

10 CONDITIONED REALITY

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Subjects that often come up in Buddhism are the conditioned and unconditioned, especially if one is a seeker after the truth, a seeker after reality, a seeker after freedom. People who have studied basic psychology, or have some understanding of the nature of things, know how much we are conditioned by our *kamma*, by our experiences, and by so many different things. Those conditions actually affect the way we see the world and experience reality. They also affect our choices and the way we use our life. When we look very deeply, we can see that our choices condition our lives, but our choices are not free. There are many influences making us do the things that we do. The way we look at things is not as ‘they truly are’. Many people have pointed out that we see, we hear, and we experience what we want to experience and what we want to see. This is the reason that our reality differs from the reality of the person sitting next to us.

The Cycle of Delusion

We create and make our own reality, our own world. We live in that world. We condition that world. I spoke very briefly earlier about the Buddhist idea of a God, especially about creation and whether Buddhists believe in a ‘big bang’, or in the beginning of things. The person who asked me that question very accurately pointed out that the one thing that we can know is that there is a creator inside of us. We create our world. We might say we condition our world. The way we condition our world is very much due to outside influences. People wish to be free and we talk a lot about freedom in this Western world, but if we look deeper, we find that what we take to be freedom is bound by the chains of conditioning. The goal of Buddhism is to see that conditioning, recognise it and untie those bonds.

In Buddhism we have a teaching called the Ten Fetters. Fetter is a very accurate translation of the Pāli word *samyojana*. Using the ideas of the agrarian society of India 2,500 ago, *yojana* means the wooden neckpiece for coupling a pair of draught oxen. This was how one joined the oxen together to pull a cart. This is a fetter, a

binding. The whole idea of Buddhism is to recognise that you are bound and then to untie that binding to achieve a type of freedom that is not recognised in this world, the freedom of the Enlightened person.

People sometimes think that monks are just attached to rules: attached to being celibate, attached to having few things, and attached to being happy. They don't realise that this is all about freedom from bonds and freedom from conditioning. People don't realise what these conditionings really are. We have blind spots and yet we think that we are freethinkers. We think that we are being rational and scientific. Having worked in science as a theoretical physicist at Cambridge University, I realised even then that many scientists are not freethinkers. They are conditioned. Much of what they do is laden with many, many values, and very often they find what they are looking for, rather than what is really there.

I read an article in a newspaper, about a debate on whether science or 'the scientific method' is value free, in other words, whether it's subjective. The debate was regarding genetically engineered food. The scientists said they were being rational, that there is nothing wrong with genetic engineering. Other people were saying that there is a lot wrong with it. Who is right and who is wrong? The scientists said the other people were being completely irrational and were just seeing things through their own belief systems. Because scientists have no belief systems, they see things as they truly are! The argument was settled for many scientists and philosophers. But who says that science is value free? There are so many conditionings in science that you see just what you want to see. So much so that there is an old saying in science:

‘The eminence of a great scientist is measured by the
length of time they obstruct progress in their field.’

The more famous the scientist and the more prominent they are, the more their views are taken to be gospel truth. That means a great scientist is so great that he or she can't be wrong. So they actually obstruct progress for many years because they must be right and everyone sees it from that standpoint.

The Buddha very clearly outlined the whole process of conditioning. He explained that we see the world through tinted glasses. He explained that what we take to be truth, to be real, is far from reality. He called the whole process of conditioning and brainwashing, coming mostly from within us, *vipallāsas*. They are the perverted aspect of the whole process of conditioning. They're the reason that what we think we know turns out to be wrong. Have you ever been absolutely sure you were right and then found out you were wrong? It happens all the time. The *vipallāsas*, these perversions of the conditioning process, work in a circle, a cycle of delusion. Our views – what we understand as truth, as reality – influence our perceptions. Basically our views influence what we choose to see, to hear, and experience. Out of all the different impressions that life offers us there are many things that you could be aware of right now. You could be aware of what I am saying. You could be just aware of what I look like. You could be aware of some fantasies being played out in your mind. Why do you choose to be aware of one thing and not the other? It's because your views guide your choice.

If you are angry at someone, or if you have ill will towards them, you will always find something in them to justify that ill will. They say, "Please, have a nice day today", and you think "what on earth do they mean by that?" It is the same with paranoia. If someone is really paranoid, they may think a monk is reading their mind. The monk says, "No I'm not," and they say, "I knew you were going to say that." A psychiatrist told me a few days ago that you can only increase paranoia, you can't decrease it. Whatever you say is looked upon by that person as confirming their view. If you are in love with somebody it doesn't matter what they do or say. If they pick their nose, they pick it in such a charming way. You think, "I just love the way you do that".

Perception is completely controlled by your views. I'm going to read a story just to show this. This story is called 'Harvard's Loss'. "The President of Harvard University made a mistake by prejudging people and it cost him dearly. A lady in a faded gingham dress (gingham is just plain woven striped or checked cotton cloth) and her husband, in a homespun threadbare suit, stepped off the train in Boston, Massachusetts and walked timidly without an appointment into the University President's outer office. The secretary frowned. She could tell in a moment that such

backwoods country hicks had no business at Harvard University and probably didn't even deserve to be in Cambridge. "We want to see the President" the man said softly. "He'll be busy all day" the secretary snapped. "We'll wait", the lady replied.

The secretary ignored them for hours hoping that the couple would finally become discouraged and go away, but they didn't. The secretary grew frustrated and finally decided to disturb the President, even though it was a chore she always regretted doing. "Maybe if they just see you for a few minutes they'll leave", she told the President of Harvard University. He sighed in exasperation and nodded. Someone of his importance obviously did not have the time to spend with them, but he detested gingham dresses and home spun suits cluttering up his outer office. The President, stern faced with dignity, strutted towards the couple. The lady told him, "We had a son who attended Harvard for one year. He loved Harvard and he was happy here but about a year ago he was accidentally killed. So, my husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him, somewhere on the campus. The President wasn't touched, he was shocked. "Madam", he said gruffly, "we can't put up a statue to every person who attended Harvard and died, if we did the place would look like a cemetery." "Oh no", the lady explained quickly, "We don't want to erect a statue. We thought we would like to give a building to Harvard." The president rolled his eyes. He glanced at the gingham dress and the homespun suit and exclaimed, "A building! Do you have any idea how much a building costs? (This was many years ago.) We have over seven and a half million dollars in plant at Harvard." For a moment the lady was silent. The President was pleased, he could get rid of them now. The lady turned to her husband and said quietly, "if that is all it costs to start a university, why don't we just start our own," and her husband nodded. The president's face wilted in confusion and bewilderment. Mr and Mrs Leyland Stanford walked away, travelled to Palo Alto, California, where they established a university known as Stanford University that bears their name. It was a memorial to a son that Harvard no longer cared about."

Isn't that a lovely story? Just because those two people wore ordinary dress no one realised that they were millionaires and so they started their own university. Isn't that so often the case in life?

What we are looking for is what we see. That's the reason the Buddha taught that

even your bare perception is already conditioned. Even what you hear – or rather what you choose to hear – what you choose to see, choose to feel, has already been filtered by your conditioning, by your attachments, by your desires and cravings. That's why even teaching of Krishnamurti, a sort of silent awareness, or non-doing was not good enough to find the real truth. What you see and hear is never reliable. That's the reason why sometimes, when I give talks, I give one message, but what you hear may be very different from the message. Something happens to the words that I say before they go into your consciousness. Some things get filtered out! Has it ever happened to you? Have you ever said something and it's been completely misunderstood? You say, "I didn't say that", and the other person says, "Yes you did". You may have said many things, but they've been filtered out or taken out of context. That's where misunderstandings come from. When you begin to understand the way that this cognitive process works, you can understand how we condition even our bare perceptions.

From those perceptions we build up our thoughts. This bare knowledge that comes to the mind as you feel, as you see, builds up our thoughts. And those thoughts in turn confirm our views. We have this circle of views bending our perceptions to suit their purpose, and those perceptions, again bending the thoughts to confirm the views. That's the reason we have different ideas, philosophies, and religions in this world. One of those religions is science. Another can be psychology, and others can be humanism, irrationalism, agnosticism, or even Buddhism. These are all different views and ideas in the world. What really concerned me when I was young was where these views and ideas came from. Why do rational people believe in a God who created this world and at the same time created the Devil just to tease people? That was very difficult for me to understand. Other points of view, for example, the idea of conditioning shaped by our existing views, thoughts, and perceptions, made it very clear how this was happening. What we receive from the world is basically conditioned by what we expect to receive.

In Denial

I am going to read a poem now. Listen to this poem. It's about the love for a mother and everyone knows that that's a wonderful thing.

‘When your mother has grown older and you have grown older,
When what was formally easy and effortless becomes a burden,
When her dear loyal eyes do not look out into life as before,
When her legs have grown tired and do not want to carry her any more,
Then give her your arm for support, accompany her with gladness and joy,
The hour will come, weeping, when you accompany her on her last journey;
And if she asks you always answer her, and if she asks again speak also
And if she asks another time speak to her not stormily but in gentle peace,
And if she cannot understand you well explain everything joyfully,
Because the hour will come, the bitter hour, when her mouth will ask no
more.’

That’s a poem that was translated from German, written by a very well known German called Adolf Hitler in 1923. Did you know that Adolf Hitler was a poet and that he loved his mother very dearly and thought about his love for his mother? No! Well, isn’t that because our views are that such a man is so bad and evil that we can never even entertain the idea that he could have a soft emotional loving side?

How many of you can make ‘Adolf Hitler’s’ out of your ex-husbands or your ex-wives? Do you understand what I am saying? The conditioning process means that if we think somebody is an enemy then we think they’re rotten. We think they’re bad and that’s all we see. We can even think, ‘I am rotten’, ‘I am bad’, ‘I am awful’, and that’s what we’ll see. The conditioning process is so strong that people can sometimes get so depressed with themselves that they commit suicide. Or they can get so full of themselves that they become egocentric and don’t listen to anyone else. This is all just conditioning working in these three ways. Don’t think that you are free from that. Even now you are not hearing what I am saying but what you want to hear, what you expect to hear. This is the difficulty for human beings, being able to know the truth of things.

Another example is rebirth or reincarnation. It’s a fascinating subject: not whether it’s true or false, but why people believe it’s true or false. That’s something that has fascinated me for many years. Why is it that when someone has a memory of a rebirth and they clearly remember it, other people often say, “No, it cannot be that

way, there has to be some other explanation”? Or, why is it that when something happens to you, you believe it has to be due to some event in a previous birth? Why are there such strong views on either side? I am especially interested in the reason people refuse to believe in rebirth. As a scientist, as a rational person, at the very least you should have an open mind. To me it was something that was quite obvious, something that I grew up with. My parents weren't Buddhists but rebirth always seemed such an obvious thing to me. I don't know where I got that idea from, but there it was. I found when I came to Western countries like Australia, or when I go to see my family in England, that there is a great resistance to the very idea of rebirth. It wasn't that people had open minds; rather they had very closed minds, a locked door to the idea. When I looked deeply, I saw clearly that people had a very strong antagonism to the idea of rebirth. The main reason people are afraid of rebirth is because they don't want to be reborn. They just want to have this life and that's the end. That is one of the reasons people will not even entertain strong hard evidence that they have lived before and that they are going to live again.

Whether it's Buddhism, Christianity, or Hinduism, or whatever, rebirth leads to a new life. No matter what religion or belief you have, the next life is always dependent on what you've done in this life. Basically most people are so ill behaved that they are scared of what's going to happen to them in their next life. They would rather believe that there is not going to be a next life. They are in denial! Where does that denial come from? Again, it's the conditioning and brain washing, "I don't want to believe it's true. I don't want to see this and therefore I don't see it".

Another example is from a disciple of mine. Many years ago she had a very big problem because her husband was sexually abusing her children. He went to jail. She couldn't see what was happening for many months. She was a very loving mother and a very loving wife. As sometimes happens in those terrible situations, it came out at school. The teachers saw the signs and when they investigated they found that they had assessed the situation correctly, the children were being abused. The mother felt very guilty, but why was it that she couldn't see those signs? As a Buddhist monk – who knows about the mind, knows about conditioning, knows about the psychology of all this – I had to explain to her the reason she could not see what others could see. The situation was so horrendous that subconsciously she didn't want to see it. If you

don't want to see something you just cannot see it. It's not a matter of suppression, which is done openly. It's blocked out at a subconscious level. It happens before this process comes to the mind's consciousness. It's already been filtered out.

There was a very interesting experiment done a few years ago at Harvard University. In front of some volunteer students psychologists flashed images on a screen and asked the students to write down what they thought the image represented. The image was flashed so quickly that at first they could not really make out what the image was. Gradually the length of the exposure was increased until they could record some idea of what it was. Then the time on the screen was further increased so that the students could record whether it was what they had expected it to be, until the time the exposure was long enough for them to clearly tell what it was.

The findings are illustrated with one example. The actual photograph was of a very well known part of the campus, a set of steps going up to one of the faculty buildings. There was a bicycle by the side of the steps. One student saw it as a ship at sea, but because the image was flashed so quickly it wasn't much more than a guess. However, once that idea was in his mind, when the length of exposure on the screen was increased incrementally, he still saw it as a ship at sea, again and again. He saw it as a ship when every one else could see it as a well know part of the campus. He insisted it was a ship at sea until the exposure was so long that he eventually saw his mistake and corrected it. The lesson from that was that once you form a view it interferes so greatly with your perception that even though the image is right in front of you, you cannot see it. You see it in a different way than it truly is.

One of the images that were during the experiment took the students a particularly long time to figure out; it was a picture of two dogs copulating. It was such an obscene or unpleasant thing to see that the students were in complete denial, again and again and again, until it was so obvious that they had to see it for what it was. This is solid evidence for what the Buddha said about the perversions of our cognitive processes. Even though we think we know what our partner is saying to us, even though we think we know who they are, how often we are wrong. This is so not just in relationships with others, but also in our relationship with ourselves.

Seeing Truth and Reality

I want particularly to mention the relationship to truth. Is Buddhism just another conditioned belief like everything else, with no greater validity than science or any other religion? Is there no truth? Is it all relative according to our conditioning? In other words, how can we break through a conditioned way of seeing and perceiving? Remember, the whole reason we bend our perceptions, thoughts, and views is because of wanting. We see and we hear what we want to see and hear, and we deny what we don't want to see, hear, or feel. It's the wanting that is the problem. It is wanting that conditions us away from truth.

The Buddha became Enlightened by giving up all wanting. Instead of wanting to see the universe in any particular way, or wanting to see himself in any particular way, he overcame all of that wanting, or craving. That's not a very easy thing to do. It's called 'letting go', being still. The sign of craving is movement. The sign of attachment is not being able to let go. The sign of ego is controlling. That's why we come across those things in meditation: craving, attachments, and controlling, again and again. These things stop us from seeing truth and reality. We have to completely let go of all desire and all craving, temporarily, in our meditation.

Most of you have just meditated for half an hour. At the end of the meditation I told you to look at how you feel. Consider what works and what doesn't work in your meditation. This is an exercise in overcoming conditioning. It's truly brainwashing your mind of all of its conditioning, all of its cravings, all of its wanting to see things this way or that way. It is letting go of all of that, letting go of all your ideas, because they are the bricks and mortar of conditioning. Have you noticed that when you face something you interpret it with your thoughts? Where did all those thoughts come from? Why do you see it this way and not another way? The reason is your conditioning.

A few days ago, someone gave the monks some ginger beer in what looked like wine bottles. It looked like wine, but it wasn't wine; it wasn't alcoholic, it was just ginger beer. This led the monks to talk about alcohol and drinking. The other monks related experiences that I had also had in my youth, when I first went to a public house in England to have my first glass of beer. My first reaction to drinking beer was, "This

is disgusting stuff; how can anyone drink it? Why do people spend so much money drinking this stuff?” That first perception was probably true; bitter beer was disgusting. But after a while I began to like it. I wondered what had happened there. Why was it that when I first tasted the beer it was awful and then, when I was eighteen or nineteen, I was drinking a lot of the stuff? I saw the reason was that it was socially accepted to drink beer, and everyone else said it was delicious. I had reconditioned my senses to like it. Because society said it was delicious, it became delicious. I liked it because I wanted to like it. That’s all there was to it.

I’ve seen that with modern art as well. What is beautiful in modern art? Someone told me that there was an artist in France who managed to talk a gallery into mounting his exhibition. There were just empty picture frames on the empty wall. This was a statement; he sold thousands of dollars worth of pictures. Have you ever seen that happen in the world? What was that which we just heard? Was it a beautiful sound or was it an intrusive mobile phone? Isn’t it your conditioning that causes you to see in a particular way? If you know the mind is conditioned, why not condition it in a wise way to create happiness? If it’s a mobile phone you have two choices. You can say, “That’s a very beautiful sound, it’s very musical, not like the old phones, ‘ring, ring, ring, ring’. At least it’s got a bit of style these days”. Or you can say, “We shouldn’t have mobile phones in here. Who did that? I’m going to talk to them afterwards. We should excommunicate them from the Buddhist Society. We are never going to let them come in again”. Now, which response do you want to take? Can you see how we condition ourselves?

Once we know how conditioning works we can condition ourselves into forgiveness and happiness. One of the first things we can do is say, “Well, I’ve got a choice. I can develop the positive conditioning or the negative conditioning. I can look at a person and see their good qualities or I can look into them and see their bad qualities. Both are there”. I have conditioned myself over the many years that I have been monk, to see the good qualities in people, so much so that some people tell me off saying that I should be a bit more critical. But I cannot do that now. The conditioning is too strong. People in the Monastery, or the monks I live with, sometimes do wrong things. The other day, while I was away, there was a bit of discussion and bad feeling about a decision to do with the books in our monastery. I

talked with one of the people – who felt quite hurt afterwards – and I said, “Look, I can’t get hurt by any of the monks in this monastery. They are all such kind, good people. We know that everyone is not Enlightened and that we’ve all got bad qualities as well”. I was being absolutely honest. I can't get angry at any of the monks in the monastery, no matter what they do, because I see too many good things about them. Even people who come here to the Buddhist Centre, no matter what you do, you have so many good qualities in each one of you. That’s the way my conditioning works now. When you perceive the good in a person it’s impossible to get angry or upset with them. You are all my friends and if I look at you that way it’s very hard to see anything else. If you do something to try and hurt me, I’d say, “No, no, I remember all the good things you’ve done.”

Why is it that if a person says something to upset you, that’s all you remember? You never remember all the kind things they’ve done for you, all the kind words they’ve said to you. I’m the other way. I forget all the rotten things people have said about me and only remember the kind things. Which one is truer? They are both equally wrong. But I choose the one that is wrong and happy. It’s interesting that this type of conditioning – seeing the positive, seeing the happiness, the positive in yourself, the happiness in life, the happiness in other people – is also the path that leads to de-conditioning and the unconditioned, to seeing things clearly.

When you develop happiness in your life – getting rid of negativity and ill will towards oneself and others – it gives you enough time to be at peace. To be at peace means to let go of desires. Once you’re satisfied for the time being, then you have a chance to let go of desires and be at peace. This is the path that the Buddha taught. By having a positive attitude to life, by developing the happiness of the mind, the mind becomes peaceful and tranquil. From that tranquillity, when cravings and desires are temporarily subdued, you start to get clarity of the mind – not seeing things as you want to see them but as they truly are. You can only do this when you start from a position of ease and happiness.

It’s almost like a trick to make you feel very happy and peaceful. When I was reading the *suttas* I realized that this was how the Buddha taught. He’d get people very interested talking about ordinary things first and, when he saw the audience were

really listening and they were happy, then he'd give it to them. Or as one Tibetan monk said, when he's got everyone laughing and their mouths are open, he can then pop in the medicine. The medicine is stillness and peacefulness, because we find there is nobody there, *anattā*, non-self. We find that which we took to be choice is completely conditioned. You think you are in control of everything. You think that you chose to come here. You think you chose to cough or to move your arm this way or that way. I've looked at my choices, at my will, over many years, seeing what was conditioned and what was coming from me, and I found out that it was all conditioned. That's why I tell the same jokes again and again, I can't help it. It's not me; it's conditioning.

Where Choice Ceases

I've been giving talks for many years in Perth. Years ago something happened to me; I had an experience that really shocked me to the core. It was one of those really powerful experiences. This was before this Dhamma Hall was built. We used to give the Dhamma talks in the community hall next door and our library was in what is now the reception area. One Saturday morning, I was browsing through the audio tapes and I saw a tape cassette recording of a talk that I had given seven years previously. It was on the same subject as the talk I had given the night before. What I had said the night before was still fresh in my mind and I thought I would compare the two talks to see how I had changed over seven years. I wanted to see if the talk I had given the night before was substantially different from the one I gave seven years previously. When I played that tape it sent real shivers up my spine. I found that I was repeating whole paragraphs almost word for word after a seven-year separation between the talks. The night before I had really thought that I was choosing every word with complete free choice and that my interpretation and my perception was fresh, but the coincidence was just too much. If I really did have free choice why was it exactly the same, paragraph by paragraph? It showed me that what I thought was free was not free at all but completely conditioned.

It really affected me because it affected my sense of self, my sense of will, my sense of direction in the world. Who was actually pulling the strings? Who was deciding and making those choices? It frightened me, but it also gave me an intuition that I

was able to follow to get into deep meditation. When there is no one left, when there is no will left, when choice ceases and ends, this is where we can actually understand something of the unconditioned.

The whole idea of non-self is difficult for many people because our conditioning will not allow us to see it. The whole idea of the Buddha's teaching of suffering, of *dukkha*, is very difficult for people. Why? Because they don't want to admit that life is suffering. The whole idea of celibate monks is very difficult. We still want to have our sexual relationships. I seem to be forever reading articles in magazines by people who are trying to see if they can still have sex and be Enlightened at the same time. That's what people want. As the old saying goes, "they want to have their cake and eat it at the same time". You can't have your cake and eat it. What that old saying means is that if you eat the cake it's gone. You can't keep the cake and also consume it. You can have one thing or the other. Often when I talk like that people are shocked. "What do you mean you have to be celibate to become Enlightened?" I say, "Yes, that's true", and they say, "Surely not," wriggle, wriggle, wriggle, writhe, writhe, writhe!

What I've said is probably something that you will not agree with. Why, because that view goes completely against your perceptions. Informed by that view the thoughts go against it. You're in that cycle. But what about Ajahn Brahm, isn't he in his own cycle of views and perceptions and thoughts? Isn't that just a monk's conditioning? The only way you can find out these things is to let go of all preconceived ideas and notions – make the mind so empty and so still that you can actually see things as they truly are and not through the eyes of a monk. See things not through the eyes of a sexually involved man or woman, not through the eyes of an Asian or a Westerner. But to see things as just empty of all those labels and positions" let go of so much that all of those ideas, positions, thoughts, and feelings completely vanish. Do you know what that's called? It's called *jhāna*, deep meditation.

What you have to do to be able to see the truth is to creep up on it, silently, invisibly. That's the only way you can overcome the conditioning. In Buddhism we say the five hindrances –sensory desire, ill will, restlessness and worry, sloth and torpor, and doubt – are what stop you from seeing clearly. Basically sensory desire and ill will

are the two main hindrances. They are only overcome in those deep meditations called *jhānas*. The mystics, the people who sit meditation and get into deep states of mind, are overcoming all of their conditioning temporarily. They are letting go of all they have been taught, all they have ever thought, all that could be true or not true, and then they can see reality outside of conditions. What they see is not what they expected to find. All great insights and Enlightening wisdom will always shock you to the core, and I really mean shock you to the core. It's not what you expected. What you expect is just conditioned. What you can't expect, what you can't imagine, is what is true.

That's the reason all the philosophising imaginable and working things out can never reach the truth. All movement of the mind misses the point. Only in silence, deep stillness, can you understand the truth. In particular, you understand the nature of the mind, the nature of happiness, and only then can you get a glimpse of what we call in Buddhism the 'unconditioned'. It is only when everything is let go of – all you've ever learnt, expected, found, or not wanted to find – that you see what is true. That's the way to become Enlightened. That's the reason all the Enlightened beings that I've met in my life, people like Ajahn Chah, have been completely unpredictable. The conditioning just hasn't been there. That's the reason you observe these people for many years and yet they always surprise you. That's always been a sign of a very wise person. Instead of always acting out of conditioning they are just incredibly innovative, doing things in a way you would never expect. That was one of the amazing things about Ajahn Chah; you always had to be on your toes because you never knew what he was going to do next. He would always shock you, one minute tearing you to shreds for doing what you thought was nothing, and then he would give you a cup of tea or send a cup of tea especially for you. With that degree of 'being beyond conditions', one didn't know what he was doing or why. This is what we mean by going beyond conditions.

So, the moral of the story is that whatever you think is truth, you're wrong. What you think is right is already missing the point. You think you are in control of these things, but you're not. But you'll never be able to accept that. It's just too horrendous. Take Nibbāna. People have strange ideas about *Nibbāna*. But those

ideas are not actually the true *Nibbāna*, they are just what people want *Nibbāna* to be. What do you want *Nibbāna* to be? That's what you'll believe *Nibbāna* is. That's the reason I sometimes teach the monks that *Nibbāna* is complete cessation, so much so that the monks have called it Ajahn Brahm's black hole. Everything gets 'sucked away' and there's nothing left.

The monks ask, "What do you want to do that for? Is that the goal, is the whole purpose of all this just to of achieve a complete spiritual, mental, physical suicide, with everything stopping?" People want to enjoy *Nibbāna* when it happens. Cessation is very hard for people to understand and accept. But I say it's true. What do you make of that? You are going to have to find out for yourself! The Buddha said that Buddhas only point the way. They point to the path, but each one of us has to walk that path for ourselves.

If you want to find out how much you are conditioned, how much you have been completely brainwashed, then develop deep meditations and have the courage to be shocked. Have the courage to let go of everything including your own ego and self. Have that degree of strength because only the strong get to Enlightenment. And I'm not talking about the strong in body; I'm talking about the courageous ones who are willing to give everything up for the sake of truth. This is how to overcome conditioning and brainwashing and to finally be free. People in this world think that freedom is being able to do what you want, but greed, hatred, and delusion are controlling you. You are not free at all. If you really want freedom, overcome those conditionings and see reality. It will surprise you, but the truth of Enlightenment is very delightful.