

Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent Origination)

Ajahn Brahmali, given at a weekend retreat in Sydney, January 2016

Part 1 transcript

I'll talk a little bit about meditation practice and then we can try to do some afterwards together. So, I think the most important thing to realise about meditation practice is that it's supposed to be a positive experience. Right?! This may seem obvious, because why else would you want to do it if it isn't a positive experience? It may seem obvious, but as a matter of fact, many of people don't experience meditation as a positive experience. When you start to read the word of the Buddha, and you start to see how he explains what you might call the psychology of meditation, how meditation is supposed to be experienced by yourself, personally you start to realize the incredible emphasis the Buddha has on this thing which is called the positive experience. You'll probably have a look at one of those suttas later on. But basically, one of those suttas which talks about the psychology of meditation, when you read it, it starts off with: okay, you are a virtuous person, this is the foundation of all meditation, is to practice virtue.

One of the things that unfortunately is forgotten around the world, people talk about mindfulness and they forget about the virtue aspect. Virtue means both being kind and avoid doing bad things. That is the foundation, so once you have that you can start your meditation practice. And then, from that virtue, the Buddha starts to explain from virtue you have non-regret, right? Non-regret is obviously a positive experience already. From non-regret you get gladness. From gladness you get rapture, pīti. From pīti you get calm, calm of the mind and the body. From calm comes even more happiness. Gladness, rapture, happiness, calm, and then from that comes what is called samādhi, which is the unification of the mind, when the mind goes into a profound state of meditation practice. What you can see there, one of the very important facts about this is that meditation is all about happiness! Almost every word the Buddha uses there on how were supposed to experience it is one type of happiness after the other arising through the right practice of meditation. So make sure that when you are here you don't do things which causes you to feel ill at ease, not relaxed which created too much pain and all these kind of things. Because if you do that there's no way you're going to be able to access those positive states that the Buddha is talking about. This is so important, and, your know, it sort of seems obvious, but I think human psychology often gets in the way, human psychology blocks you from seeing that.

So, for this reason the very first thing I want to talk about in regards to meditation practice is what to do with the body. The physical body is really the first thing. What you need to know about how to deal with the physical body is for the body to be comfortable, not to sit with too much pain and these kinds of things. For this reason we have all these great chairs at the back. Don't feel shy about using the chairs. You know this is not competing with anyone else, right? Do what you need to do to make sure your own practice makes progress; this is what it's all about. So there's no competition here. It doesn't matter what

everyone else does, forget about everybody else. Do what you need to do. It's wonderful more and more these days you go on meditation retreats you see that chairs are coming out. It's natural. Most of us have grown up in a society, in a culture, where we sit on chairs all the time. When you've grown up sitting on a chair all the time and suddenly you're told to sit on the floor it actually can be very difficult. So please don't be shy about using the chairs. Much better to be a little bit more comfortable, extra comfortable than to be a little bit on the pain side while you're sitting. That is much better, so please use that and please do that.

There's so many horror stories that I've heard over the years of people who don't get this kind of very basic thing. One of those stories when I was in Singapore a few years ago... One of the things as a monk, you travel a lot it may seem strange but you actually travel a lot because there's so much demand for English speaking monks everywhere English speaking monks are very few and far between so you get ferried around the world by plane everywhere to talk to people. It's very nice, it's a very nice thing to do to be able to give that kind of service.

But it means that sometimes you're in Singapore, and when you're in Singapore, of course, you meet Buddhist people, just like here, just like everywhere else. I was staying in the apartment of this man. He was from Kuala Lumpur originally, but he was working in Singapore and he was travelling back and forth and very kindly offered me to stay in his apartment. Then one day while I was there he comes to me and says "Bhante, I have a question for you, have you got a few minutes." And of course I'm staying in his apartment so of course I have a few minutes for him and he says to me that, "a few years ago I was on this meditation retreat and it was the worst experience of my entire life. It was terrible! I was in pain all the way through, I felt so tense and so non-relaxed and so completely ill at ease for nine days. Never, ever in my entire life do I ever want to go on meditation retreat again." I said, "ooh! Wait a minute, you're talking it too far. Just because you had one bad experience doesn't mean you should never ever go on meditation retreat again. Retreats are different. There are different types of teachers that teach in different ways. You can't just assume that everything is the same, that everything is so bad." But he insisted that, no, he never ever wanted to meditate again because the experience had been so terrible, was the worst thing he'd ever done in his life. I couldn't really persuade him so he asked me, "what should I do," Well, I don't know what he should do in that case. But, essentially he was turned off for life in regards to meditation practice.

That is a very unfortunate thing because the idea with meditation, the idea with the spiritual path is that is something which develops over time. When you keep practising these things, when you keep doing things especially in the right way, when you understand what morality is on the Buddhist path you practice that in the right way and you combine that with making the mind peaceful and calm then these things together are incredibly powerful. The longer you do it there's a gradual transformation of your entire character, of your entire person and, essentially, you are creating a new personality for yourself as you go through this. But the effect really is most powerful when you keep on doing it, month after month, year after year, the results become very powerful after a while.

So please make sure that you do this in such a way that it encourages you to keep on doing it also in the future and when you feel encouraged to do it also in the future then the long term benefits will be incredibly powerful for you, and something very beneficial will come out of this. So don't do what this man in Singapore did. He was maybe an extreme example, but this is what happens sometimes to people. I know that there are certain types of meditation retreat where only a very small fraction of the people come back to those retreats precisely because of the amount of pain and problems and tensions that people experience as a consequence of that practice.

So this is the first step, allow the body to be relaxed. So please use the chairs. Another way, if you want to sit cross-legged, it's nice to sit sometimes against the wall. Sit with your back against the wall. Sometimes when you sit with your back leaning against something, you can relax a little bit better; that's a nice way of doing it. And, especially at the beginning of any retreat. I don't know what you have been doing today, some of you have probably been working, you're probably tired. When you're tired and have been working, usually you need to relax first of all. A good way to relax is just to lean back. Some of the best meditators I know they always do like that, they lean back, they relax. Many of you would know Ajahn Brahm, Dr. Tan you would know Ajahn Brahm, and Ajahn Brahm tells me that when he starts out meditating he always leans back. Not always, but when he is tired or has been working hard he always starts off by sitting back and leaning against the wall. So if Ajahn Brahm does that you can do that. Ajahn Brahm is just about one of the best meditators around he gets into these incredibly profound meditations, so if he can do that anybody can do that, because it is about relaxing. It's about knowing what you need, understanding that you need to relax first of all. So sit back, lean back against the wall and you're okay.

Another monk I know, is a good friend of mine, he says that every time he meditates every time he meditates he starts off with nodding. He nods for about 10 or 15 minutes and then after you have nodded for about 10 or 15 minutes the mind clears up. And then when the mind clears up, then his meditation starts. He's also a very good meditator, but it's natural to feel tired at the beginning because you've been active you've been socialising, you've been doing all of these kind of things which tire the mind, so it's natural. So allow the mind to be. Just relax. Allow the mind to be, don't do anything in particular. Wait for mindfulness to arise. And when mindfulness arises by itself, it becomes very powerful and very useful.

So, what all of this is about, and I'm going to relate it a little bit to the teachings of the Buddha. I'm sure you have probably heard of the middle way. The middle way in Buddhism is essentially, in a way, on the one hand not to torture the body. In India in those days people would torture themselves. You know, sometimes you think that people lying on these beds of nails, you think it's some kind of cartoon caricature of India, and then you open the suttas and it says right there they were lying on beds of nails. It's actually the reality, it's actually what people were doing. So this was one of the ways that people were practising at that time. The Buddha says this is the wrong way. And the other wrong way is then to indulge the body. Here, on a meditation retreat like this you're not really going to be able to indulge the very much. Especially if

you keep the eight precepts. So forget about the indulging side. The side to be careful about, is the side which has to do with experiencing too much pain, torturing yourself thinking that: "by torture, I'm going to make quick progress". This is the problem, the classical problem in meditation.

What happens when you find that middle way, where you neither torture yourself, nor you indulge the body what happens is that the body becomes irrelevant. The reason why the body is important to us, is because either, we get some pleasure through the body when you get pleasure through the body the body is important because that's where you get your happiness. Or, the body is important because you get pain through the body. If you get pain through the body, there's something to be done with the body. There is a problem there, a problem that needs to be resolved. The mind will always tend to go out to the body, out into the world rather than staying inside and watch the breath, or whatever it is. So this is the idea of the middle way. The middle way, is a way where your body is no longer important. The body falls by the wayside. The body becomes irrelevant.

Of course, we all know that meditation in the end is about the mind, and because the meditation is about the mind then getting rid of the body is precisely what we want to do. And that is what the middle way is about. It's kind of strange, the two extremes in a sense are quite close to each other because the two extremes are about the body and the middle way is where the body falls away and the body is irrelevant. So this is the point here, this is what the middle way is, the body is gone, and when the body falls away you feel so at ease. So watch that. If you do feel pain in your meditation practice, please change your posture, don't think that you're going to be some superhero and just get enlightened now on this retreat. It's not going to work. I know Ajahn Brahm did that. He always said that when he was a young man he would sit down and say: "okay, I'm going to sit until I get enlightened" and, of course, it didn't work. But everybody has these ideas sometimes. Please don't try that. Enjoy the practice. Sit down, if you have pain somewhere get up, change your posture, go out, do some walking instead, do something else, if you find that. These are general guidelines for meditation practice. Don't sit with pain, especially when you feel the mind gets obsessed with that pain, it goes back to it again and again, you can't deal with it, then the time is right to change the posture.

So this is number one, and I am always surprised how tenacious this idea is, that it's okay to sit with pain, how many people think it is a good thing to do. I think there is something deep in the human psyche that tends to think that if you torture the body you are freeing the spirit. The body is like the sinful thing that keeps you tied to the world and if you torture that evil body a little bit, then you can free the spirit, then the mind gets developed and you get spiritual practice from that. Because it's so common in the world! In Christianity they do that. Christianity is famous in the Middle Ages for having these people who torture themselves. In Hinduism, very, very famous for all the torturing; you find that in the suttas. In Islam, apparently, you find the same thing, people torturing themselves. And then you come to the one religion where the emphasis is on getting away from suffering, it's all about happiness which is Buddhism, and then you find people still do the same thing! People still torture themselves even in Buddhism. This should be the one religion where torture is

absolutely prohibited, and yet it still happens. So I think there is something in the human psyche which basically makes us feel that this is the way to develop the mind. If the body gets a bit tortured that's okay because that's just the body. But actually, no, it's the other way round, it's a hindrance for meditation practice to work.

Okay, that's point number one. I've said a lot about that and the reason is because in my experience people still don't get it. Even if you talk after half an hour, it still hasn't sunk in. Sometimes it takes years before the basic message sinks in. I'm just talking from my own experience, I know how stupid I am, how stubborn sometimes you can be. It takes a while for these things to actually become clear. So that is number one.

The second point in meditation practice is, once your body is at ease, the body doesn't have any pain, the next thing to do is to relax the body. This is one of the things you will find as well, is that you come into your busy life and the business of life always is felt in the body. You feel tensions. You feel tensions in the stomach, you feel tensions in the shoulders, you feel tensions in the face. The muscles tighten up. So the first thing we need to do, is to relax. Again it's about finding the ease. Not only do we not have any pain, but you want to find the ease in the body, where the body feels really nice, and really good. What is happening here, the reason why the body is tense is because the mind is tense. The mind is what controls the body. So, if you get very stressed, of course, during daily life, stress will always reverberate, or will make itself felt in the body afterwards. Mind and body are so closely connected. This idea that these are separate things is really a non-starter. They are very, very closely connected to each other. It's a very useful way of learning how to deal with the mind, by working with the body, because with the body, it's very obvious what is going on. You know what is happening in the body, you can feel if there is any tension there you can feel if there's a problem there. With the mind, everything is a bit more difficult to pin down. So start by feeling the body. What does the body feel like? Start every meditation, every time you do this, go through the same process because then you get used to a good procedure of doing things after a while. Start off, by just feeling the body and then making the body at ease, making the body relaxed, feeling good about yourself, feeling really, really relaxed.

There are many ways of doing this. One way is just to take some deep breaths and allowing yourself to relax. Make sure you sit in a comfortable posture, like leaning back so that you can actually allow the body to relax. Use a guided meditation with somebody whose instructions you trust and voice you like to listen to, again that makes you feel nice and relaxed. And the last part is the attitude you have.

The attitude is probably the most important thing of all. With the right attitude you will relax, without it, it's very, very hard. Spend time doing this, spend however long it takes even if you spend the whole meditation just relaxing especially at the beginning of a retreat, that's fine. That's good. At least you feel at ease and relaxed when that happens. The idea, here, is really to take the relaxation deeper than what you normally are used to. Ordinary relaxation and ordinary life actually often isn't all that relaxed at all. And you only find that out once you start to meditate and you get into deeper states of

relaxation. You start to realise, wow, this is really relaxed I didn't know it was possible to get this relaxed. I had no idea, now I understand what relaxation is all about. The deeper your meditation goes, the more you think, "whoa, this is really nice! The body feels so at ease." The idea here is to start off that process of relaxation as soon as possible. And the sooner you get that done the more easily the rest of the meditation flows along. So, get that depth of relaxation deeper than you had it before at the very beginning, by focusing on the body, by sending metta to yourself, having a sense of kindness and compassion for yourself, and you start to feel the body become so easy, so light. It becomes so light. It becomes like a tuft of cotton almost. It's almost like it starts to disappear.

That's what I was talking about before, disappearing of the body which you do by not having any pain, but it disappears even more when you feel really at ease about the body. You find yourself so light, so easy, unless you fall asleep, in which case you feel heavy, that's the alternative. That's okay. If you fall asleep that's fine. Please, fall asleep, falling asleep is not a bad thing. It is very, very common, you've in very good company if you fall asleep. Allow that tiredness to wear off and then the lightness of the mind comes afterwards. So, either you feel very heavy when you do this and you fall asleep, or the mind tends to feel light. It tends to go either one way or the other. When this happens, because you are feeling so much at ease, you are feeling so good about yourself, so good in the body, good in everything, mindfulness starts to arise.

What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is basically about the ability to stay in the present moment, to be aware of what is happening in the here and now, that is what mindfulness is about. Mindfulness is not about fantasizing. If you think about future, or you think about the past, or you fantasize about all kind of things, that's not mindfulness. Mindfulness is about the ability to just be here and now. Be in this present moment. Be in this room. Be right here in front of you, being able to watch the breath, that is what mindfulness is about. And mindfulness arises especially when you feel good. If you don't feel good the mind wants to escape, but if the present moment is the pleasant moment... It's an easy one to remember: present moment is the pleasant moment then the mindfulness tends to arise as a consequence.

So this is a very easy path. All you have to do is relax. All you have to do is just to feel at ease, and when you do that in the right way, then mindfulness comes all by itself. This is the trick of this path, this is the trick of this whole practice, is that you don't actually have to do anything, you don't have to exert yourself, you don't have to use a lot of will power, there's not a lot of stuff that you have to do, because the whole doing business, actually, is what tires you out in the first place. All this doing makes the mind busy it makes you active, then when you come back home after a long day's work, you feel completely exhausted, that's because of all the doing that you've been doing. So this is the natural way for mindfulness to arise and when mindfulness arises naturally, it is easy, it is pleasant, it is happy and you feel so good about these things.

So this is the way. And one of the things to avoid here... this is almost becoming a kind of taboo word in Buddhism, in meditation, is the word 'concentration'. I'm sure you have heard the word 'concentration' being used. People say I've

got to concentrate, concentrate on the breath, concentrate on things, but be very careful with words like that because, the word 'concentration' in the English language, very often implies a lot of will power. When you go to work, or you do whatever in ordinary life, if you go to work, your employer expects you to read certain things and write certain reports and all these kinds of things, and because your employer expects that you have to do it because you have to earn your salary et cetera, et cetera, but when you're doing things that you're not really enjoying all that much, maybe it's an incredibly boring report that you have to read, you kind of have to force yourself through it, that is what concentration usually means. You're forcing attention on to something which isn't 100% natural. That is why people who have jobs that demand a very high degree of alertness, and awareness and concentration often feel incredibly tired after a long day's work. I think these flight controllers, you know - what is called? The people who sit in those tall towers at airports? Whatever. Anyway, they sit up there and they have to watch the screen to make sure none of the planes collide. If the the planes collide in midair you feel a bit bad about it afterwards So, you really have to focus on this and this is one of the biggest stress jobs, because you have to concentrate so much and people feel very tired after doing that kind of job all day.

This is how we all feel to a certain extent, when you use force to watch and to be in the present moment. So there's an idea of allowing mindfulness to arise naturally, rather than to force mindfulness. If you force mindfulness, after a while you're going to feel exhausted in meditation practice and you're going to sleep for the rest of the retreat and it won't be all that interesting for you. You still may have a good time, but you lose out on all the good fun that everyone else has. So learn natural mindfulness, that is where it's all at. That is what we're trying to get to.

Again, when you have no pain in the body - I'm just recapitulating very briefly - no pain in the body, and you are at ease, and you are relaxed natural mindfulness arises as a consequence, or rather I should say, it can arise. It doesn't always arise. The last reason why it doesn't arise is because the attitude.

The attitude is probably the most important thing of all in meditation practice. You have to look at the world, look at the people around you, feel the situation in the right way. When you have the right attitude in this way, that is when meditation really becomes possible. It has to be a positive attitude. You have to have a sense of well wishing to the people around you. You have to have a sense of mettā, karuṇā, this means loving-kindness, compassion all of these positive qualities, a sense of friendliness. When you have all of these qualities inside of you, that is when meditation becomes possible. If you feel negative, or you are upset with somebody, or you're angry about something, absolutely no way that your meditation is going to work. So you get this out of the way first of all, and then meditation becomes possible. If we have the chance, I don't know if there will be much time during this retreat, but this is one of the most important things in the entire Buddhist path is learning how to use your mind in a skilful way, so that you can move away from the unskilful. It takes a lot of training, it takes years, often, of training for people to be able to do this. Isn't this what they call cognitive behavioural therapy in psychology? Basically, it's a similar kind of thing, but it's more intense and it's a life long process to keep on

doing these kind of things. So the idea is to shift your mind, gradually, more and more away from the negative things towards the positive things. When you have a positive attitude in meditation, then it becomes very powerful.

There's a nice sutta which I always like to quote. A sutta is the word of the Buddha and one sutta means one particular instance when he was giving a talk as one sutta, is basically what it means. And in this one sutta, he talks about what happens when you are a good person, when you live a good life, when you have a good heart, and you treat people in a kind way and all of these kind of things. This sutta is Majjhima Nikāya 129, for those of you who are into this. It's called The Wise And Foolish People. So if you're interested in how to be wise, and how to avoid being a fool it's a great place to start; Majjhima 129. What he says there, is that the wise person, the wise person in Buddhism means somebody who acts well, acts with kindness avoids acting in the bad ways, speaks with kindness, avoids speaking in the bad way and crucially, thinks with kindness, doesn't think thoughts which are greedy, or angry, or full of hatred and this kind of stuff, thinks positive things as well.

In Buddhism, the idea of morality is stretched to the absolute limit. It includes also morality of the mind. So in Buddhism it's about developing your whole character. The word *sīla*, in the Pāli language is much broader than the word 'morality' in English. It basically includes your entire character. It's development of character, development of personality it what it really is about. So what this sutta, this discourse, of the Buddha, what he says there is that, it's like a good person. In the evening, when they come back home they might be tired and they might take a while as they sit down, or they lie down on their bed or sit down on a chair, or whatever, and when they do that, and when they relax, all the good actions they have done, the fact that they have avoided the bad actions all that comes back to them. Because it comes back to them, they feel a natural sense of happiness, because a sense of happiness is basically, well, you know that you're a good person, you know that you've done the right things. You have nothing to regret. You feel a sense of, "wow, I've done good things." You feel a sense of joy about that. It is just a natural consequence of living a good life. The more you purify that good life, the more you feel that natural joy.

The Buddha says it's like a mountain. In the evening, when you have a mountain and the sun goes down behind the mountain then the shadow is cast from that mountain. The entire earth in front of that mountain, the ground in front of the mountain is engulfed, is enveloped and completely surrounded by the shadow from the mountain, completely engulfed in that. In the same way, when a good person comes back a long day's work you sit down, you rest, or maybe you meditate a bit and then the mountain of good actions come back to you! Then you feel satisfied, you feel a sense of joy inside. You feel gladness because of that mountain of good actions is there. So what we have to do is build a mountain. That's what each one of us has to do. When you build that mountain, then you have that foundation of happiness and joy which also you can bring into your meditation practice. So this is what it's about, we have to build this mountain. This is what our ordinary life, if you are interested in Buddhism, or spiritual practice, or meditation, or whatever it is, this is what our whole life is really about. It's about building up this mountain of goodness inside of us. Then you have no choice, you have to feel happy! Isn't that great,

you have not choice but to feel happy? I find that such a wonderful thing. You can sit back, and sometimes if you're a bit grumpy you think, "aw, I don't want to be happy", but you have no choice, happiness just comes to you and you just feel good about yourself. What a wonderful thing that is, when you have no choice about the matter, And it always comes your way. Then, of course, the spiritual path really works as a consequence. So that is one of those similes that I think are so powerful. The Buddha is a master of creating beautiful similes that are so much to the point and show you how these things work in a very beautiful way.

So this is what happens when you generally speaking have the right attitude. We were talking about the precepts before and these precepts are very much about having right attitude. I will perhaps very briefly talk about them.

The first precept is about not killing any living beings. Okay, so we assume that you're not killing any human beings. If you kill human beings, I would recommend you to stop that very quickly. That is going to be a big obstacle. There is another discourse in the suttas, the word of the Buddha. Actually there was a man who was killing all these beings. He was a mass murderer at the time of the Buddha. It's a very famous sutta, you may have heard about Aṅgulimāla Sutta. But he also stopped doing that and as a consequence of stopping that he actually attained very high spiritual states as a consequence. So even if you are killing human beings there's still hope, which is a very positive message. But it's not just about avoiding killing. So you avoid killing humans, you avoid killing animals and even insects, but it's about being kind as well. This is one of the most fundamental and important facts about the Buddhist idea of morality. It is not just about avoiding doing the bad stuff. It's actively doing the good things as well. Being kind. Being helpful. Being compassionate, to animals and human beings wherever you can find. This is really what gives power to the meditation practice. If you don't do the bad stuff, okay, you don't feel bad about yourself, but, if you do the good stuff you actually actively feel good about yourself.

I have noticed in my own life, I try to live up to these things myself. I try not to be the ultimate hypocrite and sit here and tell you to do all these things and do nothing myself, that would be terrible wouldn't it? Of course, you don't know me, so maybe I am a hypocrite, but from my own perspective I don't think I'm a hypocrite. I have always found that it is very powerful sometimes. Sometimes you are in the right mood and you just want to be kind, and you want to be compassionate. Sometimes it's a very powerful force inside of you. Other times you don't really feel compassionate at all, but sometimes you feel very kind. And then, sometimes, when you do something kind, there's an insect that you save or something like that, something very, very small, but because you are in the right mood, and because you are mindful, and because you feel it's coming naturally from you, it often has a very powerful impact on your mind. It's like you do this little act, you think it's nothing and still you feel this joy connected with that, because it is done at the right time, at the right place.

The right time and the right place is always usually... you should always do these things, of course, but the powerful times are when it comes naturally. So if you ever feel like being kind, if it comes from your heart and you want to do something kind, do it for goodness sake! Don't hold back. Don't have some

cynical thought, "yeah, they don't deserve it or whatever". Please don't think like that because it's going to destroy a wonderful opportunity to do what is right and do what is kind. Always take the opportunity. If other people think you are a bit strange, so be it. It's their problem, you just do what is right. And then you find, that when you do these things again and again there are times when it becomes very powerful. Because you are mindful, you are clearly aware, you're driven by a powerful motivation of compassion inside of you. It makes a very powerful impact on the mind. You sit down to meditate and these things come back to you, because they have made a powerful impact on the mind. And then, that gives rise to the ability to meditate because you have the joy there.

This is how it works. This is what kamma is all about. Kamma is about when your intention is pure, when mindfulness is strong, then the impact is very great on the mind. So when you sit down afterwards, it comes back to you very powerfully. That's the idea of kamma. Powerful presence when you do it, gives rise to a powerful result later on. You can see it for yourself happening in reality, it's very easy, very straightforward and you see how these things work. So be kind. On this retreat, if you have an opportunity to be kind to the people around you, take every opportunity, never miss an opportunity to be kind in your life, here or anywhere else, because it is incredibly powerful.

And then, of course, the second factor is about not stealing. I'm sure none of you have the intention to steal anything on this retreat, but the opposite is generosity, right? Be sharing, sharing of yourself, and being generous. One of the incredibly important factors on the Buddhist path is generosity. It is something the Buddha talks about all the time. That's one of the foundation stones of the path. And generosity can be done in some many different ways. There's very little distinction between kindness and generosity. They kind of flow into each other. When we talk about generosity, we talk usually more about material things and kindness is more about helping out in a general sense, but they are really part of the same... different ends of the same spectrum, basically. So generosity.

The third precept is about no sexuality on this retreat. The idea here is to turn the mind in a different direction. Usually, in the world we find pleasures through the senses, the five sense, through the food that we eat, through the relationships that we have, through music, or whatever it is. Here, the idea is instead of finding happiness in that realm, is to turn the mind in a different direction, turn it inwards instead, and find the happiness and joy inside of you instead. Now, if we indulge in the five sense it is impossible at the same time to turn inwards because they are two different directions. If you find happiness in the five sense it means your mind is going out into the world, by it's very definition. But meditation is precisely about going inside. It's about watching the breath, about being still in the present moment. It's about not being attached to the world. So, if you are finding pleasure in the five senses, it means that you are attached to them. Wherever you find pleasure is also where you are attached. Because you are attached, you can't let go, and because you can't let go you can't focus inside. These are two opposite things. It's very important to understand that. That you cannot do both at the same time. Sometimes people say, "yeah, you know, I want to get really deep meditation, I want to live a kind of ordinary life with my partner and all these kinds of things at the same time".

It cannot be combined at the same time. It's impossible to have the full benefit of meditation practice on the one side, and living a completely ordinary life at the same time. They have to be separated from each other. That's why we do this kind of precept on retreats like this.

The fourth one is about silence, and silence is a wonderful thing. You find that it's so wonderful not to have to talk. Our society is based on communication, you have to talk all the time. It's great not to have to talk, just to be quiet. It's like you go into your own little bubble and it doesn't really matter, everybody else can do their own thing, you don't have to worry about that any more. The precept is actually not to lie, but because you are silent that's what it becomes. That's the positive aspect of that. And think of it also... sometimes people find it hard to be silent, it should be easy enough, it's only a day and a half this retreat, but sometimes people find it hard and find it oppressive. If you do find it a little bit oppressive think of it as an act of generosity to the people around you. On a retreat like this, there's always some people who get nice meditation, so think, "okay, I'm going to help you, I'm going to do this to help everyone here, to encourage you and to support you in your meditation practice." Then you have a positive attitude about silence. It becomes another positive thing. It becomes a gift to everyone around you. So you're kind of combining these precepts a little bit.

The fifth precept is about not using drugs and alcohol. Again, meditation practice is about clarity, it's about presence of mind and drugs and alcohol are about the exact opposite of that. Not using a high... the next one is vikala bhajana, I have to get my sequence right here, which means not eating in the afternoon. Again, the idea is to move away from too much sensuality. It's not a major issue... There's going to be some soup, is that right, in the evening? Okay, you get some soup, so that's good, that should keep you going. Then we have the precept about not using any entertainment, or adornments of the body, which is another very useful one. Entertainment is all about going out into the world, it's about enjoying the senses. That's what entertainment is about. Again we're trying to withdraw from that. And the last precept about sleeping on a high or luxurious bed, is also, of course, about the same thing. It's about not indulging too much, but, you know, the beds here are fine.

Back to the seventh one, again, the seventh precept, not adorning yourself. This is also one of the nice things about going on a retreat, just to have simple clothes, no make-up, no jewellery, no trying to impress anybody by the way you look, or anything like that. It's like you can become anonymous. You don't have to worry about all these things that we're always concerned about. It makes you self-conscious, if you always have to worry about what you look like, right? And here you can let go of that self-consciousness completely, and you can be nobody! Isn't that nice to be nobody? We always have to try to be somebody. We always have to try and live up to our own or other people's expectations. Always trying to be a certain person. Now, one of the things about trying always to be somebody, is this sense of self that we have inside of us always needs to be defended. If somebody challenges us and says, "aw, okay, you are no good. What are you doing? This isn't good enough". Or somebody tells you you're not looking your best today, or whatever, we feel upset. And the reason we feel upset is because our sense of self is challenged.

So this sense of self is something that always needs to be bolstered, always needs to be kept up. We need to think, how much of the time do we think about ourselves, are we concerned about ourselves. Stupid little things, right? But this is just life, everybody is like that. Now, for once, you don't have to think about yourself any more. You can start to let go of that sense of who you are, your sense of identity. How you are, who you are compared to other people. When you reduce that sense of identity what you find is that you become more peaceful, because you don't have to think about all those issues concerning yourself any more. So reducing your sense of self is actually one of the great ways of starting to feel peaceful as well. This is what you do, this is why adornments, just wearing ordinary clothes and not adorning oneself, actually is a great benefit and a wonderful thing to do.

So, those are the eight precepts and they give you some idea what right attitude means in meditation practice. All this is about right attitude. So this is one of the things we try to build up. Some very general things about right attitude that I can maybe add to what I've been saying before: one of the things I often remind myself when I do my meditation practice is that when I meditate, that is when I come closest to the meaning of life. That is where I'm touching what life is all about. This is quite radical because most people think, "yeah, I'm going to meditate so I can improve my life, so the rest of my life can become better" That's what most people think. But, no! It's actually the other way round, it's actually when you meditate you're getting closer to the very essence of the purpose of life itself. Why is that? The reason is, is because in meditation practice, what you are finding is you're finding the sort of happiness you're finding the sort of contentment you're finding the sort of satisfaction that you actually, each one of us, always is actually searching for.

If you look inside of yourself, look inside of your mind you will see that we are often run by desires, all kind of things, right? From the moment you wake up in the morning, you have to choose what clothes you're going to wear, from breakfast... Everything is run by desires and cravings in our life. Those desires and cravings, they are pointing towards one thing: we want to be satisfied. That's why you want to fulfil that craving, fulfil that desire. Except that it never happens, the desire always comes back to us again. Then suddenly one day you sit down and meditate and you find that satisfaction in meditation. At least a little bit more, than you find it by running around in the world. This is what I mean, you're actually touching here the meaning of life, the purpose of all the running you do in the world, you find it, you find the result, you find what you're searching for in the meditation practice, rather than by actually getting the results in the world around you.

So here you are touching the meaning of life. This is what life is all about, this is what you really searching for. This is what you have. Your innermost yearning, actually comes... that yearning actually gets fulfilled finally when you are sitting down and doing your meditation practice. Or rather it can do. Often it doesn't happen, but it can happen. And when it happens, you think, "WOW! This is really it! Now I'm coming to what everything really is all about." And that is very powerful, because when you understand that, when you understand that instead of sitting down and meditating and then fantasize about all the things you're going to do in the world, it's kind of crazy, because now you've got the meaning of life so why are you going to fantasize about all those things that

have got nothing to do with the meaning of life. In fact, it should be the other way round. When you're running around in the world in daily life, going doing this, doing that you should fantasize about meditation practice.

That's the way it should really be, because you understand that everything you do in your ordinary life, that if you can think about your meditation practice, it will give you a guide in your ordinary life to how you should behave. Is this going to lead to an improvement in meditation, which is the purpose of life, or is it not? Is it going to lead me away, or lead me in the right direction. So please fantasize a bit about meditation in ordinary life: "ooh, wouldn't it be nice if I could now go back and be on retreat and just sit peacefully. Wow, maybe as soon as I get a chance, an opportunity I will do that." And then you have this guide, to also guide you throughout life in a sense. So remember that, while you're sitting here on this retreat. This is it! You are touching the meaning of life itself. You're not going to get any closer than this probably, so this is your opportunity. Why waste that opportunity by thinking about all kind of other stuff instead.

This is going to be the first talk about the theme of this retreat. The theme is dependent origination, known as paṭiccasamuppāda in the Pāli language. What I thought of doing tonight, is just to do a general overview. Is it loud enough? Can everybody hear alright? I'll just do a general overview of what this teaching is about so that we have a kind of a background. Then we can draw out the details over the few sessions after that. So that is going to be the main purpose of tonight. As I said before, if you have any questions this please write them down and put them in the basket at the back. Good.

So, one of the things about dependent arising, it is well known, everybody thinks it is very profound. Everybody says, "ooh, this is very profound stuff." And, of course, there is a reason for that, and the reason for that is that, that's what it actually says in one of the suttas. I don't know if any of you read these suttas already. If you have, then you may have come across, or you probably would have come across, the way things start off in the sutta called the Mahānidāna Sutta, which is The Great Discourse on Causation, found in the Dīgha Nikāya. In that sutta, it starts off with Ven. Ānanda... Ven. Ānanda, of course, is the Buddha's right-hand man. He's always present, always hearing the discourses and he's the one who eventually makes sure those discourses are recorded, if you like, recorded in memory for posterity. He says to the Buddha, he says: "It is wonderful and marvellous, Bhante, how this dependent arising [or if you like, dependent origination] is so deep and appears so deep, yet to myself it seems as clear as clear can be." And then the Buddha says: "Do not say so, Ānanda! Do not say so, Ānanda! This dependent origination, Ānanda, is deep and it appears deep. Because of not understanding and not penetrating this teaching, Ānanda, this generation has become like a tangled skein, like a knotted ball of thread, like matted rushes and reeds, and this generation does not pass beyond saṃsāra with its plane of misery, unfortunate destinations, and its lower realms." So this is where it comes from, when everybody says, "aw, this dependent origination is so deep". This is actually the canonical reference to that.

It's quite interesting because Ven. Ānanda, of course, he knew almost all the suttas, all the discourses of the Buddha by heart. He was also well known for

having become a stream enterer. A stream enterer is somebody who has penetrated and understood the teaching on their own. He was a stream enterer fairly early on and here is one the Buddha's chief disciples saying this is really deep, but I understand it, and the Buddha says, be careful what you say, don't be so quick, because this really is profound and it because of not understanding this that people are stuck in saṃsāra. That is fascinating. It makes us wonder, "well, what is the chance of me understanding this if Ven. Ānanda couldn't understand it, what is my hope?!" That's a fair question actually. It is a fair question, but remember the idea with a retreat like this is not to grasp these things absolutely fully, in their full depth and all their details. The idea is to get enough understanding that you are moving in the right direction.

This is the whole gist, the whole purpose of the Dhamma, is always to move in the right direction. As you keep moving in the right direction, doing some meditation, doing some practice, understanding what the teachings are about, all of these things come together, and one day, who knows, one day you might also, each one of us might also understand the full profundity of these teachings. The reason why they are so profound is basically, just what it says at the end there: it is because of this that people don't make an end of saṃsāra. What that means is that if you are an ariya, if you are a noble person, who has penetrated and understood these teachings through your own insight, through your own understanding, that is when you have that full penetration. So Ven. Ānanda, my guess is that at this point he hadn't yet become a stream enterer, maybe it was later on, or, the alternative is that he was a stream enterer, but even as a stream enterer you understand the general principle for how it works, but you make not be clear about all the details.

This is one of the things that is so fascinating about this teaching, is all the details, all the things that actually come out of it once you start to investigate. There are so many aspects to this teaching. To give you some examples of the aspects that I'm thinking of, this teaching, contrary to what some people say, it includes the law of kamma. The law of kamma is very central to this particular teaching. It explains kamma in a very beautiful and very meaningful way. That's one of the things I want to draw out of this teaching, especially if you look at the first three factors of the dependent arising. The first three factors are from... I'll go through the factors latter on, but from ignorance, saṅkhāra, like activities, and consciousness. That is all really about kamma and how kamma works. It's very interesting to understand how kamma works because it's something which is very practical, something we can use in our own lives. So it brings out kamma in a very detailed way. This is one of the things that makes in so interesting.

The second thing, which of course, makes in very interesting, is that it shows us how this saṃsāra, how the process of continuous existence, how it is sustained without a self in it. This is one of the key things about dependent arising, it shows us how this is possible that you can go on, and go on, and go on keep on going, but there's no self in there there's no substance, there's no essence to it which is always present. This is one of the things that makes people stop. One of the classic counter arguments against the Buddha's teaching, against rebirth, is the idea that if there was rebirth there must be a self in there, "and you guys, you say you don't believe in a self so you're contradicting yourself." But actually, no, the point of the Buddha is precisely that such a thing as

rebirth can exist without a self. This is one of the things that precisely makes it so profound.

This is found in the third and the fourth factor of dependent arising: consciousness and conditions, what is some times called name-and-form. We will discuss that term later on, what it actually means. But that kind of nexus between those two, because they mutually condition each other, shows you how this thing sustains itself without a self in there. In fact, the whole dependent arising, the whole chain of factors, is also an example of that. So these are two very important things, crucial aspects of Buddhism which are explained in detail in dependent arising.

But the most important thing, and what makes dependent arising so interesting, is that the overall structure shows you... the first factor of dependent arising as I said before is ignorance, the last one of the 12 factors is suffering. What that does - I'll talk more about that in a second - it shows us how suffering arises out of lack of understanding, out of ignorance. This is probably the main purpose of dependent arising and why it is so powerful because it shows us that, if you don't understand things in the right way, you're going to suffer. So you want to try to understand things in the right way. If you don't you have a serious problem.

Now, before I go into more detail about these things, I thought that the mistakes that people sometimes do about dependent arising, they think it's a very profound teaching and people sometimes ask: what is Buddhism? Should it be considered a philosophy? Is it a religion? What is it? How do we make sense of Buddhism? What kind of teaching is it? Of course, you can say it's just a wisdom teaching, but that doesn't really say very much.

So the first question I want to ask: well, if it is so profound, could it then be said to be a philosophy? Is that an appropriate way of regarding Buddhism? Is it a philosophy or not? The answer to that, is a philosophy or not, is that the early teachings of the Buddha, the teachings that we talking about here, the ones that are found in the four nikāyas and not the later teachings, as far as I can see, they are not a philosophy. The philosophy of Buddhism is something that arises later on. That is what the Abhidhamma is all about, that is really philosophy. You may have heard about very famous simile of the Buddha, the Buddha is in the place called the Gosinga Wood and he takes a handful of leaves and he says, "these handfuls of leaves I have in my hand, compared to all the handfuls of leaves in the forest, which is more?" So the monks obviously say, "the handful of leaves in your hand are few and ones in the forest are great in comparison." And then the Buddha says, "what I have taught you is comparable to the leaves in my hand, but what I know is comparable to all the leaves in the forest." So what is going on here? What about the rest of the stuff? Wouldn't you guys be interested in hearing about the rest of the stuff?

If the Buddha has all this knowledge, it would be interesting to hear about all the other stuff. Why does he only teach us these little few things? And the point here, remember that the purpose of the Buddha, he is a compassionate teacher he has understood the one thing everybody in the whole world wants to know about. He has understood about happiness and suffering to the core. Look in your heart, what is it that you want? What is it that you yearn for? We are

always trying to move towards more contentment, more satisfaction, more pleasure, more happiness, less depression, less sorrow, less pain. Everybody wants that. I've never met anybody who wants more depression. Unless they are really messed up psychologically, possibly, but then they have other problems. The point is we all want to move there. And the Buddha knows, "I have the answer." So then he decides to teach out of compassion, to help people overcome their problems, and give rise to the highest happiness. That is what nibbāna is all about.

So it's pragmatic! The teaching is purely pragmatic. It has a very clear purpose, and you don't want to distract that teaching with things that have nothing to do with that pragmatic goal, which is to alleviate suffering in all beings. This is why the Buddha doesn't philosophise. What is philosophy? Philosophy is about Plato, and Aristotle, and Socrates, and we find people in the present day. We find it not only in the West, of course, you find it also everywhere. This is what the later Abhidhamma people did also. It's philosophising, it's creating, it's speculating about the world. It's based a little bit on fact, because you have a little bit of science and put these kind of things, but a lot of philosophy is thinking out systems, castles in the air that are built up, often with no foundations, a little bit of foundations, but not much. This is what philosophy is all about. And the Buddha, I think he knew... I'm not saying the Buddha would have built up anything without foundation, on the contrary, he probably would have good reasons for saying what he would have said if he had said so, but he didn't.

Even though he knew what he was talking about, he knew that it would detract from the actual practice, because, once you start to present a philosophical system a system which explains everything in the world, that's very fascinating, right? I just said before, who of you wouldn't be interested in hearing about all the other leaves, Everybody went, "yeah, that would be exciting" I think the same, it would be exciting for me, too. This is the problem, you get sidetracked. You start to philosophise. The Buddha would've probably had to spend the rest of his life answering critics, saying, "well, you know, this doesn't make any sense", "well, actually it does make sense" "oh, no" and then back and forth, back and forth. So you focus on the essentials. I think this is a very important point.

This should remind us that we should really try to be in a similar kind of mindset, where we don't philosophise too much. It means that dependent arising itself, origination itself, is not really a philosophy. The primary purpose of dependent origination is pragmatic. It is to show us that there is a problem, that there is a solution to that problem, and how to apply ourselves. Of course, it also gives a little bit more than that, it gives a little bit of understanding for how it all works, which sometimes gives rise to confidence and faith because you feel that there is a system which is complete. But, essentially, it is a pragmatic thing. It is about release from suffering and a movement towards happiness, and getting out of saṃsāra. This is the purpose of this.

So the Buddha didn't philosophise. This is the thing about the Abhidhamma, I don't know what kind of ideas you have about the Abhidhamma, but as far as I am concerned, and I read Pāli, I have read parts of the Abhidhamma not the whole thing because I find it too boring, to be perfectly honest with you, and

I've also read the suttas, pretty much everything in Pāli, and in English and in other languages as well, and it is very clear to me, that the Abhidhamma is later than the suttas. It arose over a long period of time, because this is a very complex type of literature. It started arising probably fairly soon after the Buddha and went on being developed for many centuries, perhaps millennia after the Buddha passed away. I'm not going to go into that now, if you are interested you can ask in the Q&A, but there are many, many good reasons why the Abhidhamma is not the word of the Buddha.

But the Abhidhamma is precisely a philosophical system. Why? Because it is about creating a system which explains the world completely. So you have this division of mind-moments, or mind-states 96 cittas, or something like that, and then you have the various types of mind-factors called the cetasikas, which are 70 or whatever it is, I'm not even sure how many there are, maybe it's only 40. Shows you how much I know about the Abhidhamma. And then you have the factors of materiality, the physical world. There's 28, or something, or 20 something. 24 perhaps. First of all, it's divided up into all the elements of reality, and then you have all these books that show how these things fit together. There is a book called the Paṭṭhāna, which is a book, basically, translated into English as 'conditional relations'. What that book does, it shows you that all of these categories I just talked about before, how they are related to each other through various causes. 24 causes are enumerated in the Pāli. And the book, the Paṭṭhāna, is so long because there are so intricacies, so many ways these things can relate to each other, it is so long that if you wrote out the whole thing - somebody apparently calculated this - if you wrote out the whole thing, the book would be so long that it would stretch from Sydney to Melbourne, or something like that. That's how big it is. So this is thought out by the human mind. This is what they call philosophy. And this is what happened later in Buddhism. Of course, the sad thing is that if you travel around the Buddhist world, you find that a lot of people, that's what their interested in.

It's exactly why the Buddha didn't teach it. He saw the attraction in that, the danger in that, creating philosophical systems, building them up, and it's never finished. This is the other problem, there's always some hole in the system. Somebody says, "oh, what about this? You haven't thought about this problem over here." And then you have to write a new sub-commentary to fill in that little gap. Then somebody finds a hole in the sub-commentary and the more literature you have, the more holes there's going to be. So for every book you add, there going to be another whole. And it keeps on going like that and there's no end. This is the problem with philosophy, it never, never stops. So the Buddha, very, very wisely, skipped that whole area. So dependent origination is not philosophy. It's pragmatic, it's practical, it's to be used in a practical way. So please keep that in mind. It's so easy to get sidetracked with philosophising.

So what is Buddhism? Maybe just very briefly: what it is, because I think it is interesting just as a point of general interest. Is it a religion? Is it a religion? People say, "aah, yeah, maybe, maybe not it's a religion." I think it's a fascinating question. Personally, I think it's fascinating, whether it's a religion or not. Obviously, the answer is, it all depends on how you define the word 'religion'. I looked up the Oxford Dictionary, very recently, at how that defines 'religion', and it says any kind of system where there is some kind of

supernatural agency is a religion. From that point of view, is Buddhism a religion? I would say no, it is not, because, certainly from an internal point of view of Buddhism everything is part of nature. Nothing is supernatural, Nothing is outside of nature. If you go to ordinary religions, like, Christianity or Islam, of course, the idea is that God stands outside of nature. That's why he can break all the laws of nature. He doesn't have to care about gravity or whatever. He can just do whatever he wants. Quantum mechanics, no problem, he can do what he likes with the world. He is supernatural.

But from a Buddhist point of view, everything is part of nature. So in that way, Buddhism is not, really, supernatural. But, if you're not a Buddhist and you say, "aww, you guys believe in all kind of weird stuff, you believe in devas, okay; supernatural." So from an external point of view, maybe Buddhism is a religion, because other people might think that we believe in supernatural stuff. So it depends on the angle you take. I must admit, I prefer to be very careful when using labels like 'religion' on Buddhism, because the word 'religion' has so much baggage, and a lot of that baggage does not apply to Buddhism. So we are taking on this baggage by calling ourself a religion; I'm not sure that is very suitable, or very useful. Sometimes it's better to say, "yeah, I'm not sure we're a religion, maybe we're something else."

So what is that something else? I would say that something else is that, Buddhism is essentially... this is maybe something I need to reflect a bit more about, but it's really a type of psychology. That's what I'd call Buddhism. All of Buddhism is about how to use the mind well, how to move from suffering to more happiness, how to eventually end all suffering. It's all really mental stuff. It's all about developing the mind, doing something with the mind. It's a kind of psychology. Maybe not anything like anything we have in the world apart from Buddhism, it's different obviously, but it really is, I think, at the end of the day, possibly a type of psychology. Although, I must admit, I haven't really thought about that carefully enough to really make an absolute statement about that. Anyway, Buddhism is a psychology, and, of course, that includes then dependent origination.

So where does this fit in to this picture of psychology? What is it all about? Dependent arising, the first thing, of course, to understand about it, is that it is an important teaching of the Buddha. How do you know it's an important teaching of the Buddha? Well, usually, you know because somebody else says so. That's how people often know it is an important teaching, "this is important because they say it's an important teaching." But is there any objective way of deciding this, apart from just listening to people like me saying it is important? The objective way of deciding whether a teaching is important in Buddhism or not, is to see how often did the Buddha talk about this. How many different audiences? How many different places did he give this particular teaching? And dependent arising is one of those teachings that you see throughout the suttas. You see it in all the four nikāyas. You see it in the Majjhima Nikāya. You see it in the Dīgha Nikāya. You see it in the Aṅguttara, in the Saṃyutta. In the Saṃyutta Nikāya, there is a whole section just about dependent origination. This is how you make a decision about whether a sutta is important or not. This is actually a very useful tool, because sometimes people say, "ah, this is really important." But why is it important? "I don't know, it just is important." There should be some objective criteria for deciding these things. So dependent arising is one of

those things.

The second question is then: how does it fit in with the rest of the teachings? Because we need to sort of tie it together with everything else. One of the wonderful things about the Buddhist teaching, is that it all fits together into this one picture. It's basically one picture, then you take out a little piece here a little piece there, it's almost like a jigsaw. It's not really like a jigsaw. A jigsaw is a very imperfect simile, or metaphor, because really, often, the different pieces they overlap, or one fits into another one and it's not really quite like a jigsaw, but still, it is an overall picture. And it is the picture that you realise when you awaken to the Dhamma. When you, one day, become a stream enterer and you get a flash of insight, BANG! What is it that you see? What you see is: the Dīgha Nikāya, the Majjhima Nikāya the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Aṅguttara Nikāya. All in one! That's what you see! Whoa! Your head is going to explode! Imagine seeing all that is one moment. But the point, of course, is that the insight is quite simple, but when you draw out all the implications of that one single insight, you end up with an enormous thing. That is what is so amazing. So dependent origination is part of that. It is part of that big picture, but it is only one little thing. So where does it fit in?

One easy way of understanding where it fits in is to look at the Four Noble Truths. Noble Truth number one, is the truth of suffering. Usually, most people shake their head, "okay, I'm not a Buddhist, I don't suffer." That is number one. Anyway, once you get passed the first one, you say, "okay, yeah, life is a bit unsatisfactory sometimes, okay, fair enough." Once you get passed the first one, the Second Noble Truth: the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering is taṇhā, craving, according to the Second Noble Truth. Now, in some suttas, that fact that taṇhā leads to suffering is expanded out, and it is expanded out into dependent origination. Dependent origination is what shows you that suffering arises. It's an alternative way of understanding the Second Noble Truth.

So dependent origination fits, bang in there. It is basically another way of speaking about the Second Noble Truth, dependent origination. That's already quite interesting because normally you look at the Second Noble Truth, craving gives rise to suffering. Okay, fine, first of all maybe it's a little bit hard to understand why that is the case, so one thing that dependent origination does, it spells out exactly why it is that craving gives rise to suffering. It puts in all the little pieces in between to show you how this conditionality actually works. That's the first thing that's interesting about it.

The second thing is, okay, if craving is the cause of suffering the Third Noble Truth says that when you remove that craving suffering ends. But, how do you get rid of craving? If craving is the cause of suffering, you want to get rid of craving. It's not very obvious, right? Everybody has desires, everybody has cravings in their life. How do you get rid of that? And this is the other thing that dependent arising, dependent origination shows you. It shows you all the links, all the causes that eventually give rise to craving. So it shows you how craving can be removed. And, of course, what it does, it takes it all back down to ignorance I was talking about before, which is the first factor of dependent arising. So if you remove ignorance, then everything else starts to disappear. Craving, and then eventually also suffering itself. So it fills in the gaps. It makes it clear what is going on. This is the power of dependent origination in this case.

The second thing that is fascinating about this, and often you will hear people argue about whether dependent origination includes things like rebirth. Is it about rebirth? Is it about one life? Is it about what happens in one moment? People have all these different theories about dependent origination. I don't know about you here, I'm not sure what you think. I'm not going to ask you. I, personally, don't have any doubt that it refers to rebirth. The rebirth process is part and parcel of dependent origination, and you can actually see that if you consider the Second Noble Truth, or at least one hint is found right there because, the Second Noble Truth says it is the craving that leads to rebirth, which is the source of suffering. It's not just any old craving, it's specifically called *ponobhavika*. *Pono* is from *puna* which means 'again'. *Bhavika* means existence. So the craving that has to do with re-existence. So because dependent origination is just an expansion of that Second Noble Truth, dependent origination, too, has to do with rebirth and re-existence in the future. It becomes very clear once you whack it into that formula and they obviously have to equate with each other, it's the same thing, so it deals with rebirth. That's one thing I've been saying before, I talked about the various things that dependent origination points to such as *kamma et cetera*, of course, rebirth and *kamma* are here closely connected to each other. So this is where it is then, it is part of the Second Noble Truth, and straight away you see some interesting things coming out, just by considering that.

Third Noble Truth. The Third Noble Truth is about the ending of suffering. It's great that there is a Third Noble Truth. Without that it wouldn't be so great, just the cause of suffering and suffering. So the third one is like, WOW! This is the power of the Buddha's teaching that we have the Third Noble Truth and the fourth one, of course, which is the path. Now the third one shows us that the cessation of suffering comes from the cessation of craving. Again, the sequence of dependent arising, it has a forward order and it has a reverse order. And here it operates in the reverse order. It shows you that when you eliminate *avijjā*, ignorance, at the bottom all the factors get eliminated until you eliminate craving and then it fills in the gap between craving and *dukkha*. All of those factors get eliminated and eventually suffering itself gets eliminated. There are two ways that dependent arising works: in the forward order, which shows you how suffering arises and the reverse order, which shows how suffering ends as a consequence of all the other factors ending. Second Noble Truth and Third Noble Truth.

I hope I'm making sense to you. I'm not sure how much you know about these things, or how much you don't. I apologise if I go too fast; just let me know later on, write a little complaint or whatever and I'll try to go more slowly. Sometimes it's hard because you have people at different stages, different understandings.

So this is, then, where... now you can see why it is very much a psychology. It's all to do with craving, desires, how that causes suffering in the end and about how it's ignorance, which is another mental thing, at the very beginning which causes this whole thing. It all revolves around things in our minds and the way our psyches actually work.

Very briefly, perhaps, ignorance itself even though we have this whole chain of things starting with ignorance, what about ignorance itself? Where does that come from? Can we say anything about ignorance? The Buddhist idea is that ignorance has always been there. There is not first cause of ignorance. I'll talk more about this later on but this is one of those things that always has existed. You cannot find the first cause of it. Not really always has existed, but you cannot find the first cause. But, that does not mean it cannot be eliminated. It can still be eliminated, even though there is no first cause to it. So that is how it fits into this big jigsaw puzzle. It's directly there. Part and parcel of the second and the third Noble Truths. And this becomes the importance of dependent origination.

So, now, I thought of maybe talking, very briefly today, just about the various links of dependent origination, starting from the beginning and show just very briefly how the whole system works. Once we have this overview, then we can start to focus in on the details maybe tomorrow morning. So let's have a look at the overview of this whole sequence. As I said, it begins with avijjā, usually translated as ignorance; not a good translation perhaps, - I'll talk more about that tomorrow - and it ends up with dukkha. In between, you have ten other factors in between. There's 12 links in dependent arising, and they are linked, there's like a pair-wise linkage. Each one of these factors is linked to the one which comes after it, and it's a causal linkage: one thing leading to the next one, leading to the next one.

So the first thing to understand is this idea of causality that actually drives this thing called dependent origination. We start off with avijjā and the point here is that once you have avijjā the second factor comes into effect then third factor all the way to the twelfth factor which is called dukkha which is suffering. The kind of causality you are talking about here, and this is spoken about in brief also in the suttas themselves, it is a type of causality you can call sufficient causality. Sufficient causality means that when the factor preceding another one exists, the factor that comes after must also exist as a consequence. That's what it means to be sufficient. In other words, ignorance is sufficient for the next factor to exist. And then, the next factor is sufficient for the third factor to exist, and so on all the way to the last factor. Each one is sufficient for the following one, and what that means is that if you have ignorance, you have no choice, you have to suffer. From ignorance comes suffering. What is that stupid English saying? Ignorance is bliss. It's completely wrong! It's a mistake. It's got it completely the wrong way round, ignorance is not bliss. If it is bliss, it's a very kind of shallow form of stupid, silly bliss. The real problem is ignorance must cause suffering. That's what we mean by sufficient conditions, one must lead to the next one, one after the other. If you have ignorance, you have to suffer. It's interesting, right? It means that there is only one solution to this whole thing.

But there is the other side, which I mentioned just before, and that side is that once you take away the ignorance once you give rise to knowledge and understanding instead, the second factor also disappears, also ceases as a consequence. This is another type of conditionality. Both types of conditionality apply at the same time. This is called necessary conditionality. Sufficient conditionality and necessary conditionality. Necessary conditionality means that the preceding factor is necessary for the subsequent factor to arise. So if you take away avijjā, if you take away ignorance, the second factor, which is

called saṅkhāra in Pāli, cannot exist any more, it must disappear as a consequence. This is called necessary conditionality. Take away the necessary cause, and the subsequent effect also has to disappear. This is in brief what all of dependent arising really is about. It's about this interplay of these two causes: sufficient causality and necessary causality. When you understand those two causes, it's fairly straightforward. When you understand what's going on you can understand how the whole thing comes into being and also how the whole thing ceases as a consequence.

So that is in brief what it is, and it's not just dependent arising which works like that. There are many things in life which work on the basis of necessary and sufficient conditionality. In Buddhism, as well, there are other sets. I have included some of those other sets in here as well. They're not called dependent origination because they're not the same set of 12 factors, but the same type of causality is sometimes relevant for those sets as well. Sometimes there are other types of conditionality, which are more loose. If you do this, then usually you get that. Which is not as strict. Dependent arising is a very strict kind of conditionality. Very, very strict. If you have that, that must follow. Haven't got that, that will not follow. So that is the overview. You get the idea of how this process works. Let us briefly have a look at the various factors in this chain, and see roughly how it works out.

The first factor is called avijjā in Pāli. As I said, often translated as ignorance. It basically means that you don't understand reality as it actually is. Reality is one way, the world works in one way; you think it's different. Of course, what the Buddha is saying is that we are all like that. We all have this avijjā. We all have this blockage inside ourselves, that make us not see reality as it actually is. What that means is that we are running around like blind people. We are in the dark. We think that we are pursuing happiness, but actually, we're usually pursuing suffering instead. We have got no idea what we're doing. This is basically what ignorance means. Because we don't know what we're doing, it means that we start doing all kind of stuff which leads in the wrong direction this is saṅkhāra.

Saṅkhāra is often translated with this terrible translation... this is my opinion, right, I apologise for anybody who likes this translation. The usual translation is, 'volitional formations'. At least it leaves me stone cold when I hear 'volitional formations'. It doesn't do anything for me at all. I feel like I could be on Mars when I hear that translation. Some people maybe it means something to, but I find it doesn't really grab you, grab your heart when you hear that. Basically, what it means is the activities of body, speech and mind. The things that we do, especially intentional things that we do. So saṅkhāra can be translated... I'll talk about it tomorrow what a proper translation is, but I will leave it for now. So because we don't understand, we do all these kinds of things, right? And all this doing that we do, from not understanding, has consequences. One of the consequences it has... Because all the doing is based on craving, it's about propelling us into the future. One of the things it leads to, is it always leads to rebirth. Quite literally, always propelling ourselves, projecting ourselves into the future.

The saṅkhāras are always about what we want, not about now, it's about the future. From this, we get the idea of viññāṇa. Viññāṇa, which is consciousness,

then gets established as a consequence of that. I'll take much more in detail about this tomorrow. This is just very kind of rudimentary. Because viññāṇa is then established, in this case we're talking about established in a new life in particular, in that new life, depending on where that life is you'll have certain experiences, right? If you get reborn as a deva, a god, wow, you have these wonderful experiences, so much happiness, right? If you get reborn as a kangaroo, it's not so great. Maybe you think kangaroos are cute, but actually, kangaroo life is pretty miserable. I live in the middle of the bush, I see what they are like. They are greedy, they are angry, they fight over food. The reality of kangaroo life is pretty, pretty bad. So when you see a cute animal, what you see on the surface is only one thing. But it could be worse, you could be reborn as an insect. Imagine that! Whoa! You get reborn as a mosquito, you're flying around, find this big lump of flesh in front of you and then, smack! You get swatted because of that. All you're doing is trying to get some nice food, right? You're just doing what everybody wants to do, and then that's it, end of story.

So the point is that, once you establish consciousness in a certain place, your experience of the world is set within certain limits. That is what nāmarūpa is, called 'name-and-form', also called 'mentality-materiality'. It's all our experiences, basically, and they are set within certain limits. Because we have name-and-form, we have the sense basis. You see things, you hear, you taste, you touch things and through that, through the sense is how we contact the world. All our contact through the world is through our sense. I see all of you, you see me, we see each other, we hear the sounds, everything is through the sense. It's called contact in the technical term. Phassa in Pāli. The previous term I forgot to say in Pāli, I don't know if you're interested, it's called saḷāyatana, the six sense bases. Phassa, contact in the world. Phassa leads to vedanā.

Vedanā means the feeling tone of experience. Is it happy? Is it suffering? Is it neutral? It leads to much more. Contact also leads to all kind of things. We see forms, we have volition, will, drives in us, will in us, it leads to many other things as well, but it's interesting, the Buddha here, picks out vedanā, this idea of the feeling tone of experience. He picks that out specifically because it is much more important than the other ones. Why is it so important? Because, it is vedanā which tends to drive us. Vedanā decides if you like it or not. If you don't like it, you will want to get rid of it. If you like it, you will crave for it. So vedanā makes us act. The feeling tone makes us act, through craving. So you crave and then you act and part of that action is upādāna. Upādāna is how we react to craving. What do we do with craving in the world? We do things. We take up things. We start things. Almost all the things we do are, big picture things, come from this idea of upādāna. Taking things up, almost in a literal sense. You take up having a job, or you take up hobbies, or you take up Buddhism, you take up meditation. You do things. And then because we take up all these things we live in a certain way. It's called bhava, existence. So we live in a certain way, our mind is kind of set in a certain way. This is very similar to what we were talking about at the beginning of consciousness being established. We're established, through the way we exist, and because of that establishment we are reborn in accordance with that establishment later on.

Because you are reborn, you must die, right? With birth comes all the problems. With birth comes human life and once you have human life you have to have

human experiences. I don't know what your human experience is, but it's a bit of everything, right? Sometimes you are happy, and everything is great. Sometimes it's absolute misery. You go through divorce, you get fired from your job, your closest family members and your friends, they die, or you get really sick yourself, or whatever. Life goes through all these ups and downs all the time, there are so many problems there. I think it is very important to be realistic about that. Sometimes you hear people say, "aww, yeah, in my life I won't have any suffering." It's a very shallow, to say the least, shallow outlook. You haven't really looked very carefully if you think you have no suffering. You really haven't. You, kind of say "aww, don't want to see, don't want to see." That is basically what you're saying there. I'm a monk, you could argue that my life is probably quite easy. Ajahn Brahma is probably the most happy person I can imagine. He always is very light hearted, he always jokes, he always messes around, but when he talks about suffering, he says, "life is suffering! Life is really dukkha. It's really, really bad." He's the happiest person, so if he says it's suffering, okay, I'll believe it. I can feel it myself anyway. So no problems there.

Okay, so that is dependent arising in brief, just to give you an overview. Those are the 12 links. All the terms and how they all connect together. And then, of course, the cessation mode as well. So that you have the opposite happening when it ceases at the beginning, each one of these links will cease, until you get to the last one eventually. So, I think I will probably stop there because I don't want to go into any more details about things at this particular point. It's probably lots and lots of information for you anyway, maybe way too much. I've always been a bit worried about these one hour talks. You can say a lot in an hour, so that's part of the problem.

Anyway, for tonight, have a nice, good night's sleep remember that meditation and going on retreats is about enjoying yourself, having a good time. Meditate until you feel that you are tired, have a really good night's rest, sleep as much as you like, you feel is necessary, and tomorrow you'll be clear and ready for another day.