

6 THE OPENING OF THE LOTUS

3rd May 2000

This is the first talk I have given since teaching the annual nine-day retreat for the local lay Buddhists. I always have a wonderful time on those retreats. It is a time when all my attention is focussed on meditation, and on the Dhamma. One of the things that became very clear to me on that retreat was that there is no difference between the Dhamma and meditation. One should incorporate as much Dhamma as possible into the way one meditates. If you can incorporate all your understanding of the Dhamma into the meditation, then this is a very powerful and effective way to gain the goal in Buddhism.

I find it's not possible to separate these two things. Thinking that meditation is somehow separate from the teaching of the Buddha, or that the teachings of the Buddha are somehow separate from the meditation practice, will not lead to success. The Dhamma and meditation go together so beautifully. One of the things I taught regularly to the lay meditators during the retreat was, 'When you are meditating remember the basic teachings of the Buddha!'

The Teflon Mind

Keep the Dhamma in mind as you are meditating; particularly keep in mind the Four Noble Truths as an indication of what you should be doing when you are meditating. In particular I focussed their attention on the second and third noble truths. The second noble truth is craving or more especially *kāma taṇhā*, the craving for the five-sense world, the craving to be, which includes the craving to do, and the craving for annihilation. These invariably lead to *dukkha*, to suffering.

So how can you expect to become peaceful or get into a deep meditation when you are following the path of the second noble truth? You can only get into deep meditation if you remember the third noble truth, which is the ending of that craving, the path to *Nibbāna*. The path to *Nibbāna* is the path to the highest bliss, the highest peace, and it is achieved through *cāga paṭinissagga mutti anālaya*. These four Pāli words mean giving up. *Cāga* is giving away, *paṭinissagga* is renouncing, forfeiting,

mutti is releasing and *anālaya* is not letting anything find a roosting place in your mind, not having a place where things can stick. I told someone this evening that, “With a ‘Teflon mind’ the thoughts and ideas don’t stick, they just slip away”.

With these Dhamma teachings in the mind it becomes very easy to succeed in meditation. You understand what you are doing and that helps the meditation. You begin to understand what it is you are doing that is obstructing success in the meditation. As far as this meditation is concerned, if you really practise the third noble truth, if you really do let go without exception, freely opening up and not having a place where things can stick in the mind, you will find the mind opens up and becomes very peaceful and quiet. The mind goes through the stages of meditation all the way into the *jhānas*. It’s the natural unfolding of the peaceful mind.

So often when we’re practising our meditation, we are following the second noble truth instead, that is craving. It is concern for things in the world, and thoughts about the past and the future. It is thoughts about family, thoughts about our health; thoughts about our comfort and our bodies, thoughts about the sounds that other people are making, thoughts about heat and cold, thoughts about what you’re going to do tomorrow, thoughts about when you are going to do it, and where you are going to go. All of those thoughts are the concerns of the five-sense world. In Pāli they are *kāma taṇhā*: craving for comfort, for satisfaction, for fulfilment, for success in the world of the five senses.

We should know now from our own experience and through the Dhamma – the teachings of the Buddha, the four noble truths – that this concern is not the way of peace, of happiness, or of release in one’s meditation. It will only produce more suffering, more frustration, more disappointment, and more pain in the mind. This is what is meant by ‘cause and effect’. We know where this path will lead us if we follow it. So we should know that whenever there is pain, frustration, or despair in the mind we have to work back to find the craving which is the cause. Learn from your mistakes. Learn from the wrong attitudes of the mind. Don’t be foolish and generate suffering, suffering, suffering, for your whole life and through many lives, through many world cycles. Don’t be stupid, learn from experience. If it’s suffering,

if it's despair, frustration, disappointment, or whatever, it is something to do with the first noble truth. The craving to be always comes from the illusion of self, *attā*. People often have very strong egos and a very strong sense of self from pride. They are the ones who find it very difficult to meditate.

Sometimes one needs to develop humility, the ability to surrender. I notice that people who have enormous faith are usually the ones who have an easier time doing the meditation. They get into deep states of meditation because of faith in the teaching and faith in a teacher. Faith in the Buddha is something that overcomes faith in one's ego. Everyone has some sort of faith, some sort of belief, but so often it is belief in oneself; in one's own wisdom, in one's own intelligence, in one's own knowledge and that very often obstructs the progress on the path.

When I teach retreats I often see this. Some of the Asian meditators are able to go far deeper in their meditation, because generally speaking they trust what a monk says, they don't argue with it, they don't think twice about it, they just do it. They follow the instructions and it works. In contrast many Westerners are so independent, basically so conceited and arrogant, that sometimes we don't want to follow what the teacher says, or what the Buddha says. We want to find out in our own way what we think must be right. When one is not yet a Stream Winner that belief in one's own ideas and views is very uncertain, it creates so much of a burden, so much of an obstacle in your monastic life. Be careful what you put your faith in. As you know faith or *saddhā*, is one of the five spiritual qualities, the five *indriyas*. It's very important to have faith at the beginning of your practice because you haven't grown in *paññā*, in wisdom yet. When one has gained wisdom, then that faith is confirmed. You are stronger in the faith because you have seen that truth for yourself. Ajahn Chah used to say that when you have been a monk for five years you have five per cent of wisdom. Someone asked, "Does that mean when you have four years as a monk that you have four per cent wisdom?" He said, "No, when you've got four years you've got zero wisdom". What he said was very wise: if you've got zero wisdom you have to accept it and do as you are told. Trust in Ajahn Chah and you'll go much further than if you trust in yourself. I've seen that degree of faith, that degree of surrender, in some of the Asian meditators and because of that they follow

instructions without question.

It's amazing that with some Westerners things often go wrong with the tools and equipment they buy because they don't read the instructions before they plug in and start using them. That's the arrogance of people these days; they think that they are so superior; they think they know it all. They have faith in their own abilities and that's why they are always falling on their faces. A person who truly has faith would read the instructions, understand those instructions, and if there were any questions would read it again until they understood the instructions, and then they would proceed. *The instructions are very clear, craving leads to suffering, letting go leads to peace.*

So what do people do when they try to meditate? They crave to get peaceful. They work hard to get peaceful, they strive, and they screw their minds up to get peaceful. And then they just get frustrated and think, 'I can't meditate'. It's true that *you* can't meditate. No *attā*, no 'self', can do the meditation: you have got to get out of the way. Put the 'I' aside and then you find that meditation happens. You can't do meditation; you've got to just get out of the way for meditation to occur. It's a whole process and that's precisely what the second noble truth means. It was amazing to see in the retreat how stubborn people are. They will always try and do things.

One of the most powerful methods of meditation that I practise is 'contentment'. I don't teach things and then do something else; all of the methods that I teach are the methods I practise myself. Contentment means being happy to be here, wherever you are. The reason contentment works is because it's going against the second noble truth and it's fulfilling the third noble truth.

You have to be careful of 'contentment' because it doesn't mean being content to follow the cravings and the *dhamma* qualities of the mind. It's a different type of contentment. I always know when it's real 'contentment' because I don't move. If I was not content then I would always be looking for happiness somewhere else. That's the opposite of contentment. Discontent causes restlessness, causes movement of the mind, and causes craving, reaching out and trying to find something else to feed the needs of the mind. If its discontent you get *kāma chanda*, sensual desire, the first

hindrance. You want to find some better comfort, something happier and more pleasant, you want to get rid of the pain in the body. *Kāma chanda* comes from discontent. Discontent is ill will, it is not being happy with the meditation, with yourself or with anybody else.

From discontent people often go into sloth and torpor just to escape, because they can't face the present moment or the present life. One extra hour in bed in the morning means one hour less you have to meditate or one hour less you have to face the cold world. Restlessness, worry, or remorse are obviously discontent, doubt is discontent, as is the desire to know, to figure things out. Shut up and be peaceful! You know everything you need to know. All the five hindrances are born of discontent. In the Nalakapāna Sutta (MN 68) it says that only when you achieve the *jhānas* are the five hindrances, and interestingly discontent and weariness overcome. It's interesting in that *sutta* to see that the Buddha linked the five hindrances and discontent, and how the five hindrances plus discontent give rise to weariness, and heaviness in the body. Weariness makes it so hard to drag yourself out of bed in the morning, out from under those nice warm covers.

If our meditation is going well, if we have overcome the five hindrances, we have energy and the heaviness of the body disappears. During the retreat it was often hard for me to stop skipping around the place, because when you are enjoying yourself you want to get up earlier and earlier. That's just the way of the body and the mind. When the mind has energy it is no longer weary. Discontent is at the heart of the five hindrances, and it's also at the heart of the second noble truth.

From discontent craving arises. So check your meditation. Ask yourself, 'Am I content where I am, or do I really want to get quickly into a *jhāna*?' 'Do I really want to get quickly through the next stages?' 'Do I really want to get quickly through this talk and get somewhere else?' Be careful of discontent because it causes so much restlessness, so much inner activity and thinking. I've noticed before that if I'm listening to a beautiful talk it brings me so much happiness. I'm silent inside because I don't need to speak, because the talk is so beautiful. I'm just listening to it and getting high, having a wonderful time. But if we don't like the talk, or discontent

comes into the mind, then we start thinking, fantasising, dreaming, or falling asleep. Discontent has moved us away from what is happening. We all make use of escape mechanisms that we've stupidly built up over lifetimes rather than face the present, rather than face what's happening now. We are always trying to run away; that's restlessness. That habit can very easily manifest in our meditation: instead of facing up to what's happening, and developing contentment in the moment, people run away. They run away into thinking, philosophising, dreaming, and fantasising. That's not the way to meditate. That's the second noble truth and it only leads to suffering. You should know that by now.

Following the Instructions

Follow the third noble truth of letting go. When we say *cāga* or generosity, we are giving up and abandoning; that means surrendering, forsaking, *paṭinissagga*. What do we have to forsake? We have to forsake our old views, ideas and conceits. This is hard to do because we are so stubborn. One of the monks, sitting in with me during the retreat interviews, asked me, "Why do you think it is that people come on retreat and get all these good results, when sometimes monks at the monastery, can meditate for years and not even experience a *nimmitta*?" Some of the people on retreat lead very busy lives. They don't have much time to meditate, certainly not as much as the monks and *anagārikas*. In the monastery you only have to do two hours work on five days of the week, whereas these people work forty, fifty, or sixty hours a week, plus all the other business they have to do. In those nine days of meditation it was amazing to see how many of them achieved decent meditations and even had *nimmittas* arise. So I said, "It's because some of the monks are stubborn" and that's quite true. Sometimes instead of just listening and following the instructions, so often we want to make our own instructions.

Instead of listening to what the Buddha said we want to interpret it to suit our own ideas. That's the stubbornness in Westerners. And I can understand it because you have to be stubborn to become monks in the first place. You have to go against the stream of the world to become a monk, so that stubbornness is sometimes inherent in monks. Nevertheless, if one uses one's intelligence and experience to overcome that stubbornness – to just be happy with simple duties, to renounce and to let go – then

you can get into deep meditation. But you have to renounce and let go stage by stage.

That's why I teach meditation in stages. Let go of the past and the future, just be in the present. By the simple process of being in the present moment, so much restlessness, so much thinking, and so much of the craving stops. I'm not only saying this about a novice meditation or a preliminary meditation – if I were to say things like that people would think, “Oh, I'm much more advanced than that, I'm going to do the deeper meditation not ‘present moment awareness’, that's kids stuff.” I still do present moment awareness meditation myself. I employ it at all stages of meditation. It's wonderful how powerful it is.

On the retreat I also taught *ekaggatā citta*, this mind that has gone to one peak of being; one peak in space, one point in space. Instead of looking at it that way, look at this meditation of *ekaggatā citta* as being one peak or one point in time. Focus not in space but in this moment in time, centred in the peak of this moment, right in the middle of past and future. If you look at *ekaggatā* as one-pointedness in time you will get much deeper in your meditation. You will really understand what this meditation is all about rather than have some sort of spacious awareness or focusing your attention on the ‘tip’ of something. This is where you can get into beautiful contentment, just by being in the moment.

If you are fully aware in the moment, silence emerges from within the present moment. You don't need to go looking for something else, or move on to the next stage of meditation; you move *into* the next stage of meditation or rather *the next stage of the meditation moves into you*. But watch it: if you ‘let go’ you will experience *mutti*, which means freeing, opening up. The Buddha said that as a teacher he had a *mutti* fist, an open fist, he didn't keep anything secret. One way to understand what that Pāli word means is, instead of gripping the meditation object in your fist, you just open it up. That's *mutti*, that's release, that's openness. That's the reason when people open themselves up to the breath, to the silence or to the present moment. They begin to get some understanding of the third noble truth.

You are not controlling, you are not manipulating, and you are not doing so much

anymore. All that controlling, manipulating, doing, is part of the craving to be. Craving is born of the illusion of ‘mine’, mine to control, and mine to order. Leave all that alone – that only leads to suffering, to pain, to more discontent, more craving and suffering. It’s a vicious cycle that we can get into. Discontent producing craving, craving producing *dukkha*, suffering, and suffering and discontent produces more craving. It’s so hard to let go! Once you find the ‘let go button’, you will find that in the present moment silence just emerges from within.

The Buddha used the simile of cool water for the *jhānas*. Cool water doesn’t come from the North, South, East or West of the lake; it comes from within a spring in the middle of the lake, drenching the pool with this beautiful cool water. That simile applies to all stages of the meditation. You just have to stay in the present moment and this beautiful silence wells up from within that experience, within that moment, within that mind; it comes from within and cools everything down, it makes everything so silent.

Skilful meditators have the experience that *they* don’t make the mind silent, the silence just arrives. You will find that you cannot make the mind silent; ‘you’ cannot do that. I can’t meditate to gain silence; the ‘I’ has to go away. Silence comes in its own time. When you are ready, when you’ve settled down enough, not doing anything, then *mutti* means that the claws of the mind have opened up enough so that the silence can come in. Then in that silence – if you wait long enough – the breath will arise, especially if you have done meditation on the breath before.

Doing Less and Less

As a young monk, I always tried very hard to watch the breath. When I first came to Perth, I wasn’t as skilled as I am now with breath meditation: I would watch the breath for forty-five minutes with great difficulty; it was just too hard to keep the attention on the breath. But then I developed the ‘letting go’ meditation, saying to myself ‘just let go’. As soon as I did ‘letting go meditation’ the breath appeared very easily and I could watch it for the next half-hour or so if I wanted to. It really struck me that by trying to focus on the breath I had difficulty, but if I just let go and didn’t care what came up in my mind, the breath was right there. The breath was easy to

hold in the mind's eye and I was still. It showed me that it's often hard to watch the breath if you try too much. When you are trying, that's craving – craving to be or to do something – and that leads to suffering. You can't get success in meditation that way. If only I'd realised and kept the four noble truths in mind when I was meditating, I wouldn't have wasted so much time. I would have just been peaceful. When we're letting go, contented, and silent, the breath arises within the silence, as if the breath is just there. We don't have to force the mind onto it, we don't have to control it, we don't have to worry about where we are going to watch the breath – at the nose, at the stomach – we don't have to worry about what we should do with the breath. The breath just comes by itself when it's ready and we're just sitting there watching it. The whole process of meditation is to try and do less and less. Try and do more of *cāga paṭinissagga mutti*, just allowing the mind to open up.

The other simile that I have used before is a lotus opening its petals. Just imagine a lotus opening up petal by petal. The outer petals are 'present moment awareness'. They reveal the next layer of petals, which reveals the next layer of petals, which is called the 'breath', and that reveals the next petals, the 'beautiful breath'. As you go into a lotus the petals get softer and softer, more refined and fragrant. You are getting closer to the heart of the lotus. That's just the way it is – you don't need to move onto another lotus to get to the next stage of the meditation. If you throw away this lotus that has already opened up so much, to try and get to the next stage, all you get is a lotus which hasn't opened up at all. If you want to move from the 'breath' to the 'beautiful breath' quickly, and if you throw away the breath, you just get a restless mind and you can't even stay in the present moment. Do this stage by stage making the mind as cool and as still as possible, being careful that craving doesn't come in.

If craving does come in don't give it a place to stay, don't give the chicken a place to roost. The chicken is a great symbol for craving. Just leave it! When it hasn't got a place to settle down, any moment of craving will just disappear straight away and nothing will stick to the mind. So you're just watching the breath, making the mind non-sticky, making it free and open. It's just a matter of time before that breath turns into a very beautiful and calm breath. It calms down by itself if you get out of the way, because that's the nature of things.

Once the beautiful breath appears the whole process just happens in spite all of your plans, intentions, manipulations, and control. Whether you think you can meditate or you think you can't, you think you want to or you don't want to, whether you're afraid of *jhānas* or you're not afraid of *jhānas*, whatever happens it's just a process. And as long as you don't interfere with it, it takes you all the way into *jhānas*. When the beautiful breath comes up it gives you a sense of *pīti*, the joy of meditation.

Many monks know that beautiful *sutta*, I forget its name now but I think it's in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, where it says that once *pīti* arises in the mind, the monk no longer needs to make the determination, resolution, or choice, 'May I now experience the tranquillity of body and mind'. The Buddha said it's a natural process, it has to happen. It's a natural consequence for one whose mind experiences joy that their body and mind will experience tranquillity. It's a natural experience once the 'beautiful breath' comes up, that the body is light and peaceful. The mind, instead of running around all over the place and having this irritating restlessness, becomes tranquil, still and peaceful. The Buddha said that for one whose mind is tranquil, there is no need to make the resolution, 'May happiness appear in my mind'. Happiness naturally has to happen. It is an automatic process in one whose body and mind is tranquil that happiness, *sukha*, arises!

So you just watch this happening, you just stay with the breath and it turns into a beautiful breath all by itself. *Sukha*, happiness, arises in the mind; the lotus is opening up. You don't need to rush the process; rushing the process is craving, which leads to suffering. We are opening up to the process, giving up, and letting go. The Buddha continued by saying that for one whose mind experiences *sukha*, happiness, there is no need to make a resolution, to determine, to manipulate, force or even choose, 'May my mind experience *samādhi*'. For one in whose mind there is this happiness, their mind enters *samādhi*. It's a natural course, it's automatic. It's a process that just happens.

This is a very powerful and beautiful teaching of the Buddha. It is saying that if we try, it doesn't work, if we let go it works. If we crave it's just more suffering and we can't get into these beautiful, blissful states. They are not stages of craving but stages

of letting go, not stages of attachment but stages of renunciation. They're actually putting into practise the teachings of the Buddha, the four noble truths. It's doing what the Buddha said to do and experiencing the results, not as a theory but in our own bare experience. *Samādhi arises from the beautiful breath.* The mind starts to become still, sustaining its attention, because it is satisfied.

We notice that the mind needs some satisfaction. If it does not get that satisfaction in the meditation it will seek satisfaction in the company of others. It will seek satisfaction by looking for projects to do. It will seek satisfaction in writing books. It will seek satisfaction, eventually, in disrobing. The mind seeks satisfaction if we don't give it happiness; in meditation the mind will always go somewhere else. So the only way to keep the mind still is through the satisfaction of *sukha*, that stillness, that sustained attention of the mind which is called *samādhi*. This is where *sukha* and *samādhi* work together, folding around each other, supporting each other.

The mind begins to sustain its attention effortlessly, as a natural process, and the happiness increases. It is like the happiness of being released from a very demanding boss at work. It's the happiness of being released from debt, released from sickness, released from jail, having found one's way through a desert. It is release from the five hindrances. This is the sort of happiness that starts to come up in the meditation and that happiness leads to more *samādhi*, more 'staying with what's going on'. When the breath starts to become 'beautiful' there is no more in-breath, there is no more out-breath, there is just breath. The meditation object is becoming more and more refined, more and more simple. There is just the continuous feeling, or rather the one feeling of this moment. You are so focused in this moment, so *ekaggatā*, one-pointed in time, that there is just the feeling. You know it's the breath beginning, the breath ending, the middle, the end, in-or out-breath, but it all feels the same. It is just breath!

That's what I mean by the 'beautiful breath one-pointed in time', just one experience only. From that stage *nimmittas* well up from within. At times people have a problem at this stage of the meditation: should we stay with the *nimmittas* or should we return to the breath? Sometimes the best thing to do is just to remember the metaphor of all these things rising from within, like the cool spring of water welling

up from within the lake in which you are now. Allow that *nimmitta* to come right within the centre of this breath happening now. If the *nimmitta* is not strong, you can only just see it with the breath around it – the cool fresh water in the centre with the warmer water of breath on the outside, like a ring. You are still aware of the beautiful breath but with the *nimmitta* in the middle. This is what happens if the *nimmitta* is strong enough: there is a flow of cool beautiful water, powerful enough to push the breath right off the edges of the mind, and all you'll have left is the *nimmitta*. If the *nimmitta* is not strong it will sink back again and just the warm waters of the beautiful breath will remain. You're not ready yet. Whatever happens, it's a natural process and all you do is watch. The Buddha said it's a natural process; you do not need to make any resolutions, it happens all by itself. In fact it's best if you step out of the way as soon as possible. That's why we call them 'stages of letting go'. So allow each stage to come up within the next, to come from within the stage you are in now. It's like a lotus opening up. The inner petals of the lotus are within the ones appearing to you now.

Mutti is just opening up the stages of meditation, opening up the beautiful breath, not abandoning it, not trying to get rid of it but opening it up. You open it up, you abandon what's caging it, what's keeping it from going further – open it up and you find the *nimmitta* starts to be very brilliant. What you do next is the same thing again. From that *nimmitta*, from the very centre of the *nimmitta*, flows the cool beautiful water of *jhāna*. You don't need to move towards the *nimmitta* or do anything. Just allow the *nimmitta* to be there at the very centre of the experience. In the same way that the breath is pushed to the edges of your mind by the beautiful cool waters of the *nimmitta*, so, using the same simile, the *jhānas* just push the *nimmitta* to the edges of the mind. The *nimmitta* is gone and you're left with the *jhānas*.

The Ending of Everything

If we want to go to the second *jhāna* it comes from the very centre of the first *jhāna*, pushing out the first *jhāna* like the cooler, purer water coming from the spring pushing the old pure water to the edges of the spring and then out from your perception – that's how *samādhi* happens. You find that this only happens when you take relinquishment as the central theme (*ārammaṇa*) of your meditation. In the Indriya

Samyutta there is something that impressed me as a young monk. It must have been twenty three years ago, when I saw this. It says that the mind which has the *ārammaṇa*, the mood, the inclination, of *vossagga*, easily attains *samādhi*, easily attains *ekaggatā citta*, it reaches one peak. *Vossagga* and *paṭinissagga* are pretty much the same words, *vossagga* means abandoning, giving up and opening, freeing, doing nothing. All of these Pāli words are part of the meaning of the third noble truth.

If that is the inclination of the mind, if that is what you are holding in the mind, if it's the theme of the mind, if that's what the mind is tending towards, then you are tending towards the third noble truth, and the mind opens up and the *jhānas* come all by themselves. Never think 'I can do *jhānas*' or 'I can't do *jhānas*' because both are stupid statements. That's why I get a bit peeved sometimes when people say they can't do *jhānas*, because if they only knew it, what they are saying is really technically true. Get the 'I' out of the way and *jhānas* just happen. It's not 'I can do *jhānas*': *jhānas* just happen when you get out of the way, when you let go and you follow the third noble truth.

For one who experiences *samādhi* there is no need to make resolutions, to choose, or decide, 'Oh, may I see things as they truly are' (*yatā bhūta-nānadassana*): it's a natural process, it happens as an automatic consequence, for one who achieves *samādhi*. You are seeing truly all the insights that come up from the process of meditation which produces *jhāna*. It is blocked by the second noble truth but what produces it is the third noble truth. You are actually experiencing those two noble truths for yourself; you're seeing the heart of them, the meaning of them. You're seeing what the Buddha was pointing to when he talked about those truths: not just ideas but actually seeing what craving is. You're not just having ideas about letting go of craving, not just ideas about what *cāga paṭinissagga mutti anālaya* means, but you've actually done it. You have *cāga-ed*, you've *paṭinissagga-ed*, you've *mutti-ed*, you've *anālaya-ed*, to anglicise those Pāli words. You've done it and that's the result. You've let go and this is the bliss of letting go. This is the reward. You are seeing things as they truly are. That's the reason I get a bit disappointed sometimes when people say, "Oh, Ajahn Brahm just teaches *jhāna*, just teaches *samatha*, he doesn't teach insight practice." That's a ridiculous statement. Anyone who teaches *jhāna*

teaches insight and anyone who teaches insight teaches *jhāna*. The two go together. You're seeing through experience, not just through thinking or theorising.

Experience is worth so much more than any thoughts, ideas, books, or words. The theory and the words are only pointing to the experience that I'm talking about now. You experience these states of deep meditation and then you know what the absence of craving is, because you've seen craving disappear. In the worn old simile of the tadpole in the lake, only when the tadpole grows into a frog and leaves the lake does it know what water is. Only when you've left craving behind do you know what craving is. These are states clearly said by the Buddha to be beyond craving, blindfolding Māra, where Māra cannot go. The Buddha said these *jhāna* states are pregnant with wisdom; wisdom follows naturally. That is why the Buddha said that from *samādhi* you do not need to make resolutions. It happens naturally. That's why after you've emerged from a *jhāna* you don't need to say, 'What shall I do next?' Shut up! Just allow the process to happen. Have faith and confidence in what the Buddha taught. You just go along for the ride and see what happens next.

If it's real insight, *yathā-bhūta-nāṇanadassana*, seeing things as they truly are, as opposed to seeing things as they seem to be, it only happens when the five hindrances are abandoned, usually after a *jhāna*. When this happens, real insight gives rise to *nibbidā*, the rejection of the world. Seeing things as they truly are one gets *nibbidā*, a distaste for the five senses, negativity towards those things, aversion towards those things. It is the mind disengaging from the five senses when craving has been seen, and letting them go. Seeing things as they truly are! *Saṃsāra* is seen very clearly to be *dukkha* and out of that seeing arises revulsion for the wheel of *saṃsāra*, pushing one off the wheel. It is a beautiful Pāli word *nibbidā*. Basically if you don't know what *nibbidā* is you haven't yet seen things as they truly are! This is part of the process. You can't say, 'Oh, may I experience *nibbidā*. Oh, may I not experience *nibbidā* – I don't want to leave *saṃsāra*, I want to stay for a long time; life is good, life is fine, and it's nice being in the monastery'. *Nibbidā* happens whether you like it or not. It's not part of a self. It's not part of what you want or what you don't want. Those things have to fade away and disappear. If you see things as they truly are that's the reason you can't make any Bodhisatta vows. *Nibbidā* just happens, it

pushes you out of *saṃsāra* whether you like it or not. ‘*Seeing things as they truly are*’ is the force that ends rebirth. You don’t need to make any resolutions; it’s a natural, automatic process.

Seeing that the world has nothing to hold you, gives rise to *virāga*, the fading away of interest in the world of craving, the letting go of *saṃsāra* and the letting go of the five *khandhas*, including the letting go of consciousness. It’s not me letting go of *saṃsāra*, it’s not me detaching myself from the world, it’s me fading away. It’s consciousness fading away, it’s all *saṅkhāras*, all *saññās*, all *vedanās*, all bodies fading away, and that leads to the disappearance, *nirodha*, cessation. If someone is fading away they don’t need to make a resolution, ‘May I fade away? May I cease? May consciousness cease?’ You can’t make that determination, ‘May I cease?’ If you did, that’s called *vibhava taṇhā*. That’s the annihilationist craving, the craving for non-existence; you can’t do it that way. Trying to kill oneself, that is annihilate oneself, is impossible, it takes a ‘me’ to kill me. It’s like trying to eat your head; you can’t eat your own head, it’s impossible. This is why interest fades away and leads to *nirodha*. This cessation is the ending of everything.

Sometimes people get afraid. It is bleak, thinking of *Nibbāna* as cessation, ending! Whether we like it or not, that’s just what happens. We don’t have any say in it. So there are no preferences, bleak or not bleak; it’s just a word to describe these things, this is just nature. In fact it is only when people have a sense of ‘self’ that they think it’s bleak. You know that beautiful saying in the *suttas*, ‘the *Ariyas*, who have seen this, say it is *sukha*, say it is beautiful and happy, but the *puthujjanas*, the ones who haven’t see this, say it is *dukkha*, suffering’. What the *Ariyas* say is ultimate bliss, the *puthujjanas* say is bleak. That’s the difference between an *Ariya* and a *puthujjana*.

Nirodha leads to *Nibbāna*, cessation, the ending of everything, and it’s a natural process. So this whole path of Buddhism is all about non-self. The more you can let go and allow the process to happen and the less you rely upon ‘self’ – that stubbornness of conceit and ego – the more peaceful, happy, and beautiful this path becomes, and the faster you go to liberation. The Buddha said there are four types of practice, the ‘fast and the happy’, and the ‘fast and the difficult’ full of suffering; the

‘slow and the happy’, and the ‘slow and the difficult’ full of suffering. Whether it’s fast or slow depends on the power of one’s *indriyas*. If you’ve got lots of faith and confidence, which is *saddhā*, you will have lots of energy and you will have lots of mindfulness; *samādhi* will come and wisdom will come. If you’ve got lots of *saddhā* it’s a very fast path but if your cravings, your defilements, especially your illusions of a self, are very strong there will be a lot of suffering. The stronger your perception of self and ego – the ‘me’ – the harder this path becomes and the more pain it engenders. So be selfless and let go of this sense of me and mine. Find out that it is only a bubble, it’s an illusion that we’ve allowed to grow in our consciousness. Nothing is stable there! You don’t exist – face up to it! It’s a great relief; so you’ve nothing to worry about then. In this way the path becomes happy and fast. Fast into *jhānas*, fast into insight, fast into Enlightenment! It gives you a lot of happiness and bliss to follow that path, but it also gives you all the insights that you read about in the *suttas*. You are following in the footsteps of the Buddha. *The jhānas are the footsteps of the Buddha.*

All these things are to be experienced for yourself. If you get released you find that Enlightenment is possible even in these days, as long as you follow the example of the Buddha. It’s in monasteries like this that the Buddha lived; it is practices like this that the Buddha practised. You can check in the *suttas*, and you will find that this is the way. So don’t mess around, and don’t waste time.

May you all achieve Enlightenment tonight!