is a sign of discontent; all thinking is a sign of wanting to escape to somewhere else. So much of thinking is "what should I do next?" When contentment arises in the mind such thoughts cannot arise. In the meditation that I teach I always ask people to recognise the happiness of the present moment and also the happiness of silence; each of those is very beautiful. Once you realise the happiness of those states there's no need to make any effort to meditate, there's no need to try. The mind by itself will always incline to where it finds happiness. This is one of the beautiful teachings of the Buddha found in the *suttas*. Once that happiness is perceived you do not even need to think or make a resolution or decision, "may I go deeper into *samādhi* or stillness", because these things happen all by themselves.

In these stages of meditation it's not a case of going on to something else, it's a case of going deeper into this present moment. You go deeper into where you are, as you go into the silence of the mind and start to notice the happiness of silently being, without needing to say anything at all. When that happiness is acknowledged you find that you cannot speak in the same way. You can be watching a movie on the television and you don't say anything to anybody because you are enjoying every moment of what is happening. Here you are watching beautiful peaceful silence. In the path of meditation there has to be a deepening of the silence of the present moment. It's a deepening from diversity to unity, in the same present moment awareness. In silence the mind can still go out to many things: to the body, sounds, all sorts of different objects. In *jhāna* meditation there is the focussing of the mind on just the one chosen object, with that silent awareness just focussing on one thing. One is now letting go of the diversity of the mind – what you might call the duality of the mind, or the movement of the mind from one thing to another. This will often happen quite naturally. In the silence there will always be one thing that appears to be beautiful and happy.

I was taught to choose to watch the breath. We watch the breath without controlling, just being a silent observer, telling that gatekeeper to just stay with the breath as it goes in and out. As you get closer to the breath you don't even know if it's going in or going out, you just know this breath that is happening now. This is like a carpenter who is sawing a piece of wood, focussing closer and closer on the point where the saw meets the wood. He cannot tell whether he's focussing on the beginning or the end of the saw. All you know is this part of breath is happening now. Sometimes people who try breath meditation have great difficulty because of controlling. It is especially at this stage of the meditation that one has to let go of something that is very deep inside of us, the 'will'. When we try and do this we often see how much we are trying to control and manipulate, and this is what always messes up our meditation. This is a cause for *samādhī* headaches.

Knowing that there's a problem, analysing and seeing what the difficulty is, there is always a way of overcoming it. In meditation as in other parts of life, if we know the problem, we can always avoid it. I give people the simile of the snakes – it's my own simile drawn from the time when I was living in Ajahn Chah's monastery in Thailand. These were jungle monasteries and in those jungles there were many snakes. You'd see far more snakes in Thailand in just one day than I've seen in years in Australia. The place was crawling with snakes. When I first went there I was told that there are one hundred species of snake in Thailand, ninety-nine of them are poisonous and the other one crushes you to death. So they are all very dangerous. There was no electricity, sometimes we didn't have batteries for our flashlights, and sometimes we didn't even have sandals. It was a very poor monastery. After the evening meditation we had to walk from the hall in the darkness using the stars or moonlight to light the way through the jungle back to our huts, which were sometimes five hundred metres away. Because I knew there were snakes about I was always on the lookout for them and, because I was on the lookout for them, because I was mindful of the danger, I could always see them in plenty of time. I would step around them or jump over them, but I never stepped on them. Actually, once I nearly stepped on one; fortunately the snake jumped one way and I jumped the other way. We were both very happy that we didn't choose the same direction. I never stepped on one because I was always looking out for them.

In the same way, whatever problems and difficulties you have in your meditation, if you really appreciate that it's a problem and you know it's a danger, then you will look upon it like a snake. That means you will be able to see it in good time before it can bite you. And this is how we can avoid the problems in our meditation. Whether it's sleepiness, too much thinking, or whether it's the mind wandering from one thing to another, know your snake and then you'll be able to take evasive action before it really gets a hold of you. The thinking mind, once it gets hold of you, is hard to stop. Anger, once it grabs hold of you, bites and bites, you cannot get it off. If you avoid it, then you are free.

On this path of meditation, concentrating on the breath or concentrating on any one thing, is just a way of overcoming problems by keeping the sense activities still. At least you are letting go of most of the five senses. By just watching one thing all the other senses disappear: you can neither hear nor feel the rest of the body, and smell and taste have already gone. This letting go of the five senses is very profound because they define our mind and body. If we meditate very deeply we won't be able to hear anything of the sounds outside. In the same way, just giving a simile from ordinary life, when you watch the television sometimes you can't hear your partner saying dinner is ready, or you can't hear the telephone. Two of my disciples, I'm embarrassed to say, were watching the television one evening in their house and when the program finished they looked around and noticed that a few things were missing from the room. A burglar had been into their house, came right into the room where they were watching the T.V., and stole things from right behind them. They had been so engrossed in the movie they hadn't even heard this very cheeky burglar.

I don't encourage that! But in meditation, if it happens, you are getting somewhere. What it means is that you have been able to let go of concern for the world outside and you are getting closer and closer to what we call the mind. As you all know, in Buddhism there are six senses. The five external senses dominate the consciousness so much that it's like an Emperor with knee high boots, trousers, a big jacket, a hat on, and a scarf around his head so you can't see anything of him. All you can see are the garments covering the Emperor from head to toe. In that simile, the Emperor stands for the mind, the hat is sight, the scarf sound, the jacket smell, the trousers taste, and the boots touch, completely covering that which we call the mind.

From Diversity to Unity

Meditation is letting go of all that. We are letting go of the five senses by choosing just one part of one sense base, just the breath, or something else. After a while everything disappears, until even the perception of the breath disappears. In other words it is the happiness of just being with one simple little thing. Eventually that happiness becomes so strong that the mind becomes aware of the happiness of the breath disappearing. Once the body or the five senses disappear, in traditional Buddhism, in the way of my teachers, and in the way of experience, what happens next is that a beautiful light appears in the mind. In our tradition we call this a *nimitta*.

This *nimitta* is no more than the sign of your mind when the other five senses disappear. The Buddha gave a very wonderful simile; he said it's the same as on a cloudy night when the clouds part and the disc of the full moon appears – bright, brilliant, and clear – in the sky. This is a simile of what happens when the five senses disappear. What you are seeing is a reflection of your own mind. I always tell meditators to understand that what you are seeing is not something through the eye, it is not a vision; this is a *mental object*. This is the mind being a beautiful mirror and seeing itself. And at this time in the meditation, when these beautiful lights appear, you have to be very still because it's like looking at your own face in the mirror. If you move then so does the image in the mirror. If you try and hold the mirror still it doesn't make any difference, *you have to be still*. The observer has to be so still, so motionless that what is being observed is also motionless. The degree of peacefulness is measured by the stillness one experiences in these states. The degree of inner energy is born of stillness, born of contentment, and is the measure of the happiness. The brilliance of what one experiences is the happiness – and that becomes quite immense at this stage – but it's not a happiness of the five senses. On the contrary, it's the happiness of the mind released from that world; it's happiness born of letting go.

As an interesting aside, many of you may have heard of people who have had 'out of the body experiences', people who have died temporarily and come back to tell the tale. Have you ever heard of people dying? First of all they float out of their body

and then they seem to be going towards the light. What you experience when you die is no more than the five senses stopping and the mind manifesting itself.

That mind being manifest is no more than the light that people see when they die. That's why this meditation is almost like training for dying and getting to know what it's like when the five senses stop and disappear. If you can manage to merge into the light, that is called *jhāna* in Theravāda Buddhism. It's called a *jhāna* because it's a fullness of the meditation, a time when you've completely merged with the mind and the five senses are completely gone. In our tradition it's the first real experience of non-duality; it's non-duality because there are not two any more, there is no separate observer, the mind is unified. It is the first real experience of what they call *samādhi*, that centring or unification just on the one sense of mind. And it's very blissful. But it's not that one gains these states just for the sake of bliss; it's also for the sake of what these states mean.

These aren't stages of attachment; they are stages of letting go. They arise because you've let go of a great burden. One of the disciples here in Perth – I like telling this story because it's a fascinating story – managed to get into one of these states of meditation. He just fluked it by chance. He was doing meditation in the bedroom of his house. After a couple of hours his wife checked up on him because he usually only meditated for forty-five minutes or an hour. When she went into the room she saw her husband, a middle aged Australian, sitting so still she couldn't even see his chest moving. She put a mirror under his nose and she could see no sign of breath; so she panicked and called the ambulance. The ambulance came from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the medics stormed into the bedroom where he was sitting meditation. They took his pulse; there was no pulse at all. So they put him onto the stretcher and into the back of the ambulance and went screaming off with all the sirens going to the hospital. They got him into the emergency room and put all the machines on him and they could see from the machines that he had no heart beat and no brain waves; he was brain dead! But the interesting thing is that the person who was looking after the emergency room that evening was an Indian doctor. He was an Australian, but his parents were from India, and he had heard his parents talking about people who go into deep meditation in India. When he heard that was what this man had been doing he noticed a strange thing: the upper half of his body was still warm;

usually if someone is dead they would be cold all over. So he decided to give him electric shocks, to try and start his heart up again. They tried several times and nothing worked. Then the man came naturally out of his meditation, sat up, and asked, “How did I get here?” Afterwards he said he was just blissed out. But the worst part of the experience was walking home with his wife because she gave him a scolding and made him promise her that he would never do it again. That was a shame because it was a wonderful experience to have and it showed just what’s possible with meditation.

The happiness of that state should be understood. It is the happiness of letting go. Anyone who has experienced those states already knows what will happen when they die. When the body disappears, you are left with the mind. When you experience these states you’re beginning to understand the core of this thing that we call body and mind. You’ll never have any doubts about rebirth, nor will you have any fears about death, if you understand the nature of the mind. But more than that, one understands that by letting go of doing, manipulating, and craving you get these happy states.

Many people have had these states once, just by chance, and have craved to get them back again. If you’ve had a religious experience, a state of bliss, and crave to get it back again you never will. The only way to experience those states is by a very profound letting go, a very, very profound non-doing, and a very profound emptiness of the mind, a mind empty of the ‘doer’. All these things just happen by themselves. They are beautiful processes, empty of a ‘controller’, empty of a ‘doer’. That is what you are learning to let go of in this beautiful meditation. The more you control, the more you press the buttons and flick the switches, the more problems you get.

It can be very scary to get into deep meditations. Do you know the reason why? It’s because ‘you’ have to disappear before you get into them. You’re letting go of you, or what you take to be you. That’s why it’s wonderful to be able to completely get rid of the person in here who is always calling the shots, always talking, always making the decisions. Just allow things to stop by themselves. Once in our monastery in Thailand, there was a young novice who was listening to a talk by our teacher Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Chah would go on and on and on for many hours – I promise I won’t go on for much longer! He would go on and on and on and this little novice was

thinking, ‘When is he going to stop?’ ‘When is he going to stop?’ Hour after hour this little novice kept on thinking, ‘When is Ajahn Chah going to stop?’ and then the novice had what we call an insight. Instead of thinking, ‘When is Ajahn Chah going to stop?’ he thought, ‘When will I stop?’ And he stopped. When he came out of his meditation many hours later the hall was empty. Ajahn Chah had gone to his hut and he was just sitting there happy and blissed out. He had stopped. Isn’t it wonderful to stop?

Every time we come up to a red traffic light it’s teaching us Buddhism. Stop! Do you know that in Delhi the traffic lights don’t have S.T.O.P. written on the red light; instead they have R.E.L.A.X.! So when people come to a traffic light in Delhi instead of getting tight and tense they see this beautiful word ‘relax’. That’s what meditation is all about: in that stopping is happiness. The more you stop, the more happiness you have and this is the reason meditation gives you that inner joy, that inner happiness. By stopping you energise the mind. You energise the body by exercising it, but you energise the mind by stopping it and calming it.

Once you can get into very deep meditation, if you want to, you can even remember your past lives. All you need to do is ask yourself, what is your earliest memory? The mind that has a deep experience of stillness comes out of that stillness so clear, so powerful, and so well trained, that memories of your past come up very clearly, even memories of the time when you were born. Some people think that when you are born you’ve got no consciousness. I’ve been collecting stories of babies who speak. I have heard of two cases already in Perth. One of the cases was from two Australians, Westerners, who came to the monastery one day. They had two children, one was a three week old baby and one was about two and a half years old. One baby was named Peter and the other was called Richard. It was time for the elder boy Peter to go to bed and the mother and father sent him up to his room. Before he went to bed, he went to the pram leaned over and said to his baby brother, “Good night Richard”, and little Richard said, “Good night Peter”. They were spooked; they couldn’t believe what they had heard. They stopped reading their magazines and turned around in disbelief looking at the pram. The elder boy said once more, “Good night Richard” and this time with both parents watching, fully mindful, little Richard three weeks old said, “Good night Peter”, and both the parents heard it very clearly.

There are other cases like that. One case I've heard of was in Malaysia. It was in a newspaper article so I don't know if it is true or not, but it deserves to be true. In a maternity ward in the United States, in front of the doctor, the midwife, and the nurses, when this little baby came out of the womb, it spoke in clear English, saying, "Oh no, not again!"

You were actually conscious at the time of your birth. And you can remember your past lives. What a wonderful thing to actually show that Buddhism is true and that meditation works. But please make sure that you don't come out again and say, "Oh no, not again!" Please let go of this world.

Conclusion

So, in our tradition that's what we call the *jhāna* meditations, and you can experience those *jhāna* meditations deeply and powerfully. One of the things about *jhāna* meditations is that you can't think, you can't hear, you are completely non-dual, one pointed. There are many different *jhānas*, each of a different level, each level with more refined bliss. As you let go, not only are you knowing the nature of the mind but you're letting go of that mind and with full letting go everything disappears. That's what we mean by the bliss of *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* in our tradition is indicated by a flame going out. That was the usual word used when a candle or oil light flickered and completely went out. It was said the flame had *Nibbāna*-ed.

Some of you ask, "Where is *Nibbāna*, where do you go after you get *Nibbāna*-ed?" The answer is another question, 'where does the flame go?' Does it go to the North, the South, the East, or the West? The answer is no, the flame was always empty, it just depended on heat, the wick, and the wax. When those conditions end so does the flame. And the conditions that keep you going, when they disappear, then so do you. Like a beautiful meteorite going around this solar system for thousands, millions, or billions of years, one day it finally reaches the end. It burns in a beautiful light which you see as a shooting star and then it's gone. The beautiful light which you see as a shooting star is gone forever. It's just like a person roaming around *saṃsāra*, life after life after life, until eventually they meet the Dhamma of the Buddha and go out in a

beautiful blaze of light. They illuminate the Dhamma for so many people, and then they're gone.