

MN 133 Mahā Kaccāna and a Single Excellent Night  
Mahākaccānabhaddekaratta Sutta  
Dhamma Talk presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi  
04-Dec-09

BV: That's better. [laughs]. So, it doesn't seem like anybody else is going to be coming.

ST: ~

BV: So, this is going to be Sutta #133, Mahā Kaccāna and a Single Excellent Night. This is a real interesting sutta.

MN: 133

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājahaga in the Park of the Hot Springs.

BV: My kind of place!

MN:

Then, when it was dawn, the venerable Samiddhi went to the hot springs to bathe his limbs. After bathing he came up out of the water and stood dressed in one robe, drying his limbs. Then, when the night was well advanced, a certain deity of beautiful appearance who illuminated the whole of the Hot Springs, approached the venerable Samiddhi. Standing at one side, the deity said to him:

2. "Monk, do you remember the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had an Excellent Night?'"

"Friend, I do not remember the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had an Excellent Night.' But, friend, do you remember the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had a Single Excellent Night?'"

"Monk, I too do not remember the summary and exposition of 'One Who Had a Single Excellent Night.' But, monk, do you remember the stanza, 'One Who Has Had an Excellent Single Night?'"

"Friend, I do not remember the stanza...

BV: Venerable Samiddhi at this time had only been a monk for about three years. So he hadn't started committing things to his memory very much.

MN:

...But, friend, do you remember the stanza of 'One Who Has Had a Single Excellent Night'?"

"Monk, I too do not remember the stanza of 'One Who Has Had a Single Excellent Night.' But, monk, learn the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had a Single Excellent Night.' Master the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had a Single Excellent Night.' Remember the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had an Excellent Night.' Monk, the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had a Single Excellent Night' is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life."

That is what was said by the deity, who thereupon vanished at once.

3. Then, when the night was over, the venerable Samiddhi went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, sat down at one side, told the Blessed One all that had occurred, and said: "It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would teach me the summary and exposition of 'One Who Has Had an Excellent Night.'"

4. "Then, monk, listen and attend closely to what I shall say." – "Yes, venerable sir," the venerable Samiddhi replied. The Blessed One said this:

5. "Let not a person revive the past  
Or on the future build his hopes;  
For the past has been left behind  
And the future has not been reached.  
Instead with wisdom let him see  
Each presently arisen state;  
Let him know that and be sure of it,

Invincibly, unshakably.  
Today the effort must be made;  
Tomorrow Death may come, who knows?  
No bargain with Mortality  
Can keep him and his hordes away.

{05:00}

BV: He's talking about Death.

MN:  
But one who dwells thus ardently,  
Relentlessly, by day and night –  
It is he, the Peaceful Sage has said, one  
Who has had an excellent night."

6. That is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Sublime One rose from his seat and went to his dwelling.

7. Soon after the Blessed One had gone, the monks considered: "Now, friends, the Blessed One has risen from his seat and gone into his dwelling after giving a summary in brief without expounding the detailed meaning. Who will expound this in detail?" Then they considered: "The venerable Mahā Kaccāna is praised by the Teacher and esteemed by his wise companions in the holy life. He is capable of expounding the detailed meaning. Suppose we went to him and asked him the meaning of this."

BV: Venerable Kaccāna was foremost in expounding the dhamma after he heard it from the Buddha. He had a great memory, almost as good as Ananda's memory.

MN:  
8. Then the monks went to the venerable Mahā Kaccāna and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, they sat down at one side and they told him what had taken place, adding: "Let the venerable Mahā Kaccāna expound it to us."

9. The venerable Mahā Kaccāna replied: "Friends, it is as though a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, thought that heartwood should be sought for among the branches and leaves of a great tree standing possessed of heartwood,

BV: Do you know what heartwood is? It's the middle of the tree where all of the grain of the tree is perfectly straight. Heartwood is very much desirable for building, and that sort of thing.

MN:

after he had passed over the root and the trunk. And so it is with you, venerable sirs, that you think that I should be asked about the meaning of this, after you passed the Blessed One by whom you were face to face with the Teacher. For knowing, the Blessed One knows; seeing, he sees; he is vision, he is knowledge, he is the Dhamma, he is the holy one; he is the sayer, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of the Deathless, the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata. That was the time when you should have asked the Blessed One the meaning. As he told you, you should have remembered it."

10. "Surely, friend Kaccāna, knowing, the Blessed One knows; seeing, he sees; he is vision, he is the Tathāgata. That was the time we should have asked the Blessed One the meaning. As he told us, so we should have remembered it. Yet the venerable Mahā Kaccāna is praised by the Teacher and esteemed by the wise companions in the holy life. The venerable Mahā Kaccāna is capable of expounding the detailed meaning of this summary given in brief by the Blessed One without expounding the detailed meaning. Let the venerable Mahā Kaccāna expound it without finding it troublesome."

11. "Then listen, friends, and attend closely to what I shall say." – "Yes, friend," the monks replied. The venerable Mahā Kaccāna said this:

12. "Friends, when the Blessed One rose from his seat and went to

his dwelling after giving a summary in brief without expounding the detailed meaning, that is:

'Let not a person revive the past...

{09:40}

BV: And then he goes through this whole thing again.

MN:

Who has had a single excellent night,'

I understand the detailed meaning of it to be as follows.

13. "How, friends, does one retrieve the past? Thinking, 'My eye was thus in the past and forms were thus.' One's consciousness becomes bound up in that with desire and lust for that. Because one's consciousness is bound up with desire and lust, one delights in that. When one delights in that, one revives the past.

"Thinking, 'My ear is thus in the past and sounds were thus in the past. My nose and odors...My tongue and flavors...My body and tangibles...My mind was thus in the past and mind-objects were thus in the past.' One's consciousness becomes bound up with desire and lust for that. Because one's consciousness is bound up with desire and lust, one delights in that. When one delights in that, one revives the past. That is how one revives the past.

14. "How does one not revive the past? Thinking, 'My eye was thus in the past and forms were thus.' One's consciousness does not become bound up with a desire and lust for that. Because one's consciousness is not bound up with desire and lust, one does not delight in that. When one does not delight in that, one does not revive the past.

BV: So what is he talking about? Past experiences. It doesn't matter whether it's your eye, or your ear, or your nose, or your tongue, or your body. If you have memory of that in the past then your mind takes off with that and you start thinking about it more and more and

more wishing for it to happen again. And you delight in it and you really want it to be like it was. But it's already gone. It's a dream.

MN:

15. "How, friends, does one build up hope upon the future? Thinking, 'May my eye be thus in the future and forms be thus!' One sets one's heart on obtaining what has not yet been obtained. Because one sets one's heart thus, one delights in that. When one delights in that, one builds up hope upon the future.

BV: So what happens when you start thinking about the future? You're thinking in a dream world. "I want the future to be this way! I want to be rich and famous!" Whatever it happens to be.

MN:

"Thinking, 'My ear may be thus in the future and sounds may be thus in the future, and also with the nose and odors and tongue and flavors, body and tangible, and mind and mind-objects.' One sets one's heart on obtaining what has not yet been obtained. Because one sets one heart thus, one delights in it. When one delights in it, one builds up upon the future. That is how one builds up hope upon the future.

{13:58}

BV: Okay, I'll give you a little story.

I was in Burma, very intensively meditating. This was in 1988 when they had all of their social upheaval. They were shooting people and things like that. And the government said, "We don't want any foreigners in the country. You have to get out." They told us about a week before we had to leave.

So what happened to my mind was I started planning what was going to happen when I got out of Burma. I had a friend in Thailand, he was from England. He was a meditation teacher...reasonably famous. And I started thinking about a project that he and I could do together. I started planning every little detail of it. I thought, "Oh, we're going to get this camera and we're going to take still photos

and we're going to really do this thing up right!" And I kept on planning for that whole week.

And then it got time to leave, so I got on the plane, I went to the monastery where he was staying at...a very big monastery in Thailand. As soon as I got there I found out that he had disrobed and gotten married. Now I had all my plans on that. What good did it do? You see?

You have to let go and stop taking delight in plans. That doesn't mean you can't plan for the future. You have to know what you're going to do tomorrow or next week or when you're going to go on vacation. But you don't keep going over it and over it. In my mind I knew I was going to say this to him and he was going to say that to me and I knew everything that was going to happen. It was all imagination. And then he wasn't even in the country anymore. So I wasted a whole week daydreaming. Wanting something to happen in a particular way and it didn't even come close.

Now, you can watch this happen in your own mind. You want to talk to somebody about whatever and you start making up the conversation in your mind. "I'm going to say this to them and they're going to say that back to me. And I know what the answer of that is and I'll answer in this way." And then when you see that person it doesn't even come close to what you had planned. So there is all of this time spent out of the present moment, not seeing the way mind is working, getting caught in your thoughts, not even knowing you have a body anymore. And you're planning and you're figuring out...

[To student:] You have to start smiling more! Please! [laughs]

ST: ~

...You start planning and thinking about all of the different things that you would like to see happen. But it doesn't have anything to do with reality. It doesn't have anything to do with being in the present moment and seeing how your mind is actually working. You take your mind out of the present moment and you start planning and you

start really wanting something to happen in a particular way. And then when it doesn't, what happens? Suffering! And then you go away and you went, "Ah, I should have said this to him!" Now we're in the past, huh? "I should have said that! I really should have! And then we could have done that and we could do this." Now this is something that happens all the time.

{18:37}

And I'll tell you something. My mother died in February...

What happens when people die that you're very close to is that you start wishing that you had said something or done something for them after they're gone. And you start feeling guilty and it keeps coming up into your mind. And it keeps taking you away from the present moment and you suffer very greatly.

Now this is called grief. Grief isn't one kind of mental state. Sometimes when somebody dies very close you get angry at that person for leaving you. Or you get angry at yourself because you weren't there at the last moment. But all of this kind of thinking causes suffering.

And who is suffering? Who is identifying with all of those thoughts and all of those "shouldas" and "wouldas", all of those ideas? "I" am! And there is a lot of pain that occurs and you keep indulging in it. Remember what I said a little while ago:

What you think and ponder on, that's the inclination of your mind.

You keep thinking about, "I should have done this! I should have said that! I should have been somewhere closer to them! I should have...I should have...I should have!" And your mind is just like it's on a tape deck. It'll come up again, same words, same order, same pain.

Now, I was lucky enough to be able to be with my mother as she died. And the last two days she was drifting in and out of

consciousness and I wasn't able to talk to her anymore. So what did I do? How could I help my mother? Send loving-kindness! She felt that peace and calm. She died almost with a smile on her face. It was like it had just started, a little tiny smile. I had no regrets.

Now what people do when somebody is very sick and you go to the hospital to visit them, you don't know what to do, you don't know what to say, and you feel helpless. Well, it's very easy to take care of that!

I can't take your pain away. Your pain is your pain. My pain is my pain. I allow them the space to have their pain and love them unconditionally. I send them loving thoughts.

{22:09}

Now, I've been with people...I used to go to the hospital three or four times week when I was in Malaysia. People really wanted me to go visit the people that were sick. Some of them were dying of cancer and other diseases. But when I walk in the room I didn't go, "Oh, you poor baby! I feel so sorry for you!" I don't make myself sad because they're in pain. Being sad because they're in pain certainly doesn't help you. And it doesn't help the other person. And I've been with people and their family would walk in the room and they would stay there and they would kind of look down and kind of scrape the ground a little bit and look around, "Oh, you need the window open. Here we'll open the window. Oh, you need it closed! Oh, let's fluff up your pillow!" And then they leave because they don't know what to do!

What does that person that's sick really want more than anything? They want to be loved! They want you to help them. And the way you can help them is by not trying to take their pain away, but by loving them! Now, what happens...I walked into rooms where they were in such pain they were moaning and groaning. Okay, you can moan and groan. I don't care. I can love you anyway. That's what you're learning on this retreat. What to do. You're not helpless, ever! But when you start training your mind to send loving and kind

thoughts, then you can remember, "Ah, this is a good thing to do!"

Now when I would walk into a room and the family would already be there, the person that was in the bed they'd look at me and they'd see a little smile on my face, "Hey, how's it going? What's happening?" And they said it's like fresh air coming in the room where it was real stuffy and hot. When I walk in the room all of a sudden everything cooled down. Why? Because I know I can't take their pain away, but I can love them. And because my mind stays uplifted their mind starts to get uplifted, too. When that happens, before long they're laughing and when they're laughing, when they have a little joke...sometimes it's not even very funny but it makes them laugh and that's good enough for me.

{25:29}

The way your biology is in your body, you have a pineal gland in the middle of your brain. Okay. You have two lobes in your brain. The pineal gland is in between these two lobes of your brain. It's a little tiny thing like that big. But it's in charge of endorphins. Endorphins are the pain killer in the body. Now, if you go into that room and you feel sorry for them and you feel helpless, that person actually has more pain than they really need. What makes that pain go away? Laughing! What happens when I start loving them? They lose their fear, they lose their anxiety and they start feeling good. And all of a sudden, all around that pineal gland, the muscles and the membranes that are there start to relax. And when it relaxes those endorphins go through the body. Now, endorphins are about ten times stronger than morphine...something like that. So if I can get them to lighten up and to smile and maybe laugh a little bit, their pain goes away! The body takes care of itself this way. But if they indulge in the pain and feeling sorry for themselves, that pineal gland gets tightened up. And that causes the pain to get worse and more intense.

So how can you help someone when you go to visit them in the hospital, even if they're dying? Can you make yourself sad and walk in and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry for you! I don't know what to say to

you! I might as well leave." And then you feel guilty when you walk out. Right? And then you have all of these thoughts, "I should have said that to them. I should have done this. I should have...I should have...I should have!"

It's really amazing. We have people on our internet that they're going through some major traumas in their life being with family members that are dying. And they write and say, "What are we supposed to do with this?" Well, make them happy. Do things. Now, there was a...I don't remember his name...there was a king in Sri Lanka that every time he did something good he had his secretary write down what it was in his book. And he knew he was getting close to death and he had somebody come and read all of those things that made him happy. And he died with a smile on his face! He didn't suffer, even though his body was being ravaged. Now that's a successful death, isn't it?

Death is not anything to be afraid of, it's part of life and it's okay. See, a lot of people are very confused about Buddhism and they say that there's things like reincarnation in Buddhism. There isn't. When you go deep enough in your meditation you see birth and death ... birth ... death ... continually happening all the time. One thought moment ... it arises ... disappears. It dies. Then the next one arises and dies. So when you practice this meditation and you go deep enough in the meditation you will see this for yourself. You don't have to believe anything I say. I don't want you to believe anything I say! I want you to practice. See for yourself! That's what the Buddha was all about. He was about showing you the way and then you take the responsibility for yourself and see if it's true or not. Even the Buddha came up and said, "I don't want you to believe anything. I want you to explore and see for yourself!"

{30:48}

It's a real amazing thing being with people as they die. I spent almost a year in a nursing home. There was somebody that died about once a week. My mother ran a nursing home back then and I

got a job with her and I told her I was only interested in being with people right before they died. Now she'd been in the nursing home for 20 years, she knew what to look for. And she'd come up to me and said, "Well, this person has stopped drinking and they're not taking food and they'll probably die within two or three days." And then I would spend my entire time with them. Now, they were mostly Christians so I knew that even if they were in a coma they could hear what I was saying. So what I did was I pulled out the Bible and I started reading different verses in the Bible. I don't care! I'm not trying to convert anybody on their death bed. I want them to have good memories and uplifted memories and memories that they were very happy.

At times I would tell them to remember when they really helped other people and it made them very happy! And always, right before they died...sometimes I was with the person as they died but sometimes the family members got there and it wasn't appropriate for me to be there. So before I left the room when the family members walked in I would say, "Okay, I share all of my merit with you! Every good act I've ever done...not only in this lifetime...ever! Now, you're with your family; love them. And remember to stay happy!" And they died very peacefully.

It's real interesting and I spent a year doing that. I learned a lot about what death is and it's not much different than being alive, really. Now, you remember I told you the only time you're truly alive is right here, right now. Now it's in the past. The only time you're alive is in the present moment. This practice helps you stay in the present moment and you become very content in the present moment.

{34:00}

There was a student of mine that...she had two children and took them to the beach and they were out playing in the water and a shark grabbed one of them. She came and asked me what she was supposed to do with that. She says, "This is really horrible!" And then they found the shark and cut it open and she had to go identify the

body. "How can I do that?"

I said, "You can't fight the pain. The pain is there. The pain is real. Don't try to push it away. Don't try to control it. Let it rip your heart out!

I went with her to the hospital, of course. And she really understood what I was saying. Of course she had tears. Of course she had pain. And then I started talking to her after that saying, "You're going to have this pain arise. Why? Because there is attachment ... only natural. So what do you do when that pain arise? You let it be there. You don't try to stop it. You don't try to push it away. You allow that pain to be there and send loving and kind thoughts to everybody else in your family. They're all suffering, too. Talk with them about allowing the pain to be without trying to control it."

{36:12}

See, I've told you before we're made up of five things. You have a...

Physical Body, you have...

Feeling. Feeling is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. It doesn't have anything to do with emotion. You have...

Perception. Perception is the part of your mind that names things. When you look at this your mind says, "glasses". That's the part of your mind that's perception. It has memory in it, too. You have ...

Thoughts. And you have...

Consciousness.

If a painful feeling arises, the first thing we try to do is think the pain away, and it doesn't work. It doesn't work! You can't control the pain by your thinking. If you do you're going to suffer immeasurable pain for a long, long time.

So, what I told her to do was allow that pain to be there. It's the truth...for her at that moment it was really the truth. You can't fight the truth. You can't control the truth. You can't make the truth be the way you want it to be. The truth is the truth. That's the dhamma. You have to let go of the want to control the feeling with thinking. So you have to notice what your mind is doing...and it's thinking. And you practice the 6Rs. And you allow that space for that pain to be there. Sometimes there's going to be pain, tears, sometimes there's not. It doesn't matter. If tears are going to come, allow them to come. Don't try to stop them. After a while your mind will stop trying to control the feeling and the feeling will start to fade a little bit. That doesn't mean it won't come back again at some other time. It just means that it fades for a little while.

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Now, when you have thoughts of the departed one, you don't try to control those thoughts. You allow them to be there and relax and they will start to fade away. You use the 6Rs on this. When somebody dies in your family you feel very helpless. Right? But, you're not helpless! How about everybody else in the family, how do they feel? Well, they're suffering just like you are. You want to help them? Love them! Send that love to every one of those people in your family, and you can send love to yourself when you feel like you need it. You're not helpless. This is how you overcome grief. It doesn't matter...it doesn't mean that you're going to not remember what happened. You will. But the pain won't be there anymore. The pain will fade away. And you'll have those memories your whole life, but you won't have the pain. You won't be trying to suppress anything.

When I was at the nursing home I found out...I started working with the hospice. I helped set up one. And they started talking about people that die...the family members, if they don't let go of their grief, and try to push it down and stop it from being there...well, I'll say it this way...if they do try to suppress it, then within two years they have some kind of major physical problem. They have to have operations, they have heart attacks, sometimes they even die. That's

because they fought that pain and they tried to control that pain with their thoughts and they never let go of that pain. And the pain will come back and cause all kinds of problems. It happens about a year and a half to two years after a death in the family. And there's going to be times when you need to talk and you talk with your family. And you tell them how much you miss that person that's gone. And that lets them...to release their grief knowing that you have the same kind of feelings. There's great solace in that. [laughs]

{42:30}

I don't know how I quite got onto that [laughs], but it's important to understand that you don't have to try to get some outside source to take your pain away. Your pain is your pain, and what you do with that in the present moment dictates whether you're going to suffer in the future or not. Yeah, even six months or a year later you'll get hit with that pain. Okay. Treat it in the same way. Allow the space for the pain to be there, relax, smile a little bit, come back and wish yourself well. Or wish your family members well, it doesn't matter. Keep your mind uplifted! And that way your mind doesn't have the opportunity to play the game, "Oh, I should have done this or I should have done that or I should have said this or whatever." You don't have time for that! You see your mind playing that guilt game? Let it be, relax, smile and come back and wish yourself happiness again. It's not easy...it's very simple but it's not easy sometimes. Because of the attachment that you have it's not going to go away right away. Don't expect it to. Over time it gets easier.

Now when I think of my mother, I think of the great stuff, not the pain! I miss her, of course. But she's fine. She doesn't have any more physical pain now.

{45:00}

One of the things that one of the psychics of last century, he was very famous, he was called Edgar Cayce. He said dying is much easier than being born. It's just part of a natural process. You can make it as difficult on yourself as you want. You can do that.

MN

16. "How, friends, does not one build up hope upon the future? Thinking, 'My eye will be thus in the future and forms will be thus in the future!'"...

BV: Now, as you get older your body starts having all kinds of problems. I didn't use to have these [referring to eyeglasses]; it doesn't work as well as it used to. But one of the real peculiar things is my mind still thinks I'm 30 years old and I can do everything back then that I can...whoa, I try it now, not even close!

So you have to learn how to accept the fact that your body is getting older and there are some little tics and owies and things that didn't used to happen, but now they do. So what do you do with all of those...all of those little things that crop up in your body; those little aches and pains? Love them! Send your loving-kindness into those aching joints! You're not helpless! You can help yourself a lot and when somebody else starts complaining about having a headache or having this pain or that pain, love them! You find out that you're kind of an interesting healer that way. You get to see all kinds of miracles occur.

One time I went to a hospital to visit somebody that had just had a stroke. And he was lying in the intensive care ward and he was in a coma. And the people that took me, they were very good friends with him. Oh, they were sad! And I told them to leave the room if they were going to be like that. So I started sending loving and kind thoughts to this man. I didn't know him, I had never met him before. What difference does it make? He's still a human being, he still wants the same thing that everybody else wants. Everybody wants to be loved!

After a while I said, "Okay, it's time I can go." As I was walking out of the room another boy just came. And he said, "My mother has stomach cancer and she just had her stomach taken out. And she's still in the recovery room. Can you come and be with her?" I said, "Sure! That's why I'm here." So he takes me to her room and she has

an oxygen mask, and it's a clear one. She's laying there still drugged out. So I started sending loving and kind thoughts to her and one of the students that was with me was doing the same thing. I closed my eyes and I was just really focusing on sending love and my student tapped me on the arm and said, "Look at that!" So I opened up my eyes and there's a person that, she's really out of it, still on heavy drugs, starting to recover little by little, with a smile on her face! Wow! Ain't that a miracle? That's what I'd call it.

{50:03}

Those kind of things can happen the more you focus on everything that you do with an uplifted mind and a smile on your face and a smile in your heart. It's real interesting to see how many miracles you can see in a day! Being in the forest, I only see two or three! [laughs] But when I was in Kuala Lumpur I was around a lot more people and I was seeing miracles happen continually.

Now when I went to the hospital...Malaysia is a Muslim country, they don't like monks. They really don't. And that's okay, they can be the way they want to be, I don't care. But when I go to the hospital and they'd see me sending loving and kind thoughts to someone else, before I would leave they would ask if I would come over and do that for them. "Yeah, of course!" A lot of them would grab hold of my hand, now that's a true miracle! Because they don't really like people that are dressed like this. They feel intimidated by monks.

But they felt what I was doing. They felt the love and compassion that I had and they wanted some. Sometimes it would take me an hour to get out of a room because there was a lot of beds in the room and I'd go from one to the next to the next. I don't care whether they're Muslim. I don't care if there is no god but God, Muhammad is a prophet. That's theirs; they can do that if they want. I didn't care whether they were Christians that I was hanging out with that were dying. That's why I would read the Bible to them. I was pretty selective on the ones that I was reading; sometimes the Bible can be rather upsetting, some of the stories.

The interesting thing to realize that the Buddha wasn't a Buddhist. Think about that. He wasn't a Buddhist, he wasn't caught up in rites and rituals and all of these things. He was a Dhamma teacher, he was into universal truth. And everybody you meet, if you start applying the Dhamma, you'll see that everybody responds in a positive way. There is no, "My belief is this and if you don't believe what I believe then you're wrong!" There isn't any of that. There's only the compassion to help people understand how to be happy.

{53:50}

He's very unique in history and I hear a lot of people say that...just lately I've been listening to late night radio...and they keep on saying that the Buddha was a god. No he wasn't, he was a human being. He was a very, very intelligent human being. And almost all of the suttas that I've read I don't believe, but I try it to see. And when I try it and see, and it turns out to be right, what happens to my confidence? There's no such a thing as blind belief in Buddhism. There's no real praying to other beings to help me overcome this pain and suffering. There is only the learning how to do it for yourself and that's what the Buddha taught. Interesting stuff. And it's hard to find mistakes in anything that he really said. It's real difficult because it is so universal.

You know you've been hearing me talk a lot about keeping the precepts and how important it is to keep the precepts. I don't care what religion you are, you've got precepts in your religion. They're universal laws and you have the choice either to follow it or not. But if you break one of those universal laws there are consequences that you won't really like. You break a precept, you say something that's not true, you feel guilty and you suffer. And then you try to sit in meditation and all of a sudden your mind's all over the place. And then you have to work with that to let it go.

So it's real important to keep your precepts as closely as you can, and there's nobody up in heaven that's going to shoot down some lightning bolts if you miss. Realize that you did that, forgive yourself for making a mistake, get back on the path with the determination,

"I'm going to keep these precepts! I'm not going to break them!"  
What's the advantage of keeping the precepts? First thing and foremost is, you have a tranquil mind. You don't get over-excited when there's some kind of emergency. You start doing the things that need to be done.

{57:15}

Now I was...I had my own construction company when I was a layman and we were building this very, very fancy house. So I was getting up on the roof figuring out where we needed to put some safety ropes and while I was up there I slipped off and I fell down about 30 feet. My biggest mistake was I tried to catch it with my hand, broke my wrist.

...Ah...spilled the water. It's okay...never mind.

Now I'm laying on the ground and I'm kind of stunned and this guy that I just hired to see whether he would really work with us or not was in the habit of breaking precepts. He was always cursing. He was always saying things that weren't true. He was always making up stories. And he's the first one that came to me. Now I'm laying on the ground and I started holding my wrist like this, and he said, "Are you hurt?" And I said, "No, not really. I think I broke my wrist." And he took my hand and started doing this. And I told him in no uncertain terms that that was not the thing to do and to get away from me! By his little stunt, it wound up costing me an extra two weeks in a cast. But he didn't have any clue what to do!

I've seen cases where somebody will...a fire will start out and they're standing right beside it and they start throwing their hands up saying, "Fire! Fire!", instead of doing something to put the fire out. When you follow the precepts you know what to do. Sometimes the best thing to do is stand aside and let somebody else take care of it because they're qualified to take care of it. Sometimes you do things that needed to be done. But that's why keeping the precepts is so important. Keeping the precepts is a kind of protection. You will not die a violent death, you won't die in an accident, you won't fall off a

hillside and fall to your death. It's a protection. And it leads to your happiness.

{1:00:30}

I told you the story about this one lady in Malaysia. She would not break a precept for any reason...would not! She was 42 or 43 years old, her whole life she'd been like that. And she'd heard that I was teaching meditation and it was kind of interesting so she came to me and said, "I want to learn the meditation." I said, "Fine. I'm giving a retreat this weekend. Come, I'll give you the instructions then and we'll see what happens."

So I gave her instructions. After lunch I went over to her and I said, "Well, how's your retreat going?" And she said, "Well, it's pretty good. But I can only sit for about 45 minutes." And I said, "Why?" She said, "You know, my whole life I've been sitting in chairs and sitting on the floor is just causing so much pain in my knees I can't stand it! After 45 minutes I have to get up and walk." So I said, "Well, there's no real magic in the floor. Sit in a chair, just don't lean heavily into it." Her next sitting was four hours. She got into the first jhana. This is the first day of her retreat...ever! Amazing! Nobody supposed to get into a jhana that quickly! I'm used to people getting in after two or three days.

But when I was in Sri Lanka they told me it takes at least ten years to get into a jhana. And I'm used to see it happening in two or three days. So it's a real interesting thing. The closer you keep your precepts, the more of a protection it becomes.

Saying things that aren't true is going to come back and cause you problems. Now, why do hindrances arise? Because in the past you broke some precepts. Past when? I don't know, maybe this lifetime, maybe the last. Who knows? Who cares? What you do with what happens right now is the important thing. What you do with the present moment dictates what happens in the future.

As you allow the space for that hindrance to be...without trying to

push it away, without trying to stop it...as you allow the space for that to be and you relax and...[points to smiling mouth and then to student] [laughs]

...I'm picking on you! I'm sorry! [laughs]

...and you smile and then you come back to your object of meditation, which is your spiritual friend or yourself, depends when it is, that hindrance after a period of time becomes a little bit weaker because you're not feeding it with your attention. You're not trying to control it with your mind. You're allowing the space for that hindrance to be there by itself. As it lets go finally it won't even arise again. What happens in your mind? Relief!

"Well, I've been feeling all of this heaviness all around and now I don't feel it!" And you start to feel joy arise. And right after the joy is there for a little while...you can't hold onto the joy, just let it be there just like you let the painful feeling be there...you become very tranquil, very peaceful, very comfortable in your mind and in your body. I just described to you the first jhana!

{1:05:20}

It's one of the things in the suttas that they call, "A pleasant abiding here and now." And it is! When people start experiencing jhana they start getting more radiant. Their face starts to glow! I make a joke with some people that come to the meditation center because we have a very small room that I give the dhamma talks in and they'll be sitting there and I tell them, "I don't need to turn the lights on!", because they're so radiant!

...I told you that. [laughs]

But it's really true. Your mind is very uplifted. There's a lot of happiness and contentment. And then your mindfulness slips and then guess who comes to dinner? [laughs] A hindrance will arise again but now you're starting to understand that the hindrance isn't something to fight with. The hindrance is something that is helping

you go deeper in your meditation. It's pulling your mind away, you allow it to be there, relax, smile, come back to your object of meditation, stay with it as long as you can. And before long that hindrance starts fading away and you go deeper into your meditation.

The joy you experienced before is not near as strong as the joy that you'll experience now. Now the joy is uplifting joy and you feel really light in your body and really light in your mind. And actually you can get into a space where you get so light that you'll lift off the ground. It hasn't happened with a lot of students but it has happened. It sounds fantastic, but it really does happen.

When the joy fades away the comfort and tranquility that you feel is just unbelievable! You start thinking, "Yeah, I'm starting to get this one. I really understand! This is good stuff!" You get a lot of confidence...self-confidence because now you're really starting to understand how the process works. You're starting to understand that when your mind is on the object of meditation and it gets distracted that it doesn't just jump over there, that there's a series of things that happen before your mind gets pulled away. And you start seeing those things. And the meditation gets really, really interesting.

{1:08:46}

I had one student in Malaysia, she must have done three or four retreats with me when I first started teaching loving-kindness. And she'd done a lot of meditation before so it was a bit of a struggle for me to get her to let go of the old bad habits and develop new good habits. And she came to me one day really smiling and she said, "You know, I've been hearing you say I don't know how many times, 'Relax, Smile...' and now I really understand!" And I said, "Good, continue, everything's fine." And the next day she came in really beaming! I thought, "Ahhh, okay, I've got you there. I know what's happened." And she said, "You know, yesterday I told you I really understood what you were saying? Today I REALLY understand!" And I said the same thing two days in a row. She heard it in a different way. She heard it in a deeper way. That's the thing with these suttas.

You never get tired of reading them because you always get something new that you hadn't thought of before, and it makes it exciting, it makes it real fun!

And with that I'm going to say when I first start teaching people I don't want them to read at all.

She almost rebelled when I told her I didn't want her to read anything. She started reading books and she didn't have any clue what she was reading and she was asking me these bizarre questions. Finally I said, "No more reading! No, don't do that!" After a period of time when you go deep enough in your meditation, then I'll start throwing books at you and say, "Okay, read this. Read that." Why? Because you have the direct experience and you start to understand what it's talking about.

{1:11:11}

I just had to scold one man on our Yahoo! group that started questioning some of the things I was saying about the suttas. And what was my answer to him? "You're reading! Put the books down, just do the practice! You aren't close enough to understanding what I'm saying."

That was a one-liner, I think. [laughs]

As you go deeper in your meditation, your understanding of the process becomes very, very good. And you start understanding that, well, it's not only while I'm sitting here that I can use this stuff. When I go out there I can use it. So you start practicing more with your daily activities. You start using the 6Rs all the time when you find your mind is distracted. It works! That's something that an awful lot of the Buddhists that are teaching the meditation these days, they really don't understand. It's not just about sitting like a Buddha image, it's about taking it into your life and using it.

Now, I was talking about dying a little while ago. What would happen if I didn't take that meditation with me? I would have got caught up

in all kinds of emotional states and been a wreck!

Now, there was one man that...he had a tumor that was growing on a carotid artery and he had to have it operated on. He told me he was pretty scared so I started teaching him loving-kindness. And the night before his operation I got his whole family together and we started sending loving-kindness to him, sending loving-kindness to his doctors, sending loving-kindness to all of his family, all of the nurses that had anything to do with him. We spent about two hours just radiating loving-kindness to everybody we could think of. He went in for the surgery...and this is a very, very touchy surgery. It was marginal whether he was going to come out alive or not. They said it was going to be a five hour operation. After five hours I called up the family. They said, "Well, he's still in surgery." "How much longer is he going to be?" "We don't have any idea."

After eleven hours on the operating table he got out of surgery and they just shut down his body...put him on automatic life support system so he could start recovering a little bit. So I didn't go see him the day after his surgery because he was on life support. The day after that, his family came and took me to the hospital. Now, I started telling everybody in the car that you can't take their pain away, don't even try, just love them. And the wife...uh, his sister-in-law, she was very much caught up in material things. And as soon as she walked into see him, oh, she started really suffering! And I could see on her face and I said, "Why don't you go outside?" And I sat down by this man, he hadn't talked to anyone, and I held his hand and I just started radiating loving-kindness to him and to all of the family.

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After about an hour or an hour and fifteen minutes I took a look at him and his color is starting to get real good, and he's starting to look around a little bit and he's starting to get his focus. And then he wanted to talk a little bit but he had trouble talking, so I had him sit up a little bit straighter, and all of a sudden he's talking. Now this is something that the doctors said probably wouldn't happen. But there

he was! After about two hours I said, "Okay, I've given you all I can give you right now." And he just got stronger by the minute, it was amazing to watch.

Now, people tell me...they hear the story of what I was doing, and I wasn't doing anything except focusing on loving-kindness. That's all I was doing. The loving-kindness is the thing that helped him a lot. After four days in the hospital, he goes home. And he's a little bit weak but he can get up and walk around, but he's talking in a whisper. And the doctor had told him that he might have hit his vocal cords, he didn't know. So he asked what I thought he should do, and I said, "Well, send loving-kindness. Send loving-kindness to the spot right here. See how it goes."

And of course I was going over to visit him everyday and spend time with him and help him in whatever way I could. And he was starting to get up and do his walking meditation so he could get strength in his body, sending loving and kind thoughts to himself. And after about two weeks he calls me up on the phone in his regular voice. Now, he was a school teacher. If his voice can't carry he wouldn't be able to teach school anymore, so it was real important for him to get that back. And I said, "How come your voice is so strong?" He said, "Well, I was sending loving and kind thoughts and all of a sudden I had to spit so I went [throat clearing sound], and a big blob of blood came out and now I can talk!" That's a miracle! Really good!

This stuff works but don't believe me! You make your own miracles. The more you can focus your mind and get into a jhana when you're sending that loving and kind thought, it becomes a real power. It really works! And when you start practicing putting a person in your heart and radiating loving-kindness to that person, you don't have to direct it anywhere, just keep that person in your heart and radiate loving-kindness and watch what happens. Takes practice.

So, after that happened...I kind of became famous for that for some reason or another...because I didn't do anything, it was the loving-kindness. But people started coming to me with pictures of their relatives and they'd say, "Well, can you send loving-kindness to this

person or that person. Or this baby was just born and is very jaundiced. Can you help them?" I don't know. I don't know whether I can help anybody or not. But I do have a lot of confidence in the loving-kindness and it seemed like there was all kind of interesting things happening.

{1:20:08}

This one man, he lived in Johor Bahru, which is down by Singapore, and I was Kuala Lumpur. And they gave me a picture of this little boy that was jaundiced and they were going to have to take him back to the hospital. He was yellow and the whole thing. "Can you send loving-kindness to him?" "Sure, I can send loving-kindness to anybody!" And I had a picture of him in front of me...cute little boy, oh, great, just great! And in the half an hour that I was sending loving-kindness to him his father called up and said his color came back. Is it me that's doing that? No, it's the loving-kindness that does that.

I'm not here. It's not me. I'm not anything that's special. But I do know what to do and how to help most.

Now this happens with animals, too. I used to drive her crazy. I used to have a...live in a trailer...and I had wasps, maybe 50 or 60 of them, floating around on the ceiling. They never bothered me but she'd come in and run out! "Oh, get those wasps out of there!" "Aww, okay." So I'd catch each one and I'd let it go outside because that's really what they wanted anyway. I'd never get stung. But something happened, just a week ago...week and a half ago...I was waking up and I grabbed the covers to pull the covers off and there was a wasp there and he stung me on the hand! And I looked at that and I looked down at him and I said, "What did you do that for?!" I said, "I help you guys all the time!" So I picked him up by his wings and I looked at him and I said, "You shouldn't have done that!" And he hung his head down a little bit like he was ashamed. So I let him out and said, "Go tell your friends that I don't need to get stung! I'll help you whenever I can!"

[laughs]

She wasn't like that when she...when we first came to Missouri. She'd get stung by a wasp and you'd hear her yell from miles away!

SK: I would jump all over the place and go, "Ahhhhh!" It took years...

BV: And now they don't do that very much to her anymore. And when they do, she just looks at that and goes, "Hmm. No big deal" Now, that's a painful feeling! Right? But it's okay for a painful feeling to arise. It has to be because that's the truth.

SK: It's okay because it's going to pass away.

BV: Well, everything does.

So the more you can live in the present moment, the more easy it is to do the right thing at the right time.

I have people coming into my cabin all of the time crying about this, angry about that, whatever. So what do I do? I sit there and I listen to them complain and radiate loving-kindness to them and then they calm down and they say, "Thank you very much," and walk out. [laughs] "You never get upset with this kind of thing?" No, no need.

So, the lesson that you need to learn on this retreat is to practice as much as you can. When you're walking from here to your car what are you doing with your mind? Thinking this, thinking that, planning this, thinking about what happened yesterday, whatever it happens to be. Well, let that go and radiate some loving-kindness!

I tried a very difficult practice for about a year and that was every time I got up I would take...the first would be with my right foot and that would remind me to start practicing loving-kindness on every step. It's a difficult practice. And then when I forgot then I would go back and sit down and stand up and do it again.

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There's all kinds of different times during the day when you can practice loving-kindness. You can't give me the excuse, "I don't have time to meditate."

Life is meditation! You do have time to meditate! It's remembering to do it. That's the one.

And taking an interest in sending little kids that are grumpy loving-kindness when you're in the line at the store. I love to make those kids laugh! She sees me do it all the time. And how much does that help everybody else around them? Who likes to listen to a little kid be angry and yelling at the top of their lungs? But then they calm down and some of them will just look at me like, "How'd you do that?" Some of them will laugh and we have a great time for a little while!

Anyway, the more you can keep your practice going without a break, the easier it is to get into these deeper states of understanding. The more you can smile, the more you make a game of life. Now this sounds odd, I know. "Life is suffering! You're supposed to suffer!" Well, that's not what the Buddha said. The Buddha said there is suffering in life. He didn't say you were supposed to suffer. He didn't say, "Everything is suffering!"

You don't have to suffer all of the time. It's your choice whether you do it or not. Make the conscious decision to turn life into a game, not be serious. "Well, at work I have to be serious!" If you have to be serious at work it means you're not having fun. If you're not having fun that means your interest wanes. If you're not really interested, then you make mistakes.

Keep it light! KISS! I told her today...it's an acronym. K.I.S.S. For women, "Keep It Simple, Sister!" For men, "Keep It Simple, Son!" That acronym became popular because it was, "Keep It Simple, Stupid" but I don't like that one. [laughs]

Okay, so I've been talking for a real long time. Got any questions?

Do you remember that discourse I gave...[laughs]

ST: I have one...

BV: Okay

ST: Like, when you die and your mind is peaceful, you said, like, you talked something nice so that mind is peaceful. Does it help to have a good birth?

BV: Definitely! When you die with an uplifted mind you will have a good rebirth. Definitely!

ST: Okay, but if that person was a bad ~

BV: If they die with an uplifted mind they will have a good rebirth. It doesn't mean that what they did in the past won't come back and haunt them sometime. The last thought you have before you die is very, very important.

One of the problems that was happening in Malaysia was there was an awful lot of Christians that were coming in and trying to convert people on their death bed. "Oh, you've got to forgive!" And gets them thinking about things that are unwholesome. "Don't you do that! Get away! Go do something else!" It's real important.

{1:30:39}

Now, there was one man, he was an airplane pilot. And he came and he said, "I want you to teach me meditation." And I said, "Okay." He's flying around 747s and all of this kind of stuff, that's fine. And about a week after he started meditating, he told me that he had terminal cancer and he was failing. There was not much he could do. "Okay, fine. Keep practicing loving-kindness." And eventually he got so bad that he had to go into the hospital. So, I started visiting him every day and I would sit with him and practicing loving-kindness. And then one day I walked in and he was really, really serious and all

the other people in the room, he said, "I want to be with Reverend. Go out, I want to talk to him." So he said, "I just saw the doctor and he told me that it's time to make out my will. He told me I was going to die very soon and that I'm terminal."

So, I started laughing.

And he said, "What are you laughing! This is serious!" I said, "We're all terminal! You just have an advantage, you know closer to when it's going to be! That's okay!" And he saw that that was actually kind of funny. And when he started laughing the pain went away. It's pretty amazing to watch. I said, "It's no problem!"

Now, before he died, I had to go to another country and give a meditation retreat. And I got delayed coming back by two days. And the day that I got back he'd died the night before. And the people that were with him said that he had died a very, very peaceful death. His body had gone...he weighed about 50 pounds...the flesh was just hanging off the bones. He had a picture of his spiritual friend and right before he died he turned over and looked at that and started radiating loving-kindness and he had a smile on his face when he died. I know where he was reborn. He was reborn in a heavenly realm because his mind was so uplifted. He had a good rebirth.

That's what being with people that are dying...that's how you start recognizing things. And you start getting them to remember the times when they were happy and doing things that make them comfortable. It's real important. His whole family, they were sad that he was gone but they weren't suffering because he was gone because they saw the way he died. He died with a radiant face! He just closed his eyes and went to sleep. That was it. Amazing! That's the way to die. Not having somebody come in and try to convert you to another religion while you're going through this. No, No, No, don't do that!

So, is there any other question?

[laughs]

Okay, let's share some merit...

May suffering ones, be suffering free  
And the fear struck, fearless be  
May the grieving shed all grief  
And may all beings find relief.

May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired  
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth  
Devas and nagas of mighty power  
Share this merit of ours.

May they long protect the Buddha's dispensation.  
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

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