

Emptiness

The following article is a transcription of a talk given at the University of British Columbia.

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Just last week when I gave my talk, I was very tired after a long journey. On that particular day, from United States Los Angeles, even though I have been working very hard the last week, I am very rested. And so I thought it might be would be a good opportunity to give a more powerful talk than usual. Simply because as a monk, you want to change things around, I do get a bit tired at telling the same old jokes myself. And talking about two bad bricks. And so, when I was in the United States, I was not just talking to people buying a book, I was also visiting many ministries and teaching some deeper teachings there. So today I'm going to talk about the Buddhist idea of emptiness to try and bring it into the way we meditated and why we meditate this way. And to also answer some of the questions which were raised when I was in the United States. Many of you know that because in the United States, there were so many fundamentalist Christians. They have huge powers in the media and they started this silly thing of intelligent design. And because of that many people ask you about what's a Buddhist understanding of such things about life, the world, consciousness, the whole thing. So today I'm going to try answer all those questions in one hour. The whole meaning of life would be revealed to you. So stay awake. Again, I'm going to start with just science about the nature of this world because I was a theoretical physics before I was a monk. And I still keep in contact with some of the science which is happening now. But also had a very solid grounding in that field and I can say that I can understand very deeply the principles which were being espoused at the time. So I know roughly what I'm talking about. But in many of you, even though you may not be scientists, just know that in the nature of the world, and by the world I mean in what most people think is the world know that the things that you can touch, you can feel and you can see. You know the stool that you sit on and the hall which you are in and the country, the earth, the sky, the planets, the solar system, the universe. All of that is sometimes thought as the totality of the world. Well I am going to start with what people think is the totality and then expand from there. And actually see some parallels between what we know is the world and the world of our minds. One of the things which I knew or found out when you start studying science is this how this thing in which we think of and perceive of as very solid is so empty and vacuous. You all know because I'm sure you've seen this on tv documentaries, some of you read it in books. Just even this solid earth in which we're sitting now seemingly so thick and so dense when examined in detail is full of space and holes. Even though the concrete underneath the carpet there, we all know and it's the truth. The atoms which make up that concrete, it is spaced so far apart that its hardly anything there at all. What do they say, sometimes like it was, if the atom of the concrete was a tennis ball, then the next tennis ball, the next atom would be probably at the moon or somewhere, it's that distant away. So you can imagine one tennis ball, another tennis ball at the moon, and the next tennis ball the same distance away, you can imagine just how empty this solid piece of concrete is in which you're sitting on, the thing with the scientists is that they never stop there, they don't stop there. They'll look at an atom and see what that was. And found that too is just a smear of electrons, and tiny and tiny infinite decimal nucleus in the center. Again the center

proportion of the tennis ball and the next nucleus is just so far away, but then they went further to the nucleus and found out that too was empty. Just this flux of energetic particles called the quartz, there is nothing there. And this was the mighty thing about looking in with deep profound insight into what the nature of this particle is.

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It is completely empty of anything solid. It is shifting that soul. Not to mention that because people ask when they talk about intelligent design, and Buddhism, where did our world come from. And if you think about if you going to mind with reasons you're understand that if there is actually something here in this physical world, then how can you create the something out of nothing, it is a big problem there, how can you get this universe or this planet if there is nothing there to begin with, and because of that, the people have to invent this idea of a god who came to being, supreme being that changes nothing here to something. It's almost like some act that actually break the laws of science and the laws of reason because it cannot make sense that we can get something out of a void. And if you think this something here, then you have to have some sort of god or some sort of create impulse to make this world in which this world see and feel however scientists also know that because literally this seat you sit is full of emptiness and space that there is actually nothing underneath your bottom. You look deeply and it appears that there is something but there is not, it is completely empty, full of space, full of holes. And then there maybe the solutions to the creation of the physical matter of this universe will become clear to you. It is true you can't create something out of nothing but you can certainly can create nothing out of nothing. Maybe there is nothing here now which is why this world can evolve out of nothing. The surprise of energies, energies being born is actually what happens in the world, for those of you that know physics, it is 2 particles, 2 anti-particles can suddenly appear, as part of the laws of science, when the science is so finely balanced like the avalanche just waiting to happen, you can get this huge effect from just no cause. This is what happens with this universe, it came from nothing, there is nothing now therefore you can disappear into nothingness. That is hard science. Now what does that mean, with regard to the other parts of the world, the mind which know this, this is where Buddhism has always said from the beginning, just as this world is empty of substance, empty of a cause, so the Buddhist said is you mind empty of substance, empty of a cause, there is nothing there. It feels solid just like the floor in which you sit feels so solid, and your mind is sets of eye, the knower, the doer, the me seems so solid but the Buddhist said there is nothing there. Which is all very well but how can you accept that, the thing is that the only way you can accept that is with this path in which we have of meditation. This meditation is learning how to find out for yourself the emptiness of the body and the mind in the same way that the scientists has spent years and years, centuries to centuries looking into the nature of this thing we call stuff, and finding it so empty, can't pin anything down, in the same way the Buddha would look at the meditation of the mind and not pin anything down. But how does this happen, so now I'm going to take you on the journey, the journey of meditation that leads to enlightenment, and how this whole process is about how this process is to see the emptiness of things, by allowing things to disappear. There is a fundamental analogy which I'm going to bring up at this spot which I've used many times in my talks with the monks.

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I love analogies because they put in very simple words what is sometimes very hard to describe. Which gives understanding why invoking a picture which you can all recognize sells simile and metaphor of the tadpole in the lake. As you all would know, a tadpole born in a lake lived in the lake all its life will never be able to understand what water is because it's been around it all the time. Surely it may understand the ripples and the currents in the water, maybe the temperature of the water, some aspects of the water but not what water truly is. How can you when its been there with you all the time. But with a tadpole as we all know, one day the tadpole will grow its legs and grow into a frog and leaves the pond for the first time. But it is only when the tadpole leaves its pond when it know what water is. Can know its true nature. This is a problem with the delusion of human beings. Sometimes is needed for some astronaut to actually leave the planet to be able to get the view from hundred thousand miles away, to be able to see just what this planet really looks like and send images back to us so we can get our perspective of what it's like when we leave our home and our area where we usually have our experience. The way of meditation is extending our experience, meditation is very much like a tadpole leaving the lake, you are leaving the body and your mind refers time. So this is actually why when we sit down, we close our eyes in meditation, sometimes people ask me can you meditate with your eyes opened? And I say you are missing the point if you meditate with your eyes opened because the whole point of this meditation is to allow things to disappear because there is too much happening out there with your eyes opened and you tend to get distracted. Pooled with the colours and changes of the world outside and the fact that you spend your whole life with your eyes opened, you said when you're sleeping, your particularly unconscious, there is so much going on there, you're in the lake, you don't know what it's like when you leave that pond. So we close our eyes in order for the world what I call the body of 5 senses to completely disappear. The point of meditation that I mentioned at the beginning of the 30 min of meditation is not to get things. The point of meditation is to allow things to disappear, not to gain more, but to allow what you have to disappear. And it is already gone. This is why what happens when you even close your eyes, many things that usually occupies your mind disappear, literally the world outside vanishes and all you have left is your body. And as you meditate more and more, this is one reason why we sit still in a comfortable position so that we don't scratch or move because when the body is still, it begins to disappear. Sometimes people get afraid when the body disappears, I've had students who've so other times they are sitting there and their hands are disappearing, and they get afraid. And why are people so afraid with your body disappears. This is what supposed to happen during meditation. The point is, the cause for many people always been alert to the feelings of our body when it disappears is just strange, that's all. Just like with the tadpole leaving the lake, when things disappear we got into experience where we have never been before, where we lack familiarity, there is a nature in our minds to be scared in areas where we haven't been before, which is why the path to Buddhism and finding out the truth demands great courage from everybody, the courage to let go, which is a tough one to ask. But fortunately there is something which actually helps the letting go. Some which can overcome the fear, something that does encourage you, its not just to pursuit of truth, although that is a great incentive to go deep into the mind, but even more the pursuit of truth is the sheer peace and pleasure in this path of letting go. It feels good, it feels very good, and it's that attractive nature of letting go which actually pulls the mind deeper and deeper into states of literally abandoning.

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Sure if you think about it, the hands aren't there and you might get worried, it feels so good when you have become peaceful and past your body that tends to disappear. And the more your body disappears, the more peaceful and the more driftful that you become. As you get deeper and deeper into meditation, there are many times where you can't feel your body at all. To the point when even a mosquito landed on you, you would know it even if it puts its nose into you and can feel it. When there is no itches or aches, no heat nor cold where the body starts to completely disappear. There is a wonderful state of meditation, simply because when you have nothing to worry about. It's like finishing the work on the weekend. Many of you have been working hard and now it's the weekend you are free of all that business. Isn't that a delight of the weekend, so we have holidays and vacations, and you don't have to go to work on a Monday morning, alas, free. When you understand what happens when your body disappears. You understand that this body gives you so much work to do. Usually, tells you exercise now, sometimes you have to scratch your nose, sometimes you have to play with your hands, sometimes you have to move your body backwards and forwards, sometimes you have to scratch and move your jacket, sometimes you have to blink your eyes, sometimes you have to scratch your lips. I'm just describing what I'm seeing because you can never stay still. Why, why do you have to scratch something or move something in your arm or in your legs, moving your knees, scratching your foot. Just all of these things you do, just why. Cause this body will never give you a moment of peace. It's always asking for something, asking to be scratched, asking to be fed, asking to be adjusted, asking to be taken to the toilet asked to be bent this way or that way. Because you never notice this. You think it's normal but if someone points it out you just look at the other people around you to see how many can actually sit absolutely still without fidgeting or doing something or why they are fidgeting or why they are doing something because the body is so demanding. Now when you meditate and get into a state of stillness, and the body disappears it's like a tyrant that has gone to sleep. It's like a business has now finished, it's like the work that has been completed. Alas you can leave your body alone and attend to other business, it's like the great weekend of meditation. When your body can be put down, forgotten about and you can attend to other things. Which is one of the reasons why when people meditate, they get to this state where their body disappears, their mind get so free that they start to think about all sorts of things that allows their free to think without being disturbed by the body needing to be taken to the toilet or scratched or whatever. Now this is interesting, because we are starting to leave the world of the body, and with it the world of the 5 senses, we are letting go of something. When we really let go of this body, when we get so still, in Buddhism the bodacoda (18:40) decided that the tranquility of the body, when it gets tranquil, it disappears. Now the point that I made when I gave a talk to the monks on Wednesday night, the sign of tranquility and peace is a disappearance of those things. When your body begins to get peaceful, it literally disappears. It falls off the radar, it's not a problem anymore, it's finished with, it disappears, you've let it go. And this is the most important point, meditation is to allow things to disappear. To let them go, and the way that happens is to make it tranquil and peaceful and then the things disappears by themselves. So just sit comfortably, and sit still with eyes closed in a place where there is not too much noise to disturb you, if there is a noise like the humming of traffic in the background it is ok as long as it is not sudden noise. The 5 senses turned off, and with it, the physical

world disappears, you've let go. When you've actually start to let go of the body, the next thing you notice is the world of the mind.

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Sometimes the people have great discussions on the nature of the mind is, sometimes I've given a simile to people, I was giving this simile to people often in my tour of the United States. It is the simile of the emperor in the 5 pieces of clothing. Imagine an emperor and you don't know who the emperor is, whether it's male or female, whether it is republican or democrat (cause I was in the united states and I wrote other stuff down), whether it is a Chinese or Caucasian or African, old or young, because this emperor is clothed in boots which goes up to his thighs, he got trousers which cover his waist, well, it's waist, and go over the boots, and it's got a jacket which covers its trousers, to its neck and down its arms, gloves which go over the top of the arms and a helmet which cover its head and go overlaps the top of his jacket. The 5 clothing, the boots, the trousers, the jacket, the gloves and the helmet cover the emperor so completely you can't see who's inside. You just don't know what it is. In this simile, I describing the mind of the 5 senses, otherwise known as the body. That mind is like the emperor inside. The one who is responsible for so much. The one in control, the one who actually sees and understand things. That's why I call it like an emperor, because it is such an important thing inside the human being, actually inside all beings. But is has always covered so much by the 5 senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and physical touch. The many people got no understanding what this mind is. I have theories and inferences but I don't really know the path of meditation is to take clothes off the emperor, to take away seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching and see what's left in all those 5 senses when they disappear, when the body disappears, when its all let go. What you find when that happens is this beautiful state of inner bliss where the mind is released from the body. I don't mean go floating out into space because space is all part of the 5 senses, it's all part of the body, this is not the mind floating out into a near death experience. This is the whole world disappearing, no space left, this is the realm of the mind where we call in Buddhism, the jar of experiences. Here, what's happening is you let go of the body and the 5 senses, and you are left with this mind business, this mind is incredibly important thing to understand, one of the great things about, what I really enjoyed about the Buddhist path is, this is not theory anymore, it is direct experiences so no one can argue with this, this is actually what you are feeling, what you are experiencing, what you are seeing, what you are knowing directly without anybody having to tell you about it, so you don't have to rely on some authorities. Which I say I find very, very annoying when people actually tell you what to believe. You say why? Because I told you so. All these authorities, sometimes they could be right, most often they are wrong. So as a young man, with a spiritual seek, I wanted to find out for myself, this is the way to find out. There is a simple simile which made it very clear what you're supposed to do, but more importantly how you are supposed to do it. What happens is when you are letting go of things, when they disappear, you find it not so important, going back to the simile in the beginning, the nature of the ground you are sitting on, you find that there is nothing there. This body of ours, the 5 senses, because they disappear you see there is nothing there. Sometimes, people make a big thing about race or about gender, about age, and very often I've told those people who come here long enough that you should never think of yourself as a woman or as a man, as old or young, as Asian, Caucasian, African or whatever. That's just surface stuff for goodness

sake. Just what's on the surface is defining you with those things, but when you go deeper and deeper beyond the body, you are not a man anymore or a woman.

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That's why it is great being a monk, because sometimes you are not either. In Thailand, I was taught when I was young that there are 3 sexes, 3 genders. Males, females and monks. I quite like that idea. It's great being out of all of this endism of being male or female and actually you might notice that the monks and the nuns that come and teach here, as soon as you shave your hair and hear these loose fitting robes, no makeup, you can't tell who's a monk and who's a nun. That is the only reason why here we insisted that the monks wear the lighter robes and the nuns and sisters wear the darker robes. It's just so you can tell. But if being a woman or being a male is so essentially part of you, you should be able to tell if you are a nun or a monk but you can't, it is completely superficial. And so when you get into these things, we understand those sort of things which we argue about, we make a big deal about which sometimes run our world is just empty of real meaning. When they are empty of real meaning, we can play with them, we can leave them alone because they are not substantial, they are not important, we can leave them alone. But the most important part of this is to get into the realm of mind and find out what this mind is. Already you have done away with calm, calm this body till it disappears. And then you go deeper into calming this mind until it disappears. This is actually the ways to the deeper stages of meditation, which few people actually follow. Even in the first stage of meditation, what we call the first jhana, in such a stage, because you've left the lake which you've known it, the pond of your normal experience is being transcended, and your experience of freedom and bliss you've never had before is oneness of mind. And whatever I've read in the Christian mystics, or even the Hindu mystics, it is very clear to me those traditions which claim the union with god, thus what it actually describing. This here we get to the mystical experience as defined in our world. You can imagine, in everything you have known has disappeared. And you got this incredible bliss and stillness of mind, and joy which is I've used as a marketing tool, joy better than sexual orgasm. And there still, not moving for hours, and hours and hours, you wonder what is that? If you were in the middle ages and got to some of those stages, which some of you here have done, you'll be considered a saint. It's a great powerful experience, but in Buddhism we take it deeper than that, you see this is only the start, the body has disappeared, there still left the mind, if you stay in those states, more and more and more, even the mind starts to disappear. This is a fascinating experience as it deep stages in meditation, to see as you go, calmer and calmer and calmer, because it is all stages of letting go or seeing how much you can abandon, seeing through stillness of how much disappears. And see what's left. This is where we get stiller and stiller and stiller. One of the great stages of one of these jhanas, in the second stage is where will disappears. This thing we call intention and choice, will the choosing. Sometimes people write great articles of the nature of the will. What actually motivates you, what is the process which makes you decide what you do decide. How does that all work? I've had great fun talking about the will and experiments that has been done to the will and choosing, but when one goes into it, into these deep meditations, you find that will disappears. It's like the tadpole has now left the water for the first time. You have left the realm of the will and choice but that was what you thought as freedom.

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When you experience this state where the potential to do, the potential to choose, the potential to move your mind or your body completely removed, but you are still incredibly aware and alert, this is like the experience of the frog. Only when you've moved out of the water can you know what water is. Only when you've moved completely beyond the potential to do things, only then can you understand the thing we call will, choice truly is. This is a place where great insights arise. When strange but powerful experiences so often we think the will is coming from us. That we are the one who choose, that we are the one who do things. There are so many examples of that, that I think before I go too deep I should tell a few funny stories about the will just to give people who might get lost in this deep talk a little bit of relief. One of the stories which I would like to tell you about the nature of the will is when you understand it, it's not really coming from you, it is completely conditioned and brainwashed because I remember once, or not just once, but many many times you can see the way advertisements work, and how they condition the mind and how they make you do things which you think you are doing but someone else is completely controlling you. Well, one of the first times I notice this is when I was a young man, I remember watching television and this particular advertisement which got me sucked in was for St. Bruno tobacco. I still remember it clearly, it was a little advertisement in which this ordinary young man bought some St. Bruno tobacco and put it into a pipe, lit it and was walking down the road of a typical English town. And the aroma from this tobacco wafted into a bank and one of tellers behind the counter was this incredibly beautiful girl, some model, as soon as she smells the first fragrance of St. Bruno's tobacco, became completely besotted and jumped over the counter and started following this man fully in love and then he passed a news agent and the same thing happened to this gorgeous red head who also had to leave her job as a news agent and follow this man, and then somebody in this laundry also came out in the face of one or two minute, this ordinary man was being followed by the most gorgeous and attractive girls you can imagine. Stupid advertisement isn't it, who would believe in something like that, well I did. I bought some of that tobacco, lit it in a pipe, walked down the street but no one jumped over any counter for me. It's just as well because if it did I wouldn't have ended up as a monk. But when you look back upon that, I thought I was an intelligent, sensible young man. Why did I do that? That was some year ago, I remember being a nobody. That was a very very cold day, and there were these girls in these tank tops that had these huge area of exposed chest around the midriffs. I felt so sorry for them, they must have been freezing. What did they do that for? But did they have any choice? Or was it the fashion? The dictates of the media or advertisements? Has conditioned her will into doing something which is completely appalling. Why do you do all this fashion stuff? Is it really your free choice or have you been completely conditioned. What is actually free will? Are you free? I know because when you get to these deep states of meditation and actually you come out afterwards you know the nature of the will, nobody is completely conditioned. The reason I tell bad jokes is because my father told bad jokes. It was his fault and nothing to do with me. He conditioned me completely and that is the way it is. When you actually understand the nature of the world, when you allowed it to disappear, it shocks you to the core. Do you really think you were in control? You are not. It's a process, a process which goes through a very complex web of cause and effect.

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Once you know that you have to be very careful, because you notice that you can be conditioned by others, or how the media, especially how the politicians, they can know how to press the buttons. They know, I remember a few years ago, Princess Diana's funeral. Why was it that so many people who are not even related to her watched her funeral? And also cried as it was so sad, you are being manipulated! That's all it is. Why in movies, do you get sucked in and start crying? It's only a move for goodness sake. What did you do that for? And you pay for it as well. Crazy! For a lot of this, you can see the entertainment industry is brilliant at being able to control people. They control your emotions so easily even if this was Christmas time, you got to control your emotions. And for those of you that come from a Caucasian background, you see a few Christmas trees and a few carols and you start to get all soft and mushy. They are great at making use of that because I know the way the mind works so well that when I was going in England, even the first time that people are in a tour, so used to seeing a monk. But I said Merry Christmas and that put them in a difficult spot because they had no way to say Merry Christmas back. Even in the United States and some places in which they are very heavily Christian, you just say good morning to somebody. Psychological pressure say that they had to say good morning back. When you know the way the mind works, you notice how many of our responses are completely conditioned, even predictable, you know exactly how people are going to behave. At least if you know that, you can use it to your advantage, as we do here every week, but for good purposes. That's why monk that got incredibly high virtue so we will never abuse or exploit you but if we do, do any brainwashing, it's always for good, for peace, for kindness, for charity, and looking after you. And it's true because if you, whatever you go, that actually affects your will, if listen to these teachings long enough, you will become enlightened yourself, simply because you can't avoid it. Your will gets reconditioned. I have been doing that in my monastery for the past 10 to 11 years since I have been here. Putting these suggestions in into the minds of my monks to be peaceful, to be virtuous, to be kind, to be peaceful and it works as I am doing it for you. You find that if you come to places like this, afterwards your more peaceful mind can pass onto a person, why? You've been brainwashed into doing it, that's why. You know some people as well as in the United States, sometimes people put all these talks which we have on the web on ipod and they go down the beach and listen to it in their car for 2 to 3 hours in LA going to work, and listen to these talks, they are completely brainwashed by now, imagine 3 to 4 hours a day listening to the same talks. It's not that you just hear the jokes again and again, the message, the jokes are there to sweeten the message, is peace, kindness, compassion, all those sorts of things. So understanding just how this always works, you can also recondition your own mind. This is something which I have been using for the last few years, when you understand just how the mind works, and what will truly is, you can play with your own will. I call this programming mindfulness. If you got some bad habits, and say you are always arguing with your partner or saying these snide remarks which is quite common when you are married for 4 to 5 years or more. I've heard of, this is crazy, people love each other but again, just this bad habit always finding fault, point out the other persons weaknesses. So all you really need to do is see any bad habit that is making you do that is just conditioning, that's all. You've done it for so long, it's just how you do things, in order to reprogram the mind, I tell people when you're feeling quiet, calm, relaxed, only those times when you feel good, you got a bit of energy, not when you stressed out or burdened with so many other things to do, you know, calm, quiet, time of your day, think of that problem and just tell your mind, when I meet my partner, I will never say anything hurtful to him or her,

and I meet my partner, I will never say anything hurtful, when I meet my partner, I will not say anything hurtful.

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You say that to yourself, you do this 3 times, pay full attention, it's most important the attention you give to what you are resolving is form, listening completely, then you forget it. Leave it alone. And you'll be so surprised that when you meet your partner, you are about to follow to old habits of saying something mean and nasty, but the thought comes up, no I will say something nice and you do, that thought, you may imagine on the spur of the moment came because you programmed it in there, you put it in there, sometimes days before and now it's come up. It's a great way of understanding how to change behaviours. Even with smoking, drinking or whatever else you think it is. Whatever is a bad behaviour, something you want to try and change within your life, try programming your mind first. Remember, just to sum it up again, quiet times of your day, when you feel relaxed, energetic, at peace, make a resolution, 3 times, listen carefully, then leave it alone. It has gone in, it will happen, it will work. Great way of doing things. You understand the nature of the will. So as you go deeper into meditation, the potential to do disappears. The will has vanished. Remember, this meditation is all about being still, being peaceful and this will thing keeps on moving the world. Strange thing, I was mentioning this the other day, the nature of the Western world, is very willful. One of the reasons we are willful is because we are neurotic fault finders. I don't know what it is about our Western world, because we are always finding fault, we are never satisfied with ourselves, with our partners or with life, because of that we are always so active trying the change, develop, make things so called better. There are civilization that has done so much, built so much, we've got so much technology but we can't ever stop. We can't even stop to enjoy what we have achieved. Our Western world is completely neurotic in that way. It works ever harder and harder and harder, more and more things, more and more inventions, more and more work, why? Why can't we say this is good enough. No matter how many of my so called disciples, they are very happy in their house and they decide to buy a bigger house. The investment for the future. Not investment for the future, all it means is more housework, that's all. More worries. Why always, always trying to change things. We don't have any appreciation of what we already have. We are always seeing the faults. There is this saying, when we are looking at ourselves, too many people lack the self-esteem. And I always think, I think there is huge correlation there, an absolute correlation I would say between the pace of our life, which is fault find, trying to make things better because we never actually experience or appreciate what we have and sort of the lack of our own contentment. We don't think we're good enough, we always want to force it, go more and more and more. The fault finding mind drives our civilization. And the same time, create this enormous angst, unhappiness, discontent inside the mind. To be able to get to the deep states of meditation, you have to oppose the fault finding mind. Develop a mind of appreciation, of loving kindness of a door my heart opens whatever it is, the ability to be at peace with things, to appreciate things, not to see the fault with this thing, the good things there. To learn from your successes, to not learn from your mistakes from what I've been saying few years. This positive energy rather than negative energy is the only way you can get stillness and peace. This is good enough. What more do you want! You start wanting more, there is no end. There is only an end

with contentment because contentment gives stillness, stillness stops this doing, this wanting. And everything becomes calm.

45:00

In the great stillness of the mind, that which was the will stops. Often wondered about the nature of time, time is driven by craving, by will, it's actually craving and will that creates time. So, the more we want, the more time is important. When we are not wanting anything, when we are still, time disappears. A whole flow of life stops. I'm not just saying that as a theory because that's what happens when you get into meditation, how many of you have sat still and experienced timelessness. 10 min, half an hour, 2 hours have gone by and you haven't been asleep, people can actually take photographs of you being perfectly upright, you haven't been sleeping, perfectly alert, but time has lost its meaning. Why? Because you are being content, the mind has being still, craving creates time, and for those scientists here who want to know about the arrow of time because the laws of physics can go about both ways, why does things flow in one direction? It is because craving flows in one direction. That actually directs the movement of time. When craving stops, when the mind stops willing and doing, everything becomes very still, as it becomes still, just like your body disappears gradually when you stop moving, so does the mind disappear. When deep in meditations, the seeing, the mind vanish. It's those experiences seeing the mind vanishing, and here I mean that which knows of vanishing, these give an even more powerful insights, to see even that which knows that which does, just like the ground underneath you. It's empty of everything. There is literally nothing there, and when we see it vanish, you investigate deeply, you understand just how insubstantial it is. It is a just process, an interplay of energies if you wish, just like the solid matter underneath you. Just like this solar system, this universe which any scientist will describe to you, in the same way your mind is the same. These are the insights which people have in the deep meditation. It challenges us to our core because we think the evidence in front of us is this thing isn't solid, how can we hit it but the evidence sometimes misinterpreted, misunderstood, it's not as straightforward as people want to see. And sometimes it's not what you want to see. One of the great things about truth, never expect truth to be what you want to believe. There is too many people have invested interest in wanting it to be this way, wanting it to be that way. Insight takes you out of your comfort zones, challenges you and sometimes makes you very afraid. Strange thing but it's the joy, the bliss of freedom which will overcome that fear. Even though you are losing so much of what you really thought you were in the deep states of meditation. There is so much bliss, so much profound stillness, you can't avoid it. It's just too attractive. Freedom, real freedom is just too attractive for you, so you just get pulled along as your mind disappears, as everything goes. Is there really is nothing left. When you really understand the nature of the mind, the consciousness of knowing and doing, and seeing that it's empty, only then you can really understand, where did this mind come from and where will it go to when there is nothing there, even now. When you see it, full of emptiness, you will understand that it can come from nothing and you can also more importantly understand you can go back to nothing. You can only do that if there is nothing now. You can't destroy anything, you can only change it.

50:00

Even if you blow up a building, you got rubble there afterwards. The only way anything can disappear is if there weren't there in the first place. This is why when we meditate, we allow things to disappear, as they disappear, we understand just how empty they were. As the whole world disappears, then you can understand the deeper teachings of a Buddha. You understand there is nothing here, after awhile there will be nothing left. All of those will one day disappear and pass away. To end this story of emptiness, I want to repeat one of the great moments of my life with my master Ajahn Chah. Using a teaching which he gave me. Personally, I don't know if he gave this teaching to anybody else, no one else, he's told me he taught like this, but there is one occasion when I was going to help Ajahn Chah, this great teacher at the sauna, because Ajahn Chah was getting sick lately, we've built him a sauna in the monastery in Thailand. His monastery is just a little ways away. I was mentioning this as just an aside that one of the great gifts of this teacher Ajahn Chah was he didn't just teach us to be monks, he taught the Western disciples how to be teachers because he got some land a little ways away from his monastery and he told all his Western mates, here you can run your own monastery. Of course, we made a lot of messes, many times and he had to come and sort them out, but that is the only way we can learn. And so that now, whenever I went over to the United States, went to Europe, there is so many monasteries with his tradition in the West and they are very, very popular. Even, actually this is another aside, I going off on a tangent, I'll come back to this story eventually, I'm trying to tell the story in the moment, but he CEO of Ford corporation, I think its called John Ford, he's a Buddhist, I always thought he was a Tibetan Buddhist but apparently when he went to Thailand recently, to negotiate the opening of a car plant in Thailand, and obviously had to meet the Prime Minister Thaksin to discuss the plant, and when they had the meeting, instead of discussing the plant and the economics of it and the deal they're going to make with the government, the CEO of Ford said to the Prime Minister of Thailand, have you heard of the monk named Ajahn Chah because the CEO of Ford has read many books on Ajahn Chah and of course the Prime Minister of Thailand, his previous teacher was Ajahn Chah's secretary, a monk named Isonmonory (53:05) cause I remember him when I first went to Ajahn Chah's monastery, he was the secretary, the one who did my Visa for the first time. But he left because he was too busy, set himself up, he came teach in his own right, and he was teaching the Prime Minister of Thailand. And of course, that meant that Thaksin also had huge number of books on Ajahn Chah. So it's fascinating, just how his teachings have actually reached CEO's of top companies in the United States now. So Ajahn Chah was an enormously powerful monk and this actually shows the depth of his power because when I was, he came for the sauna one day, one of reasons why we built that sauna is to get the teacher to the monastery every week so he will give us a dharma talk, like a sermon before he had his sauna. And now and again he just really hits the spot and on this particular case, he gave an incredibly profound talk. When you have a profound talk and it inspires you, it's so easy to meditate afterwards, the whole mind is being moved in one direction, so instead of taking my body to the sauna to help my teacher, I just went around the back of the hall and meditated, it was so easy to get into a still, peaceful state when you are inspired. So there I was in the back of the hall, sitting in meditation, enjoying myself because when you meditate, you feel so much bliss, so much peace, it's profound and it's deep, and you feel that, it's beyond all sort of theories, and dogmas, and arguments about what we need to do to be right, what is the right tradition, what's the right teacher, what's the right thing to believe. Just shut up and be still. So when you're after, you feel it. When you feel it, it's so beautiful and wonderful, the liberation when you just allow things to disappear.

55:00

And everything becomes so still. It's the best bliss in the world. It's why so many are in the monk, this is why people become nuns, that beautiful stillness. So there I was enjoying myself, but I don't know how long I was in that meditation, but I came out, the first thing I thought was wow this is really nice, but then I thought I should go look after my teacher. That's the job of monks, to look after the ones who teach you, especially in the Asian tradition. So there I went off to find my teacher, maybe I can do some little service for him but I was too late. Ajahn Chah finished his sauna cause I met him on the path, I was going to the sauna and he was coming in the opposite direction. And it's one of these wonderful little encounters. And there were a great teacher, because he took one look at me and I'm not judging that sometimes these great masters, they look right through you and you feel that they can look right into your mind, some of these people do have psychic powers, they can read your mind and that's what he was doing. Cause he saw the features of my face when you have a good meditation and you are relaxed, you have a big smile in your face, just whole body language shows you your peaceful. So he saw that, saw that I had been in a nice meditation, he decided to try the night with me. Cause sometimes when you are ready, all it need is just a little piece of information just to create a enlighten experience. So he looked me in the eye and said "come along sir, why". That's how he said it. Sharp, right to the point, "why"? The biggest question of all, and I promised you at the beginning of the talk that I shall tell you about the meaning of life. He was asking that question why? I answered, "I don't know". Because as an ideal young man, I was stupid, I didn't know what I was doing. I had asked for meditation but I didn't really know what it meant. So I was honest, and said I don't know. And this great teacher, he was obviously disappointed that it didn't work, but he just laughed as a great teacher do, they never put you down, sometimes when you're really stupid, and do something idiotic, they think it's so funny, and that's what I really learned, making mistakes and being stupid is a wonderful compassionate act for all other people because it makes them happy. It really was so stupid. I remember this one time when I went up to see Ajahn Chah just early night and because I needed soap for the shower and I went up to him and asked him for some soap. In Thai, I was just learning Thai for goodness sake, but the word for soap is *S̄bũ* and I said *Ṣappa rd* which means pineapple. He said what did you want and I said I want pineapple to wash with. That's how he heard it, he thought these Western monks are really weird. Is it really true in England that you wash with pineapples? He never let me forget that but from that time I always knew the difference between a pineapple and a bar of soap. But he never, sort of, criticized you, you just learned that it was a big joke, a wonderful entertainment it was to have really stupid Western monks around. So we made him happy, so that was our wonderful gift for our teacher. So there I was being stupid once again saying I don't know, but then he looked me in the eye again, he stopped laughing and gave one of those big looks, right inside you, he said I'll tell you the answer, if anyone ever ask that question again, this is your answer. This is one of the great teachers of our modern times. The answer to the question why, he said, (*ma mi alai*), which is time for isn't for anything, that's the answer, is nothing, and then looked at me, do you understand? And I said yes, he said no you don't. Do you understand? No you don't. What a brilliant teacher that was, and what a great answer. The answer to the question why, emptiness, there is nothing there, it's powerful. This is what you see when everything disappears. That's the only place where there can be any stillness, if there is something left, there is always some business left. There can never be an ending of things, never any stillness, never any

freedom, never any peace. Whenever there is something left, there is always something to do, and there is nothing left at all, only then do you have real freedom.

1:00:00

So that's what nirvana is, and everything disappears and there's nothing left. How can that happen? The Buddhist says there is nothing here to begin with, there is nothing here now. That's the answer to the question why. There is nothing. So all you nothings have all just wasted your time listening to sweet nothings. So that's the talk today, I did a little deeper talk today. I hope I entertained you but also provoked you, giving you some powerful deep teachings, cause I thought it's about time I gave a deeper teaching rather than two bad picks and all these other jokes. So, has anyone got any questions or comments about the talk, about nothing, emptiness and the meaning of life. Any questions or comments? Yeah? That will be very cheeky, but also be missing the point. Cause, actually, I'm glad you maybe asked that question because sometimes, I've seen people ask questions like of monks or teachers and instead of asking a straight answer, you've been asked a question back. I think that's very unfair., because, you know, if you are a teacher, you are supposed to be giving answers, students are supposed to ask the questions. So, no that will be the wrong thing to do. I don't know if you've ever been in a teacher-student relationship, but if you go to somebody like a psychiatrist and say why does this happen to me and they say why not? Then you know, they are not really doing their job. So if they don't know the answers, they shouldn't be charging the fees, basically.

1:02:00