

Introduction

The Buddha manifests as each and every individual. This is not easily understood but it is true. 2500 years ago lived the individual Siddhartha Gautama of the Shakya tribe who understanding this started calling himself the Buddha. His disciples gathered his talks and labeled them Sutras (Suttas in Pali). Some of his disciples believing that the Buddha was just this individual Siddhartha, and could be no one else, held fast to the Sutras as spoken by Siddhartha and would not allow any other into the canon of their creed. Today this is the school of Theravada Buddhism found mostly in Southeast Asia.

Other disciples understanding that no one individual was the Buddha and recognizing other Enlightened individuals as Buddha gathered their teachings and labeled them also as Sutras. These are the Mahayana Sutras. It has been many centuries since any piece of literature has been labeled as a Sutra and added to the formal Buddhist Canon though there are many many venerable pieces of literature by later Buddhas.

I call this essay a Sutra because I chose to write it in the question and answer style of the early Buddhist Sutras not because I think it worthy of the label but because the style suits my purpose. With this Sutra I attempt to respond to what I see as common mistaken views of Buddhist practitioners. Often these views are reasoned from the language of Buddhist teachings but are not based on deep meditative experience. Teachings such as Emptiness or Mind Only often lead into a kind of nihilism. Please forgive me for having the arrogance to write as the Buddha

Sutra on the Understanding of Emptiness and the Avoidance of Nihilism

Thus have I heard, the Buddha residing in Port Townsend surrounded by all his disciples, Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas and all the beings of this kalpa and past and future kalpas did address the audience as follows:

Buddha: Ananda I have said that all things are “empty”. In what way are all things empty?

Ananda: All things are empty honored one because they don't truly exist.

Buddha: What do you mean when you say that all things don't truly exist?

Ananda: All things are a bubble a dream, just a product of the mind.

Buddha: Whose dream, whose mind, you are referring to?

Ananda: Everything is our dream, a product of our minds.

Buddha: Am I your dream Ananda?

Ananda: Yes.

Buddha: Then you must be my dream.

Ananda: Yes.

Buddha: Ananda, I am not finding this a satisfactory explanation of Emptiness. Is your mind my dream and my mind your dream?

Ananda: No.. Mind is the foundation of being. All things arise from mind.

Buddha: Then I am not your dream, at least my mind is not your dream. What aspect of me is your dream?

Ananda: Your physical aspect is my dream.

Buddha: Ananda you seem to be holding to the view that what truly exists are the minds of individual beings and that these minds individually are dreaming up the physical universe.

Ananda: Yes.

Buddha: This view holds to an attachment to an individual self or atman. It is caught in the duality of self and others. It is not my view when I speak of Emptiness.

Ananda: Maybe this dream this illusion is not our individual dream but a collective dream. Maybe it is an illusion that our individual minds are individual minds but rather they are one collective mind.

Buddha: Ananda, does this collective mind include just the minds of only humans or does it include the minds of devas, asuras, monkeys, tigers, elephants, insects, and all other thinking beings?

Ananda: I don't know World Honored One.

Buddha: Exactly Ananda, these views you have expressed are not the result of your own experience but intellectual suppositions without foundations. Shariputra, again I ask you, in the past I have said that all things are empty, in what way are they empty?

Shariputra: All things are empty because they have no self nature, World Honored One.

Buddha: Very good Shariputra, but what do you mean when you say that all things "have no self nature?"

Shariputra: All things are without self nature because all things are temporary

manifestations of causes and conditions.

Buddha: Shariputra how do you know this. Has experience taught you this?

Shariputra: Yes World Honored One, my experience in meditation has shown me that all things are temporary manifestations of causes and conditions.

Buddha: How is this so?

Shariputra: After many years of practice in meditation, having stripped away all desire, emotions, and thoughts there was not a permanent self or soul to be found. Having realized this I understood that all the activity of individual minds were likewise just the result of causes and conditions. In this way I discovered I am empty of a permanent self as are all individual things, that all things are the result of causes and conditions and in time will dissipate from causes and conditions.

Buddha: Very good Shariputra, But then I ask are the causes and conditions also empty?

Shariputra: Yes of course they are empty. This world is like a river with the causes and conditions upriver immediately resulting in new causes and conditions and so on as the water flows down the river.

Buddha: Yes, yes Shariputra, but is this the only way in which we are to understand Emptiness?

Shariputra: No World Honored One things are empty of intrinsic existence because it is only our individual minds which separates individual things from the totality of what is, the Dharmakaya (the body of dharma or the body of reality).

Buddha: How do you know this?

Shariputra: I know this because in meditation the function of my individual mind which divides the world into this and that is turned off and I experience the world without division and experience the Dharmakaya.

Buddha: Excellent Shariputra, your meditation is very deep. You have truly experienced Ocean Mirror Samadhi. I have said that all things are like “a bubble a dream” how do you understand this?

Shariputra: All things are like a bubble because all things are temporary, resulting from and dissipating from causes and conditions. All things are empty of true individual existence. When you say that all things are like a dream you are pointing to the role of our individual minds in thinking of things as individual

and separate one from another. Yet in truth, things are not individual and separate, but rather connected through causes and conditions as well as being not separable within the one body of the Dharmakaya. Also because most humans are confused and deluded in their understanding of existence, and imagine things to be something other than what they are, they compound delusion upon delusion. In this way all things are like a bubble and a dream.

Buddha: My dear Shariputra you are doing an excellent job explaining the understanding of the Tathagata, but I am afraid this is still confusing for many people. You use words like *things, you, I, my experience, individual mind* which point to the existence of individual people and things but then you say that all things are empty of true individuality. How can this be?

Shariputra: Honored One language is an imperfect tool for explaining the Dharma. It is imperfect because words by their very nature divide the world into You and I, This and That. Words are the products of individual minds dividing experience into You and I, This and That. Yet words are what we have for explaining the dharma and creating the causes and conditions to liberate people from an attachment to the notion of an individual existence.

Buddha: Very true. Very true. We must communicate with people with what they understand – the use of words and the perspective of samsara – in order to move them towards an understanding that is beyond the notion of an individual existence, beyond words, Nirvana. We can only point to the truth with words. The truth cannot be experienced in words. It is through meditation that the truth beyond words can be experienced.

Shariputra when you say that all things are Empty because they result from causes and conditions and they dissipate from causes and conditions, and they are also Empty of intrinsic existence because it is our minds which create a notion of individuality from the totality of existence, are you speaking about two different Emptiness's.

Shariputra: No, World Honored One, these two different explanations of Emptiness point to one truth. When we drop the notion of an individual self we drop the notion of separation between You and I, this and that. It is though we formerly tried to separate the drops of water in a river and then come to understand that this makes no sense. Though we speak of causes and conditions there are no true boundaries around causes and conditions which allows us to truthfully say that these causes and conditions cause this or that result. It is though we formerly believed that this wave caused that wave and now understand that in the fluidity of water our former view makes little sense. The river of existence is wild and turbulent ever changing appearing one way at one moment and another way at the next moment.

Buddha: Just so, but then why do we speak of causes and conditions Shariputra?

Shariputra: We speak of causes and conditions because we recognize patterns. Just as

we know that one wave follows another wave we know that birth follows pregnancy, and childhood follows birth, and adulthood old age and death follow in their turn. Just as one wave follows another suffering follows greed anger and confusion, and happiness follows generosity love and compassion. Yet, I don't want to be too simplistic in this understanding because though we recognize patterns that usually happen in a certain way they do not always happen as expected. Adulthood does not always follow childhood because people die in childhood, and even happiness does not always follow love because love can come with many attachments which can create suffering.

Buddha: Truly excellent Shariputra. You have a deep understanding of the Dharma. We cannot say with certainty that any specific causes and conditions will have any specific results because there are no specific individual causes, conditions, or results. All causes, conditions, and results are empty of an isolated individuality. This whole process we call the Dharmakaya is infinitely complex and essentially unfathomable

Buddha: Shariputra does this exhaust your understanding of Emptiness as applied to my teachings.

Shariputra: No World Honored One. The word Emptiness has many subtle meanings as applied to your teachings.

Buddha: Tell our audience more Shariputra.

Shariputra: I think of Emptiness in two other ways. I think of Emptiness as a quality of the individual mind in Samadhi and a quality of things as experienced in Samadhi. In other words when one drops attachments, ego, ideas, opinions, and emotions, the individual mind enters a state which can be characterized as empty yet crystal clear and aware. And when in this state all the things which parade across awareness appear empty of any intrinsic quality, there are no thoughts or emotions towards the things in awareness, everything appears simply as phenomena.

Buddha: Is it important to experience this Samadhi?

Shariputra: Yes it is important to experience this Samadhi if one is to understand the Dharma. Because it is from this experience of our own personal Emptiness that all other understandings of Emptiness result.

Buddha: Shariputra, though what you have said is excellent there is still something important left unsaid.

Shariputra: What might that be World Honored One?

Buddha: This Emptiness which you have explained, how does it have the power to transform people, become Bodhisattvas, make them happy and work for the

happiness of other people?

Shariputra: The deep understanding of Emptiness that comes from the experience of Samadhi allows the individual to drop the idea of an individual self and its attachments which causes unhappiness. It frees us from greed, anger and delusion which poisons both our individual minds and society at large. It extinguishes the passions resulting from our delusive way of thinking. In such a way we become happy, free, and tranquil.

Buddha: Very good Shariputra but I still find something missing. You have explained the Dharma in negative terms. The Dharma becomes a matter of extinguishing, extinguishing the self, extinguishing passions, and extinguishing delusions. Is this your final insight into Emptiness? Is this insight enough to open the hearts of people? Will this insight motivate people to do what is right and good? How can we function if we extinguish everything? Don't we need a way to integrate our understanding and our practice with being a human being?

Shariputra: Yes of course we need to integrate our practice and understanding into our life as humans, but I am not sure where you are taking this discussion.

Buddha: Let me ask you, what is your true Self Shariputra.?

Shariputra: My true self is no-self as you have taught many times World Honored One.

Buddha: Yes that is true there is no self from one perspective but from another perspective there is a true Self. What is this true Self.

Shariputra: This true Self is the self experienced in Samadhi, the clear awareness of the clear mind before there are any thoughts.

Buddha: Is a stone aware.

Shariputra: No, I don't think a stone has awareness.

Buddha: Then what is the true Self of a stone?

Shariputra: A stone does not have a true Self.

Buddha: Then you hold the view that this stone and other non-sentient things are inherently different from you and other sentient beings. Is this correct?

Shariputra: Yes I think so.

Buddha: Does your view abide by my teachings on non-duality and Emptiness?

Shariputra: No, I think not.

Buddha: In Samadhi do you experience a separation between self and this rock, for example?

Shariputra: No

Buddha: Though you have experienced Samadhi you are still holding on to an idea of the specialness of your small self. Is not your clear awareness also empty of any inherent self nature?

Shariputra: Yes.

Buddha: Does your clear awareness also result from causes and conditions?

Shariputra: Yes.

Buddha: Then let us go back a few steps in our discussion. If we cannot say that there are any individual causes and conditions then we must say that that the whole body of reality, the Dharma Kaya, is the cause and condition of every single thing. In other words the whole Universe is involved in the formation of every thing and every event. Everything that happens is the result of the whole Universe, not just some isolated part of the Universe. And in this sense the whole Universe is reflected in every single thing. Now Shariputra if I ask you what is your true Self how would you answer?

Shariputra: Yes, now I understand. My True Self is the whole Universe past present and future, the Dharma Kaya, the Buddha.

Buddha: Now when you speak of "I" how should you understand this "I"?

Shariputra: When I speak of "I" I understand that though I might be referencing the small conventional I, I am also referencing the true Self..

Buddha: Truly excellent Shariputra. Attachment to an idea of a small self composed solely of the individual body and mind, or even expanded to include family tribe or nation or any limited identity is a delusion. Our true identity has no boundries. This deep understanding of the True Self without boundries is the essence of the Mahayana the vehicle that includes everyone and everything. This is the understanding that truly opens up our Hearts.

Shariputra, when you walk the whole universe walks. When you are talking the whole universe is talking. What you think is not just your thoughts but also the thoughts of the whole universe, even when they are deluded, Ha! Ha! Your awareness is the awareness of the whole Universe.

But when I tell you this, is it enough that you understand my

words?

Shariputra: No, we must lay the foundation for this understanding with experience.

Buddha: Where do we find that experience?

Shariputra. We find this experience in meditation World Honored One.

Buddha: Why do we need to lay the foundation for our understanding with experience?

Shariputra: Without experience our minds will never be firm in understanding, doubts will arise and lead our mind astray, and habits of ego based thought will still be present. With experience the roots of ego based thought are cut and a deep faith in practice will develop, and understanding will continue to deepen.

Buddha: Excellent!

At this point a Biksu in the audience rose and asked a question.

Biksu : Most Honored Buddha I have heard that some philosophers adept in your teachings have said that all things are Mind. They call this the Mind Only Doctrine. This doctrine seems to contradict the teachings you have given today. Can you clarify this?

Buddha: Honored Biksu we must be very careful with philosophic doctrines like Mind Only. Words can easily lead us astray. A word like Mind may mean something very different to you then it does to those philosophers. Without deep experience one can only have a limited understanding of a word like Mind.

I know these philosophers of whom you speak and know that some of them are of deep experience and are truly Enlightened, and so for them there understanding is in accordance with mine. But I can see where their use of the word Mind can easily throw one astray. Let me ask you a question, when I say that all things are Empty, or I say that all things are contained in the Dharma Kaya, or I say that all things are Mind, am I saying anything different in each case.

Biksu : Yes and no. The words Empty, Mind, and Dharmakaya seem to have different meanings and yet you posit them to be equal to the same thing, everything, therefore they must be equal to each other. Either some of your statements are incorrect or the meanings of those three words are the same though I don't see how they can mean the same thing. This is very confusing.

Buddha: Of course this is confusing because you only hear words and you are trying to figure this out with words and logic alone. Have you experienced everything as Emptiness or as Dharmakaya or as Mind? I think not. But if you had you

would realize that each of these three statements is an expression of the same experience. Each of these statements contains the other two statements and does not contradict them. Different teachers use different words and different ways of explaining the Dharma in an effort to point you and other students to this one experience we call Enlightenment. We have talked about Emptiness and we have talked about the Dharmakaya and we have pointed to at least one misconception that might arise from the Mind Only Doctrine. But what are these most honored philosophers trying to point to when they say that everything is Mind? Shariputra can you illuminate us?

Shariputra: We say that all things are Mind not because things exist only because of our individual or collective minds. Things exist, at least in some temporary way, independent of anyone's thought. And as I have explained before all things are a result of causes and conditions. All things are Mind because in deep Samadhi the energies swirling around inside our heads forming thoughts and the energies swirling around in the material world, are not, nor seen as, essentially different. In this non-dual understanding we can think of all thoughts as being essentially material resulting from causes and conditions or we can say that all material are essentially thoughts residing in the One Mind of the Buddha. But always of greatest importance is the experience of Samadhi in which our minds are so quiet that the sensations of things become our thoughts, not distinguished from our verbal or emotional thoughts.

Buddha: Well explained Shariputra.

Again a Biksu arose and asked a question.

Biksu : World Honored One everything we experience is subjective. In other words these are experiences that exist only in our individual minds. How can we be sure that there is an objective reality that exists outside our minds?

Buddha: Clearly stated Biksu, this goes right to the heart of many of today's questions. From your perspective in which there is a self that experiences, all experiences are subjective, being within your individual mind. But the view that, by extension, there is nothing outside our individual minds is not clearly thought out. Ask yourself what would make it possible for there not to be an objective world? Where would our subjective experiences originate. If they did not originate in the processes of an objective reality they would have to originate either internally in our minds, in other words in our imagination, or they would have to be placed in our minds by an agent which does not exist in the objective reality that we seemingly experience. If we follow out the logic of either of these views they quickly make little sense.

If the view that all experience is self caused by our imagination is true then we have no reason to believe that there are even other individuals. The whole universe collapses into the small self. Nothing else exists but I, but this

is not the I of the large self. No this is the I of the small Ego. There is a certain attraction to this view as it seems to offer an unrestricted freedom to do as one desires. Of course this view leads to a deepening attachment to an imagined idea of self and how one thinks the world ought to be. This is not the path to happiness as the world does not revolve around any one individual, and will only lead to the suffering of both those who hold this view and those who interact with such self centered individuals.

If we hold the view that our experiences are projected into our minds by an agent outside the seemingly objective reality outside our minds then who or what is this agent? Biksu can you give me an answer?

Biksu : That agent must be a god or maybe Brahmin the God that contains all other gods.

Buddha: Yes it must be God or at least a god. Then we have all sorts of further questions? What is the nature of this God. Is it an independent being? Does it experience an objective reality? Where does it exist? This gets very complicated. Biksu if all our experience is truly subjective without any objective basis can we even know if one of these views we have just discussed is correct?

Biksu: No!

Buddha: Can we know anything?

Biksu: No!

Buddha: We have just caught ourselves in the dilemma of Nihilism. We have allowed delusive thinking to lead our minds astray. This is the logic of samsara. This is the logic of dualistic thinking. Why is this dualistic thinking? Can you tell me Shariputra?

Shariputra: This is dualistic thinking because underlying the thought is the assumption that there is an individual being whose subjective awareness apposes an objective reality even if that awareness is illusions created by the gods or the dreams of the individual mind.

Buddha: How do we free ourselves from this dualistic way of thinking Shariputra?

Shariputra: Only experience will free ourselves from this dualistic way of thinking. This is the experience of deep Samadhi which we talked about earlier. We have to realize the Emptiness of not only clear awareness but also any idea of an individual behind that clear awareness.

Buddha: Very good Shariputra, again you have pointed to the importance of experience. I am often surprised and dismayed by the many people who start

with my teachings and end in nihilism. Can you tell me why my teachings so often seem to lead people to nihilism?

Shariputra: World Honored One, many people don't balance your teachings with practice and experience. They are attached to an idea of self, and are caught by words and dualistic thinking. And then they don't understand the true meaning of Emptiness and take it to mean that nothing exists in any way, except of course an idea of themselves which they hold dear.

Because they hold the idea of self so precious when they try to reason away dualistic thought they eliminate everything but themselves. By truly experiencing non-dualism we discover that instead of eliminating the objective we eliminate the subjective. What does this mean? It means that we discover that there is no self to be subjective. It means that the individual and his thoughts are essentially no different from the rest of what is, part of the same process, and a creation of that process.

Without subject-object dualism objective reality becomes just plain *what is*. What can we say about this absolute reality? We can say that it is empty, or that it contains everything, or call it Mind or even call it our True Self, but these are just words too easily misunderstood. If we break it down into things and try to understand it as a multitude of inter-working parts then we miss the essence of its Oneness. What then can we say? I can only express that in a poem.

Beyond dualism
In the spring the cherry trees blossom
In autumn apples fall into the garden

Buddha: Shariputra your Dharma eye is truly open.

At this time a third Bikisu rose and asked a question.

Biksu: I have heard a Dharma teacher say, that our True Nature is what is at this very moment, no past no future just now. Can you explain what he meant by this and if you agree?

Buddha: Very good question Biksu. I find this Dharma teacher's teachings excellent from his perspective but also potentially confusing. It might be easy, but wrong, to make the jump from this teaching to the view again that everything is subjective and that the past never had any existence nor will the future have any existence. It might be easy again to fall into a subjective nihilism.

Yet if viewed correctly this teaching can be very useful because it points the way towards correct practice. Let me explain. In the samsaric way of thinking in which we are attached to a view of a permanent self we are constantly thinking of the past and the future. The past has had a strong effect on our current thoughts and emotions. We call this karma. An event from the past might leave deep karmic scars. Another event might leaves us with fond

memories. Because we have a deep attachment to the idea of self we attach emotions, both negative and positive, to events from the past thus these events deeply effect the way we feel and interact with present events. Also because the samsaric way of thinking is filled with desires and fears we are constantly thinking about the future. We think so constantly about the past and future that there is little space in our individual consciousness to be aware of the present. We practice meditation so that we can be aware of the present. And it is this experience in which we are fully aware of the present without any thoughts of the past of future of even the present but only awareness of the now that is essential to develop insight into our true nature. But we must be careful to not put any boundaries on our understanding. Just because our practice is to be fully present does not mean that we should deny the fullness of our experience which includes both a past and a future. The past present and future inter-fuse in the Oneness of experience. Even full awareness of the present with out thought contains all of the past and all of the future. Our true nature has no boundaries

Again a Biksu rose and asked a question.

Biksu: World Honored One how shall we practice to lay the foundation for the experience which will give us insight into these truths?

Buddha: My great friend Maha Kashapa would you please tell us all how exactly we should practice the path of liberation, the path from suffering to joy, the path of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats?

M.K.: Though we call the path The Eight Fold Way, the path divides into three parts, morality, wisdom, and meditation. Though we may separate the path into three parts, these parts work together ,develop together and support each other. As we begin our practice, morality understanding and meditation are inconsistent, pushed around by events feelings and attachments. One moment we may be generous and the next moment selfish. One moment we may feel love and the next moment hate. One moment we may make peace and the next moment war.

For people beginning on the path and still easily pushed around by a self centered view we offer the Buddhas wisdom as expressed in the precepts, setting a moral foundation.

For people beginning on the path wisdom is inconsistent and incomplete, thoughts are easily pushed around by circumstance, emotion and attachments. Doubts and confusion enter the mind. Ignorant of our true selves we are caught in a dualistic ego based view of the world. For these people we have the teachings of all those who manifest as the Buddha.

For those people just beginning on the path, whose minds are not disciplined, and are easily pushed around we offer the practice of meditation so that one may develop mindfulness, concentration, and a steadfastness of mind and which eventually results in the experience of our True Nature

manifesting the wisdom of the Buddha.

As one develops on the path through the three practices, meditation, morality, and the contemplation of wisdom, the mind begins to settle and is not so easily pushed around by events. A general feeling of happiness starts to develop. With our minds not so easily pushed around more mindfulness and concentration start to develop. Wisdom develops through meditation as we are more clearly able to see how our own mind works. With deepening wisdom our doubts start to be eliminated. Faith starts to grow and steadfastness of purpose in the practice develops.

By practicing morality our mind becomes undisturbed by our past actions, no longer plagued by feelings of guilt and remorse. By becoming honest with ourselves we become honest with others. Morality creates the background for the calmness and steadfastness of mind necessary for meditation and the development of insight. And so, on three legs we walk the path of the Buddha.

As one continues on the path the experience of these three aspects of the path deepen. With effort in practice, slowly and steadily the mind is freed of its habits, delusions, and attachments. All three legs of the practice, morality, wisdom, and meditation develop together. The path develops a calm steady mind, a mindful mind and a mind with deep powers of concentration. And then finally the path produces a clear deeply aware mind without thought. Now deep wisdom naturally arises. In this deep state of meditation dualistic and ego based thought are not present. In this state of mind there is no separation between self and other, this and that, right and wrong. This state is without dualism ego or discrimination. Now there is room for insight into this non-dual ego-less state, an insight in which we experience the essential Emptiness and deep interconnectedness of all things, an insight in which we recognize our true nature.

With this deep wisdom the mind undergoes a revolution and can never return to the deep attachments to ego and dualistic habits of thoughts and emotions. Without these attachments, with the wisdom of prajna, the ego based habits will naturally diminish and the emotions of love and compassion will blossom. Now morality is no longer the practice of any second hand concepts but the natural outcome of one's inner being.

Buddha: How wonderful Maha Kashapa. You have the true Dharma Eye the wonderful mind of Nirvana.

Another Biksu rose and asked a question.

Biksu: World Honored One what meditation techniques are most effective in developing prajna.

Buddha: There is no form of meditation that is most effective for all individuals. Any sense or sense object can be used to hone concentration and attention. I often teach Biksus to pay attention to their breathing but even this may be

difficult so I ask them to count their breaths as an extra aid. For some I teach the practice of mantra recitation. For others I ask them to just listen, and others I ask to be mindful of their bodies feelings. There are countless meditation techniques. When giving a student a practice I chose a technique that is suited to the individual.

Biksu: World Honored One I think of right mindfulness and right concentration as both aspects of meditation. Please tell us the difference.

Buddha: Excellent question. Mindfulness should be practiced both in our daily lives and in sitting meditation. Mindfulness means paying attention to what is going on around us and what is go on inside our own minds. Mindfulness means being aware , and when we loose awareness because we get lost in our thinking or emotions or dreaming and then finally become aware that awareness was lost we simply return to awareness and attempt to maintain it as long as we can. Mindfulness means being aware of awareness.

Mindfulness in meditation is not essentially different, but instead of anchoring our attention on the world around us as we might be practicing mindfulness in our daily activities, in meditation we usually anchor our attention on a specific object of meditation, such as our breath, a mantra, or just sound itself. In both cases we cut off the habits of the ego centered and dualistic mind. In the case of meditation we are still practicing mindfulness but now only mindfulness of the object of concentration.

Biksu: I have heard it said that the enlightened mind is characterized by expansive awareness. Why do we practice concentration?

Buddha: Both concentration and an expansive awareness are natural aspects of the functioning of our minds. I hesitate to discriminate in importance between these two aspects of awareness. Yet because our minds are almost always thinking both concentration and expansive awareness are extremely difficult. Deep concentration is only possible as we quiet our minds down. But it is also through the action of attempting concentration that we learn to quiet our minds. Expansive awareness is only possible if our minds are already quiet. It is very difficult to use expansive awareness in learning to quiet our minds because most of us have experienced no more then a glimmer of expansive awareness. We all can experience our breathing or say a mantra at any time and so at any time we can practice meditation on one of these objects. How do we practice meditation on expansive awareness if it is not available? Expansive awareness is an outcome of practice. As one's practice deepens and the habits of samsaric consciousness start to be broken, concentration deepens, simply because there is more space in our consciousness for the object of attention, and that space lasts a longer and longer amount of time. But now because there is more space in consciousness one can expand attention to include not just something small like the breath but also the sounds in the environment, or maybe the feelings of the body. If all thought is

stopped one will discover that awareness is able to expand to include all six senses simultaneously. Expansive awareness becomes available to the practitioner only after their meditation practice has matured.

Dualistic thought is cut off in a moment of complete perfect awareness, whether that awareness is concentrated on something small or is of the whole universe. In that moment we have the possibility of recognizing the True Self.

The unfettered mind moves freely from deep concentration to a fully expansive awareness. It is not caught by self limiting attachments to one or another view. It holds no prejudices against thinking or emotions. It doesn't try to be something special, and yet because it is unattached to events from the past or desires for the future it functions according to the conditions of the present. The unfettered mind is clear and freely responds to what is happening right now.

Again a Biksu stood and asked a question

Biksu: World Honored One the path you teach of non-attachment and meditation seems to promote passivity. In what way does it open the heart?

Buddha: For the mind unconstrained by the emotions of love and fear and hate, likes and dislikes the heart functions freely and naturally. Because we are normally caught in an ego based way of thinking, because we are constantly protecting our illusory selves, the function of the heart is blocked by fear, anger, hate, greed and a rational mind which serves the ego that does not find the heart convenient. Most of us let the heart function only in the normal channels of family and friends.

If we drop the small self and come to understand our true self without bounds then there is no need for fear, anger, hate and greed. Then when we feel love or compassion we will understand that it is the Universe's own love and compassion. The Universe's love and compassion become our own love and compassion.

Even with just a single deep experience of one's own true nature one becomes a Bodhisattva and motivation in practice and life is no longer for fulfilling personal desires but rather to live through the heart in intimacy with all things and all people.

Biksu: World Honored One how should we practice non-attachment?

Buddha: Honorable Biksu I would be pleased if you tell me what attachments you think we need to drop?

Biksu: We need to drop our attachment to material objects. Material objects may give us some temporary happiness but they may also cause suffering if lost or destroyed. In the face of our deepest fear and cause of suffering, death, may seem important though ultimately is unimportant. Also for some people attachment to material objects is so strong that these people value material

objects over people and consequently create suffering for other people and society at large.

Buddha: To what else should we not be attached?

Biksu: World Honored One we should not be attached to our desires. Fulfilling our desires is not always possible, and so our attachment to them only creates unhappiness. When we desire the world to be one way and it is not as desired we are unhappy. And certainly the world is always changing and we have little control over what happens so being attached to the world being one way and not another way will invariably lead to unhappiness.

Buddha: Very good, but please go on Biksu.

Biksu: We should not be attached to an idea of a limited self because this is an illusion and will certainly lead to a lot of suffering. And If we are too deeply attached to an idea of self we will not be able to have that experience of selflessness of which you teach.

Buddha: All you have said is excellent honored Biksu but how should you practice non-attachment in meditation?

Biksu: In meditation we become conscious of our various attachments, study our attachments and understand how these attachments cause suffering and thereby free ourselves from these attachments.

Buddha: Yes, but go deeper. How does the practices of mindfulness and concentration work?

Biksu: Through mindfulness and concentration we break our mental habits of attachment by not letting our minds be caught. As soon as an attachment arises in meditation we bring our minds to the object of attention and concentration and thereby cut the habits of thought again and again.

Buddha: Very good Biksu you have been very thorough but you can still go deeper? Tell me about the most fundamental nature of attachment?

Biksu: I am not sure what you are getting at World Honored One.

Buddha: Maha Kashapa my good friend can you please tell us the most fundamental nature of attachment?

Maha Kashapa: World Honored One the most fundamental nature of attachment is the following of sense contact with a word, feeling, or image and then attaching another word, feeling, or image to that first word, feeling, or image. In other words at it's most fundamental attachment is the attachment of thought to

sensation and thought to thought. In meditation if we are completely free of attachment we are aware but unmoved by both external and internal events and enter samadhi without thought.

Buddha: Yes yes my friend, whether I am talking about mindfulness, concentration, non-attachment, purity, or our clear original mind it all comes down to samadhi without thought. It is from within this samadhi without thought that the truth of the dharma becomes evident and we experience our true nature.

Biksu: Blessed One once we achieve this mindless samadhi are we to remain in this thoughtless state and go around in blissful idiocy?

Buddha: Of course not honorable Biksu. Does it appear that I have stopped thinking and go around in a state of blissful idiocy? At least not always. But my thought is in harmony with the truth experienced in blissful Samadhi. No longer is my thought defiled by samsaric habits. No longer is my thought caught in attachment to an individual I, self or, ego.

Biksu: Achieving a state of thoughtless Samadhi seems almost impossible. Even after many years of practice I have not experienced a completely quiet mind. How should I practice and what might I be doing wrong?

Buddha: Very true, achieving a state of thoughtless Samadhi is like climbing Mount Everest. The effort seems super human. It must be approached with fearlessness. It must be taken one step at a time. And the proper path must be taken. Without unwavering resolve it will not be achieved.

Yet with unwavering resolve and effort in the proper path thoughtless samadhi and Enlightenment will result.

But simply attempting to stop thinking through desire and effort might not work. Our ego is very clever. It can create doubts and even distort our practice, making us think “I can figure this out” ,or “I don’t need to practice this way.” Maybe every time our mind quiets for just a moment we notice this and become self conscious and start thinking again. The desire to attain a state of thoughtless samadhi is itself a barrier. Some how we need to go around these barriers. We must be even more clever than our ego. We might need to approach the task of quieting down our minds indirectly. Instead of thinking “I must quiet my thoughts”, we simply practice concentration on an object of meditation and practice mindfulness and possibly repeat a mantra. These practices do two things which work together. One, they discipline and strengthen our ability to concentrate and shut down extraneous thoughts and two, they weaken our habits of thought by the practice of not constantly energizing these thought habits, by repeatedly cutting them off through the practice of concentration.

Lastly, when we practice we must find a balance which allows us to drop any thought that there is anything to achieve and still find the effort and

diligence necessary for practice.

I have found that many people have their first experience of thoughtless samadhi after many years of practice not when they are directly engaged in meditation but during a relaxed moment when they drop their self consciousness.

Another Biksu rose and asked a question

Biksu: If after many years of practice I learn to enter a deep Samadhi, and stop thinking, is this Enlightenment, and if not what is Enlightenment?

Buddha: Just to experience a state of thoughtless samadhi is not Enlightenment. The opening of prajna – wisdom insight and compassion, understanding your true nature – might be a better definition for Enlightenment. But, after Enlightenment, prajna and samadhi cannot be separated. prajna is a result of deep samadhi and once prajna is opened samadhi and prajna cannot be separated because prajna will be present in samadhi. May I quote the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, “Samadhi is the natural activity of prajna and prajna is the natural result of Samadhi.”

Biksu: I still don't understand World Honored One.

Buddha: Though you will not fully understand this until you have experienced it I will try to give a better explanation. This state of complete awakesness without thought we call Samadhi is in fact not completely uncommon. We may experience it for short moments doing many activities during both play and work. Just think of that total concentration the hunter experiences before he lets go of the bow string, or the total joy children experience as they chase each other, or the complete focus the artist and artisan sometimes experience performing their craft. These are all examples of samadhi. These states of mind are little different from the experience of samadhi in meditation, and yet we don't think of the child, hunter or artist as necessarily wise. Why? Because these are fleeting experiences and these people have not deeply examined this state of mind, and are still deeply caught in a samsaric way of thinking. In meditation we cultivate samadhi so that it is not just a fleeting experience and then naturally or with a little prodding this experience of samadhi has a deep wisdom to teach. The very essence of samadhi is the truth of it's non-dual perspective. This first insight into the non-dual perspective is just the beginning of enlightenment the awakening of prajna. Once prajna is awakened we understand that the very essence of prajna is the non-dual perspective of samadhi. The cultivation of prajna is the cultivation of samadhi and the cultivation of samadhi is the cultivation of prajna.

Biksu: World Honored One you talk about Enlightenment as being the realization of non-duality and no-self and that this involves not thinking but here before me is a person who is thinking and talking and obviously self

aware. Tell me how you reconcile this contradiction?

Buddha: Quite right, I am simply a human being like you. All the five skandas are here in this being called Siddhartha. But Siddhartha is just a temporary phenomena due to causes and conditions. This body called Siddhartha is born and will die. Because of prajna I am not attached to an idea of an individual self. Because of prajna I understand my true nature to be not an individual but a manifestation of everything. In this sense I was not born neither will I die. And you are the same as me, as are all other beings, we are both temporary beings bound by our limited bodies and also manifestations of everything as one which is the true body of the Buddha. One difference between you and I as limited beings, I understand from the experience of deep samadhi my true nature and you have not.

Biksu: World Honored One now that you are Enlightened and are truly free why do you still practice meditation?

Buddha: I still practice meditation because only in Samadhi do I deeply experience my true nature. As humans our limited bodies pulls us towards a dualistic and samsaric way of thinking. I continue to practice, constantly renewing and deepening insight into my true nature, and not just rely on ideas and memories of a past experience.

A single deep experience of one's true nature does not make an individual fully enlightened. Yes it may be a truly revolutionary experience for the individual but that does not mean the individual is forever immune from ego centered thinking. It is easy to fall back into ego centered habits. The individual practitioner must fuse his whole being with his deep understanding and this can only be achieved after years of practice and experiences in deep samadhi

When we fully understand the truth of non-duality we understand that duality is just an illusion, a whisper of suchness, and that this whole Universe is in deep samadhi engaged in nothing but non-dual activity.

Lay Disciple: Lord Buddha, My teacher tells me that the essence of your teaching is about being happy, and yet during this whole talk you have been talking about such abstract ideas as our true nature, non-duality and the Dharmakaya. I understand how desire creates suffering. I understand that if I discipline my mind and eliminate desires I can be happy, but how is all this abstract stuff going to help me be happy?

Buddha: Very good question worthy Sir. I want to emphasize that I have tried not to take an absolute position on any of these words like, True Nature, non-duality, and Dharmakaya, instead I keep on pointing to experience, that experience of deep meditation which can illuminate the meaning of these words. I also must say that our discussion this after noon is deeply related to my teachings on happiness. Let me explain. If I may ask you a question, what

is causing you to suffer these days?

Lay Disciple: I suffer because there are many things which I want which I cannot afford, or just cannot have, like a bigger house for my family, or a properly made cup of coffee and I understand that if I could just drop some of my desires and was not be so picky I would be happier.

Buddha: Lets just take one of these issues. Obviously no one in your house hold knows how to make coffee the way you want it. What is so special about this coffee and why are you upset when you can't get the coffee made the way you want?

Disciple: Of course the coffee made the way I want tastes better, and I am upset when I get that poor substitute my wife makes because she is neglectful in her duties to make coffee the way I like.

Buddha: If you were to travel and entered a shop in some remote city and asked for coffee would you be upset if the coffee did not taste the way you want.

Disciple: Maybe a little bit but not much because I cannot expect a stranger to make coffee the way I want.

Buddha: Why do you expect your wife to make coffee better then that stranger?

Disciple: I expect my wife to make coffee the way I like because that is her job. I am a little insulted that she doesn't seem to care enough for me to make a proper cup of coffee.

Buddha: Do you not see that your suffering is caused by your sense of personal importance and pride? Do you not see that the root of this suffering is because of this sense of personal importance and pride which we call ego, and that the ego starts with a belief that there is an individual, an I, a me which truly exists? Because we believe that there is an individual I that truly exists, and we attach importance to this I and become attached to our desires, we will often be suffering in a ever changing world which cannot satisfy our many desires. And because we are most deeply attached to our own life we suffer over the fear of our death. With this idea of a self, an I, a me, we act out of our desires and fears and cannot help but personally suffer and also create suffering for others. To truly experience a deep abiding happiness we must cut the root of our suffering, we must understand out True Nature and thereby drop our attachment to an idea of a self, an, I, a me. This can only be done through experience and this experience can only be found in meditation. Though helpful to practice the dropping of attachments as they come up in life causing us to suffer this is just like pruning a Black Berry Bush, unless one digs it out by the roots, spiny arms will continue to appear. This is why I teach the practice of meditation, and the deep meditative experience of egolessness

and non-duality. Only through this experience do we cut the roots of suffering.

At this point I think it is time to stop talking. I hope all your questions have been satisfactorily answered. It is a beautiful day to practice. Don't waver in your determination.