

## Secular Dharma: a Practice of Care and Awakening for our Times

### Class 1

**Taught by: Martine Batchelor & Bernat Font**

**Recorded on April 12, 2025**

#### **Martine Batchelor**

So it's wonderful to be with you wherever you are. We are in England at the moment, though I live in France. We are teaching at Gaia House. And so today, the way it's going to work is that I will talk for 15 minutes, then Bernhard we'll talk, then we will have a meditation, then we'll have a discussion, then we'll have a break. We will have a break, and then again, talk, talk, and then some discussion, and then we'll finish with a meditation.

So in the first part, what I like to look in terms of what I want to share with you so the title is **secular dharma** and here now I would like to look at what does it mean in a way secular meditation secular Buddhist meditation and what do we mean by secular what we mean by secular actually is just to mean secular so that it is for this time because in a way the Buddha was 2500 years ago and then through different kind of in different countries different times then Buddhism meditation has come to us and of course both of us Bernhard and myself are very interested in the early Pāli texts what are they saying and then in a way what are they saying to us today and at the same time personally I think in terms secular dharma, I think we are in a very different situation than 2,500 years ago, because, you know, even over time, in China, even in Korea, even in Tibet, in different countries, Japan, etc., generally, Buddhism, Buddhist meditation was since circumscribed by geography, and only a few people really kind of traveled and were pilgrim, and then a lot of them stayed where they are and studied and practiced what was around them.

Personally, I feel nowadays in this secular, we actually have so many different meditation techniques. We can encounter so many different Buddhism, and within that you have so many different aspects that I think is very specific to this secular. And then one wonders in a way what is it I should do a bit like in the **Kalama Sutta** the people saying to the Buddha all these teacher comes and tell us to do this or that and which should we follow or should we follow your teaching and in a way the Buddha says oh you follow the teaching which will bring more wisdom and compassion and you don't follow the teaching which will make you to cause more harm. And so in a way, what interested me in terms of my background, because I was a song in Korea for 10 years, so more like Zen Chan. And then I practiced mindfulness and insight and vipassanā in England.

And what I was struck was that, in a way, the theology is a bit different between song and vipassanā. It's kind of a little different. But then I heard about **Samatha** and **Vipassanā**, anchoring, concentrating,

focusing, experiential inquiry, kind of looking deeply. And to me, he sounded just like my teacher. Because my teacher, every time he gave a talk during a long retreat, which we had of three months, he would say, song, song, jok, jok, bright, bright, calm, calm.

When you practice, you need to cultivate brightness and calmness equally. And then I realized, oh, he's talking about Samatha Vipassanā. And then I kind of thought, ah, but each tradition, each technique, seem to have these two common elements in terms of the meditation. So you have a bit of anchoring, focusing, concentration, and you have exploration, looking deeply, questioning. But then you might have different objects to focus on, And you also might have a different way you're going to explore.

And what then I became interested in, to see that, yeah, the technique comes actually after the Samatha Vipassanā. And then it became interesting for me in terms of the secular and what we're doing here. I thought, how does it work, this Samatha and this Vipassanā? Because the more I practiced, and in my tradition in Korea, they never, in those days, in the 70s, 80s, they never talked about mindfulness. Really, they did not talk about mindfulness at all. But what was interesting to me is that after three, six months of just questioning in their technique, what is this, what is this, what is this, I became very aware.

So then I became curious, how does it work? And then I realized that in a way you can cultivate mindfulness directly or indirectly. You can cultivate compassion directly or indirectly. And then how does it work? I would say the way it were, or it seems to me, in my experience, is that with the anchoring, you are actually doing four things. Four things happen when you come back to the breath, when you come back to the sound, when you come back to the body, when you come back to loving kindness, when you come back to open awareness, when you come back to question what is it.

You're still doing four things. First thing is that you don't feed the destruction. Because if you're not on the breath, you're generally distracted. And what are you distracted by? Generally, repetitive thoughts you have had before. So in a way, I see the practice of Samatha as really about not feeding the habit, the pattern of thinking, as dissolving its power and at bringing it back to its creative functioning of thinking, imagining, pondering, whatever it might be.

And the fourth thing that happens is that you come back to the whole experience instead of being locked in just one thought or whatever it might be that has taken you away. And so, of course, this, as is pointed out in the text, the Samatha, in whatever way you do it, actually, is going to lead to calm. And then the looking deeply, which you can do looking into impermanence, or you can do in a way, the technique I use was to ask a question, what is this? What is this? leads actually to a similar place of becoming aware of impermanence. And through becoming aware of impermanence, actually, wise compassion arises.

So I really see the inside, the vipassanā, the looking deeply, as a means to not only have clarity, but also in a way experience a compassion which will change our behavior. And it seems to me that when these two things come together, then we're actually developing what I would call a **creative awareness**, a

creative mindfulness. And I would say that creative awareness, mindfulness, then has two aspects. One aspect of acceptance, that actually we see, oh, this is the way things have arisen. And in a way, I have to accept mindfully what's going on.

And at the same time, at times there is transformation, which means we need to do something. And so it seems to me that when we cultivate this samatha, this vipassanā, whatever way we do it, it actually removes the obstacle to our creative potential. And so then what arises is something which we respond, we will respond to the situation. And so for quite some time, I have had this idea of creative awareness, creative mindfulness, creative engagement. And then I wanted to check with one of the great scholars who at time to time asked, can I do this, can I do that? So I asked him, can I translate sammā-sati as creative awareness? And he said, it's not in the text.

So I thought, okay, I cannot do that. But as a secular Buddhist, I thought, I can still use it. Because I really felt what we were developing was not just this bare awareness. I really feel that in a way when we practice meditation, we're actually cultivating a creative awareness. That actually an awareness that helps us to see things anew. And more than that, to respond to the situation at hand with wisdom and compassion. And so nowadays, I would say creative awareness.

But nowadays, I would actually now I'm starting to translate Sammā. I presume you know the term Sammā, generally translated for the Eightfold Path. Sammā-Sati, generally right mindfulness, then appropriate mindfulness or skillful mindfulness. Personally, I would rather, actually nowadays I prefer to call it a caring and careful mindfulness. I'm going to start it to translate or kind of expand the meaning of Samādhi as caring and careful. so it's caring and careful action caring and careful effort caring and careful samādhi caring and careful mindfulness and it seems to me that in terms of secular dharma for our time each of us has to make sense of how do I experience this how do I understand this and sometimes we create a language which might not be totally exact to the text, but Martin will speak better to us or possibly speak better to our audience. So that's what I wanted to share today from my side and now Bernat is going to present his own take.

### **Bernat Font**

Thanks, Martine. So another way that we can understand this secular in the secular dharma is secular as meaning this world our condition here so we talk about the secular state you know the temporal state um so secular means these worlds and how does Buddhism explain these worlds our existential condition in this world, is with what is usually known as the **three characteristics**. You may have come across this term, the three characteristics, usually translated something like impermanence, suffering, and not-self. If I had to just explain this without using Buddhist jargon, I would say that it's trying to describe not existence, sometimes it's called the three characteristics of existence, I find that too metaphysical. It's describing our experience and if it means existence, it means our existential condition, what our life is, what this world is.

And I would say that it's saying that we live in a changing, unstable, unpredictable world. That's

what life is. It's a changing, unstable, unpredictable place in which we depend and are vulnerable to circumstances, lots of them outside of our control. And we are not the mini-gods of our mini-worlds. We don't write the script, we cannot decide how things go. So the first of these characteristics is fairly self-evident. Change, impermanence. Things change, things are unstable, therefore they're unreliable in some sense, and they're finite. And we are finite.

But the second one is much more interesting, Because I would say impermanent is an observable fact. But then the second one, **dukkha**, really depends on how we understand it and how we translate it. And to me it's quite crucial to our understanding of the dharma, this term. It's often translated suffering, which is many times a good translation, but sometimes it doesn't work. Because dukkha in Pāli is sometimes a noun, sometimes an adjective. And in the famous first noble truth, it's an adjective. It doesn't say that birth is suffering, whatever that means. It says that birth is painful, aging is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, being separated from what we like is painful, being associated with what we dislike is painful.

It's an adjective. And I can quite relate to the slogan in a way, life is painful. It's even more than life is suffering. I don't know why. And we know it doesn't mean that it's painful all the time. But that it contains pain and tragedy that's part of life. Precisely because it's changing and unstable. That opens us up to hurt. Physical or emotional. But when we go to the psychological, that's where I think the translation unsatisfactory comes, which is very, very popular nowadays. And I sort of have a mental project in my mind to really trace where this interpretation comes from.

Because I don't really know any Pāli term that would literally translate as unsatisfactory. It's a very modern idea. I know the word contentment in Pāli. It's completely different, has no connection linguistically to the word dukkha. So this unsatisfactory, I find a very unsatisfactory translation. Because, sure, obviously we don't like that things change a lot of the time. So it depends on what change. But if we hold this generally, say that one characteristic of life is that it's unsatisfactory, what does that really tell about our take on life and what we should do with it? Like, if anything that's changing is unsatisfactory by definition, kind of fatalistic.

And these days that we're teaching here with Martin at Gaia House, I gave some kind of ridiculous examples. It's a little bit, imagine that you buy a flower and then you go back to the flower shop complaining because it withered. And it's like, I'm returning it to you because, you know, the flower is wilted, it's not beautiful anymore, I want my money back. Or if a waiter asked you how was the food in your restaurant, you would say, well, it tasted nice, but then it changed. It was transient, so I didn't find it very satisfactory. You're just getting one star on Yelp. That would not make a lot of sense.

So impermanence is often explained with this idea that good things end, whether that's like a nice chocolate ends, or the weather, nice weather changes into bad weather. Because this is what we resist. We don't resist when a toothache goes away. We embrace that change very happily. But still, to me, this idea of unsatisfactoriness as a mark of our experience, or even of existence as it's usually said,

relies on a mindset that values permanence and devalues what is transient. And we see this even in the story of the Buddha that sets out in his noble quest to find what does not age and decay, what does not change.

So you can think to me a secular dharma is one that takes these questions and ponders them deeply how do I understand that where do I agree or disagree what interpretation do I give to this and what effect it has in my practice it's part of what we will want you to reflect on and debate and ask about so it's a very natural inclination to we dissatisfied with what's unreliable and changing, of course. But what do we do with it? I feel that an emphasis on this, to me, encourages some world denial and that search for something that will not pass, something that's reliable, something which can never fail us. But what would that be?

In a sense, that is a quest to find something which is not of this world. Because things of this world are changing and unreliable. They're imperfect, they're just the way that they are. So a secular dharma to me is one that fully embraces these worlds, really embrace to the last consequences. Sounds a little heroic, I know. Fully embrace change and unreliability. It doesn't mean that you love it all the time. It's a deeper understanding that this is the state of things. So again, it's understandable to seek refuge from this existential condition that seems to not offer anything solid, ultimately.

We seek refuge, metaphorically, from the inclemency of the weather. The weather also being, to me, a symbol of this change and the unpredictable nature of nature. Where I live in the north of Thailand, and as you know, we had an earthquake some weeks ago. And that is a reminder of these kind of things. The fact that we're at the mercy of natural conditions. It's as if saying that our existential condition is one of being kind of in the outdoors, exposed to the elements. We are exposed. I pity the English language for not having a perfect translation of the Spanish term **intemperie**.

Intemperie, I'm going to write this down because a lot of you might speak Spanish. Intemperie is a term that refers to that exposed condition. When you sleep exposed to the elements, you sleep in the outdoors because you don't have a roof. But it ends up having this almost psychological sense of being unprotected. And here I like, there's a Catalan philosopher that has this quote, which I hope you can see. Can you see this? Okay, it says, we are out in the open. The most fundamental human situation is to be exposed, to be unprotected. If there were not this basic exposure, the gesture of caring for and protecting would make no sense. But it makes perfect sense. It makes the most sense of everything that makes sense. I really like this quote.

It boils down to the fact that we're vulnerable. And nowadays this is my favorite translation of Dukkha. Vulnerable because it speaks to the fact of pain and the fact of the possibility of pain everything that's changing is vulnerable in the sense that it's subject to circumstances if it were not subject to circumstances if it was an isolated thing that cannot be touched and affected by anything else, it would not be changing. Because why would it change? Things change because they depend on something that changes and then the thing changes. If nothing can touch you, you're just the thing you are forever.

So I like this translation, vulnerability.

And I think of the three characteristics, is what I call the **triangle of vulnerability**. Because if you really think about it these three characteristics imply each other in this way if I'm changing and impermanent it means I'm vulnerable I can be affected by conditions so that's the second dukkha and this means I'm conditioned I'm not an autonomous and all-powerful self I depend on conditions and their change means I change. They affect me. In other words, something is at stake. Shit can happen and we need each other. Because if I were not vulnerable, if I were this all-powerful self, then would I be a finite mortal being? Probably not. If it were up to me, I would go on forever. Until I got tired.

But we're usually not very friendly with the idea of death it's a reminder that our existence depends on things outside of ourselves and this is what another philosopher who's not a Buddhist but to me sounds so much like a Buddhist in some senses explores in a book and he starts by asking what is the difference between living things and non-living things So what's the difference between me, you, a rabbit and a doorknob? What does it mean that a doorknob is not alive, for example? And his answer is that to be alive means to be engaged in the activity of self-sustenance. To be alive is to be engaged in the activity of self-sustenance.

In other words, to be alive, I have to be doing something to continue being alive. We're exchanging gas with the atmosphere, we're taking in food, we're taking out waste, etc. This activity has to continue to happen for us to be called alive. When it ceases, because of whatever reason, we don't call ourselves alive anymore. Now a doorknob doesn't need to do anything, doesn't need to be engaged in an activity in order to continue being a doorknob. Or this mug right here. So to be mortal means to be dependent on things outside of our control. Because these activities that we do to be alive, they involve external things, or what we call external things. The trees that provide the oxygen, etc., the things that make us safe. And this is, again, our condition, our existential condition.

So I will draw this to a close with another quote that gets to perhaps the heart of the matter here of this idea of secular Dharma as a practice of care, together with José María Esquirol's quote about being exposed, and that's why we care for each other. And that is this idea by Martin Heglund of **secular faith**. He says the sense of the ultimate fragility of everything we care about is at the heart of what I call secular faith. To have secular faith is to be devoted to a life that will end. To be dedicated to projects that can fail or break down. I call it secular faith because it is devoted to a form of life that is bounded by time. Bounded by time.

Instead of being that quest for something that's not changing, not vulnerable, not fragile, that cannot fail us. This is, I know that things can fail, I know that, you know, in a sense they will. This is a match that we're going to lose. And I'm going to play this match. When a project fails, when a relationship stops, when a loved one dies, we can feel a lot of pain. But would we then say it was never worth to engage in in the first place? Because it ended. So that is secular faith. It's devotion to a life bounded by time and defined by vulnerability. So that's my take on the importance of the secular bit in this idea of

secular Dharma.

So we have time for discussion now. Anything of what we've shared or anything that you brought with you to this session. And it might be a question, it might just be a reflection, or you might just be thinking out loud about the ideas that we just presented. We will have another chance of this later and, of course, next week. But it's nice to engage in some discussion. I don't want to call it a debate. Some discussion to tease these things out and make this more of an interesting thing, both for us and for you, so that we can make it relevant to your concerns and your ideas. So we really, really want to hear from you.

**Questioner**

I'm very much enjoying your presentation I've longed to hear about secular Buddhism for a long time but in listening to Bernat it seemed to me that most of your comments were about things happening to us externally and recognizing the impermanence and the change that's always happening but I think sometimes it needs to be emphasized that at the same time we ourselves are eternally changing. So it's kind of like, you know, instead of kind of isolating ourselves and saying, looking at the world as a changing thing, we ourselves have to take into account and realize that we are changing and our sense of self is changing. I just thought maybe that could be more emphasized.

**Bernat Font**

Yeah, I mean, as I said in the meditation, our bodies are changing and the same would go if we continue with our minds it's not the world as an external thing, it's our existential condition to be finite beings who are changing, who are vulnerable who need each other that's the point of care yeah, absolutely.

**Martine Batchelor**

Yeah, and I think in a way what we have to think it's a little like this flow of condition meeting the outer flow of condition. So the condition within us in terms of mood, in terms of thought, in terms of sensation are changing at the same time that outside is also changing. And then in a way you have two different types of change. You have the change which comes and goes. And then you have the change which kind of actually is kind of over time.

And to me what is an interesting thing in terms of our practice of daily life is to notice when for example a mood changes inside ourselves and then I ask myself oh how long is this going to last and then if it goes quickly I think oh I don't need to do anything about it. If it continues then I really need to creatively engage with it. Eva.

**Questioner**

So I'm going to back up Hashi because you know part of what attracted me to attend this is I just feel like Buddhism is so fundamentally secular and I would call it non-theistic so I don't know if that resonates for you I'd like to hear but you know when I look at Dharma teachings you know if you kind of peel away the cosmology and the fanciful stuff, I'm not sure if that's legitimate for me to do that, then actually it is completely secular. And by that, I mean relevant to everybody and how they live their lives

and not incompatible with any other, you know, kind of, our religion is basically the cultural overlay, as far as I can see. Anyway, I'd just love to hear what you would respond to that. Thank you so much.

**Martine Batchelor**

Thank you. I wonder if we should hear everybody and then we will respond. Shirley.

**Questioner**

Hello, Martine. Many years. I've been dwelling on these concepts with our Sangha. And one of the things that I have found so profound is the teaching of the Buddha of being able to face and go through whatever our suffering offers and not be resistant to it, but vulnerable, open to it, to understand it, to see it clearly with discernment.

And one of the images that has come to mind, and I'm sure that you have seen it too, is if we imagine a rolling stream, a roaring stream, and we see a rock in the middle of that stream that remains resilient, that everything is cutting away at the rock, all the power of the water.

And to recognize that through our suffering, we eventually investigate it, begin to understand it, see it clearly, so that we can be like that rock and find a place in the flow and in the suffering where we can stand and be the caring individual.

And the nobility of character that we are suggested, what is suggested that we cultivate in our lifetime. Thank you.

**Martine Batchelor**

Thank you, Shirley. Victoria?

**Questioner**

Thank you. I apologize because I've had some disruption for this first hour, so please forgive me if my question is not appropriate. But I would like to hear more about timelessness. So in other words, looking at – I come out of the Christian tradition, but with a mystical emphasis on mysticism and the apophatic tradition. So it's an outlook that time itself is a construct that we have in our temporal existence, but that actually the ultimate reality is there is no time.

And so in looking at the three characteristics, it's hard for me to articulate, but I would love to hear more about how there can be a way of looking at impermanence in an ultimate sense, that actually our perception of permanence or impermanence is in itself not complete or not. I'm sorry, I'm not articulating this very well, but I hope you understand what I mean.

**Martine Batchelor**

OK, thank you. Thank you, Victoria.

**Questioner**

Thank you. Yeah. Thanks so much for your your teaching. So this is just really, really interesting. And it's it's great to to see you both. And I was just kind of wondering in a general way, if you could speak to the point about how we co-create experience, you know, that there's this highly unstable system.



And there are these two flows, internal and external, meeting each other. And the idea that the mind, you know, we have the brain in our head, inside our skull. But the mind is this thing in between two people. It's a co-creation of what's happening. I'm not sure if I've articulated that very well. But if you could maybe speak to that a little bit, it would be really nice.

**Martine Batchelor**

So we have different things. I mean, the easiest thing to say is, of course, I would say Buddhism and secular Buddhism is definitely non-theistic. And, of course, very secular because at one level it's very practical. The Buddha is always telling us, check it for yourself here and now. So really, it's kind of being here.

In terms of the timelessness, actually, one of the things, one of the quotes, I know this is on the sideline of that, but I think one of the wonderful quotes I heard is that patience is out of measured time. So being patient, in a way, is having all the time in the world. And I think this is a wonderful quality in practice nowadays. And then I would say, of course, in terms of co-creation, we are constantly co-creative because, in a way, we're kind of so enmeshed in the world, which impacts us, we've impacted.

And I think we have to be careful to think it's only in the mind. I think also the way we are with each other, the way we impact physically or in terms of the mood or emotionally. I find very interesting to also how one listens. I find a very interesting co-creation, how we listen really allowing very much a creative co-production. Bernhard.

**Bernat Font**

Okay. Yeah, a lot was said. I took a few notes to see if I can remember some of this. I mean, these are my perspectives. And to me, the point of sharing my perspectives is that you take them in and think about them and either agree or disagree, and to some extent, the full extent, whatever.

I would question to what degree Buddhism is non-theistic. I mean, it doesn't have a creator God in the same way. But I mentioned the Buddha's idea of the noble quest. The Buddha is, why if I'm subject to aging and decaying death, do I seek what is also aging and decaying and subject to death? Why don't I seek what is not changing and decaying in death? And that's not very far from some of the conceptions of God.

God is what is not this world. God is that which is not changing. It's not imperfect. It cannot fail us. And so it's a similar idea. So I can't say it's exactly the same. But there is that sort of a religious tendency in seeking that. And I don't say this in any sense pejoratively. I think we all have some of that impulse in us. And, yeah, so in that sense, there's a little bit of season there, but it's different.

And to me, the idea of secular Buddhism has less to do with stripping away the culture, which depends on the time we have. We might talk about this maybe next week. But it's always with a culture. I don't think there is a Buddhism before a cultural overlay or underneath a cultural overlay. Buddhism is a fruit of culture, always, from day one. How could it not be? It's dependently arisen. It comes upon conditions of time and place.

But yeah, I think maybe that for next week, some of this. So in terms of shipping away the cosmology, personally I think we have all the right, all the permission to interpret these things the way we want to, psychologically, metaphorically, as long as we do so with knowledge and respect, as we have the permission to put them aside. It's not what I find most useful. But that isn't what makes it a religious kind of Buddhism for me.

But it's rather, are we aspiring to somehow something other than this changing imperfect world, to escape it, or are we aspiring to engage it and embrace it? And in that sense, Buddhism throughout history has had what we could call religious and secular aspects to it, like probably all philosophical and religious traditions.

And for our times, I think it's quite appropriate to emphasize really the embrace of the world, this embrace which is an act of care. And then the last point before maybe Martin wants to add something or someone else wants to then share reflection, the question of timelessness.

Again, this is one perspective Victoria for you to write but you're wrong, which is really the point so my perspective would be that we have all sorts of experience which depend in part on the brain, not totally and we have, most of our experiences are in a modality of time but we can have experiences that generally we call mystical, that are in a different modality, a modality where we don't have a sensation of time.

My personal take is to resist the tendency to then transform this timelessness in what is ultimate truth, really true, but also, personally, to resist the tendency to somehow devalue this experience, saying, oh, it's just something that the mind does, but the real thing is with time. No, there's two modalities here. We can have experiences in the time mode and in the timeless mode. And that's it. And that's the emptiness of it. None of it is ultimate realities. It's dependent. It's dependent.

### **Questioner**

The imperfect world only exists because in some ways for me, I'm still infantile and I want it to be the way I want it to be. And so part of talking about that is, what if nothing changed and I didn't have to grasp on anything? And I mean, it seems like, gee, that would really be intolerable, you know? If there was never any weather, if there was a constancy in sameness, as much as I think I might like that, that would take care of the anxiety about uncertainty, which is sort of rampant at the moment in the world, but in the United States.

So the world is perfectly the way it is because that's the way it is, right? And so then that's, I'm a little surprised I'm saying that because I struggle with the way the world is, not the way I want it to be. But how else could it be? And then this is the second course recently that I've been in, and maybe some of the other people here too. When we go over suffering, we go over pain. So you talked about pain, and I could be wrong, but from the very beginning, I thought the Dharma and the practice is about suffering, of which we do play a role in that.

So it's about the second arrow. So I don't know if we have some responsibility, but we have some

agency. That's why I'm doing the practice. We have some agency. And so I assume that you know, clearly you know way more than I do. So I wonder why lately are people moving away from the idea of the second arrow? And isn't that what the practice is headed towards? It isn't to change the conditions of the world it's to be more fluid in a fluid world.

**Martine Batchelor**

I think it's actually if I may say so I would say it's both in a way it seems to me that yes I mean the Buddha said life is conditioned life is impermanent and so there is suffering in life. And in a way, his question was, can we, it was not so much suffering. I mean, the noble truths are stated that way. But personally, I feel the Buddha is more into what is it that cause harm and what is it that does not cause harm to ourselves and to others.

And so, yeah, we need to be aware of pain, of suffering. In order to understand how it arises, how it continues, how it disappears. And then, of course, you have the two aspects. One aspect that things happen to us. And then, of course, how we react to them. You have the double arrow. But at the same time, I don't think it's just about the double arrow, although I think Shirley was kind of pointing out that, you know, the rock in the water, you know, and how can we care for the tumultuousness?

But it seems to me there is a bit which is about, yes, recognizing the double arrow, not giving rise to that, and at the same time a certain creative engagement with certain circumstances where it's not just about how we behave but that we need to do something about it. So I would say the response. Bernat, do you want to say something or we ask? Shirley at the back?

**Bernat Font**

I would like to reply, just respond rather quickly to Jerry, but not so much because some of this, in a way, we're going into the second part of today, as Martin was anticipating already. And so if I can already, if I can open the box of the rabbit, sorry, I'm thinking in Spanish. I don't see nirvana or awakening as freedom from suffering. I see it as freedom from harming. It's an ethical thing. So we'll talk about this in the second half.

And the other thing very quickly, as you observed, yeah, change is what allows bad news and good news. So how could it be otherwise? Changelessness, absolute changelessness, is uninhabitable. It's everything and nothing.

**Martine Batchelor**

And then Mark?

**Questioner**

I would say that I really like the emphasis in **secular Buddhism**. I heard this from Stephen, a bachelor as well, the emphasis on care. So I've always regarded the Buddha as a physician, as somebody who is taking care and emphasized care and care for the suffering in the world. And so what is new then in, well, I'm not sure whether secular Buddhism is new, but at least historically, I think it is some new

stage or some new development. But why is that different from what the Buddha, I think, really was about?

**Martine Batchelor**

I don't think we're saying that actually what we say is new. Actually, we're saying more that it corresponds to what the Buddha said. Definitely, definitely. And I think it's also, which we have not talked about, and we might talk about next time, which is in a way **karma** and **reincarnation**. And how, in a way, I mean, I have been in some country, and once I was at a conference, when a Korean nun was admonishing the public to not use the idea of karma, to not care for people who were deaf.

And then she had kind of a choir with death language by hand language. And I thought very interesting because you can use karma in that way. Oh, it's your fault. I'm not going to help you. So I think it's, again, how a certain idea leads to more care or less care. And that we might look more at it next time.

**Bernat Font**

I would say, Mark, that it's impossible to know what Buddhism was about. And attempts to do that are attempts to think for oneself, but put it, as the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges put it, everything one writes is autobiographical. But there's two ways of doing that. One can say, I was born in Buenos Aires in 18-whatever. One can say, in a land very, very far away, etc., etc.

So all we can do is try to understand our best, how it makes sense to us. So maybe some of the things we say are new, maybe not. Maybe it's the same, but it's a different language, which looks different, but it's impossible to know in the end whether it's a different language completely or a different content. The line is really blurry.

**Martine Batchelor**

Shirley, or is there somebody else? Shirley listen.

**Questioner**

I just feel that this secular Buddhism and it's a feeling it's a universal feeling because there's so much goodwill out there that we can connect with but I think the Buddhist teachings are about self-care so that we can be a benefit to others and the way that he teaches is all about taking what we have been born with and using that to cope with whatever circumstances and conditions arise in our lives. Now I'm 93, so that's kind of where my perspective is.

**Martine Batchelor**

Thank you, Shirley. You know, what is interesting is that in a way we say secular Dharma, But in Taiwan, very early in the 20s, 30s, actually there was a few monks and nuns, and they promoted what they call **humanistic Buddhism**. And what was characteristic about what they call humanistic Buddhism is that they actually went into the world to help people in very practical way. So again, I think maybe why did they do this? Possibly because the monks and the nuns have stopped doing it, even they might have done it before.

So I think in a way, secular Buddhism in comparison to maybe something just a little before, not necessarily all the way back to 2,500 years. Bernat, do you want to have the last word?

**Bernat Font**

Sometimes I do it's quite one of the pleasures of life a joke aside um uh thank you Shirley for for that I have nothing to add uh to that I did though remember part of what Mark said about the Buddha being a physician and that's the norm, at least in Southeast Asia, monks were doctors. And they stopped that with the arrival of modern medicine in places like Sri Lanka, Burma, or Thailand. It was always connected to whatever was the medical science of the moment, be that Ayurveda or whatever. So in some sense, the mindfulness movement, being in hospitals, is nothing new at all.

**Martine Batchelor**

So thank you very much for now because we thought you might need a little break so we thought a break of 20 minutes so welcome back it's nice to see you again the one I can see on the screen I am on an iPad so I only see a certain amount, about 12. So thank you.

---

**Martine Batchelor** And so what we want to do in the second part of this session is actually look at **awakening, enlightenment, Buddhahood**, in a way you could say from a secular point of view, or in a way point of view of now, the secular. And to me, again, what I found interesting about the place where we find ourselves in terms of encountering Buddhist ideas, Buddhist history, and Buddhist philosophy, is that actually we can see the history.

We can see, in a way, from 2,500 years ago, and then you have certain transformation in certain countries, then you have different traditions evolving.

And in a way nowadays in our century that we encounter this different element. And then we can see that actually up to a point, you have slightly different idea about awakening, about Buddhahood, about enlightenment. And this is something I have pondered about, Because in a way, the first idea of Buddhahood, which appeared in a way after the Buddha died, but maybe during his time also, that in a way, in order to become a Buddha, he had to have many, many, many, many lifetime of practice.

And then there was one important condition for his last life, to become the fully realized Buddha, and that's what he had to be born in a male body.

And me, I have a little trouble with gendered awakening, let's say. So I'm a little kind of like, hmm, what does that mean? Does that mean the ladies have to wait in the back? And as my teacher used to tell me, and I used to totally disagree with him, he used to say, oh, pray, pray to be reborn as a man, and then you'll have better chances. And then I would say, oh, do you mean that? A woman cannot be enlightened. They say, no, no, no, no, no, I don't mean this, but.

So in a way, we have that first idea of Buddhahood, that basically many, many lifetimes, and you need a male body. Then over time, then you start to have another idea, that in a way, Buddhahood, awakening, enlightenment, is possible within one lifetime. In a way, if one practices hard enough and really devotes oneself, then possibly towards the end of his life, then you could experience Buddhahood awakening enlightenment. That's something you find more, for example, in the Tibetan tradition, some Tibetan tradition.

And then you have a further, in a way, idea. I'm not saying temporally, but in terms of kind of when Buddha would happen. You have the idea from the song, Zen Chan tradition, that actually you already awakened. So before many, many lifetimes, then you have one lifetime, and now you're already awakened. And in a way, the only thing you need to do is to see it, is to know it. And I met long ago in Korea this wonderful nun. And I asked her, what's your practice? And she said, my practice is to be a Buddha.

And so in the morning, she would do her chanting, her meditation, and then she was a teacher at a university. And then she would leave the temple with the intention to be a Buddha today.

So really like secular, totally secular.

Today I'm going to be a Buddha. And then she would go about her day.

Then she would come back in the evening. And then she would check how Buddha-like I had been, how un-Buddha-like I had been. And then she would start again. And why would she do this? Because there is this saying in the Song tradition, kind of, you know, a Buddha is a sentient being, a sentient being is a Buddha. And so in a way, it's kind of like, how much Buddha like? How much sentient being like? And then there is this, what I would say, this interesting idea to me, which I met when I was at my temple, because my temple was in Korea, in the Southwest, near Guangzhou, Songguangshan.

And they were following the teaching of Master Bojo, Master Chinul, who followed also the teaching of Master Zongming in China in the 11th, 10th, 11th century. And one idea they had about awakening was that in a way you had certain awakening followed by gradual practice. When actually most of the time in the Sun tradition, what's the best deal is sudden awakening and sudden practice, which never totally made sense to me, I must say. So I was so happy to be actually in this temple, who believed, I mean, the basis was sudden awakening followed by gradual practice.

What did it mean? is actually looking at sudden awakening, as awakening, as in a way something which can happen at any moment. So in a way, since you're already a Buddha in that tradition, then in a way it can happen at any moment. And then in a way what happens is generally in terms of possibly for our experience, is that suddenly, to me, this is about, in a way, from a secular perspective, a moment of the grasping.

Because I think often sometimes the problem I feel with enlightenment, with Buddhahood, with awakening, is that we feel it's going to be kind of something which is going to transcend everything.

Often I have an image that you suddenly kind of start to rise above the ground And then you become a Christmas tree at the same time.

But personally, I doubt this is what happened. And maybe it is more what we experience when we meditate, but also in daily life, that we have these moments where actually we're experiencing manifesting what we would call the factors of awakening. **Mindfulness**, quietness, evenness, care. And so it's a moment when in a way the selfish self dissolves and then we experience the connection and we see others as much as we see ourselves because I think this is one of the important conditions for a wise compassion. The fact that we see others as much as ourselves.

And so in a way, there is this idea that you have this sudden moment where you see things clearly, or there is this love, or whatever it might be, where the self, in a way, this selfish, this grasping, just disappears for a moment, for a few hours, for a day or two.

And then it comes back. But why does it come back?

In a way, it comes back because of the power of the habits. And I think that's when we practice the Dharma, that it be secular Dharma or not.

I think in a way, as we practice with the three training, ethics, meditation, wisdom, what we recognize is that we are caught in repetitive patterns. And so that's what I was talking about in terms of the anchoring, the focusing, that it helps us to go back to the creative functioning and we dissolve the pattern. And if we dissolve the pattern, then in a way, there is so much more space. There is so much less repetition. And then there can be much more clarity, much more insight.

But in a way, the power of the habits are quite strong. I mean, we know for ourselves. Are we sitting in meditation, planning, ruminating, or if we are in daily life? I personally am very interested in patience in daily life. You know, I mean, I am a teacher. I have meditated hours. I mean, I was in a scientific study because I had done my 10,000 hours of meditation. But sometimes my patience can be like... timeless I have all the time in the world and sometimes my patience is a millisecond and this is so interesting why at times I can have this endless patience and at other times I'm like there is this kind of like there is no patience at all and I think again this is back to what Bernhard was talking about, the conditionality.

I think the gradual practice is very much looking at, in a way that's what we studied during the week. We were teaching this week at Gaia House and we were teaching the contemplation of the Dharma, of the Satipaṭṭhāna. And really looking at process, the absence of something, the presence of something. How can something not arise? How can something will arise? What are the conditions for that? And it seems to me that in a way, there is this two things in tandem. There is this sudden moment where in a way the grasping can go, and there is other moments where actually the condition, inner, outer, will make that we can suddenly, we tense.

Suddenly we self in a way. And I think this is so hard. And I think one of the conditions which really

make us self is uncertainty and fear. And I would say at the moment, there is so much uncertainty and so much fear.

And in a way, how can secular Dharma or Dharma of any kind, How can it help us to creatively engage with the uncertainty, with the fear, so that the care can be there?

Because I think this is something I noticed with the impatient. If I am impatient, I'm actually not compassionate. I'm actually not very caring and careful. I really notice that. Same when you are busy. You are busy. I am busy. I am busy. It's like, oops. Kind of awakening is very far away then. Selfing is in full action. So I think it's kind of interesting to look in a way when we practice in terms of when have I experienced. And that's what the awakening factors is about in the contemplation of Dharma is knowing that I can experience this mindfulness, the energy, the investigation, the quietness, etc., the samādhi.

And at the same time, with certain conditions, I will be caught. And then how can I creatively engage with that? And so in a way, I found for secular dharma that idea of sudden awakening followed by gradual practice again sudden awakening, again followed by gradual practice, I find that a very interesting framework to kind of in a way kind of ground the practice on, so that's what I wanted to share. Now to Bernat.

### **Bernat Font**

Okay, so awakening is kind of an important topic, I think, in Buddhism. Sometimes I think if someone asked me what Buddhism is and I had to reply in a very concise way, one way would be that it's a reflection on **impermanence**, as we were talking about before the break. And the second way I might think about it, it's also a reflection, an extended reflection across time about what awakening means. It has been changing, and as Martin pointed out, there are different conceptions of it according to culture and time. Since secular Buddhism is usually associated with going back to the early texts, I thought we could go back to the Buddha's story.

But when I say the Buddha's story, I do not mean history. I'm going to be using the story of the Buddha, regardless of historical arguments about it. As you probably know, the Buddha is said to have lived in great luxury in a palace, and then he's dissatisfied with that. He has an awakening moment, in a way, when he really realizes that everything is finite, everything is transient, impermanent. We all grow old and get sick and die, so he wakes up to his existential condition, as we were saying earlier.

He wakes up to the fact that, in some metaphorical sense, we live exposed to the elements of nature. We cannot escape this. Then he literally leaves the palace and goes to live out in the open, exposed to the elements. In that moment, you could say that he has already seen the truth of impermanence and **dukkha**, pain, or however we translate that. So you could think, well, then that cannot really be the big awakening discovery.

Because he already knows that when he sets out on his path. In fact, that's what sets him out on his path: the realization of impermanence and suffering. Human suffering, human pain, human vulnerability.



And he's looking for something else, for something that's not changing, that's not vulnerable, that is not going to disappoint us. He has some Brahmanic teachers, and he learns that, but then moves on to some other teacher, and then moves on.

He spends some years practicing very harsh austerity. It's a very painful type of practice. Until, again, he thinks that maybe that is not going anywhere, to just harm himself in this way. The village girl, Sujata, offers him a bowl of rice porridge. After eating that, he thinks, well, maybe I do not need to fear this sort of pleasure of just nourishing myself if it has nothing to do with reactive patterns.

So maybe now I'm experiencing some well-being that's not about the flitting superficial circumstances of my luxurious palace life. But he has this meditative experience of bliss, of happiness, of joy, that is not related to reactivity. And that's a big breakthrough. Then he finds he reaches his awakening. And then he hesitates whether to teach or not to teach.

That is the question. And he's inclining to not teaching, thinking that's going to be quite annoying. And it's going to be really exhausting. People don't want to hear these things. People are happy with their comfort zones. They don't want anyone coming and shaking up their apparent certainties.

So it's going to be really tiring for me to try to make them understand. Then he receives the visit of this deity who says, please teach, some people will understand. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who will understand the **Dharma**. Then he decides to teach. Now, why is this interesting?

Why is this interesting? I think it's interesting because after he wakes up and he decides to teach, part of what he's doing is helping the world, helping others. He teaches the Dharma, so that's one way of helping, but he also sometimes tries to mediate between rulers and the villagers. There's some conflict. So he tries to promote well-being.

He expresses his care. He's helping the world. And my question is, this is not what he had set out to find when he left the palace. He was looking for that which is beyond change, aging, sickness, and death. So how did he end up there?

What's the turning point? Is the turning point that experience of non-reactive well-being of **Jhāna**? Well, that's one reading. I think what makes a difference is Sujata, the village girl who offers the Buddha some rice porridge. So you probably know this.

Sujata offers this to the Buddha. It's an act of care. And that's what leads the Buddha to wonder about well-being. Then there goes the jhānas, and then later there's awakening. The beginning of the turning point of the journey is the kindness of this girl.

So it's as if through an act of kindness, of compassion from someone else that he receives, he realizes that the path of hardships doesn't make sense. In that path, he's harming himself, quite literally. It's a type of practice where one subjects the body to very extreme conditions. Later in his teaching career, the Buddha will criticize and even sometimes mock that type of practice by saying this is useless. You're just creating pain for yourself for no reason.

And those ascetics say no with all this pain we are burning the past karma, the past sins if we want to use this Christian language. And the Buddha cheekily asks when does this pain increase? Is it while you're doing the practice? Then does this pain come from burning past karma or does it come from the way you're practicing? You're inflicting this pain on yourself.

Through that act of kindness from Sujata, the Buddha thinks the way is not to cause harm. Of course, he never thought that the path is about let's harm others. But I think maybe it's some sort of shift that well-being and caring is the path. Because the well-being of jhāna or other type of state. But the type of well-being that the Buddha will later promote is a well-being that's non-self-centered.

It's a well-being of generosity, of kindness, of being mindful and caring to others, to learn to enjoy that. So that it's basically a win-win situation. You derive your happiness from helping others. You need some happiness and they need happiness. So we're all contributing to each other's well-being.

So, in some sense, I think when he hesitates, whether to stay in the bliss of those states or go out and teach, he's having that little crisis of faith. And then that deity, what he does is to remind the Buddha of that act of kindness. So, like, please help others. And maybe then there was a connection. And I say maybe because I'm imagining this.

So it's like, ah, I was helped. And that's why this has happened. And so I will help. For a while now, I've been thinking about **nirvana**, not in terms of freedom from suffering, but freedom from harming. And it seems just like changing a word.

But I think it has quite big implications and it has shifted my practice. I think it will continue to do so. If I aim for freedom from suffering, I'm assuming that that end is possible of every suffering. Yes, the second arrow, but there's still other forms of suffering. And so that depends on what worldview we hold, then that will have one meaning or another.

That doesn't mean the same thing if we think of life in terms of reincarnation or if we think that there's only one life. It makes a difference. I think suffering is there to be embraced because it's a part of life. And I don't think I can stop all of it. But I observe that very often I create suffering for myself and for others.

That's the bit that's interesting. I create that suffering. I harm myself and others not because I want to, not because I'm evil, but because I suffer myself and I don't know how to handle it. I'm a bit clumsy and things happen and life isn't easy. But still, I don't want to hurt others, but I do.

I don't want to create suffering for myself, but I do. So the question is, okay, how does this happen? How do I do this? How am I creating suffering? How am I increasing tensions?

If I know how to, then I will know how can I stop. This reminds me of another story. You may know this serial killer, Aṅgulimāla, is chasing the Buddha to kill him. The Buddha performs a miracle, psychic powers, where the Buddha appears to be walking very slowly. But it doesn't matter how quickly Aṅgulimāla runs, he can never catch him, even though the Buddha is walking very slowly.

There's a paradox there. At one point, Aṅgulimāla is really frustrated. Why can't I catch this guy? Why don't you stop? The Buddha says, "I have stopped. Why don't you stop?"

Maybe again, we can interpret that as the Buddha has stopped inflicting suffering. So the Buddha is the idea that we can understand how we're creating suffering and then we can undo this. For some, this might be a little bit of a mundane quest. To me, I think that if you take it to the ultimate consequence, it's a huge deal. It's a huge deal.

So, these are my thoughts about awakening. What we want to do now is to make you reflect on your ideas about awakening. Now, we suggest making breakout rooms, so Rob is preparing these, but do not feel obliged to join them. Some people may prefer to reflect on this individually. So again, you will have 20 minutes.

Or, yeah, 20 minutes. I would really encourage you to take some time, even pen and paper, if that's what helps you think about how do you see the goal of the practice at this time? What is awakening or what could it be? Because it's important. If this is where you want to go, you have to make sure that your boat is facing that way.

It has to match. It's not that there's a right or a wrong understanding of nirvana. It's that whatever is your north star, you have to think about it, refine that understanding, and then make sure that you're facing that direction. Also, be brave to discover that maybe some things are not facing where I want to go. Or maybe I had not thought about this for some time.

Now that I think about it, my goal is a little bit different than it was a few years ago. Challenge it then. That means you should change something of your practice so it matches your understanding of where you want to go. What awakening is for you. Then we'll meet back here.

So whether you go into the group or reflect individually to then reflect together and share ideas and questions that arise in this exercise. Martin, is there anything that you want to say to that? OK, there's going to be 20 minutes starting now. In the first couple of minutes, maybe we will move someone around. If there's a room that's just only one person alone, then we will move them somewhere else. So see you in 20 minutes.

---

### **Martine Batchelor**

Hello, nice to see you coming back. So is everybody back? Yes, it looks like it. Good, good, good. I hope you had a very nice discussion for those who had discussion or an interesting self-reflection for those who decided to do self-reflection.

And so now we have 20 minutes of discussion. Have you got any questions or comments, questions about what we said, comments, or anything you want to share from your discussion? So somebody has raised their hand.

**Questioner**

Good morning. This is Michael on the telephone. I just wanted to show my appreciation for you putting us in the small groups because I find that I hear a lot of wisdom, and it helps me reflect. I find it probably the most beautiful part of the practice. Sometimes Sati Center does, sometimes they don't. It's uncertain.

I'm just very grateful and appreciative and deep bows for your kind attention and beautiful talks and facilitation this morning.

**Martine Batchelor**

Thank you. Thank you. So I'm glad because we know some people really benefit from the small groups. Some people feel differently about it. I think it's going to make it flexible.

So those who benefit do it and those who don't do it. So I'm glad it was beneficial. Anything else?

**Bernat Font**

We'd really like to hear your ideas about awakening. You don't necessarily need to summarize. I mean, 20 minutes is a lot. But maybe in that discussion, something arose that now you can think, oh, so Miranda.

**Questioner**

Thank you, Bernadette. Firstly, let me say what a comfort it is to see both of you. I almost always am thrilled with the little breakout groups whenever they're offered, but I stayed by myself and wrote because I'm at a very difficult crossroads in my life, which, lucky for you, I won't go into. But the two things are in the discussion of whether or not Buddhism is theistic. The thing that has always drawn me in is the lack of something being supernatural.

There's plenty of Buddhist stories where there's all kinds of supernatural stuff, but it tends to be laid over the top and is not necessary for what I take from the stories and the teachings. The fact that it is transcendent in a personal way rather than transcendent in a religious way. The thing that struck me today that I found so helpful in the little letter that I wrote to myself here was the idea of ordinary pleasure in the porridge. The ways in which I hurt myself have to do with seeking joy and overshooting the mark. The idea of just a bowl of porridge was so helpful and lovely. So thank you.

**Martine Batchelor**

Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I think in a way what personally I found interesting in terms of text, in terms of religion, with Buddhism is that in a way I find it's kind of like is it that speak to us what is it that we can cultivate and especially at any moment in our life because in a way at different time we are in different places different texts will speak to us differently and it's it it seems to me that's something about text actually which I found interesting about buddhism because I've done some translation is that in a way one third is actually still relevant to us now. That's what I found, you know, that something said 2,500 years ago, it's so practical, it's so about life, it's so about experience that it speaks to me now

and I can apply it. Then there is a third, which is really so cultural in terms of the reference point are so different.

Than my reference point. There is a different perspective. I totally honor that perspective because that's what they know and how they knew then. For me, it's very hard up to a point not to have like, for example, a scientific perspective because that's what, in a way, I have been raised with. Then there is one, sir, which is about competition with other religion, other school.

And generally, I think, well, that's what they competed the time, I don't need to bother with those because that was kind of what was happening for them then. And so I think yes, I think each of us will take what is beautiful at the moment. And then the porridge, I'm glad the porridge. I think Bernadette has got some really interesting idea about this kind of meeting of the young girl and the porridge and the Buddha, I think there is really something there.

**Questioner**

Well, I just thought it was a really lovely question about what does it mean about awakening, nirvana, or to put it in other terms, like why am I here today? Why did I choose to spend my three hours this way today? And lots of other hours. And I don't think I really know. I think, like, I'm looking out my window at some mountains in the distance, and, you know, Bernat was talking about, you know, it really helps if you're going to reach your goal to be pointed in the right direction.

So supposing I want to walk to those mountains, I don't really know what it'll be like when I'm up on the mountain. I don't know what that perspective will be. But what I can do is to just, you know, it would take several days to get there. And so you could think in terms of like rebirth if you wanted to or whatever. But all I can really do is enjoy my journey and enjoy where I am today.

To me, that is as close as I can get to living the goal of all the goals of the practice. I don't know if that makes sense. Thank you.

**Bernat Font**

Thanks. And that's beautiful. That's beautiful. Yeah. The goal, see, we never know what it is.

Sometimes we have a specific language for it. Some time ago, I thought about this freedom from harming. It inspires me to walk in a particular direction. Maybe it stops working in a few years and I have to change it. There's a period in the middle where it's a bit unclear but the point is more the direction than the destination we reach.

So totally on board with this. It's the journey, it's the walking.

**Martine Batchelor**

And Victoria?

**Questioner**

Thank you. I see that Shirley has her hand up too. I just didn't know what the sequence was, but did you see that?

**Martine Batchelor**

You can go, and then Shirley will still be there.

**Questioner**

Okay, thank you. I had a question earlier, so I didn't want to take up more time than I should. I still, as you recall, was asking about **timelessness** and the interface between secular Buddhism and, like to me, the idea of reincarnation. Apropos of this time versus timelessness is again, and I think in other religions too, even if they don't espouse reincarnation, if they have the idea of heaven or an afterlife, there becomes this kind of conflict almost. Or it could be a conflict between living in the moment and **mindfulness**, which is what is so prevalent in contemporary secular Buddhism.

I thought it was really fascinating that you said, Martine, that when you were studying that, it wasn't a discourse. It wasn't as prevalent as a focus. But I find this, there can be almost a kind of duality between the sense of living in this moment. And when you talked about **patience**, I totally relate to that. And then the idea of reincarnation and how one's **karma** then will lead to the ultimate, you know, the next reincarnation.

That dance between something in the future and being in the moment now and how we live out our karma in the moment. And even with **Nibbāna**, the sense, I love the idea of non-harm, of claiming the possibility of Nibbāna moment to moment, rather than this thing of, you know, maybe in a thousand lifetimes, I will be enlightened enough that I can achieve nirvana. But looking at more, I really love looking at it in the sense of the cooling off, the cooling off of the **kilesa** or the afflictions. Because then it is like apropos of patience. It's a moment by moment, you know, we're on this path.

Every moment we're trying to, you know, do better for the sake of non-harming. But if you could comment on that a little bit. Because for me, the reincarnation tends to keep popping up, and I don't know where to put it in my own study of Buddhism.

**Martine Batchelor**

I think, you see, you have two suttas I would recommend, the **Kalama Sutta**, but also the **Titta Sutta**. The Titta Sutta is very interesting. It's in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, in the Sri number 61. But the Kalama Sutta, what I love about it, not so much the beginning, everybody knows about, don't depend on this, on that, on that, but what is interesting is the Buddha said what is important is not the truth of the statement that the teacher says, but if you apply it, are you going to be less harmful or are you going to be more harmful?

But then, to me, the Kalama Sutta is kind of like a piece of music in full movement. And the third movement is about if you believe in reincarnation, then if you are homeless, you're going to have a good next life. If you don't believe in reincarnation, you will have a good life anyway because you're not harming anybody.

So I really like this, the Buddha saying you believe in it, it's still helpful.

You don't believe in it, it's still helpful.

Because the point is actually more than not harming than what will happen or not, because we're not sure about that. But in the Tita Sutta, it's kind of like the wrong view of others. And then the first one is that everything we experience is because of the past karma. And the Buddha said, no, no, no, no. Because if everything is due to past karma, then you cannot change anything now.

Because it's all due to past karma. Then he said, if it's because of God, then you have no action on God, so again, you can't do much about this. And then you have the people who say, well, there is no cause and effect.

And again, he said, well, you can't change anything with that. And in a way, what interests a Buddha is, what kind of action can we have now so that we don't create harm now.

So personally, I think in a way, in a culture which believes in reincarnation, I'm not going to tell them I don't believe in it. Because, I mean, they believe in it. Why not? That's the way that they believe in it like I believe in scientific stuff, which I can't prove myself. But people have told me it's true. Okay.

About the same a little bit, but in a way for myself, it's oh, what can I do now and then we'll see later what happens or not. But we might talk more about this next week. Thank you.

**Questioner**

I will read those suttas in the meantime. Thank you so much, beautiful answer.

**Martine Batchelor**

Shirley.

**Questioner**

I just want to ask you to comment on **insight**, **Vipassanā insight process**, and **enlightenment**. How do you see them the same, and how do you see them differently?

**Martine Batchelor**

So both of us can answer. So me, I would say insight, it's kind of a momentary, suddenly we see something we've not seen before. Even if it was in front of our eyes, we suddenly see it. When we have not been able to see it clearly before. When I think awakening enlightenment, I would see as a definition in the sutta about the **unconditioned**.

What is the unconditioned? It is being unconditioned by greed, hatred, and ignorance. So I think in one insight, I don't think we can really dissolve greed, hatred, and delusion. But it can diminish, of course, greed, hatred, and delusion. But it seems to me our, I mean, my path, my practice, is very much how can I diminish greed, hatred, and delusion to such a degree that then there can be more wisdom and compassion.

So I would see the awakening enlightenment as much more encompassing, much more multifaceted. And insight more as a certain moment in the way of insight that you see something you had not seen before. Bernat.

**Questioner**

Thank you. Thank you.

**Bernat Font**

So just to make sure I understand the precise point of the question about the relationship of insight and awakening or insight process, can you reformulate briefly? Because I want to really understand the point of it.

**Questioner**

My question is about in my practice. Well, first of all, I never thought of being an enlightened human being in this light. My life circumstances are such that it just didn't seem necessary. On the other hand, insight was very important into my personal growth and going on the journey. And then when I heard you talking about enlightenment before, I thought to myself, well, what's the difference between a positive moment of insight, which can really transform your life, versus, I guess, the overall moment that you become enlightened?

**Bernat Font**

Yeah. So the Buddhist tradition from the beginning has spoken of awakening in the various levels. So we have the idea of this definitive sort of awakening, the idea of the 100% destruction of any form of reactivity, greed, hate, or delusion. Then there's also the acknowledgment that every time we let go of some of this form of reactivity, that is a little nirvana as well. So it's a difference between a fire may go out temporarily, a big fire may be extinguished forever.

So there's that awakening that's sort of definitive, another that's not completely definitive, and different teachers and different traditions have thought of this in various ways. So that I particularly like Ajahn Buddhadasa and his idea that, it sounds very Mahāyāna, but it has actually been part even of the Theravāda Abhidharma for centuries, that it's the baseline of the mind. Nirvana is kind of like the baseline of the mind. We just go out of it very often.

But what I like about Buddhadasa is his idea that actually the little moments of nirvana, which is where the mind goes in between each instance of reactivity, where it goes to rest. He said if you do the maths, those actually outnumber the moments of reactivity. He said like, what we need to do is tap into those moments. So moments of insight as you describe them could be understood as moments where we become hyper-aware of that absence of reactivity. This has a profound effect because then we see it is possible, I can be non-reactive and things feel different and things look different and I am different etc.

And yeah, the sort of faith in a way, and it's easier to tap into them more but nowadays I even think of degrees of nirvana, I can be a little more awake or even I can be more Buddha-like or more Mara-like in every moment.

**Questioner**

So I'm really appreciating and really learning a lot and taking a lot of this in. In a personal level, I



work in mindfulness and in a nonprofit that I'm training mentors and support providers that deal with individuals with eating disorders. So when we talk about rumination and we talk about habits and we talk about coming back and forth, in fact, I'm creating a module now, the strength and the power of self-compassion, developing self-compassion and meditating ourselves so that when we go up to this pattern and we keep coming back and we're practicing, that we give ourselves some grace, that we understand that as we practice and we're aware and insightful of behaviors or habits that are harmful to ourselves or to others, that we have the understanding that it takes time and practice and to come back and understand it and then it may happen again.

Because in recovery, it's a stepping stone. It's a stair. And we fall and we go up maybe one or two steps and we go back down. But I think that self-compassion and loving-kindness for ourselves as we're going through our process is extremely important.

### **Martine Batchelor**

So that's it. Yes, thank you. Thank you. No, no, of course, of course. And in a way, I think whenever there is this kind of patterning, I think what also is very helpful in a way it's mindfulness of the feeling too, to see how in a way often if we overeat, it's often easier because you want more food but I would say a lot of the time it's more because you have an unpleasant tonality and that's your way to cope with it.

And so in a way to understand it is kind of like a survival mechanism could there be another one? But also as you say, one of the interesting things about impermanence is what I would call the gift of change that maybe I cannot change immediately but I can have compassion for myself where at time it has been a little better, then it's a little worse, then it's a little better again. And I think then also the insight in impermanence can be also that kind of softening, kind of knowing it's possible, knowing I have done it before and knowing it's possible. So, yes, very much loving-kindness and compassion.

During the retreat, Bernard did some wonderful kind of talk about that. He could do a course on that next time. It was so beautiful. So maybe he has a few words to say about that.

### **Bernat Font**

I'm not sure. I mean, what you both said is very on point. And I'm still thinking of Sujata and that moment where the Buddha allows himself to feel okay. The Buddha allows himself to feel okay. And that's a big shift. That's a big shift.

I've been recently, maybe in the past year or so, influenced in Mettā practice by a Thai teacher called Ajahn Mahachachai, who speaks of metta as meeting anything with a soft and gentle mind softening your contact to any experience so you know the Buddhist concept of contact like there's a sensory stimuli and then there's an organ and then there's an awareness so they meet that's called contact like any conscious experience you have is a form of contact of touching the world touching your experience. It's just like soften those contacts. That's the beginning of mettā. And that's one of the beginnings of mettā. And I find this very, very helpful.

Anytime I feel some tension, some hardening, then, ah, reminder, soften. And sometimes that's all it takes. But, yeah, I think if I continue talking, I would go over that. But this teacher recommends spending a long time just staying with the first stage of Mettā for oneself. It's not just for oneself, it's just like abiding in Mettā, just generating, contacting that quality, kind of baking it and just like dwelling there. And then you start to expand it and open it and just you live in it. You are Mettā and Mettā is you. So it's like don't rush over the kinds of people. Just kind of just cook it. Just be a meta bot, you know. And then you can open the lid and people can smell the soup.

**Martine Batchelor**

So thank you very much. It was so nice to be with you today. And I don't know if Rob has some announcements. Otherwise, we'll meet each other in a week at the same time.