

On the vital importance of one's mind's training being G R A D U A L

Bhikkhu Sambodhi

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So maybe I will start with some quite long-winded introduction. At first I would like to clarify, on the way here I stopped at Maui and I met one local Caucasian American, and when I told him Buddha's teaching, he didn't understand what I meant. Do you understand Buddha's teaching? He didn't understand it's Buddha's, but because American pronunciation I think is "Boo-da", something like that. And I pronounce it as it is standard in Sri Lanka, "Boo-da". I think Indians don't have problem with understanding it because Pāli language is close relative to Hindi and many other Indian languages. So for them it's not a problem, but I suspect for some Americans it could be a problem to understand. So you understand this because I'm going to use it quite often.

I normally don't use words "Buddhism" and "Buddhist" because Buddha didn't teach Buddhism. Buddhism is British invention in the similar way as Hinduism is. Anyway, it doesn't matter. So I trained myself to use Buddha's teaching or Dhamma instead of Buddhism because these two things like Buddhism and Dhamma or authentic Buddha's teachings, it's not the same thing. It should not be conflated or used interchangeably because these two things are different.

So this general long-winded introduction is aimed at helping you to understand how it happens that the Dhamma or teaching about reality appears in the world and how it is completely natural for the Dhamma eventually to disappear. So we know this from, I think, Indig Hanukkah, the first collection of Buddha's discourses that the Buddha described. There are some descriptions of, I would say, cosmology, Buddha's cosmology, or of how worlds develop. Most of the time, one more question from you. How many of you believe that rebirth exists, that there is rebirth? Some people are doubtful about it. Some people are not. Okay, that's normal.

To those who are doubtful, I recommend to check 70 years of research at University of Virginia. I think this research proves quite without a doubt that there is a rebirth. Psychiatrist Professor Jan Stevenson collected about 3,000 records of children remembering past lives. Some of these memories can be verified. One can go into historical records and can actually check that this person existed in the past. And some facts can be verified. I would say it's not hard science evidence, but it supports this idea of rebirth so strongly that I think people who can open their minds to this thing, I think for them it's quite easy to accept that there is rebirth. Because without rebirth, actually, Buddha's teachings would not make sense and would not be needed, basically.

All right, so in Digha Nikāya, in this collection, there are a few suttas where Buddha describes how the world, how it is in the world, and how dhamma arises. Most of the time in this universe, which is a universe of not just matter but also the mind, the consciousness, the mind is part of the reality. In this

world of mind and matter, most of the time, the true nature of life or existence is not known. People are just believing in various things like God, creator, and so on, and they keep being reborn without any beginning. Buddha said there is no beginning, and if they don't know the dhamma, this round of rebirth continues infinitely.

But it's in the nature of this universe that from time to time, someone exceptional, very exceptional, realizes the truth. That's the discovery of the dhamma, and this person is then called Buddha. It's title, right? This last historical person who attained this enlightenment was Siddhartha Gautama in India about 25 centuries ago. And he himself mentioned six previous Buddhas. And the first one or two were 92 eons ago, right? And if you count 92 divided by 6, that's about one Buddha per 15 eons. Eons is extremely long time. Nobody can really describe how it is.

But it's extremely rare. And when the dhamma is discovered by this exceptional person, that person, if it is Sama, Samabuddha, I'm talking about Sama, perfectly enlightened ones. There are many more who are called Pacheka Buddhas, but who realize the truth but are not able to teach it. It's not easy, even if you know the truth, how it is with life and existence. It's still possible not to be able to teach it to others in such a way that they can also realize it, understand it for themselves. So these Pacheka Buddhas or silent Buddhas are much more common, but because they don't start teaching, they don't enter history. And we don't know about them unless a Pacheka Buddha, a perfectly enlightened Buddha mentions them.

So then we know that they existed. So I disregard these, but these Pacheka Buddhas, Sama, Samabuddhas, perfectly enlightened ones are much more rare, and they are capable of teaching the dhamma to others effectively enough. So they start teaching, and a number of their disciples become themselves fully enlightened. Now, when the Buddha is alive, and there are many of his enlightened disciples around, that's the best possible state for the dhamma presence in the world. Now once the Buddha passes away, the true dhamma, true teachings, or saddhamma continue with the time. They continue for some time. As long as the first generation of enlightened disciples are alive, the dhamma is safe, like knowledge of the dhamma is safe. But when the first generation passes away, everybody has to die sooner or later. And as time continues, the number of truly enlightened followers of the Buddha, not Buddhists, followers of the Buddha, the number of them is getting smaller and smaller. And eventually, with the passage of time, various ideas become introduced, new ideas.

And also, teachings or their knowledge are moving through one place where it was originally taught by the Buddha himself, are moving into different geographic areas, into different cultures, completely different cultural backgrounds. And from those cultures, new ideas are being introduced. And this is basically an inevitable process of delusion. This is a little controversial, and I'm quite surprised that it is not being talked about at all, basically. So new ideas are introduced, and old ideas, which were taught by the Buddha, are gradually, through slight incremental changes in understanding, or maybe changing of the wording, which is not preventable. This is a completely natural process. Eventually,

the true dhamma or teaching that has liberating potential is basically lost, forgotten. And this happens after every Buddha passes away. And in between, these periods of time, between two times when the Buddha's teachings are known, is extremely long. So now we are 25 centuries after the Buddha, when the Buddha said that true dhamma would last only 500 years. So you can imagine that probably what we understand as dhamma or as Buddha's teachings is not all correct. Right? Is it acceptable? Yeah.

So one of the teachings I suspect was a little bit lost is teaching on gradual training. I myself started, or came across Buddha's teachings in 1992 when I was studying psychology, and I started with the Burmese tradition, Mahasi method. Have you heard about it? Mahasi. I think these famous teachers, American teachers like Joseph Goldstein and I'm not sure, Jack Kornfield, they started also Mahasi. By the way, my first teacher was a Czech psychologist who also came across Mahasi method in India in 1968. And he was there with this Indian teacher, Anagarika Munindra, at the same time as Joseph Goldstein, a young one. So it comes from the same source.

So I was introduced to Buddha's teachings and meditation through Mahasi, through this Czech teacher. As a layman, I went for two-week intense retreats, Mahasi. My introduction was actually precisely the opposite of gradual training. So I just heard as a psychologist, I heard about this meditation course and I found it attractive and exotic. So that is why it was attractive to me also, because it was exotic. I had no idea about anything about Buddha's teachings. I just knew the word "Buddha" and "Buddhism." Nothing else.

So I went to this retreat and I sat down cross-legged and I think before any teaching I was asked to sit, to close my eyes and sit without movement for 45 minutes and not to move. So that was terrifying for me. I had panic attack during the sitting and not being able to move and just to watch the breath was like, it felt like impossible. But because of social pressure I had to do that. So the only option for me was to basically exercise the power and push against it. So only many years later I understood that this was completely wrong way to come to meditation.

Because if you read Buddha's formulation of gradual training, this formal meditation basically comes only as sixth step. And for me it was first step. And I didn't know, I was just following instruction. Then I received some teachings on this retreat, which was only three-day retreat, like longer weekend. So I even remember the date of my first sitting, 7th of May, 1992. And what gained my interest was teaching on kamma and later also teaching that I read in a book, Anatta. I thought Anatta was cool idea. Non-self, you know, there is nobody here. Even now this voice that you hear, there is nobody behind it. There is no knowledge beforehand what I am going to say in next sentence. It just comes by itself, I don't know. I just, the idea arises of a sentence and then the mind needs to stay with this idea until the whole idea comes out of the mouth word by word. And only after that next idea arises. It's happening like that.

So this idea of Anatta seemed really cool. Because of this I decided, okay, maybe I should be Buddhist. So I decided on the way from this three-day retreat in the train, I also remember this moment in 1992, when I decided, okay, now I am Buddhist. Only like three or four years later I decided, okay, no, I am not

a Buddhist, I am Buddha's follower. And it was like 20 something years later. I stopped being Buddhist, but I became, I hope, true Buddha's follower. Yeah, anyway, so I was following Mahasi method for a long time. And I even went in 1995 for intense ten months retreat in Mahasi center and I meditated Mahasi method or how it is conducted in Mahasi centers, not just in Burma, but I think everywhere, is this idea of really intense meditation, basically formal meditation.

So it's one hour of sitting, one hour of walking, one hour of sitting, one hour of walking, pretty much throughout the whole day. So it's like 12 hours of formal meditation. Curiously, I never heard teaching on gradual training anywhere for a long time. But this is the way it is conceived, it's actually not gradual training. What I understood much later is that these first five steps are really important and basically formal meditation is not as important as these formal four or five steps beforehand.

So I guess, so I think this is one of the elements which got pretty much lost for our times, you know, gradual training. I don't intend to criticize Burmese tradition, but I think it's lost in this tradition. So what are these initial steps? So interestingly enough, the first step, there are many different Buddha's discourses in scriptures where Buddha gives teaching on this gradual training. And it's more or less detailed in different sutras, the most detailed, if you are interested to read the sutra later, it has been translated very well by Bhikkhu Bodhi and published as a separate book. It's called *Sāmaññaphala*, Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship.

So it's a very detailed teaching on this gradual training given by the Buddha to King Ajatasattu, so to a lay person. But Buddha knew better what and how to teach. It's kind of curious because it's actually teaching, this gradual training is mainly teaching aimed at monastics, because the first step in this teaching is to become monastic, ordaining. And this is not contemplated very often at these times, secular times. I suspect that the idea of secular Buddhism, secular Buddhism is Buddhism without monasticism. I don't know.

So, Buddha himself was a monk, and at the Buddha's time, it didn't happen very often that lay followers would meditate. Most of the lay people who became enlightened became enlightened while listening to the Buddha's teaching. So instantly. It would be nice, wouldn't it, to become enlightened tonight by just listening. Well, I'm not Buddha. At any rate, it is also a nature of reality of the universe that when this exceptional person appears in the world and becomes somehow some Buddha, it's a kind of nature that many, many beings also are reborn there who are ready to accept. It simply works like that. The universe works like that.

So, Buddha, many disciples became enlightened by just listening to, sometimes just a few sentences, like Mahamoggallāna and Sāriputta became stream-enterers by listening, I think, just three verses. Quite incredible. And also many lay people became enlightened like that. But how does it happen that people become instantly enlightened by just listening to someone teaching the Dhamma? Why does it happen to them and not to us? Any idea? Yes, exactly. They were born as prodigies, meditation prodigies. How prodigies happen? It's because of very natural explanation is that they have practiced

that kind of thing in which they are prodigies in past lives.

So even piano or violin prodigies, it happens because they already have these skills in them from the past. Similarly with meditation, people who had practiced gradual training, the whole training in the past, they are ready. So it can happen for them that quickly. So if any one of you is like that, you can have a chance. But most of us are not. Definitely I was not. I think I had some, I believe I had been a monk before in past lives because when I went to Burma for the first time in 1995 to practice Mahasi, this 10-month intense retreat in Mahasi Center, I did take temporary ordination. And from the first moment I put on robes, it felt completely natural to me. It was like coming home.

So I believe I was a monk, but I don't consider myself a meditation prodigy from the beginning. I had a difficult time from the first sitting and it took a long time for me to get used to cross-legged sitting and to overcome this panic because of not being allowed to move in the sitting. That took some time. Not everybody has these kind of difficulties. I remember my good friend in Prague, I introduced her to meditation and she could sit cross-legged without moving for 90 minutes from the beginning. Even though she didn't practice yoga or anything. I don't know how that is possible because for me it was like just 10 minutes and then it was torture. And I didn't need to practice this 10 months before I was able to be comfortable for 90 minutes while cross-legged sitting. While for her it was from the first sitting. I cannot understand. But I think she had a better paramis for this meditation than myself.

Anyway, if we had practiced gradual training in past lives, then it's possible to become enlightened quickly. But at the Buddha's time all the lay practitioners who became Arya Puggalas, enlightened ones, any stage up to anagami, did so just by listening to Buddha, not through meditation. So for those who need to practice gradual training, all those steps in this life, for the Buddha at the Buddha's time it was most natural if they were really motivated to attain liberation or at least the first stage of liberation it was to ordain, to become monastic.

And what does that mean? By ordaining you become basically meditation professional. You don't need to waste time by making a living and all these worries about making enough money to support oneself and so on. You just don't have that. You become meditation professional and you have all the time, thanks to the Buddha, by the way. It's unbelievable, I am still at awe that even 25 centuries later there is still enough support for monastics to live this kind of life. It's unbelievable. Especially in Sri Lanka and in Theravada countries, it's like this level of generosity for monastics is unbelievable. So it has been established like this by the Buddha and also it kept going into the future thanks to efforts of monastics and thanks to also support of lay community. It's kind of mutual or shared project.

Keeping the Dhamma going into the future is a shared project of both monastics and lay supporters. If monks or monastics were not supported by lay people, the order would die out and the Dhamma would disappear much faster because the first five centuries it was maintained in existence in the world by monastics. Learning Buddha's discourses by heart and teaching them to the next generation of monastics and so on. So it's kind of, thanks to all of those generations, we are still here and listening

and talking about the Dhamma. So this is the first step. I am quite surprised that I didn't understand this earlier. I just came, I understood only a few years ago this, that about difference in practicing the meditation and the Dhamma as monastic or lay practitioner, that it's basically the same difference like for instance playing tennis as professional tennis player or as amateur. Can amateur tennis player become a winner of Grand Slam? Probably not, right? If you really want to win Grand Slam, you definitely have to be professional tennis player.

So you must have all the time available for training. So in meditation it's extremely similar. If you are really intent on real enlightenment, then why not to become monastic? There are exceptions again. There are some practitioners who cultivated gradual training enough in the past so maybe they can make it in lay life. But it's extremely rare, I would say. So this is the first step, becoming monastic. I am not saying that it's not worthwhile to practice this path as lay person, right? But one should be realistic in expectations, what one can get from it.

Second step, maybe I might read the passage where the Buddha describes this. I think it's quite nice. When the Buddha describes this first stage, first step. Now, you notice if you read original scriptures that there is indeed gender bias there. Because it's mostly about males. Yeah, there is... This is theme for another talk about this, why it is and why all this discussion about equality, it is based on wrong view basically. Because males and females are artificial terms. It's just temporary casing, body. Any being is sometimes born in male body, sometimes in female body.

When a being is born in female body, at the beginning this sets framework or limits to what karma can bring result within this frame and what cannot. And the same when a being is born in male body. Again, this is from the beginning, it sets some limits to what past karma can bring fruits and which one cannot. Some karmas can bring result only when a being is born in male body, for instance. So if that person is born in female body, then that karma will have to wait until some other time when that being is born in male body. You understand, right? Is it understandable?

So, yeah, just digression, sorry. So it's formulated for male, but it applies to females as well. A householder or a householder's son or one born into some other family hears the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, he gains faith in the Tathagata. Endowed with such faith, he reflects, "The household life is crowded, a path of dust. Going forth is like the open air. It's not easy for one dwelling at home to lead a perfectly complete, perfectly purified, holy life, bright as a polished conch. Let me then shave off my hair and beard and put on saffron robes and go forth from home to homelessness." After some time, he abandons his accumulation of wealth, be it large or small. He abandons his circle of relatives, be it large or small. He shaves off his hair and beard, puts on saffron robes, and goes forth from home to homelessness.

So I thought, why I am dwelling on this first step for so long is that I think that in American Buddhism, this is heavily underestimated. I hope it's not too threatening for you or too challenging, this kind of idea. I sort of feel that even if lay practitioners are not ready to become monastics, not everybody

can. It's a kind of nature of reality, again, that only a small percentage of those who gain faith in the Tathagata become monastics. And it's like that in Theravada countries as well.

When I stay in the jungle alone in Sri Lanka, I go every morning into a village for a pindapath, and when I go back, I see people toiling, working hard in paddy fields, scorching sun, and they are plowing with these water buffaloes in the mud. And so I always am wondering, why don't they become monks or nuns? Why do they keep doing all of this? Because they can see me. I am walking past, passing by them, happy and comfortable, and going back to my solitary kuti and meditating there the whole day, being alone, being peaceful, not worrying about growing rice and stuff. So they see me, and they could do the same thing. It's open to everyone who decides, but they don't. So this is nature, the nature of the human realm, that only a few... And I think it's also given by past experiences, accumulation of experiences and understanding.

So it's not... I would recommend American Buddhists to think about it a little bit, and maybe to change the idea about the importance of... If anyone is not ready to become a monastic, that's fine, nobody should be pressed or forced, but one should not blind oneself to think that it's not important, that it can be just removed from Buddhism, secular Buddhism, Buddhism without monastics. I suspect that's what it means.

Anyway, so the second step... I have some... Yeah, so the second step is noble aggregate of moral discipline, so purification of conduct. Now in this sutta which I mentioned at the beginning, Sāmaññaphala Sutta, "Discourse on the Fruits of Reclusheship," this section on sila is longest. So I sort of imagine the development of the path of dhamma or gradual training as kind of building of Shwedagon Pagoda. I don't know whether you know Shwedagon Pagoda in Burma. It's shaped like this, circular, and shaped like this. The foundational layer is largest, and that's what is meant by purification of sila. One basically needs to purify one's conduct really well.

This foundation of virtue needs to be really well established, and I would say first before one comes to intense meditation, at least longer intense retreat. One should spend enough time to practice at least five precepts consistently, which means refraining from killing anything, from taking what is not meant to be taken, from sexual misconduct, which means adultery, from wrong speech, which means not just refraining from lying, but also gossiping and using hurtful words and so on, and then from taking intoxicants. One thing I forgot to mention also, why going forth is important, because as a monastic you give away all your possessions, at least 99% of them, and this fulfills also dharma, giving, generosity.

I always wondered why it was that monks or nuns don't practice giving, but that's because they give away everything before they become monks, so by that they basically fulfilled this giving. This is not easy, right? It's not easy to give away everything and to abandon all the relatives and so on. So it's an incredible boost in energy, in spiritual energy, when a person is able to do this kind of thing. So these first steps basically fulfill also the dharma. So then it comes sila, this is like purification of virtue, and you could read that monastics have how many different precepts they have to keep. It's

quite extensive, but okay, for lay practitioners, practicing dharma can sort of approximate going forth, becoming monastic. You just keep giving what you can afford as a lay person, and that's training in letting go of attachment to possessions. I can also bring in a little bit of personal experience.

When I started practicing as a student, at that time also the Prague Buddhist Center started in the very center of Prague, and I began to attend meditation sessions. There were donation books there also for support of the center. Somehow it was natural for me to start giving right away. So the first three times I think I dropped a coin, and then I realized a coin is just not enough, so I started giving more and more, and eventually I ended up giving a few thousand. But I don't know anyone among my Buddhist friends who would do this. I was basically the only one who understood the importance of giving. And it is like that until this day.

Almost nobody among Czechs understands this. I suspect maybe, I don't know whether it is in this way also in other Western countries, but giving seems to me to be extremely also underestimated as a part of practice. And it's a great contrast from what I know from Sri Lanka or Thailand or Burma. It's an unbelievable difference in generosity between Western culture and East Asian culture. It's something difficult to describe. Because for people from these countries it's such a part of their nature to give, to keep supporting monastics, that there is no comparison. So the reason why I am talking about this is to offer you this kind of reflection. Not just importance, extreme importance of monasticism within the Dhammapada, but also of this giving. It's not beginner's practice. It's basically foundation.

If you don't build foundation, you cannot build the structure above it. It's not possible. So people who start like myself with intense meditation without doing anything before, it's like trying to start building this Shwetagang Pagoda from this path. Building the structure in the mid-air. It just doesn't work. So purification of Sila is also quite a large part of the practice, a foundational part, and if it's not fulfilled, the intense meditation can reach only a little far. So it can be also imagined like trying to build this. You can build the pagoda by layers, or you can build it by building a small pagoda in the middle, like this.

And if you start with just a small foundation, you can go only this high. So then you need to enlarge the foundation, and you can go a little bit higher than before, and you keep enlarging foundations and building like that. A little bit we may imagine to start just with meditation and without practicing all these steps before, it's like trying to build this pagoda on a small foundation. So it can go a little bit up, you know, but only to a certain limit, and then you feel stuck in meditation. And you keep meditating, meditating, meditating, and it doesn't go anywhere. So you need to go back and start enlarging the foundation.

So, moral discipline. And then there is nobler restraint over the sense faculties. So you train your mind to become aware of where you place your attention within the five senses, you know. So what you look at, what you listen to, smells, tastes, and touches. And I think for layperson, for a monk, for a monastic, it's like, for instance, when we walk on the street, we are not supposed to look around like this. We are supposed to look down and walk, and only when we need to see where we are going, we look up, you

know. So that's the strictest way of practicing this.

For laypeople, I think it's pretty much good if they just become aware of where they are looking. So if you can become aware before you look somewhere, so you have this intention, and you do it with mindfulness. And you know where you are looking, and then you know the response. You know, the mind responds on this object you are looking at with craving or with ill will. And if sometimes from time to time, if you know that you intend to look somewhere, and you know it is connected with desire, sometimes you can try to say no, so not to look there. So this is kind of interesting practice, and you can watch how the mind feels afterwards.

You know, when you say no, you say no to a tendency to look at some desirable object, and then you look how you feel afterwards. If you do this repeatedly, you probably notice some greater peace maybe in the heart. So this is the third step, it's noble restraint over the sense faculties. And then there is so-called noble mindfulness and clear comprehension. Now if you read exactly the instruction, how it is taught by the Buddha, then you would know that this is what we normally call mindfulness in daily activities. So you train yourself to be fully aware of what you are doing. Normally when we do something out of habits, we do it quite well, but while we are doing it, we are thinking about something else. It's completely possible.

So the mind is programmed like this. I had a friend when I worked as a journalist, he was a photojournalist, so we once went by car, he was driving, and he said it was completely possible for him to drive through the whole Prague. So it's capital, you know, so it's lots of cars, traffic lights, and so on. And he was able to drive through the whole Prague, and only at the end he realized he was at the end, and he had no idea how he'd get there. He was lost in his thoughts.

So this is opposite of mindfulness in daily activities. So we are trying to prevent this by making effort to whenever we are doing something to be completely fully with it and to be completely aware of it, you know, what we are doing. One way to make oneself confident that one is there is if mind remains silent. If mind keeps thinking something while doing something, then we are not there. So if we are doing something while mind is silent, while there is no thinking, then that's probably correct. So this is noble mindfulness and clear comprehension.

And the fifth step is noble contentment. So this is being content with what one has, you know, not to keep buying things when you already have what you need. For monastics, it's contentment with four requisites, with food which we get on alms round, with robes, just standard practice would be just to have three pieces of this kind of bed sheet, you know, and with lodgings. I spent a few years in kutis, in huts in central part of Sri Lanka, and I had only three walls, small kuti, small hut, with three walls made of mud and some roof, and that was more than enough for me. So yeah, contentment with whatever lodging we get, and contentment with medicinal requisites when we fall sick, so whatever we can get, we are supposed to be content with it.

Yeah, for lay practitioners, simply not to indulge in shopping, I would say. And if we have car which

works, there is no need to buy new car, as long as it works. My father had old Skoda car for 25, 24 years, I think, but that was in the past, during communism. But I think my brother, this car which he had for quite a few years until someone crashed into them, so they had to buy a new car. But yeah, there is no need to change car every four or five years, I think. And similar with all other things, you know, just as long as it is working, you just keep doing. Yeah, noble contentment. And only after that it comes to intense meditation. So that's how Buddha describes it.

I wonder whether I have quotation here or not. Yeah. Yeah, here it is. So I will read how Buddha describes this sixth step, which is intense meditation only now. "Endowed with this noble aggregate of moral discipline, this noble restraint over the sense faculties." One should be endowed with it before the meditation. "Endowed with this noble aggregate of moral discipline, this noble restraint over the sense faculties, this noble mindfulness and clear comprehension," or mindfulness in daily activities, "and this noble contentment, he resorts to a secluded dwelling, a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a cremation ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After returning from his alms round, following his meals, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and sets up mindfulness before him. Having abandoned covetousness for the world, he dwells with a mind free from covetousness. He purifies his mind from covetousness."

So all this passage is about abandoning five faculties, five, sorry, five hindrances. So that's how intense meditation starts. All is aimed at purifying mind or removing these five hindrances. Do you know five hindrances? Yeah, most of you know. And once the five hindrances are removed, the mind is ready to enter states of strong samadhi. And then this samadhi serves as foundation for developing wisdom, and then enlightenment happens.

So I think it was quite long. I think you are tired already, right? So this is gradual training. So give it a thought and don't underestimate. For me, the most rewarding is really mindfulness in daily activities. And I had to recondition my mind quite forcefully to abandon the idea that only formal meditation matters. Even after I understood that actually for me, even at this stage I think after I had done lots of formal meditation, it feels to me like practicing presence in daily activities is actually more important than formal meditation. Sometimes I get quite good insights and improvements in understanding just by being mindful, for instance, while practicing yoga. It has been quite often more fruitful kind of meditation than formal sitting with closed eyes or formal walking meditation.

So don't estimate it. It's much better if this stage is well developed before actually putting too much stress or emphasis on formal meditation, formal sitting, and so on. One can become enlightened even while practicing mindfulness in daily activities. And one little teaching I might offer for your reflection is the idea about what actually mindfulness is. In Pāli language, in this original language, it's sati. Do you know what sati actually means? It's not mindfulness. Memory. I am kind of surprised why nobody gives much thought to this fact that actually sati is not mindfulness but memory. How is English word mindfulness connected to memory?

So I started practicing as a Czech, so I didn't use this English word mindfulness, which is actually quite good. It's actually a good term, I think. But in Czech Republic we used a different Czech word, which is in my opinion now, as I understand it, really misleading. It's not accurate at all. Mindfulness is not misleading, but it's quite vague.

Probably people, when they come to it first, at first they don't know what it is. They wonder what happens, how they come, how they decide what mindfulness means. Now if they are wise enough or discerning enough, maybe they might decide, "Okay, I don't know what mindfulness is, so I need to discover for myself through practice what that word means, what kind of quality it is." If it's an ideal case, they keep their mind open and they wait. If they adopt some idea of what mindfulness is, they don't hold to it too strongly. I suspect in some cases maybe that they quickly decide what mindfulness is for themselves, and then they stick to it even if it is not correct. This happened to many of my friends in the Czech Republic. They just take this Czech word, and then when they hear quite correct description of mindfulness in English, but it doesn't correspond to this Czech word, they think that that's wrong. They don't realize that this Czech word is actually misleading. It's kind of an unfortunate translation for it. But because I knew from the beginning that this is probably not completely correct translation, I kept to it only just slightly.

So after four years of intense meditation as a monk, suddenly I could see this quality of sati directly in my mind, and about two, three days later in meditation, suddenly this word came to me, which appeared to fit much better in Czech than in this original term, and I decided that sati was actually better described by presence. Presence. And only recently I decided I would also in English start using more presence than mindfulness, even though mindfulness is not incorrect, but it's kind of vague. I think presence is more concrete, more instructive, because it gives a better idea of what you are supposed to do. So when you are practicing sati in daily activities, it feels like you are present when you know fully what you are doing. It's like presence. And you can practice this at any time, any situation. You don't need to wait until you have time for a formal meditation.

And what is only needed to develop this faculty, you basically need to remember to be present. So this is how it is connected with memory. You basically need to remember to be present, or remember present moment. So what is needed to correctly cultivate presence is to keep remembering it, and the right effort to be present is... My idea, latest idea, is that most of the effort should be directed exactly to just remembering, nothing else. So if you are trying to be present and you notice some kind of tension anywhere in the body, then it's not the right, correct effort, because you don't need to tense up to remember.

For remembering, what you need to do for remembering is what you do normally when you try to remember something. You need to keep repeating it. So whenever you remember, "Now I was not present, but now when I remember, I am present." And since then, you just need to decide, "So now I try to keep this presence, sense of presence, and keep it." And after some time, mind forgets. So

forgetting is opposite of sati, right? It's forgetting. So when mind forgets, you cannot do anything until you remember, or until mind remembers. In the state of forgetfulness, there is no way to do anything. But only when you remember, at that time, you just need to re-determine, "Okay, now I will try to keep this."

The moment when people or practitioners lose it, lose the path, is when they remember, and they get discouraged. "Now I was not mindful or present for half of the day, and only now I remember. I am hopeless. I forget about it. I cannot do it." This should not happen, because the only person who doesn't keep forgetting is Arhat. That's also quite interesting fact that I realized quite late, that only Arhat has all the five faculties developed fully, including presence. Only Arhat is present continuously without any break. All the rest have some lapses of presence, so the mind forgets. But for Arya Pugas, the moments of not being aware are shorter than for less advanced meditators. So it's a natural process, and we just need to be patient, and whenever the mind remembers, then we start again. A million times a day, or a million times in one hour. It doesn't matter. That's how the practice works, and it cannot practice in any other way, in my opinion.

Okay, so I think I talked too much. Too much information for you. Overload. Information overload. Anyway, it has been recorded, so it can be listened to later again if you forget. [laughter] So I guess now is the time for questions.

You use the mic because it's recorded, as Bhante said, and also people online won't be able to hear your questions if you don't speak into the microphone. So raise your hand, and I'll bring over the microphone. Anybody have questions for Bhante? Well, this is a first.

Question: Thank you very much for the talk today, Bhante. I was curious, I heard once, this was from Luangpor Ganha, I heard him say that there are, I forget how many thousand rules that monastics have to follow. Many thousands, yeah. We usually only hear of maybe, I don't know, some 200 or something of that sort. Plenty, yeah. So maybe if you could share a little bit, because we heard today that the first step is to ordain. But could you share some light on this, and how could one feel at home, for example? But yeah, many questions around this. Thank you.

Bhikkhu Sambodhi: So you want me to mention some of the rules, right?

Question: Yes, and why the difference of 200 and so many thousands, and how as a monastic are you finding, adhering to this?

Bhikkhu Sambodhi: Yeah, nobody can know all the rules. But yeah, the 220 are, it's usually said 227, but actually the last seven are not rules, but procedures for settling disputes. I think 220 rules of conduct. So these are most basic, and every monastic or bhikkhu should adhere to them. Bhikkhunis have many more. They have over 330. So again, gender bias.

So these 220 are the most basic, and everybody should adhere to them. When I asked my Upajayo, Pauk Sayado, who is also Shalaya Catherine's teacher, so I asked him about this, like why is it just

220 rules recited at Pātimokkha on full moon and new moon, and all these other rules, are they not important also? And he said, “No, no, they are also important.” We should keep all of them.” So first of all, nobody is expected to be perfect. Even monastics are not expected to be perfect, so keeping those 220 rules is not so difficult once you learn them. And it’s a path, progress, and we keep learning about different rules, other minor rules along the way, and when we learn this rule, we also adopt it. And it’s a lifelong process.

So the rules you don’t know about, and which are not part of Pātimokkha, you don’t keep them. You don’t know about it, and when you learn the rule, you take it up. But many of those minor rules in the scriptures are not so much relevant for our times. Sometimes even in Pātimokkha, some rules never come into effect, like monk should not enter king’s bedroom without announcement or something. So some of the rules are simply dated and don’t apply to our times. And many of the rules, you never encounter a situation in which you would need that rule, or you could apply it. It’s not so terribly strict. And many of those minor rules are just minor offense, so you clear yourself if you fall into offense by telling about it to another monk, and that’s it.

So it’s not so difficult as it appears on the surface. The most important rules, as you probably know, are these four parājikas, which every monk is supposed to learn during ordination ceremony to make sure that he doesn’t break them. So it’s not committing sexual intercourse with any being, not stealing, not killing a human being intentionally, and not falsely claiming attainment of superhuman state, like enlightenment or jhanas or psychic powers. But interestingly enough, it’s quite possible to fall into any of these parājikas quite innocently without knowing, even after years, it happens. It happened to me. It’s kind of interesting that I almost fell into all four of them without knowing. And something always saved me. For instance, when I was... This is quite interesting. It’s not the only case where generosity saved me from something.

But when I was first ordained in Burma, in Mahasi Center, on this retreat, during meditation there was not much chance to commit anything or transgress because it’s formal meditation, so you don’t have chance to act against the rules. But I was not told by anyone how to correctly disrobe. There is a certain procedure for disrobing to count as real disrobing. It’s not just taking off robes, which is what I thought. I took this English word “disrobe,” so I thought just taking off robe is an act of disrobing, so I did that, and I thought I was a layman. But that was not the case. I was still a monk without knowing about it, and I could have fallen into prajika because of that. You go back to lay life. I was married, by the way, so when I went back to my country, to Prague, I reunited with my wife and so on.

But fortunately I had these two sets of robes, which I became really attached to, and I was fighting with myself with this attachment. I thought, should I take them back to the Czech Republic with me or not? They were really, after 10 months of use, and I had to wash them every day because of lots of sweating and heat in Burma, hot season. It was terrible. But after washing them, they were really pleasant, like cotton, you know, washed. And the color, I became really, I fell in love with the color of them. It was

faded, so one of the set of robes was really this beautiful reddish brown, and the other one was more brownish brown.

But really, I was really sensually attached to those robes. So I was fighting myself with thinking, okay, they will be lying in the wardrobe without being used, and bugs will eat them and mold. So eventually my better self won, and I decided to give those robes to my friend, an older Czech monk who was living nearby. So I washed them nicely, folded them beautifully, and I went to see him in the Mahasi training school, which meant I had to travel by public buses. It was really painful.

But I did it, and when I was giving him the robes, he had me say the correct thing. The correct act of disrobing is that you say, "I am not a monk anymore." And you mean it, and the person has to understand. The person has to speak that language. So he basically forced me to say the right thing, so I was correctly disrobed. If I didn't win this fight over my attachment for robes, I would not be able to ordain again. Something similar happened with all other three rules. I didn't advise my poor grandmother, who was suffering terribly at the age of 87. She fell sick for the first time after 50 years. She never went to see a doctor for 50 years. She was incredibly healthy, but at the age of 87, she fell sick after she had to wait for a train in the middle of the winter in temperatures minus 15 centigrade. How much is it? Fahrenheit. It's something like 20 Fahrenheit.

So she missed the train, and she waited in the middle of the night for another train for three hours in the waiting room, which was not heated. So after this experience, she fell sick, and she was suffering terribly. So I thought it was unlikely she would recover, so I thought I would advise her how to give up will to live to shorten her suffering. If she had followed and died as a result, I would also be paragonal. But I didn't advise her because she made me angry. (laughter) I went to see her after three years of being a monk. I visited my parents, and on that occasion, I also visited her, and she was not happy about me being a monk. She said something which didn't make me happy, so I didn't advise her. But I think she would not follow anyway.

So one needs to study these four rules. They appear on the surface like simple to understand, but there are many subtle nuances of them. And I know some monks who fell, who became non-monks by acting against them, some of them, one of them, unknowingly. So these are most important to keep, and then the rest is redeemable. It's possible to purify oneself from all the rest. That was a long answer. (laughter) (inaudible)

No questions? (inaudible) Well, it was an exhaustive talk. (inaudible) 8:23. (inaudible)

Almost, yeah. Seven more minutes. So I recommend you to give thought about maybe getting used to the word "presence" as meaning of sati as well. Presence, it's kind of, I think, useful. When I decided this presence was the right term for me to understand sati, I was using it for myself in Czech, not in English, and only some years later I came across Eckhart Tolle. Do you know him? So it looks like he became, in my opinion, he might have re-experienced stream entry or something like that independently because he already had it from the past. So he didn't encounter Buddha's teaching before he had this experience.

So he developed the way of teaching independently of Buddhist literature. So he never uses the word “mindfulness” and I discovered that he actually uses also the word “presence.” He keeps talking about presence all the time. His famous book, “Power of Now.”

So I was happy to discover this because it confirmed that I was correct. Basically he also uses just presence. I myself also decided I could replace mindfulness with presence in my talking. I didn’t use it much here because it was not talking about five faculties, five mental qualities, which is what we aim to develop in formal meditation. Or in Bhamana, actually. Bhamana is normally translated as meditation, but again I think a better term is cultivation. Cultivation of five faculties. The five faculties are, like central of them is sati or presence and effort to be present, that’s virya. And the faculty which comes before, which Buddha mentions as first one, is sadha or faith or confidence. And then what comes after presence is samadhi, which is translated normally as concentration, but I think a better translation is stillness. Stillness of attention.

So when you develop enough of these first three faculties, presence, skillful effort to be present, and confidence or faith, then that’s quite, that’s foundation for you to be able to still attention to chosen object. So then it’s easy. If it’s difficult, for instance, to keep being focused on breath or something like that, if it’s difficult, then you need to go back and strengthen presence first. Okay, stillness, and then the last faculty is discernment or wisdom.

So yeah, once you have these four other faculties, discernment grows organically. It’s like organic agriculture, cultivation, organic cultivation of wisdom. Yeah, you cannot really build to develop discernment, and that comes as a result of well-established presence and ability to still attention on one object. What you need to have good discernment of is to discern when you are present and when you are not. This is like beginning of discernment, when you are able to be sure that you are present. You see this quality of presence is there. That’s beginning of discernment. Yeah, so that was, I think, enough.

Question: I have a question. I just wanted to ask how should we develop virya?

Bhikkhu Sambodhi: Virya, yeah. Virya, effort or energy, I was trying or had been trying to sort that out for all those years. It’s not a simple question. What is the right effort? And I think for many, many years, like 20 years, I was making not completely correct right effort in meditation. I think it was like exercising willpower, and it is felt here like tension in the heart. If you notice tension anywhere in the body, either physical tension or sort of emotional tension here, so then probably you need to check what kind of effort you are making.

Now I decided not long ago that probably most of the effort should be directed at what I already mentioned, just remembering to be present. If you put effort into just keeping in mind, keeping in mind is better phrase, keeping in mind to be present. It’s kind of a strange kind of memory. When we talk about memory in general language or remembering, what we mean is when we need to commit to memory like a phone number, we keep repeating it, and then it is there, but it’s not in the mind all the

time. We just remembering means that we can recall it when we need it.

So that's a different kind of memory. This kind of memory is keeping in mind, meaning that you keep it in mind all the time. It's like keeping the phone number in your mind all the time. Can you imagine it? So that would not be recommendable, but keeping present moment in mind continuously, that's what we are aiming at. But we cannot achieve that by willpower. I think it can be only achieved by repeating this process which I described.

So when the mind remembers, "Now I have not been present, but now I remembered," and from that moment of remembering, then the mind is present. So now I just, "Ah, okay, now I will be fully aware of what I am doing," with silent mind. That's mindfulness in daily activities, or presence in daily activities. And you can cultivate this at any moment, at any situation, even though in some situations it's difficult. For instance, the most difficult thing to maintain presence is when you are listening to someone talking like this and understanding, or when you are talking like myself. I only became capable of maintaining presence and knowing that I am present, and at the same time maintaining this speech only very recently, after 24 years practicing as monastic and 8 years before as a layperson.

So it's the most difficult thing. So we don't start practicing or aiming at being perfect in presence while talking or listening to someone talking. We start just with simple activities, like walking on the street alone, or washing dishes, or whatever, or vacuuming, you can maintain. These simple physical activities you can do with full awareness.

So that is why it's also more hopeful to become Grand Slam winner in meditation, because you can actually practice cultivation, because you can practice bhavana at any time while doing anything else. You cannot practice tennis, playing tennis while doing vacuum cleaning. But you can practice presence while doing vacuum cleaning or anything else. So it's a little more hopeful with meditation.

Okay, 8:32. I'm surprised by myself that I managed to talk so long. It doesn't happen very often. I usually am finished within 30 minutes.